

Employability Access Project - Action 2 Interim Evaluation



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Introduction

1.1 Background

1.1.1 The Employability Access Project (E.A.P.) is funded through Equal, a programme administered through the European Social Fund which aims to test new ways of tackling discrimination and inequality experienced by those in work and those looking for a job, with a view to developing new ideas to change policy and practice in employment and training. E.A.P. brings together organisations from the public, voluntary and community sectors in North Belfast with the aim of managing a health sector specific training and employability programme. The Project aims to develop new and innovative training and employability programmes and policies for people furthest from the labour market in a very disadvantaged area.

1.1.2 E.A.P. has completed Action 1, which focused on the establishment of the partnership and working arrangements for the programme. It is now implementing Action 2 which will investigate new and innovative ways to tackle unemployment and economic inactivity within North Belfast through addressing, and where appropriate amending, the recruitment and selection practices in the health sector in order to develop comprehensive and effective linkages between the supply and demand for jobs within North Belfast. It aims to:

- Test human resource models of recruitment and selection to promote social inclusion and employment.
- Lead engagement between health sector employers, employability services and beneficiaries.
- Improve supply of and demand for quality jobs in the health service.

1.1.3 The members of the Development Partnership represent a variety of sectors including health sector employers, training and education providers, statutory agencies and community based providers of local employability services. In order to achieve its goals, the Development Partnership will:

- Deliver a health sector targeted pre employment, personal skills development

programme incorporating one to one mentoring support, job shadowing and guaranteed interview. The programme will be available to any long term unemployed or economically inactive resident of North Belfast.

- Address, review and where appropriate amend the recruitment policies and practices of the North & West Health & Social Services Trust and the Mater Hospital in order to make these more accessible and inclusive for those potential employees currently furthest removed from the labour market.
- Additional activities identified at D.P. Board level to assist in addressing the project objectives.

1.1.4 The members of the Development Partnership include:

- North Belfast Partnership (lead partner)
- North & West Belfast Health & Social Services Trust
- The Health Action Zone
- The Mater Hospital
- North City Training
- South Belfast Partnership
- Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education
- North Belfast Employment Centre
- The Ashton Centre
- The Department for Employment and Learning
- The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
- Women's Tec
- Unison

1.2 Terms of Reference

1.2.1 North Belfast Partnership, as the lead partner of the Employability Access Development Partnership, has appointed Williamson Consulting to undertake an external evaluation of the activities of the Employability Access Development Partnership. The evaluation brief includes:

- Oral and written reports on the progress of both the domestic and transnational elements of the project at regular intervals;
- Submitting interim and final reports on the project, both domestic and transnational elements, covering:

- The extent to which the project has achieved its aims and objectives;
- How the project has achieved its aims and objectives;
- The transferability of results;
- Good practice and issues to be addressed within the project;
- Recommendations for the future development of the project.

1.2.2 The initial report reviewed progress on Action 1 and looked at the strategic and policy context and the establishment of the partnership structures and processes. A summary of this report is set out in the body of the report. This report focuses on the activities and outcomes in Action 2, including:

- The effectiveness of the Partnership
- The content of the programme
- The recruitment of participants
- Job outcomes
- Other impacts and outcomes
- Mainstreaming
- Conclusions and recommendations

1.2.3 The evaluation of Action 2 involved:

- Meetings with the Development Partnership to discuss the project and the outcomes of Action 2 in more detail, including programmes, rationale, involvement in EQUAL structures
- Detailed consideration of the Development Partnership Agreement (incorporating the Transnational Cooperation Agreement) and Action Plans to assess the extent to which key actions, outputs, outcomes, milestones, delivery agents and costs have been outlined and clarified and the extent to which it meets EQUAL requirements and the needs of the wider labour market.
- Consultation with each of the partners individually to discuss their involvement
- Interviews with participants
- Consideration of resource inputs
- Analysis of outcomes and achievement of objectives
- Impact of the programme on policies and procedures.

2

Overview

2.1 The Equal Programme

2.1.1 The Employability Access Project is funded under the EQUAL Programme through the European Social Fund. This aims to test new ways of tackling discrimination and inequality experienced by those in work and those looking for a job, with a view that new ideas could change future policy and practice in employment and training. The EQUAL Programme is briefly explained below.

2.1.2 EQUAL operates by bringing together the key players in a geographic area or sector into Development Partnerships (D.P.) to pool their expertise and experience. Development Partnerships must establish links with at least one partnership from another European member state. The EQUAL Programme has 5 key themes, Employment, Entrepreneurship, Adaptability, Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, and, Asylum Seekers. The EQUAL programme in N.I. is the overall responsibility of the Department for Employment and Learning and support by Proteus N.I. It has adopted two key themes as being appropriate to the needs of the N.I. labour market, employability and equal opportunities.

2.2 The Development Partnership

2.2.1 The initial driver for the Employability Access Project came from North Belfast Partnership Board and arose from a concern that there was a gap between unemployed people and major employers in the area. It also followed exposure to other Equal programmes and networks through, for example, the Futures Project delivered through the Health Action Zone. The Employability Access Project focuses on North Belfast and seeks to develop ways of closing the gap between employers in the health sector and those seeking employment. It was perceived by people working in North Belfast Partnership, the Health Trusts and in the employability sector that there was a difficulty, on the demand side, in relation to filling posts in certain grades and, on the supply side, accessing work in the health sector, despite a range of work undertaken in the past to address this.

