

Possibilities Project (EQUAL)

Report on Action 1
for
Gingerbread

April 2006



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1 Introduction

1.1 The Possibilities Project

1.1.1 The Possibilities Project has been funded under Round 2 of EQUAL funding and will run from October 2004 - December 2007. It is funded under the subset "Reducing gender gaps and supporting job de-segregation" with the EQUAL Theme of "Equal Opportunities for men and women". Its focus is to address the needs of lone parents in the labour market through research, a pilot project and dissemination of learning and good practice to key stakeholders. It is being delivered through a Development Partnership which involves the Department for Employment and Learning (D.E.L.), the University of Ulster (U.U.), Belfast GEMS and Gingerbread N.I. Gingerbread N.I. is the Lead Partner. Under the requirements of EQUAL funding The Possibilities D.P. has formed a European wide partnership called "Empower" with Development Partnerships in Italy, Spain, Lithuania and Malta. In line with EQUAL funding requirements the Possibilities D.P. has developed a Partnership Agreement (including a Transnational Agreement) and a Strategic and Delivery Plan outlining its purpose, aims, objectives, activities and costs.

1.2 The Evaluation

1.2.1 In July 2005 the Possibilities D.P. commissioned an evaluation of the funded EQUAL project involving separate evaluations of Action 1 and Actions 2 and 3. This report outlines the findings of the evaluation of Action 1 and focuses on:

- ◆ the need for the project and fit with the relevant policy context
- ◆ the effectiveness of the Partnership
- ◆ the appropriateness of the project
 - Agreements and Plans
 - Activities, inputs and anticipated outcomes

- fit with EQUAL requirements
- ◆ Conclusions and recommendations

1.2.2 The evaluation of Action 1 involved:

- ◆ Initial meeting with the Development Partnership to discuss the project and the evaluation of Action 1 in more detail, including processes, rationale, involvement in EQUAL structures
- ◆ Detailed consideration of the Development Partnership Agreement (incorporating the Transnational Cooperation Agreement) and Action Plans to assess the extent to which key actions, outputs, outcomes, milestones, delivery agents and costs have been outlined and clarified and the extent to which it meets EQUAL requirements and the needs of the wider labour market.
- ◆ Consultation with each of the partners individually to discuss their involvement
- ◆ Consideration of resource inputs

1.3 The EQUAL Programme

1.3.1 The EQUAL Programme is funded by the European Social Fund and aims to test new ways of tackling discrimination and inequality experienced by those in work and those looking for a job, with a view that new ideas could change future policy and practice in employment and training.

1.3.2 EQUAL operates by bringing together the key players in a geographic area or sector into Development Partnerships (D.P.) to pool their expertise and experience. Development Partnerships must establish links with at least one partnership from another European member state. The EQUAL Programme has 5 key themes, within which there are 9 subsets. The themes include Employment, Entrepreneurship, Adaptability, Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, and, Asylum Seekers.

- 1.3.3** The N.I. EQUAL Community Initiative Programme is positioned within the wider labour market policy context of N.I. and aims to ensure that:

Employment opportunities are spread more equally
Concentrations of unemployment among certain groups in society are reduced
Long term unemployment and inactivity are removed
Welfare dependency is reduced

- 1.3.4** The EQUAL programme in N.I. is structured as follows:

Managing Authority European Unit within D.E.L.	Overall responsibility for the implementation & delivery of EQUAL in N.I.
	Responsibility for payment and monitoring finance
National Support Structure Proteus N.I.	Assist with the provision of some of the more specialist D.P. Support roles.
	Monitor D.P. activity
	Assist with transnational co-operation
	Offer ongoing advice and guidance to Development Partnerships.
	Training (e.g. in monitoring/evaluation and partnership working)
	Websites, newsletter, conferences, workshops, seminars
National Thematic Network Representatives from the public, private, community and voluntary sectors & each D.P.	Adopting a strategic focus ensuring that EQUAL continues to focus on priority areas
	Identifying, selecting and analysing good practice
	Recommending projects for approval by N.I. EQUAL Monitoring Committee in the 2nd round of EQUAL
	Developing and agreeing a dissemination strategy
North/South Steering Group - Managing Authorities in N.I. and R.o.I., National Support Structures in N.I. and R.o.I., the Equality Commission (N.I.) and the Equality Authority (R.o.I.).	Established to facilitate and promote cross border co-operation
Joint Support Structure Managing Authorities and National Support Structures representing N.I., R.o.I., England, Scotland and Wales	Assist the co-ordination and standardisation of processes and procedures for EQUAL

- 1.3.5** The N.I. EQUAL Programme has adopted two of the 9 subsets within the 5 key themes as being appropriate to the needs of the N.I. labour market. These are:

Theme	Subset
Employability	Facilitating access and return to the labour market for those who have difficulty in being integrated or reintegrated into a labour market, which must be open to all
Equal Opportunities for men and women	Reducing gender gaps and supporting job desegregation

- 1.3.6** There are two funding rounds within the EQUAL programme. Round 1 commenced in November 2001 and will end in November 2005. Round 2 commenced in October 2004 and will end in December 2007. In N.I. 13 organisations received funding under the second round of EQUAL. The list of projects is included in the Appendices. The Possibilities project was funded under the Theme “Equal Opportunities for men and women” above.

