



# Equality in VET?

*Promoting equality and accommodating diversity  
in vocational education, training & labour  
market programmes*

*2005 Conference Proceedings*

The Equality Authority was established in 1999 with the broad remit to promote equality of opportunity and to combat discrimination in the areas covered by the Employment Equality Acts and the Equal Status Acts.

The Employment Equality Act 1998 and 2004, and the Equal Status Act 2004-2004:

- Cover the nine grounds of gender, marital status, family status, age, disability, sexual orientation, race, religion and membership of Traveller community.
- Prohibit direct, indirect *discrimination* and discrimination by association in employment, self employment, vocational training, educational establishment, and in the provision of goods and services.
- Prohibit *sexual harassment, harassment and victimisation* on the discriminatory grounds.
- Require employers and those engaged in vocational training to take appropriate measures to enable a person who has a disability to have access to employment, to participate or advance in employment or to undertake ordering unless the measures would impose a disproportionate burden.
- Require providers of goods and services, accommodation providers and educational establishments to provide special treatment or facilities for customers with disabilities where without this special treatment or facilities it would be unduly difficult or impossible for the customers to access the goods, services, accommodation or educational establishments unless the special treatment or facilities cost more than a nominal cost.
- Allow *positive action* measures:
  - (i) to ensure full equality in practice between employees
  - (ii) under the Equal Status Act, 2000 in relation to disadvantaged groups or measures which cater for the special needs of persons.
- Impose *vicarious liability* on employers and service providers in relation to discriminatory acts of employees and agents unless the employers and service providers took reasonably practicable steps to prevent the discrimination.
- Contain a number of detailed exemptions.

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Proceedings of the Joint Conference of the The Equality Authority  
and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

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# Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	Page 5
<b>Biographies</b>	Page 7
<b>Session One: New Context, New Challenges</b>	Page 11
<b>Opening Remarks</b>	Page 12
Karen Erwin, Chair, The Equality Authority	
<b>Prospects for a Cosmopolitan Economy?</b>	Page 14
Professor John Fitz Gerald, Economic and Social Research Institute	
<b>VET – Meeting the Equality Challenge</b>	Page 21
Niall Crowley, The Equality Authority	
<b>Equality &amp; Diversity in European VET</b>	Page 30
Tim Oates, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, UK	
<b>Session Two: Planning for Equality and Diversity</b>	Page 39
<b>Chairperson’s Introduction to Session Two</b>	Page 40
William Parnell, ESF, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment	
<b>Incorporating Equality and Diversity in Labour Market Programmes</b>	Page 42
Shira Mehlman, FÁS	
<b>Learning from EQUAL on Equality in VET</b>	Page 47
Liesbet De Letter, European Commission, EQUAL Programme	
<b>Session Three: Putting Equality into Practice</b>	Page 53
<b>Implementing Equal Opportunities</b>	Page 54
Kevin Moriarty, Fáilte Ireland	
<b>Effective Gender Mainstreaming: Lessons for Education and Training</b>	Page 60
Dr. Anne Marie McGauran, Institute of Public Administration	
<b>Accommodating Diversity: Lessons from the Equality Studies Unit</b>	Page 65
Laurence Bond, The Equality Authority	

<b>Session Four: Final Plenary Session</b>	Page 73
<b>Opening Comments From:</b>	
<i>Robin Webster, Age Action Ireland</i>	Page 74
<i>Itayi Viriri, Irish Refugee Council</i>	Page 76
<i>Kathleen Connolly, NDP Gender Equality Unit, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform</i>	Page 78
<i>Rachel Doyle, National Women's Council of Ireland</i>	Page 79
<i>Bríd O'Brien, Pavee Point Travellers' Centre</i>	Page 81

# Foreword

'Equality in Vocational Education and Training' brings together the papers presented at the conference on this theme organised by The Equality Authority the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. These wide ranging papers provide insight into the thinking and practice necessary for vocational education and training initiatives to be non discriminatory, to accommodate diversity and to contribute to full equality in practice.

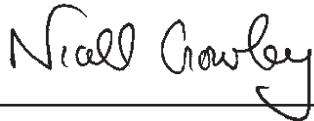
The composition of the Irish workforce is changing rapidly and will become even more diverse in the years ahead. Employee diversity encompasses all of the nine grounds of gender, marital status, family status, age, disability, sexual orientation, race, religion, and membership of the Traveller community, that are covered under the equality legislation.

This equality legislation is another contextual element of relevance to the debate on equality in vocational education and training. The Employment Equality Acts 1998 and 2004 prohibit discrimination in the workplace and in vocational training. The Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2004 prohibit discrimination in the provision of goods and services, education and accommodation.

Ireland's future growth prospects depend on successfully mobilising and developing an increasingly diverse workforce. Future prospects for social inclusion and social justice are heavily dependent on ensuring equality for all in the labour market and in the wider society. This analysis encourages and underpins a focus on this theme of equality in vocational education and training.

For the education and training sectors the central challenge is how to develop equality in learning opportunities for all people, taking full account of their diversity. The papers in this publication support an exploration of this central challenge, of the changes in practice and provision that are necessary to meet this challenge and of the institutional developments required in those organisations providing vocational education and training so as to achieve this equality in learning opportunities for all people.

The conference and the publication of the conference papers reflect the shared commitment of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and The Equality Authority to supporting a labour market that is characterised by diversity and by equality. We are grateful to the authors of the various papers for their insights and for their contribution to furthering the debate on equality in vocational education and training.



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**Niall Crowley**  
Chief Executive Officer  
The Equality Authority



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**Dermot Mulligan**  
Assistant Secretary  
Department of Enterprise,  
Trade and Employment



# Biographies

**Laurence Bond** is Head of Research in The Equality Authority, and leads the work of the Equality Studies Unit, a technical assistance measure of the Employment and Human Resources Operational Programme of the National Development Plan.

**Kathleen Connolly** was appointed as Head of the NDP Gender Equality Unit within the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in April 2005. Most of Kathleen's prior experience is related to gender equality. She worked as an Assistant Principal in the Gender Equality Section of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform from 1999.

**Niall Crowley** Niall Crowley is the Chief Executive Officer of The Equality Authority since its establishment in 1999. Prior to this he worked in the community and voluntary sector on a wide range of equality issues. He has been a member of the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) and the National Economic and Social Council (NESC).

**Rachel Doyle** is Head of Outreach at the National Women's Council of Ireland. She is a community worker with over 12 years' experience of community work, primarily with Travellers and with women. She has represented the community sector in a wide range of local, national and international policy arenas and is currently chairperson of the European Network Against Racism – Ireland, and a board member of the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism.

**Liesbet De Letter** is a Programme Manager in the EQUAL Unit of DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities of the European Commission in Brussels. She has been working for many years in European training and employment programmes (PETRA, ADAPT AND EMPLOYMENT, Article 6 of the ESF Regulation), as well as in the private sector.

**Karen Erwin** is Chairperson of The Equality Authority. She is a professional commercial and workplace Mediator and a Solicitor and she is the founder of Erwin Mediation Services. Karen chairs The Irish Auditing and Accounting Supervisory Authority; is a Fellow and Chairperson of the

Board of Management of St Columba's College and is a Director of the Irish Heart Foundation. She chairs the Forum of Chairpersons of State Sponsored Bodies in Ireland.

**Prof. John Fitz Gerald** is a Research Professor with the Economic and Social Research Institute working on the economics of energy policy, macro-economic policy, and the economics of the labour market. He is a member of the NESC and of the Northern Ireland Authority for Energy Regulation.

**Dr Anne-Marie McGauran** is a Research Officer in the Institute of Public Administration. Prior to joining the IPA, Anne-Marie worked as Head of the NDP Gender Equality Unit in the Dept of Justice, Equality and Law Reform for five years. She is the author of *Plus ça change? Gender mainstreaming of the Irish National Development Plan*, an evaluation of gender mainstreaming carried out as a Visiting Research Fellow with the Policy Institute, Trinity College, Dublin in 2003. She is also guest editor of a special edition of Administration on gender proofing in Irish state policies, published by the IPA in July 2005.

**Shira Mehlman** joined FÁS in June 2000, following the government decision to mainstream services for disabled people. On joining, she became Manager for FÁS' Disability Policy and Development Unit, and has since been appointed Director – Social Inclusion as part of the organisation's strategic re-structuring. Her primary responsibility is to ensure that FÁS policies and services reflect best social inclusion and equality practice to increase participation and progression of disadvantaged groups into the labour market.

**Kevin Moriarty** is Head of Professional Development in Fáilte Ireland, the National Tourism Development Authority, where he has responsibility for supporting tourism development through a wide range of programmes of education and continuing professional development. Recent projects in which he has been involved include: Cultural Diversity – a strategy and implementation plan; developing a National Recruitment Plan for Careers in Tourism, as well as developing initiatives to support business management in the tourism industry.

**Tim Oates** is the Head of Research and Statistics in the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority in the UK. The QCA Research Group and Research Faculty has a remit that extends from early years' education to lifelong learning and undertakes a wide range of projects dedicated to evidence informed policy and practice. He has undertaken evaluation and research work on a broad range of major government initiatives, focussing particularly on vocational education and training.

**Bríd O'Brien** has worked for a number of years with Travellers and is based in Pavee Point Travellers' Centre. Her work has focused on the themes of economic and local development; equality and social inclusion; and more recently the development of system tools to monitor Travellers' involvement in education from both an ethnic and gender dimension. Her work on these themes has involved the development of project and policy responses from both a specific and mainstream perspective. She is a member of the ESU Advisory Committee and the NESF's project theme on "developing a more inclusive labour market".

**William Parnell** is a Principal Officer in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, with current responsibility for European Social Fund policy and operations. William has worked on various labour market policy issues in the Department for over ten years. He was closely involved in the mainstreaming of employment and training services for people with disabilities in 2000 and with the establishment of Skillnets Ltd., of which he was a Board member for a number of years.

**Itayi Viriri** is a journalist, educated and trained in Zimbabwe in mass communication, media studies and public relations. He worked in Zimbabwe as a business and political correspondent and later as sub-editor and also as a public relations practitioner and briefly in the broadcast media. In Ireland, he worked for a Limerick newspaper before joining the Irish Refugee Council as Policy Officer, his current position. He was a co-presenter of RTE's multicultural TV series "Mono" in 2004 and is completing studies in Ethnic and Racial Studies at Trinity College Dublin.

**Robin Webster** has been the Chief Executive of Age Action Ireland since its establishment in 1992 as the independent national network on ageing and older people. Its main aim is to improve the quality of life of all older people, especially those who are most frail and vulnerable, by combating discrimination and promoting equality and diversity.

His previous positions include Director of AONTAS, the National Association of Adult Education in Ireland, Director of Age Concern Scotland, National Development Officer, Society of St Vincent de Paul in Ireland, Lecturer in Social Work, Trinity College, Dublin, Lecturer in Gerontology, the Open University in Ireland and HM Inspector of Schools (Further Education) in the Scottish Education Department.



# Session One: New Context, New Challenges



## Opening Remarks

Karen Erwin, Chairperson,  
The Equality Authority

Today's event brings together policy makers and practitioners in the vocational and further education and training sector, social partner organisations and equality interests. We are hoping that in our deliberations we can bring to bear our different perspectives, our knowledge and expertise as we strive to explore together the challenges involved in promoting equality in vocational education and training in Ireland. I am looking forward to an important day's work here.

The Equality Authority has identified the vocational education and training sector as a key area of emphasis in our work in the last number of years. Obviously, in part, The Equality Authority's role is to ensure that individuals and organisations are aware of their rights and responsibilities under the legislation. However, an additional key element of our work with the vocational and education training sector has been a focus on supporting a capacity within policy making in the sector and within the design and delivery of education and training initiatives at national and local level to combat discrimination, to accommodate diversity and to promote equality.

In that context, we have been delighted to have the opportunity to work with a wide range of organisations and individuals many of whom are represented here today. We work closely with our colleagues in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and in the Department of Education and Science. In addition over this period we have engaged with the National Qualifications Authority and more recently with FETAC in their development of an equality dimension to their quality assurance procedures.

We have also worked closely with FÁS in developing equality proofing and with FÁS and Fáilte Ireland and other bodies in supporting a focus on equality and diversity in the measures which comprise the Employment and Human Resources Development Operational Programme of the National Development Plan. Our Conference here today is part of a programme of work of our Equality Studies Unit which is a technical assistance measure of this Employment and Human Resources Operational Programme.

The agenda we are addressing today is challenging. It is, however, possible to be ambitious about placing equality at the centre of our approach to vocational and further education and training, not least because many of you have already led in your own areas of expertise and service provision in this regard.

# Prospects for a Cosmopolitan Economy?

Professor John Fitz Gerald

Economic and Social Research Institute

## A clockwork mouse

I would like to talk about what I see as the economic background in Ireland for the next 15 years, against which the areas we are interested in will evolve. I never liked the metaphor of the Celtic Tiger so the notion of a clockwork mouse slowing down over the rest of the decade is better. I will say something about the labour market up to 2015 and then try and draw out the implications for us today of the labour force of the future.

Many people in the late '90s felt that Ireland was like Icarus, flying too close to the sun, and we would come to a sticky end. It has not turned out that way but the picture I would like to paint is one of the certainties of life. I am not sure that Icarus has escaped the sun unscathed, or that there will be no bumps on the way, but hopefully not a crash landing. We expect the Irish economy to continue growing at about 5% a year for another four or five years and then slow down to a more European norm. Part of the reason for this slowdown lies in the demographics, which I will describe later. Ireland is still a successful economy by European standards but it is nonetheless slowing down.

## Education and skill levels

When I refer to skilled and unskilled labour, I mean those with a good education and those with a limited education. By skilled I mean people with at least Leaving Cert. or higher qualifications. The supply and demand for unskilled labour has been falling for some time in Ireland, alongside a dramatic rise in the supply and demand for skilled labour. However, when we consider unemployment rates by education level, we see that the supply and demand for unskilled labour did not run together over much of the period and there was very substantial unemployment among those with Junior Cert. level education or lower. There have been significant improvements over the last few years with one big difference common to most of northern Europe. The higher a person's level of education the more likely they are to find permanent employment. With a Leaving Cert. or above a person can expect to spend most of their life at work.



