



Belfast Area Partnerships

‘From Challenge to Change’

Employability in Belfast

Long Gallery, Parliament Buildings

10th November 2005

From Challenge to Change

B.A.P.s Employability Event - Stormont 10/11/05

Introduction

The Belfast Area Partnerships' Seminar on Employability was held on the 10 November 2005 in the Long Gallery in Parliament Buildings. The event was hosted by Nelson McCausland, M.L.A., who opened the seminar by welcoming everyone.

Sammy Douglas, Chairman of B.A.P.s thanked Nelson for hosting the seminar and again welcomed everyone to the event, which was part of a series of events hosted by B.A.P.s on the theme of urban regeneration. Sammy noted that there were currently a number of major initiatives within Belfast, including Titanic Quarter, Victoria Square, Laganside and the development of the Gasworks site that provided opportunities for job creation. He highlighted the importance of ensuring that everyone involved in improving employability for those in disadvantaged areas should gear up to exploit these opportunities.

Gerry Doherty, Chief Executive of South Belfast Partnership Board provided an overview of employability initiatives in Belfast. He noted that educational attainment and employability were key factors in improving social inclusion for people from disadvantaged areas. There has been an ongoing dialogue with Government Departments in recent years concerning issues surrounding unemployment and poverty and a lot of progress has been made on developing active labour market policies. One of the outcomes of this was the report of the Task Force on Unemployment and Employability. Gerry highlighted the significant contribution that the community sector has played in engaging with Government programmes to tackle barriers to employment. These included the Labour Market Intermediaries, such as Belfast GEMS in South Belfast, N.B.E.C. and the Ashton Centre in North Belfast, Stepping Stone in East Belfast, the Equal and LEAP programmes in North Belfast and the Employment Services Board and Job Assist Centres in West Belfast.

Gerry noted that, despite increases in employment and reductions in unemployment, the spatial distribution of unemployment remained static, with disadvantaged areas caught in a cycle of unemployment and deprivation and economic inactivity levels still high. Multiple barriers to employment still existed in these areas and there needs to be a balance between Government provision and local interventions.

Presentation by David Williamson, Williamson Consulting

David's presentation sought to set the scene for the main speaker by looking at some of the issues affecting unemployed people in Belfast and at some of the best practice in seeking to improve employability. The apparently strong position of the Northern Ireland economy was highlighted, noting that unemployment is now among the lowest in the European Union however, many of those who are unemployed have been so for many years and unemployment tends to be concentrated in a few small geographical areas. Evidence of skills shortages and difficulty in filling some posts has become more apparent. Low unemployment figures perhaps hide the fact that there are a substantial number of people who are economically inactive. Work in Belfast was set within the context of the European Employment Strategy which recognises that all parties have an important role to play in addressing unemployment. The strategy highlights the importance of both employees and employers being more flexible in their practices and encourages governments to address structural barriers to employment.

Local Approaches

Responsibility for addressing employability rests within the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland, whose priorities include implementing Welfare Reform, raising employability levels and developing their skills strategy. Current thinking at government level has been influenced by the Taskforce on Employability and Long-term Unemployment which has, for the first time, recognised that employability is not simply about an individual's personal attitudes or skills but is also affected by how the labour market is managed and that a range of structural aspects relating to employment also influence the likelihood of people getting jobs. The taskforce recognised the importance of working on both supply and demand sides, i.e., ensuring that people are equipped to undertake work, but also addressing the provision of work and the means by which people are recruited. Traditionally interventions have focused on the unemployed person seeking to improve their skills or attitudes and, in some cases, supporting skills development which is not directly relevant to employers' needs. The newer models of intervention have sought to address personal and structural barriers to employment by involving and influencing employers at an early stage. These newer models have often been community lead, or have at least involved partnership with the community. Recent approaches perhaps fall into two categories:

- ◆ **Intermediate Labour Markets or Transitional Employment Programmes** - which provide paid work in a real work situation allowing people to develop skills and attitudes relevant to work.
- ◆ **Labour Market Intermediaries** - which seek to address the barriers faced by unemployed people, to match them to work and sometimes provide support when they are in work.

Intermediate Labour Markets

Intermediate Labour Markets have been shown to be effective if the period of participation is sufficiently long and if they reflect and meet local employment needs and work closely with employers. In most parts of the U.K. I.L.M.s have incorporated New Deal funding with other sources of funding to create larger and better

programmes. However, in Northern Ireland traditionally New Deal has not formed part of the package. In Belfast there are currently four D.E.L. funded L.M.I. projects. It is therefore worth bearing in mind that employability needs to be addressed at three levels.

- ◆ Unemployed people need to have appropriate skills and the right attitudes
- ◆ Employers need to address any factors that make jobs unattractive or unattainable to those who are available for work
- ◆ Government needs to ensure that there are no structural barriers or no financial disincentives.