- 1.3.7** Each project receives funding to complete three Actions:

Action 1:	Setting up Development Partnerships and transnational co-operation
Action 2:	Implementing the work programmes of the Development Partnerships
Action 3:	Thematic networking, dissemination of good practice and making an impact on national policy (mainstreaming)

- 1.3.8** The EQUAL programme incorporates six key principles

Partnership	bringing together key players into development partnerships and ensuring links with other member states
Innovation	testing and promoting new ways of combating discrimination and inequality faced by those groups most disadvantaged in the labour market
Equal Opport.	cross cutting feature of the programme
Transnational Co-operation	the transnational dimension ensures that lessons are learned across member states and examples of good practice are exchanged
Mainstreaming	EQUAL has been designed so that its actions inform policy developments and ensure that policy makers learn lessons from its activities.
Empowerment	those who are targeted for support also have an opportunity to influence the design and the evaluation of the proposed activities.

2 The Need for the Possibilities Project

2.1 Lone Parents

2.1.1 The Possibilities Agreement has highlighted that the EQUAL Community Initiative Programme (C.I.P.) recognise research that indicates that lone parents in N.I. have more difficulty in finding and keeping employment, than their counterparts in Britain. Known barriers include low qualification levels, difficulties balancing work and parenting responsibilities, achieving required income levels as the sole family earners, fear of moving off benefits and lack of affordable accessible childcare. It also highlights that the majority of lone parents are women (95%). The C.I.P. also states that lone parents remain disadvantaged in the labour market.

2.1.2 Gingerbread N.I. is the only organisation in N.I. which specialises in the needs of lone parents. Gingerbread has information on the number of lone parents in N.I. and the barriers they face. For example:

- ◆ In N.I. there are nearly 92,000 lone parents with 150,000 children.
- ◆ Between 20% and 25% of all families in N.I. are one parent families
- ◆ 46% become lone parents due to separation or divorce, 7% due to bereavement and less than 3% are teenagers
- ◆ 80% are aged between 25-49 years
- ◆ 60% are in debt
- ◆ 67% live on an average of £156 per week
- ◆ 90% wish to work outside the home at some stage
- ◆ pressures faced by lone parents include stress, social isolation, low personal expectations, financial difficulties, difficulties in finishing/continuing education and training, limited access to relevant training opportunities, challenges with childcare (access and cost),

complexity of the benefit and tax credit systems and negative attitudes in society.

2.1.3 Gingerbread has undertaken or commissioned a range of research on the needs of lone parents, or identified other relevant research, to use in lobbying and advocating on behalf of lone parents. This research has included:

- ◆ Gingerbread commissioned research:
 - Bright Futures? - the needs and circumstances of one parent families living in the W.H.S.S.B. area (2004)
 - From Strength to Strength- the experiences of young people growing up in one parent families (2003)
 - Obstacles to Employment (1998)
 - A Wise Head on Young Shoulders- the experiences of young parents in N.I. (1997)
 - Out of Reach: Accommodating the housing needs of lone parents (1997)
 - All Alone? - the health and social care needs of lone parents (1996)
- ◆ Other relevant research identified by Gingerbread has included:
 - Final Report of the European Network of One Parent Families - Single Parent Inclusion Networks (2002)
 - Training for Lone Parents: an evaluation of Gingerbread N.I.'s provision (2001)
 - Myths and Reality - Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood (2000)
 - Models for the Social and Economic Inclusion of One Parent Families European Network of One Parent Families (2000)

However, in spite of the range of material, this research has not primarily focused on the impact of barriers to employment and training such as availability of flexible employment, training and childcare; the existence of family friendly employment and training opportunities; the benefits trap, etc. Nor has it primarily focused on the identification of successful approaches to addressing barriers and/or analysis of why successful approaches work.

2.1.4 Through this project the D.P. wishes to undertake and collate research on the main barriers to employment faced by lone parents and the extent to which various approaches (in N.I. and beyond) impact on these barriers and why these approaches work and how they can be adopted within N.I. (through existing/new provision) to better meet the employability needs of lone parents. The findings of the research will be used to raise awareness of needs and to highlight successful approaches to meeting these needs, with a view to encouraging providers and policy makers to adopt such approaches to better meet the needs of lone parents. They also hope that the research will provide guidance as to how such approaches can be adopted. The Possibilities project also includes a locally based pilot project which aims to address barriers faced by lone parents particularly through working with local community and voluntary organisations and employers. This will form part of the research element of the project and the aim will be the identification of what works and what does not work with a view to advising future delivery.

2.1.5 The need for the project is highlighted by the fact that, although there are statistics relating to the number of lone parents in N.I. and, in broad terms, the barriers they face, there is no focused research relating to how barriers impact on accessing training and employment (particularly structural barriers) and why approaches adopted to address these (N.I. and elsewhere) are successful. By collating such research the D.P. hopes to influence policy makers and delivery agents.

