

**Autumn 2009**

**Promoting Employability for Marginalised Groups**



A strange thing to do one might assume, in a time of economic turbulence, limited economic growth and increasing unemployment. However, the Equality Commission is committed to encouraging employers to promote employability initiatives for those marginalised groups less able to access employment in Northern Ireland.

The Commission is realistic about the short and medium term opportunities available, however we view the increased employability of those from marginalised groups as a longer term strategy which will play a key role in addressing inequality in Northern Ireland and assist a growing economy to meet its labour needs.

It should be remembered that in our most recent period of economic growth, many employers had difficulty in accessing the workers they needed. Arguably, some of our companies might have been forced to relocate were it not for the migrant workers who came to Northern Ireland. We anticipate that as our society moves into positive economic and employment growth, we will once again face the challenge of developing a workforce with the skills necessary to facilitate that growth.

This briefing outlines a number of events being held in partnership with others to promote employability for those having difficulty in accessing the labour market.

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## Support for Employers

It is generally accepted that improving access to, and progression within employment is seen in public policy as a key driver of economic and social wellbeing and presents a key route to improved social mobility and inclusion as well as a route out of poverty.

In Northern Ireland, successive government policies and strategies have repeatedly stressed the importance of improving access to, and progress within, employment, most recently in the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government 2008-2011.

The Commission aims to develop and implement a programme of partnership working to raise awareness among employers and to promote the employability of those having difficulty accessing the labour market <sup>[1]</sup>.

To this end, in March 2009 the Equality Commission organised a Conference entitled 'Bridge the Gap – Improving Access to Employment', the aim of which was to improve access to employment by providing a networking opportunity for employers and community groups. The Conference brought together 150 employers from across the public and private sectors with representatives of community and statutory organisations that seek training and employability opportunities for marginalised people. These organisations included Gingerbread, Simon Community NI, Disablement Advisory Service and Belfast Interface Project among others.

Employers had the opportunity to discuss the employment support programmes offered by the community and statutory organisations and to listen to examples of good practice offered by other employers. Those working to provide training and employment opportunities for marginalised people were informed of the potential opportunities that employers could provide.

As follow on to the Conference employers fed back that they would find it useful to have further opportunities to network with groups representing people who are having difficulty accessing employment. Consequently we have organised a series of Employability Seminars which are discussed on page 3 of this briefing.

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[1] Equality Commission for Northern Ireland Key Inequalities Paper 2007

## Lunch Time Seminars October 2009 – March 2010

The Equality Commission is facilitating a series of free lunch time seminars to help employers develop employability strategies.

Each seminar will promote a range of employability initiatives and will provide advice for employers on how to integrate them into their business.

Anne Reid from the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Rehabilitation of Offenders will address the audience to discuss their Job Track Programme.



Laura McCartney from Disability Action will talk about positive actions to recruit people with disabilities and the sources of advice and support for employers.



Maeve McKeag will introduce employability projects set up by the Gasworks Employment Matching Service (GEMS). They work with employers via their 'Language in Work' programme and provide cultural awareness and diversity training for businesses.



Jacinta Totten from Include Youth will introduce the 'Give and Take Scheme' which aims to integrate young people (aged 16-21) into employment, by working with employers to provide support and learning opportunities.



Julie Cullen will discuss An Munia Tober's employability and economic development projects and share first hand experiences of Travellers trying to enter the labour market.



Each seminar will run from 12pm – 2pm and lunch will be provided.

DATE	VENUE
15 October	Malone House, Belfast
11 November	The Signal Centre, Bangor
14 January	Lough Neagh Discovery Centre, Craigavon
10 February	The Dunsilly Hotel, Antrim
24 March	The Silverbirch Hotel, Omagh

To register your attendance please call 028 90 500 610 or email [edtraining@equalityni.org](mailto:edtraining@equalityni.org)

It is anticipated that a further series of seminars will be organised, which will build upon this existing framework and range of speakers. Details of future events will be available on our web site in due course.

## Equality Focus -Promoting Employability In Northern Ireland



**By Jacinta Totten, Employment Liaison Co-ordinator, Give and Take Programme, Include Youth.**

Misjudged, Misread, Misrepresented or Missed Out?

For generations stereotypes have often portrayed young people as threatening, aggressive, irresponsible, lazy or disrespectful. These negative stereotypes label and disempower young people by creating a context where they are assessed on the basis of their age and background, rather than their personal characteristics.

Stereotypes, particularly of care-experienced and disadvantaged young people, limit equality of opportunity and decision making capability within communities, at school, work and in wider society.



Since 1989 Include Youth's Give and Take scheme has been primarily working with young people aged 16-21 who have been in care and facilitates these young people in being placed with employers for work experience. The Project aims to redress to some extent the negative imbalance of poverty, abandonment, disability, neglect or abuse suffered by these young people in their earlier lives.

Give and Take has three main components; training, personal development and work experience. We are always looking for employers from all sectors and industries and across every region in Northern Ireland to offer work experience to young people of even 1 or 2 days. We also encourage employers to offer longer term part-time placements, with the ongoing support of the Give and Take Project Worker. There is no cost at all to the placement provider.



The involvement of employers can even be limited to providing tours of their premises to small groups of young people and providing talks about workplaces or careers...really any means at all of raising awareness of how their place of work operates.

