

A Review of the Equal North-East Re-Integration  
Training Initiative

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **1.1 Background**

In 2000, the Work Research Council produced a report on a survey of adult long-term unemployed in Dundalk, *Adult Long-Term Unemployment in the Tiger Economy*. It emerged that despite employment growth and decreasing long-term unemployment nationally, there remained persistent adult long-term unemployment in Dundalk, particularly among older males. Consequently, a pilot Equal North East Re-Integration Training Initiative Programme was introduced by the FÁS Dundalk Training Centre, funded by Equal<sup>1</sup>. The three-year pilot commenced in 2003, was based in Dundalk, and initially targeted older, long-term unemployed males.

During the course of this pilot, the programme reported that it achieved a progression rate of 85% for its clients. This high rate of progression (and the innovative approach taken with regards to programme delivery) led to the programme's successful application for mainstreaming funding from Equal in 2006, to continue the programme for a further 18 months. During the course of this extension, Dundalk Training Centre requested that FÁS Planning and Research Department carry out an evaluation of the entire Equal North East Re-Integration Training Initiative (i.e. the three-year pilot and the 18-month mainstreaming initiative).

This chapter looks at the background to the Equal North East programme and presents the aim of this evaluation, the methodology used and an outline of the structure of the report.

### **1.2 The Equal North East Re-Integration Training Initiative**

Equal North East was specifically designed to address the reintegration issues faced by persons experiencing multiple social disadvantage (such as long-

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<sup>1</sup> Equal is a European Social Fund (ESF) Community Initiative which provides funds to projects which test and promote means of combating discrimination and inequalities in the labour market. This European funding initiative seeks to assist long-term unemployed men and women experiencing multiple social disadvantages to compete effectively and successfully in the labour market.

term unemployment, substance abuse issues, ex-offenders, mental health issues, little or no formal education, literacy difficulties)<sup>2</sup>.

In its proposal for funding<sup>3</sup>, the programme co-ordinator outlined how the programme differs from more traditional employment activation measures in terms of engagement, delivery, assessment, support and progression. While these five distinct elements of the programme can be identified as being different to traditional mainstream training programmes, it is important to highlight that the programme was designed holistically and is more than just the sum of its parts. The elements are all interconnected. However, for the purpose of describing the programme, it is necessary to break it down into its composite parts. Each of these elements will be addressed briefly in turn. The overall logic of the programme is outlined here, while the structure and the content of the programme are examined in the next chapter.

### *1.2.1 Engagement*

The Equal North East proposal<sup>4</sup> noted that the traditional recruitment methods used by the programme initially faced considerable attrition in terms of interview attendance and post-interview attrition in terms of those called to attend training and those commencing training.

As a result, Equal North East introduced a more coordinated and integrated, engagement strategy. The Pilot developed a strategy of shared inter-agency responsibility for clients during the engagement strategy. A Development Partnership was established in 2003 made up of representatives from a range of organisations. Through this partnership, the programme ultimately developed a strategy of joint interviewing in conjunction with the Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA). This strategy proved very effective in increasing attendance at interviews.

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<sup>2</sup>Ann McKeon (2005) *Review of the North East Training Initiative Equal Programme*, p. 16

<sup>3</sup>Geraldine Caldwell (2005) *Equal Community Initiative: Application for Mainstreaming Funding*

<sup>4</sup>*ibid*, p.2

In terms of alleviating post-interview attrition, it was deemed essential “that the referrals being made were suitable for and appropriate to the individual needs of the clients. This facilitated a heightened focus on client progression that led ultimately into jobs<sup>5</sup>.” This was achieved by introducing the HARP assessment/guidance interview. (HARP is discussed in Chapter 4)

### *1.2.2. Flexible Delivery*

“Flexible delivery” encompasses various forms of flexibility – flexibility with regard to staff roles, with regard to course start times, course content, payment of allowances, and course length.

### *1.2.3. Measurement and Assessment*

The programme contained a number of assessments in its two-week induction. These assessments included personality tests, psychological profiling, learning styles and literacy testing. The purpose of these tests was to highlight the participants’ strengths and to uncover any weaknesses that required additional supports. The results were available to the instructors, so that they could be more aware of the individual participant’s learning style.

### *1.2.4. Mentoring Support*

Mentoring support (both scheduled and informal meetings) was offered to participants during the programme and during the work placement. This support continued for up to a year after the programme was finished. While the programme was running, participants were aware that they could discuss any issues that were affecting them with the Equal team. For persons in employment after the programme, this support included the provision of further training (if required/requested). The purpose of this support was to ensure that participants completed the programme and to help in their progression.

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<sup>5</sup> Geraldine Caldwell (2005) Equal Community Initiative: Application for Mainstream Funding.

#### *1.2.5. Progression*

When the pilot Equal North East programme commenced, the progression aim was similar to that of general Foundation-level programmes i.e. to help the majority of clients to progress into mainstream training or an employment programme. However, when the programme began, it emerged that the participants were more interested in gaining employment than in moving to further training. As a result of this, the focus of the Equal team adapted to finding sustainable employment for its participants. Equal North East developed an Employer Network through which they assisted participants obtain suitable placements.

### **1.3 Programme Design and Team Delivery**

An important quality of the programme was that it worked in one continuous thread of recruitment, delivery and follow-up. The Equal team selected participants onto the programme, delivered the course content, arranged work placements and established links with employers, and then maintained follow-up for up to a year after participants left the programme.

Unlike traditional FÁS programmes where a single instructor delivers the course in its entirety, Equal North-East had a multi-skilled, multi-functional team of three persons delivering the course. The roles within the team included interviewing clients, instruction in the various modules, mentoring, establishing and then maintaining an employer network, administration work, administering tests, literacy classes, and follow-up with previous participants.

### **1.4 Aim of Evaluation**

The first aim of this evaluation is to ascertain the overall progression outcomes from the programme. Although Equal North East kept placement records for the participants immediately after the programme, it is important to look at outcomes some time after the end of the programme, to see whether the positive outcomes were maintained.

If the outcomes compare favourably to other FÁS programmes, then the

evaluation has two further questions.

- 1) How did Equal North East achieve such positive outcomes, compared to other FÁS programmes? In order to achieve this, the various elements of the programme will be examined, focussing on how these elements differ from traditional FÁS programmes and how they can improve outcomes for participants.
- 2) It is recognised that Equal North East is more expensive than traditional FÁS programmes. The final question of this evaluation will be: does the improvement in outcomes outweigh the extra costs of running this programme?

### **1.5 Methodology**

The evaluation was conducted in-house by the Planning & Research Department in FÁS. The evaluation is based on a number of sources of information.

- Files held by Equal on client backgrounds.
- Desk research (relevant literature, FÁS policies, etc. A selected list is appended).
- In-depth Interviews with the Equal team (the co-ordinator, instructors past and present (n=4); the mentor and the administrator); four Employment Services Officers (ESOs); the local Department of Social and Family Affairs representative; the Local Employment Services (LES) representative, and the former Dundalk Training Centre Manager. These interviews were all recorded. Four interviews with employers took place – these were not recorded.
- Participant feedback, through a survey (carried out by post and telephone) (n=64); in-depth telephone interviews (n=14) and two focus groups meetings (n=14).
- Conversations with relevant FÁS divisions/functions: Training Services Manager, Community Services Manager, Course Recruitment Officer.
- Comparison of survey results with other relevant FÁS surveys.

### *1.5.1 Survey*

The survey was undertaken in three stages: a postal phase, telephone contacts and then in-depth telephone interviewing. The aim was to achieve 50 responses to the survey.

Firstly, a postal questionnaire was designed and sent to all 150 participants of the programme (this figure excludes the final 'mainstreamed' programme participants who were still in training). Of these, ten questionnaires were returned due to wrong addresses. Thirty-one responses were received, giving a response rate of 22% to the postal phase of the survey, which is a higher rate than had been anticipated. A copy of the questionnaire is attached in the Appendix.

Attempts were made to contact the remaining 109 participants with telephone calls. No telephone numbers were available for 26 participants; the telephone number was out of service for a further 29 participants and five participants had either moved address or were unavailable. Three telephone call attempts were made to the remaining 49 participants and 27 successful telephone interviews took place (this gives a response rate of 55%).

After achieving the desired 50 responses, the telephone surveys were continued to elicit further information. In total, 64 responses to the survey were achieved. In addition, some fourteen in-depth telephone interviews were carried out on areas that the questionnaire did not cover (e.g. views about the interviewing process, work placements, etc.)

## **1.6 Report Outline**

Chapter Two gives an overview of the profile of clients on the programme, and the structure and content of the course. Chapter Three looks at the outcomes from Equal North East and compares them with the outcomes from comparable traditional FÁS training programmes. Chapters Four to Eight

examine how Equal North East differed from other FÁS programmes in terms of engagement, flexible delivery, measurement & assessment, support and progression. Chapter Nine outlines the costs associated with the programme and Chapter Ten presents the conclusions and recommendations.

## Chapter Two: Client Profile and Course Details

This chapter looks at the profile of clients who participated in the Equal North East training programme, and gives an outline of the content and structure of the programme.

### 2.1 Client Profile

The profile of clients was examined in terms of gender, age, education level, and previous employment situation. The data sources used are detailed below.

#### 2.1.1. Data Sources

The Equal North East team provided Planning & Research with the files of individual participants. There were 151 files. In addition, the names and addresses of 18 other participants were received. The level of information on the participants varied. Full information was available for 116 participants, i.e. names, addresses, and background information (date of birth, education level, etc.). HARP assessment reports were available for 26 participants (HARP will be discussed later in the report), which included names, addresses and date of birth, Contact details only were available for 18 participants and no information (other than their name) was available for the final nine participants.

**Table 2.1: Available Information on Equal North East Participants**

<b>Level of Information</b>	<b>Numbers</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Full	116	69
HARP	26	15
Contact Details	18	11
Names	9	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>100</b>

The evaluation encompasses the total 169 persons who participated in the programme but the figures presented in the report Tables are derived from the 116 persons on whom full information was available.

### *Total Numbers*

During the course of the three-year pilot, 142 persons participated in the Equal North East training programme. A further 27 persons participated during the second phase of the programme. The evaluation encompasses the total 169 persons that participated in Equal from when it commenced in October 2002 to when it finished in September 2007.

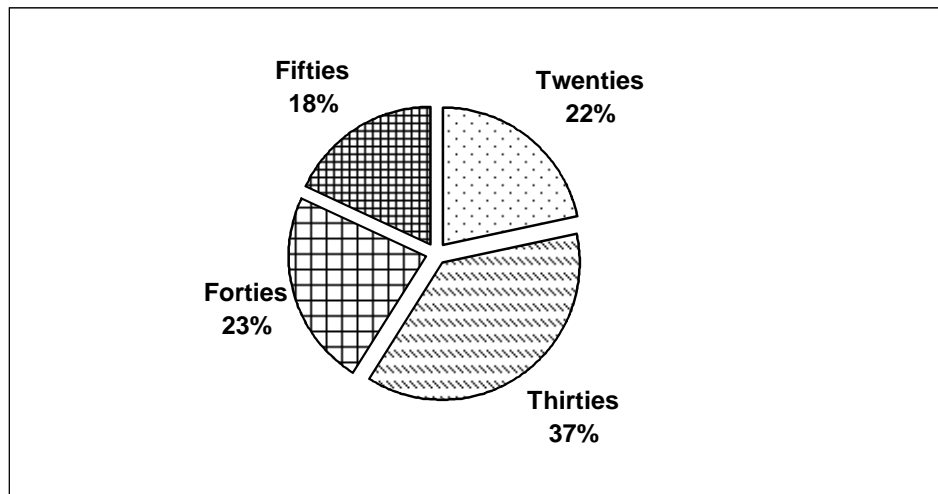
### *2.1.2. Gender*

The gender profile of the participants was fairly evenly split. Of the 169 participants, 91 (or 54%) were male, and 78 (or 46%) were female. The courses were generally recruited on a single gender basis (i.e. either men or women), but there was mixing of genders to varying degrees in some cohorts.

### *2.1.3. Age*

The average age of Equal participants was 38 years. The ages of participants ranged from the youngest aged 22 to the eldest aged 58. The most common age category was people in their thirties (37%), followed by people in their forties (23%), twenties (22%) and fifties (18%). The proportion in each age category is presented in Figure 2.1 below.

**Figure 2.1: Age profile of participants**

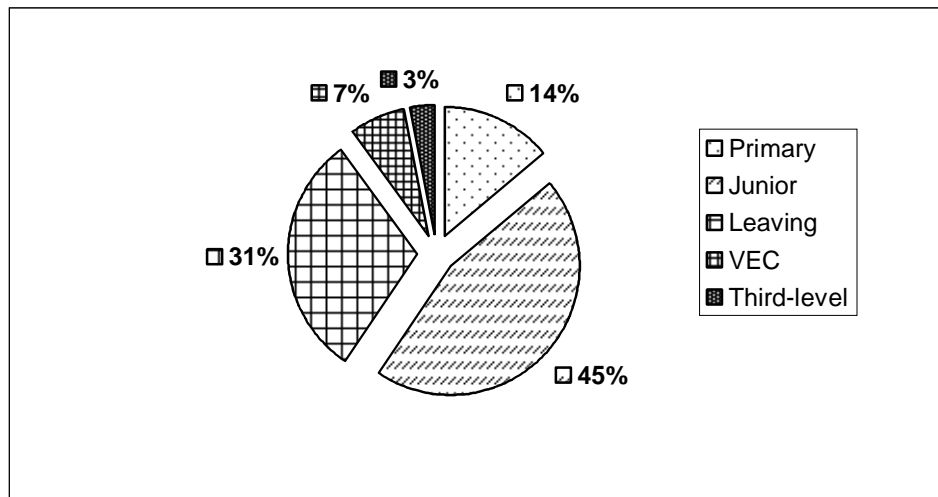


*Base: 139*

#### 2.1.4. Education Level

The most common level of education for Equal participants was Junior Certificate-level or equivalent (45%), followed by the Leaving Certificate (31%). One in seven (14%) had primary-level education only, and 7% had PLC-level or some kind of VEC qualification (level unknown). Three percent had third-level.

**Figure 2.2: Education-level of Participants**



Base: 104

Participants were also asked whether they had any issues with literacy (prior to any literacy testing). Of the 141 participants where information was available on their file, 27 stated that they had issues with literacy (19%, or almost one in five).

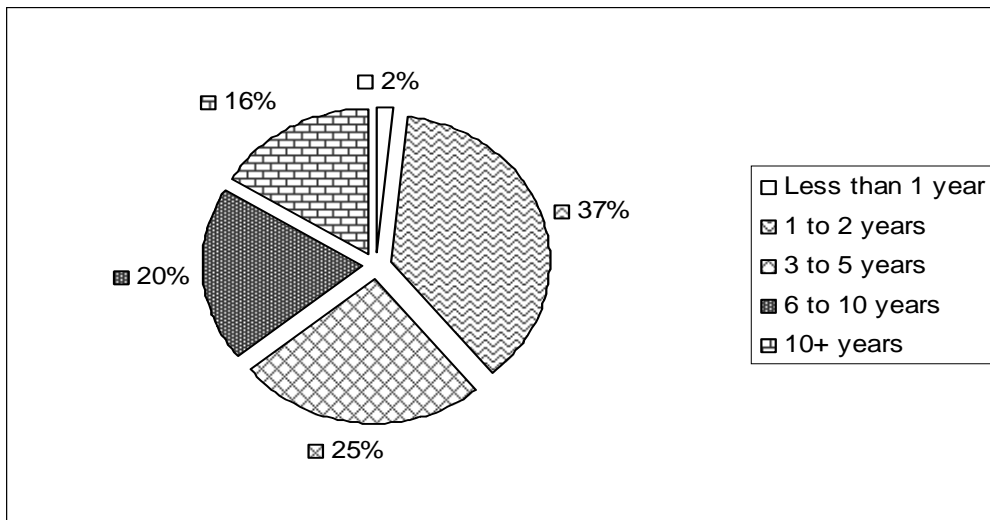
#### 2.1.5. Previously Unemployed

Of the 169 participants, information on their previous situation was available for 135 clients. Of these, 93% were unemployed prior to participating on the programme and of these, 98% were long-term unemployed. Therefore, nine out of ten of all participants (91%) on the Equal North East training programme were long-term unemployed prior to starting the programme.

The clients' status as "unemployed" is based on the client's self-definition.

Figure 2.3 displays the length of unemployment for Equal North East participants. Of the 93% of participants who were unemployed when they started the Equal programme, the most common length of unemployment was one to two years (37%), followed by three to five years (25%). A further one in five (20%) were unemployed for six to ten years, and 16% had been unemployed for more than ten years. Two percent were unemployed for less than a year.

**Figure 2.3: Duration unemployed**



Base 123

From these figures, it can be seen that a third of all participants on Equal North East had been unemployed for more than five years before starting the programme.

#### 2.1.6. Reason for Participating in Programme

One of the questions asked in the survey of all participants on the Equal North East programme was why they participated (Table 2.2). The results add up to more than 100% as respondents could give more than one reason.

**Table 2.2 Reasons given for participating in Equal North East**

<b>Reason for Participation</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
To find a job	32
Sent by social welfare	26
Advised	16
Increase self-confidence	5

*Base: 54*

One in three (32%) said they went onto the programme to find a job, and 30% wanted to gain skills. One in four (26%) said that they went on because they were sent by social welfare and 16% said that they were advised (by FÁS, social welfare or personal recommendations). Five percent said they participated in order to increase their self confidence.

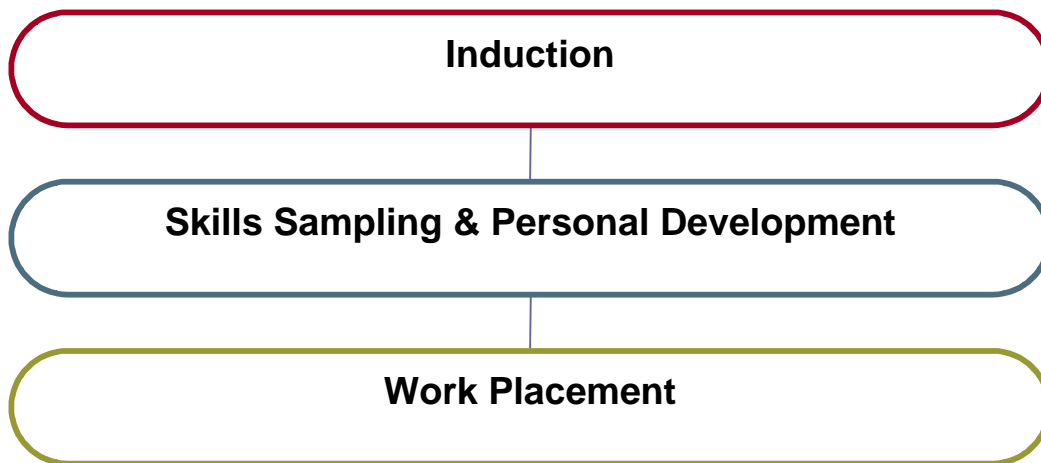
## **2.2 Course Structure**

This section looks the structure and content of the training programme.

### *2.2.1 Structure*

The programme consisted of a two-week induction programme, followed by skills sampling. During the course of the skills sampling, participants spent a half day a week with computer classes; a half day on personal development and guest speakers were invited in on Friday mornings. After the training portion of the programme was completed, when the participant was placement-ready and a placement had been organised, the participant went on work experience. The length of these latter two stages (skills sampling and work placement) varied depending on the needs of the client. This section looks at the first two stages of the diagram below i.e. the training programme components.

## Structure of Equal North East Training Programme



### 2.2.2 Induction

The first two weeks on the Equal programme comprised a Pre-Training Orientation Process<sup>6</sup>. This was developed and refined over the years of the programme.

The content of the induction programme included:

- Standard FÁS induction (i.e. FETAC-certified Health & Safety and Manual Handling),
- Safepass
- Tests/screening (e.g. literacy & numeracy screening, personality profile, emotional intelligence, aptitude/ability)
- A series of group work sessions producing group rules, identifying learning and thinking styles, identifying existing skills, goal setting etc.
- One-to-one sessions giving feedback from assessments, and formulating an Individual Learner Action Plan.

At the end of the induction, participants had a common understanding of their expectations of the programme and had signed a learning contract that stated the agreed responsibilities of the programme providers and the learners. The group as a whole also agreed on which optional modules to cover on the programme (depending on the availability of instructors).

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<sup>6</sup> The orientation process may be carried out in the first week only. If this is the case, the testing segments of the induction are carried out in the following weeks.

The testing/screening content of the induction programme is covered in more detail in Chapter 6 on Measurement and Assessment.

### *2.2.3 Skills Sampling and Personal Development*

After the induction, the clients began their training modules. The core training modules were Hand Skills and Computers. Optional modules over the course of the programme have included Hand Tools, Retail Sales, First Aid and Payroll.

In terms of overall certification the majority of clients left the programme with:

- Manual Handling (certified by the Health and Safety Authority)
- Health and Safety (certified by the Health and Safety Authority)
- Safepass (certified by the Health and Safety Authority)
- Hand Skills (certified by FETAC – Level 3, Minor award)
- Computers (certified by FETAC – Level 3 or Level 4, Minor award)
- One of: Retail Sales, Payroll, Hand Tools (certified by FETAC – Level 3 or 4, Minor award)

The content of the programme and the modules covered within it are discussed in more detail in Chapter Five on Flexible Delivery.

## **Chapter Three: Results of the Survey**

This chapter compares the Equal North East programme to analogous FÁS training programmes to see how it fared in terms of the perceived benefits of participating on the programme and on the outcomes subsequent to exiting the programme.

### **3.1 Rating of Programme by Participants**

This section first presents the findings for the Equal North East programme then compares them with the results from the most relevant FÁS training programmes.