2.2 N.I. Labour Market

2.2.1 The Possibilities project fits with the wider N.I. labour market policy context in that it aims to:

- ◆ reduce concentrations of unemployment among certain groups in society (in this case lone parents)
- ◆ reduce long term unemployment and economic activity among lone parents
- ◆ reduce welfare dependency

It will do this by identifying the key barriers to employment and training faced by lone parents (personal and structural barriers) and by identifying good practice and successful approaches to addressing these barriers (through research and a pilot project), with a view to ensuring that policies and practice are delivered in a way that remove or minimises such barriers in the future.

Furthermore Government has set targets for 70% of lone parents to be in employment by 2010. The U.K. average is currently 55% and the N.I. average is lower than that again (D.E.L.).

3 Effectiveness of the D.P.

3.1 Background

3.1.1 Gingerbread developed the idea for the project in late 2004 in response to the funding opportunity made available through EQUAL. They see the funding as an opportunity to work towards improving support for lone parents at a wider strategic level. Under EQUAL requirements a Development Partnership had to be established to deliver funded projects. Possibilities project partners were identified based on their roles in terms of providing of support for lone parents. All had previous links with Gingerbread N.I. Belfast GEMS is currently represented on Gingerbread N.I.'s Board, U.U.J. had been involved in previous research with Gingerbread N.I. D.E.L. were invited to participate due to their remit for the provision of education, training and employment initiatives and because of their ability to advise on, and at later stages influence, policy and strategic issues. Gingerbread N.I. also have a working relationship with D.E.L. particularly in relation to the New Deal for Lone Parents. The views of lone parents themselves are represented on the development partnership by a lone parent member of Gingerbread N.I. who is the current chair of the organisation. In addition, the D.P. envisage involving other organisations such as N.I.P.P.A., employers (through Belfast GEMS links), the Equality Commission and the Association of N.I. Institutes and Colleges.

3.1.2 The Partnership came together in early 2005. Gingerbread developed the Partnership Agreement (each Partner added their own sections) and disseminated it to partners for feedback. All were happy with the Agreement. During 2005 Proteus offered training to all D.P.s, which was delivered by the Workers Education Authority. The training focused on helping Partners identify their role and responsibilities within the D.P. All Possibilities D.P. members found this very useful and indicated that it reinforced the need for active participation, rather than a purely advisory/facilitating role. Within the Possibilities project Gingerbread has taken on the role of Lead Partner. Gingerbread N.I.'s role in this regard is considered in more detail in later sections.

- 3.1.3** Under EQUAL requirements D.P.s in N.I. must develop a Transnational Partnership with D.P.s in other European countries. The Possibilities D.P. is linked to Development Partnerships in Italy, Spain, Lithuania and Malta. As Possibilities Lead Partner, Gingerbread N.I. have been very involved in the development of the Transnational Partnership Agreement with these countries and have fed back to other Possibilities Partners. Gingerbread N.I. staff believe that, while the Transnational element will offer opportunities to learn from other countries, some of the transnational countries may have a lot to learn from the Possibilities project.
- 3.1.4** D.P. meetings are held on a monthly basis (though they were more frequent at the start of the project) and provide an opportunity for members to exchange information in relation to project activities and progress and to plan future progress and activities. Additional meetings are held between partners in relation to issues arising which fall within their area of expertise.
- 3.1.5** To date all partners have indicated a high level of satisfaction with their working relationship as a D.P. and with Gingerbread N.I.'s role as Lead Partner. All identify the need for their involvement and are clear about their role.
- 3.1.6** The following sections provide an overview of the Development Partners and their key roles within the Partnership. A diagram outlining Partner's roles (developed by the D.P.) is included in the Appendices.

3.2 Gingerbread N.I. (Lead Partner)

- 3.2.1** Gingerbread N.I. developed from a lone parent support network and formed the N.I. sister network of Gingerbread England, 28 years ago. A C.E.N.I. evaluation described Gingerbread N.I. as "the only organisation in N.I. which specialises in the needs of lone parents". Gingerbread N.I. aims to improve the social and economic circumstances of one parent families in N.I. through empowerment and personal development, vocational training, research, childcare, providing

advice and support and addressing wider policy issues, lobbying and advocacy. Gingerbread N.I. has both Lone Parent Membership and Associate membership (for organisations which work with lone parents or are interested in issues affecting one parent families). There are over 500 members in total throughout N.I. Gingerbread is a N.I. wide organisation with offices in Belfast, Derry (Western Area Office) and Ballymena (Northern Area Office). Gingerbread N.I. is a member led organisations with a lot of involvement and commitment from lone parents. The Board of Directors are made up primarily of volunteering lone parent members.