2.2.2 The Partnership reflects the interests and needs of key stakeholders including employers, trade unions, the community sector, and those involved in employability programmes. The list of partners is as follows:

- North Belfast Partnership Board (lead partner) brings together representatives from the statutory, private, voluntary and community sectors across North Belfast.
- The Mater Hospital is a major employer in North Belfast.
- North and West Belfast Health and Social Services Trust is also a major health sector employer in North Belfast and has a number of centres.
- The Health Action Zone was established to tackle health inequalities in North Belfast and to promote a holistic approach to health including lifestyle and employment issues.
- North City Training is a community based training provider in the area.
- South Belfast Partnership brings experience of employment programmes targeted on disadvantaged areas.
- Belfast Institute for Further and Higher Education is the leading third level adult education provider in Northern Ireland.
- North Belfast Employment Centre is a Labour Market Intermediary and provides a range of services for unemployed people from North Belfast.
- The Ashton Centre is a Labour Market Intermediary in North Belfast and also provides a range of training programmes focused on those who are long-term unemployed.
- The Department for Employment and Learning has a statutory responsibility for programmes to tackle unemployment.
- Women's Tec is a community based training provider.
- The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority has a remit in terms of education qualifications.
- U.N.I.S.O.N., representing the trade union sector.

2.3 The Action 1 Report

2.3.1 The conclusions and recommendations in the Action 1 Evaluation Report are summarised below. The Employability Access project successfully completed Action 1 and, at that stage, was moving towards the point where it was starting to prepare to deliver programmes under Action 2 of the programme. The project initially focused on establishing the partnership and ensuring that the appropriate structures are in place to enable the partnership to move forward. The conclusions included:

- 1 The Employability Access Project has achieved its initial objectives of setting up the partnership, establishing terms of reference and establishing the Transnational Partnership.
- 2 The Development Partnership has secured the commitment of the key stakeholders in the sector. All of the relevant sectors are included.
- 3 The structures within the D.P. are robust and working well. There are good internal communication and decision making processes.
- 4 The project is primarily about looking at the relationship between employers, communities and the labour market whilst seeking to address the gap between those seeking staff and people from North Belfast seeking work. Its potential benefits are for employers, those who are unemployed and organisations who work with those who are unemployed in terms of improving communication, linkages and HR policies.
- 5 Initial progress in forming the partnership was slow, largely because of delays in receiving the letter of offer which meant that the project could not recruit staff until March 2005. Once the Co-ordinator was appointed on a full-time basis, the partnership has progressed significantly.

- 6 The project has secured the commitment and participation of all of the partners and there is good interaction between the sectors represented.
- 7 All of the partners are aware of the requirements of the programme and the potential benefits that could come from this.
- 8 The financial monitoring systems are robust and expenditure, while slightly less than budgeted is satisfactory.
- 9 The project is still working on developing its monitoring systems and these will be finalised over the next few weeks. The partnership is aware of the need for monitoring and the issues to be covered.
- 10 The Development Partnership, and the organisations within it, have made very significant progress during Action 1. There have already been achievements in terms of improving understanding, co-operation and communication between the partners which is already producing benefits in terms of human resource policies and practices.

2.3.2 The main recommendations were:

- It might be useful at an early stage in Action 2 to organise a residential to give all of the partners the opportunity to spend time reviewing the project and discussing its operation.
- The project is focused on recruiting those who are furthest from the labour market, who by definition are those hardest to reach. It will be important to look at and test a range of referral mechanisms, including community contacts, and this in itself will be a learning experience.

3

Evaluation Findings

3.1 Action 2 Activities

3.1.1 The Employability Access Project focuses on tackling employment issues in North Belfast and seeks to develop ways of closing the gap between employers in the health sector and those seeking employment. It was perceived by people working in North Belfast Partnership, the Health Trusts and in the employability sector that there was a difficulty in relation to, on the demand side, filling posts in certain grades, and on the supply side accessing work in the health sector, despite a range of work undertaken in the past to address this. EQUAL provided a means to tackle this by creating a genuine partnership and piloting new approaches to recruitment and training.

3.1.2 The health sector employers had found it difficult to fill vacancies in service type posts (cleaners, home-helps, domestics, catering, laundry, etc.) and were open to looking at ways to better access the available pool of unemployed people from North Belfast. Given the nature of the posts that were vacant, very often these suit unemployed people who live locally. Both the Mater Hospital and the North and West Trust were open to reviewing their recruitment policies and practices to test how these present barriers to those who are unemployed.

3.1.3 Action 2 of the programme therefore is mainly concerned with the operation of the programmes, in this case the recruitment of participants, the delivery of training, the organisation of job shadowing and support for participants through to interview and job outcomes. This section of the report describes activities carried out under Action 2, while later sections look at outcomes and learning from this.