Three programmes are used for comparison: Bridging/Foundation; Expanding the Workforce; and Return to Work.

Bridging/Foundation programmes include courses for people who have left school early and/or mature people who have been out of work for a considerable period of time. The courses can be flexible in delivery and concentrate on basic personal skills development, career direction and skill sampling, with a view to progression to Specific Skills Training programmes or entry to the labour market. This course description closely matches that of Equal North East.

The Expanding the Workforce (ETW) process was designed for women who are not on the Live Register, are in the home and are looking to enter/re-enter the labour force. The programme shares a number of common features with Equal North East - emphasis is placed on the initial face-to-face guidance interview, mentoring support is available throughout the programme, participants are placed on a work programme and support is available for a year after exiting the programme. Also in common with Equal North East, Expanding the Workforce developed an Employer Network through which they placed participants.

The Return to Work programme is suitable for people who may have been out of paid employment for a long time and who are interested in returning to the labour market. The programme is mainly for mature adults who have good basic skills i.e. literacy, numeracy and communication skills. It can be flexible in delivery and concentrates on personal development, building self-esteem, career planning and selected technical and soft skills.

These three programmes were used as they were considered the most similar to Equal North East in terms of their aims, content and structure. As Equal North East was made up primarily of long-term unemployed participants (91%), when comparing it to the Bridging/Foundation programme, comparisons are generally made with the long-term unemployed participants on that programme.

The data for comparisons with Bridging/Foundation and Return to Work is sourced from the *2006/7 Follow-Up Survey of FÁS Participants*<sup>7</sup> conducted by the ESRI. The data for comparisons with Expanding the Workforce is from the *Follow-Up Survey of Women Returners* conducted by Franklin Research in 2007. Where possible, comparisons were made with each of these programmes. In some cases, however, there was a lack of comparability (due to coding differences with the Expanding the Workforce survey) or there were insufficient numbers for a given question to allow for meaningful comparisons.

### *3.1.1 Survey Results for Equal North East*

In the survey of Equal participants, respondents were asked a range of questions taken from the *2006/7 Follow-Up Survey of FÁS Participants*, to enable comparisons between Equal North East and other FÁS programmes. These questions included topics such as: improving employability, satisfaction with various aspects of the programme, the overall usefulness of the programme, whether the respondent had worked since exiting the programme, and the respondent's current situation.

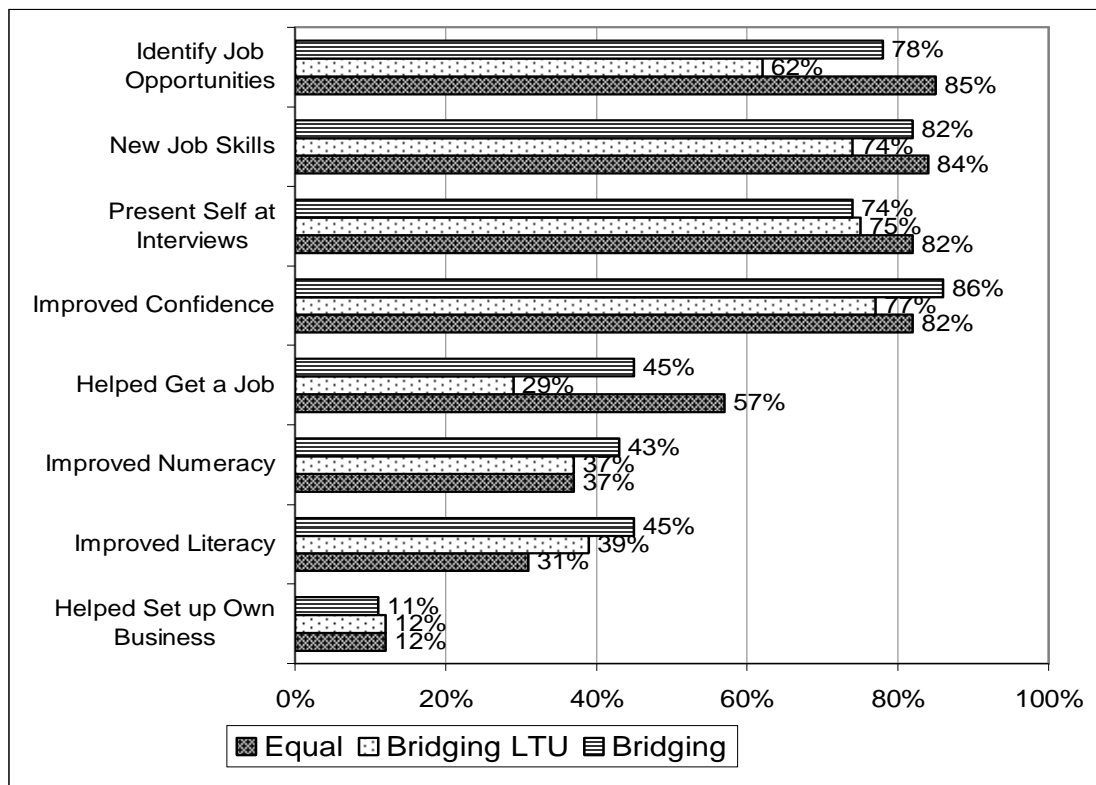
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<sup>7</sup> The Follow-Up Survey is a regular survey undertaken by FÁS of participants on training and employment programmes. The findings relate to employment outcomes, the perceived usefulness and benefits of the programmes, and satisfaction with the programmes.

### Improving Employability

Respondents were asked whether attendance on the Equal training programme helped in a range of areas, such as improving confidence, identifying suitable job opportunities and giving new job skills. The results from the survey are presented in Figure 3.1 below, and are compared to the results for long-term unemployed participants on FÁS Bridging/Foundation training programmes. The results for all participants on Bridging/Foundation programmes are also presented for information purposes. There were insufficient numbers to enable comparisons with Return to Work and these questions were not asked in the Expanding the Workforce survey.

**Figure 3.1: Benefits from Attending Training Programme**



Base: 64 for Equal; 34 for Bridging/Foundation LTU

Looking first at the results for Equal, four out of five participants stated that attendance on the programme helped them at least ‘a little’ to identify suitable job opportunities (85%), gave them new jobs skills (84%), helped them to

present themselves at interview (82%) and improved their confidence (82%). Furthermore, more than half of participants said that the programme helped them at least 'a little' to get a job (56%). Approximately one in three participants said that programme attendance helped improve their literacy (31%) and numeracy (37%). One in ten (12%) said that the programme helped them to set up their own business.

Comparing this to results from the *2006/7 Follow-Up Survey of FÁS Participants* for participants on Bridging/Foundation programmes (and in particular, long-term unemployed participants, the most comparable group), the most significant difference is in the rating for "helped me to get a job" – more than half of the participants on Equal said that attending Equal helped them at least "a little" in getting a job, compared to 45% of all Bridging/Foundation programme participants and 29% of long-term unemployed Bridging/Foundation participants. Participants on Equal also gave higher ratings than long-term unemployed Bridging/Foundation participants for aspects such as: identifying job opportunities (85% compared to 62%), new job skills (84% versus 74%), and improved confidence (82% versus 77%).

Surprisingly, given the emphasis on literacy screening and assistance in this area on the Equal programme, Equal participants gave a lower rating for the help they received in improving their literacy – 31% said attendance helped them at least "a little" compared to 39% of long-term unemployed clients on Bridging/Foundation programmes. The percentage saying that the programme helped improve their numeracy skills was the same for both programmes.

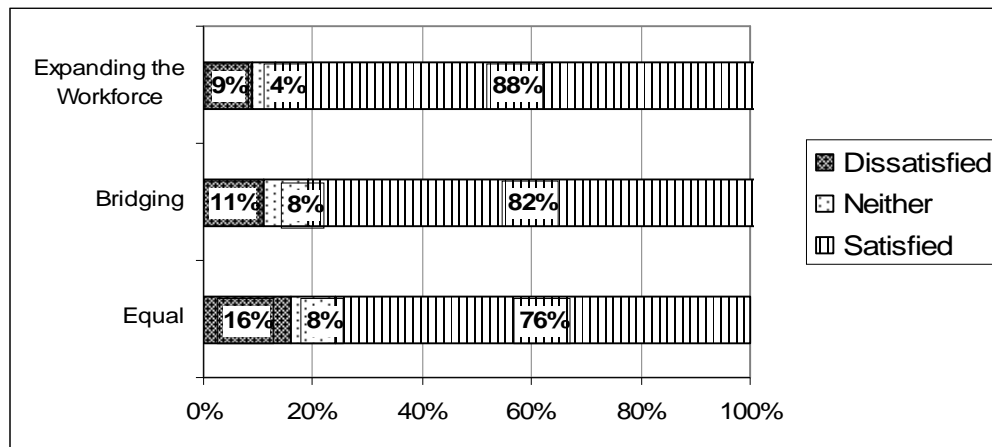
#### *Usefulness of Programme*

Three out of four respondents (76%) stated that the Equal programme was useful to them, compared to 86% of long-term unemployed participants on Bridging/Foundation programmes. Fourteen percent said that it was 'no use at all', compared to 5% of long-term unemployed participants on Bridging/Foundation programmes.

### *Satisfaction with Programme Content and Instructor*

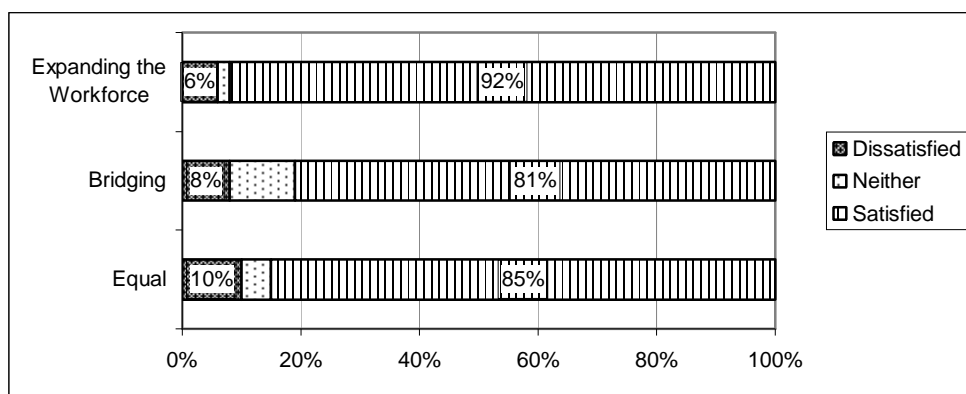
Respondents were asked how satisfied they were with the content of their programme (Fig 3.2 below). Three out of four respondents (76%) positively rated the content of the programme; 16% were dissatisfied. Compared to other programmes, 82% of long-term unemployed participants on Bridging/Foundation programmes positively rated the content of their programme, as did 88% of participants on Expanding the Workforce. Satisfaction with the content of the Equal North East programme was therefore lower than comparable programmes, although not statistically significantly.

**Figure 3.2: Satisfaction with Content of Programme**



Respondents were also asked to rate their satisfaction with the instructor/trainer on the programme (Fig 3.3 below). More than half (58%) of Equal participants were 'very satisfied', and 85% in total positively rated their instructor. This compares with 92% of participants on Expanding the Workforce positively rating their instructor and 81% of long-term unemployed participants on Bridging/Foundation programmes. Therefore, satisfaction with the programme instructor was at a similar level in the Equal North East programme.

**Figure 3.3: Satisfaction with Programme Instructor**



### *Summary*

Comparing the survey results for participants on Equal North East with long-term unemployed participants on Bridging/Foundation programmes and with Expanding the Workforce, Equal scored better than the other programmes in terms of delivering on employment-related criteria i.e. helping to get a job, obtaining new jobs skills, presenting at interviews and improving confidence. It scored less well in terms of the content of the programme, the usefulness of the programme and improving literacy. It scored similarly in terms of rating the programme instructor and improving numeracy skills.

## **3.2 Outcomes Achieved by Participants**

This section looks at the outcomes achieved by participants of the Equal North East training programme, both immediately after exiting the programme and at the time of the survey. These results are compared initially with outcomes for long-term unemployed participants on Bridging/Foundation programmes and participants on Return to Work, and subsequently with Expanding the Workforce participants.

### *3.2.1 Background*

When Equal North East began, the progression aim of the programme was to prepare its clients for mainstream training programmes or employment schemes. The client profile was similar to that of FÁS Bridging/Foundation or Foundation programmes, where the client has been out of the labour force for

a long time and not in possession of up-to-date labour market skills. The aim of the programme therefore was to prepare clients for a mainstream training programme setting, or an employment programme. However, when the programme began, it emerged that the clients were more interested in gaining employment than in continuing training. The focus changed accordingly and Equal North East focussed on progressing its clients into employment more than any other outcome.

### 3.2.2 Immediate Progression

From the records maintained by Equal North East, the outcomes for participants immediately after exiting the programme are available (Table 3.1 below). Immediately after exiting the programme, 38% of participants were in employment, 20% were in FÁS, education or other training. One in four were unemployed (26%) and 16% were on home duties/other.

**Table 3.1: Outcomes Immediately after Equal North East Participation**

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Percent</b>	
Employed Full-Time	22	Total Employed: 38%
Employed Part-Time	14	
Self-Employed	2	
Education	7	Total FÁS/ Education/Training: 20%
Vocational Training	3	
Employment Scheme	10	
Unemployed	26	Unemployed: 26%
Home Duties	6	Total Home Duties/Other: 16%
Other	10	

*Base: 98*

The most appropriate comparator for these outcomes are the FÁS placement figures. The FÁS placement figures aim to record whether FÁS registered clients progress into work, education or training. The figures presented below in Table 3.2 are the 2007 (Year to Date) figures. These figures were considered the most relevant as there has been sufficient time for the necessary data to be collated from the various sources. The data is therefore considered to be more accurate than the 2008 data currently available.

**Table 3.2: Placement on Comparable FÁS Programmes, 2007 YTD**

	<b>Bridging/ Foundation</b>	<b>Return to Work</b>	<b>Equal North East</b>
<b>Total Placed</b>	47%	56%	58%
<b>Job</b>	30%	33%	38%
<b>FÁS/Education</b>	14%	17%	20%
<b>Uncoded</b>	3%	5%	NA
<b>N</b>	6,315	914	98

*Source: FÁS MIS (Unplaced Terminations) 2007*

The placement figures for Equal (employment plus education/training = 58%) compare similarly to those found on Return to Work and are higher than Bridging/Foundation-level participants (although not statistically significantly so).

The total placed into employment was slightly higher in Equal (even accounting for the fact that a small proportion of placed participants from Bridging/Foundation and Return to Work courses – 3% and 5% respectively - were “uncoded” and could have been placed into either employment or FÁS/Education). It should be emphasised that the FÁS programme placement figures refer to all participants on these programmes and not just long-term unemployed participants. The placement figures found on Equal North East compare positively to those found on mainstream Foundation-level courses, despite the high proportion of long-term unemployed participants on the Equal North East programme.

### *3.2.3 Outcomes at the Time of the Survey*

The employment outcomes of the Equal North East participants are compared separately to the outcomes of the Bridging/Foundation and Return to Work programmes and the Expanding the Workforce process.

#### *Comparison with Bridging/Foundation and Return to Work Programmes*

Table 3.3 below presents the outcomes from the survey of Equal North East participants, and compares them to the outcomes of participants on Bridging/Foundation and Return to Work programmes from the *2006/7 Follow-Up Survey of FÁS Participants*.

**Table 3.3: Outcomes at Time of Survey (%)**

	<b>Equal North East %</b>	<b>Return to Work %</b>	<b>Bridging/Foundation (All) %</b>	<b>Bridging/Foundation (LTU) %</b>
<b>Current Situation</b>				
<b>Working</b>				
Working Full-Time	30	14	25	
Working Part-Time	18	18	11	
Self-Employed	4	2	2	
<b>Total Working</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Other Progression</b>				
Education/Training	7	8	9	
FÁS Training	4	5	4	
Employment Scheme	9	9	3	
<b>Total Ed/Train/Scheme</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>16</b>
Unemployed	19	21	28	52
Home Duties	7	19	9	11
Other	4	4	9	
<b>Total N</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>38</b>

The first column of the table presents the survey results for Equal North East. The second and third columns give the results for all participants on Return to Work and Bridging/Foundation programmes respectively from the *2006/7 Follow-Up Survey of FÁS Participants*. The final column displays the results for the long-term unemployed participants on Bridging/Foundation programmes. As the total number in column 4 is quite small (38), the results are only given for the major divisions of activity (i.e. working, FÁS/training/education, unemployed and home duties/other).

Slightly more than half (52%) of participants on Equal were employed at the time of the survey, compared to 38% of all participants on Bridging/Foundation programmes, 34% of Return to Work participants and 21% of long-term unemployed participants on Bridging/Foundation programmes. The employment outcomes are statistically significantly higher for Equal North East compared to Return to Work and Bridging/Foundation

programmes (both for total participants on Bridging/Foundation and the long-term unemployed participants).

One in five participants on Equal was in further education/training or on an employment scheme at the time of the survey, compared with 16% of participants on Bridging/Foundation programmes and 23% of Return to Work participants.

Overall, almost three out of four participants on Equal (72%) had some sort of positive outcome at the time of the survey (i.e. employment, education, training, or an employment programme), compared with 37% of long-term unemployed participants on Bridging.

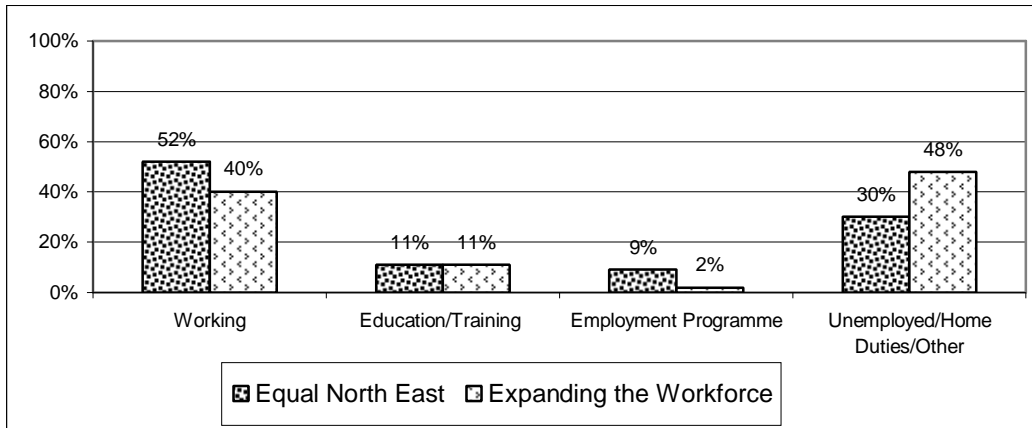
Less than one in five participants (19%) on Equal was unemployed at the time of the survey, compared with 52% of long-term unemployed participants on Bridging, which is a statistically significantly lower percentage.

The outcomes achieved at the time of the survey by participants on Equal programme are very positive. It is important to note, however, that there is a difference in the time lag in carrying out these surveys. The Follow-Up Survey is conducted approximately 12-18 months after participants exit their programme. The range of exit years in the Equal North East survey is substantially broader, going from one year to five years, which can impact on participant outcomes.

The next section compares the outcomes of the Equal North East participants with participants on the Expanding the Workforce (ETW) programme (formerly known as Gateway for Women). A survey for this latter programme was carried out approximately five years after the programme started, so the range of exit years is similar to that of the Equal North East survey.

Unfortunately, the survey results for ETW merge the three categories of unemployed, home duties and 'other' all together. For that reason, the results for this category are not discussed, although they are presented.

**Figure 3.4: Comparing Equal North East to Expanding the Workforce**



Equal North East achieved a higher rate of progression into employment than Expanding the Workforce<sup>8</sup> (52% compared to 40%). Both programmes had the same proportion of participants enter into education/training (11%). Equal North East had a higher proportion of participants enter employment programmes. This was most likely due to their differing client profiles (i.e. the vast majority of Equal North East participants were long-term unemployed and therefore eligible for Community Employment programmes, while ETW participants were not on the Live Register and may not have been eligible).

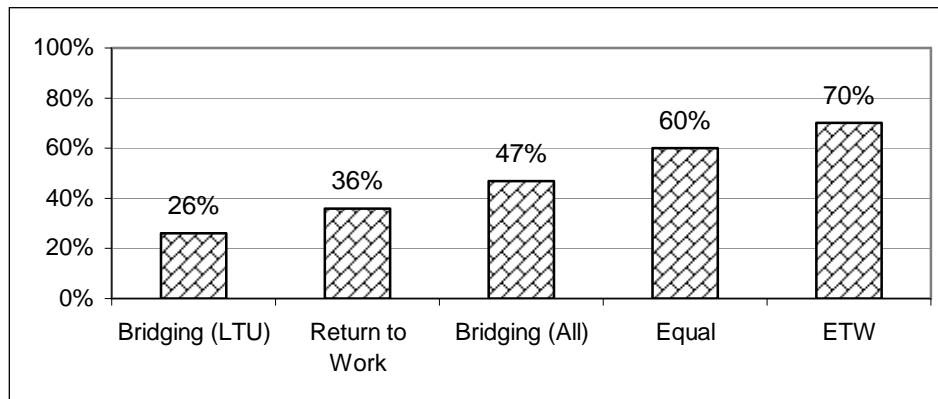
Overall, it can be seen that the employment outcomes for Equal North East compare favourably to those from ETW, although the results are not statistically significantly higher.

### 3.2.4 Employment Record

Another question asked of participants is whether they had ever had a job since exiting their training programme (Figure 3.5 below).

<sup>8</sup> It might be suggested that this could be attributed to a skewed sample: a greater proportion of the participants on Equal North East are from more recent years, while a half of participants from Expanding the Workforce were from 2002-2004. Interestingly, however, the level of employment achieved by the later years (2005-2007) of Expanding the Workforce is actually lower than in the earlier years (34% compared to 46%) therefore the higher rate of employment is not a result of sampling bias.