3.2.2 As lead partner within the Possibilities D.P., Gingerbread N.I. has responsibility for:

- ◆ co-ordinating the D.P. including organising meetings
- ◆ involvement in the EQUAL support structures and networks.
- ◆ liaising with Transnational partners
- ◆ feeding back to the D.P. about activities and disseminating information
- ◆ financial and administrative management
- ◆ project monitoring
- ◆ line management of project staff (excluding the researcher who is line managed within the University of Ulster)

3.2.3 The D.P. has funded a Project Co-ordinator who is managed within Gingerbread N.I. The Co-ordinator has an M.A. in Human Resource Management and over 10 years experience of managing European and other funded projects. A full time Project Administrator and a Finance Manager have also been funded by the Development Partnership and are based in Gingerbread and managed by the Project Co-ordinator. The Development Partnership has appointed a Training Officer to deliver the pilot project and this post is based in Gingerbread N.I. and line managed accordingly. The EQUAL team within Gingerbread meet monthly and, in addition to the staff outlined above, includes the Assistant Director - Services and

Development, the Assistant Director - Organisational Development and the Finance Manager. On an ongoing basis the Assistant Director - Services and Development dedicates approximately 30% of her time to the project.

- 3.2.4** All Gingerbread's values and principles will apply to the project. All Gingerbread finance reports are presented to the Board of Directors on a quarterly basis. Monthly management accounts are prepared and presented to the Director and Assistant Director.

3.3 Department for Employment and Learning (D.E.L.)

- 3.3.1** D.E.L. is the Government department with responsibility for employment, further and higher education and training in N.I. It has responsibility for a range of initiatives aimed at improving the employability of those seeking work. D.E.L. works in conjunction with a range of training organisations and voluntary and community organisations in order to deliver initiatives at a local level. D.E.L. has responsibility for delivering New Deal programmes under the Government's Welfare to Work Programme which includes the New Deal for Lone Parents. The New Deal for Lone Parents is a specially designed voluntary programme to help lone parents who want to work. Lone parents who work less than 16 hours a week (or not at all) and whose youngest child is under 16 years old are eligible for New Deal for Lone Parents. A trained New Deal Advisor will support lone parents throughout the New Deal programme and the programme includes:

- ◆ advice on the opportunities available
- ◆ advice and assistance with jobsearch or interview skills
- ◆ vocational training courses which last up to 13 weeks to update existing, or develop new, occupational skills and lead to a qualification or part qualification
- ◆ opportunity to undertake N.V.Q.s at a further education college
- ◆ self employment route for those keen to set up their own business

- ◆ weekly training premium for those currently in receipt of certain benefits
- ◆ advice on benefits and how they are affected by work
- ◆ a contribution towards the cost of childcare and travel expenses
- ◆ help with registered childcare costs in the week before starting work and help with registered childcare costs for those who begin part time work of less than 16 hours per week
- ◆ continued support after finding work.

Staff responsible for the New Deal for Lone Parents within D.E.L. are represented on the Possibilities D.P.

3.3.2 D.E.L.'s main role on the D.P. is to advise and support the delivery of the Possibilities project, particularly in relation to policy and strategic issues. In the long term it is envisaged that D.E.L. will have more input in terms of the project's ability to influence policy at a wider level, and operations at a lower level, particularly in relation to the delivery of training and education initiatives. Although the extent to which D.E.L. representatives may be able to influence policy at wider level may be limited (particularly by U.K. Government policy), they are keen to adopt lessons learned where possible, to better provide for lone parents in N.I. Furthermore, the D.E.L. representation on the D.P. will provide an inroad into the wider policy arena with D.E.L.'s knowledge of Government structures and what can and cannot be done.

3.4 Belfast GEMS

3.4.1 Belfast GEMS is a locally based, highly innovative, employment matching service with a wide range of experience in helping to move unemployed people into work. In addition to experienced Employment Consultants providing one to one advice and support on the opportunities available, job search and personal development skills are provided. Belfast GEMS works with local employers to identify their skills requirements. Belfast GEMS staff then either identify suitable training and facilitates unemployed people's participation on this, or, it

develops and delivers training to ensure that unemployed people can attain the skills that employers are looking for. In some cases this results in tailored employer/industry specific training. Belfast GEMS' employment consultants provide ongoing support to their clients, even after they have obtained work. Belfast GEMS is based in South Belfast and works with locally based community and voluntary organisations to identify unemployed people, particularly those who are most difficult to reach, in order to provide them with support in seeking employment. Belfast GEMS is represented on Gingerbread N.I.'s Board.

- 3.4.2** Belfast GEMS' main role is to advice and support the delivery of the programme, and in particular share their expertise in working with local community and voluntary agencies and with employers and in providing training to improve employability.

3.5 University of Ulster

- 3.5.1** The University of Ulster has been involved in a range of research and social policy work over many years and, in particular with Gingerbread N.I., on the needs of young people growing up in one parent families. This has involved widespread consultation with lone parents in a range of settings.
- 3.5.2** The University of Ulster's main role is to advise on the research element of the programme. The U.U. representative on the D.P. will manage the Researcher employed by the D.P. to undertake the research. In addition, the U.U. representative on the D.P. (a lecturer) will dedicate 6 hours per week (formally) of her time to the project.

