

**Blanchardstown Employment Diversity
and Equality Project**

**A Joint Initiative between
Blanchardstown Area Partnership
and
Greater Blanchardstown Chamber of Commerce**

**A Study of Diversity and Equality
in Employment in Blanchardstown
Executive Summary**

Some interesting comments that were made (this page is to be the inside front cover)

"If we have to legislate for diversity we are finished".

"The positive mix of cultures has had a great effect on staff."

"We have an open door policy"

"I want to leave my mark on the world."

"Our employment policy is non-discriminatory"

"My colleagues made me feel like a freak"

"I want to be treated as well as everyone else in the workplace. We are all the same."

"I was treated like a child by my Supervisor".

"A diverse work environment brings a lot of challenging dynamics."

"Formal policies & procedures information pack is issued to all employees"

"We probably meet some of our requirements unbeknown to ourselves"

"I was isolated from other members of staff".

"best person will get the job"

"fully compliant in spirit & practice with terms of legislation"

Introduction

In 2002, Blanchardstown Area Partnership (BAP) and Greater Blanchardstown Chamber of Commerce commissioned Burtenshaw Kenny and Associates to carry out a study regarding diversity and equality in employment in the Greater Blanchardstown area¹. This document is a summary of the comprehensive report submitted to both organisations².

Since its formation in 1995, BAP has worked directly with those experiencing social exclusion which includes the unemployed, while at the same time, developing the capacity and co-operation of local community organisations. In this context, in 1997, BAP sought and received government support and funding to operate a Local Employment Service (LES). The LES aims to tackle the personal, social and institutional barriers that prevent the long-term unemployed from accessing employment.

However, while the LES has been a success, barriers still remain for those attempting to gain access to employment. These barriers include, for example, attitudes of those in decision-making roles and stereotyping. BAP, as part of its employment strategy 2000-2006³, decided to broaden its activity, extending and intensifying its focus on promoting diversity and equality and working with employers on determining the causes and effects of inequality in the workplace.

To this end, BAP and the Greater Blanchardstown Chamber of Commerce jointly developed an initiative to explore equality and diversity in the workplace in the Greater Blanchardstown area. The initiative was funded by the Equality Authority and its aim was to identify the barriers, supports and attitudes to diversity and equality among employers. It was hoped that this would lead to a new understanding, particularly in relation to the barriers experienced by the long-term unemployed and others experiencing exclusion from the workplace.

This report is a summary of the study, the process involved, the research findings and conclusions reached. It must be emphasised that the study is very much the first stage of a process - not an end in itself. It has always been the intention of Blanchardstown Area Partnership and the Greater Blanchardstown Chamber of Commerce to use the

¹ This document has been developed with support from the Equality Authority under the PPF Framework Agreement for the Development of Equal Opportunities at the Level of the Enterprise.

² Copies of the report are available from either of these sources, on request.

³ Blanchardstown Area Partnership Strategic Plan 2000-2006 Action for Positive Change

study as a platform from which to launch future projects in the field of diversity and equality in employment - in the first instance actively linking with The Blanchardstown Equal Initiative (2002-2005).

Process of the Study

As indicated in Table 1 below, the study involved seven stages:

Table 1: Process of the Study



1. Developing a Working Group⁴

2. Developing a Vision of Diversity and Equality in Blanchardstown

The Working Group was asked to describe its vision of Blanchardstown in 2010 which assisted in developing and implementing the proceeding stages.

3. Reviewing Databases to Identify Employers in the Area

⁴ This comprised staff of BAP, the Greater Blanchardstown Chamber of Commerce and Consultants from Burtenshaw Kenny & Associates.

Following an exhaustive search of relevant databases and other sources, it was established that there were approximately eight hundred employers in the Greater Blanchardstown area, ranging from very large multinationals to employers of one or two individuals. Three hundred and seventeen were selected as being representative of local employers by reason of size and sector and suitable for inclusion in the research. A smaller number was identified as suitable for inclusion in the qualitative research.