**Figure 3.5: Ever Had a Job Since Exiting Programme (%)**



Three out of five participants on Equal (60%) had obtained employment since leaving the programme. This compares favourably with the 47% of Bridging/Foundation participants<sup>9</sup>, the 36% of Return to Work participants, and even more so than the 26% of long-term unemployed participants on Bridging/Foundation programmes. A higher proportion of participants who went through the Expanding the Workforce process obtained a job afterwards (70%) – however, the employment obtained by Equal North East participants appears to be more sustainable as more of them remained employed at the time of the survey.

### *Summary*

Comparing the results from the survey of Equal participants with the results for Bridging/Foundation-level and Return to Work programme participants from the *Follow-Up Survey of FÁS Participants*, a statistically significantly higher proportion of participants on Equal North East were employed at the time of the survey. A statistically significantly lower proportion of participants on Equal were unemployed at the time of the survey compared to Bridging/Foundation-level participants. Furthermore, compared to Expanding the Workforce participants, a higher proportion of participants were employed at the time of the survey.

<sup>9</sup> Statistically significant at  $p < 0.10$ .

### **3.3 Conclusions**

The first aim of this evaluation was to determine whether the outcomes from Equal North East merited further attention, in order to see whether there are any lessons to be learned from its content and delivery. The results from the survey found that participants on Equal North East achieved better employment outcomes than participants on analogous FÁS programmes. This outcome in and of itself makes Equal North East worthy of further examination. However, the employment outcomes are rendered all the more impressive when one considers the high proportion of long-term unemployed participants on the Equal programme.

The next question to be addressed is how did Equal North East achieve such positive outcomes, compared to other FÁS programmes? Chapters Four to Eight look at the various elements of the programme, focussing on how these elements differ from traditional FÁS programmes and how they can improve outcomes for participants.

## Chapter Four: Engagement

### 4.1 Introduction

The aim of the Equal North-East programme is to assist long-term unemployed people who are experiencing multiple social disadvantages to compete effectively and successfully in the labour market. This group of people is difficult to describe such is the range and complexity of the problems they are facing. They often have multiple barriers to education, training or employment, for example alcohol, solvent or drug related abuse or dependencies; health related problems; homelessness or family problems; second or third generation unemployed; involvement in illegal or anti-social criminal activities. In addition, many of them have essential skills needs, poor records of attendance and achievement in education/training as well as attitudinal problems. The target trainee profile is outlined in Table 4.1 below.

**Table 4.1: Target Trainee Profile**

<b>Age</b>	The programme targets male and female clients aged between 25-55+. Where a need is identified, clients not in this age category will be considered.
<b>Education/Training</b>	No formal educational qualifications are required. The programme has been designed to accommodate the needs of those clients who may be early school leavers and those experiencing numeracy/literacy issues. If a need is identified, clients with formal educational qualifications will be considered.
<b>Aptitude</b>	No special aptitudes are required. As part of the programme, a thorough identification of individual aptitudes will be carried out, eg personality profile, numeracy/literacy skill, learning ability, thinking style, fluid intelligence (trainability) etc.
<b>Personal Skills</b>	No personal skills are required. As part of the programme, a strong emphasis will be placed on the development of the individual's personal skills, eg communication, team working, etc.
<b>Previous Experience</b>	None required
<b>Special Requirements</b>	Unemployed clients who have been out of the workforce and where it has been identified that in order to progress they need to develop new skills, improve their personal skills and develop a realistic achievable career plan that will assist them to re-enter the labour market. Also clients who may require an intervention to facilitate them to develop a genuine interest in returning to work and consider a wide range of job options.

This chapter looks at the new approach which was taken regarding the recruitment and selection of clients onto the Equal North-East programmes. It describes in detail the Holistic Assessment, Reintegration and Progression (HARP) instrument which was used by the Equal North-East team to assess

clients' suitability for the programmes. Feedback of the views of participants, the Equal team, the training centre manager, the LES co-ordinator, the DSFA officer and four Employment Service Officers (who undertook HARP training) is also presented.

#### **4.2 Recruitment Process**

Traditional recruitment methods were used on the initial pilot Equal programmes – namely referrals from the Gateway route of FAS Employment Services. Other recruitment sources included advertising in the local media and referrals from the Local Employment Services (LES), the Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA), the Simon Community and the probation services. However the level of referrals was low and there was significant attrition between those called for interview and those attending the interview; and those called for training and those turning up to start the programme. It was felt that a more coordinated, integrated and innovative engagement strategy was required. As a result, the Pilot developed a strategy of shared inter-agency responsibility for the engagement of clients. A Development Partnership was established in 2003 made up of representatives from a range of organisations and was chaired by the former Manager of the Dundalk Training Centre. Membership included representatives from:

FÁS

Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA)

Local Employment Services (LES)

Resource Centre for the Unemployed

Dundalk Employment Partnership (budget holder)

Vocational Education Committee

Community

Through this partnership, the programme ultimately developed a strategy of joint interviewing in conjunction with the DSFA. They found this strategy to be effective in increasing attendance at interviews. In terms of alleviating post-interview attrition, the strategy ensured *“that the referrals being made were suitable for and appropriate to the individual needs of the clients. This*

*facilitated a heightened focus on client progression that led ultimately into jobs.”*<sup>10</sup>

The process of joint interviewing started towards the end of the pilot and continued when the programme was mainstreamed. Letters were sent by the DSFA inviting clients to attend for a briefing. At this briefing, if the clients indicated interest in the programme they were subsequently invited to attend for interview. This process resulted in a marked reduction in the number of clients failing to turn up for interview. It also ensured that the clients who were referred to the programme were suitable for the programme and that the programme met their immediate needs.

This process involved an element of compulsion as the letter inviting clients to attend for interview/briefing finished with the following sentence “Failure to attend may result in your payment being reviewed”. However this is normal practice for clients receiving letters from the DSFA as people receiving job seeker benefit or allowance are all supposed to be available for work and actively seeking employment. What was different, was the practice of joint interviewing. A DSFA officer and a member of the Equal team would jointly interview/brief clients and if they fit the profile and were interested in the programme they were offered a HARP<sup>11</sup> interview and a place on the programme.

Question 3 in the survey asked participants to give the main reason why they attended the Equal Programme. Table 4.2 presents their responses.

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<sup>10</sup> Geraldine Caldwell (2005) *Equal Community Initiative: Application for Mainstream Funding*.

<sup>11</sup> The HARP interview is explained in Section 4.3

**Table 4.2: Why did you attend the Equal Training Programme?\***

<b>Reason</b>	<b>%</b>
To help me get employment	28
Sent by Social Welfare	26
To receive training/improve my skills	25
To increase my confidence	6
Was advised to attend	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

\*This table presents the main reason given only – therefore the figures differ from Section 2.1.6. Also the results include the main reason given by the five participants of the second focus group (n=5). Base = 57

As can be seen from the above Table, more than half (54%) of the participants attended the programme with a view to improving their chance of gaining employment or receive training and improving their skills. However, one-quarter (26%) said that they felt compelled to attend as result of being sent by the DSFA.

#### *4.2.1 Comparison to other FÁS programmes*

Normal FÁS recruitment onto training programmes is through the FÁS Gateway. Employment Service Officers (ESO) interview candidates and can refer them to various FÁS training courses or employment programmes. There is no element of compulsion regarding attendance at these interviews. The only other instance where the DSFA are officially involved in FÁS recruitment is with the National Employment Action Plan (NEAP) clients, whereby persons unemployed for a certain length of time are sent a letter to attend an interview with FÁS. These letters also state that failure to attend the interview may result in payments being reviewed. Notwithstanding this, the NEAP interview has no connection to a specific FÁS programme and a DSFA representative is not present at these interviews.

#### *4.2.2 Feedback on the Recruitment Process*

##### *Feedback from Participants*

One in four respondents (26%) to the survey indicated that they took part in the programme because they were “sent” on it by social welfare.

Feedback from the two focus groups indicates that the majority of them participated on the programmes because they felt compelled to do so. They said that they were not told categorically that they would lose their dole if they didn't attend but they were afraid that they might. The presence of the DSFA officer at the briefing compounded this feeling. A number of them said that they were unhappy with this feeling of compulsion at first. They *"didn't want to come on the programme, dreaded going and hated the first few days"*. However as time went on they began to enjoy it. A number of people in the focus group chose to do the programme – they were *"bored of sitting at home, vegetating on the dole"*. Others had heard about it and wanted to attend. One member of the focus group said *"(The team) wouldn't take on people who didn't want to work"*.

The 'compulsory' element of attending the programme was not raised as an issue to any great extent in the telephone interviews. Whereas a number of respondents indicated they had been sent to the interview by social welfare, a majority indicated they had applied themselves to do the course, or were advised to apply, or saw it advertised. One respondent *"knew the people who were running the course and knew that FÁS courses could open doors into employment and that is what I was looking for."* Another respondent indicated that he had taken some time in *"considering whether to take up the place or not on the course"* intimating that he did not feel under any pressure about losing his social welfare. Not one person who took part in the telephone interviews mentioned the presence of the DSFA officer at the interviews/briefings.

#### *Feedback from Programme Co-ordinator*

The co-ordinator said that the original aim was to fill the courses using Gateway. They were looking for long-term unemployed clients who were having difficulty progressing into either training or employment. However this strategy did not work out and they received most of their referrals directly from the DSFA, circumventing Gateway completely. Eventually they began the process of joint interviewing/briefing with the DSFA.

The only criteria used to exclude people from the programme were substance-abusers not receiving help and people experiencing serious psychological problems not receiving counselling. Others who were not offered places on the programme were those who were deemed 'not-training ready'/disengaged (see next section). The results of the interviews (including reasons why clients were not offered a place) were sent back to the agencies/organisations who referred them for interview.

#### *Feedback from DSFA representative*

At the start of the Equal pilot programme, the DSFA officer interviewed clients on his own and would then, if he thought they were suitable, refer them to FÁS for a separate interview for the programme. A large proportion did not attend this FÁS interview. Subsequently they (DSFA and FÁS) began to interview in adjoining rooms. He would interview first and if the client was interested he would refer them for immediate interview by FÁS. However, they discovered that at these 'FÁS' interviews a sizable number declared to FÁS that they weren't interested in training or that they were already working. Eventually, they decided to interview jointly and this proved to be very successful.

### **4.3 Interview process**

The clients who fit the profile and who were interested in the programme were offered a HARP interview and a place on the programme.

#### *HARP*

The Holistic Assessment, Reintegration and Progression (HARP) tool-kit was first developed in 1994 by Development Research Initiatives (DRi Ltd). It was initially used in the UK Prison Service as a means to assess the progression of former prisoners and their reintegration back into society. It was subsequently used in the Derry and Strabane Job Assist Centres to assess case-loaded clients.

HARP is based in action research carried out over a six year period between 1994 and 2001 with funds received from four European Union programmes

(Social Exclusion / Integra / Youthstart / ADAPT). The action research had a focus on what worked best with a range of different groups who had a common experience of exclusion from learning or the labour market or a lack of progression in terms of employability or enterprise such as:

- Long term unemployed
- Socially excluded youth
- People with low basic skills
- Ex-offenders / prisoners
- Drug users in rehab
- Disadvantaged communities
- People with learning disabilities
- Disabled people.
- Non traditional learners

#### *4.3.1 The HARP Assessment Tool*

The HARP assessment tool is used to assess and categorise an individual's state of employability based on identifying barriers to employment. Clients are rated from Level 1 to 4 – depending on the level of support they require in order to enable them to become employment-ready. (1 = low support required, 4 = therapeutic support required). The objective of HARP is to assist individuals overcome their barriers and move towards Level 1 and the process tracks the level of progress made in overcoming their barriers.

The HARP interview is prompted by a series of questions and some assessments on:

- Barriers to employment
- Potential for progression
- Motivation/Readiness

### *Barriers to employment*

Barriers to employment can cover a broad range of issues such as family, health, childcare, peer relationships, emotional problems, learning difficulties, social problems, substance abuse, etc. The presence of any of these issues in a clients' life is not a problem as such as everyone has issues at various stages in their lives. However, it becomes a problem when the issue impacts on the individuals' ability to gain and maintain employment.

The first stage of the HARP process involves identifying barriers to employment. This involves a very detailed, structured interview which can take up to one hour to complete. It is grounded in sound interviewing techniques and prompts the interviewer to consider why people are not in employment rather than focusing on which type of work might suit the client. The process involves the interviewer asking the client a broad range of questions – many of which may not be work-related, and challenging them if needs be on the answers given. Interviewers employ a range of intervention techniques, such as:

- Listening and reflecting back what the client has said.
- Checking out with the client for accuracy and not making assumptions.
- Working with the clients' use of metaphor.
- Guiding clients to define their own problems and potential.
- Reaching understanding.
- Actively evaluating with the client.

Clients may use real or perceived barriers for not progressing and the purpose at this stage of the process is to identify the barriers so that they can be put aside. The absence of such a frank discussion may mean that real issues are not uncovered and therefore not dealt with. This differs from the 'standard' FÁS interview style which tends to focus on more general type of job-matching questions.

### *Potential for Progression (Employability)*

Clients are also asked to look at their positive attributes which are categorised as generic skills, vocational skills and personal qualities. They identify the skills, knowledge and experience they have and how they can transfer these and what personal qualities they possess. They rate these attributes and give examples of how they have used them in their lives. Technical skills and employability skills which the client will need to develop are also identified.

### *Motivation/Readiness*

Clients are assessed under five headings of motivation/readiness – disengaged, ambivalent, decisive, active and maintaining:

- At the **disengaged** state, the client is not ready for either employment and/or training and does not want to change their status/situation. It is a waste of time and resources recruiting clientele who are disengaged. Clients who were rated as disengaged were not offered a place on the programme.
- At the **ambivalent** stage, clients express an interest but make excuses as to why they can not engage in training/employment (“The course sounds really interesting but my partner is sick, etc”). Ambivalence can be either mild or deep. Those people who are mildly ambivalent can be encouraged to engage if supplied with good quality information (benefits of the programme, how to overcome issues). Those who are deeply ambivalent have lots of reservations and will require a second meeting.
- People at the **decisive** stage are ready for action.
- When clients are **active**, they are applying for jobs/ training.
- At the **maintenance** stage, the client continues striving.

At the end of the HARP interview, an individual's barriers to employment; potential for progression; and readiness to engage will have been identified and agreed on. The level of support the individual will need in order to progress is also identified. Clients are rated from Level 1 to 4 – depending on the level of support they require. Level 1 is peer support (low support) – the client is fine and needs little support. They can get on in a group and don't need close supervision. Level 2 is mentor support (medium support). They will benefit from one-to-one guidance and advice. Level 3 is brokerage (high support). The client will need the help of more than one agency to progress and ideally should be part of a high support case conferencing process. Level 4 is therapeutic and the client needs specialist help. They are not suitable as yet for training/employment and are not the remit of FÁS.

#### *Action Plan*

At the end of the interview, the client and interviewer identify and agree opportunities and planned actions. The planned actions have to allow for at least one of the following; sustain motivation, reduce a barrier or improve employability. The detailed information on the questionnaires is then transferred to a training needs analysis form and this becomes their individual learner plan when they commence the programme. For those people who are not taken on the programme (because they are 'disengaged' or because they need specialist help) the results are sent back to the agency who referred them for interview.

#### *4.3.2. Training for delivering HARP*

Three FÁS staff members who were engaged in a full-time capacity on the Equal North East programme took part in a three day HARP training programme. The programme took place over a seven month period commencing with two days training followed by a break to allow for practice. During this period participants wrote up case studies regarding clients they had worked with. On the last training day, the facilitator on the training programme worked with participants on these case studies.

In June, 2007, four Employment Services Officers (ESOs) from the North-East region attended a two-day HARP briefing workshop. The four ESOs were not directly involved in the Equal project but had heard of HARP and were interested to see if the process would be advantageous/useful to them in their own work as ESOs. All four were experienced interviewers with long service in FÁS. They all had completed the N.U.I. Maynooth, Certificate in Guidance and Counselling. The four officers agreed to give their views and opinions on their own experiences of using the HARP tool as part of the qualitative aspect of this evaluation. The LES co-ordinator and the representative from the Department of Social Welfare and Family Affairs (DSFA) also attended a briefing workshop.

#### *4.3.3. Feedback on HARP and the Interview Process*

##### *Feedback from Participants*

No direct questions were asked about the interview process in the postal survey and no comments were made about it in the returns. The only feedback given on the process is from some focus group respondents and a number of the telephone interviewees. The views of clients who didn't take part in the programme regarding their interview experience are not available.

A number of participants in the second focus group referred to the interviews they had. They mentioned that it was *"different from FÁS interviews because it was more casual"*, *"It was different because it wasn't just questions coming at you, it was more casual and they actually wanted to know about you"*.

The interview process was raised by a number of participants in the telephone survey – mainly in relation to the length of time it took compared to other interviews they had done *“It was a long interview – about 30 – 45 minutes”*. Nobody mentioned that they found it anyway confronting or were uncomfortable with it. *“Good interview. I thought the interviewer had a good suss on people. She had the ability to pick out a person’s good qualities. She was a straight talker which I liked.”* Another respondent said that he didn’t notice anything different about the interview compared with other interviews. It took about a half an hour. Some things came out in the interview - he was non-specific, then he mentioned that he had problems reading and writing and since has participated in a literacy programme.

#### *Feedback from Training Centre*

The former training centre manager and the Equal co-ordinator first came across HARP at a conference in Derry. The manager thought at first that HARP would be suitable for the Local Employment Services as well as the Equal programme. The reason for introducing it was to deal with the problem of lack of progression of trainees from foundation type programmes. He feels that it is cost-effective in so far as it doesn’t waste resources on inappropriate interventions. *“We have huge attrition rates on other foundation programmes. We have had problems at the engagement stage. The HARP methodology addresses this before they (trainees) enter a full-time programme”*. He argued that the process involves *“a coaching and positive style of interviewing as opposed to being mediating and passive”*. He considers HARP to be a very effective tool for benchmarking trainees’ motivation levels; training needs; strengths and progress. *“This is a great tool to benchmark where they are now and to benchmark their progress from being disengaged, to ambivalent, to being active, to going out the door with a job plan”*. He also emphasised the need for staff to be properly trained in the process.

#### *Feedback from Programme Co-ordinator*

According to the co-ordinator, normal interview practice results in the constant re-cycling of ‘difficult-to-place’ clients. *“They keep turning up and never seem to progress to employment. There is no logical sequence to the interventions*

*we send them on. There is no sequential plan and we don't track them".* The profile of the client that emerges from a 'normal' FÁS interview is limited, and confined to facts that are uncovered at interview – nothing personal is discussed. People can be put forward to courses that they are not ready for, they then can't get (or don't look for) a related job and then they come back or are sent back to FÁS again. She feels that when clients go through the HARP process a much truer picture of them emerges - *"we get the reality of their circumstances. When you put people through the HARP process at least you get to the core"*. She argued that while the HARP interview is challenging and confrontational it is nevertheless safe and it leaves the client motivated and supported. She stressed that the remit of the Equal programme is for the client to progress into training and/or the active labour market. If the client is not willing, able and ready for this, there is no point in taking them on. In her view, HARP is the best way to measure whether the client is ready and able to engage in the programme.

#### *Feedback from Instructors*

Two of the instructors were trained in HARP. They said that the client profiles and the individual learner plans which were drawn up as a result of the process were very accurate and helped them to address their clients' specific needs. In this way they were able to help their clients progress more effectively. One instructor said that her female clients responded more readily and positively to the individualised personal development training plan that was drawn up for them than did her male clients. All the instructors who were interviewed mentioned the benefits of being able to track their clients' progress throughout the duration of the programme.

#### *Feedback from Local Employment Services (LES) Co-ordinator*

The LES Co-ordinator took part in a recorded telephone interview. He mentioned that he had attended the two day HARP training workshop and found it very interesting. He did not think that he was currently sufficiently trained to conduct HARP interviews but said he would be very interested in further training. He thinks HARP would be useful to the LES as an initial screening tool particularly in relation to 'disengaged' clients. He stressed that

HARP should not be used to or be seen to be used as a way of “... *precluding people from training, it’s more to find out where people are and to take it from there*”. He said that it would be most useful to use it “*with harder-to-deal with clients* “ as it would help him measure more accurately the distance clients’ travelled rather than the current system of measuring movement solely by placement into training/education or employment.

He said that if the LES were going to use HARP it would have to be done in conjunction with the Employment Services and this should lead to a reciprocal referral service between the two services. If HARP was going to be used, it would need to be integrated into the FAS Client Services System. He said that prior to receiving HARP training, the Equal team sent him feedback on clients who had been turned down for Equal training saying that a therapeutic intervention was required. His understanding of the term ‘therapeutic’ was different from the HARP definition and this caused communications problems. Therefore, everyone (all ESOs and LES officers) should be trained in HARP “*so that all practitioners are subscribing to it, are using the same terminology and know what each other are talking about.*” He concluded by saying if HARP were to be introduced, sufficient amount of time and resources (a private interview room) would have to be given to ESOs in order for them to conduct the interviews effectively.

#### *Feedback from DSFA Officer*

The DSFA officer attended a briefing workshop. However while he took part in the preliminary interviews/briefings with the Equal team, he did not take part in the subsequent HARP interviews.