3.1.4 The activities of the Employability Access project under Action 2 are described under six main headings as follows:

- Planning
- Setting up
- Project launch
- Programme delivery

- Mainstreaming
- The Transnational Programme

3.1.5 Planning

The planning for Action 2 began around March 2005 with the recruitment of the Project Coordinator and the subsequent recruitment of the Administration and Finance Officer. The initial work involved setting up systems and procedures and discussions with partners' organisations about the content of the programme. Two Employability Development Officers were appointed in August 2005. These are the staff who have been involved directly in programme delivery. The recruitment was carried out through public advertisement with the qualifications for the post including previous experience of work in the employability field. Following review of applications and interviews, two staff were appointed to work alongside the Project Co-ordinator.

- The planning stage involved research into best practice in training and support for the long-term unemployed and discussions with partners to co-ordinate recruitment, training, job shadowing and interviews. This included:
- Discussions with L.M.I.s, including Ashton and N.B.E.C., to look at key issues for those who are long-term unemployed and furthest from the labour market. These included barriers to employment, recruitment issues and training.
- Discussions with training organisations to look at best practice in providing training for those who are long-term unemployed or furthest from the labour market and at issues such as the duration of training, the level of training and support required. Partners involved with this included Ashton, N.B.E.C., North City Training, B.I.F.H.E. and Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (Q.C.A.).

3.1.6 Discussions with employers and trade unions to look at recruitment issues, job shadowing, management support by employers, vacancies and interviews. The employers included the Mater Hospital Trust and North

and West Belfast Health and Social Services Trust.

3.1.7 A great deal of work went into the planning of the E.A.P. programme with a high level of participation from all of the partners. The planning was a genuine collaborative effort which involved a great deal of discussion between the E.A.P. staff and partners and also between partners. The planning of the programme took around six to eight months of negotiation and discussion to design the programme and secure the agreement of all the partners. The planning process was very successful and did require a high level of input and flexibility from each of the partners. The planning process was in itself a valuable learning opportunity for several of the partners as it gave them an opportunity to gain insight as to how other organisations work and to better understand the issues facing the target group and organisations in other sectors.

3.1.8 Programme Set Up

The aim of the planning process was to develop a pre-employment programme to match long-term unemployed and economically inactive residents of north Belfast to access entry level jobs at the Mater and N.W.B.H.S.S.T. The programme therefore had to recruit participants, deliver programme training and support in essential skills and personal development, provide a period of job shadowing and provide a guaranteed interview with the opportunity of securing permanent employment. All of these elements had to be co-ordinated and had to ensure the support and participation of key partners at various stages.

The elements of the programme are as follows:

Recruitment

3.1.9 This is a key element of a pre-employment programme as those who are furthest from the labour market are often those who are most difficult to recruit. Therefore, this would require innovative approaches to maximise outcomes from the programme. There is little point in providing an employability programme

which provides training and interviews for those who would be likely to obtain employment in any event. E.A.P. has adopted a number of approaches to maximise awareness of and access to the programme. This includes house to house leaflet drops in targeted areas of North Belfast which suffer from high levels of unemployment, particularly Neighbourhood Renewal areas. Leaflets have also been left at places that people use such as doctors' surgeries, libraries and community centres, again in areas where there is high unemployment. Leaflets have been left and awareness raising work carried out with Labour Market Intermediaries (L.M.I.s) and other organisations that work with those who are long-term unemployed, including D.E.L., Job Assist Centres (J.A.C.s), the Ashton Centre and North Belfast Employment Centre (N.B.E.C.). Thousands of leaflets were distributed in target areas of north Belfast in late 2005 and throughout 2006 to date.

3.1.10 The second phase of recruitment is to facilitate contact with the programme and to make it relatively easy for those furthest from the labour market to access the programme. The first point of contact for the programme are the Employability Development Officers (E.D.O.s), although in some cases applicants will have made initial contact with an advisor in an L.M.I. (often Ashton Centre or N.B.E.C.) or a J.A.C. The E.D.O. provides information about the programme and will arrange an initial meeting with the applicant. The purpose of the initial meeting is to gather information about the applicant's background, work history and qualifications and to look at their circumstances. A key part of the application process is that applicants are advised to take a finance check to look at their financial circumstances, and advise on how gaining employment will affect the applicant financially, in terms of benefits. This allows the applicant to make a decision about whether to join the programme based on full information about how it will affect them and impact on their lives. Each applicant is then invited to apply for the programme. The E.D.O.s assist with the application.

3.1.11 It is important to ensure that there are vacancies available before running a programme. It is also important that all of the partners are aware of the programme at management and staff level so that the job shadowing and site visits can take place and are available where there are job vacancies. This requires a great deal of coordination and organisation.

Training

3.1.12 The training programme provides four weeks training (it was initially six weeks) followed by two weeks work experience in either the Mater Hospital or in N.W.B.H.S.S.T. The training provides essential skills and personal development and pre-employment skills. The training is based around the Steps to Excellence programme which is an established motivational training programme which seeks to encourage participants to assess their skills, develop their skills and work towards specific goals. The E.D.O.s are trained to deliver the Steps to Excellence programme. The training also provides pre-employment skills such as interview techniques, filling in application forms and work skills. The training is delivered in house to groups of between 10 and 12 participants. Training takes place on three days per week over the four week period. The training runs from 9.30 a.m. until 2.30 p.m.

