

Economic Development Committee EDC-15-00(p9)

Date: 18 October 2000

Venue: Conference Room 1, National Assembly for Wales Building

Title: EQUAL Community Initiative

Purpose

1. This paper encloses the draft GB EQUAL Community Initiative Programme (CIP) document which is being placed before the Committee for information (EDC-15-00 (p10)). The draft CIP was submitted to the European Commission on 15 September 2000. No action is required on the part of the Committee at this stage.

Background

2. EQUAL is one of 4 new European Community Initiatives for the period 2000 – 2006. The Department for Education and Employment is leading the development of EQUAL on a GB wide basis, in consultation with the National Assembly for Wales and the Scottish Executive. The overall aim of EQUAL is to promote new ways of combating all forms of discrimination and inequalities in connection with the labour market, through trans-national co-operation. The initiative has a strong emphasis on dissemination and influencing the policy making process. It will have a particular focus of equality issues associated with gender; disability; race or ethnic origin; religion or belief; age and sexual orientation. The initiative will also support the social and vocational integration of asylum seekers.

Consultation

3. A wide-ranging consultation on the scope of the EQUAL initiative was conducted during July and early August. The National Assembly managed the consultation in Wales, on behalf of the DfEE, and questionnaires were sent to over 100 organisations across Wales. In addition, an informal Equal Liaison Group (ELG) has been established in Wales. Its role is to advise on the development and implementation of the initiative in Wales and it met for the first time on 10 August. Membership of the ELG is outlined at Annex 2.

Scope of the GB Programme

4. The National Assembly and the Scottish Executive were given the opportunity to comment on earlier versions of the draft CIP.
5. Key points for the Committee to note are:
 - Overall Purpose of the Initiative – to test new ways of delivering policy priorities for tackling discrimination in the labour market within the context of the European Employment Strategy. The Initiative will help to inform future policy development and encourage the sharing of good practice between Member States through trans-national co-operation. The intention is to incorporate successful innovation into mainstream Structural Fund programmes;
 - The Target Groups (Chapter 1.1) – there will be a particular emphasis on tackling discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. The initiative will also include action to help the social and vocational integration of asylum seekers;
 - Thematic Working (Chapter 2.3) -. The initiative is structured around 9 thematic fields Eight of these are defined in the context of the four pillars of the European Employment Strategy (EES) and include facilitating access to the labour market; combating racism and xenophobia; opening up the business creation process to all; strengthening the social economy; promoting lifelong learning and inclusive work practices; supporting the adaptability of firms; reducing gender gaps and supporting job desegregation . Equal Opportunities is also being addressed as a cross-cutting issue. The ninth theme covers the specific needs of asylum seekers.
 - Framework for Action (Chapters 2.3 & 3.3) – this CIP sets out the UK policy context and the scope for further/innovative work under EQUAL, broken down by theme. Having consulted relevant policy divisions within the Assembly, together with the EQUAL Liaison Group, there is agreement that the priorities contained in this section are sufficiently enabling to allow us the flexibility to address the issues which are of particular interest in tackling labour market discrimination and social disadvantage in Wales
 - Development Partnerships (Chapter 3.4.1) – EQUAL projects will be prepared and implemented by 'Development Partnerships. Each partnership must have at least one transnational partner. Partnerships can be constituted on either a geographical or sectoral (thematic) basis. The emphasis will be on developing innovative ways of delivering employment policies addressing inequality and discrimination issues rather than mainstream delivery, which is catered for under the structural fund programmes.
 - Framework for Implementation (Chapter 4.1) – this chapter describes the process by which EQUAL will be implemented in Great Britain. It is proposed that the National

Assembly and the Scottish Parliament will act as joint managing authorities for the implementation of the programme. A Wales Management Committee will oversee the implementation in Wales, reporting to the GB Monitoring Committee. It has also been agreed that there will be a separate Wales Implementation Plan, supported by a ring-fenced allocation of resources. Discussion are currently ongoing with the DfEE over the exact allocation. WEFO will administer the programme in Wales, but some activities (eg thematic networking) will be organised on a GB wide basis);

- Timetable for Implementation – The draft CIP was submitted to the European Commission on 15 September. Negotiations with the Commission are due to be completed by February 2001, with the Programme expected to get underway shortly thereafter.

Next steps

4. Following consultation with the EQUAL Liaison Group and partner organisations, a first draft of the Wales Implementation Plan will be submitted to both the Economic Development Committee and the Equality of Opportunities Committee for consideration in December. The Wales Implementation Plan will then be submitted to the GB EQUAL Monitoring Committee for formal approval early in the New Year.

European Affairs Division

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