4 Appropriateness of the Project

4.1 The Agreement

4.1.1 The Development Partnership agreement submitted to EQUAL outlines the aims, objectives, actions and targets relating to the project. It also sets out details on the partners and outlines the key issues relating to the Transnational Partnership. Gingerbread N.I. took responsibility for the development of the agreements which were then disseminated to partners for ratification or amendment. All were happy with the content. The format of the partnership agreement (as outlined by EQUAL) is very comprehensive and at times repetitive, however this is no criticism of Gingerbread or the other partners, as they simply had to address each of the issues suggested. The Agreement includes details of the D.P. Equal Opportunities Policy, and the Lead Partners' Articles and Memoranda of Association and policies relating to the Race Relations (N.I.) Order and the Sex Discrimination (N.I.) Order.

4.2 Key Aims, Objectives and Activities

4.2.1 The Agreement outlines the aims, objectives and targets of the project. The objectives of the project are:

- ◆ to identify the obstacles which inhibit lone parent entry into the labour market and lead to economic inactivity
- ◆ to review current interventions aimed at improving lone parent access to employment and enhancing employability
- ◆ to identify gaps in provision and make recommendations for the development of appropriate responses
- ◆ to demonstrate ways in which existing interventions can become more effective through additionality, mainstreaming or interagency working

- ◆ to highlight existing models of good practice and pilot an innovative and effective model of community based intervention which can be replicated
- ◆ to disseminate and recommend the replication and mainstreaming of effective policy and practice, domestically and transnationally and on a cross border basis.
- ◆ to raise levels of awareness among agencies involved in developing and influencing social policy including public sector agencies, employers, education and training providers and the voluntary and community sector through the dissemination of findings.

4.2.2 The development of the partnership and the Strategic and Delivery Plans is known as Action 1 of the overall EQUAL funded project. This took place during January 2005 - July 2005. In order to meet the objectives outlined in the plan the key activities to be undertaken from September 2005 to December 2007 (within Actions 2 and 3) will include:

- ◆ a review of current policy and practice relating to lone parents and employment both within N.I. and in the “Empower” partner countries. The research will include talking to lone parents to identify the obstacles preventing them from having equality of opportunity in the labour market. In particular the review will focus on:
 - a review of literature - compare policy and interventions (N.I., other countries, transnational partners, etc.) and their impact on lone parents.
 - interviews with trainees (pre entry and exit)
 - consideration of fit between aspirations, available support, outcomes, progression
 - monitoring of progression of participants on the pilot project in addressing personal and structural barriers
 - work towards identifying recommendations re. mainstreaming
- ◆ the development of partnerships with community organisations and service providers in South Belfast to pilot an innovative model of community based support for lone parents who are interested in returning to work. The “Lone Parent Support Network” will enable local organisations to work in partnership to provide a co-ordinated

package of support to lone parents including training, childcare, careers advice and work placement opportunities.

- ◆ the dissemination of findings to key policy makers

The transnational element will be explored through contact with transnational partners (meetings, workshops, staff exchanges) and the use of websites, e-newsletter, etc.

4.2.3 A Research Assistant was employed in September 2005 and is supported and managed by the D.P. representative from the U.U.J. Overall, the research will aim to consider the external barriers facing lone parents in obtaining employment and accessing training and the impacts of different approaches to addressing these barriers (in N.I. and elsewhere including the transnational partners) with a view to making recommendations on how these barriers can be addressed in the N.I. context through mainstreaming, etc. The research will involve examination of opportunities and constraints for lone parents in training, especially with respect to childcare and personal development support (F.E. and private), examination of the pilot project, consideration of policies and structures in N.I. and elsewhere and their impacts on lone parents entering employment, consultation with 60 lone parents (longitudinal) consideration of good practice approaches and identification of what works/lessons learned.

4.2.4 A Training Officer was recruited in October 2005 to undertake the training and support offered through the pilot project. The Training Officer is line managed through Gingerbread.

4.3 Measuring outcomes

4.3.1 The outcomes of the activities are expected to be:

- ◆ Research:
 - identification of the extent and impact of the obstacles which inhibit lone parent entry into the labour market and which lead to economic inactivity - in N.I.

- identification of the extent to which wider policies and strategies impact on lone parents
 - review of current interventions aimed at improving lone parent access to employment and enhancing employability - N.I. and beyond and, in particular, drawing on the experiences of transnational partners
 - identification of gaps in provision
 - identification of models of good practice (including the pilot project delivered under this project as noted below) with references to what works and what does not work in terms of meeting needs/gaps which have been identified in N.I.
 - recommendations on how needs should be addressed based on research findings
 - collation of information which can be used to lobby policy makers and providers with a view to mainstreaming good practice and/or influencing policy and practice which in turn will result in better provision for lone parents which addresses their barriers to employment
- ◆ Pilot Model of support for lone parents
- 60 lone parents completing employment and training and work/learning placement
 - 50% of participants moving into employment within six months of participation

4.3.2 Proteus, as the EQUAL National Support Structure, has indicated that all funded EQUAL programmes must use the Rickter scale as a way of measuring the progress/outcomes associated with participants within the funded programmes. This was in response to recommendations from the evaluation of the first round of EQUAL funding which highlighted the need for consistent monitoring/measuring of soft outcomes. Proteus have offered/will offer training to all project officers/trainers on how to use the Rickter scale. The scale itself is based on ongoing interviews between trainers/project staff and participants in which they identify a score in relation to factors perceived as inhibiting inclusion. The scores are recorded at intervals to chart ongoing progress in this regard.