3.1.13 Each of the participants has the opportunity to job shadow for a two week period. The job shadowing placements are either at the Mater Hospital or N.W.B.H.S.S.T. During the job shadowing, the participant will work alongside one of the Trust staff and will have the opportunity to experience the reality of working in a post that they will then have the opportunity to be interviewed for. During this period, the participant is supported by the E.D.O., the member of staff being job shadowed and line management within each Trust.

3.1.14 During the training, the participants are offered site visits to the Mater and N.W.B.H.S.S.T. and can speak to staff working there. This gives them the opportunity to see the type of work that is

on offer and to find out a little bit more about it by speaking to staff in post. This has generally worked very well. There were some initial problems with organisation of one the site visits but this has been addressed through the partnership and they have been very successful.

Support

- 3.1.15 Most of the participants have not worked for a very significant period of time and suffer from low self-esteem and low self-confidence. For many, the experience of training and work can be daunting and stressful. Built into the programme is a wide range of support for participants to assist them to join the programme, complete the training and enter the labour market. The initial, and perhaps most important, means of support is the E.D.O.s. The participants work closely with the E.D.O.s throughout the training, job shadowing and into employment. The programme is relationship based and the E.D.O.s provide a very high level of support. This runs from support with applying to the programme as described earlier, to training and frequent contact during work shadowing and into employment. Support can take the form of advice, encouragement, practical assistance, or simply providing someone to listen.
- 3.1.16 Support is also built into the programme through the Peer Group. The training is undertaken in groups of around 12 participants. One of the purposes of this is to provide a support group of people who are in a similar position. The programme seeks to encourage the group to work together to support each other. It is not a competitive atmosphere, rather one of mutual co-operation.
- 3.1.17 The third level of support is the staff and management within Trusts. The co-operation of staff and management within the Trusts is very important both during the training, job shadowing and into employment. Participants have the opportunity to meet staff, including previous participants, and the support from staff and managers is very important.

Job Shadowing and Interview

- 3.1.18 The job shadowing element of the programme lasts two weeks and involves the participant working with a member of staff in one of the Trusts in one of the roles that the participant will have the opportunity to apply for. These include jobs in stores, portering, catering, laundry and domestic services. The job shadowing is co-ordinated with employers and during this period the participant has the opportunity to experience the culture of work, and to gain experience in the job. This has four main benefits. First, it allows the participant to experience different types of work and to have an idea of what they might like to apply for. Secondly, the participant has an opportunity to become familiar with the task and it will take away some of the unknowns. Thirdly, the participant can experience the culture of work and get used to what is expected from them. This builds confidence and reduces anxiety about their ability to work. Fourthly, it provides the Trusts with an opportunity to view and develop the participant in the post. The job shadowing is a key element of the programme as it assists participants to put their learning into practice and to build their confidence and aptitude.
- 3.1.19 The job shadowing also helps the participants when it comes to interview as they have more confidence and can talk about the job. All participants are guaranteed interview at the end of the training and job shadowing process. The interview is for an actual job and the participant will be in competition with others who may have applied for the job. Only the interview is guaranteed, the outcome of the interview is not.

Monitoring

- 3.1.20 The recording and monitoring of outcomes of the programme is critically important, not just as a record of the achievements of the project, but also to inform mainstreaming activity. Recording and monitoring includes information on the background of participants, the numbers trained, the outcomes of training, the numbers going on to permanent employment, attitudinal change and other outcomes. Recording is undertaken on quantitative data including

information about the participant's age, gender, time unemployed and benefits. The Rickter Scale has been tested to measure soft outcomes but this has not worked particularly well. The evaluation is also measuring quantitative and qualitative information using interviews with participants and partner organisations.

- 3.1.21 The project continues to be overseen by the Development Partnership, which meets on a bi-monthly basis. Its work is assisted by sub-groups to look at employability issues, H.R. policy and the Transnational programme.

3.2 Activities

3.2.1 Programmes

The first programme started in January 2006. Each programme lasts six weeks (initially eight weeks) and between 10 and 12 participants are recruited for each programme. By May 2006, the third programme has just started. The outcomes from these are assessed in later sections of the report.

- 3.2.2 In the first programme, the Steps to Excellence training was delivered by external facilitators. However, the E.D.O.s have now been trained to deliver this and, from programme 2 on, the Steps to Excellence training has been delivered in-house. The participants have found the training challenging and useful in terms of looking at themselves and planning for the future. For many, the concepts covered in the training are new and, in some cases, quite difficult to get to grips with.

3.2.3 The Project Launch

The official launch of the Employability Access programme took place on 10 January 2006. The launch was held at Belfast Castle and the keynote speaker was Angela Smith, Minister for the Department for Employment and Learning. The event was attended by around 100 people drawn from the partner organisations and representatives invited from the private, public, community and voluntary sectors.

- 3.2.4 The launch was very successful and featured presentations from the Chief Executives of both Trusts, Belfast City Councillors and the Minister for the Department for Employment and Learning. The event was reported in the local media. The launch also showed a D.V.D. presentation which promoted the Employability Access programme and included interviews with staff in the Mater Hospital Trust and North and West Belfast Trust.