#### *Feedback from Employment Services Officers*

Although they were not involved in the Equal North-East programme, the four ESOs who attended the HARP briefing workshop said that they attended the workshop after hearing about HARP and they wanted to see if it could be of any benefit to them in their own jobs working with unemployed people. All four ESOs were very positive about it. They identified a number of differences between the HARP interview and ‘normal’ FAS interviews. The HARP

interview is more challenging and it requires greater expertise on behalf of the interviewer. It is very structured and it is also more time consuming:

- *“The HARP interview allows you to identify the issues – there is no place for the interviewee to hide. HARP allows you to stand over your decision.”*
- *“Although it is challenging, it is not done in a confrontational way. It is done in a very natural and conversational way.”*
- *“When you explain the process to them they accept it. A lot of them are glad to get stuff off their chest – otherwise they would be bringing all this baggage around with them.”*
- *“The HARP interview takes at least one hour. It is very intensive. You have to go through (a detailed) document with the client. You then have to analyse the results and do a report. You then give feed-back to the client. Results are also sent to the person/agency who referred them in the first place”.*
- *“The FAS interview takes about 20 – 30 minutes. It is not as detailed or thorough as the HARP interview. You may not always refer the client to the right course.”*

The ESOs were asked to identify the situations when they found HARP to be useful and if there were situations when it was not appropriate. They all said that the HARP interview was most useful when they had to work with ‘difficult-to-deal’ with clients and for ‘revolving-door’ clients. They said that there has been an increase in the number of these clients being referred to them as a result of FAS taking over the work of the NRB; the Dept. of Health’s policy of ‘Care in the Community’ combined with an economic situation of nearly full-employment whereby only the most disadvantaged and disengaged people are unable to find work.

*“It’s good with difficult clients especially those who have poor education and poor skills. They keep coming back over and over again. HARP helps you to look at them in more depth and helps you identify what is stopping them from moving forward”.*

*“If you consider the amount of time we have spent with some of our difficult clients over a period getting nowhere, HARP is very efficient as well as being effective. We have spent a huge amount of time with some people. You are saving time in the long-run.”*

*“A client of mine was ‘HARPed’ and it was agreed that she needed counselling. I was able to get counselling for her – pay for it and I was then able to take her off my case load. It is important to be able to get the people we can’t help immediately off our caseloads so that we can spend time on people we can help.”*

*“You don’t need to use HARP with everyone. It is great for difficult people. It is very good with young people who have no direction.” “You don’t need it for ‘normal’ interviews. It is very time consuming. You couldn’t do it with everyone.”*

The HARP training programme takes place over a five day period. It comprises of two days training followed by a break for a couple of months for practice. During this period participants write up case studies regarding clients they have worked with. For the last three days the facilitator on the training programme works with participants on these case studies. The four ESOs attended a two-day briefing workshop. All four however would like to complete the full training programme as they feel that they are not fully skilled with the process.

*“I would need further training. Two days is not enough. I would love to do the next 3 days. Currently, I’m not skilled enough. You have to be really well trained to give clients ‘negative’ feedback.”*

*“I certainly need more training. There is an IT system in HARP that is like our CSS system that we can track people. We saw it when we were being trained but didn’t get into it. It seems to be more user-friendly. It’s very important to*

*track people and keep an eye on how they are getting on and we need to do this electronically.”*

The ESOs all mentioned that they thought HARP training would be of benefit to their colleagues in the Employment Services.

- *“Every employment officer should be trained in HARP. If they want to use it, it would be up to them. You need more than one person in the office trained in it”.*
- *“I’d love to see it as part of the Adult Guidance Certificate.”*
- *“Induction is the time it should be given to new ESOs”.*

Regarding management support for HARP, all four mentioned that they felt their managers did not currently know enough about HARP and as a result they would not have particularly strong views about it one way or the other. They all felt that their managers would support them in HARP training if it helped them in their jobs. They said that they thought management may have some concerns regarding the cost implications, the time implications and the readiness of all staff to train in and use HARP.

*“Management don’t know enough about it to know whether it is going to benefit us or not and I think they are very conscious of the fears we have around it. They are nervous about the time implications of it and I think they know that they can’t force everybody to do it. We were all offered training in it but I was the only one who did it. The only thing that stopped the others was the time implications – they were too busy. I think if there was an introductory course they would go on it and then they could make up their minds about doing it. I think management would be happy to encourage it if they felt staff wanted it. They don’t know how beneficial it is going to be – they need to know statistics”.*

#### *4.3.4 Comparison with Interviewing for other FÁS Programmes*

Normal FÁS recruitment is through the Gateway process. The booking/referral of a client to any FÁS course is made directly by the ESO on the Client Services System. The ESO has access to the trainee profile and relevant details of the course, including core and optional modules. For more technical courses an interview aid is available to assist the Officer and the client. If a client is referred to a course which requires an aptitude test or interview with an employer (traineeship), Employment Services course recruitment staff take over and co-ordinate the aptitude test or employer interview. If the client is successful they are selected for the course and, if not, they are referred back to the ESO for further interventions. The course instructor generally does not meet the client before they are selected onto a course.

The 'Gateway' interview is based on the course requirements and trainee profile – it assesses whether the client is suited to the course and it takes about 20 minutes to complete. The main emphasis of the HARP interview is questioning why the client is not employed rather than focusing on which type of work might be best suited for the client. As a result, it is a more interactive style of interview and may involve asking more personal, non-job related questions.

#### **4.4 Conclusions**

The engagement process undertaken by Equal North East resulted in the provision of a coherent framework for promoting a seamless transition for clients from the initial contact stage to employability. Within this process, there were two distinct elements that differed from general FÁS programmes: joint interviewing with the DSFA and the use of the HARP assessment tool in interviewing.

##### *Joint Interviewing*

The impact of joint interviewing resulted in increasing attendance at interviews and possibly in increasing attendance in the programme. The element of compulsion (i.e. the threat of having benefits taken away) meant that persons

who would ordinarily not engage with FÁS did engage, and persons who may have dropped out after the first few days remained on the programme. This impact meant that Equal North East had no problems filling course places, and had waiting lists of potential participants once joint interviewing was introduced.

### *The HARP Assessment Tool*

The combination of selecting clients who were training ready, understanding *why* a person was unemployed, and creating an action plan that worked to sustain motivation, reduce barriers and increase employability, established a system that helped clients into sustainable employment.

The HARP assessment is quite structured in nature and it removes a reasonable degree of subjectivity from the assessor. It proved to be particularly useful for clients who are difficult to deal with, or “revolving door” clients, as it provides a means for identifying the appropriate level of intervention. It is particularly useful at a time of scarce resources to have a method of objectively determining the level of intervention a client requires. It may be that the client is in need of greater assistance than FÁS can provide and equally, a client may not appear at first contact to be training ready, but the HARP interview can reveal that despite the problems surrounding the client, he or she is in fact training ready, and may simply need some basic support around addressing barriers. The HARP tool gives the assessor a basis for making either decision and standing behind it.

The focus on employability rather than simply job-matching is another important feature of HARP. Progression from FÁS programmes has been a source of concern in recent years e.g. the Working Group on Placement. Focusing on employability means that the underlying issues that have led to persistent unemployment can be addressed, thus reducing the likelihood of recurring unemployment. As stated previously, this is more of a feature for revolving door clients, the clients that return time and again, because the underlying issues preventing them gaining employment have never been addressed.

The HARP assessment tool is not suitable for all FAS clients. It is a holistic assessment instrument which delves into personal areas which may not be fitting or appropriate for many clients. It is also a resource intensive and time consuming process. However it proved to be most appropriate for marginalised people helping them overcome barriers to employment by focusing on their attitude and personal development needs as well as on their technical skills.

## Chapter Five: Flexible Delivery

This chapter looks at the operation of “flexible delivery” in Equal North East. In its proposal for funding, “flexible delivery” was identified as one of the ways in which the Equal North East programme differed from traditional FÁS training programmes. This chapter looks at the different components of this flexibility, namely: delivery of the programme, programme content, start times, payment of allowances and course duration. Feedback from the interviews is also presented.

### 5.1 Programme Delivery

The Equal North East proposal stated that one of the project objectives was to develop *“a model of best practice delivered by a multi-disciplinary cross-functional team with the skills and will to provide the intense support required by both the participants and employer network to achieve sustainable placement”*.

The Equal programme was initially delivered by a team of four FÁS staff (this was later reduced to three) who carried out the following roles :

- programme instructor
- mentor
- co-ordinator
- administrator
- jointly interviewed with the DSFA to recruit clients for the programme;
- liaised with the Developmental Partnership
- conducted HARP interviews to assess the client’s readiness to engage
- carried out, analysed and fed back the results of psychometric tests for the clients
- carried out literacy and numeracy assessments of clients and provided the required supports
- established and maintained an employer network to enable clients to gain meaningful and sustainable employment.

Throughout the duration of the programme, different team members were trained to carry out these various roles. However, not all team members performed all of these functions. For example, the FÁS instructors tended to concentrate on the delivery of skills, although they contributed to other roles depending on their own personal talents – one instructor was particularly successful in liaising with employers. Two members of the team remained with the programme for its entirety and they carried out all of these roles.

The initial programmes were held off-site from the Training Centre and this helped the team to bond as they were all involved in every aspect of the programme's delivery, from the most menial to the most complex tasks. This bond continued when the programme transferred to the Training Centre.

#### *5.1.1 Feedback on Programme Delivery*

##### *Equal Team*

The team were extremely positive about the experience of working on the Equal programme and appeared to have gained great job satisfaction while working there.

- *“It was fabulous. The team worked very well together. Everybody did everything – cleaning, tea, stationery, etc. I was always busy”.*
- *“The team worked very closely. We worked in one building away from the centre. It was not a boss-worker relationship.”*
- *“We worked really well as a team. It was the best crew ever. XXX was the best boss I’ve ever worked with. We had our ups and downs and could disagree. It was a brilliant team – very dedicated.”*

The co-ordinator spoke highly of the flexibility of the team. She had purposely selected staff on the basis of their willingness to contribute and develop. As she said, the team were hand-picked so wouldn't be *“hiding behind job descriptions”* They could *“cope with a chaotic environment”* and were *“multi-skilled”*. They were *“unique, committed individuals”*.

##### *Training Centre Manager*

When the former Training Centre Manager was asked about the use of a team instead of an individual instructor, he said that *“high support requires*

*additional staff*". He recognised that *"there is a need in the organisation for a foundation-type programme that will integrate people back into employment. It can't be run on a one-man, one-course basis. It needs more resources. This is expensive."* He said, however, that *"when the sums were all done it was found to be as cheap if not cheaper"* than other foundation-type programmes when placement rates for long-term unemployed clients were taken into account.

He believes that a course of this nature *"requires a team effort. It requires expertise that is not generally available. If and when it is done, it can't be done with 'cast-off' instructors – it can't be done with people just because they are available."*

### *5.1.2 Comparisons with FÁS Programmes*

In general, Foundation-level FÁS programmes are delivered by a single instructor, who may or may not involve others. No other FÁS programme has a dedicated team assigned to its development and delivery.

### *5.1.3 Conclusions*

The Equal team displayed a remarkable willingness to be flexible and to take on tasks beyond their job description.

In the context of flexibility, the delivery of the programme by a team instead of a single instructor allowed for:

- Much wider range of interventions
- More intensive personal support available (one-to-one contact)
- Seamless delivery from the point of contact to placement

For the team itself, it provided a challenging and supportive working environment, where they could further develop their skills.

## **5.2 Course Content**

The structure of the programme was a two-week induction process, followed by skills sampling and then a work placement. This section looks at the

content in terms of the induction and the skills sampling. The work placement is discussed in Chapter Eight on Progression.

### *Induction*

The first two weeks comprised a pre-training orientation process. During the first week, clients commenced a battery of psychometric tests (these are discussed in the later section on measurement and assessment - Chapter 6). They were assessed for numeracy and literacy, they agreed ground rules and did the FETAC accredited FÁS induction programme (manual handling, health & safety). Many participants also received certification in Safepass, issued by the Health and Safety Authority.

Throughout the induction period, participants engaged in various forms of group work: identifying learning barriers, identifying existing skills, setting goals, assessing learning and thinking styles etc. The programme was flexible in the range of tests used and the timing of the induction (it was generally at the start of the course but elements were moved around for one cohort).

### *Skills Sampling*

After the two weeks induction, the participants moved onto skills sampling. All of the cohorts did modules on Hand Skills and Word Processing. In addition to these modules, cohorts did other modules such as Retail, ECDL, Payroll, Hand Tools. All of these modules were certified at FETAC Level 3, apart from an Advanced Computer module that was FETAC Level 4 which was taken by participants who had previous experience with computers. There was an emphasis on accredited training as in many cases it may have been the clients' first opportunity to gain a certificate.

The selection of these additional modules was based on the interests of the cohort (and the availability of an instructor in that discipline) and demonstrated the flexible delivery of the content of the programme.

An innovative approach was taken in making this varied content available to participants. The Equal team offered to provide the soft skills and career development modules to other classes in the training centre if the instructor of

that programme would teach the desired skills content to the Equal group. Through this mutually beneficial exchange of skills, the participants on the Equal programme received a skills sampling experience beyond that which they could receive solely through their own instructor, while the other programme benefited from having the soft skills content of their programme provided by someone who excelled in its delivery.

Personal development training continued throughout the duration of the programme. There was a big emphasis on shared responsibility, team-work and co-operation. Time-keeping, attitude and motivation was recorded every week and there was a structured session, on a one-to-one basis, with each client every week to check progress. One half day a week was devoted to computer training and guest speakers were invited in on Friday mornings.

#### *5.2.1 Feedback on Course Content*

##### *Equal Team*

The Equal North East team all emphasised that it was not the content of the programme that was important, but the process. The consensus was that the participants learned the most from the process surrounding the modules e.g. while doing their woodwork assignments, they would be learning about coming in on time, helping each other, working as a team, their team roles, abilities and strengths. In the programme's logic, the actual module and certification was less important than the skills they uncovered while gaining the qualification.

Having said that, the team recognised that the qualification was very important to participants. As one team member said: "*Certification was very important. A lot of clients had very negative experiences of school. They had low self esteem. They were really chuffed on presentation night*".

They varied the modules depending on gender. For the women-only cohorts, they focused on retail and computers, while for the men they focused on construction-related modules.

### Participants

From the survey, it emerged that the majority of participants were satisfied with the content of the programme. Three out of four participants (76%) were either satisfied or very satisfied with the content of the programme. The responses are presented in Table 5.1 below.

**Table 5.1: Satisfaction with the Content of the Programme**

	Content of the programme					Total
	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	
Female	0%	10%	7%	47%	37%	100%
Male	9%	12%	9%	48%	21%	100%
Total	5%	11%	8%	48%	29%	100%

*Base: 63 responses, of which 33 were male.*

The responses differed by gender. One in five males was dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the content of the programme, compared to one in ten females. Similarly, 84% of females were satisfied or very satisfied with the content of the programme, compared to 69% of males.

From the feedback received by the focus groups, it appeared that the participants were interested in a more varied skills sampling. While they agreed that they benefited from the soft skills and the process surrounding the modules, they felt there was too much emphasis on woodwork and would have preferred more of a variety. Women in particular commented that, while they enjoyed the woodwork content of the programme, they were interested in obtaining an office-job where a Safepass qualification was of no benefit. It is not clear whether participants were aware of the philosophy behind the course that the emphasis was on the process rather than the content.

The majority of people who took part in the telephone interviews were positive regarding the content of the course – particularly in relation to computer skills. The participants who had no prior experience of working with computers were the most positive – *“I got a lot out of the computer skills part of the course. I had no computer skills beforehand – didn’t know how to turn it on. Now I can email, do word processing ..”*. *“I used to be terrified of computers. I wanted to cry before the computer class but now I’m really confident with them”*.

Participants who had prior computer experience indicated that they would have liked more advanced computer training particularly ECDL. Two mentioned that they had completed the ECDL subsequent to the programme. A number of interviewees mentioned that they would have liked more emphasis on business and management skills. *“The work placement and programme was not enough to get an office job – fine for working in shops”*.

The telephone interviewees indicated that they enjoyed the hand skills aspect of the programme – and were aware that the training would not qualify them to work as carpenters or painters. A number mentioned that they have continued to use these skills in their own homes.

The majority of telephone interviewees said that they found the programme to be very helpful regarding building up their self confidence. *“The programme gave me confidence. I had no confidence before I started the programme”*. *“I had very little confidence before the programme and I now have loads”*. *“My confidence before Equal was very low....the impact that Equal has had is incredible from ‘hibernating’ to where I am now”*. *“Equal gets you motivated”*.

### 5.2.2 Comparison with FÁS Programmes

The overall content of the programme is similar to that of other foundation-level programmes available in FÁS. For example, the Return to Work programme has an induction programme with assessments, personal development, similar level certification and a combination of core and optional modules. The flexible delivery of content depending on the needs of participants and the availability of skilled instructors is of interest for mainstream FÁS training. The *FÁS Training Strategy* states that a “range of skills sampling options need to be provided” for the long-term unemployed (p.43).

### 5.2.3 Conclusions

In terms of the flexible delivery of course content, Equal North East succeeded in as far as was possible to provide modules that suited the participants’ needs. The programme was limited in its ability to do this by the

varied needs of participants and, more crucially, the availability of skilled instructors.

This highlights that, while it is a FÁS policy to provide flexible training, this goal is dependent on the availability of skilled instructors to provide a range of skills sampling courses.

### **5.3 Course Length, Start Times and Attendance**

Equal North East differed from traditional FÁS training programmes in terms of the flexibility in the length of the course and in its starting times.

#### *Length of Programme*

By the time Equal North East succeeded in achieving mainstreaming funding, the length of the course had been streamlined down to twelve weeks, normally including six weeks of work experience. Initially, the course had been envisaged to last for up to 30 weeks; however, clients were ready to progress before that time, and the course adapted to this. The main way in which this programme differed from others, therefore, is that it allowed participants to move to their work placements when they were ready. The length of the programme varied according to the participant's needs. Equal work placements were also afforded more flexibility. On most courses work placements tend to be 4-6 weeks. However on the Equal programme, participants sometimes remained in the placement for up to 12 weeks if the employer felt they needed this extra time to make them more employable or if a job was coming up in the company and the employer wanted to keep on the client.

#### *Start Times*

Traditional FÁS training programmes have a start time of 8:30am. The start time in Equal North East was decided by the group, depending on their particular circumstances. The programme hours were usually 9:30am to 3:30pm Monday to Thursday and a Friday finish time of 1:30pm. This allowed participants with caring responsibilities to attend the training course. It also made it easier for participants who were long-term unemployed to re-adjust to core working hours. Often the cohort would begin the programme with a later

start time and then gradually work their way back to a 9:00am start (if this was possible for participants with caring responsibilities).

#### *Attendance & Allowances*

Participants did not have their training allowance deducted if they could provide a reason for non-attendance, and informed the instructor regarding their absence (e.g. caring responsibilities). The same principle applied for persons arriving late for training. If the participant phoned in and said that they were going to be late, then their allowance was not deducted.

#### *5.3.1 Feedback on Course Length and Start Times*

##### *Equal Team*

The Equal team all viewed the flexibility in relation to start times and course length as being crucial to the success of the programme. It was one of the key ways in which the programme demonstrated its focus on providing training that met participant rather than organisational needs.

The instructors recognised that the programme participants were adults. The flexibility gave the participants, in particular those who had been long-term unemployed, time to adjust to core working hours. The view taken by the Equal team was that, *“if they are here, it is progress”*. One instructor stated that *“The course is successful because it is flexible. You cannot regiment them [the participants]. They are getting out of bed at 9.00am instead of 11. The flexibility gives them leeway. It is important not to wave the stick at them... Flexibility relaxes them. It gives the instructor time to gain their trust.”*

The instructors stated that the participants did not take advantage of this flexibility. As one instructor stated, the *“timekeeping was flexible and they didn’t take advantage of it. We agreed it at the start. It wasn’t a big deal if they were half an hour late on a particular morning. It was 9.30 initially and then it went back to 9.00am.”*

### *Training Centre Manager*

In terms of overseeing the flexible timing from the perspective of managing the training centre, the training centre manager stated that, “*we leave it up to the professionalism of the staff to monitor timekeeping and attendance.*”

In terms of its actual operation, “*participants signed in – they didn’t have to clock in. We organised a ‘progressive start’ timetable. They were weaned off lying in bed. If they are here it is progress. It became the norm for them to get up early and come in. They learn to manage their time. This also applies if they have problems at home – sick children or dependents. They have to organise themselves.*” The strength of the progressive start timetable, therefore, as seen by the training centre manager was that it encouraged time management among its participants, many of whom may not have had a reason to do so for many years.

### *Participants*

Participants were asked their opinions on the flexible start times. The second focus group (i.e. the last cohort of the programme) said that they started at 9:30am rather than 8:30am like other courses, but that this was not something that was agreed upon or decided but they were told, how would you like starting at 9:30 instead and everyone said yes.

When asked whether this helped their circumstances at home, the focus group said no, it made no difference to them when they started, 8:30 would have been fine – although one woman’s childminder wasn’t available until 9am, so she would have missed half an hour each day.

During telephone interviews, participants tended to state that the start times were not really an issue for them, but appreciated that for some participants, particularly those with small children, it made a big difference.

### *5.3.2 Comparison with FÁS Programmes*

FÁS programmes generally start at 8:30am. However, some programmes, and, in particular, some Foundation and Return to Work programmes, have flexible start times incorporated within their structure. The *FÁS Training*

*Strategy* emphasises that the flexible delivery of service provision is a key tenet in improving foundation-level training programmes and that “flexible start and finish times ... need to be provided” (p. 43). The decision to implement this flexibility, according to a senior manager in Training Services, is made at the local-level.

The proportion of drop-outs among participants in Equal North East was compared to that of other similar FÁS programmes, to see whether completion rates were higher. The hypothesis was that the drop-out rate would be lower among participants of Equal North East, as participants would be more able to continue with the programme due to the flexible start times.

The *2006/7 Follow-Up Survey of FÁS Participants* found that approximately one in ten clients did not complete Bridging/Foundation (13%) or Return to Work (9%) programmes. Long-term unemployed clients had a slightly higher drop-out rate of 16% on Bridging/Foundation programmes. The rates of non-completion were therefore similar or slightly higher than Equal North East (10%). There was no statistically significant difference in the completion rates between Equal North East and comparable FÁS programmes.