4.3.3 Gingerbread and U.U.J. have concerns about the use of the Rickter scale, namely that it is based on the assumption that

the barriers to inclusion are personal barriers that can be addressed and can change through the provision of personal development and training. Gingerbread and U.U.J. have indicated that lone parents face a range of external barriers to inclusion which relate to policies and structures and which cannot be addressed through personal development approaches. The major focus of the Possibilities project is to undertake research to identify the impact of such barriers and to highlight examples of how they have been successfully addressed with an ultimate aim of influencing policy and practice and encouraging the mainstreaming of good practice. The Possibilities project have indicated that they feel that the Rickter scale is not an appropriate way to measure these key elements. Although Rickter may be used to evaluate soft outcomes relating to the training element of the project the Possibilities D.P. have concerns that the process is not necessarily appropriate in terms of assessing project participants' views of their progress in that participants may not always be willing to assess themselves in this way. It is also possible that participants may not wish to highlight certain aspects of their circumstances to project staff and also that in some cases the process of highlighting certain aspects of their circumstances may be traumatic and lead to the need for further support. However feedback from Proteus indicates that, in order for them to effectively monitor the whole EQUAL programme, the adoption of Rickter is necessary and it is therefore recommended that Possibilities uses the scale and adapt it to best meet their needs.

In order to assess the effectiveness of the programme as a whole other monitoring and measuring processes should be adopted. These are included in later sections of the report.

4.4 Meeting EQUAL requirements

4.4.1 The requirements of the EQUAL programme are noted in previous sections. The project meets the overall requirements of the relevant theme of Employability. The extent to which the project meets the EQUAL principles is noted below:

- ◆ **Partnership** - the whole ethos of the programme focuses on partnership between relevant organisations in N.I. at strategic level (the D.P.) and at operational level (pilot project) and partnership with other countries in Europe (Transnational Agreement). These partnerships have been established and will need to be monitored on an ongoing basis.
- ◆ **Innovation** - it is hard to establish the extent to which something is innovative without knowing exactly what is happening elsewhere in comparison. Perceived innovation may simply be applying something which is well known elsewhere in a new situation. The Possibilities project is focusing on identifying what is happening in N.I. and elsewhere with a view to learning from good practice and incorporating learning into existing/new approaches. Overall, the project is innovative in that it allows the D.P. to test approaches with a view to learning from them, rather than forcing the project to meet targets for the sake of meeting targets. Although partnership approaches are adopted in other areas, this project's innovation is that it brings together key partners specifically to look at the needs of lone parents. While the establishment of the project is therefore innovative, tackling structural factors rather than the more commonly addressed personal factors could also be considered innovative.
- ◆ **Equal Opportunities** - the whole project focuses on equal opportunities. Delivery will take account of the requirements of participants to ensure equality of access, etc. and ultimately the project's purpose is to address perceived inequalities.
- ◆ **Transnational Co-operation** - Gingerbread N.I. has been heavily involved in the establishment of the Transnational Agreement and is very keen to learn from other partners, already citing lessons learned from meetings to date.
- ◆ **Mainstreaming** - the whole purpose of the project is to identify good practice which positively impacts on lone parents' inclusion with a view to encouraging mainstreaming and influencing policies and

strategies. As the partner most likely to have influence in this, D.E.L.'s enthusiastic participation is important.

- ◆ **Empowerment** - the project focuses on empowering lone parents (during the pilot) and empowering organisations which work with lone parents to influence policies and strategies to the benefit of lone parents. In addition, the project aims to include lone parents in the D.P., in the design of the research, as well as through participating in the programme

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

- 5.1.1** The EQUAL Programme is funded by the European Social Fund and aims to test new ways of tackling discrimination and inequality experienced by those in work and those looking for a job, with a view that new ideas could change future policy and practice in employment and training. The Possibilities project has been funded under the theme “Equal Opportunities for Men and Women” and the subset “reducing gender gaps and supporting job de-segregation”. The Possibilities project aims to identify the barriers to employment and training faced by lone parents (the majority of which are women), to examine good practice in terms of addressing these barriers (in N.I. and beyond), with a view to influencing policy and the delivery of existing support and to recommend new ways of supporting lone parents to address their barriers to employment and training. Therefore, the project fits very well within the relevant EQUAL theme.
- 5.1.2** The Possibilities project will fulfil its aim through undertaking research on the barriers faced by lone parents (both personal barriers and structural barriers - current policy and practice) and research on effective approaches to addressing barriers (which will highlight what works and why). It will also include the delivery of an employability project for lone parents which focuses on partnership with the local community and voluntary sector, local training organisations and local employers. This pilot project will also be included in the research. The research findings will be collated to inform policy makers, employers and training providers of the barriers faced and of successful approaches in addressing them, with a view to influencing policy and provision in the long term.
- 5.1.3** The need for the project is highlighted by the fact that, although there are statistics relating to the number of lone parents in N.I., and, in broad terms the barriers they face, there is no focused research relating to how barriers impact on lone parents accessing training and employment (particularly structural barriers). Nor is there research on why approaches

adopted to address these barriers (in N.I. and elsewhere) are successful and how they can be used to influence policy and delivery. The Possibilities project also fits within the wider N.I. labour market policy context.