The focus of any of these activities is to encourage these young people to break the cycle of exclusion and challenge their self-perception through involvement in the world of work.

This anchor provides stability in other aspects of the young person's life such as accommodation, relationships, health and lifestyle. On leaving the scheme many participants have gained paid work or have chosen to return to education. Either way, the experience can be life changing.

In the words of some of the young people who have participated on the Give and Take Programme:

*"I know now that I want to get a job in this area of work and have applied to do a course in retail at my local college. For the first time in my life I can see a clear path ahead"* – **Joanne**

*"The Give and Take Scheme has made me feel better about myself and I have had a lot of good experiences. I hope a lot more young people will benefit the way I have"* - **Sean**

We need a range of work experience opportunities throughout Northern Ireland so if you feel that you or your organisation can help please contact your nearest Give and Take office:

### **Belfast**

Include Youth/Give & Take Scheme Headquarters  
Alpha House  
3 Rosemary Street  
Belfast  
BT1 1QA  
Tel: 028 9031 1007

### **Armagh**

Give & Take Scheme  
19 Railway Street  
Armagh  
BT61 7HP  
Tel: 028 3252 8899

### **Ballymena**

Give & Take Scheme  
25 Castle Street  
Ballymena  
BT43 7BT  
Tel: 028 2563 8140

### **Derry**

Give & Take Scheme  
Tracey House  
29 Clarendon Street  
Derry  
BT48 7ER  
Tel: 028 7127 2760



**By Lydia Lynas, Head of Employment and Skills Service, The Orchardville Society**

The Orchardville Society is a voluntary organisation that operates within South and East Belfast offering specialist employment services to young people and adults with learning disabilities and Autistic Spectrum Disorder. The Orchardville Society receives funding from various sources including ESF, DEL, BHSCT and Big Lottery to deliver a range of programmes designed to enhance employability and assist individuals to gain and retain employment. During 2009 over 250 people accessed services attending a combination of work experience and vocational training. A significant percentage progressed into employment.



Last year over 120 employers offered opportunities to service users and took part in disability awareness training offered free of charge by the Orchardville Society. In addition many employers support the social economy enterprises managed by the Orchardville Society including the Orchardville Business Centre and Edgumbe Catering Services.

The Employment and Skills Service recently received funding to develop two new challenging and innovative projects. An Employer Taskforce funded as part of the ESF programme is comprised of a number of strategic employers that employ individuals across Belfast and Northern Ireland. Representatives include All State, Belfast Health & Social Care Trust, Belfast City Council, Botanic Inns Ltd and Translink as well as Business in the Community (Chair) and the Equality Commission.

The group has been established to primarily examine the area of corporate social responsibility in relation to the employment of people with disabilities. The group will have an opportunity to benchmark with each other regarding best practice as well as with counterparts within the island of Ireland and Europe. The work of the group will be disseminated throughout Northern Ireland and beyond when the project ends in 2011 and a best practice guide will be produced to accompany this.

The second new development is Project ABLE (Autism: Building Links to Employment) which has attracted funding from the Big Lottery for a period of four years. The project will offer specialist career guidance as well as practical support to assist young people and adults with Autistic Spectrum Disorder prepare for and enter employment. The Orchardville Society as lead partner will work in partnership with NOW to deliver a Belfast wide service offering opportunities to young people and adults from the age of 16. A keen focus of the project is to work within special and mainstream schools in the Belfast area as well as with adults with an ASD diagnosis interested in securing employment.

If you are interested in offering employment opportunities to someone with a learning disability or ASD please contact Lydia Lynas at [lydia.lynas@orchardville.com](mailto:lydia.lynas@orchardville.com) or on 90 732326 for further information.

If you would like to learn more about the services offered within social economy please contact [alison.wilson@orchardville.com](mailto:alison.wilson@orchardville.com) at the above number or alternatively visit the website for more information: [www.orchardville.com](http://www.orchardville.com)

## Training Opportunities

The Employment Development Division has responsibility for the provision of equality training to employers. This training is delivered through a prearranged schedule of training programmes. Training topics include general equality awareness, harassment, disability, race, sex equality and age.

This year, the addition of two half day training sessions entitled '[Affirmative and Positive Action – A guide for Employers](#)' will enhance our commitment to encourage employers to promote employment opportunities for those under-represented in the workforce.

The sessions will outline the positive and affirmative action provisions of equality legislation in Northern Ireland and explain how employers can, and in some cases must, use these provisions to address under-representations in the workforce. The sessions will provide guidance for employers on developing affirmative and positive action plans.

Further information on how to register for these sessions and all of our free training programmes can be found on our web site.

**[www.equalityni.org](http://www.equalityni.org)**

To encourage employers to promote employability initiatives for those marginalised groups less able to access employment in Northern Ireland, the Commission is currently developing a resource for employers which will provide details of employability projects throughout the Province.

If you work in, or know of, an organisation which addresses employability issues for marginalised groups, and would like to be included in this resource, please contact;

**Catriona Reilly**

**Employment Development Division**

**Phone: 028 90 890 890**

**Email: [edenquiries@equalityni.org](mailto:edenquiries@equalityni.org)**

**Textphone: 028 90 500 589**