### *5.3.3 Conclusions*

The flexible start times utilised in Equal North East proved beneficial in three main ways. Firstly, it enabled participants with caring responsibilities to attend the training programme. Secondly, it allowed participants to develop their time management skills and, in particular for those who were long-term unemployed, to adjust to core working hours. Thirdly, it helped to create an atmosphere that was client-based, which aided instructors in gaining the participant's trust.

These findings strengthen the case for further implementation of flexible starting times among programmes provided by FÁS. While the flexible starting times did not impact on the drop-out rate among participants, it did foster a client-centred environment that is central to FÁS' Training Strategy.

#### **5.4 Allowances**

As mentioned above, if a participant missed a day of training, or came in late, but gave a reason for it, they were not deducted any money from their training allowance. Furthermore, the payment of allowances was flexible in that participants were paid their training allowance from the week that they began training, as opposed to a week in arrears (as is the norm for FÁS training programmes). The rationale behind this was that the participants were not able to afford being paid a week in arrears.

#### **5.5 Summary**

Flexibility was a key component in the delivery of the Equal North East programme. This flexibility was evident in the programme delivery, the content of the programme, the course length, starting times and in the payment of allowances. It is also evident in the multi-disciplinary nature of the team and how they delivered the programme.

Flexibility is a key tenet in the *FÁS Training Strategy* in relation to long-term unemployed clients. The experience of the Equal North East team was that flexibility was necessary for the provision of training that was focused on client rather than organisational needs. The experience of Equal North East highlights that flexibility relies on the availability and willingness of skilled instructors, and the commitment of the Training Centre manager.

## Chapter Six: Measurement and Assessment

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at the operation of “measurement and assessment” in the Equal North East programme. According to the initial Equal proposal for funding, *“measurement and assessment of a client’s skills, abilities, personality, potential and barriers is a vital tool to improve client’s self-awareness, but of greater importance, it facilitates the design and development of progression interventions that are personalised to meet the deficits, barriers and capabilities of the client.”*

The aim of measurement and assessment, therefore, is two-fold: to assist the client’s awareness of his/her abilities, potential and barriers; and to develop appropriate individualised interventions that match the client’s needs.

There are three main aspects to measurement & assessment as it applied to the Equal North East programme.

- The initial assessment, carried out using the HARP tool at the engagement stage
- The Skills Assessment that is carried out during the induction phase of the programme.
- A Psychometric Summary Report is created on the basis of the results from the above assessments. This report, in conjunction with feedback sessions where the client reflects on career goals, informs the Individual Learner Action Plan.

HARP has been addressed in detail in Chapter Three on engagement, and is consequently only briefly mentioned here. This chapter looks mainly at the elements of the Skills Assessment and how they feed into the creation of Individual Learner Action Plans.

This evaluation does not seek to assess the validity and reliability of the individual tests/assessments used in the programme. The focus is instead on the rationale behind the testing and subsequent use of the test results.

## **6.2 HARP**

The HARP assessment tool establishes the baseline for: barriers to progression, potential for progression and training readiness. When the assessment is completed, the information is transferred to the Training Needs Analysis Form. If the client is deemed to be 'training ready', they attend the two-week Pre-Training Orientation Process (i.e. the induction programme).

## **6.3 Skills Assessment**

During the two-week Pre-Training Orientation Process, the following skills assessments are carried out:

- Numeracy/literacy
- Learning Style
- Thinking Style
- Personality Profile
- Aptitude/Ability
- Emotional Intelligence/Employability Skills

Each of these assessments is explained briefly in turn. The information presented below is largely drawn from the Equal team's documentation of the testing used.

### *6.3.1 Numeracy & Literacy Skills*

The numeracy and literacy tests used in the programme were developed by the National Adult Literacy Association (NALA). Some members of the Equal team were trained in order to be able to carry out the tests (a part-time ten-week certificate run by the VEC).

The testing assessed the level of numeracy and literacy skill held by the client on a five-category scale ranging from "below entry level" to "above level 1". Clients with "below entry-level" ability would require considerable help; those with "below level 1" would only need help with higher level work. Thus, the level of intervention needed by the client could be ascertained as a result of this testing.

For some participants, attendance on the Equal programme was the starting point in obtaining help with literacy, while others had started it prior to programme. The majority didn't require help and it wasn't an issue for them.

The client was asked during the HARP interview whether they desired assistance with their numeracy and/or literacy while on the programme. If they did request help, they were advised of their options. Many didn't know that the VEC could help them. Some were referred to the VEC to do literacy training in the evenings, while others worked on the NALA programme on the computer in the training centre. For people with extreme difficulty it was done on a one-to-one basis, while with others the support was provided in a small group. On the last two courses, it took place in class.

### *6.3.2 Learning & Thinking Styles*

Participants discovered their learning style i.e. whether they were visual learners (learn by seeing and doing), auditory learners (learn by hearing and listening), or kinesthetic learners (learn by touching and doing). The thinking styles assessment judged which hemisphere of the brain (left or right) was more dominant. People with a dominant left side are more logical, with common sense, while people with a dominant right side deal with wholes and not in detail, and specialise in intuition and feelings.

Gaining awareness of different learning and thinking styles can give confidence to a learner, particularly to those who have previously had bad learning experiences. Having the results relayed to the instructor encourages him/her to use a broader range of instructional techniques.

### *6.3.3 Personality Profile*

Various tests in personality profiling have been tried by the Equal team including: Myers-Brigs, the Enneagram, Thomas International and Maps. Personality profiling provides an insight into how people behave at work e.g. what are their strengths and weaknesses? How do they communicate? What motivates them? It is a tool that enables clients to become more aware of themselves and their work style.

For personality tests such as these, the person administering the tests needs the Certificate of Competence in Occupational Testing Level B from the British Psychological Society. The Equal Co-ordinator had this accreditation, and as such, was qualified to administer these tests (and did so). Myers-Briggs and the Enneagram require additional conversion courses in order to administer the tests and interpret the results. Again, the Equal co-ordinator was trained in this.

#### *6.3.4 Aptitude/Ability*

Aptitude/ability testing gives an overall view of a person's general intelligence. The emphasis is on a person's response to training, mental processing speed, concentration. The tests focus on: reasoning, perceptual speed, number speed/accuracy, word meaning and spatial awareness. The results give participants an overview of their strengths and weaknesses and can help them in deciding career options.

Aptitude/ability testing requires the Certificate in Competence Occupational Testing Level A from the British Psychological Society. Level A is the first step in the British Psychological Society's accreditation process. The Level A course incorporates BPS Test Administrator certification and is for test users who wish to interpret and feedback test results as well as administer and score tests. Training at this level also covers the fundamentals of using psychometrics, including equal opportunities, data protection and how to choose the most appropriate test.

The focus in Level A is on ability tests. However, the concepts learned are relevant to the use of all psychometric tests. BPS Level A Certification allows delegates to purchase and use ability tests published by all reputable test publishers. Level A also gives delegates access to training in Level B.

Level A courses involve some online training/coursework followed by two days attendance at a practical workshop. The most common route to gaining Level A accreditation for FÁS is through the Diploma in Adult Guidance in N.U.I. Maynooth.

### 6.3.5 *Emotional Intelligence*

Behaviour and emotional competency have a large part to play in an individual's performance. The test results provide an index of a person's perceived ability to understand, process and utilise emotion-related information in everyday life. Four factors of relevance are:

- Well-being – how happy, positive or fulfilled a person is
- Self-control – how able a person is at regulating external pressure and stress, as well as controlling impulses
- Emotionality – can they perceive and express emotions and use these abilities to develop and sustain close relationships with others
- Sociability – how good are their general social skills? Can they listen as well as communicate clearly and confidently?

This test measures various aspects of the person's emotional intelligence – optimism, self-esteem, stress management, assertiveness, adaptability, and self-motivation and can help direct them to develop these skills if need be.

The Certificate of Competence in Occupational Testing Levels A and B held by the Equal Co-ordinator were sufficient to cover the administration and interpretation of these tests.

### 6.3.6 *Other Material in Induction*

The Equal induction programme also included adapted material from STEPS and Pathways to Employment. STEPS stands for Steps to Excellence for Personal Success and is a motivational programme based on research from the field of cognitive psychology and on studies on how effective and fulfilled people think and act in their lives. STEPS is included as a module in a number of foundation-level FÁS courses, such as Return to Work, Jobs Clubs and Connections but also on other specific skills training courses such as courses for Delivery Drivers and Warehouse Operatives. It is delivered over three days and works on breaking barriers, improving self-esteem and emphasises the importance of positive self-talk.

'Pathways to Employment' is a three day FÁS programme (although generally delivered part-time over three weeks). The aim of this programme is to

identify the most appropriate progression routes for trainees that will enable them to obtain and maintain employment, expressed in the form of personal progression plans approved by FÁS.

#### *6.3.7 Psychometric Summary Report*

The results from all of these assessments were collated and put into a Psychometric Summary report. The report contained the result of each test as well as a summary of the impact that the results would have on training. At the end of the report, there was a section called “Employability Skills Training Recommended”, which detailed the areas to be addressed in order to improve the participant’s employability. This included technical as well as soft skills gaps.

The results of the Psychometric Summary Report were discussed with the participant in a one-to-one session. Following this, the cohort as a whole discussed their strengths and the areas that they needed to address. The instructor also received the report so that he/she would then be aware of, among other things, the participant’s needs in terms of literacy supports and their individual learning style. It was envisaged that this would be useful information for an instructor to have, in terms of increasing awareness of the need to facilitate different learning styles.

#### *6.3.8 Feedback on Skills Assessment*

Feedback on these tests was obtained from the training centre manager, participants on the programme, Employment Services Officers and instructors (past and present), and is presented below.

##### *Training Centre Manager*

The former Training Centre Manager was positive about the use of the tests within the programme for two main reasons. Firstly, he had received positive feedback from the participants (he spoke with each cohort of the programme to find out what they thought of the programme and to elicit any suggestions for improvement). Related to this, he felt that the tests were particularly useful for this group of clients i.e. persons who faced a multitude of barriers in

entering or re-entering the labour market. Finally, he felt that the tests were easy to administer and that they were accurate.

In terms of feedback from the manager with regard to the participants' response to the tests, he stated that, *"I have spoken to a number of the clients and they found them useful – a great place from which to work. To a person they found it a great tool and a great starting place."* He continued to say that, *"it gave them something positive to use about themselves. It addressed trainability issues. It gave them a profile how they worked under stress. The feedback was always given on a positive note and they found it positive."*

In terms of the actual tests used, he said that the Equal programme, *"tried and played with loads of different tests. I often wondered which tests we should be using, how many tests we should be using, the validity of the tests, the accuracy of the tests, the usefulness of the tests. I took a couple of them myself and was surprised how accurate they were. The Thomas International was quick and easy to administer and seemed to be quite accurate"*.

When asked about the possibility of mainstreaming the tests, he stated that, *"I would have no problem mainstreaming them within foundation training. With that target group (those most distanced from the labour market, the disadvantaged, those in probation training) they were very useful. Not generally though. Could be used in other foundation courses – Pathways, Return to Work, Connections."*

He also acknowledged the cost of incorporating such testing: *"They have to be administered and delivered under licence and under certain conditions. In unskilled hands they would be dangerous. The feedback has to be handled professionally so it can be expensive"*.

The costs involved include the licensing in obtaining the tests, which is negligible. FÁS as an organisation already has a contract with SHL, which is the licence holder for aptitude, personality and psychometric tests. There is a need for qualified personnel to administer the tests; however, many staff within FÁS already hold the Certificate of Competency in Occupational

Testing Level A, through the Diploma in Adult Guidance, which is all that is required to administer and interpret aptitude/ability tests. The cost of gaining the Level B certificate for psychometric testing is approximately €3,500, which includes the cost of the training, the exam fees and registering with the British Psychological Society. Some of the tests, such as Myers-Briggs and the Enneagram, require additional specialised training in order to administer them. The cost of gaining accreditation with these organisations varies.

### *Instructors*

The instructors were positive about the availability of skills assessment reports. In general terms, one instructor remarked that “*any information is beneficial*”. The results from the literacy and numeracy testing were appreciated. One instructor said that while literacy issues tended not to impact when on the floor (doing woodwork, etc.), in the classroom the difficulties would create more work. A former instructor stated that identifying literacy and numeracy issues and providing literacy and numeracy training would help on all programmes. He had incorporated the literacy and numeracy testing on the course he was instructing on at the time of the interview and would like to see it mainstreamed for all programmes. All of the instructors expressed a wish for literacy and numeracy testing and training to be provided for all courses.

The instructors spoke of the positive impact the testing had on the participants. As one instructor said, when “*the participants received their personal profiles, they never disagreed with them*”, and another stated that “*it reflected them accurately*”. The psychometric testing proved particularly useful for the more disadvantaged participants as it gave them positive feedback and an awareness of skills and strengths of which they were previously not conscious. Importantly, it gave the participants vocabulary to verbalise their abilities, which was useful for them in an interview situation.

### *Employment Services Officers*

The Employment Services Officers were positive about the prospect of having skills assessments available as a resource in FÁS. As one officer put it, “*Career directions is very basic and can give the wrong direction if clients*

*don't think through their answers clearly. We don't have time to sit with them as they go through it. A resource centre in the Training Centre would be useful if it offered learning style assessment and personality profiling – particularly learning style assessment at the start of a programme.”*

### *Participants*

Participants were generally positive or neutral about the skills assessments. One woman pointed out that the assessments were useful for bonding within the team: everyone had their own assessments done and then there was a team talk where everyone spoke of their individual strengths. In terms of the assessments highlighting a person's abilities and helping to build confidence, it would appear, then, that the assessments were effective. Another man, when asked what he thought about the assessments, remarked that *“Well, sometimes you'd see them and say, that's exactly like me, and other times you wouldn't. That's just how it is with those tests.”*

Participants in the focus groups were very positive about the literacy support provided in the programme. The bonding within the cohort, which can at least partially be attributed to the measurement and assessment aspect of the programme, allowed persons with literacy difficulties to openly discuss their needs and to obtain peer and other support.

The telephone interviewees were also positive about the tests that were administered during the programme. *“They (instructors) were great with talking with you about what you wanted to do with your future and help you realise those plans”. “If you had any cop-on at all you could work the programme to your advantage. It helped reveal what skills you had – they had a funny way of doing it without you noticing. You'd try lots of different things and realise that you were good at them”.* One interviewee said that *“Assessments were useful for bonding within the team. Everyone had their own assessments done and then there was a team talk and everyone spoke of their individual strengths. It was useful and gave them all comprehension”.*

### 6.3.9 Comparison with other FÁS programmes

One other programme run by FÁS includes psychometric testing in its training specification; Deciding Your Future, which was running in counties Clare, Waterford and Cork in 2008. The programme uses general intelligence tests, personality tests, and career guidance software (JIIG-CAL, an Australian designed software package, rather than FÁS' Career Directions). The aim of these tests is "to work with each participant to enable them to identify their individual skills or skills deficiencies in regard to developing occupational options"<sup>12</sup>. The trainer/instructor profile specifies the need for Level A and Level B qualifications from the British Psychological Association.

Standardised literacy testing is being rolled out in all Community Training Centres from January 2009; it is envisaged that psychometric testing will be introduced in the coming years.

### 6.3.10 Individual Learner Action Plans

As stated previously, material from these assessments were all collated in the Psychometric Summary report, which formed the basis for the participant's Individual Learner Action Plan "that is tailor-made to their identified needs and which will meet desired outcomes". These Individual Learner Action Plans were adapted from the Community Services template, where: "an *Individual Learning Plan* approach was implemented to ensure the learning needs of clients were identified and addressed so as to assist .... entry/re-entry into the labour market."<sup>13</sup>

The main advantages of this approach were that it:

- Allowed for tailored interventions. A one-size-fits-all approach was not considered appropriate for this client group's disparate needs.
- Provided a focus for deciding on interventions which ensured that the planned actions were purposeful. HARP provided a framework whereby the interventions that were selected for a participant worked to sustain motivation, reduce a barrier or increase employability.

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<sup>12</sup> Taken from QA58/01 Training Specification for *Deciding Your Future*.

<sup>13</sup> FÁS Annual Report 2005

Interventions that did not address any of these three goals were not included.

- Recognised the importance of soft skills development alongside technical and vocational skills requirements.
- Necessitated the active involvement of the participant, as the plan was agreed, reviewed and signed off in collaboration with the participant.
- Focused on providing a clear exit strategy for the participant when leaving the programme. The Individual Learner Action Plan was reviewed mid-way through the programme and then again when the participant was finishing the programme. The progression plan for the participant upon exiting the programme was explicitly addressed.
- Formed an integral part in the holistic nature of the training programme. From the initial engagement to the eventual exit, the Individual Learner Action Plan provided the means through which the participant and the Equal team remained focussed on the aims of the programme for the individual and the cohort as a whole.

#### **6.4 Conclusions**

Instructors, the former Training Centre manager and Employment Services Officers were all positive about the use of assessments for foundation-level programmes, and in particular, tests for literacy and numeracy needs. Participants did not convey any negative feelings towards the testing, and spoke of the positive impact in terms of bonding within the cohort as they discussed their individual strengths and the areas they needed to work on.

Feeding the results into an Individual Learner Action Plan for the participants proved to have many advantages, such as focusing the planned actions to ensure that they helped the participant sustain motivation, reduce barriers and improve employability, and also by providing a clear exit strategy for participants when leaving the programme. (A lack of progression plans after exiting a programme was raised as an issue by some clients in the *2007 Employment Services Customer Satisfaction Survey*.)

There are cost implications in mainstreaming this testing. The person administering the tests needs to have Level A and Level B qualifications from

the British Psychological Society. There is a cost involved in obtaining the licence for the tests. There is also a time issue in conveying the test results individually to each participant. If, as a consequence of the test results, it emerges that e.g. a person requires literacy supports, there are further costs in providing these supports to the participant.

It should be noted that these costs do not necessarily have to be borne solely by this programme. Instructors and Employment Services Officers were very enthusiastic about the provision of these tests for a broader range of clients. Equal North East had conceived the idea of developing a testing/resource centre within the Training Centre, which would be available to all persons referred to it. This concept is similar to the Community Training Centre model, where literacy testing is available to all participants, and is not attached to one particular course.

## **Chapter Seven: Mentoring Support**

### **7.1 Introduction**

The Equal programme recognised that participants on the programme faced multiple barriers to progression, such as low self-esteem, substance misuse, literacy issues, etc. In its proposal for funding, it stated that, *“If an intervention is to be successful, it must have the capacity and flexibility to embrace all of the issues in their totality... training alone is likely to fail and high dropout rates ensue, unless participants are supported by a mentor ... and assisted in identifying and dealing with the many issues and blockages preventing their re-integration into the labour force.”*

The role of the mentor within the programme was to provide support to the participants to enable them to remain in training. In the extreme form, this entailed helping participants find homes to live in, or meals to feed them. More often it was being available to listen, helping address domestic issues such as childcare, or helping address issues that may have arisen with their employer on placement (such as smoking breaks).

This chapter looks at the use of mentoring within the Equal programme. The various roles of the mentor are discussed. Feedback from participants, the Equal team and employers is presented. Comparisons are made with other FÁS programmes, namely Expanding the Workforce and Community Training Centres. The implications of mainstreaming mentoring support are outlined.

### **7.2 Operation of Mentoring**

The mentor was involved from the initial engagement stage, during the programme, during the work placement, and after the placement (for up to a year after the programme ended). These three functions are discussed in turn (programme, workplace, and post-programme mentoring).

### **7.3 Programme Mentoring**

During the initial engagement stage, the HARP interview constituted an important starting point in identifying the barriers faced by the participant.

This would form the foundation from which the mentor would establish relations with the participant. (The mentor would not necessarily have conducted the initial interview; however, the results of the interview would be documented and given to the mentor.)

While on the programme, the mentor had formal meetings with the participants on a weekly or bi-monthly basis. During these meetings (scheduled for half an hour), the participant could discuss any issues that had arisen either within or outside of the programme. The issues highlighted from the HARP interview were addressed on a regular basis.

Of equal if not more importance, the mentor was a consistent presence in the class during the programme. This enabled *informal mentoring* on a continuous basis. The mentor was always available for the participant – they could briefly mention any issues or problems that had arisen or the mentor could observe whether anything was troubling the participant during the course of the programme. This could be followed-up at the formal meeting, or be dealt with immediately, whichever was more appropriate. In-group mentoring was encouraged as participants could learn from each other. It was important that participants developed self-reliance and did not become too dependent on the mentor.

### *7.3.1 Feedback – Programme Mentoring*

This section presents feedback from participants and the Equal team regarding the mentoring support during the programme.

#### *Participants*

Participants were overwhelmingly positive in their feedback about having a mentor available on the programme. There were three main facets to this positive feeling: the continuous availability of the mentor, the range of issues that the mentor would help with, and the feeling of being supported.

Some comments made by participants included:

- “People need to be pushed, they need support.”
- “If you’d a problem, [the mentor] would fix it, or try to fix it.”

- “[The mentor] was spot on.... If you’d any problems, there was somebody there.”
- When asked to specify what the mentor would help with, focus group participants replied, “well, everything”
- Another participant said he was “very happy” with the mentor: “She was a good help, she made my life easier”

The survey of participants included a question asking respondents how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with respect to the mentor on the programme. Of the persons who responded (58 persons out of 64) more than half were “very satisfied” (53%) and a further 31% were “satisfied”. Therefore, 84%, or seven out of eight participants were satisfied with the mentor on the programme. Nine percent were dissatisfied and 7% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

#### **7.4 Workplace Mentoring**

Another role played by the mentor was helping the participant find a work placement, and then supporting the employer and the participant during the course of the placement. While participants were encouraged to find their own placements, the mentor would play a large role in helping participants when needed. The mentor would establish a relationship with the employer and then, when the participant was on placement, the mentor would maintain contact with both the employer and the participant to ensure that the placement was running smoothly.