We can predict with a fair degree of certainty that, leaving aside immigration, the supply of unskilled labour, that is those with Junior Cert. or lower qualification, is going to fall slowly with a continued very rapid rise in skilled employment and in the numbers in the skilled labour force. There will thus be a transformation in the labour market and in our society. Where at one time most people had Junior Cert. or lower most people will soon have a university level education. It changes the economy but also changes society in a much broader way.

Another important factor is the replacement rate. This refers to how much a person gets in unemployment benefit compared to income from unskilled work. There was a dramatic rise in the replacement rate in 1982 and not long afterwards a very substantial rise in long term unemployment. The fall in the replacement rate in the late 1990s and the dramatic fall in unemployment are related and noteworthy although there is no direct cause and effect. The reason for the declining replacement rate is not that welfare payments were not indexed to average earnings, (they were), but that unskilled wage rates rose much more rapidly than skilled wage rates. Wage dispersion, that is the ratio of the top decile to the bottom decile in wages, is seen to narrow dramatically after 1997. The reason is that while the economy boomed, the supply of unskilled labour was still falling and for every three skilled people, employers needed one unskilled person. The demand for unskilled labour rose and suddenly wages for unskilled people rose rapidly for those with Junior Cert. or lower levels of education. This priced people into jobs and helped solve the unemployment problem.

This was not accidental, it was part of government policy going back to the 1980s. While a lot of attention was on the third level sector, the aim was also to keep young people in the education system. This is hugely important and it suddenly paid dividends in the late 1990s. Looking at this return to education, there was an argument in the ESRI, in the late '80s, that as a result of qualification inflation all these graduates would end up working in McDonalds. But it did not happen like that. A person with university education in 2000 was likely to earn about 65% more than someone with no qualifications. It has come down slightly, but the investment in education has clearly paid off in terms of earnings. This has not been a dramatic increase but a fairly steady rise. If we look at relative wage rates, that is unskilled wage rates relative to the average, there is a big rise followed by a narrowing and dispersion up to about two years ago after which it comes back down again. Why is this? A significant factor is probably immigration of unskilled labour, which I will discuss later.

Investment in human capital to reduce the supply of unskilled labour has been hugely important in the Irish economy. In 1992 the ESRI published a paper which showed that investment in keeping students in school at least until Junior Cert. made them potentially much more employable. This would have a huge payoff in society as government policy over the late '80s and '90s targeted this issue of keeping people in school. We have some distance to go, as progress has slowed or stopped but it remains very important. As manufacturing industry moves to China and other parts of Asia, demand for unskilled labour is not going to rise. The future is in skilled services as investment in human capital raises productivity while it also increases income per head of population. The effect on unskilled wage rates depends on supply and demand.

### Education, gender and labour supply

Participation in education is one of the really big equality issues as the participation rate for girls is far higher than for boys. Even if something is done to remedy that in the near future, there are huge implications for employers planning for the next ten or fifteen years. If a firm is looking for people with university qualifications, the bulk of its labour force will be women. This means employers must look at the labour force in a different way; in particular, labour supply growth: where it came from in the past and where it will come from in the future.

The natural increase in population is significant but slowing down and this is one of the reasons the clockwork mouse is running down. Female participation in the labour force has risen substantially but we are beginning to run out of women. Likewise immigration is a significant factor in labour supply and will continue as such, but the economy will slow because labour supply is going to decline. First reason for this is that babies went out of fashion in the first quarter of 1980, 9 months after the Pope visited Ireland. Not many babies have been born since, so 20 years on there are far fewer people entering the labour market. As of three years ago the numbers entering the labour market each year have been on the way down which in turn affects the population structure.

In 2003, the 20 to 24 year old cohort was the dominant cohort in Ireland, with not that many older people because so many had emigrated and never came back. Also, there were not that many young people because we had stopped having babies. Move on ten years and the dominant cohort is the 30 to 34 year olds.

## Women in the workforce

The population structure means there will be a very high proportion of people at work in Ireland compared to the rest of Europe. It is only after 2020 that the crisis will hit home in terms of high levels of dependency. If we consider female labour force participation over the last 15 years and the dramatic rise from 25 years of age up to about 40 or 45, it is clear we have higher female participation for the under 30s than any other EU country, including Sweden. But alongside the rise in participation is the problem that we are running out of women to join the labour force. Remember that women are on average better educated than men and that entry to the labour market added 1% or more to growth rates over the 1990s. The women who are not in the labour force tend to be over 40 and less well educated than their sisters who have taken a job, so the scope for rising female labour force participation will be more limited in the future. The part-time working issue affects parents under 40 but for women over 45, childcare is not the most important issue.

## Labour migrants

Turning to migration, it is clear Ireland's history for the past 150-200 years was one of emigration and in the late 1980s we became very concerned about what was happening to our people. We feared the brain drain, that our children were going to leave and never come back, but it turned out they were homing pigeons and they did come back. Many Irish people still emigrate but they tend to return now. Interestingly, the lifetime productivity and earnings of people who go abroad and come back are 10% higher. That is one of the reasons the Irish economy has been so productive. Once we lived on a boring island, all of us had the same DNA, 70% with the same blood group, O, all speaking English and so on. How do we jazz the place up and become more cosmopolitan? One way was to go abroad, learn something useful and bring it back. This has been important in terms of invigorating the economy.

The ESRI published a paper in November 2002 on the contribution of non-Irish immigrants in the late 1990s. They were far better educated than the Irish who go and those who stay and they really helped the economy grow rapidly. They helped solve the unemployment problem, while at the same time narrowing wage dispersion. With immigration there was an increase in the supply of skilled labour so there were lots of professors of economics running around whose pay did not go up that much. That was good for people with limited education and important in narrowing wage dispersion. The common perception of immigrants is of people who take non-skilled jobs but in fact most immigrants, in particular those from

countries other than Britain, are substantially better educated than this and many have a university education.

The study showed that most immigrants are from other EU states and do not get jobs commensurate with their qualifications, probably because they do not speak English or perhaps because of discrimination. This raises an important issue for the future. If a large number of immigrant workers have unskilled jobs, this will drive down unskilled wage rates, which is bad for unskilled Irish citizens. If there was unlimited unskilled immigration there would be no welfare system and this would also drive down wages. Irish people would then be on welfare, not the immigrants. Given the experience of the Irish abroad, the likelihood is that if immigrants with good qualifications do not get a good job, they are more likely to go home. Our research indicates that helping them integrate into jobs commensurate with their ability will substantially improve the growth potential and productivity of the economy and be good for unemployment and unskilled labour in Ireland. This is an important issue in terms of how we manage the migration process.

### Europe's utility function

This is an economists' phrase and means basically what Europeans prefer to do and how we like to behave. Some say Europeans are lazy and do not work as hard as people in the US. It is true we do not work the same number of hours as people in the US. One very interesting reason is that wage dispersion in Europe is much narrower than in the US. In America it pays to employ an immigrant to look after your children and you will make money by it, but there is no way it would pay to do this in Germany. Wage dispersion means that carers are paid much better in Germany, not quite as well in Ireland, but better than in the US. This affects the number of hours people work, possibly because of high taxes or maybe because of preferences. My belief, shared by a lot of economists, is that preferences are an important part of this and even when you take out issues like childcare and so on, Europeans prefer to take longer holidays than in the US.

Looking at work behaviour, it appears American women with children under 4 work the same number of hours as German women but they work substantially more in the paid than in the unpaid labour market. This is partly because of preferences and partly relative prices. In future our society will have a lot of parents and we need to take account of these issues.

## The labour force of the future

The labour force in 2015 will be very different. It will be one where both partners work and it will be much older as the 30 to 34 age group will dominate. This will affect the workplace in a very important way and also consumption patterns. Instead of most people having limited education attainment, a high proportion will have third level education with a direct effect on consumption patterns and holiday preferences. Female labour force participation will increase because of rising educational attainment as the women entering the labour market will be much better educated than their sisters who are retiring. If firms want to employ the best brains in the country they must make it attractive not just for women but for men to stay in work. In this society the single biggest cohort are probably going to have young children and the labour market and society must accommodate them. Ireland will be very different from the rest of Europe in terms of the proportion of the population in that cohort.

## Immigration

Immigration has been extremely good for the Irish economy and probably for Irish society but it must be managed. From an economic point of view the work permit scheme is thoroughly daft, in that immigrants should be able to earn as much as they are able. In doing this they will be as productive as they can, so tying them to a single employer is crazy. We need to have controls on the immigration of unskilled labour otherwise this will force down the price of unskilled labour with serious consequences for wage dispersion. We must manage patterns of immigration and we must do it a lot better than we have up to now.

## Working parents

Future society will need to accommodate working couples. The 30 to 34 age will become the largest cohort. It is interesting that the age of first birth in Ireland is rising dramatically. This may be because parents choose to have their children later but my own suspicion is that the labour market and society are a major influence. Research by my colleague, Helen Russell, shows that the penalty for women in the labour market, which was significant in the 1980s, has largely disappeared with one notable exception. Time out of the labour market is very heavily penalised. So if you choose to have a child in your 20s you may find it very difficult to get back onto your career path. Given that the vast majority of women go on to third level education and provide the largest cohort of skills in the country this penalty has serious consequences for the economy too. This is not just a women's issue, it is an issue for parents. Do we want a society that puts people on a treadmill and penalises them harshly if they take a break in

their chosen career? So women delay having children or do not have them at all because time out of the workforce is heavily sanctioned.

There is also the cost of children and of childcare that will not fall, as the numbers needing paid childcare are going to rise dramatically. In the past, skilled carers tended to be people with more limited education and their numbers are falling steadily which will in time create enormous pressures. Some people say immigrants can do this work. Does this mean we think caring for children is an unskilled job? In terms of the quality of life for our children it is surely not that. How will we deal with this when the demand for childcare, other than that provided by parents, is rising dramatically and the supply is static or falling?

This raises issues about how we manage the workforce. I believe part of the solution must be state-provided childcare but we will have to increase taxes to pay for that. Parents may be paying for it already but in the future they are going to pay even more for having children and for childcare. Another part of the answer will be more flexible working arrangements. How do we manage a flexible working labour market when there is currently a very heavily penalty on time out of work? That penalty says you must work and you cannot work part-time. The cost of childcare is going to rise so it will not be easy to find a solution but we certainly need more flexible working arrangements.

Lastly I believe part of the solution is that employers must offer compulsory paternity leave, something on which few people agree with me. This is an issue for both parents, as we deal with a labour market that penalises people for taking time off. Every employer will know that when they recruit somebody aged 30, male or female, they are going to take time off work to look after children during the next decade. We need to ask is this a matter for penalties or how should the labour market create flexible working arrangements? Unless the labour market finds solutions, the burden will fall on our children and if not our children then our grandchildren. Our economy can certainly prosper but we must face the changing demographics that confront Ireland even more than the rest of Europe and we must find a better way of doing this.

# VET – Meeting the Equality Challenge

Niall Crowley

The Equality Authority

## Introduction

The Equality Authority has a broad mandate under the equality legislation to promote equality of opportunity and combat discrimination in the areas covered by the Employment Equality Acts 1998 and 2004 and the Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2004. This mandate not only focuses our attention on the obligations in the equality legislation but also on the ambitions for equality that shaped the enactment of this legislation. It is a mandate that involves us in enforcement work and developmental work.

Vocational education and training have been a particular focus in this work. They have been a subject for casework, research, communication initiatives and projects supporting good practice. This is not surprising given the centrality of this field of provision to the quality of life for those who currently experience inequality and given the contribution to be made by this field of provision to equality in the workplace and in the wider society beyond the workplace.

The theme of this paper is meeting the equality challenge in vocational education and training. I will first explore what this equality challenge is, then identify strategies for meeting it at the level of policy making, in the development of standards and within institutional systems and practices.

## The equality challenge

The equality challenge has three key dimensions and all three flow from the provisions of the equality legislation. The Employment Equality Acts prohibit discrimination in the workplace and in vocational training. The Equal Status Acts prohibit discrimination in the provision of goods and services, accommodation and educational establishments. Both Acts cover the nine grounds of gender, marital status, family status, age, disability, sexual orientation, race, religion and membership of the Traveller community.

Non-discrimination is the first element of the equality challenge. Discrimination is defined in the legislation as the treatment of a person in a less favourable way than another person is, has been or would be treated

in a comparable situation on any of the nine grounds which exists, existed, may exist in the future, or is imputed to the person concerned. Indirect discrimination and discrimination by association are also prohibited. Sexual harassment and harassment on any of the nine grounds is prohibited. Victimisation is also prohibited.

Under the equality legislation employers and service providers are liable for anything done by an employee in the course of his or her employment unless they can prove that they took reasonably practicable steps to prevent the discrimination, sexual harassment, harassment or victimisation. Non-discrimination involves a clear statement by employers and service providers that they will not tolerate discrimination, sexual harassment, harassment or victimisation. It involves procedures to deal with any such incidents that might arise. Non-discrimination should also focus on prevention, with employers and service providers taking steps to ensure no discrimination, sexual harassment, harassment or victimisation occurs in the first place.

Accommodating diversity is the second element of the equality challenge. The Employment Equality Acts require employers to take appropriate measures to enable a person with a disability to access employment, to advance in employment and to undertake training unless this would impose a disproportionate burden on the employer. The Equal Status Acts require service providers to provide special treatment or facilities to customers with disabilities where without these it would be impossible or, unduly difficult to use the service provided unless this would cost more than a nominal cost. These important positive duties on the disability ground are known as reasonable accommodation.

Reasonable accommodation is also important for other groups experiencing inequality across the nine grounds. This wider accommodation of diversity is not explicitly required under the legislation although it may be implicit in certain circumstances. However, this type of focus on diversity or difference is key for the effective promotion of equality. Diversity or difference concerns:

- identity: the shared values, beliefs, perceptions and understandings of a group
- experience: a shared often negative relationship with the wider society experienced by a group
- situation: a shared economic status, health status, education status or accommodation status among a group.



The shared identity, experience and situation of a group experiencing inequality have practical implications for the design and delivery of, for example, education and training provision. A failure to adapt to or to reasonably accommodate this diversity creates barriers for members of these groups to enter, participate in or achieve outcomes from training and education.

Reasonable accommodation involves, first and foremost, a dialogue between providers and those who experience inequality about their particular needs and about how best to meet these. The design and delivery of services need to be assessed for barriers they present for a diversity of service users. Staff training needs to build a capacity to understand difference and to respond to its practical implications. Communication and information strategies should encompass a range of formats, media and channels to accommodate diversity.