The Role Of B.A.P.s

Belfast Area Partnerships have played an important role in developing and working with new initiatives aimed at improving employability and increasing access to the labour market. B.A.P.s have shown themselves to be well placed to facilitate networking between community, statutory and private sectors, both at a small area and Belfast wide level. Due to their experience of partnership, they have made best use of partners' time by reducing overlap and have been able to engage with other partnerships at an international level. In East Belfast the Health Learning Works project has enabled long-term unemployed people to obtain jobs within the health sector which were previously hard to fill, leading to mutual benefit for both parties. In South Belfast, Belfast G.E.M.S. has operated a range of innovative programmes as a labour market intermediary and through customising programmes to meet the needs of specific employers. In North Belfast efforts have been concentrated on developing the L.E.A.P. Network which brings together the three key sectors to improve relationships and processes between addressing employability and meeting employers' needs. In West Belfast the Employment Services Board has been set up following the West Belfast and Greater Shankill Taskforce's work and is now co-ordinating a range of initiatives, including the pilot Job Assist Centres. The Belfast Area Partnerships have also worked closely with the Dublin Employment Pact to learn from them and to share experiences. A number of important challenges remain for the future:

- ◆ Government - must make sure that work pays and should support innovation and recognise the value of acting on both supply and demand sides in addressing employability.
- ◆ Employers - need to have a good understanding of long-term unemployment and a recognition that those in this position can make effective employees. There needs to be clarity about they actually need from an employee and recruitment procedures which make it possible to get the right people.
- ◆ The community - has an essential role to play in connecting long-term unemployed people with interventions that can address the barriers that face them and has the capacity to access those who would not respond to other approaches.

Presentation by Bob Marshall, Community Renewal

Bob Marshall was originally trained as a City Planner and has worked in a number of housing and employment projects in Glasgow and in London. From 1994 to 2001 he was the Director of Glasgow Works, which was one of the most innovative and effective large scale Intermediate Labour Markets, getting 500 people per year into work and developing a range of social enterprises in some of the deprived parts of Glasgow. Bob is now a Director of the Know How Company which specialises in development of community based initiatives for unemployed, disabled and excluded people and is also a Director of Community Renewal Limited. Community Renewal manages several of the Full Employment Area Initiatives in Scotland and Bob's presentation focused primarily on this work and how it has used a very down to earth and innovative approach to addressing people's employability as part of a wider lifestyle programme.

The presentation started with an analysis of the current situation. It noted that most entry level jobs are flexible, part-time, retail based or service sector and paid minimum wage. As a result those obtaining these jobs tend to be female, students or people who are prepared to travel. Older people, men, those with low skills, poor health or disability are much less likely to get entry jobs and as a result many families and communities remain in relative poverty. Bob noted that there was no shortage of programmes to address unemployment however, levels of success seem low and in general getting 25% to 35% of participants into jobs, which are often unsustainable, is considered typical. Changes in public policy have sought to encourage people back into work where possible and the development of Job Centre Plus has led to more flexibility and discretion by local advisors and greater partnership working between statutory and other agencies. By considering what motivates people, i.e. being able to support a family, feeling better about yourself and have a meaning to life, should determine how programmes are designed.

Traditional Approaches to Employability

Traditionally services for unemployed people are not particularly user friendly. People tend to want to tell their story once and be supported by the same person throughout the process, rather than be passed from one to another having to repeat their experiences over and over again. This highlights the importance of partnership working which Bob referred to as "Scottish country dance approach" where someone sticks with the same partner, even though they may dance with everyone along the row in the process. It contrasts with the "rugby ball approach" which is more typical of such services and which effectively pass the client around. Bob posed the challenge that achieving retention and progress in work requires appropriate targets, i.e., the right job not just any job; family income maximisation; and community well-being. To make a local partnership model work, resources have to be located in the right place. Effectively therefore they must be prioritised, seeking to fill gaps in provision, target groups rather than everyone and target neighbourhoods rather than everywhere.

Good Practice

Some good practice examples include:

- ◆ Independent job brokerage targeting deprived areas and low skills people. This starts by assessing the skills of the client and arranges appropriate support. A different staff member seeks out and acts on behalf of the employers. These two staff members must then negotiate on behalf of their client, i.e. the unemployed person and the employer respectively, to reach an appropriate position. The result is a better fit of the client to the job and an employer who is more likely to have a positive experience.
- ◆ Tesco's Pre-employment Training Programme, where those participating are guaranteed an interview if they complete the programme. As a result 60% to 70% of jobs go to local unemployed people.
- ◆ Glasgow Disabled Persons' Housing Service - this Intermediate Labour Market works with 15 unemployed disabled people per year recruiting them from 60 to 70 who apply to job adverts. They are given admin. and I.T. training and placed with local housing associations, estate agents, etc. Employers contribute £5,000 per person to the cost of their salary. To date 70% have got a permanent job.

