

1.1 Equal at Work

Equal at Work is one of 21 projects operating in Ireland between 2001 and 2004 under the EU EQUAL Programme. The project is led by the Dublin Employment Pact and it aims to develop new and more inclusive models of recruitment and in-work progression. Equal at Work comes under the 'adaptability' pillar of the EQUAL Programme. The project involves 48 partner organisations from the public, private and community and voluntary sectors. The partners operate through four 'sites' where specific initiatives are piloted. Two of these sites are in the public sector, one is in the private sector and one is in the community and voluntary sector.

1.2 Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland

The Community and Voluntary sector in Ireland is a large sector with a paid workforce of over 32,000 (1995), and in 1999 received funding of over €1.2 billion from the Irish State and EU sources. The sector is very diverse, ranging from small community based projects with one or two staff, to very large, national voluntary organisations. *The Government White Paper on Supporting Voluntary Activity (2000)* recognises that the community and voluntary sector in Ireland not only complements and supplements State service provision but is the dominant or sole provider in particular social service areas. The rapid growth of the sector over the past twenty years has meant that this development has sometimes been ad hoc and has led to difficulties in defining and negotiating with the sector as a whole. Despite this, the sector has a significant input into the development of social policy and it acts as an effective advocate for many issues. Organisations in the sector come together under the Community and Voluntary Pillar of Social Partnership to participate in the development and monitoring of national agreements. In considering the issues of recruitment and progression within the context of EQUAL in Ireland, it was felt that there was an opportunity to address these issues within the Community and Voluntary sector and to examine our role as employers and our systems for promoting equality and diversity within our own organisations.

1.3 Community and Voluntary sector site of Equal at Work

The community and voluntary sector site has examined existing HR practices in the sector and identified the factors influencing good practice in terms of recruitment and progression. The site also looked at the relationship between Community and Voluntary organisations and the Government Departments or agencies which fund them. While much evidence exists on the variety of HR practice in organisations in this sector and on the many and varied types of agreements of funders and therefore differing terms and conditions for workers, much of this information was anecdotal and not formally documented. Equal at Work set out to examine these issues in more detail.

1.4 Overview of Research Carried Out

Two pieces of research were carried out by the Community and Voluntary Sector Site. The pieces of research were the following:

1. The first aimed to identify existing HR practice in relation to promoting equality and diversity through systems of recruitment and progression within the C&V sector. It also identified barriers to the further development of good practice in these areas.
2. The second looked at the impact of funding mechanisms and reporting arrangements on the HR practices of C&V organisations.

- Both pieces of research were carried out with a view to documenting and collecting data particularly around HR issues impacting on equality and diversity in organisations in the sector.
- The ultimate aim of the project is to raise awareness of these issues and to lobby for change both within the organisations themselves and within the Government Departments and Agencies which fund them.
- A training module is currently being developed on the issue of equality and diversity in HR for Community and Voluntary organisations. This will be delivered as part of National College of Ireland's course on Management in the Community and Voluntary Sector.

76 organisations were surveyed in total. All of these were based in Dublin although a large number had a national remit. Both pieces of research involved written questionnaires, with interviews and focus groups being used to get more depth and detail on some of the responses.

2.1 Key Findings

This piece of research was carried out by the Ballymun Job Centre in conjunction with Equal at Work. A total of 180 organisations were circulated with a postal questionnaire in April 2003. 40 organisations responded (22%). In September 2003, a focus group was held with 10 organisations to get more in-depth information on a number of issues raised.

Profile of organisations

- All organisations employed full time staff and 75% employed part time staff
- Although the organisations surveyed were based in the greater Dublin area, the majority of respondents held a national remit (68%).

Statement of Policy

- 47% of organisations did not have a written statement of policy on issues including Equal Opportunities, work/life balance, staff recruitment, promoting equality and diversity, volunteer policy, staff training. Despite this, the organisations had established practice in many of these areas. Of those organisations that did not have written statements on any of the above policies, over half of them cited lack of staff and time resources as the main barriers to putting the specified policy in place.

Recruitment practices

- When a job becomes vacant or a new position is created within the organisation, most respondents had well defined recruitment practices in place. 88% drew up a new job description or reviewed the existing one, 73% said a job analysis is undertaken and 78% drew up a person specification.

Promoting Diversity within the Organisation

- When asked whether the organisation had a specific policy aimed at the recruitment of marginalised groups, some 28% did in relation to economically disadvantaged (including long-term unemployed) and a further 20% did in relation to women.

- When asked what the main barrier was to recruitment / training and development of excluded groups, the main reason (40%) cited was that the organisation was too small or lacked the resources to provide the necessary support.