A proactive pursuit of equality is the third element of the equality challenge. The Employment Equality Acts allow positive action to ensure full equality in practice between employees on all nine grounds. The Equal Status Acts allow positive action to promote equality of opportunity for disadvantaged persons or to cater for special needs of people from across all nine grounds. Positive action that targets specific groups experiencing inequality is central in addressing legacies of discrimination and exclusion. It is central in ensuring equality objectives emphasise not only opportunities for people who experience inequality but also outcomes.

A proactive pursuit of equality involves establishing and achieving a wide range of equality objectives. These objectives need to encompass the economic, political, cultural and affective domains.

Equality objectives should be concerned with a new access to resources for groups experiencing inequality. These resources include access to education and training opportunities and training credentials on a par with other groups. Equality objectives should also be concerned with access to decision making and having a say in shaping one's community and society and its organisations and institutions. This includes access to decision making on the design and delivery of education and training provision and access to real choice within a range of learning options.

Equality objectives need to focus on status for the particular identity, experience and situation of groups that experience inequality. This focus on status involves valuing or affirming and taking account of the diversity of groups that experience inequality in the practice and provision of education

and training establishments. Finally equality objectives need to be concerned with access to relationships of respect, care and solidarity for those who experience inequality. These relationships are in contrast to current experiences of hostility, abuse, being patronised and mistrust. This equality objective would involve training and education organisations ensuring that they welcome and value diversity and that they do not tolerate harassment or sexual harassment.

### Meeting the challenge – Education and training policy

Legislation and policy making must be the starting point for any exploration of meeting the equality challenge in vocational education and training. This legislation and these policies must reflect a commitment to non-discrimination, the accommodation of diversity and the achievement of equality objectives. Legislation and policy making need to be coherent with the obligations and ambitions of the equality legislation. Legislation and policy making are key starting points in meeting the challenge of equality in vocational education and training because they can govern:

- priorities for investment
- strategies for the deployment of resources
- programmes for the delivery of education and training.

These priorities, strategies and programmes should reflect the needs of groups experiencing inequality and have a capacity to redress current issues in relation to the education and training status of these groups. The preparation of legislation and new policies needs to incorporate an equality dimension. Equality impact assessments have been identified as the methodology to ensure the inclusion of such an equality dimension.

The European Union (EU) has a significant influence on policy making and programme delivery in vocational education and training. The EU has emphasised a significant equality dimension in this area of policy.

Strategic EU objectives established for education and training (“Education and Training in Europe: diverse systems and shared goals for 2010” from DG for Education and Culture), include the objective of supporting active citizenship, equal opportunities and social cohesion. Key issues identified for the provision of education and training in this strategy include:

- ensuring education and training establishments are more effective in promoting solidarity, tolerance and democratic values

- integrating equal opportunity considerations in the objective and functioning of education and training
- ensuring fair access to the acquisition of skills for the less privileged.

This EU policy position provides a valuable foundation for the further development of an equality dimension to legislation and policy in Ireland in the area of vocational education and training. Equality impact assessment of new legislation and policies will assist and enhance the further development of this equality dimension.

Equality impact assessment places an equality dimension at the heart of decision making in the policy process. It involves:

- selecting those policies or programmes of a scale and potential impact that should be subjected to an equality impact assessment
- identifying those groups experiencing inequality whose situation, experience or identity have practical implications for the design or delivery of the policy or programme
- collecting and analysing data on the situation, experience and identity of the groups identified as a focus for the equality impact assessment
- assessing the capacity of the policy or programme to accommodate the diversity of these groups in its design and delivery and to have a positive impact on the situation and experience of these groups
- engaging in a dialogue with organisations representing these groups on the data collected and on the impact assessment before finalising the policy or programme
- monitoring the programme policy for its impact on the groups identified within the equality impact assessment.

The EU has just published a framework strategy on non-discrimination and equal opportunities for all. This emphasises the need to mainstream a focus on non-discrimination and equal opportunities for all and commits to developing tools to promote this mainstreaming in relevant EU policies. This is an important and valuable commitment that could usefully drive the further development of equality impact assessments at Member State level. It is a commitment that could also be informed by initiatives already developed in Ireland.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment and The Equality Authority, for example, have already developed and applied an equality impact assessment as part of the reporting process under EU employment

guidelines. It is intended to further develop this initiative as part of future national employment action plans.

It will be important to learn from this equality impact assessment experience and to apply it across all legislation and policy making in Ireland in relation to vocational education and training. A number of initiatives are required to support this wider application of equality impact assessments. Policy makers and non-governmental organisations need training to assist their capacity to engage effectively in equality impact assessments. Data collection across the nine grounds needs to be further developed to assist the equality impact assessment. The Equality Authority has also recommended a legal requirement on the public sector to have due regard to equality in carrying out their functions in the equality legislation. This would ensure a sustained and coherent approach to placing equality at the heart of decision making in the future development of vocational education and training.

### Meeting the challenge – Standards

Standards governing vocational education and training are another vital stimulus for a sustained and coherent equality dimension in provision and practice in this area. Standards establish a benchmark for quality and it is important that equality is identified as a pre-requisite for quality.

The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 created a new context and a new potential for an equality focus within standards in this area. The National Qualifications Authority has launched a national framework of qualifications which is valuable in eliminating the artificial distinction between education and training. The focus in the framework on learning outcomes and on recognising all different forms of learning creates a new context that can only be favourable to greater equality.

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland has usefully taken up the equality dimension in its work on policies, actions and procedures for access, transfer and progression for learners. This work emphasises that learners should have access to appropriate initiatives that promote equality and combat discrimination. It highlights operational principles that include:

- addressing access, transfer and progression for all learners but particularly those who in the past had limited access to education and training awards, including older learners, people with disabilities, Travellers, minority ethnic groups and refugees
- designing elements of national policy with particular regard to the equality legislation.

These are an important foundation for a sustained focus on those experiencing inequality in the further development of policies, actions and procedures for access, transfer and promotion in vocational education and training.

FETAC, the Further Education and Training Awards Council, was also established as part of the implementation of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999. FETAC must agree quality assurance arrangements with all providers of education and training programmes leading to FETAC awards and has produced guidelines to assist providers develop and implement quality assurance systems. Valuably these guidelines identify equality as an important dimension in this work.

Providers of further education and training, under the guidelines, are asked to:

- develop an equality policy setting out a commitment to equality in employment and service provision
- ensure training on equality issues is available to all staff
- produce a plan to realise equality objectives based on an audit of current provision with respect to equality.

These guidelines mark a new and valuable development within vocational education and training. It will be important to build this approach across all sectors. There is also a key challenge to ensure the implementation of these guidelines. It will be necessary to develop supports for providers in this regard and to ensure careful and rigorous monitoring of the implementation of these guidelines.

### **Meeting the challenge - Institutional systems and practices**

These FETAC guidelines for quality assurance focus on institutional systems and practices. This focus on institutional systems and practices is the third key element in meeting the equality challenge in vocational education and training. The focus on institutions that provide vocational education and training is key. It is within these institutions that policy is implemented, that standards are applied and that outcomes for those experiencing inequality can be achieved. The goal is to develop systems and practices within these institutions that reflect an equality competence.

Equality competence involves providers of vocational education and training in a planned and systematic approach to equality. This contrasts with an approach to equality that is ad hoc, informal or reactive. A planned and systematic approach requires organisations to develop an equality

infrastructure that reflects a commitment to equality, builds a capacity to promote equality and creates a context within which equality objectives can be effectively pursued.

This equality infrastructure includes:

- an equality policy that establishes the commitment to equality, accommodation of diversity and non-discrimination and a strategy to ensure this commitment is reflected in provision, practice and decision making within the organisation
- equality and diversity training to build staff capacity to implement this commitment to equality, diversity and non-discrimination. This training needs to build a staff awareness of equality issues and the staff skills needed to develop an equality dimension in the organisation's work
- an equality action plan that establishes equality objectives to be pursued by the organisation. These objectives should be established on foot of a review of policies, practices and procedures in the organisation for their impact on equality across the nine grounds
- the allocation of responsibility for this equality dimension to an equality officer or a senior member of staff. This is not to suggest that equality issues are not the responsibility of all staff. However, it is important that there is an identified individual as the driving force within the organisation to support all staff to take up this responsibility to good effect.

Equality competence also involves an equality dimension to governance within organisations providing vocational education and training. Governance is about how decisions are made within these organisations. Equality in decision making needs:

- an equality impact assessment of business plans, new programmes or new investment. These key developments need to be assessed at design stage for:
  - their capacity to accommodate diversity
  - their contribution to equality objectives established by the organisation
  - their potential impact on learners from across the nine grounds;
- participatory decision making which engages organisations that represent and articulate the interests of groups experiencing inequality in the decision making processes of the organisation

- evidence based decision making where the organisation generates data about access, participation and outcomes for people from across the nine grounds within its training and education provision. This data is then analysed to inform decision making and combat any potential for negative stereotypes, myths and false assumptions to shape this decision making.

Equality competence needs to be further developed within organisations providing vocational education and training if the challenge of equality is to be met. There are already interesting models emerging in this regard in the Irish context in a range of organisations.

## Conclusion

This focus on meeting the equality challenge is timely. The equality legislation provides an important framework and foundation for meeting this challenge through non-discrimination, an accommodation of diversity and a proactive pursuit of equality.

Current practice highlights an ambition within the sector for meeting this equality challenge. This is evidenced with the emergence of equality impact assessment techniques within policy making, the inclusion of an equality focus within quality standards and the development of equality competent systems and practices within provider organisations.

However, these new approaches should now be further developed and embedded. There needs to be a more universal application of these approaches across the sector. Legislation, new investment and practical supports could all assist in this.

# Equality and Diversity in European VET

Tim Oates

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (UK)

## Introduction

The central thrust of my presentation connects with John Fitzgerald's approach to analysis - it links many features and trends in participation in vocational education and training (VET) to the labour market and the economy; and to cultural features of society. In exploring these I will also connect with Niall Crowley's emphasis on evidence-informed policy and practice.

This paper looks at the groups at risk and examines critically the current state of transnational statistics as a means of comparing what is happening in different countries. I will consider access to various EU initiatives and describe critically the current understanding of the nature of problems of equity, equality and diversity in access to VET. I will also seek to outline the challenges facing policy makers, service providers and society at large in developing public policy which impacts favourably on these problems.

## Resistance to change

The gains made through policy and practice in equality and equity have not been very significant. Just why are patterns of inequality so resistant to change; and why is the return on all our effort, in formulating policy in this area, actually quite small? This is an important question for policy makers – who need to reflect on why policy is not as effective as they – and we – think it might be. Practitioners are constantly struggling to improve access and opportunity for certain groups. It seems as if they are banging their heads against a brick wall as they confront extreme systemic resistance to change.

Gender is a major theme in equality analysis, and this key theme illuminates resistance to change in the face of very noble aspirations to improve equality. We need to understand the factors which lie behind slow progress in effecting change in social systems, thereby leading hopefully to changes in policy and better support to providers and practitioners. In the area of gender discrimination there are strong patterns of disadvantage for women evident from the data, despite the legislation having been in place for a long time.



Let me say two things about legislation. Some laws simply create a kind of cultural shift; they communicate the kind of things people should be doing, but the laws do not aim to directly change material things significantly. They communicate the tone but do not actually do much else. Other legislation is highly targeted and impacts strongly on patterns of drivers and incentives – for example, financial returns or costs; provision of subsidy; etc. John Fitzgerald proposed introducing targeted legislation, for example, compulsory paternal leave, to affect some change in drivers and incentives. When policy is of this second, targeted form we often see both immediate direct effects - and a whole range of unintended consequences.

### Patterns of disadvantage

It is important to contrast different approaches to international comparisons. It is possible to simply list all EU initiatives, country by country, using 'parallel descriptions': in Germany it is like this, but in France it is like this, etc. However, such an approach is useful, but of restricted value in understanding why things are as they are in different national contexts, and why something which works in one nation is unlikely to work in another. 'Policy borrowing' frequently accompanies 'parallel description' –and policy borrowing has a very chequered history.

To understand arrangements in national settings and any potential for export-import of policy we need to follow Andy Green's strictures for genuine international comparative work: transnational comparisons which seek to get at the combination of factors operating in a country. We need to examine both the details of each policy a country has adopted and what determines whether it is a success or a failure. Without listing the initiatives, I will extract some factors to help understand why some initiatives work in certain contexts.

First, I want to examine the categories by which we understand the nature and pattern of disadvantage, because these often condition the way we see inequality, the way we collect data and the way we formulate policy. Examples are gender, ethnicity, ability, age, learning difficulties, class and social background – some of which are ignored in analyses, in some countries and by some policy makers. Class and social background were just off the spectrum in terms of English policy making for a number of years; no-one mentioned them, they were the 'elephant in the corner of the room'. But Bynner's work on the national cohort data, Raffe and Croxford's work at Edinburgh, PISA, and the work of the Social Exclusion Unit show that social background is a pre-eminent factor in educational attainment. Ignoring this factor in public policy formation means, at best, policy formation which is ill-informed by key factors affecting educational

attainment and, at worst, policy which will be ineffective or harmful, since it fails to engage with key mechanisms. Likewise, inter-country comparisons often just focus on particular groups, such as how well systems integrate women into the labour market. What is very important and often neglected is relative group performance. In schools, for instance, we need to ask what is happening in respect of the most able and least able when they enter the labour market and are the gaps increasing or decreasing. These relative group performance indicators are absolutely crucial but are often ignored.

In England, work on diversity is frequently defined in terms of categories such as race and ethnicity, religious diversity, bilingual and multilingual learners, refugees and asylum seekers, Travellers. There is a lot missing from that list and the policy focus is on those categories – they function as a lens through which policy makers and practitioners see the world, conditioning people's perspectives. They in turn condition patterns of funding. But this ignores the fact that multiple-disadvantage frequently applies. If you suffer from a physical disability you may also suffer from an accompanying set of disadvantages. Multiple-disadvantage is often ignored in the structures of institutions, funding and lobby groups. Individuals may then suffer from a number of disadvantages which prevent their full participation. Analysis frequently fails to explain this, being built around discrete categories which impact adversely on action.