##### *7.4.1 Feedback – Workplace Mentoring*

This section presents feedback from the Training Centre Manager, the Equal team and participants regarding the mentoring support during the work placement.

##### *Training Centre Manager*

The former Training Centre manager stated, it “was very important to support employers – they were taking on people who they knew had problems.” In relation to the participants, “it was with the support of the mentor outside that helped them to keep their jobs.”

### *Equal Team*

The Equal team felt that this workplace mentoring support was crucial to the success of the programme. They felt that employers “*responded exceptionally well... They felt they were being supported by FAS.*” It was also seen as a “*great way of developing an employer network. Anyone who came near us (deliveries etc) were asked if they had jobs on offer and their names were taken.*”

In terms of the operation of the workplace mentoring, it took place as a monitoring meeting, which was arranged by the mentor once a week and agreed with the employer. The mentor spoke privately with the participant and also spoke with the employer when visiting the client. If the participant wanted to speak with the mentor outside of these arranged meetings, they could contact the mentor directly.

The Equal team believed that companies were very positive towards the mentoring support offered. This was confirmed in the conversations with employers. One employer stated that it was good that the mentor was taking an interest. Another said that he wouldn't have taken on the participant without the support of the Equal team.

### *Participants*

The participants also appreciated the support offered to them while on placement. One participant said that her mentor visited her every week while she was on placement and for about six weeks afterwards. They spoke occasionally. Otherwise her mentor spoke to her manager to see how she was getting on – “*she didn't leave me, she worked for me, she was always there for me*”.

Another participant said that while he was on placement his mentor dropped in to see him at the company. He often missed her as he was out on a job but she met his supervisor to discuss his progress. He was happy with these visits as he felt she was looking out for him. The supervisor was also happy as it showed FAS were interested as well.

Another participant stated that her mentor was “great”. She was in contact with her mentor during the course, during her placement, and afterwards. “If you found anything difficult, including personal problems, you could just go to her and talk about it.”

## **7.5 Post-Programme Mentoring**

Finally, when the work placement had ended, and if there was not a job available to the participant with the employer, the mentor would help the participant in their further progression, into either employment, or further training/education or an employment programme. This continued support was available to any participant who contacted the Equal team after exiting the programme.

### *7.5.1 Feedback – Post-Programme Mentoring*

This section presents feedback from the Equal team and from participants regarding the mentoring support after the programme.

#### *Equal Team*

Post-programme mentoring was targeted mainly at those who were working or actively looking for work. The Equal team contacted them every three to four months, for up to a year. The participant could contact them more if they wanted further contact. Participants who dropped out very rarely remained in contact.

The Equal team had hoped that they could fund further training for participants who found employment through the One Step Up initiative which is under the remit of Services to Business; however, this was not possible as the One Step Up initiative did not fund individuals at that time. Services to Business have since developed an Individual Learning Option within One Step Up, which is a possible avenue for future funding, but this was not available at the time. Equal therefore funded further training of employed persons through their own budget. For instance, one participant obtained work in a large national furniture store after her participation in Equal. The Equal programme provided the funding for her to do a Diploma in Interior Design in Dublin. As a result of

earning this qualification, she was promoted to manager within the store. The reasoning behind this was the promotion of sustained employment for Equal programme participants.

### *Participants*

The participants were very positive about the post-programme support, in particular those who were helped to access further education/training.

One participant said that his mentor helped him to find out about grants for his college application. He was in college at the time of the survey interview and he said that it would never have happened without the Equal programme. His mentor sat him down, got him his application forms. He had no idea what to do, how to apply for college or for a grant. He said that he owed it all to them. He said that he'd been thinking of college and that his mentor "*just made it easy for him*". He was very happy with the help that he received from his mentor.

Another participant said that his mentor was "*instrumental*" in helping him get a place on a six-month Autocad course in the Dundalk Training Centre. The skills on the Autocad course helped him get employment in the area he was interested in. At the time of the survey interview, he had been working at his job on a full-time and permanent basis for two years and had been promoted since he started. His skills were frequently being updated. He said his mentor was very helpful – particularly in relation to getting him onto the Autocad course which led to his current job. He wouldn't have gotten the job without the Autocad course and he wouldn't have gotten the Autocad course without the Equal course and the support of his mentor.

Two of the telephone interviewees were foreign nationals, both were well qualified. They mentioned that prior to the Equal programme they had experienced extreme difficulty in trying to get work – they even had difficulty in getting an interview. With the help of their mentor they were able to find full-time employment which related to their skills. Both have been promoted since starting work. One of them said "*She was a good help, she linked my professional skills to jobs*".

Participants on the focus group, who had only recently left the course said that they were “*still in contact every couple weeks*”, and that their mentor, “*still sorts out any problems*”. They found it very reassuring to know that their mentor “*will keep helping*” and that it’s “*good to know, if anyone’s getting hassle ... the mentor would fight their corner*”.

## **7.6 Comparison to other FÁS Programmes**

Mentoring support is available in two FÁS programmes, Expanding the Workforce (formerly known as Gateway for Women) and Community Training Centres (CTCs).

Outside of these programmes, there is no mentoring support available for participants in mainstream FÁS training programmes. The level of support available depends very much on the individual instructor on the course.

### *Expanding the Workforce*

Expanding the Workforce was a programme aimed at women who had been out of paid employment for over a year and who were not in receipt of Jobseeker’s Benefit or Allowance. Its aim was to proactively encourage and facilitate women who would consider returning to paid employment. This was achieved through an initial face-to-face meeting with the participant and possibly through participation in a Pre-Employment Preparation Programme and/or other training.

Part of the programme plan included the concept of post-programme mentoring for participants who obtained employment. It was envisaged that participants who had gone through the Expanding the Workforce process and who were in employment would be followed up by Services to Business. The aim of this follow-up was to ensure that participants were satisfactorily trained – if a participant or their employer identified any skills gaps, this gap would be addressed through the One Step Up development programme organised by Services to Business.

Similar to the Equal programme, this follow-up training did not occur because the One Step Up Initiative did not fund individual training at the time. (As stated previously, Services to Business have since developed an Individual Learning Option fund, which is a possible avenue for future funding.)

### *Community Training Centres*

Community Training Centres (CTCs) have the equivalent of a mentor in two separate roles: Advocates and Key Workers.

The role played by the Advocate is very similar to some of the tasks undertaken by the mentor in the Equal programme. While the specifics of the role can vary from centre to centre, in general, it involves:

- Regular scheduled meetings with the participant, tracking progress on the Individual Learning Plans/Career Action Plans. As stated previously, Community Services have Individual Learning Plans for all of its participants. The Advocate has discussions with the participant about his or her interests and, from this, a Career Action Plan is developed, which is linked to their Individual Learning Plan. As they meet regularly (e.g. every two months), the Advocate can monitor the participant's progress to ensure that the necessary experience/qualifications are being gained.
- Work Placement. The Advocate is so-called because he or she advocates on behalf of the participant with employers to seek out appropriate work placements (if the participant is unable to obtain a work placement for his or herself). The Advocate generally has a network of employers that he or she has developed over time.
- After programme support. The Advocate maintains contact with participants after they leave the programme. For example, sometimes trainees come back a few years later looking for help with their CV.

Each participant is assigned a Key Worker upon entry to the centre. The Key Worker is a staff member of the CTC and has a role more similar to the informal programme support offered by the mentor in the Equal programme. The participant sees the Key Worker to discuss any issues impacting on

his/her learning on the course, and also to maintain progress on the Individual Learning Plan.

Community Training Centres (CTCs) have one Advocate for a whole centre or even a region. Furthermore, not every CTC has an Advocate; they are available at approximately half of them. While all participants have a Key Worker assigned to them, the Key Worker has other responsibilities to a greater extent than the mentor on the Equal programme (despite the mentor on the Equal programme also being responsible for tasks such as soft skills development, job-seeking skills, and literacy and numeracy training).

The main difference in the provision of support by the Equal programme compared to the CTCs was that the Equal programme had its mentor present in the classroom. This had the impact of allowing a much greater level of informal contact. Also, because there was one person available for sixteen to twenty participants, there was more time available for regular one-on-one contact.

## **7.7 Summary**

The availability of a mentor was highly valued by the participants on the Equal programme. Participants spoke of the very useful help that they received from the mentor in helping them find work, getting them into education programmes and providing support so that they knew that there was someone who was willing to fight their corner.

The Equal team was united in its positive view of the benefits of mentoring support for this client group, and believed that it should be mainstreamed. The former Training Centre Manager shared this view and when asked whether he supported mainstreaming mentoring said, *“within the context of that client group, I would, most definitely. It would be suitable for foundation training with long-term unemployed people who are disengaged from and ambivalent to the labour market.”* He recognised that *“it would take up time. Alternatively, you could buy it in.”*

In terms of the skills needed in order to be a mentor, *“there are no formal qualifications in mentoring. A lot of life skills are needed and a wish to empower people and impart learning to others. A mixture of tutoring/facilitation/guidance and counselling skills and a strong element of coaching. Life coaching courses might be the best programme for mentors. It is best clients don’t see it as a therapy. It needs to be integrated into the programme. Most mentoring is more effective if it’s done within the group – they learn from each other. There has to be a private facility also. You don’t want them to become dependent on you.”*

In addition to this coaching aspect of mentoring, the mentor was also trained in literacy and numeracy and was responsible for providing support in this area.

There are cost implications in providing mentoring support, as it requires the provision of an additional staff member.

## Chapter Eight: Progression

### 8.1 Introduction

The Equal programme was developed in the context of a buoyant Irish economy, the fruits of which, according to Equal's proposal for funding, were not being enjoyed by *“significant numbers of long-term unemployed [who were] failing to engage and derive the financial or personal benefits of our economic success”*. It states that: *“One of the keys to progression lies in a much stronger involvement of Employers. The issue of employment and a supportive employer network is crucial for successful participant outcomes.”*

This chapter looks at progression among Equal participants. Survey results show the progression paths of Equal participants compared to those on Bridging/Foundation programmes and Expanding the Workforce. The main results in terms of employment outcomes have already been presented in Chapter Three. This chapter looks at the role played by work placements in gaining employment and at the level of sustained employment achieved by participants. The importance of the holistic nature of the programme, programme delivery through the Equal team and a clear exit strategy, is emphasised. Feedback from participants, the Equal team, employers and the Department of Social and Family Affairs is presented.

### 8.2 Employer Network

The Employer Network was developed by the Equal team during the course of the pilot Equal programme from 2002 – 2005. According to the Equal proposal for funding, the programme *“successfully developed a database of local employers who are committed to equality of opportunity.... Throughout the development and implementation of the programme, relationships were developed between project staff and local employers. The Employer Forum was officially launched in December 2004 with 60 employers attending, of which 42 made a written commitment to support a participant’s progression directly from the programme. The establishment of a local employer network was vital to the success of the project, demonstrating that once consulted, informed and supported by the project team, employers were willing to provide*

*employment opportunities to participants that previously they would not have considered job ready.”*

The Equal team argued the importance of having an employer network. They automatically approached any employer they came into contact with. If they were in a shop, or getting petrol, or if a delivery person came to the centre, whoever it was, they would ask if there were any jobs going. Currently within FÁS, the responsibility for developing and maintaining relationships with employers lies primarily with the Employment Services Officers. Networks instructors had previously developed with employers have been lost. The Equal team believe that there is a need to share information within FÁS about employers and possible opportunities for placement, and for FÁS to be more proactive in creating relationships with local employers. This issue has been endorsed in the *Report on Improving Placement from FÁS Training Courses*. (an internal FÁS report).

The Equal team encouraged participants to find their own work placements, as the experience of creating a CV, writing to or visiting employers and obtaining a placement independently constitutes good job-search experience. When participants did not feel able for this, or if they were unsuccessful in their endeavours, the Equal team helped the participants. The Equal team were focused on obtaining placements that had the prospect of resulting in a permanent job for the participant, or failing that, at the very least that the employer would provide a reference for the participant. The aim was always to find a permanent job for the participant. The placement would last for six to eight weeks, but it could be extended if necessary.

Having an Employer Network meant that the Equal team had developed a ready base of employers who had already agreed to have participants on placement and who were on board with the aims of the Equal programme.

### 8.2.1 Feedback on Employer Network

#### *DSFA Facilitator*

The Department of Social and Family Affairs Facilitator, who was on the Equal programme's Development Partnership, spoke strongly of his support of the Employer Network and the need to have a relationship with employers: *"One of the things with Equal, which was so important, which was a result of the meetings in France and Spain, was the interaction between the service providers and the employers. And we used to have that here, years ago, within the DSFA before FÁS ever came about."* He said that one of the big learning curves for him when on Equal was realising the importance of this. He firmly believed that *"There needs to be a local employer database."*

#### *Employers*

Employers appreciated the support that was offered by the Equal team. One employer said that he wouldn't have taken on the participant had Equal not stood behind him. He had the reassurance of taking the participant on placement, knowing that it was temporary and that he could let him go if he didn't fit in (they work as a team and it's important for everyone to get on well together). The person he took on for placement is still working with him now. *"He was initially limited in what he could do and he was limited in his belief as to what he could do."* But they trained him in, encouraged him and now he's well able to cope.

The Equal team phoned him regularly and maintained contact. He said that *"it was good to know that they were in it, too."* He believes that there's a need to build confidence in people and stated that he was disappointed that the programme wasn't running anymore – *"it was one of the better ideas"* and he said that he'd *"like to see it started again"*, particularly with the downturn in the economy.

### **8.3 Progression after Programme**

This section looks at the extent to which participation in the Equal programme helped participants gain employment and the quality of the jobs that they obtained particularly in terms of permanency.

### 8.3.1 Role of Equal in Progression

Chapter Three has already presented the employment outcomes of Equal participants. Some information presented there is repeated here, to provide a context for the other figures shown.

Equal participants were asked in the survey whether they had obtained employment after exiting the programme. Table 8.1 below shows the percentage of participants who obtained employment. It also presents the percentage of participants who stated that they would not have found their job without the Equal programme. The equivalent figures for Bridging/Foundation programme participants (from the *2006/7 Follow-Up Survey of FÁS Participants*) are presented as well for comparative purposes.

More than half the respondents from the Equal programme who had obtained work after exiting the programme (58%) felt that they would not have been able to get their job without participation on the course. Only a third of participants on Bridging/Foundation level programmes stated that they would not have been able to get their job without participation on their course.

**Table 8.1: Would have gotten job without programme?**

	<b>Equal</b>	<b>Bridging</b>
Gained employment?	60	47
Would have got job without participation? (% No)	58	33

*Base: Equal 32; Bridging 98*

Respondents were also asked whether they had worked with their employer during their work placement. More than one in three Equal respondents (39%) in employment had previously worked with their employer for their work placement (Table 8.2). This compares with one in ten Bridging/Foundation programme participants (11%).

**Table 8.2: Worked with Employer on Work Placement?**

	<b>Equal</b>	<b>Bridging</b>
Worked with Employer on Work Placement?	39	11

*Base: Equal 32; Bridging 98*

It can be considered, therefore, that the placements organised with the Equal programme converted into sustained employment for a significant minority of participants ( $60\% \times 39\% = 23\%$  i.e. almost one in four participants on the programme compared to 5% for Bridging participants –  $47\% \times 11\%$ ). There are large error margins in these figures. However, they are presented for general information purposes.

### *8.3.2 Survey Results – Sustained Employment*

Another aspect of employment is whether this employment was sustained i.e. was it a permanent job and was the participant still employed at the time of the survey (in some cases, five years after exiting the programme). The survey also asked whether the respondent had changed their jobs or had they remained in the same job.

Table 8.3 below shows the percentage of respondents whose first job was full-time and the percentage whose first job was permanent. The results are also given for participants on Bridging/Foundation programmes for comparative purposes. It can be seen that a higher proportion of participants on Bridging/Foundation programmes were in full-time employment in their first job (74% compared to 55%); however, a greater proportion of participants on Equal obtained permanent employment in their first job (79% compared to 26%).

**Table 8.3: Full-time and permanent employment**

	<b>Equal</b>	<b>Bridging</b>	<b>Bridging, LTU</b>
Full-time job?	55	74	
Permanent job?	79	26	
<i>Base</i>	32	98	

Given that the participants from the Equal programme had, in some cases, left the programme as far back as 2002, respondents were asked whether they

remained in employment, and if so, whether they were in the same job or had moved positions within the company or if they'd changed employers. The results are compared with participants from Expanding the Workforce, as they were surveyed in a similar time-frame<sup>14</sup>. The questions were asked to those participants who had obtained a job since exiting their programme – 60% in the case of Equal participants, and 70% for Expanding the Workforce (Table 8.4).

**Table 8.4: Comparing Job Mobility, Equal North East and ETW**

	<b>Equal North East (%)</b>	<b>Expanding the Workforce (%)</b>
Had a job	60	70
Currently employed	51	40
<b>Of currently employed</b>		
<i>Still in same job</i>	62	80
<i>Same company, different job</i>	15	4
<i>Different company</i>	23	16
<i>Total</i>	100	100

*Base: Equal 55; Expanding the Workforce 104.*

Three-fifths of Equal participants obtained a job after the programme – 85% of these participants were still employed at the time of the survey (51% of all participants), which in some cases was five years after exiting the programme. Comparing this to participants on Expanding the Workforce, 70% of participants got a job after exiting the programme, and 57% of these participants were still employed at the time of the survey (40% of all participants).

Of participants who were employed at the time of the survey, 62% were still in their first job. Fifteen percent were working in the same company but in a different job, and 23% were working for another employer. Comparing this to participants on Expanding the Workforce, four out of five participants remained in their first job.

<sup>14</sup> Franklin Research Limited, 2007. *Follow-Up Survey of Women Returners*.

From interviews with participants and employers, participants who had a different job within the same company had been promoted within the company. Some participants who had changed employers had been let go by their first employer as there wasn't enough work available to keep them.

#### **8.4 Education and Training Outcomes After Equal**

This section looks at the education and training outcomes of Equal participants, subsequent to leaving the programme, based on the survey results. Some feedback from participants that has been presented previously is briefly repeated.

##### *8.4.1 Survey Results*

At the time of the survey, almost one in five (19%) Equal participants were in a FÁS programme or in education: 9% were on an employment programme, 7% were in school or college and 4% were on a FÁS training programme.

Since exiting the Equal programme, 43% of respondents stated that they had participated in some form of further education or training. It should be noted that in some cases, the participant had exited the programme up to five years previously.

Respondents had participated in a wide range of courses, from ECDL to a Bachelors in Business Studies. Some of the courses undertaken included: ECDL/Computers; Carer's course (FETAC); Food Hygiene (HACCP); Accounts (e.g. Sage); Interior Design; Security; Tiling; and Office Administration.

Some participants had achieved considerable educational success since leaving the Equal programme and credited Equal for starting them off. For instance, one woman was encouraged to complete her Junior Certificate while on the Equal programme. She left Equal, and obtained her Junior Certificate. She then completed her Leaving Certificate and then a Certificate in Office Administration. At the time of the survey, she was working full-time as a clerical officer.

While some participants did advance to third-level education, a more typical example of progression would be Ann,<sup>15</sup> who had been unemployed for seven years. After doing Equal, she did a FETAC certificate in Caring for the Elderly and a Food Safety (HACCP) course (which she said she would not have done had it not been for Equal). At the time of the survey, she was working part-time as a carer.

Of the 43% of participants who stated that they had participated in some form of further training or education since the Equal programme, two-thirds (67%) stated that they would not have done so without their participation in Equal. The time spent on the Equal programme gave participants the confidence and the knowledge of how to progress. As one previously cited participant who was in full-time education said, *“I didn’t know how to apply for college... I owe it all to them.”*

One in ten (9%) survey respondents were on a Community Employment (CE) programme at the time of the survey. The participants who progressed to CE were men with a Junior Certificate-level of education. For the most part, they had participated in another FÁS course subsequent to Equal (tiling, roofing, plumbing) and then moved to CE.

#### **8.4.2 Summary and Conclusions**

The Equal team placed a lot of emphasis on the Employer Network that they had developed. The Training Centre Manager and the Department of Social and Family Affairs Facilitator also felt strongly that this network had a very important role to play. It worked both as a source of placement for participants and as a reassurance for employers support was available to them.

This emphasis was well deserved. The majority of participants from the Equal programme (60%) obtained a job after exiting the programme and 39% of these jobs were obtained through their work placement. From this it can be extrapolated that almost one in four clients (23%) on the Equal programme

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<sup>15</sup> Not her real name.

obtained a job through their work placement. Four out of five jobs attained by participants were permanent jobs. Furthermore, one-half of clients were still employed at the time of the survey, which in some cases was five years after exiting the programme. The jobs obtained by Equal participants, or rather, their employability, showed longevity.

It would appear that employers are willing to hire persons who they ordinarily would not if they are supported in this venture. It is necessary to engage employers in this process. The Equal team all involved themselves in interacting with employers and developing relationships with them. These relationships were based on honesty, which allowed employers to trust that the Equal team and FÁS were there to support them.

Almost a half of participants (43%) undertook further training or education subsequent to leaving the Equal programme. Two-thirds of these said that they would not have done so had it not been for their participation in Equal.

## Chapter Nine: Cost Implications

### 9.1 Introduction

The final question of this evaluation is whether the higher rate of placement seen in Equal North East compared to other FÁS programmes justifies the extra cost in running the programme. This chapter looks at the overall programme costs, identifies the extra costs associated with running Equal North East and weighs these costs against the higher placement rates.

### 9.2 Overall Programme Costs

The overall programme costs, as detailed in returns by the Equal North East programme, are displayed in the Appendix. The table below displays the sub-totals for each of the main categories. These figures combine the total costs of the three-year pilot and the 18-month mainstreaming initiative.