Staff Promotion and Progression

- Some 35% of organisations said that no opportunities existed for staff promotion. The main reason cited was the size of the organisation and all of the organisations with fewer than five employees fell into this category. Almost half of respondents (45%) said that limited opportunities for progression existed within the organisation.
- Almost all organisations (94%) used some form of employee performance indicators. Overall, participants in the focus group felt that the development of a fair and effective system of staff appraisal was slow in the sector. The constraints of funding for training were also highlighted. In many organisations, funding for staff training is available only to staff who have low education and skill levels (eg, Community Employment scheme workers). It was suggested that this is an equality issue for other workers.

Scheme Workers and Volunteer Policy

- Of those organisations who had workers on Government funded employment schemes, over half said the main barrier to progression for this group was a lack of specific experience or qualifications for posts (26% of total respondents).
- Forty five per cent of respondents employ staff on a voluntary basis. The main barrier cited to employing voluntary staff was the lack of time and space resources necessary to train, manage and supervise a volunteer workforce (38%).

Staff Training

- All of the organisations that responded made some provision for financial assistance and/or time off with pay in relation to training. A high proportion of full time staff are eligible for financial assistance and/or time off with pay in relation to induction (95%), attending conferences / workshops / lectures / seminars (85%), one-off training (80%), on-the-

job training (72%) and certified courses (57%).

- The focus group participants noted that, in general, lack of resources is a major constraint on staff training opportunities within the Community and Voluntary sector. Most organisations tend to rely on staff coming in with the necessary skills for the job.

2.2 Recommendations

1. There is a need for information, guidance, support and resources, for relevant personnel, in the development of written staff policies relating to the promotion of equality and diversity within recruitment and career development. In addition the same supports should be in place to ensure these policies are equality proofed.
2. The relevance of the business case for equality and diversity, beyond its ethical and legal dimensions, and including the economic imperative to the sector, should be actively promoted. Particular issues and barriers pertaining to the Community and Voluntary sector should be addressed.
3. Baseline research should be undertaken on provision for disability access, and related awareness raising and lobbying within the sector.
4. There is a need for awareness raising and capacity building in the area of work/life balance policy. Specific issues include the need to be equitable in the application of policies across all members of staff.
5. There is a need to investigate and develop good practice in competency based recruitment practices for the sector. For this to work, viable support systems need to be put in place for staff, to encourage professional development.
6. There is need for the sector to be more innovative in its approach and to find ways of opening up options to those who may be excluded. Staff involved in recruiting should think creatively about a job before it is advertised – e.g. consider taking on a worker at a lower level than actually needed but taking account of the training and mentoring supports they would need to up-skill.
7. There is a need for research looking at the reality of progression within individual organisations, within the sector, between different strands within the sector and between the sector and the public and private sectors to investigate perceived barriers and develop mechanisms for overcoming these.
8. Exploration of lateral job enrichment strategies within, across and between sectors such as mentoring and the development of career pathways.
9. Strategies to be developed for career progression pathways for scheme workers and volunteers linking existing prior life and work experience with training and other interventions for entry level positions within the sector and within the public and private sector.
10. Quality human resource training (and updating on good practice) for non HR managers should be developed.
11. A comprehensive equality awareness training programme is needed.
12. Funding for staff training must be provided and ring fenced, within annual funding allocations.

Members of the Community and Voluntary sector site of Equal at Work:

- Dublin Employment Pact
- Exchange House Travellers Service
- INOU
- Southside Partnership
- IMPACT
- Rural Dublin LEADER Company
- ICTU
- Dublin Inner City Partnership
- SICCCA
- KWCD Partnership
- Focus Ireland
- Forum of People with Disabilities
- The Linkage Programme
- National College of Ireland
- Merchant's Quay Ireland
- Fingal Community Forum
- Ballymun Job Centre
- Co-operation Fingal

3.1 Introduction

This research was carried out in March 2003 by Unique Perspectives in conjunction with Equal at Work. A sample of 64 organisations was selected to reflect the main categories and types of organisations in the Community and Voluntary sector. 33 of these organisations took part in the research. The research involved a postal questionnaire and some follow-up interviews.

3.2 Key Findings

Funding experience of respondents

- The findings suggest that the community and voluntary sector can be seen as a continuum from smaller community based bodies at one end of the spectrum (typically with less than 10 staff and with one funder) to larger voluntary bodies at the other end of the range (this group has more staff - usually over 25 and received funding from a number of sources).
- In respect to sources of funding, 8 out of 10 C&V sector organisations receive funding from more than one source.
- An analysis of core funding (funding for core activities including staff and administration) showed that a significant number of groups in the study exhibited more than one core funder.
- 40% of all funding did not specifically provide for annual increments, 60% did not provide directly for pensions and two thirds of funders did not provide for recruitment and advertising costs, training or staff supervision. This indicates that, in most cases, HR practices and employment benefits are not outwardly factored into the funding of C&V sector groups by public sector funders.
- The decision to pay for these costs is mostly at the discretion of the C&V organisation itself with little if any direction coming from the funding body. It is unlikely that C&V organisations can cover these costs from existing budgets. The availability of employment benefits in the C&V sector therefore lags behind that in the public sector. The lack of support for these HR practices is also at odds with the aspiration in the White Paper on the Voluntary Sector that there will be a 'more complete and comprehensive' funding package.