Getting to the bottom of gender inequalities in the labour market and trying to explain the data is a complex business. If you get it wrong, your policy may give rise to a whole series of unintended consequences without engaging with the reality of the problem. Disadvantage and access to and performance in VET are part of a complex set of relationships. They involve, for example, patterns of incentives, the way grants are available, which courses are available in a particular locality, the encouragement career advisors give to certain student groups and so on. This includes the complex set of relations between a school, local, national, international labour markets, family structures, culture and the national and global economy. The only way to explain patterns in the aspirations and opportunities for certain groups to participate is to look at all of these. A policy maker may only be able to explain difficulties in recruiting certain groups or the reasons why they drop out by understanding the way in which these things combine.

### Gender disadvantage

Providers too must understand the way these things influence certain groups. This approach will explain why certain policies are ineffective and

do not make inroads in the target group. A problem for researchers is that transnational data is poor and the analysis tends to be confined to identification of trends rather than explanation of causes. Questions to be asked include: Why is it that women suffer so greatly from disadvantage – in particular the returns to them financially, individually, as a family and in certain occupational areas? From the data, we can see that a lot of analysis merely describes what is happening, without looking at underlying causes. As a result, outcomes of policy measures are often disappointing or laden with unintended consequences.

Educational researchers think of school as a strongly mediating institution. Research on patterns of educational attainment, life trajectories, personal aspirations, etc. suggest that the early years of a person's life are highly formative. It's not that everything has to be done early in a child's life to achieve a later effect but things that happen early strongly condition later aspirations and achievements. The research we have done on children's aspirations to participate in the labour market is fascinating. They enter school very young with highly gendered perceptions of occupations - detectable as early as age 4, 5 or 6. These perceptions then moderate quite strongly through school for a whole series of reasons, not least that teachers are often highly politicised and primary teachers are frequently women. Often the kind of message they give to young people strongly challenges gender stereotypes.

However, as boys and girls in England make exam subject choices at around age 16, determining the more limited courses they take from 16 to 18, they are already beginning to think about the labour market, what their friends are doing and talking to their family about what they will do. Gender stereotyping re-enters their culture at this point. The strongly gendered data as they enter the labour market shows that school is a mediating and moderating institution. This is very important for policy; it shows the effect of an important social institution (the school) and the impact it can have.

If messages are getting through at key points and places, it helps with refinement of public policy – not least the choice of optimum intervention points.

Participation in VET and subject choice for ages 16 to 19 remains highly gendered. We know there has been societal change in the structure of employment over the last five to ten years - but strong stereotyping persists. John Fitzgerald made the point that career breaks are fundamental while family structures and cultures remain highly relevant. It is to this which I now turn.

### Female employment discontinuity

In the labour market, the principal factors resulting in female disadvantage include: career discontinuity, part-time employment and gender segregation. Career discontinuity has only emerged more recently as a key factor and I will refer in a moment to some compelling evidence. Women part-time workers are much more likely to be heavily concentrated in gender stereotypical occupations in the service sector. Much of their downward mobility in the labour market occurs following the first break from work after having a child. By contrast, the occupational status of men tends to increase throughout their lives. For the majority of women it tends to decrease or remain static.

The issue of career breaks is fascinating when you consider women in jobs with a high control factor. For example, the experience of having a child for women general practitioners contrasts with women bank managers – these latter tend to have very low control factors over their work hours and their employment structure. If you take a career break as a GP you have much more say in the structure of the work you go back to; there is far less impact on your income. Comparing like with like in terms of key variables such as level of educational attainment, a woman of equal ability/potential who works as bank manager experiences much stronger discontinuity effects.

Much of the legislation and the work around women's employment aims to impact on gender stereotyping within occupations but has ignored this crucial issue of discontinuity. To frame sound policy and actions it is vital to tackle the actual causes of discontinuity in employment.

By the time males and females enter higher education and acquire vocational qualifications the situation has reversed in comparison with schooling, where girls' performance outclasses the boys'. In England, women obtain fewer first class honour degrees: at Oxford the figures are 14% for women and 20% for men. John Fitzgerald referred to how well girls are performing in school in Ireland. It is the same in England; but when they go on to third level or into the labour force, the situation is reversed. In respect of vocational qualifications, 43% of recipients are women, 53%

are men. Men are 1.5 times more likely to receive advanced vocational qualifications as women. So whereas girls do very well at school and get better results, statistics show how much educational training reflects a cause of gender difference. Further, it is vital to realise it is the workforce which is gendered and that gender and qualification are slightly less pronounced, this again reveals a lot about policy.

All this suggests that while it is crucial to exploit the gains from specific policies, requirements, qualifications and so on, it is the structure of the labour market which is absolutely fundamental. In advanced economies we should be concerned about the problems present in our own systems but even more concerned that the global statistics are really grim. In Georgia, for example, parents instructed their daughters to prepare for family life after only six years' education, after which they were withdrawn from school. Economic arrangements are deeply embedded and reinforce such social structures. Policy must be highly ambitious to achieve change and engage all those factors, not just one.

### VET patterns in other countries

Schooling is, as I have emphasised, highly significant. But to change VET patterns, we need to think about what comes before. Bynner and Feinstein's work suggests that elements which we can term 'personal and social capital' emerge as key factors. These comprise elements of personal disposition and identity such as how a person construes things which are happening to them ("I have no control over what happens to me..."), the networks which they have (friendship groups, social groups), and necessary interpersonal skills (how to adapt to different social circumstances). Bynner and Feinstein are concerned that these elements of personal and social capital take a powerful initial form early in life – before compulsory schooling – yet they are highly determinate of educational success and overall progression in life. By the time a person begins to access VET, their attainment and approaches to learning are already highly conditioned by these elements of personal and social capital.

Alongside this, the correlation between parents' occupational status and student literacy is highly significant in some countries - the OECD PISA study places Germany, Switzerland and England high on the ranking of countries where there is a strong relationship between these. In other words, parents' occupation and social status greatly affect educational attainment in those countries. But in some countries there appears to be a low correlation between occupational background and how well children do at school – most notably Finland.

But in those countries where a strong relationship obtains, this conditions aspirations and career options – in advanced economies a third level or fourth level qualification is vital for good economic return – and bear in mind that VET comprises a large sector of higher education. Naïve commentators consider all higher education to be 'academic', yet courses such as surveying and engineering are all strongly vocational and have a close labour market linkage. Higher education can make a major VET contribution, not just in vocational training, but as regards who has access to both the labour market and to continuing professional development.

It is intriguing that Germany and Switzerland have very well-developed apprenticeship systems, with relatively rigid structures and a rigid track system which provide high quality, broad-based vocational training. But apprenticeships in those systems may both reflect and reproduce rigid social systems - so that if you come from a skilled manual background and aspire to change it may be quite difficult so to do. In such systems, a young person from a skilled family with a manual orientation is conditioned to stay on those kinds of career routes. The message is: you may be guaranteed a training place but you will be conditioned in your aspirations.

There is a lot of evidence that flexibility in the labour market is a key feature of modern economies and this has stimulated, in policy-makers, a belief that a similar flexibility should be present in training systems. But the current evidence suggests that when such a system allows dropping out and back in again, personal and social circumstances can make it very difficult for a person to rejoin education and training once they drop out. The problem for countries like Germany and Switzerland is that highly rigid structures reproduce existing social arrangements which tend to downgrade certain social groups' aspirations of participation in, for example, higher education. The system does not, therefore, promote equality and diversity. Further, if certain individuals find that their personal and social capital is not adequately developed because of their social background and the type of early education they receive, they may be put at a disadvantage in making use of choice and flexibility in both training and in the labour market.

But a key question for policy-makers and developers is how to design initiatives which will help these specific groups? The John Grey paradox is that for any given initiative which aims to close the gap between the disadvantaged and the advantaged, the advantaged are invariably in a better position to make full use it. This is a serious issue for policy makers requiring hard thinking about targeting and the nature of any proposed initiatives. This is happening in Turkey and Austria, as shown by an evaluation our research group has just completed. Tom Leney and his

colleagues have just completed an evaluation of the Lisbon Goals<sup>1</sup> and the report examined and described various initiatives in other countries. This analysis showed these initiatives to be of a similar character: they are highly focused and conditioned by those countries' perceptions of which groups need most support. Faced with a high drop out rate from school in Norway, the minister there decided to improve opportunities for alternative training. Reports on the web show how contextualised each initiative is and the priorities of the relative governments: in Bulgaria, one of the priority targets was motivation to participate in training – delivered through targeted training courses for unemployed women over 50 years of age.

### Promoting social inclusion

We emphasised at the end of the 'Lisbon Goals' report that education and training cannot on their own change the conditions for social inclusion but have to go hand in hand with other strategies. Financial help may be offered in the first place to give unemployed people a realistic opportunity to enter training and education, but is not enough by itself. This brings its own powerful dilemma: the assistance offered may be more attractive than getting into work. Far more effective policy can be developed by looking at those kind of relationships which John Fitz Gerald outlined: how structures in the economy provide drivers and incentives, how financial incentives from the state and signals and opportunities from the labour market can be linked. It is vital to link VET policy with overall economic development policy.

There are difficult ethical issues around priorities in deciding funding for different groups: you cannot do everything for everybody. Policy makers have to make stark choices but we believe these kinds of decisions should be made in a fully democratic context. From the recent evaluation we believe all EU member states have VET initiatives with inclusion elements – but what emerges from the analysis is that different groups have been targeted with very different strategies.

1 *In March 2000 the Lisbon European Council set the EU a strategic goal for the following decade to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth, with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion. The Council placed particular emphasis on lifelong learning and this element of the strategy was subsequently developed to confirm the importance of well-developed lifelong learning strategies in member states and focuses in particular on the role of VET.*

## Conclusion

My summary may seem quite controversial, critical and challenging. We as researchers need more and better national and transnational data and must avoid crude categories for analysis and policy making – such as only looking at gender, or only looking at disability. We need a better understanding of causal relationships, as it is all too easy to focus on gender stereotyping in occupations and miss the greater impact of career discontinuity which materially affects so many women – the degree of effect being dependent on features of specific occupations.

And to understand what affects participation in VET, we have to look beyond features of the VET and the labour market. For women, it is not only career discontinuity that is crucial, it is the fact that the division of labour in the home has not changed significantly, as Kate Purcell's work shows. While economic pressures for both partners to work outside the home have grown, the roles of men and women in the home have not changed significantly. Not only is the woman holding on to a job, she also tends to organise the childcare, copes when a child is ill and responds when the school phones home – while continuing to do most of the everyday domestic work.

For policy formation, research, censuses and overviews have a lot to offer, but we must understand the opportunity for access to IVT and continuing VET from the perspective of learners and their propensity to participate. Employers need to consider what it is like to be a learner. Agencies and government in turn need to drive policy in specific directions in the light of the drivers and incentives operating on both learners and on employers. If you fail to see the world through the eyes of those groups it is unlikely any policy will be effective - it is essential to reflect on how drivers and incentives operate on the social circumstances of those groups.

Most crucially, policy requires integration of economic development strategy and education and training strategy. Elements of social policy and fiscal/monetary strategy all combine to present incentives to participate in VET. Effective policy will take account of these linkages – all too frequently, national policies fail to integrate these elements, and thus have diminished effectiveness (and a raft of unintended consequences). To develop this more 'joined-up' and sophisticated policy is a major challenge to all levels of the system and for all European nations.



# Session Two: Planning for Equality and Diversity



## Chairperson's Introduction to Session Two

William Parnell

ESF, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

For a number of years the ESF (European Social Fund) has played a major role in trying to address equality issues in vocational training and education. It has funded investment of over 5 billion here since Ireland joined the EU in 1973. It currently substantially funds the Employment and Human Resources Development Operational Programme. This is, in effect, the human capital part of Ireland's National Development Plan for 2000 to 2006. One of the measures which the ESF sponsors in the Operational Programme is the Equality Studies Unit within The Equality Authority which Laurence Bond describes in his paper. The ESF also supports the EQUAL programme, an EU wide initiative operating in all 25 member states, the aim of which is to tackle inequality and discrimination in the labour market. Liesbet De Letter's paper covers this programme.

Some of the earlier papers ended on a slightly pessimistic note, referring to the difficulties and complexities of achieving equality in vocational education and training. But let us remember that unless we try to do something about it we will not change the world – and we can make changes.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment is very happy to be associated with this conference and our involvement underpins the importance we place on addressing inequalities in the labour market. Ireland's unemployment rate has been very low for a number of years, hovering around 4%. But in spite of that, there are many people who still cannot get a job, among them people with disabilities, older people, members of the Traveller community and other minority ethnic groups. It is important at this particular time when we enjoy economic success that we share the fruits of that success throughout all of society. The best way to do that is to facilitate the participation in the labour market of all those who want to work, and as we have heard, good education and training are the foundations to enter and remain in the labour market.

We have heard, particularly from John Fitz Gerald, how Ireland is becoming a more diverse, cosmopolitan society, with an outline of some of the benefits and a particular focus on gender equality and the role women play.

Equality or inequality of course do not just affect women. New ethnic groups are arriving to work in Ireland and we still have our own disadvantaged minorities: people with a disability, Travellers and older people. The issue of ageing is not yet on the same scale as the rest of Europe, but older people are increasingly a group that are at least in danger of being marginalized. Unless we embrace this diversity we could end up with a more polarised society than ever before.

We have heard about the changing context and the challenges for equality and vocational education and training, but putting equality into practice requires planning. Shira Mehlman from FÁS and Liesbet De Letter from the European Commission will discuss how organisations can prepare and plan to incorporate equality and diversity into labour market programmes. These are people who are trying to work their way through complexities and to bring the practical application of equality practices to play in labour market programmes. There is a danger at a conference like this that we might be speaking to the converted, but even if we are converted, we can still learn from one another.

# Incorporating Equality & Diversity in Labour Market Programmes

Shira Mehlman  
FÁS

## What is FÁS?

Let me give you a very brief overview of FÁS, the Training and Employment Authority. It was established in 1988 under the Labour Services Act, 1987 and is a national organisation whose functions are statutorily defined, with policy priorities established by the government of the day, and by a ministerial-appointed Board. FÁS is a large organisation employing approximately 2,300 staff in eight regions, with over 70 Employment Services offices and 21 training centres providing services to job seekers, communities and businesses through a wide range of training and employment programmes.

The mission of FÁS is to increase employability, skills and mobility of job seekers and employees to meet labour market needs and thereby promote competitiveness and social inclusion. To assist in achieving its mission, FÁS has identified eight priority goals including the need:

To mobilize labour supply from all available sources and stem the flow into long-term unemployment through the provision of a range of programmes and services for unemployed people, with a particular focus on marginalized groups, that are driven by labour market demands and individual customer needs.