3.2.5 Mainstreaming

While mainstreaming is the focus of Action 3 of the project, work is already underway within the D.P. and among the partners to highlight the importance of mainstreaming and look at how this can be applied. The sustainability of the project and learning from it is an important element of Equal projects. Consultation with partners suggests that some mainstreaming is already taking place and the project has already had an impact on recruitment policies within the Trusts and the way in which they advertise vacancies. However, it is recognised that there is still a great deal of work to be done on mainstreaming and disseminating learning from the project.

- 3.2.6 In May 2006, the E.A.P. organised a planning day with the D.P. to discuss mainstreaming of the project. This was well attended with all of the main partners represented. The event was held at Belfast Castle and lasted a full day. The event was facilitated by W.E.A.

- 3.2.7 The event looked at the highlights of the project to date and the main learning points for each of the partners. It also identified possibilities for mainstreaming and looked at how this could be introduced into policies and processes within partner organisations. It considered the economic impact of the project and future possibilities for funding. The outcome of the event was that organisations were encouraged to consider mainstreaming as a ongoing product of the project and not something that is simply added at the end. The event was very useful and demonstrated the E.A.P.'s commitment to mainstreaming and to maximising learning

from the project. The E.A.P. intends to produce a draft mainstreaming strategy by the end of June.

3.2.8 The Transnational Element

The Transnational project is a key element of Equal funding and of the E.A.P. project. E.A.P. is involved in a transnational partnership titled: Co-operation for Employment (Co.F.E). Co.F.E. brings together partners from Italy, Spain and the Republic of Ireland, as well as Northern Ireland. All of the partners are involved in matching the supply and demand of labour in disadvantaged communities. The Transnational partnership is subject to a separate evaluation, also being carried out by Williamson Consulting, and a more detailed report in relation to the Transnational Partnership will be produced separately. However, the activity of the Transnational Partnership is also relevant to this evaluation and therefore this is mentioned briefly below.

3.2.9 There have been two main transnational events held during the evaluation of Action 2. The first was an exchange visit in Spain in November 2005. This was attended by eight representatives from E.A.P., along with representatives from each of the other partners. The theme of the exchange in Spain was: critical analysis of public policies regarding labour market reintegration into entry level jobs including those in social care. The exchange was held over two days and included a range of presentations by the partners and local projects relating to the theme of the exchange. This was the first opportunity for the partners to come together in this way. There were some concerns expressed about the organisation and content of the exchange, although generally those who attended felt it had been useful, not least in establishing contacts between partners. This was the first transnational exchange and it was thought that there was learning points which could be used to improve following exchanges.

3.2.10 The second exchange took place in May 2006 in Milan, Italy. Again this was attended by eight representatives from the E.A.P., along

with representatives from the other partners. The theme of the exchange was: matching the supply and demand of labour. The exchange took place over two days and included presentations from each of the transnational partners and site visits to local projects. The event was well organised and provided a range of useful information which improved the partners' understanding of each others' projects and provided interesting views on ways of matching supply and demand of labour and difficult approaches in different countries. The feedback from the exchange to date has been positive. There will be a more detailed analysis of the Transnational Partnership in a separate report. Overall, it is felt that the T.P. does need to improve communication between partners if it is to maximise its usefulness.

3.3 Outcomes

3.3.1 While it is early in the lifetime of this project, it is useful to look at the initial outcomes from the programmes in terms of quantitative and qualitative analysis. The quantitative analysis is based on records from the E.A.P. and looks at numbers recruited, numbers completing the course and gaining jobs. The qualitative analysis is based on interviews with participants and partners and looks at issues such as the background of participants, changes in attitudes towards work, employment outcomes and changes in employment practice.

3.3.2 The recruitment process has been successful in attracting participants who would otherwise have been very unlikely to apply for jobs in health. The most successful contact method has been the leaflet drops, particularly door to door deliveries, with one third of referrals in this way. While this can be a hit and miss approach, it has enabled the programme to reach people that would not be likely to respond to advertisements. Increasingly, word of mouth has been a source of recruitment as more people become aware of the programme. The recruitment sources are summarised in the table below:

Source	Number
Leaflet to home	10
Ashton/NBEC	4
Job Centre	5
Other leaflet	4
JACS	2
Word of mouth	2
Media	1
Other	2
Total	30

3.3.3 To date, two programmes have been completed and a third is underway, as at the end of May 2006. The first programme started in January 2006 and was completed in early March 2006. There were 12 participants who started the programme and six who completed the programme. Those who left did so for a variety of reasons, including domestic reasons, and health reasons. One of those on the course had actually obtained employment. Of the six who completed the programme, all were offered interviews, five were interviewed and offered employment in the Mater Hospital Trust. Four started employment with the Mater and one early leaver took up a post in the N.W.B.H.S.S.T.

3.3.4 The second programme began in early April 2006 and finished at the end of May 2006. Ten people started the course and all completed it. Final figures are not yet available on numbers securing employment, however six have definitely secured jobs in the Mater or N.W.B.H.S.S.T., and four who were unsuccessful in interviews at the Mater have been offered interviews by N.W.B.H.S.S.T. One completed the course but was unable to attend job shadowing or interview because of health problems.