**Table 9.1: Overall Programme Costs by Broad Category**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Trainer Costs	€363,297.92
Participant Costs	€718,269.50
Premises, Equipment and Materials	€124,688.56
Administration & General Overheads	€423,867.96
Transnational Costs	€48,270.72
Other Costs	€15,346.00
<b>Total Costs</b>	<b>€1,693,767.66</b>

These costs include items that were were not directly associated with running the training programme e.g. the costs of running workshops for external agencies on HARP, transnational costs incurred during the course of the three-year pilot, etc. Therefore, it is not appropriate to compare these total costs with a comparable FÁS training programme. These figures are presented for information purposes only.

### 9.3 Costs versus higher placement rates

In an effort to determine whether the direct costs associated with running the Equal programme were justified by the higher placement records, the former Training Centre Manager conducted an exercise using data extracted from SAP records in FÁS. The data used was from 2004, and only direct costs were included in the analysis<sup>16</sup>.

Table 9.2 below displays the costs associated with running a Bridging/Foundation training course in-centre, and through contracted training, with running Equal North East. The costs are divided into staffing costs and participant costs, which are then added to provide total direct costs.

**Table 9.2: Comparative Costs for Bridging and Equal North East**

	<b>Bridging - In-Centre</b>	<b>Bridging - Contracted</b>	<b>Equal North East</b>
<b>Direct Costs</b>			
Allowances; Materials; Travel	€8,418,696	€6,267,648	€231,644
Staff Costs; Trainer costs	€3,325,844	NA	€124,885
<b>Total Costs</b>	<b>€11,744,540</b>	<b>€6,267,648</b>	<b>€356,529</b>
Throughput	2,921	2,071	49
<b>Cost per throughput</b>	<b>€4,020.73</b>	<b>€3,026.39</b>	<b>€7,276.10</b>
Placement	1,099	666	38
<b>Cost per placement</b>	<b>€10,686.96</b>	<b>€9,410.88</b>	<b>€9,382.34</b>

*Source: FÁS SAP records*

Direct costs for running Bridging/Foundation programmes nationally in FÁS Training Centres in 2004 amounted to €11.7m, of which €8.4m was spent on allowances, material and travel, and a further €3.3m on staff and trainer costs. With a throughput of 2,921, the cost per throughput can be calculated at €4,021. Furthermore, with a placement figure of 1,099, the cost per placement works out at €10,687.

<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that while this exercise was only performed on the 2004 figures, the placement rate on SAP for Equal North East was higher in other years – this year was therefore not chosen on the basis that it had the highest placement rate.

Looking at Bridging/Foundation programmes contracted out nationally in 2004, the total cost ran to €6.3m for a throughput of 2,071. This amounts to a cost of €3,026 per throughput, which is 25% cheaper than running the programme in-centre. In terms of placement after exiting the programme, 666 participants were placed, which provides a cost of €9,411 per placement.

Finally, looking at Equal North East, 2004 saw an expenditure of €356,529 on direct costs (of which €231,644 was spent on allowances, material and travel, and €124,855 spent on staff and trainer costs). With a throughput of 49 in 2004, the cost per throughput amounts to €7,276, which is substantially more expensive than running a Bridging/Foundation training programme, either in-centre (81% more expensive) or on a contracted basis (140% more expensive). However, when placement figures are looked at, the cost per placement for Equal North East amounts to €9,382, which is a little less expensive than the Bridging/Foundation programmes.

In conclusion, the cost of running Equal North East was clearly more expensive than running Bridging/Foundation level training programmes, both on an in-centre and on a contracted basis. However, when placement figures are looked at, the cost per placement for Equal North East amounted to a little less than the cost per placement for Bridging/Foundation programmes. Therefore, if costs are judged on the basis of outcomes rather than cost per activity day, Equal North East provided more cost-effective training than Bridging/Foundation courses.

#### **9.4 Extra costs associated with Equal North East**

Discussions were held with the former Training Centre manager and the Equal Co-ordinator to identify precisely the nature of the extra costs of running the Equal programme, compared to other FÁS training programmes. While there are additional features such as psychometric testing that have costs associated with them, FÁS as an organisation holds contracts to access these tests and, as such, the cost is not one that is specifically attached to running the Equal programme.

Essentially, the extra cost in running the Equal North East programme boils down to the need for one additional staff member. This additional staff member worked on: literacy and numeracy support; mentoring (during and after programme); developing and maintaining the Employer Network; computers training; and soft skills training.

Equal North East ran two programmes simultaneously during the course of the three-year pilot, which meant that the additional staff member was spread over the two classes, thus halving the cost. The main implication of this is that the extra staff member does not need to be on a full-time basis. However, the Equal North East pilot also had the Equal Co-ordinator devoting approximately half her time in the direct running of the programme, carrying out tasks such as conducting HARP interviews for recruitment onto the programme, psychometric tests during the induction, and assessing the readiness of participants to progress from the course. Therefore, in essence, the help of one extra staff member is required, with a complex and varied skills set.

### **9.5 Costs associated with running Equal on Contracted Basis**

The Equal North East programme has been running as a new programme called *Deciding Your Future* since 2008 on a contracted basis. The request for tender specified the need for psychometric testing of the participants, and an extra staff member for mentoring and soft skills. The tenders that came to provide this programme were approximately twice the cost of running other Bridging/Foundation-level programmes, due to the cost of the extra staff member and the specialised skills required. For example, a Return to Work programme run on a contracted basis works out at a cost of approximately €70 per person per day. The *Deciding Your Future* programme cost approximately €120 per person per day.

From discussions with the former Training Centre Manager and the Equal Co-ordinator, it emerged that the cost of running the programme on a contracted basis was necessarily going to be more expensive than running it in-centre due to a loss in flexibility. One of the advantages of the Equal North East programme was that as soon as they identified when a participant was

progression-ready, they helped the participant move on to their work placement. There was also flexibility in the course content – if they could find an instructor willing to do two days basic training in tiling with the class (and the class was interested in this), it was implemented. It is mandatory in contracted training that the trainers adhere to the QA58 course profile. As a result of this, the course length has reverted to being a 20 week course, while the Equal team had streamlined it down to 12 weeks, which adds to the expense of the course.

The manner in which payment is currently organised in Contracted Training prevents the encouragement of participants off the course and into employment, as the contracted trainer is not paid for participants once they exit. It is of interest to the contracted trainer to keep the participants on the programme for as long as possible. This was not the attitude of the Equal team and, as such, it is possible that the placement rates for this programme could also suffer. A system that allows and encourages progression into employment is required.

## **9.6 Conclusions**

The cost of running the Equal North East programme per throughput was approximately double that of running Bridging/Foundation-level training programmes nationally, both in-centre and on a contracted basis. However, when the cost analysed is cost per placement as opposed to cost per throughput, a different story came into view. Equal North East proved to be less expensive than running Bridging/Foundation-level programmes both in-centre and on a contracted basis when the cost per placement figures were examined.

The cost of running Equal North East on a contracted basis, in its new form as Deciding Your Future, also proved to cost approximately double the cost of an average Bridging/Foundation-level contracted course. While most of the additional cost can be attributed to the requirement of an extra staff member and specialised skills, delivering the programme on a contracted basis takes away the advantage of a flexible course length. The current payment system

for contracted training penalises the trainer if a participant exits early, while the advantage of Equal North East was that participants were encouraged to move on as soon as they were progression ready.

# Chapter Ten: Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

## 10.1 Introduction

A pilot Equal North East Re-integration Training programme was introduced in the FÁS Dundalk Training Centre in 2003. The programme was designed to address employment re-integration issues faced by persons experiencing multiple social disadvantage such as long-term unemployment, substance abuse, ex-offenders, mental health issues, little or no formal education, literacy difficulties, etc. A high rate of progression on the pilot programme combined with an innovative approach to the programme delivery led to the successful application for mainstream funding from Equal in 2006.

Subsequently, the Dundalk Training Centre requested that the Planning and Research Department in FÁS carry out an evaluation of the pilot and the mainstream programme.

The evaluation set out to assess the success of Equal North-East compared to traditional FÁS training programmes aimed at long-term unemployed clients in terms of costs and outcomes. It was carried out in-house by Planning and Research. It is based on a number of sources of information including:

- Files held by Equal on client backgrounds
- Desk research
- In-depth, face-to-face interviews with stakeholders (the Equal team, Employment service officers, representatives of the DSFA and the LES and with the former Dundalk Training Centre manager.
- Participant feedback through a postal and telephone survey, a number of in-depth telephone interviews and two focus group meetings
- Conversations with relevant FÁS divisions./
- Comparison of survey results with other relevant FÁS surveys.

The evaluation encompassed 169 persons who participated in the programmes. Of these, 54% were male and 46%female; the most common age category was people in their thirties (37%) followed by people in their

forties (23%); the most common education level was Junior Certificate-level or equivalent and 91% were long-term unemployed prior to starting the programme.

## **10.2 Outcomes of the Programme**

The first purpose of this evaluation was to establish the progression outcomes for participants on the Equal North East programme and to compare these to outcomes from similar FÁS programmes.

From the survey of Equal participants, four out of five participants stated that attendance on the programme helped them to:

- Identify suitable job opportunities (85%)
- Gave them new jobs skills (84%)
- Helped them to present themselves at interview (82%)
- Improved their confidence (82%)

Furthermore, more than half of the participants said that the programme helped them to get a job (57%).

Comparing this to results from the *2006/7 Follow-Up Survey of FÁS Participants* for long-term unemployed participants on Foundation/Bridging programmes (the most comparable group) participants on Equal gave higher ratings than the long-term unemployed Bridging participants did for all the above aspects; identifying job opportunities (85% compared to 62%); learning new job skills (84% versus 74%); improved confidence (82% versus 77%); and presenting self for interview (82% versus 75%). The most significant difference was in the rating for “helped me to get a job” - 57% on Equal compared to 29% of long-term unemployed Bridging participants.

In terms of outcomes immediately after exiting the programme, 58% of Equal participants progressed to employment, education or training. This compares favourably with placement rates for Bridging/Foundation (47%) and Return to Work (56%), despite the extremely high levels of long-term unemployed trainees on Equal North East.

Employment outcomes at the time of the survey were statistically significantly higher than those found for Bridging/Foundation programme participants. At the time of the survey, 52% of participants from Equal North East were in employment, compared to 38% of all Bridging/Foundation participants and 21% of long-term unemployed participants on Bridging/Foundation programmes. The employment outcomes at the time of the survey were also higher than those found from Expanding the Workforce (52% compared to 40%).

#### *10.2.1 Why Were the Outcomes Better?*

The positive employment outcomes lead to the next question in this evaluation: How did the Equal North East programme achieve better employment outcomes for its participants than those found in other FÁS programmes?

This question is complex and some caveats are required. While there are specific elements within the programme that can be identified as being different to that of other FÁS programmes, it is difficult to isolate the impact that each of these elements had on outcomes. Furthermore, the programme was designed holistically, so that all of the distinct elements of the programme worked together. Therefore, it is not known how well a particular feature would work if taken out in isolation and placed within another programme.

Caveats aside, it is important to attempt to learn from the experiences gained at Equal North East. The next section sets out the various tools utilised by the Equal North East programme and highlights how they helped participants. The order that they are presented in follows the order of the report, and not necessarily the order of importance (in terms of the impact they have on outcomes). Each aspect is considered in terms of how it helped client outcomes and how FÁS can learn from it.

### **10.3 Engagement**

Within the engagement process, there were two distinct elements that differed from general FÁS programmes: joint interviewing with the DSFA and the use of the HARP tool in interviewing.

### *Joint Interviewing*

The impact of joint interviewing was mainly in increasing attendance at interviews and possibly in increasing attendance in the programme. The element of compulsion (i.e. the threat of having benefits taken away) meant that persons who would ordinarily not engage with FÁS did engage, and persons who may have dropped out after the first few days remained on the programme. This impact meant that Equal North East had no problems filling course places, and had waiting lists of potential participants once joint interviewing was introduced.

How this differed from the National Employment Action Plan (NEAP) process is that by having both FÁS and the DSFA representatives present at the same time, the individual being interviewed could not give different stories to the two different agencies depending on the agency with which he or she was speaking. Prior to joint interviewing, the FAS and DSFA representatives discovered that they had heard different explanations from the clients as to why they were not employed or in training/education. The different explanations were tailored to meet the particular demands of the agency in question. With NEAP, the individual is speaking with FÁS, and FÁS has a different remit to the DSFA.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The main benefit of joint interviewing and co-operation with the DSFA was that it assisted Equal North East in reaching unemployed people who would otherwise not engage with FÁS, and thus it positively affected those particular persons' outcomes.

However, there are potential problems associated with the practice. There is the potential that a client might feel 'coerced' on to a programme that they did not really want or alternatively, an instructor might find that they have trainees 'who were sent' on their programme, who are not suitable and who may subsequently cause problems on the course for both the instructor and other course participants.

It must be remembered that the FAS representative on the interview panel for Equal, was HARP-trained and was interviewing for a programme that she was directly involved with and could assess reasonably accurately the client's suitability or otherwise for the programme and the programme's suitability for the client

It is therefore recommended that if FÁS is to continue with the practice of joint interviewing with the DSFA, it is done on a closely-monitored pilot model on foundation level course only.

### *HARP*

HARP improved the employment outcomes achieved by Equal North East participants in a number of distinct and overlapping ways:

- It allowed the team to identify and select participants who were willing to engage with training – and to identify persons who were not training ready and who would not benefit from training
- It enabled the team to identify:
  - the motivation levels of the participant
  - the barriers that they faced in accessing the labour market and

- the areas that they needed to work on to improve their employability (both technical and soft skills).
- It provided the means to develop an Individual Learner Action Plan that identified interventions that would work to increase/sustain motivation, reduce barriers or improve employability. All planned actions had this focus.
- It focused the mind of the team members and the client on *why* a person was not working, as opposed to trying to immediately match them to a job or training programme. As a result of this, the mindset of the team was significantly different to that of general FÁS officers and instructors.

The combination of selecting clients who were training ready, understanding *why* a person was unemployed, and creating an action plan that worked to sustain motivation, reduce barriers and increase employability, established a system that helped clients into sustainable employment.

In terms of learning for FÁS, the use of HARP greatly enhanced the programme. The HARP assessment is quite structured in nature and it removes a reasonable degree of subjectivity from the assessor. The ESOs who were partly trained in HARP were very positive about its use, in particular for clients who are difficult to deal with, or “revolving door” clients, as it provides a means for identifying the appropriate level of intervention. It is particularly useful at a time of scarce resources to have a method of objectively determining the level of intervention a client requires. It may be that a client is in need of greater assistance than FÁS can provide – HARP gives an ESO a solid basis for making this decision and standing behind it. Equally, a client may not appear at first contact to be training ready, but the HARP interview can reveal that despite the problems surrounding the client, he or she is in fact training ready, and may simply need some basic support around addressing barriers. Again, the HARP tool gives the ESO a basis for making decisions.

The focus on employability rather than simply job-matching is another important feature of HARP. Progression from FÁS programmes has been a

source of concern in recent years e.g. the Working Group on Placement. Focusing on employability means that the underlying issues that have led to persistent unemployment can be addressed, thus reducing the likelihood of recurring unemployment. As stated previously, this is more of a feature for revolving door clients, the clients that return time and again, because the underlying issues preventing them gaining employment have never been addressed.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The HARP tool is an extremely useful one and, based on the research conducted for this evaluation, it is recommended that FÁS have a number of HARP-trained staff available in Employment Service Offices and Training Centres to work with long-term, unemployed clients who would benefit from this focused intervention. Training on the process should be provided to staff as required. HARP assessments would not be required for other clients who are interested in and capable of other forms of FÁS training.

As HARP is primarily targeted at long-term unemployed individuals, it may be the case that it would be an appropriate intervention for use by the Local Employment Services who can provide a more intensive support service to this client group than the FÁS Gateway can currently provide.

#### **10.4 Flexible Delivery**

The flexible delivery offered by the Equal North East programme took a number of different forms: the course length, the course content and the course starting times.

The flexibility in terms of course length provided an important lesson for FÁS. It demonstrated that a short-term course of 12 weeks including work placement can be effective in getting long-term unemployed participants experiencing a multitude of social problems into sustainable employment. This is a significant finding from the Equal North East initiative. The team had the confidence to shorten the course length due to the insights gained from the HARP tool – they could assess the participants' readiness and, from that,

take the decision to progress them into placement, rather than continue with further training.

In terms of the content of the course, the length of the programme and the profile of the client group did not lend itself to a specific skills training type of programme, with a focus on one subject in order to obtain a major FETAC award. The participants had been out of a learning environment for too long to start with an advanced level programme.

The main skill content in Equal North East was Hand Skills. It was selected because it was accessible for people with literacy and numeracy issues (which affected a significant proportion of participants) and it provided opportunities to develop soft skills, such as team-work. In addition to hand skills, all the participants did a module on Computers. This helped improve the confidence of participants and was useful as a general life skill. It was also necessary for anyone who was interested in pursuing work in an office.

Apart from these main modules, participants were also able to choose (depending on the availability of skills within the centre) other modules that they were interested in e.g. one cohort did a few days of tiling.

The participants were aware that the modules they worked on were not sufficient for them to get employment in the area e.g. the hand skills training certificate would not enable them to work as a carpenter, the computers module wouldn't train them sufficiently to get work as a programmer, etc. The course content was sufficient to give the participants basic practical skills in the area e.g. they built a cot or a coffee table that they could use in their home, or they knew how to go about tiling their bathroom. Developing real practical skills worked to improve the individual's self-confidence, as there were tangible outcomes to their skills training. The types of practical skills the Equal team introduced were ones that encouraged team-work.

As an aside, it should be noted that a significant minority of participants on the Equal North East programme were there because they felt that they had to be. Learning practical skills that they could use at home was an effective method

of getting the participants to buy into the process. They may have started on the programme because of perceived DSFA pressure, but they were happy to stay on for the practical skills as it was genuinely beneficial.

The other modules that some cohorts tried were Retail Sales and Payroll. These modules did provide skills that could help the participant gain employment. The payroll module would not be sufficient to get a job in an accounts department, but it would be enough to familiarise the participant for an administrative role that involved a basic knowledge of accounts. Similarly, the retail module would not be enough to get a job as a window dresser, but it would be enough to know, for example, how to balance tills, customer service and possibly some aspects of security. Furthermore, the limited extent of the skills training which was offered was not an issue for the employers who employed the participants on their placements. The employers were aware that this client group would need further in-company training to bring them up to speed with company requirements and were happy to provide this so long as the participants showed willingness and motivation to undertake it.

The content of the course was designed to be at a level that was comfortable for participants, yet would provide useful, practical, real skills. These skills helped the participant buy into the programme (therefore reducing drop-outs) and also improved his or her self-confidence, through the successful completion of modules and projects, and through attaining certification. The modules were selected on the basis that they served as a vehicle for soft skills development. Furthermore, by giving participants the choice of further optional modules, the programme reinforced the sense of being a client-centred programme, and provided participants with skills that could be used in obtaining relevant employment.

In addition to practical skills and the module on computers; personal development and job-seeking skills were incorporated into the general programme design, to better enable participants to seek employment.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

For this client group, getting the participants to engage in the programme played a large part in increasing their motivation and self-confidence. For this reason, giving participants some control over their optional modules was important. The Equal North East strategy of exchanging skills with other instructors in the centre on a quid pro quo basis proved effective and its continued practice is therefore recommended. It broadened the range of options available to participants – they were not confined to the skills available with their own instructor while the other programme benefitted from having the soft skills content of their programme provided by somebody who excelled in its delivery.

### *Flexible Starting Times*

Another feature in the flexible delivery of the Equal North East programme was the flexible starting times. FÁS training programmes normally start at 8:30am. Equal North East started at 9:30am. This allowed participants who had caring responsibilities to attend the course. It also allowed long-term unemployed participants to gradually adjust to core working hours and develop their time management skills. Generally, the course started at the later time of 9:30am and then ideally rolled back to 9am or 8:30am but this would depend on the needs of the cohort and was agreed by the cohort as a whole. Operationally speaking, according to the former Training Centre manager, the flexible starting times did not prove to be problematic. Participants signed rather than clocked in and out. An instructor noted that the flexibility helped to create an atmosphere that was client-based, which aided instructors in gaining the participant's trust.

This feature, along with the other aspects of flexible delivery like selecting course modules and adapting course length, all help to foster a client-centred environment that is central to FÁS' Training Strategy.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The *FÁS Training Strategy* states that flexible start and finish times need to be provided. The experience at Equal North East demonstrates that flexible

starting times are possible with the support of the Training Centre manager and staff.

## **10.5 Measurement and Assessment**

There were three aspects to measurement and assessment on the Equal programme that can be highlighted as being different to that offered on general FÁS training programmes: literacy and numeracy testing and support; psychometric tests and the Individual Learner Action Plan.

### *Literacy and Numeracy Testing*

The need for literacy and numeracy testing and support was highlighted by the Equal team as a whole. The instructors in particular expressed the need for literacy training as they considered the literacy levels of their clients to be considerably lower than the postal survey results indicated.

Some members of the Equal team had received literacy training, which enabled them to identify literacy issues and use simple techniques to overcome certain difficulties. They also had software from the National Adult Literacy Association (NALA) available for participants to use, and would refer participants to the VEC for further support if required.

Participants benefited from the availability of both testing and support. The environment created by the Equal North East team was one where it was made easy for participants to be open about literacy issues and which allowed them to freely discuss their literacy needs. This could involve asking an Equal team member or someone else in their cohort for assistance where needed.