This requires that FÁS develops and implements specific actions that enable people to integrate into the active labour market, and to meet the varying and individual needs of our diverse user base. In practice, FÁS must assist in removing barriers and help provide supports which ensure access to programmes, services and employment for groups facing exclusion, discrimination and labour market disadvantage. There are a number of initiatives to achieve this, among them:

- developing an equality policy and framework within the organisation
- data collection and setting targets for participation of specified target groups, and

- training staff to campaign for inclusion, equality and diversity.

We have undertaken two specific initiatives: an equality proofing pilot carried out within our Employment Services Division, and secondly our role in assisting to mainstream the learning from the EQUAL initiatives.

### Equality proofing pilot

According to the NESF (1996:35), “[E]quality and equality proofing are about seeking to change public attitudes and behaviour and, where it is essential, to outline principles which have relevance and applicability to all marginalised groups”. It is an important initiative in the goal to mainstream equality, comprising the development of “an integrated and systematic approach to ensure that discrimination and marginalised groups are provided with the necessary means and recourse to participate in society as equal citizens” (NESF: 1996:4). A central tenet of the “proofing process” is that the particular needs of users and interest groups are taken into account during the policy making and/or programme design process, through to implementation and evaluation of the policy or programme. Equality proofing is a planning process, and a means towards achieving effective policy. “Enabling participation from the target groups is fundamental to the process” (DJELR: 2000).<sup>1</sup>

In the latter half of 2002, FÁS initiated a pilot equality proofing project supported by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform's Equality Proofing Working Group. It was decided that FÁS' Employment Services, as the gateway to all services, was the most “appropriate” unit through which to undertake the pilot. The aim of the pilot was to assist FÁS in developing equality proofing tools and processes. Its objectives were to:

- review current equality practices and policies in FÁS, as they related to Employment Services
- carry out an equality impact assessment on a number of measures and programmes
- develop and test appropriate equality proofing tools and systems for FÁS
- set-up an equality proofing strategy for FÁS.

<sup>1</sup> *Enabling participation “means ensuring that the basic material, psychological, educational and other needs of the target groups are met so that they are in a position to participate on equal terms”; and encouraging participation “involves proactive policies to promote greater understanding of the policy proposal and to encourage involvement. Relevant strategies include affirmation action measures, training and technical assistance and education (DJELR: 2000:19)*

## How did it work?

- It was agreed to set up a working group comprising Employment Services staff. To ensure the full scope of the operations and a broad regional representation, the composition was from several regions with managers, Employment Services officers and administrative staff (those at the front-line).
- The main task of the working group was to identify, and prioritise equality issues within Employment Services. To achieve this, each member of the group was asked to gather information from their colleagues through a service impact questionnaire, designed by the consultant, covering all nine grounds.
- In addition, since none of the members of this working group had worked together before and had no training in equality proofing, three training modules were incorporated into its first three meetings to address these issues.
- Arising from the issues identified, an action plan was developed to implement six local equality proofing initiatives to be conducted with the help of an external consultant.
- The specific pilot initiatives involved: equality proofing job notifications through our Call Centre; assessing access and participation by members of the Traveller community; exploring equality issues for staff (two pilot initiatives); exploring clients' experience of prejudice within and outside the organisation; and exploring equal opportunity issues with employers.
- Concurrent with this process, consultation took place with groups representing the nine grounds. Seven groups were represented and asked to identify the key policy areas and barriers with regards to access, participation and outcomes within FÁS Employment Services. Key strategies for removing these barriers were also explored.

The findings from the working group's internal impact survey, the local equality proofing pilot initiatives and the consultation with groups representing the nine grounds, provided a rich source of strategies for implementation within the organisation to increase access, participation and outcomes for under-represented groups. We are now putting the recommendations in place, with my colleagues in Employment Services. The other key factor was that it was incredibly successful in developing tools and processes for use by the organisation to “equality proof” other programmes and services within FÁS. I am pleased to report that the need to, and process of, equality proofing all FÁS programmes and services is a commitment that we are embedding in our new Statement of Strategy.

It should be noted that this Equality Proofing Pilot Initiative has been predominately a top-down initiative in that it was developed and driven by the Social Inclusion Unit in consultation and collaboration with our external consultant, Marie Hegarty, and the Equality Proofing Working Group. However, incorporating diversity and equality in training and employment programmes also means enhancing our capacity to mainstream the learning from local initiatives into national policies and programmes. To this end, FÁS has been working closely with both the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and The Equality Authority to look at processes and mechanisms through which we could mainstream the learning from the projects funded under the EQUAL initiative.

### Mainstreaming EQUAL

Mainstreaming in this context, is extracting the lessons from the EQUAL initiatives and applying them to national or local policy and practice. The focus is on learning and its value in improving provision for specific groups; it is not about funding continuation of the projects as a whole. Our role has been three-fold.

Firstly, we need to identify best practice. This information-gathering stage should not only involve the more formal information processes such as conferences and launches, it also involves meeting the Development Partnerships (DPs) and internal staff who represent the organisation on the DPs.

Having gathered the information and extracted the lessons, the second stage focuses on identifying its added value and where it fits in organisational policies and practices. This process of applying the learning, or parts thereof, is very much like sitting at a table with four or five puzzles before you with one piece missing, and one in your hand. You need to fit the piece into one of the puzzles. To do this you twist and turn the piece within the various options until it fits in the right place.

Having identified best fit, the third stage is creating a critical mass within the organisation to support the integration of the learning (mainstreaming). This process involves working as conduit, advocate and facilitator with the relevant internal functions within FÁS and the relevant bodies external to the organisation. It involves sharing and disseminating the learning both internally and externally, and ensuring that the right people are targeted (those who have some say or influence in integrating the learning). It involves speaking their language and being clear about what this has to offer. Finally, it involves working with the end in mind – being willing to let go of preconceived processes to obtain the outcome.

## Lessons learned

The lessons learned from both these initiatives involve organisational commitment and competencies. They must be the responsibility of the organisation as a whole, and not just specific units or functions.

There is also a presumption that incorporating equality and diversity needs to be top-down, starting with organisational priorities and policies. While these areas are significant, focusing on actual practice is also a useful starting point.

Such initiatives are more complicated than they sound. A long lead in time is required to develop a shared understanding of what is to be done, and this must be provided for from the outset. The organisation must make a commitment to learn from the actions undertaken, and incorporate this learning into its policies and practices.

Finally, some users and interest groups have unrealistic expectations about what is being undertaken, and how it fits in with the overall decision making process. To overcome this, there is a clear need to strengthen their capacity to engage. In the first instance, they must be better informed about the decision making process within FÁS. Secondly, while these initiatives required an openness to change within the organisation, there must be the same commitment among users and interest groups as well.

## Conclusion

The recent fundamental changes in the economic, social and cultural fabric of Irish society have forced service deliverers, public or otherwise, to examine seriously the services we provide, how we provide them and to evaluate their effectiveness and efficiency in meeting our customers' changing needs and demands. What I have outlined are some of the approaches that FÁS has used to facilitate this process. It is important to note that these initiatives are not an end in themselves; they are a starting point – and early in their development. Yet, in spite of this early development, we have made significant progress.



# Learning from EQUAL on Equality in VET

Liesbet De Letter

European Commission, EQUAL Programme

## Introduction

The aim of the EQUAL programme, namely an equal labour market, fits very well with the theme of this conference, whose focus is equal opportunities in training. EQUAL is about combating all forms of exclusion, discrimination and inequalities in the labour market, for all groups and individuals.

## How does EQUAL work?

EQUAL is part of the European Union's strategy for more and better jobs and for ensuring that no-one is denied access to them. Funded by the European Social Fund, this initiative has been testing, since 2001, new ways of tackling discrimination and inequality experienced by those in work and those looking for a job.

EQUAL co-finances activities in all EU Member States. The EU contribution to EQUAL of 3.274 billion is matched by national funding. EQUAL differs from the European Social Fund mainstream programmes in its function as a laboratory (principle of innovation) and in its emphasis on active co-operation between Member States. Two calls for proposals for EQUAL projects in the Member States have taken place so far, the first one in 2001, the second one in 2004. Responsibility for the implementation of the Community Initiative programmes in the Member States lies with the national authorities.

## The building blocks of EQUAL

- **Partnership:** to bring together key actors (local and regional authorities, training bodies, public employment services, NGOs, enterprises, social partners) in Development Partnerships (DPs) on a geographical or sectoral level to tackle discrimination and inequality
- **Thematic approach:** to concentrate actions on thematic fields in keeping with the European Employment Strategy
- **Innovation:** to explore and test innovative approaches in formulating, delivering and implementing employment and training policies

- **Empowerment:** to strengthen capacity building by making all relevant actors, including beneficiaries, work together on an equal footing
- **Transnationality:** to render it possible for individual DPs and national authorities to learn from each other and co-operate productively across borders
- **Mainstreaming:** to develop and test new ways of integrating best practices into employment and social inclusion policies.

## Development Partnerships

Within EQUAL there are more than 2,000 Development Partnerships (DPs), many of them in lifelong learning; you can find them in the database on our website ([http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment\\_social/equal/index](http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/equal/index), go to the database and do a search on “lifelong learning”).

## European thematic work

A European Thematic Working Group on adaptability was set up, working on two aspects: dealing with the ageing workforce, including active ageing, and lifelong learning. Ireland has played an important role in this Thematic Working Group. The Group has produced a number of policy briefs. These are four page documents on specific issues that EQUAL has tackled, formulating policy recommendations and including examples of what has been done in member states. These are also available on our website.

One of the issues covered by this Group and in the policy briefs is, for example, intergenerational learning, sharing skills and knowledge across generations, attempting to shift the focus from age to skills, trying to change the attitudes of both employers and employees. An interesting EQUAL experiment has been to introduce trainers and coordinators for intergenerational learning and the role of mediators. Other examples are coaching, tutoring and mentoring models, with a rethinking of information and communication channels and setting up learning and knowledge sharing platforms.

## Validation of workplace learning

An important thematic focus was the validation of formal and informal workplace learning. Validation is an interesting aspect as not all member states have legislation on validation of informal learning. EQUAL has shown that this kind of validation contributes to a more mobile and adaptable workforce. A lot needs to be done to convince people this is possible, something that many DPs have managed. Validation pays off for both employees and employers. On the employee side it empowers individuals and particular groups by addressing their specific needs and circumstances.

DPs have, for example, worked specifically with migrants or refugees or the long term unemployed. Employers can get a better picture of the workforce and actually save on training if they have a clearer view of the existing skills in their company and what they really need. Among the tools developed are on line self-assessment, a digital portfolio of evidence which many employers found useful, a competence passport and many more.

### The partnership approach

To illustrate how important the EQUAL principles are, the partnership approach has played a crucial role in raising awareness and getting the commitment of all stakeholders. With the right stakeholders on board, DPs both worked on co-development and then spreading them to other actors, making sure they were taken on, e.g. in a sectoral approach. The partnership approach, combined with a constant focus on empowerment as well, trying to cater for disadvantaged groups, has achieved greater accessibility to training and learning opportunities.

EQUAL has also given particular attention to small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), who often do not have the capacity to develop their own training policy or do not manage to choose the adequate kind of training. The use of teaching methods suitable for non-traditional learning and workplace training is particular to EQUAL with its focus on tackling discrimination in the labour market. EQUAL has tried to move away from the traditional target group or box-type approach, such as providing one service for disabled people and another for young people and so on. It tries to develop a more comprehensive approach and work together with all groups.

Change does not happen overnight but is a process of evolution and it may take years to develop partnerships that really work and achieve impact. Moreover, it is not always easy to bring different actors and horizons and actors together, while resisting the tendency to go back to “the good old target groups”, putting labels on people and segregating. EQUAL hopes to contribute to a much broader approach and to really tackle these multiple and complex issues.

### EQUAL examples

Among the initiatives we have undertaken are a workshop on lifelong learning, a range of publications and developing our website. We plan to hold a number of other events in close cooperation with the Member States, inviting them to propose themes and locations for exchange events and policy fora. The EQUAL database has descriptions of projects provided by member states and we aim to offer good journalistic presentations of

projects that have worked successfully. We want to make as many DP success stories available on the web as possible.

I would like to give two concrete examples of quality DPs in which a lifelong learning approach was implemented. The first is in Greece, a country with a high number of SMEs and very small family businesses. Validation is often a problem in this context, as many such businesses are in remote areas and do not have access either to training centres or validation centres. This DP developed validation centres in these far-flung locations so people do not have to travel to Athens to validate their training or experience. These centres provide an online test to check and validate theoretical skills combined with a video centre where people can demonstrate their practical skills.

One example was a car mechanic who had worked for 30 years but did not have a formal qualification because his was a family business and he just went right into the job, without any official accreditation. The video testing centre allows such skilled workers to display their skills, sit an exam and receive official accreditation.

Another example of an EQUAL project is in the Azores, a group of islands in the mid-Atlantic which are part of Portugal. It concerns the fisheries sector. Fisheries have always been a vital and traditional part of the economy of the Azores involving many families. Ageing equipment is a major problem. The fishing fleet is badly hit by fierce competition as huge factory ships from other parts of the world fish very close to the islands. Fishing in the Azores has for many years been a traditional family-based business and although women do a great deal of the work and have many unique skills to pass on, they receive no professional accreditation.

This project brought the participants together through training courses, for example in IT, English and hygiene issues. Many of the women had never made contact with other women on the next island, even though it was only a few kilometres away. One group was astonished to realise that whereas on their island women were not allowed set foot on a boat, it being a male preserve, on the neighbouring island many women owned and sailed their own boat. So there was quite an exchange of ideas, not only between the islands, but also within the “transnational partnership” with Italian and Spanish project partners. They could see the various interest groups and how they worked on the islands, thus deriving inspiration for the tourist sector. They realised there were conflicting interests where, for example, Spanish partners wanted to develop the maritime sector to introduce more ships but the Portuguese feared this would mean the loss of fishing grounds.

Finally, a very important aspect of this DP was partnership. It managed to bring together all the important players in the sector who had often worked in an isolated way before. Here they really began to cooperate and were able to change how things were done.

## Conclusion

This paper has presented a general overview with some concrete project examples and I hope I have been able to offer some insight into what EQUAL is doing in the field of lifelong learning.