3.3.5 The table below summarises the programme and job outcomes from the first two programmes. The courses have a completion rate of 75% and the proportion of those getting jobs is at least 50%. Depending on the outcome of interviews this could increase to over 70%. The average age of participants was just under 35 years, with a range from 19 to 52 years. There have been nine males and 13 females. The average time

unemployed was 5.4 years, with a range from 6 months to 17 years. Eleven participants were receiving JSA, with eight receiving income support and two on incapacity benefit. The average age of the early leavers was 43 years. Six of the participants were lone parents. The third programme started on 23 May 2006 with eight participants. Four participants are receiving J.S.A. and four, Income Support. Two are lone parents. The average length of unemployment is 2.5 years, with a range of one year to six years. There are six females and two males. The courses are run on a cross community basis and participants have come from both of the main communities. Participants have reported that the groups have all bonded very well and the cross community impacts of this should not be underestimated.

Programme 1 and 2 Beneficiaries

Gender	Age	Benefit	Time unemployed	Outcome
F	32	JSA	11	Employed
F	35	IS	9	Job offered but not taken up
M	39	JSA	10	Employed
M	22	JSA	1	Employed
F	47	JSA	3	Did not attend interview
F	43	JSA	1	Employed
F	40	IS	10	Early leaver
M	51	None	4	Early leaver
M	52	JSA	2.5	Early leaver
M	43	IB	4	Early leaver
F	29	IS	8	Job offered
M	19	JSA	1	Early leaver
M	37	IS	8	Job offered
F	22	IS	1.5	Job offered
F	22	JSA	1	Unsuccessful interview
F	37	JSA	17	Job offered
F	32	IS	3	DNA Interview
F	25	IS	5	Health issues
M	51	IB	3	Job offered
F	33	JSA	12	Unsuccessful interview
M	20	JSA	0.5	Job offered
F	31	IS	3.5	Job offered

- 3.3.6 As part of the evaluation, the consultants have undertaken interviews with participants. To date, 12 participants have been interviewed. The process is to interview participants at the start of the programme and again at the end of the programme. The interview uses a structured set of questions which look at the participants' background and work history, why they joined the programme and how they have found the programme. It also looks at changes in their attitudes towards key issues such as self-confidence, attitude to work and aspirations. To do this, the consultants have used a scoring frame where participants rate themselves on a scale of 1 - 10, with 10 being the highest. This is undertaken at two different points in the programme to assist assessment of attitude change. All of the participants have been very positive about the programme. It would be inappropriate at this stage to analyse responses in detail as this could identify individuals. More detailed analysis will be undertaken with a bigger sample in the next evaluation report.
- 3.3.7 All of the participants are from North Belfast and from disadvantaged areas. The majority heard about the programme through the door to door leaflet drop. All have been unemployed for a considerable period of time and most were very far removed from the labour market with very few qualifications and very little experience. Most thought that they had little hope of obtaining employment and none thought that they would be capable of getting employment within either of the Trusts. All demonstrated very significant barriers to employment. All reported very significant changes in their attitudes towards themselves and work. All felt much more confident, much more positive about their future, and much more positive about their employment prospects. All were very enthusiastic about the programme and their jobs.
- 3.3.8 The interviews with participants bring up a number of key points:
- The project has been successful in accessing those who are far removed from the labour market and would be very unlikely to gain employment through standard employability programmes.
 - Many had already been on programmes such as New Deal or Worktrack but these had not been successful.
 - The programme provides a high level of support, both through the E.D.O.s, managers within the Trusts and group itself. This has been very important in assisting participants to complete the programme.
 - The outcomes in terms of attitudinal change are very positive. All those who have completed the course have been successful in securing employment.
 - All of those who secured employment are very happy in their jobs and believe that this has made a very significant difference to their life.
 - All have been very positive about the content of the programme and the input from the E.D.O.s.
 - All believe that the programme has made it possible for them to access employment which would not have been possible otherwise.
- 3.3.9 All of the participants found the Steps to Excellence course very useful and enlightening. Some described it as difficult, particularly in the early stages and reported that they struggled to get through this. This has been reported to the E.D.O.s who are looking at how this can be made easier. Participants were also very positive about the site visits and the job shadowing, which were excellent experiences for them.
- 3.3.10 In terms of the employers, the feedback has also been very positive. The programme has enabled employers to fill vacancies that were otherwise proving very difficult to fill and the experience with the participants has been very positive. All have been keen to work and have done a good job. The project has been very useful in terms of accessing the recruitment policies and practices and it has

helped to address the gap between large employers and disadvantaged communities in North Belfast.

3.4 Management and Staffing

3.4.1 It is generally agreed that the Employability Access project has secured the commitment of all the right partners that will be needed for a project of this type in North Belfast. The project has representation from both the supply side and the demand side. In other words, the project has the commitment of organisations which work with unemployed people to provide training and support and also the commitment of employers who provide jobs and which are responsible for determining employment policy and practice. This partnership is very important both in terms of the operation of the project, i.e., it provides training, jobs and support but will also target and recruit people who can benefit most. At the same time it will also influence employers' policies and practices and will seek to mainstream findings in best practice.