Experience of I.L.M.s has shown that they are good value for money if they are well targeted to people with low confidence, no work record or people who are discriminated against in the workplace, if efforts are made to move them on at an early stage and if there is specific in-work training and appropriate placements.

Community Renewal - Foxbar

Bob went on to discuss in detail the Full Employment Area managed by Community Renewal. This has ambitious objectives and starts with small areas with low employment rates. Its intention is to work with everybody in the area until all those who can get work, get one. It seeks to get whole families into work by working with all other relevant agencies, effectively changing the whole culture of an area, i.e., making it the norm to be in work. Community Renewal works through a team of independent community animators. They knock on doors, talk to people in the streets and in the shops, get to know the communities and families and where they work and the barriers faced by people and stay with them as long as it takes to get them into work. By building trust and working with individuals they seek to develop personal plans for those people, linking them into other agencies. Efforts are made to get people into work however, this is not the initial priority and arises naturally as a result of the process. Community Renewal seeks to identify the assets within an area, rather than the deficits, and encourages people to build on the positive. It incorporates input on health, money advice, careers, employability and other areas of support. In the Foxbar area of Paisley, which has 2,000 households, the project has been in contact with 1,650 people in the last two years. 400 of those have been engaged in some form of activity (in many cases community or social activities).

Does it Work?

To date, 190 have got work and 45 have got into education or training. 84% of those who have gained work are still in work after one year. An analysis of the project has shown that it is having a substantial impact. An independent evaluation has compared the area with similar neighbouring areas over the last two years. During this period, on average there are 13% fewer unemployed people however, in the Foxbar area, there are 22% fewer unemployed in the same period. It is estimated that the programme has improved the employment rate by around 3% and that total earned income from jobs gained and sustained is around £1.25 million per year. There are also thought to be a range of community well-being outcomes such as reduced crime, better safety, improved health and a more buoyant local economy. The lessons have shown that the process works however, it does require a level of dedication from staff which is over and beyond a normal job. People have shown that they respond well to an independent friend/advocate and long-term commitment and that there is a need to work with whole families and the whole community. Participants have shown that they do not like to be referred on to other services and services need to be seamless. Of those people who still face barriers, many are health related and thought needs to be given to other ways of working with them.

The Future

Bob finished by proposing a new paradigm. He suggested a move from the existing organisational/bureaucratic structures. These tend to be categorised by solving problems through development of programmes, employing professionals to assist people and using person/client relationships. He suggests that the success of new approaches may come from an individual/creative approach which considers challenges, addresses these through development of individual paths and works with the person in an equal relationship, with the participant an active contributor throughout.

Question and Answers

The seminar ended with a question and answer session with Bob, which provoked a number of questions as follows:

Question: A representative from B.I.F.H.E. asked what role had education played in improving employability in the Glasgow model?

Answer: The education sector has not played a substantial role so far but this is developing. Community Learning Services is becoming involved in outreach work by participating in door to door networking. Work is also beginning with schools to reach young people and their families through existing contacts.

Question: A representative from Laganside asked how the Glasgow model dealt with the perceived mismatch between expectations of those who are long-term unemployed and the actual jobs that are available, and how to deal with the benefit trap?

Answer: In the Glasgow programme, most jobs that are available are entry level and are low skilled. The average wage is around £6 per hour. The programme sees this as a starting point not an end and seeks to work with people over the long-term to develop their skills and help them move on. In relation to the benefits trap, the approach in Glasgow has been to take

a collective approach, dealing with household income rather than individuals within the household, and to highlight the non monetary benefits of working.

Question: A representative from Urban II in North Belfast asked how it was possible to secure funding for the programme, given that this was a long-term approach to addressing barriers to employment? Secondly, he asked: how did the programme attract staff?

Answer: The Glasgow programme is funded on job outcomes, i.e. meeting targets for getting unemployed people into jobs. The funding is often short-term and has come from E.S.F. and Equal, among others. Now other agencies' resources are being levered in to support the programme. Recruiting staff is difficult as the jobs are demanding. 90% of the employees are women and there is a relatively high turnover of staff.

Question: A representative from a community based organisation asked how does a programme marry the "one size fits one" approach with government provision which tends to be "one size fits all (or none)"?

Answer: The programme tries to avoid clients getting on to statutory programmes where possible, but where necessary will work with statutory programmes but provide added value.

Question: A representative from the Job Assist Centres asked for a view on the Working Neighbourhood programmes run in Liverpool and Sheffield.

Answer: There needs to be care taken in learning lessons from other programmes as there is a need to focus on what works in particular areas rather than copying others. The programmes are described as a recipe which requires a mix of lots of different ingredients, rather than a menu. There is a need to understand why and how a programme works in a particular context.

Question: A representative from the health sector asked was the Glasgow approach planned or did it develop over time and what is the key success factor?

Answer: The process has come out of many years experience of trying approaches to see what works. The success factors are a tailored approach which aims to put people in jobs they are happy with and a neighbourhood approach which is community based and responds to client needs and provides support over the long-term.