5.1.4 The project will be delivered by a Development Partnership made up of representatives from:

- ◆ Gingerbread N.I. - the only N.I. wide voluntary organisation dedicated to supporting lone parents (as the lead partner) with experience of managing projects funded through European monies (and other funding)
- ◆ D.E.L. - the Government department responsible for training and support for lone parents seeking employment
- ◆ Belfast GEMS - a locally based voluntary organisation which provides a job matching service for unemployed people and has links with local employers
- ◆ University of Ulster - which brings expertise in social policy research

5.1.5 The Development Partnership therefore has appropriate representation in terms of effectively delivering the project. The main concern in the long term would be the ability of D.P. members to influence key policy makers. D.E.L. representatives will be in a position to inform the D.P. of how best the findings can be used to influence policy. D.E.L. are particularly interested in the findings to assist them to assess the effectiveness and appropriateness of their provision and to consider barriers to access and good practice. In the past D.E.L. has proven to be very flexible in terms of delivering their projects to best meet the needs of their client group and, where possible, would continue to do so following the findings highlighted through the Possibilities project. In relation to influencing employers and Further and Higher Education providers, the D.P. members have indicated that they would like to include employer representatives on the Partnership and Belfast GEMS will seek to do this through their employer contacts. However, it is recognised that one employer representative will have limited influence in terms of influencing employers on a wider level. Rather, their input would be valued in assessing what approaches identified through the

research may or may not be appropriate or useful for employers. The D.P. will also include representation from lone parents. The D.P. has also identified that it would like to include representation from the Association of N.I. Institutes and Colleges. This is something worth pursuing in order to involve the further and higher education sector, both for their expertise in this area and for their potential to influence policy and delivery in the long term. As the project progresses other potential partners may be identified and the partnership are willing to include others as necessary, such as N.I.P.P.A. (childcare element), S.S.A./Inland Revenue (benefits), or other voluntary and community organisations who may support the range of needs identified by lone parents through the research.

5.1.6 To date the partners appear to have worked very well together and the training, delivered by W.E.A. and sponsored by Proteus, was identified as very positive in terms of helping partners recognise their roles and responsibilities. Gingerbread N.I. as the Lead Partner has had a very substantial input into the project to date. This has sought to gain an understanding about EQUAL, develop the relevant Agreements and Action Plans, organise the D.P. meetings, organise transnational contact and, in particular, the transnational visits in November 2005, feedback to the D.P., and initiation of the pilot project. This has had some knock on effects on Gingerbread's normal activities, however the organisation perceives the Possibilities project as having huge significance on a strategic level and this in turn will affect their long term activities. Other partners appear to be content with Gingerbread's performance as lead partner to date and are happy to be involved and to contribute to the project and all recognise their role in making it work.

5.1.7 At this stage it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of the Transnational element. It is part of the EQUAL programme and cannot be ignored. As lead partner Gingerbread has been most heavily involved in working with the transnational partners and has indicated an enthusiasm about the Possibilities D.P. learning from other countries, as well as being able to support others who are less well developed in supporting lone parents. Communication between transnational partners to date appears to have been positive and Gingerbread are currently organising a visit to N.I. for all the partners. It is acknowledged

that the transnational element is very time consuming and whether or not it reaps the desired rewards remains to be seen.

- 5.1.8** The activities outlined in the action plan appear to be appropriate in relation to the overall aims of the project. It is more focused on research than activity, however, given that the aim is to identify barriers and how best to address them in order to influence policy makers and providers, research on good practice on a wider strategic level along with a pilot practical demonstration seems more appropriate than delivery for the sake of delivery and “reinventing the wheel”. The Possibilities project appears to meet the EQUAL principles of partnership, equal opportunities, transnational co-operation, mainstreaming and empowerment. By defining innovation as doing something new it is hard to say that the Possibilities project is truly innovative, other than that it has adopted approaches to specifically focus on lone parents. Overall, the EQUAL structures within N.I. appear to be quite complex with the range of networks and support structures, however it is acknowledged that this is part of the programme and as long as organisations can benefit from shared learning the time spent on these structures may prove worthwhile. The Possibilities D.P. members appear to be enthusiastic about what can be learned within such structures however, it is too early to determine the potential value of this.
- 5.1.9** Gingerbread and U.U.J. have indicated concerns about the use of the Rickter scale. Proteus however has recommended that all funded projects use the scale. If the Possibilities project were to identify a more appropriate alternative way of measuring participant progress this should be suggested to Proteus. If not, and Proteus insist that Possibilities use Rickter, then Possibilities should monitor the success of applying Rickter to measure participants’ personal progress.