3.4.2 All of the partners feel that the partnership is working well and that the partnership has been effective in putting in place the necessary procedures for Action 2. Any potential problems have been identified and addressed through the planning process or during programme evaluation. Partners have established a better understanding of each other and the different needs and constraints within other organisations. The partners support the aims and objectives of the project and feel that they have the opportunity to make a positive contribution, both in the development of the project and into developing policy within their own organisations. The benefits from the project include better relationships and links between partners, where there is mutual benefit, and the opportunity to develop new approaches to recruitment and employability in North Belfast. The partnership has been meeting regularly and the level of participation and discussion has been good.

3.4.3 There is a general consensus that the partners have learned from each other, that there is good communication and that changes in systems and procedures have taken place. During Action 2, the partners have been able to test the key issues for their organisations and for the target groups and this has already led to better understanding between the partners. This has had an impact on employers' practices and employers are already seeing tangible outcomes in terms of recruitment practice.

3.4.4 The project structure seeks to provide a strategic and practical approach which covers all of North Belfast and the target groups. The Development Partnership brings together all of the key stakeholders in the area and it is responsible for the strategic development of the project, overseeing the programme and dissemination of best practice. The Development Partnership board meets every two months. The Development Partnership has also set up subgroups to take forward specific aspects of the project. These are an Employability Subgroup and a Transnational Subgroup. There is also a H.R. Policy Group and a H.R. Working Group to look at key issues arising from the programme.

3.4.5 The Employability Subgroup is responsible for taking forward the development of the programme, including the Pilot Pre-employment programme, job shadowing, and interviews. The Subgroup involves representatives from all of the Development Partner organisations. It meets monthly and is working closely with the Co-ordinator and relevant organisations to establish the pilot programme and the marketing of the programme. The Transnational subgroup is responsible for taking forward the transnational aspects of the project, which is subject to a separate evaluation. The H.R. Working Group has produced a report looking at barriers to employment based on the experiences of participants.

3.4.6 The Development Partnership is supported by a Project Co-ordinator, an Administrator, and two Project Officers. The staff support the Development Partnership, provide administrative and financial monitoring and reporting, support the partners, organise the operation and delivery of the project, co-ordinate the work of the partners and undertake the day to day running of the project.

3.5 Finance

3.5.1 The table below summarises the expenditure during Action 2 compared to the budget. In most areas the actual expenditure is below the budgeted figure. This is largely because progress on Action 1 was slow at first because the letter of offer was delayed and staff were not recruited and programmes run until later than had been planned. Also, the costs of the programmes have been less than forecast because of low take up of child care and travel expenses. The transnational cost for travel has also been lower than expected.

E.A.P. Action 2 Summary July 2005 to June 2006

Item	Budgeted	Actual	Variance
Staffing	139,200.58	121,345.2	17,855.38
Beneficiaries	49,455	11,055.99	38,399.01
Other costs	48,189.29	41,400.67	6,788.62
Transnational Costs	17,364	8,064.74	9,299.26
Overall Total	254,208.87	181,866.6	72,342.27

4

Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

4.1.1 The Employability Access Project is now well into Action 2, the delivery phase of the project. This interim evaluation report therefore has focused on the establishment and delivery of the programme and the extent to which the programme is meeting its Action 2 objectives.

4.1.2 A summary of the E.A.P. Pre Employment programme content is included in the appendices. The training is delivered at N.I.C.V.A. and it is run over six weeks, three days per week. Originally, it was planned to deliver the programme over two days per week and to run two programmes simultaneously. However, it was believed that this would be more difficult for participants and therefore the programme was changed to three days per week, with only one programme running at any time. The target for the programme was originally to deliver ten programmes with 10 - 12 participants per group. This has now been revised and there will be nine groups running from January 2006 to June 2007 with a similar number of participants.

4.1.3 Conclusions that can be drawn from the evaluation to date are as follows:

- The Employability Access project has successfully completed the planning and set up stage of Action 2 and has now moved into the delivery phase.
- The project has successfully recruited two E.D.O.s to deliver the programmes.
- The set up of the programmes involved all of the partners and required co-ordination of a number of different organisations in the Health and Employment sectors. There has been a high level of participation and co-operation from the partners and this has been very successful.
- There has been good management and monitoring of the programmes which has resulted in changes to the programmes where necessary to ensure that they achieve their objectives.
- The partnership itself is working well with input from all of the main partners. There are some partners who perhaps feel less

able to contribute and are unsure of their role at this stage.