The instructors also stressed the need for literacy testing and support in training programmes in general and indicated that there was a growing urgency to address this need,

Having literacy and numeracy testing and support was beneficial to both participants and instructors. Participants gained by improving their literacy and numeracy, which are essential life-skills, and also by becoming

comfortable asking for help in this area. Instructors gained by having a clear strategy in place on how to address literacy issues in a classroom.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Literacy issues are commonplace across many training programmes. FÁS would benefit from having literacy and numeracy testing available within training centres for foundation-level programme participants. It would also be beneficial to have instructors given training in how to identify literacy and numeracy issues, and simple techniques to overcome them. Knowing when it is appropriate to refer a participant on for further support (e.g. the VEC) would also be helpful.

#### *Psychometric Testing*

Equal North East incorporated a range of psychometric tests within its induction, for example: learning styles, thinking styles, emotional intelligence, and personality tests.

This testing proved helpful for participants who had been out of formal education and the workplace for a long time. It identified the participant's strengths and weaknesses. The identification of strengths was particularly useful for this client group, as it helped to develop their confidence. Participants with low self-esteem find it difficult to identify any strengths; these tests gave them an awareness of their abilities and their potential and the vocabulary with which to express these. The weaknesses identified through the testing were incorporated into the participant's Individual Action Plan. The psychometric testing was also useful in that it provided a focus beyond technical skills and gave a context for soft skills development.

Support for a more widespread availability of this testing came from instructors and Employment Services Officers. Most of the tests can be conducted by persons with Level A certification from the British Psychological Society. One route for gaining this qualification is through the Adult Guidance diploma in Maynooth. The personality tests require further qualifications (Level A and Level B from the British Psychological Association). Some

Employment Services Officers who are involved in Course Recruitment would have this qualification.

It is important that the results of these tests are fed back to the participant in a positive way; it is crucial that the person conducting the tests is fully qualified to do so. The cost of purchasing the tests is negligible for the most part as FÁS already has a contract with the licence holder of many of these tests.

In its proposal for mainstream funding, Equal put forward its intention to establish *a Regional Diagnostic Skills Assessment Centre which would conduct literacy/numeracy testing; colour vision testing; skills ability assessment; personality profiling; identification of existing skills/competencies; training needs analysis; measurement of potential for/barriers to progression.* It was envisaged that this Diagnostic Centre would serve the needs of Training Centre course participants, ESO caseload clients and LES caseload clients. Although this Skills Centre was not set up during the period, the Equal participants nonetheless received the above services from the Equal team.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The results of this evaluation indicate that it would be to the benefit of FAS to investigate further the advantages of establishing such assessment centres for use by FÁS clients. The centres could be located within either Employment Service Offices or Training Centres. With this approach, the benefits of such assessments and testing would be open to all FÁS registrants/training participants and would not be confined to a single programme. Equally, the cost of having staff members trained and the cost of purchasing the various tests would not have to be borne by a single programme. This centre could have the literacy/numeracy assessments, the literacy support software, a trained literacy tutor, psychometric tests and HARP.

### *Individual Learner Action Plan*

The results from the various tests and assessments were all fed into an Individual Learner Action Plan for each of the participants. This proved to have many advantages, such as focusing the planned actions to ensure that they helped the participant sustain motivation, reduce barriers and improve

employability, and also by providing a clear exit strategy for participants when leaving the programme.

The Individual Learner Action Plan used by Equal North East differed from the Individual Learning Plan used by Community Services in that it incorporated the results from the HARP assessments and it was primarily paper-based. However, conceptually both are very similar forms of individualised learning plans.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The Individual Learner Action Plan worked to keep both the Equal team and participants focused on the programme aims and is an essential component of any career guidance exercise. It would therefore be beneficial for all FÁS participants, but in particular for those on foundation-level programmes, to develop an Individual Learner Action Plan or equivalent. It helps to track the progress being made by the participant over time on the programme.

### **10.6 Mentoring Support**

Mentoring support was available to participants during the course of the programme, while the participant was on work placement and up to a year after exiting the programme.

The mentoring helped with programme outcomes in a number of concrete ways. While on the programme, the mentor was there to offer continuous support in whatever way was necessary. For this client group, participants faced a multitude of disadvantages, and could become discouraged quite easily because of previous negative experiences in work and education. Having the mentor available throughout the programme, delivering aspects of the course and providing support was viewed very positively by participants. The mentor could sort out any problems that the participant faced or help the participant to find the solution to their own problem, before such problems became overwhelming.

Having a mentor available while the participant was on work placement also proved very beneficial. These participants had been out of the workforce for a

long time and, as a result, could take a little time to re-adjust to working. Having the mentor come to visit them (with whom they already have an established relationship) meant that they could ask any questions, or voice any concerns that they had and were too nervous to say to their employer. These concerns were generally minor ones (e.g. taking breaks), but they could make the difference between the participant staying on in their work placement, or dropping out. The mentors also spoke with the employers to see how the placements were getting on and offered any support they could give to the employer to enable the placement to be successful.

Finally, mentoring was offered to those clients who did not find employment after their work placement. Rather than simply leave the programme and possibly be directed to someone they didn't know in Employment Services (although that option was of course there for them) or dropping out altogether, it was helpful to have someone who knew them, knew their skills and interests and could help direct them to an appropriate progression route in the months after exiting the programme. The option of this form of mentoring was left up to the client to choose.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The participants were very positive about the mentoring support that they received. The need for support for more disadvantaged clients is recognised in Community Training Centres and by Specialist Training Providers. Providing support for Foundation-level training programme participants is something that FÁS should consider introducing. There are costs associated with mentoring due to the requirement of an extra staff member. However, within Equal, the mentor carried out other roles such as literacy and numeracy support, soft skills development, the module on Computers, and help with developing and sustaining the Employer Network. Therefore the cost of an additional staff member is not attached solely to the mentoring aspect of the programme.

## **10.7 Progression**

The Equal North East programme developed an Employer Network that provided a source of placement and employment opportunities for participants and offered support to employers. This proved to be a very important contributor to the successful employment outcomes achieved by the programme. The aim of the placement was to provide sustained employment for its participants and to enable employers to hire persons who they would otherwise not consider taking on. The results from the survey showed that a significant minority of participants remained employed with their initial placement years later. Those that did not obtain a permanent job at least received a letter of reference from their placement employer, which would help to obtain future employment.

It would appear from the Equal experience that employers are willing to hire persons who they ordinarily would not employ if they are supported in this venture. It is necessary to engage employers in this process. The Equal team all involved themselves in interacting with employers and developing relationships with them. These relationships were based on an openness which allowed employers to trust that the Equal team and FÁS were there to support them if any difficulties or problems arose with the placements.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

For long-term unemployed and other disadvantaged client groups, it would be beneficial for FÁS to develop similar employer networks in other regions. Establishing relationships with employers over time to generate work placements for clients is already carried out by Advocates in Community Training Centres, by Specialist Training Providers, and by some Contracted Training providers. This role used to be fulfilled by FÁS instructors in the past. Creating a link between a particular programme and particular employers appears to be a good way of proactively generating placements for clients who would otherwise be difficult to place.

## **10.8 Holistic Programme Design and Team Delivery**

The two final differences between the Equal North East programme and other FÁS programmes were: the programme was designed holistically and the

programme was delivered by a team rather than an individual instructor. These two features are intertwined.

#### *10.8.1 Holistic Programme Design*

There are two aspects to the holistic design of the programme. Firstly, the programme itself was designed as one complete process, with a seamless delivery from the point of contact to placement.

In practice this meant that from the moment of interview, through the assessments, tests and certification, to tracking progress on the Individual Action Plan, and developing soft skills and job-seeking skills, to finding a work placement, and being supported on work placement, to finally signing off an exit strategy – the participant dealt with the same people throughout. There were no opportunities in the process for the participant to disappear through the cracks, to be lost between referral from the DSFA to FÁS, or from Employment Services to Training Services – the participant interacted with the same people throughout.

As a result of this, the service offered to the participant was individualised and personalised. The participant never had to explain his or her situation more than once. The participant never had to wonder who they should contact to access a service. Regardless of whatever query or concern they had, they could speak to a member of the team. It was never the case that “it was somebody else’s job” – everything fell under the remit of the team. The importance of this in terms of ease of access for the client cannot be overestimated, in particular for long-term unemployed and similarly disadvantaged clients. Not all clients need this level of support, but some clients do, and it is important that it is available for them.

The second aspect of the holistic design of the programme was that the programme was designed to look at the participant holistically. There wasn’t an emphasis just on technical skills and job-matching. The programme was designed, through the use of the HARP assessment tool and the Individual Action Plan, to look at a person’s overall situation, to look at their strengths and weaknesses in their entirety. The focus was on sustaining motivation,

reducing barriers and increasing employability; however that would be achieved. This approach allowed for getting to the root of why a person was unemployed, and subsequently dealing with the root causes effectively and practically.

#### 10.8.2 *Team Delivery*

This holistic approach necessitated the use of a multi-skilled, multi-functional team. The team of three carried out a multitude of roles which included:

- Interviewing prospective participants
- HARP assessments
- Literacy and numeracy testing
- Literacy and numeracy support
- Psychometric tests
- Instructor, Hand Skills
- Instructor, Computers
- Instructor, Soft Skills
- Mentor, on the programme
- Mentor, following up on participants while on placement
- Mentor, post-programme support
- Tracking progress with the Individual Action Plans
- Developing and maintaining the Employer Network

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Having the programme delivered by a team rather than by an individual instructor allowed for the seamless delivery of the programme from point of contact to placement. A single instructor could not effectively carry out all of the above roles, due to both time constraints and the unlikelihood of one individual having all of the necessary skills. The Equal team were able to offer a much wider range of interventions and also offer more intensive personal support and one-to-one contact. Should one instructor attempt to deliver this programme, there simply would not be the time to schedule one-on-one meetings on a weekly basis, employer visits, and literacy and numeracy supports. It is recommended that this form of support should be continued for this type of client group.

This continuity in service provision does cost extra due to the extra staffing costs but there is a commensurate improvement in the quality of service provision.

### **Overall Conclusion**

Equal North East was a successful programme that should be continued. Successful intervention with, and providing training for, disadvantaged groups is important for FÁS. While the cost per day of training on Equal North East proved more expensive than other FÁS training, such as Bridging/Foundation training programmes, the cost per placement figures demonstrate that Equal North East has been cost effective.

Currently, the programme is on offer on a contracted training basis in the North East. This evaluation recommends extending the programme to other regions. Furthermore, this evaluation recommends that the programme also be delivered on an in-centre basis in FÁS building on the success of the previous in-centre programmes.

## APPENDIX I: EQUAL PROGRAMME COSTS

<b>Table A Trainer Costs</b>		
1a	Net wages / salaries of training personnel employed by DP	275,085.56
1b	Pension / health provision for 1a	1,260.33
1c	Revenue returns in respect of 1a (i.e. PAYE, Employers and Employees PRSI)	55,644.79
1d	Fees of training personnel externally contracted by DP	12,549.02
1e	Travel and subsistence allowances for trainers in Ireland	9,610.17
1f	Other: please describe or attach explanation	9,148.05
	<b>Sub-total Trainer Costs</b>	<b>363,297.92</b>
<b>Table B Participant Costs</b>		
2a	Net payment to participants	568,764.00
2b	Revenue returns for 2a (i.e. PAYE, Employers and Employees PRSI)	3,164.00
2c	Childcare allowances paid to participants	56,771.00
2d	Other allowances paid to participants (e.g. meals, travel in Ireland, clothes, etc.)	25,248.00
2e	Other: please describe or attach explanation	64,349.50
	<b>Sub-total Participant Costs</b>	<b>718,296.50</b>
<b>Table C Premises, Equipment, Materials</b>		
3a	Non-depreciable items (e.g. teaching materials, protective clothing, etc.)	38,431.56
3b	Hiring / leasing of equipment by DP	233.00
3c	Rent on premises or part thereof used by project	72,747.00
3d	Rates on premises or part thereof used by project	1,674.00
3e	Other: please describe or attach explanation	11,603.00
	<b>Sub-total Premises, Equipment and Materials</b>	<b>124,688.56</b>
<b>Table D Administration and General Overheads</b>		
4a	Net wages / salaries of managerial personnel	294,460.00
4b	Pension / health provision for 4a	335.26
4c	Revenue returns in respect of 4a (i.e. PAYE, Employers and Employees PRSI)	335.25
4d	Travel and subsistence allowances for 4a in Ireland	22,246.35
4e	Net wages / salaries of administrative personnel	31,788.97
4f	Pension / health provision for 4e	0.00
4g	Revenue returns in respect of 4e (i.e. PAYE, Employers and Employees PRSI)	5,668.00
4h	Travel and subsistence allowances for 4e in Ireland	750.00
4i	Net wages / salaries of secretarial personnel	0.00
4j	Pension / health provision for 4i	0.00
4k	Revenue returns in respect of 4i (i.e. PAYE, Employers and Employees PRSI)	0.00
4l	Travel and subsistence allowances for 4i in Ireland	0.00
4m	Recruitment / advertising costs for project personnel and participants	2,237.00
4n	Utility costs (e.g. light, heat, power)	5,904.00
4o	Cleaning and maintenance	10,038.00
4p	Telecommunications costs	17,749.00

4q	Postage and courier costs	24.20
4r	Printing and stationery costs	13,342.46
4s	Insurance costs	1,464.00
4t	Cost of childcare provision for project personnel and participants	0.00
4u	Expenditure on accounting and audit services	10,000.00
4v	Expenditure on legal and other professional fees	164.00
4w	Other: please describe or attach explanation	7,362.47
4x	Expenditure on docs/resource materials etc. from project (e.g. publications etc)	0.00
	<b>Sub-total Administration and General Overheads</b>	<b>423,867.96</b>
	<b>Table E Transnational Costs</b>	
5a	Expenditure on foreign travel for project personnel	22,627.83
5b	Expenditure on subsistence associated with transnational visits of project personnel	10,332.89
5c	Expenditure on foreign travel for participants	0.00
5d	Expenditure on subsistence associated with transnational visits of participants	519.00
5e	Expenditure on hosting of events in Ireland directly related to transnational partnership / activity	8,219.00
5f	Expenditure on jointly organised events in other EU Member State	1,812.00
5g	Expenditure on translation services	4,692.00
5h	Expenditure on language tuition	0.00
5i	Other: please specify or attach explanation	68.00
	<b>Sub-total Transnational Costs</b>	<b>48,270.72</b>
	<b>Other Costs of Action 2</b>	<b>15,346.00</b>
	<b>TOTAL ACTION 2 EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>1,693,767.66</b>

**APPENDIX II: EQUAL NORTH EAST PARTICIPANT SURVEY - STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL**

**A. QUESTIONS 1 TO 11 DEAL WITH THE EQUAL NORTH EAST TRAINING PROGRAMME**

Q.1 FÁS records show that you registered with the Equal North East programme (also known as Equal) between 2003 and 2007. Is that correct? Yes <sub>01</sub> No <sub>02</sub>

Q.2 Did you complete the Equal programme? Yes <sub>01</sub> No <sub>02</sub>

Q.3 Why did you attend the Equal training programme? Please give your main reason.

Q.4 Did attendance on the Equal training programme help you in any of the following ways?

- |  | A lot                                  | A little                               | Not at all                             |
|--|--|--|--|
| a. Improved my confidence .....                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>01</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>02</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>03</sub> |
| b. Helped me to identify suitable job opportunities .....          | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>01</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>02</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>03</sub> |
| c. Taught me how to present myself effectively at interviews ..... | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>01</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>02</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>03</sub> |
| d. Helped me to get a job .....                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>01</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>02</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>03</sub> |
| e. Helped me to establish my own business .....                    | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>01</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>02</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>03</sub> |
| f. Gave me new job skills .....                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>01</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>02</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>03</sub> |
| g. Improved my reading and writing skills.....                     | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>01</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>02</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>03</sub> |
| h. Improved my numeracy skills/general maths.....                  | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>01</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>02</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>03</sub> |

Q.5 Did you receive a certificate on completion of this programme? (Please tick as appropriate)

<p>Yes ..... <input type="checkbox"/><sub>01</sub> → Go to Q.6 ↓</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p>Q.6 (If Yes) Did you find the certificate useful when applying for jobs?</p> <p>Yes..... <input type="checkbox"/><sub>01</sub>      No ..... <input type="checkbox"/><sub>02</sub></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Now Go to Q.8</p> </div>	<p>No ..... <input type="checkbox"/><sub>02</sub> → Go to Q.7 ↓</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p>Q.7 (If No) Why did you not receive a certificate?</p> <p>Left before completion ..... <input type="checkbox"/><sub>01</sub></p> <p>Failed the test/exam for certificate..... <input type="checkbox"/><sub>02</sub></p> <p>Other, please specify ..... <input type="checkbox"/><sub>03</sub></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Now Go to Q.8</p> </div>
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Q8 Did you do a work placement as part of your Equal programme? Yes <sub>01</sub> No <sub>02</sub>

Q.9 Please tick the box showing how satisfied or dissatisfied you were with respect to the following aspects of your Equal programme?

- |  | Very Dissatisfied                      | Dissatisfied                           | Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied     | Satisfied                              | Very Satisfied                         |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| (i) Content of the programme.....  | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>01</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>02</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>03</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>04</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>05</sub> |
| (ii) Instructor/Trainer on the programme.....  | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>01</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>02</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>03</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>04</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>05</sub> |
| (iii) Mentor on the programme .....  | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>01</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>02</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>03</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>04</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>05</sub> |
| (iv) Work placement (if not applicable, tick <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>06</sub> )..... | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>01</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>02</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>03</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>04</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>05</sub> |

Q.10 In general, how useful do you think the Equal programme was to you? (Please tick one box only)  
 Very Useful ..... <sub>01</sub>      Quite Useful..... <sub>02</sub>      Not So Useful..... <sub>03</sub>      No Use at All..... <sub>04</sub>

Q.11 Would you recommend a friend to do the Equal programme? Yes <sub>01</sub> No <sub>02</sub>

**B. QUESTIONS ON YOUR FIRST JOB AFTER THE EQUAL PROGRAMME**

Q.12 Since you left the Equal programme have you had a job? We are referring here to an actual job not a work programme funded by FÁS. Do not include jobs you may have undertaken as part of the Equal programme or a FÁS Community Employment Scheme or Job Initiative Scheme. (Please tick 'Yes' or 'No')

Yes ..... <sub>01</sub> → Go to Q.15      No <sub>02</sub> → Go to Q.13

Q.13 Since you left the Equal programme, have you looked for work? (Please tick ONE box)

Yes ..... <sub>01</sub> → Go to Q.22      No <sub>02</sub> → Go to Q.14

Q.14 What is the MAIN reason you have not looked for work ? (then go to Q.22)

Q.15 How many months after the Equal programme did you start that first job? \_\_\_\_\_

Q.16 Please give the name or title of the job \_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE TURN OVER

Q.17 Did you work with this employer ... (Please tick Yes or No on each line at (a), (b) and (c) below).

- |  | Yes                                    | No                                     |
|--|--|--|
| a. Before the Equal programme .....  | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>01</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>02</sub> |
| b. On Work Experience or Placement during the Equal programme .....                | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>01</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>02</sub> |
| c. On a part-time basis (other than Work Experience) during the Equal programme... | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>01</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>02</sub> |

Q.18 Is/was this job: Full-time, permanent <sub>01</sub> Part-time, permanent <sub>03</sub>  
 Full-time, temporary <sub>02</sub> Part-time, temporary <sub>04</sub>

Q.19 Do/did you use the skills you learned on the Equal programme in this job?

All the time .... <sub>01</sub> A lot..... <sub>02</sub> Sometimes..... <sub>03</sub> A little <sub>04</sub> Never ..... <sub>05</sub>

Q.20 Do you think you would have been able to get this job without Equal? Yes <sub>01</sub> No <sub>02</sub>

Q.21 Are you:

Still working in the same job..... <sub>01</sub> Working in a different company ..... <sub>03</sub>  
 Working in the same company, but in a different job... <sub>02</sub> Not working now..... <sub>04</sub>

**C. QUESTIONS ON CONTACT WITH MENTOR AFTER COMPLETING EQUAL PROGRAMME**

Q.22 How often were you in contact with your mentor in the year after the Equal Programme?  
 (If you were not in contact with your mentor, go to Q.24)

Q.23 How useful was the contact with your mentor?  
 Very Useful ..... <sub>01</sub> Quite Useful..... <sub>02</sub> Not So Useful..... <sub>03</sub> No Use at All..... <sub>04</sub>

Please explain your answer to the above.

**D. QUESTIONS ON PRESENT SITUATION AND ANY EDUCATION/TRAINING AFTER THE EQUAL PROGRAMME**

Q.24 Which of the following best describes your situation at present? (Please tick one box only)

WORKING	NOT AT WORK
1. Working (Full-time employee) ... <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>01</sub>	5. On a FÁS Community Employment Scheme; Job Initiative Scheme or Social Employment Scheme <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>05</sub>
2. Working (Part-time employee) ... <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>02</sub>	6. On some other FÁS course or scheme, (not one of the three listed above at item 5) ..... <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>06</sub>
3. Self Employed with Employees.... <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>03</sub>	7. At School/College ..... <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>07</sub>
4. Self Employed without Employees <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>04</sub>	8. Other Training (not FÁS) ..... <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>08</sub>
	9. Unemployed ..... <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>09</sub>
	10. Engaged in home duties..... <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>10</sub>
	11. Other (Specify) ..... <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>11</sub>
Now Go to Q.25	Now go to Q.25

Q.25 Have you undertaken any formal training/education since completing the Equal programme?  
 (Please tick one box only) Yes..... <sub>01</sub> → Go to Q.26 No..... <sub>02</sub> → END OF SURVEY

Q.26 Do you think you would have undertaken this course without the Equal programme?  
 Yes..... <sub>01</sub> No..... <sub>02</sub>

Q.27 Please give the names of any courses that you have completed and the level of certification (if any, e.g. FETAC Level 3) that you received.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND EFFORT IN COMPLETING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE  
 PLEASE RETURN THE QUESTIONNAIRE IN THE ENCLOSED PRE-PAID ENVELOPE



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