# Session Three: Putting Equality into Practice



# Implementing Equal Opportunities

Kevin Moriarty  
Fáilte Ireland

## Introduction

This paper highlights some of the work Fáilte Ireland is doing to implement equal opportunities in training and education, starting with a brief overview of Fáilte Ireland and the Irish tourism industry.

In 2003, Bord Fáilte and CERT merged under the National Tourism Development Authority Act to form Fáilte Ireland. Our remit is to encourage, promote and support the recruitment, training and education of employees in the tourism industry. One side of the organisation is responsible for human resource development (HRD) and the other looks after marketing (you may be familiar with the recent TV advertisements as part of our marketing campaign: “One click and you're away”). We are very involved in supporting the tourism industry and in the provision of training and education. On the one hand tourism is a complex industry and on the other it is very straightforward. Tourism in Ireland is dominated by small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs). The larger organisations and hotel groups are probably familiar to you but in fact there are about 16,500 small businesses comprising pubs, restaurants, tourist attractions, small hotels, B&Bs, guest houses and self-catering establishments operating in the industry.

The structure of this industry impacts on the essence of what is being discussed at this conference - equal opportunities. Tourism still has seasonal demand patterns with tourists tending to come to Ireland at particular times of the year. The industry employs approximately 145,000 full-time staff and with part-time and casual workers, that increases to 200,000 within the State. The results of the 2004 Fáilte Ireland Business Employment Survey revealed that there is a gender split of 57% female workers to 43% male.

An interesting recent development is the number of international employees within the industry. We reckon there are about 25,000 EU and international employees working in tourism out of 145,000 which is a significant percentage of the total. Tourism is perhaps known as the



industry of every parish and as very much a regional, local industry, not just clustered around Dublin or the main cities. It is also a practical, operationally-focused industry, where you have production, service and consumption all happening at the same time. People are very much involved as part of the tourism industry or the tourism product, so the interaction with them and our dependence on them as part of this industry is very high.

### **Tourism education and training**

Fáilte Ireland has three approaches to education and training. Firstly, we provide a range of training programmes for the 145,000 people in the industry. In relation to lifelong learning we are trying to put in place systems and structures to encourage continuous learning for people working in tourism. Secondly, we support education programmes for school leavers and young people wanting to get into third level and we design and deliver programmes through the network of Institutes of Technology (ITs). Thirdly, we are very involved in the areas of promotion, recruitment, programme design and skills enhancement. We respond to the needs of jobseekers, people who want to return to work or start up a business. So our work involves these three areas and I would like to refer to the challenges and the actions we have taken on each.

### **School leaver programmes**

Our policy ensures that school leavers have open access to education and training. In our promotional material and registration forms we stress the importance of equality and access with no barriers. We ensure that our promotional material reflects not just cultural diversity but also equality. Making statements and creating awareness is the easy part but progressing forward to the implementation stage can prove trickier. We need to ensure equality issues are included in school and third level curricula and that instructors and lecturers on our training programmes are trained in equal opportunities. It is through their sensitivity, their awareness and their skills that a lot of the good work takes place. We also work with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform running training programmes for instructors and interviewers.

## Recruitment and retention

Fáilte Ireland staff who interview school leavers or people who want to join the industry or return to work are trained to increase their awareness and sensitivity towards a whole range of equal opportunities. In relation to staff retention, issues often arise after we spend a lot of effort recruiting, promoting and encouraging young people to do a course and then, as sometimes happens, they drop out. We have conducted a 'Drop-Out Survey' to ascertain the reasons why people drop-out of courses and we looked at it from a gender perspective. Interestingly, it was often not a gender issue but some indirect equality issues emerged. When we asked some people why they left their course a number of responses included: "I didn't think it would be as tough as it was", or, "There was too much theory." However, it became clear that problems such as learning difficulties or childcare had arisen for some people and we were able to respond and work with them through the ITs.

## Encouraging participation in training programmes

We are also working on improved data collection, making sure that we gather the right data, at the right times, and with the right level of analysis. We need to be able to monitor and track and then focus as necessary on particular groups to ensure their participation in our training programmes. Our labour market programmes provide entry-level skills for people of all ages and from all groups. Our approach to training programmes must be very flexible. There is a great variety of programmes available for example a programme might run for two hours a day, five days a week over ten weeks or it might be a hundred hour programme. Alternatively a person can opt for a 13-16 week programme. Return to work type programmes run on a regional or local basis, usually during the morning to encourage people, mostly women, who are thinking of returning to work. Employment opportunities normally arise within a particular locality so we talk to employers and invite them to look at our programme which is part-time, flexible and meets a specific need for one particular group of people. When we get the opportunity to successfully match the needs of employers and employees who require flexibility and have specific learning requirements it results in a win-win situation.

We believe a partnership approach is vital, working with a range of groups from County Enterprise Boards, to Leader groups, to community workshops. We work in partnership with the NTTI, FÁS, Teagasc and even with the army and the prisons. We have also highlighted the availability of financial support for childcare and have removed the requirement to be on the live register to join these programmes in order to eliminate barriers and encourage participation.

We work closely with the tourist industry to address all equality issues. The hospitality industry has suffered in recent years from a negative perception and most people will know someone who works in it. Much of the work we do is to encourage employers to implement good practices and promote the industry as a great career. We believe firmly in this.

### **Future staff needs of the tourist industry**

Looking to the tourist industry and the workplace of the future, it is clear that over the next five years, the industry is going to need 6,000 new entrants per year which is a significant number. Those new entrants must meet the requirements of a growing industry and we need to ask where we will find them. The industry must plan for various sources of recruitment over those five years, including international staff. Employment issues such as flexibility, productivity and work practices and good Human Resource Management (HRM) will be central to this strategy. We do not use the term “best practice” as for the moment we are happy with “good practice”. We believe that if the industry implements good HRM practices, in which equal opportunities and equality are fundamental, then recruitment will not be a major issue and the image and profile of the industry will improve.

We run courses for supervisors and managers that include sessions on equality and equal opportunities and our programmes on HRM practice cover employment and equality legislation.

### **Cultural diversity in tourism**

Fáilte Ireland has been engaged in a lot of work in the area of cultural diversity. Let me firstly quote from an article written by a hotel manager in Cork which appeared in Equality News, the magazine of The Equality Authority.

*“The initial recruitment we had shifted from employing an almost exclusively white, Irish homogenous staff base to one which was far more diverse and made up of employees from such nationally and ethnically diverse backgrounds as Bangladesh, Malaysia, India, Morocco, the Philippines and Sri Lanka. The religious diversity in this new staff included Muslim, Hindu, Catholic and Protestant as well as a number of other religions. That was the diversity we could see, feel and touch.*

*What I failed to recognise is how to get people from very diverse religious, cultural, ethnic and racial backgrounds to work together in a way that respects the identity and dignity of each individual. It wasn't long before I began to face new issues and new challenges, such as male employees of Asian background having difficulty accepting directions from a female Irish manager or clients who insisted on being served by one of their own. When*

*tensions arose between staff from different ethnic backgrounds, managers and supervisors were afraid to deal with some of the problems they were presented with as well as communication difficulties.”*

This article highlights some of the issues facing the industry where there are 25,000 international workers representing 150 companies speaking many different languages. So how do we approach this? We developed a strategy and implementation plan, directed by the government through our department, to look at some of the issues from an employee and an employer's point of view. We put together a working group, again with a partnership approach to conduct research and formulate an industry strategy including hotels, restaurants, pubs and the catering industry. I know these sectors do a lot of work with The Equality Authority and ICTU.

We held a series of focus groups with international employees working in the tourism industry asking questions such as: How good is it? What are the issues and what are the problems or the difficulties? It was interesting to do this exercise from the point of view of the employee. We also looked at good practice in the industry and discovered there is plenty of it in Ireland. Then we looked at what supports an implementation plan could put in place to support the industry.

Initially it involves talking about people becoming more aware. What sparks the attention of employers is talking about business impacts and to get a positive response we need to show them there is a business case for an initiative. This is what the group began to do. I would like to quote from another equality article which relates to a UK company that introduced equality strategies in age, cultural diversity and disability. The company tested them out in one store and within two years it had increased profits by 18%. Staff turnover was six times lower, absenteeism was down by 39% and customer perception of service was greatly improved.

Our support for the industry is very much on a business case model with initiatives such as seminars for managers on cultural diversity to improve their interaction with a culturally diverse workforce. We run workshops for international employees and people who have recently arrived in Ireland who are working in the tourism industry. The sort of issues they raised were: How do I open a bank account? Where's the post office? What's tax all about? Why do I have to pay to go to the doctor? A worker needs to get all those sorted out before they can be fully productive. Training programmes and workshops for international employees are run in conjunction with the ITs, with one recently started in Tralee. We translated the material into thirteen languages and this is freely available to employers and employees. We give advice on language training because it

is probably one of the main access barriers to further education and training for international employees. We also developed action plans on cultural diversity.

We provide awards in conjunction with our colleagues in industry for those companies that deliver the best culturally diverse training programmes and we publish information on these programmes in, for example, Mandarin.

## Conclusion

This has been a brief discussion on what Fáilte Ireland is doing to encourage and implement equal opportunities. We need to explore how to get people onto that qualifications framework and how they can progress within it. It is a major task to make sure there is access for everybody within it. We want to make sure there are career paths, equal opportunities and progression for everybody coming into the tourism industry. As an example I'd like to refer to one of our past trainees who was unemployed and walked into a training centre in Wexford five years ago. He now has a degree and a top job as a hotel chef. He is earning a very good salary and has a great career ahead of him.

We want to make sure those career paths are visible and practical. We need to continue to incorporate good equality practice into our recruitment, our selection and our training. We also need to maintain our research as the foundation of good practice for us to maintain access with our groups and to monitor and track people who have come through training programmes.

Finally I'd like to thank my colleagues in The Equality Authority and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment for their ongoing support.

# Effective Gender Mainstreaming: Lessons for Education and Training

Dr. Anne Marie McGauran  
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## Introduction

I want to address three issues. First, what is gender mainstreaming? Second, what lessons can we learn in order to practice it more effectively in terms of strategy? And third, what lessons can we learn in order to practice it more effectively in terms of implementation? Kevin Moriarty referred to various ways of implementing diversity and equality proofing, an approach that I will be confirming.

Whoever came up with the term “gender mainstreaming” was not a marketing guru because it is hardly the most accessible term. Most people ask: “What's that?” Gender mainstreaming is a new strategy adopted to promote equal opportunities between women and men. But the term is maybe a little more accessible than we think and in one way explains itself. It is essentially about putting gender equality into mainstream policies.

You might ask: “Why do we need gender mainstreaming with all the legislation we have had for years to give women and men equal access to opportunities?” Equality legislation does seek to open up opportunities for everybody and is very positive. However people come from different starting points with different attributes and skills and that is the key idea behind gender mainstreaming. It recognises that the outcomes of policies are often very different for women and men because they come from different starting points and so in practice they are not always able to access opportunities in the same way. So gender mainstreaming means looking at the outcomes of policies to see why they are different for women and men, and how to adapt our policies so that the outcomes are more beneficial and significant for both women and men.

## Aspirins and airbags

Let me give two instances of how gender differences are obvious in different policies. These are taken from the private sector, to give the beleaguered public sector workers a break! The examples are aspirins and airbags, which probably do not spring to mind as the most gender relevant things but they are actually more applicable than you might think.

Most people will have heard that a way to reduce the risk of a heart attack is to take an aspirin a day. Beginning in 1981, the main research study for this focused on 22,000 physicians, demonstrating the beneficial effect of a daily aspirin to prevent coronary heart disease. However Science journal has reported that not one single woman was included in this study. This is a very important study and it is used widely to provide medical support for women and men in danger of a heart attack. We do not know much about the difference between the risks of heart disease for women and men but we do know that it usually affects women much later and the symptoms they display are quite different. Recently there was a study of 40,000 initially healthy women aged 45 and older who were followed up for ten years to see if they developed a heart attack or a stroke. One half of the group was asked to take 100 milligrams of aspirin every second day while the other half were given a placebo or dummy pill. The results were significant because they suggest women benefit from aspirin differently to men. The study showed no overall reduction in heart attacks for those women taking aspirin, a well proven benefit for men. This shows clearly what happens if you design a programme or a policy which takes account of one viewpoint only.

The second example is airbags, again something that might not leap out as very gender relevant. It is reported from the US that a new federal regulation compels carmakers to reduce the risks to children and small stature car passengers from airbags. Frontal airbags began appearing in new cars in the 1970s and by the mid 1980s were a common feature. The National Highway Transit Safety Authority (NHTSA) did not require them until 1997, following years of debate. The NHTSA noticed frontal airbags' lifesaving potential, saying they saved the lives of more than 5,300 people in 14 years between 1986 and March 2000. However the real world data also showed a troubling problem: more than 150 people, most of them children, were killed by airbags, often in low speed crashes. The reason was that frontal airbags were designed to meet government requirements to provide protection in a car crash for an unbelted average size male, that is half way between the smallest and largest male. Therefore car manufacturers had to make sure their airbags deployed quickly enough and with enough pressure to give the right protection for a sizeable male body not held in its seat by a safety belt.

Researchers discovered this kind of airbag could be lethal to smaller sized people, including children, small women and older people, particularly if they were sitting too close to the dashboard. So now the NHTSA requires a battery of tests by the car makers for advanced airbags, with tests using a family of crash test dummies, representing one-, three- and six-year old

children, a small female as well as the average male. This is a good example of how to build in diversity to the development of policy, otherwise it will have unexpected impacts that are not so good for the groups left out.

The reason women were left out in these cases is probably because most car manufacturers and probably most doctors are men. We all make decisions based on what we know but if we have quite a small group involved in that decision-making process, it is easy to exclude other groups.

### **Gender differences in the labour force**

Let us think now about gender differences relevant to vocational and education training.

First, there are several differences in the participation of women and men in the Irish labour force: 70% of males are in the workforce but only 53% of females. There are also many differences in occupations by gender, and in who works part-time. For example, 95% of construction workers are male and three-quarters of those in education and health sector employment are female, while three-quarters of part-timers are women and about three-quarters of managers are men. Unfortunately one of the impacts is that women earn less, with follow-on impacts into pensions and quality of life.

Other differences centre on the numbers of those unemployed seeking part-time or full-time work, as many more women than men would prefer part-time work.