- The project has been successful in targeting and reaching out to those who are furthest from the labour market. The project has managed to recruit people who have had difficulty getting jobs and would be unlikely to be able to compete in the labour market without an intervention of this type.
- The programme has had a high success rate to date in terms of getting completers into jobs. However the continued success of this will depend on the number of vacancies available in the Trusts.
- The project has used innovative methods to recruit and create awareness of the programme, for example door to door leaflet drops. These have proved successful in reaching those who would not respond to traditional means of advertising jobs.
- The majority of the participants would have been very unlikely to apply to for jobs in the Trusts without this programme.
- The programme is achieving or progressing towards achieving its objectives at this stage.
- Participants are very happy with the content and structure of the programme and believe that it is making a very significant difference to their lives.
- Employers are very happy with the programme and it has made a difference to recruitment and H.R. practices. The project organised and held a very successful launch which received positive publicity and was attended by local politicians and representatives from key sectors.
- The project is already looking at mainstreaming and is encouraging the partners to consider ways of mainstreaming elements of the project at this stage.
- The Transnational Partnership has held two exchange visits. These have been generally well received although there is some improvements needed in the Transnational Partnership, particularly in the area of communication between partners.
- The programme has had a very good completion rate to date.
- The programme has been run on a cross community basis and is recruiting

participants from both communities. There are therefore positive cross community impacts.

4.2 Recommendations

4.2.1 As the conclusions show, the project is working well at this stage. The partners are satisfied with the way the partnership is working, as are participants and employers. A number of issues have been raised over the last six months during the planning and set up and delivery of the programme and these have been addressed by the programme staff and within the D.P. The recommendations at this stage are:

- It would be worth reviewing the membership of the DP to ensure that all members are clear about their roles and contribution.
- It may be worth exploring how to target specific sections of the unemployed, e.g. lone parents, ethnic minorities, etc.
- It may become increasingly difficult to find and match vacancies in the Trusts. It may be worth considering other potential posts within the Trusts or signposting participants to vacancies in other Trusts.
- It has been difficult to get feedback from anyone leaving the programme early. The project should look at alternative ways of doing this.
- The project should monitor sustained employment outcomes.

A large, stylized white number '5' is centered on a teal rectangular background. The number is composed of thick, rounded lines.

Appendix

**EAP Pilot Pre Employment
Programme timetable**

WEEK 1
Session 1



Programme overview & timetable; show EAP DVD of employees to introduce jobs available, progression pathways and future employers. Breaking Barriers session including effective thinking skills to help personal potential to be reached, start personal development plan (PDP- to map progress). Arrange Rickter Scale appointment.

WEEK 1
Session 2



What is the truth? (Where beliefs come from & how they limit personal growth) followed by exercise to identify barriers to work. POCVA and occupational health forms completed (facilitated by Mater/NWHSST representative). PDP filled in and etiquette regarding site visits is discussed. Also a visit by a Welfare Benefit advisor to discuss Working Tax Credits.

WEEK 1
Session 3



Site visits to the Mater Hospital and various sites of the NWHSST.

WEEK 2
Session 4



How you mind works– address the issue of how we need to live our lives according to our beliefs. Session about thought process to investigate how the mind works followed by Beliefs control our senses- How we are captive to our beliefs.

WEEK 2
Session 5



The impact of Self Talk – looking at thought patterns to improve self-image. Identify job interests/ posts available – outline career progression pathways, benefits of work (introduce pension, sick leave, annual leave flexible working etc) and address identified barriers. Discussion around work etiquette. Complete participant profile.

WEEK 2
Session 6



Self Esteem – examine the importance of thinking well of ourselves. Application forms- A discussion, handout followed by the participants filling in a mock application form. Participants are asked to get the information they will need to complete the application form and bring to the next session.

WEEK 3
Session 7



Comfort Zones – how self-image as a regulator lets us take risks. Start to complete application form (hints and tips around completing forms). Application forms continued, revisions and mistakes corrected.

WEEK 3
Session 8



What do you think about? – Looking at our capacity to look forward, plan and have forethought. Finally complete job applications if necessary. Participants are given their job shadow details and discussion around this. Honorary contract filled in. Job maintenance techniques.

WEEK 3
Session 9



What we should think about.– resolving conflict, create energy and set goals. This is followed by a discussion about in work etiquette, job management techniques and expectations of employers. Discussion around job progression and success stories regarding the Mater and the NWHSSST. Update PDP

WEEK 4
Session 10



Goals provide our energy – taking full accountability for your future followed by interview session incorporating interview skills, interview questions, do's and don'ts, hints and tips and mock interviews.

WEEK 4
Session 11



Affirmations – deciding what participants want to achieve in life followed more interview skills training and a mock interview with Project Coordinator.

WEEK 4
Session 12



Motivation is an inside track– using skills and techniques learned during the programme to stay on track followed by any anxieties/practical problem solving. Focus group, PDP'S, final wrap up and certificate of achievement presented.

WEEK 5 


Job shadowing – visits by EDO mentor 1x weekly- PDP filled in.

WEEK 6 


Job shadowing – visits by EDO mentor 1x weekly – PDP filled in.
2nd Rickter Scale interview completed. Evaluation Form completed.

WEEK 7 + 


Interviews

WEEK 8+ 


Start work

1 month post job 


In work support provided by EDO/in work mentor. 2 x visits more if needed.

Employability Access Project - Action 2 Interim Evaluation

Jobs in North Belfast... Secure a healthy future

Employability Access Project (EAP)
North Belfast Partnership
2 Duncairn Gardens, Belfast BT15 2GG

Tel: 028 9075 2990
Web: www.nthbp.org

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