5.2 Recommendations

5.2.1 At this stage both the research and the pilot project are just commencing. To date, the Agreements and Action Plans appear to be appropriate and the key recommendations focus on measuring and monitoring the key inputs, outputs and outcomes of the project. The consultants intend to work with Gingerbread and the other D.P. partners over the next few weeks to ensure that the most appropriate information is collated and the most relevant factors measured. At this stage, it seem appropriate to measure inputs, outputs and outcomes as follows:

- ◆ Inputs
 - staff time dedicated to the project (by all D.P. members)
 - financial resources utilised by the project
 - level of input from D.P.
 - level of input from other partners (community/voluntary sector, training providers, employers)
 - costs associated with training, etc.
 - time and costs dedicated to the transnational element
 - time dedicated to EQUAL structures and networks
 - information networking with other EQUAL projects
 - time dedicated to training
- ◆ Outputs
 - number of participants involved
 - number obtaining qualifications, type and level
 - number obtaining employment (including type of job and length of time in job)
 - dissemination of findings - what was disseminated, the quality of materials, how, who to, were right people targeted, etc.?
 - examples of partnership working through the pilot project

◆ Outcomes

- personal benefits to participants - qualifications achieved, employment obtained (including what type of job, length in job), other personal barriers addressed (low confidence and self esteem, ability to balance work and family life, stress levels, isolation, etc. - adapt Rickter scale accordingly)
- identification of the extent to which structural barriers impact on lone parents in N.I. - benefits system (complexity, benefits trap), childcare (accessibility, affordability), income levels (ability to sustain family as sole earner), flexibility in employment and training (family friendly), attitudes to lone parents (employer and trainer organisations)
- identification of good practice in terms of addressing barriers identified above - what works and why, how can it be adopted to suit various contexts, how can findings be used to influence policy makers and providers, role of partnership working,
- raised awareness of needs of lone parents and successful approaches to meeting these needs
- changes in policy and delivery to provide better support for lone parents based on their identified barriers/needs and best practice identified
- adoption of policies or practice learned from Transnational Partners
- adoption of Gingerbread learning by Transnational Partners

6 Appendices

6.1 EQUAL Projects - Round 2

Cresco Trust - Key Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assist integration into employment for those that are hard to employ, - Enhance progression of those in low paid employment without skills to develop their potential/integrate - Engage employers who have the capacity to offer employment
Disability Action - Diversity Works Project	Examine the different forms of discrimination relating to men, women, black, ethnic minority communities, people with disabilities, young people, old people, and carers and the lesbian/gay/bisexual and transgendered community
Fermanagh College - South West Learning Partnership	Examine ways of facilitating access and overcoming barriers to employment for those who are homebound, in particular those with caring responsibilities and the disabled
N.I.A.C.R.O. - Reach Out Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Effect labour market entry of those with a history of custody - To impact on mainstream policy - To influence policy makers in the targeting of resources
North Belfast Partnership Board - Employability Access Programme	Pilot and evaluate how human resource policy and practices in local health trusts and local government can be developed to increase access to jobs, within these sectors, for people who are furthest from the labour market
N.I.U.S.E. - Supported Employment in Action project	Aims to address the barriers faced by people with disabilities by bringing together a partnership of key stakeholders and policy makers to strategically review existing social and economic policies and practices relating to people with disabilities
Orchardville Society - Employment for Autism Project	Bring together key stakeholders to work alongside people with Autistic Spectrum Disorder to develop a programme of support and training to enable them to tackle the specific barriers they face in accessing employment
Simon Community - Engage project	Link with key sectors to examine how the employment needs of the homeless people can be best addressed and to develop a sustainable model of best practice for promoting pathways to employment and social inclusion of homeless people
Action for Real Change - Promoting Opportunities for Inclusion in Social Care Employment (POISE)	Explore staff recruitment and retention issues in the care sector in N.I. focusing initially on the North Down and Ards, North and West Belfast areas with a view to mainstreaming its findings throughout N.I.
Aspire Micro Loans - Women in Rural Areas and Investment in Self Employment (WRAISE)	Develop an innovative methodology for supporting women in rural areas to start and run their own businesses successfully, using Credit Unions as a base to form peer support groups which will empower women to access mentoring, training and finance for flexible self employment and help to combat attitudes that inhibit their entry into the progress within self employment
Belfast City Council - Women Into Non-traditional Sectors (WINS)	- Undertake research to identify means to combat attitudes that inhibit women's entry into and progression within partner organisations

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide an empowerment programme for 40 women as a means of developing employability - provide an employment taster for 40 women (results will help support the integration of women into non traditional employment through adoption of new working practices - Influence policy at local, national and European level through the dissemination of results
Gingerbread N.I. - Possibilities Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify the obstacles which inhibit lone parent entry into the labour market and lead to economic inactivity - Review current interventions aimed at improving lone parents access to employment and enhancing employability - Identify gaps in provision & make recommendations for the development of appropriate responses - Demonstrate ways in which existing interventions can become more effective through additionality, mainstreaming and interagency work - Highlight existing models of good practice and pilot an innovative model of community based intervention which can be replicated - Disseminate and recommend the replication and mainstreaming of effective policy and practice domestically, transitionally and on a cross border basis
Triax Taskforce - Helios Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To develop a review of training practice and the barriers women experience attempting entry into non traditional trades - to devise an awareness programme for construction trades tutors involved in training women - to work with DEL to review government policies regarding apprenticeship workplace requirements

6.2 D.P. Diagram



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