Another major area of difference is education level. Boys are much more likely than girls to leave school early and to have lower qualifications, with knock-on effects later, particularly for unskilled workers who find themselves out of a job when they are older. Research indicates that fewer men participate in further education outside of school or university, with over half of those taking part being women - while at the same time very few women enrol for apprenticeship courses. There are also slightly more men than women with long standing health problems in the workforce and of this group 16% of men, compared to 11% of women, need assistance to be able to work.

### **Addressing these issues**

How do we address these policy issues in the workforce? Both the strategy and implementation of new policies are very important.



So in terms of strategy – to gender mainstream, the first task is to have an overall goal. Government departments and state agencies have strategy statements outlining their organisation's goals and this is a very good place to state that you aim to gender mainstream your work. Targets are also very useful, specifying what is to be done and by what date, because, as is often said - what gets measured gets done. Poverty proofing is a good example of a policy where we have targets, with the main targets we have in Ireland being to reduce poverty rates by a certain amount.

A leader is also essential to drive the strategy but in the absence of such a charismatic figure it is possible to link into existing powerful policies or groups to help drive the process forward. In order to gender mainstream you may also need extra resources in terms of funds or personnel, particularly at the start.

Other elements for the strategy to implement mainstreaming are involving excluded groups in decision making because they can highlight the main issues you need to address. Motivation is also important: try the carrot first, using rewards and incentives and if they do not work then try the stick. You will also need guidelines to outline how you plan to reach your organisation's goals while statistics and other background information are important to show why there are differences in the training and work of women and men.

And what are the implementation lessons? We have heard we need to develop Irish society and its resources and that vocational and educational training aims to do this by educating the workforce. We need to do this with more and more groups of citizens, such as women and immigrants and people who have not been part of mainstream education and training. Gender mainstreaming means asking questions such as: Who are your clients? Who are your trainees? Who is not availing of training? Where are they and how do you reach them? Also, as Kevin Moriarty said: What can you do to retain them and to ensure the training programme has the right outcome for them? Marketing is not often used here in a mainstreaming context but is one of the ways to explain it. Mainstreaming is similar to market research to see who benefits from a programme or policy and who does not, and how to change this.

What are the other key issues to consider in policy implementation? Make sure you communicate with the various groups who will benefit from training. Women and men, for example, use different communication channels: men tend to read more newspapers and women tend to listen to the radio so you need to use both media to reach them. If the plan is to train men who may not be highly skilled, you may need to go directly to their workplace and advertise what you are doing. To encourage women who are not in the workforce to sign up for job training you may have to put up notices in the local shopping centre.

Eligibility criteria are also important because sometimes they can exclude one group. For example, in the past to join a FÁS course, trainees had to be on the live register and many women could not meet the eligibility requirements. Costs are also a key issue. Are there fees and if so can the various target groups afford them? And is transport provided to get them to the training centre?

Finally, it is important to monitor mainstreaming to identify what is not working well or failing. You can do this using targets, audits or evaluations. A few key high level targets are needed which can be measured regularly. Every few years you can also audit procedures for developing courses or implementing them. Any evaluation should be an independent process with the findings publicly available. All of this is easier to do than it is sometimes made out to be - sometimes I think it is viewed as difficult because it is a new area of work. In many cases this way of working is not new: CERT and now Fáilte Ireland have been doing a lot to tailor their courses to the people who need to join them. The hardest thing may be deciding to mainstream, but once this decision has been made putting in place a different programme management structure can sometimes be hard but does not necessarily need to be so. It is, after all, about making better use of resources in the organisation and society as a whole by unlocking people's full potential. This is a challenge for us all.

# Accommodating Diversity: Lessons from the Equality Studies Unit

Laurence Bond  
The Equality Authority

## Introduction

The Equality Studies Unit (ESU) is a technical assistance measure funded under the Employment and Human Resource Development Operational Programme of the National Development Plan and implemented by The Equality Authority.

Its focus is to examine labour market inequalities – and the implications for labour market policies and programmes – with respect to groups covered by the equality legislation and with particular reference to four groups: older workers, people with disabilities, Travellers and other minority ethnic groups, in particular refugees.

The work programme of the ESU includes commissioning research and analysis<sup>1</sup>, a range of work with provider agencies to develop capacity in regard to equal opportunities and work with representatives of groups covered by the equality legislation.

I would like to discuss some of the main findings and issues arising from the work of the ESU to date. I will first cover our work on labour market inequalities and then consider some of the issues arising for educational and training provision.<sup>2</sup>

## Labour market inequalities

One aim of the work of the ESU has been to develop a more informed understanding of the labour market situation and experience of minority groups. With this in mind we have promoted the systematic collection and analysis of labour market and other data on these groups and commissioned a number of qualitative group-based studies. It is impossible to do justice to this body of work in a short presentation. Instead I can

<sup>1</sup> All The Equality Authority research reports cited can be downloaded from: [www.equality.ie/research](http://www.equality.ie/research)

<sup>2</sup> While, for convenience, I refer to any work carried out by the ESU as “our” work, most of the research and other project work of the Unit is commissioned from external researchers.

only give a flavour of some of the main findings in respect of the groups of interest.

### Older people<sup>3</sup>

Our research on ageing and labour market participation highlights important differences among older people (for the purposes of this research, people aged 50-70), with respect to their labour market situation.

Many older people who are not in employment have chosen early retirement. While they may have preferred a more graduated exit from employment they are broadly happy with their current situation. Older people in this group are more likely to be from the skilled working class or middle class groups. Other older people have left employment as a result of ill health or may have been excluded through unemployment. These are more likely to be from manual working class groups. In addition there are a significant group of older women who have been out of the workforce for very long periods, essentially since establishing their own families.

Over the last decade, employment rates among older people increased. This was driven not by a delay in retirement but by increased movement into employment of formerly non-employed people – women returning to work from “home duties” and to a lesser extent older men moving from unemployment. This highlights an important orientation to the labour market among many older people – men and women – not currently in employment.

However in our qualitative research, older people identified what they saw as an over-emphasis on formal qualifications as a major factor that disadvantaged them in the current labour market.<sup>4</sup> They also expressed concerns about skills mismatches between the skills they had and those that seem to be needed in today's labour market; they saw this barrier compounded by difficulties in getting access to training.

3 See Russell, H and Fahey, T (2004) ‘Ageing and Labour Market Participation’, The Equality Authority.

4 For overview see WRC Social & Economic Consultants (2003) ‘Accommodating Diversity in Labour Market Programmes’, The Equality Authority.

## People with disabilities<sup>5</sup>

Recent years have seen a significant expansion in representative data on people with disabilities. Data is now available from the 2002 Census, from the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) and from the ESRI's Living in Ireland Surveys (LIS).

For various reasons these different sources come up with very different estimates of the numbers of disabled people – for those of working age the estimates range from just over 6% in the Census to almost 11% in the QNHS and almost 17% in the LIS. They also show different rates of employment among disabled people from a low of 25% (Census 2002) to around 40% (QNHS and LIS).

However, on further examination, all the sources suggest fairly similar patterns with respect to the labour market: in all cases the rate of disability increases with age while the rate of employment among people with disabilities falls with age. In addition, a likely explanation for the difference between the Census and other sources is that the Census question on disability focuses on people with disabilities who experience somewhat greater restrictions on average. Further analysis of the QNHS and LIS also show particularly low employment rates among such groups.

The research shows that poor employment rates are partly explained by poor educational outcomes for people with disabilities. Disabled people – especially those with a disability from birth or acquired early in life – are far less likely to have Leaving Cert. or third level qualifications than other adults and far more likely to have no qualifications even when differences in age profiles and other factors are taken into account.<sup>6</sup> It must nevertheless be emphasised that this is not the full story as even when allowing for education, age and other relevant factors an enormous discrepancy in employment rates remains.

The numerous barriers disabled people face in education in the first place and subsequently in the labour market provide at least part of the explanation for these employment gaps. Among the obstacles people with disabilities highlighted in our qualitative research are: negative social

5 See Gannon, B and Nolan, B (2004) 'Disability and Labour Market Participation', The Equality Authority.

6 See also Gannon, B and Nolan, B (2005) 'Disability and Social Inclusion in Ireland', The Equality Authority and National Disability Authority.

attitudes towards disability, physical, transport and architectural barriers to taking up work and concerns about employers' attitudes and responses.<sup>7</sup>

### Travellers and other minority ethnic groups/refugees

Census 2002 provides the only representative data set on Travellers' labour market situation. Travellers are a small group – the Census gives a figure of approximately 24,000 of whom approximately 13,000 are aged between 15 and 64.

The Census shows that just one in five Travellers of working age is employed (defined on an ILO basis), compared to two-thirds of those in the rest of the working age population. The data suggests that – as with disabled people - poor employment rates of Travellers are partly explained by their poor educational outcomes. Only 6% of working age Travellers have a Leaving Certificate compared to 60% for the rest of the working age population. Again however this is only a partial account as employment rates for Travellers are notably lower than for the settled population, even for people of similar educational levels or age. While a range of factors is likely to be at work here, the discrimination Travellers experience is undoubtedly a significant part of the explanation.

Our qualitative research with Travellers focused on their experience with labour market programmes and highlighted a number of central issues.<sup>8</sup> Travellers laid particular emphasis on the lack of recognition of Traveller culture in the planning and delivery of programmes and a consequent lack of essential supports during these programmes. They also highlighted a lack of follow up and development following programmes with progression or more particularly lack of progression from programmes identified as a primary concern.

To date there has been no comprehensive data set on which we can draw to analyse the labour market or wider social situation of refugees or minority ethnic groups more generally. This situation is now changing with respect to minority ethnic groups. A recent QNHS special module on Equality and Discrimination collected data on respondents' ethnicity for the first time. In addition, the 2006 Census includes a question on ethnicity.

<sup>7</sup> See WRC Social & Economic Consultants (2003), cited above.

<sup>8</sup> See Pearn Kandola Occupational Psychologists (2003) 'Travellers' Experiences of Labour Market Programmes', The Equality Authority.

In our qualitative research, refugees<sup>9</sup> identified difficulties in acquiring English language skills as a particular barrier, as well as a lack of familiarity with the job search culture in Ireland, a lack of recognition of their qualifications and ethnic based discrimination. The last of these was more particularly an issue for people from Africa than elsewhere. While the research cited here focused specifically on refugees, many of the issues highlighted would apply to migrants more generally.

### Implications for policy

It is obvious that even fundamental changes in the vocational and further education and training sector could not - on their own - eliminate the inequalities experienced by minority groups. Clearly, for example, the accumulation of inequality and disadvantage in relation to educational experience of groups such as Travellers or disabled people needs to be addressed at much earlier stages of the education system. In addition, many of the current barriers that minority groups face in the labour market have to be addressed through wider social and legislative change.

However, even acknowledging these limitations, the vocational and further education and training sector can potentially make a significant contribution to greater equality in the labour market and in society more generally. Part of the ESU's work has been directed towards identifying ways to realise that potential more fully.

In approaching this part of our mission we cannot claim to have a simple equality blueprint for the sector. Rather we have sought to work in a developmental way with stakeholders to identify feasible ways of advancing equality in practice for minority groups. Niall Crowley's paper on "Vocational Education and Training: Meeting the Equality Challenge" outlined some of the main implications for policies and practice arising from this work to date. He outlined the challenge of equality proofing at a policy level and the elements of a planned and systematic approach to equality at an organisational level.

<sup>9</sup> More specifically this research included persons with refugee status and others who having applied for asylum had been granted leave to remain. See WRC Social & Economic Consultants (2003), cited above, and Conlon, C, Parsons, S and O'Connor, J (2005) 'Is the Grass Greener? Experiences of Refugees and Asylum-Seekers on the Irish Labour Market', in Boucher, G & Collins, G (eds.) *The New World of Work*, Dublin, Liffey Press.

Promoting equality of access, participation and outcomes in the full range of vocational and further education and training programmes for the groups covered by the equality legislation is a fundamental concern of the work of the ESU.

However there are significant obstacles here. In the main, participation in programmes or outcomes achieved are not monitored with respect to minority groups. Without such monitoring across all provision we cannot really assess the situation with regard to equal opportunities for these groups. The development of relevant data and monitoring are therefore essential if we are really to get to grips with what is happening and what should happen for these groups in the vocational and further education and training provision. Promoting equality data collection and monitoring of programmes has been a priority for the ESU and we acknowledge welcome progress in certain areas. But this remains an area where much more needs to be done.

While it is important, therefore, to acknowledge the real limits on what we know about equality or inequalities in access to programmes, the limited programme data available does suggest a number of areas of concern. There seems to be considerable variation across programmes in the participation of minority groups. A number of factors appear to influence this variation. Clearly, the educational qualifications required for participation are a factor with higher educational requirements usually meaning lower participation by minority groups, who as we have seen typically have poorer educational profiles. This suggests that the St. Matthew effect – to him that hath, shall be given – familiar in discussions of educational disadvantage more generally, also operates to reinforce group-based inequalities.

The issues here obviously parallel issues of inequality in access to higher education that are the focus of the work of the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education. It is therefore interesting to note that the National Office will “set both national and institutional targets for participation in higher education by socio-economically disadvantaged students, those from the Traveller community and ethnic minorities, mature students and students with a disability” and will ensure that the data needed to monitor such targets is collected by providers.<sup>10</sup> A parallel strategy in the vocational and further education and training sector should be developed.

*10 Higher Education Authority (2004) 'Achieving Equity of Access to Higher Education in Ireland: Action Plan 2005-2007', National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education, Higher Education Authority*



Apart from formal educational requirements, access to programmes is influenced by other formal and informal allocation procedures. There are some indications that channelling participants to programmes through the National Employment Action Plan activation process may in fact disadvantage those minority groups who are less likely to be on the live register. In addition the predominance of group-specific provision for people with disabilities and for Travellers may also act to pull people in these groups away from other options. Both these issues need further investigation.

On the positive side there are indications that providers can attract the participation and retention of minority groups through more pro-active approaches to recruiting minority participants as well as accommodating diversity in the delivery of programmes.

Proactive publicity and information dissemination that ensure members of minority groups actually receive information on suitable programmes and the potential benefits to them appear to be an important factor underpinning relatively higher minority participation in some programmes. Such activities might include ensuring information is available in accessible formats and publicity materials reflect the intended diversity of participants. They can also include targeted outreach either directly or through relevant intermediaries and so on.