- The receipt and duration of funding is ad hoc overall. This contrasts with the White Paper's contention that funding transfers to the C&V sector would become more structured during the implementation of its recommendations.
- There are numerous reporting and accountability systems in operation under the major funding systems. There is considerable variety in these systems, even under one funder, where such a funder can provide two or more funding streams and/or programmes.
- The research indicates that the funding experience of C&V groups limits their ability to provide employment conditions for their staff in a manner comparable to those in the public sector.

Working Conditions and HR practices in the C&V Sector

- 83% of groups indicated that they used pay scales of some sort. In one third of cases, the use of pay scales was determined by the funder directly. The remaining groups used pay scales at their own discretion. As a good number of organisations receive funding from more than one funder, this meant that, in some cases, staff in the same organisation are on different pay scales.
- Of the two thirds that used pay scales at their own discretion, over 70% based their pay scales on those used under the general civil service or Health Board grades.
- The staff profile of the organisations indicates that women make up 76% of full time staff, which is significantly higher than the national gender profile of the workforce.
- While 100% of staff in the sector are employed under standard contracts of employment, the renewal of the vast majority of these contracts is wholly dependent on the receipt of funding each year.
- The main challenges in attracting and retaining staff cited by C&V groups were low pay, limited career and promotion prospects, insecure employment, poor non pay benefits, short term contracts and comparatively difficult working conditions.
- The profile of union membership in the sector is closer to that of the private sector and unlike the high union membership in the public sector.
- The C&V sector does not exhibit equal overall terms,

conditions and HR practices to those generic to public service employment.

- In general, C&V sector organisations do not have sufficient funding with which to pay for employment costs and HR practices. This leads to prioritisation on the part of C&V organisations which acts to the detriment of HR practices and staff/employee benefits.
- Even where staff in the sector are placed on pay scales for equivalent positions in the public sector, they are most likely to be on the lower rungs of such scales and will not be in such positions long enough to move up the scale to the long service increment point.
- In terms of basic pay and non-pay employment benefits and HR practices staff in the C&V sector are disadvantaged compared to workers in similar positions in the State sector.

3.3 Recommendations

1. A platform of community and voluntary groups should address pay and working conditions in the sector. This can be based in Dublin initially and can be extended nationally in the medium term. The rationale is to develop some consensus among groups in the sector on these issues so as to enhance the prospects of collective negotiation with all the relevant Government Departments and the White Paper Unit in the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.
2. Following from the above, a coalition of interests in the C&V sector should begin a dialogue with the funders around the issues of pay and working conditions. This should begin with the Dept. of CRGA, but also include other mainstream departments and agencies such as the Health Boards and FAS, which are significant funders to the sector.
3. Meetings should be arranged with interim funders and government departments to assess their familiarity with the White Paper and its implications for their work. The focus of these meetings and contacts would be to explore what changes the various agencies and departments are planning in regard to funding on foot of the White Paper.
4. Minimum standards and protocols around employment conditions and HR practices in the community and voluntary sector should be developed in the context of funding. In other words, all C&V groups could adopt such minimum standards

and protocols and this should form the basis of all funding arrangements from the State sector that support the employment of staff.

5. A dialogue should be initiated with the main and/or appropriate unions on the basis of this report and in view of negotiating and implementing the recommendations above. This dialogue should look at strengthening the voice of the sector to increase the collective bargaining power and representation of staff employed in the sector.
6. At a more practical level, efforts should be made to speed the standardisation of accountability and reporting mechanisms across the C&V sector, and therefore in the Statutory sector. This would have the effect of freeing up considerable resources, both in the sector and for the State.
7. In cases of smaller employers that do not have HR functions, HR guidelines, which are generic to the sector should be developed and used as a minimum by such groups. Such guidelines are already in place with some funders, however, it is envisaged that these should be agreed and applied universally in the sector as a minimum.
8. In line with the benchmarking process between the Statutory and private sectors, a similar process is required for the C&V sector and the State sector. Such a process should achieve equal pay and equal working conditions between employees in both sectors.
9. In a similar vein, employers in the community and voluntary sector have the same responsibilities as employers in all sectors. In order to ensure good practice and support for staff, training (along with other factors) is one element that, due to funding limitations, is not generally provided. This needs urgently to be addressed.

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Community and Voluntary Sector Site

Summary report of research findings and recommendations