In addition to positive action with regard to recruitment, actions to accommodate diversity in the delivery of programmes can attract participation and support retention and successful outcomes for participants from minority groups. Such actions might include, for example:

- provision for assistive technologies or other specific supports to enable participation
- reviewing teaching methods and materials and revising where possible to make them more appropriate to minority participants
- adjusting the location and or/the timing of programme delivery to support minority participation; and so on.

More generally they might include equality and diversity training for staff. Such actions will usually need to be developed in the context of a planned and systematic approach to equality and diversity across provider organisations.

A particular issue emerging in our work concerns the roles of group specific programmes versus broader access to mainstream programmes and supports in addressing the inequalities faced by minority groups. A lot of the provision made for minority groups has been in terms of group-specific programmes. However an over reliance on this approach is increasingly being questioned and the importance of supporting the participation of these groups in wider education and labour market programmes is a growing concern. This is particularly highlighted by the issue of progression – or the lack of it – from group specific measures into broader education or training provisions.

A further emerging issue is the need to identify and address specific educational and training needs of particular populations. Here the need for support for “English for speakers of other languages” (ESOL) is a specific priority. While there have been a number of important developments in regard to policy and provision in this area, there is a need to develop a more comprehensive approach, taking into account expected trends in migration over the medium and long-term. This need has of course been increasingly acknowledged with, for example, the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA), among others, having developed important proposals in this regard.

Finally, at a very general level, the work carried out by the ESU supports the now widespread view that demographic and economic changes mean that, to quote a recent overview, “education and training opportunities must be made more flexible, not only in terms of the phasing of opportunities across life-cycles, but also of modalities and contents of learning. There is a need to end the traditional 'front-loading' of education and to create more age-related education and training opportunities”.<sup>11</sup> This was an important thrust of, among others, the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning and is now underpinned by the National Framework of Qualifications, and the development of supporting policies on access, transfer and progression. Our work to date highlights the importance of explicitly promoting equality and accommodating diversity within this developing policy framework.

11 Green, A, Wolf, A and Leney, T (1999) 'Convergence and Divergence in European Education and Training Systems', Bedford Way Papers, Institute of Education, University of London

# Session Four: Plenary Discussion



## Robin Webster

### Age Action Ireland

I want to start by making two general points on the issues arising from this conference. First, I think our emphasis should be on ageing as a life long process rather than dividing the population into specific age groups ending up with old age as a fixed condition. The use of old age dependency ratios comparing people over 65 years with those between 16 and to 64 is can be misleading and even ageist. The implication is that nobody beyond 64 is economically active and everyone between 16 and 64 is. This is patent nonsense and we must develop more accurate indicators of dependency and economic activity. Secondly, the invisibility of older people in much research is a major cause for concern. The upper age limit of 65 years in many statistics, especially in education and employment, clearly reflects the lack of interest in what people over 65 do or want or need.

Ageing is a process shared by people of all ages and it is in all our interests to make it as positive an experience as possible. Ageing is also a personal experience, which varies enormously according to a person's and other characteristics such as gender. Instead of regarding older people as an homogenous group, our policies and services should be much more sensitive to the different life expectancies of men and women and, as we heard today, to the reasons for their differing participation rates in the educational system. Such differences are even starker among older people groups, where there are hardly any men at all.

In fact, chronological age is often the least important issue when considering the causes of inequality and disadvantage, with gender, disability, ethnicity and social class much more important in relation to opportunities as well as barriers. However chronological age assumes much greater importance when considering ageism – a common experience for far too many older people. There seems to be a widespread assumption that all people over a certain age are too slow or limited to learn anything new. This is not only incorrect and unfair, but it can also be damaging. Some older people are so affected by ageism, that they internalise these negative attitudes and even live down to them. The problem is that chronological age is so often used as a proxy for ability or lack of ability influenced largely, I suspect, by fear of one's own ageing. So we use birthdays as a ready-reckoner to judge people without having to take into account their experience, knowledge, skills and other personal qualities.

If we are to improve the educational and employment opportunities for older people, we have to change our attitudes and policies towards them. Let me end with two practical examples. The first example is the gulf between ageing and disability. It is extraordinary how someone can be a person with disabilities for 65 years and then at 65 they suddenly become an old person with different services and different entitlements provided by different bodies operating under different legislation. If we are to meet the needs of the increasing number of people with disabilities surviving into later life, then we have to develop more integrated policies and services.

Secondly, we need to develop policies and services on caring and recognise that we all give and receive care at different stages of our lives and that much of the caring is provided by the same people, women, as mothers, grandmothers, wives and daughters. In the talks on Sustaining Progress, we encouraged Government to include caring as one of the special initiatives. Initially it was confined to childcare but gradually expanded to caring throughout life cycle, for children but also for people with disabilities and older people. The initiative has not yet achieved much, not for the want of trying but for the lack of ability to develop integrated rather than separated services based on the life cycle approach that integrates rather than separates us. We could even adopt this integrated approach to education by making life long learning a reality.

## Itayi Viriri

### Irish Refugee Council

I would like to comment on some of the issues discussed with a few reflections of my own.

It was interesting to hear Shira Mehlman talking about what FÁS is doing at the moment in regard to equality proofing exercises. This took me back four years to Limerick, when I was trying to get a job. I went to FÁS and gave them certificates of all my qualifications, education level and so on. A few weeks later I got letters sent through FÁS inviting me to apply for two jobs. Both were cleaning jobs: one in a big hotel and the other in a hospital. I was, to say the least, very surprised as the jobs had nothing to do with the qualifications and previous experience that I had presented to FÁS. At least they could have got me a cleaning job in a newspaper office where I could have wangled some access to the editor. But thankfully, due to dogged persistence, I later did manage to land a job in a local newspaper. That was my experience with FÁS at that time and I do not know whether things have changed since then. To be fair though, most immigrants who come here naively think that because they are well educated and qualified they will land the job of their dreams. They quickly learn otherwise.

A significant number of refugees who come to Ireland have postgraduate qualifications and relevant professional experience. I came here with postgraduate qualifications, but that was still not good enough for some employers, who routinely turned me down. Thankfully, I did eventually get into the profession that I wanted – journalism. Though brief, this stint in the newsroom served as a good launch pad into the Irish workplace. Still, I felt I needed to prove myself. If the excuse was that they did not recognise my qualifications, I would gain those that they recognised. So I enrolled at Trinity to do an M.Phil. You can only do so much – after that it is up to those with the desire and power to make the necessary changes and treat immigrants fairly and equally in the job market. I would be very interested to hear more about the equality initiative in FÁS and how it could challenge the factors which block refugees from accessing employment for which they are qualified. There is, for example, an African man who is now an Irish citizen. He was a well respected vet in his own country and before coming here, had carried out what he thought was sufficient research with a view to taking up the profession in Ireland. He failed. Interestingly enough, at least one Irish college has used his work in teaching vet students.

Apart from language barriers, non-recognition of non-Irish qualifications and previous professional experience, racism and discrimination are still very significant reasons why immigrants (especially darker skinned ones) are turned down for jobs. There is a well circulated story about an African IT specialist who personally took his application package to the organisation. Having handed over his application and left the office, he realised that he had left his umbrella in that office. He returned to find not only his umbrella, but also his application sitting snugly in a dustbin. The more pragmatic immigrants would point to the treatment of Travellers in Ireland as a strong enough reason not to be too optimistic about the fight against racism and discrimination, but there is always hope with organisations like The Equality Authority around.

## **Kathleen Connolly**

### **NDP Gender Equality Unit**

#### **Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform**

I'd like to pick up on some of the points made earlier. Thinking about the role of the Gender Equality Unit within the National Development Plan (NDP), the decision by the government and the social partners to include gender as an NDP objective has important consequences. In trying to implement that decision the focus was straightaway on benchmarking, development of indicators and on output.

The NDP framework for gender has been particularly important not just in developing the agenda for gender equality but in creating a mechanism to sustain the earlier development achieved through legislation and sometimes through policy. It is difficult to answer the question: What if this commitment had not been included in the NDP? It is an important part of the policy process that we monitor mechanisms.

We have heard some very good examples of best practice and there is no need to repeat them. As a result of that commitment we have seen developments such as supporting parents' access to education and training through childcare supports, a really significant development of particular benefit to disadvantaged women.

I also want to pick up on outputs from the education sector. Our sister unit within the Department of Education and Science has secured a commitment that the whole school evaluation process is now picking up on gender issues and within the education system there is a gender perspective. This means looking at issues for men as well as women. There is a tendency towards flexible interpretation of gender mainstreaming within the NDP whereby some people understand it to mean developing indicators and collecting statistics. We have to ensure there is a focus on removing barriers as well. While we now see lots of new statistics around gender equality, the link is often not made between what those statistics are telling us and the need for action. My concern is that statistics are part of the mainstreaming picture but we must not place too much reliance on them.



## Rachel Doyle

### National Women's Council of Ireland

I welcome today's conference and I think it is extremely important that discussions on active participation and outcome in relation to VET and labour market programmes are held within a framework of equality and rights as opposed to solely an economics framework. Today has been really useful in providing the space to do that. It has helped us to look at strategies to ensure these programmes reflect the lives and the realities of the people and communities they target.

The discussion today is also very timely in that with unprecedented economic growth there has been a marked increase in women's participation in the labour force. That participation has gone from 40% in 1994 to 56% in 2004. We need to look at the kind of experience women have when they join the workforce, the jobs they hold and the kind of work they do. By 2002, 56% of those returning to work entered the services sector, with just 9% holding professional positions. It is very difficult to talk about the general position of women in relation to participation in VET and employment programmes, given they are half the population and are not an homogenous group. Differences in age, ethnicity, class and levels of physical ability have a huge impact on the needs and experiences of women seeking to participate in such a programme.

Women cite a number of common difficulties and barriers to returning to employment and we have heard about many of these today. They talk about a lack of user-friendly information on their entitlements and the opportunities available. Practically all studies of women who are returning to employment or to VET programmes refer to their low self-esteem, low confidence, low aspirations and low expectations. This is particularly so for women with low levels of education, those from marginalized communities or who have been out of employment for a long time and whose skills may seem obsolete. Transport has been highlighted today as a barrier, childcare even more so; inadequate childcare is one of the most significant factors preventing women with young children from participating in such programmes and in employment. We have one of the poorest levels of childcare provision in the EU. Parents here spend approximately 20% of their earnings on childcare, compared with the EU average of 8%. There is a huge amount of work to be done there.

Eligibility criteria were also referred to as a significant barrier for many women who are not recognised in their own right by the social welfare system. The time limit and nature of many programmes does not take

account of past educational disadvantages, so that progression for a lot of women is very difficult. We mentioned the importance of equality proofing, which Niall Crowley spoke about, of placing the impact of particular communities and women experiencing disadvantage at the heart of programme design, development and implementation. The Equality Authority has done a lot of work on this in the past year, we have engaged with them on it and we welcome it. We discussed gender mainstreaming and the need for equality proofing to go hand in hand with it in order for particular groups of disadvantaged women to benefit.

The National Women's Council is calling for a publicly funded childcare infrastructure which will impact on all women aiming to enter the workforce. Consultation with community based organisations working with marginalized communities is key, as is their input into the decision making process and the design and development of programmes. Data collection and monitoring while not in themselves the answer will help as it is difficult to introduce equality proofing and see how policies and programmes impact on women or particular communities without the data and while we fail to monitor progress and outcomes.

Fáilte Ireland's training programme for instructors in equality and gender awareness is extremely progressive and very much needed, while sharing learning among institutions and agencies is absolutely crucial. It is very encouraging to hear about good practice and the fact that it is happening at the highest level and where role model organisations are being developed to share learning and to influence other organisations. In Ireland 23% of women are at risk of falling below the poverty line, the highest rate in Europe and we still have significant gender gaps in earnings with women earning 15-22% less than men while 47% of lone parents live in poverty. Our key challenge, from a woman's perspective, is to ensure that provision in VET and employment programmes reaches those women in most need so they can take up opportunities that are rewarding, offer progression and move them away from poverty, the risk of poverty and social exclusion.

## Bríd O'Brien

### Pavee Point Travellers' Centre

I would like to cover a few points raised during the course of the day. If you target particular groups, there is a danger Travellers will experience exclusion because of their group and collective identity, something that impacts on them in different ways. They are no more a homogenous group than, say, people with disabilities or older people.

A range of agencies, institutions and players now use the term cultural diversity, something they would not have dreamt of five or ten years ago. Very often people think of diversity solely in terms of the new communities now living in Ireland rather than the diversity that has been here for centuries. Unfortunately, when some agencies talk about cultural diversity and you raise issues around Traveller culture, they say they will deal with that separately. It is evident they do not want to deal with it at all; and that prejudice against Travellers is still widely accepted within Irish society.

It is interesting that the issue of care is now on the agenda because of the economic imperative for it: either because people want to get more women back into the labour market or to maintain existing employees in the market place. I note this as several speakers have noted the need to put forward the business case for diversity. That is all well and good and sometimes you have to pitch what you are saying so that people will listen to it. But, the difficulty is that the interests or concerns of the more powerful players are often taken on board rather than those of the excluded communities.

One speaker noted that interest groups may need to change their expectations of how they interplay with policy makers and providers. This presumes there is equality and equal power and resources between the state and those interest groups when in reality there is a huge differential. We would argue that those with the greater power have the greater responsibility and if equality is to become an integral part of Irish society, if social inclusion is to become a reality, then those with the greater power have to move and change. They have to do this not just because it is in their own interest to do so but because it is for the greater good of society. They have to initiate significant changes to bring about inclusion and not expect those on the margins of society to change their expectation in the hope they might be included.

There are inconsistencies across the policy domain in Irish society. It was great to hear that Fáilte Ireland is working on the issue of cultural diversity.

But I was surprised when I saw some of the bodies working on this issue, because they are the very groups that lobbied against the Equal Status Act and tried to undermine it when it was introduced. They were also successful in moving certain types of inequality cases from the Equality Tribunal to the District Court.

We need to be going towards a truly inclusive and equal society. It will be hard work but we must try to do it because as the 2002 Census highlighted, the statistics facing Travellers and other marginalized communities are horrific. This is now a wealthy country, we have all the necessary resources but we lack the drive and commitment to really make the change necessary for greater equality. We have started on the journey, let's put in a lot more hard work to try and get further down that road.









Barcode to be  
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### Equality Studies Unit

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