4. Developing Tools to Gather Data

The working group discussed various data-gathering models and decided that with the resources available and confidentiality requirements, a questionnaire was the tool most likely to gather maximum and useful information. Following research into the issues involved and an identification and analysis of similar models used to assess related topics, a questionnaire was devised which, broadly, addressed four issues relating to equality and diversity in the workplace;

- The level of awareness of these issues at enterprise level
- The barriers available to employers in relation to recruiting and retaining excluded individuals (most of which are identified in the Employment Equality Act)⁵
- The supports available to employers in relation to recruiting and retaining excluded individuals
- Examples of 'best practice' among local employers in relation to equality and diversity

5. Carrying out the Qualitative Research (Focus Groups)

In early November, five Focus Groups were held, comprising representatives from employers, employees and the unemployed from categories defined under the Employment Equality Act 1998 (see appendix 1).

The employers were representative of all employer sizes and sectors including employers from private, community and voluntary sectors. Two Focus Groups were made up of representatives from SMEs⁶. These Focus Groups not only addressed issues in relation to equality and diversity at enterprise level, they also discussed the draft questionnaire and made suggestions for modification. A group of long-term unemployed,

⁵ See appendix 1

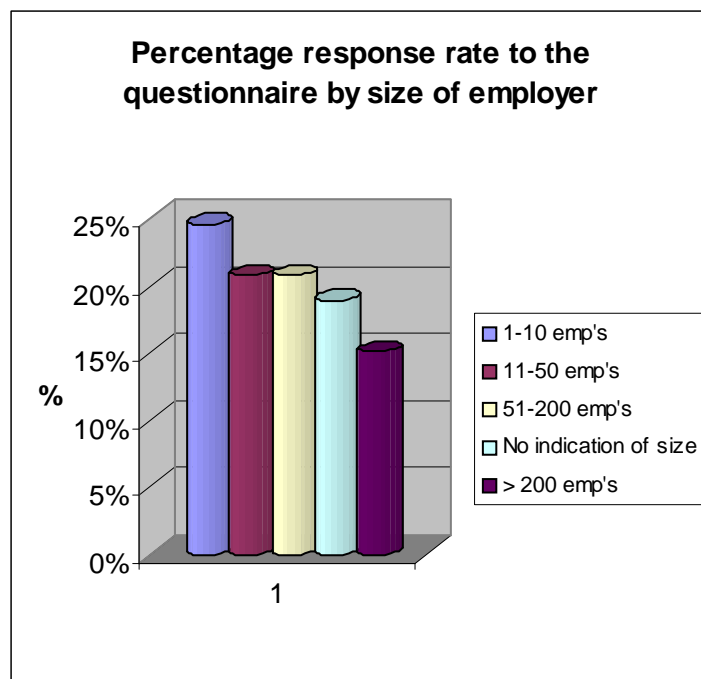
⁶ For the purpose of this study, SME's were identified as those organisations employing 50 employees or less

all of whom are LES clients, was selected to explore any issues of discrimination or inequality experienced by them prior to employment.

6. Carrying out the Quantitative Research (Questionnaires)

In its modified form, the questionnaire was sent to three hundred and seventeen employers in mid November. The questionnaire posed twenty-one questions in relation to employment policies, practices, awareness and experience in the areas of equality and diversity.

Table 2: Response Rate by Size of Employer



Fifty three employers responded to the questionnaire, representing almost 17% of the target group. While this appears to be a relatively low level of response, it is in line with similar data-gathering tools. Further, it was established that a representative number of responses was received from each of the categories (see Table 2 above) and, therefore, was deemed sufficient for the purposes of gathering reliable information.

7. Analysing and Writing up the Research

The qualitative and quantitative data was analysed, with the results produced into a comprehensive report of which this is the executive summary.

Findings

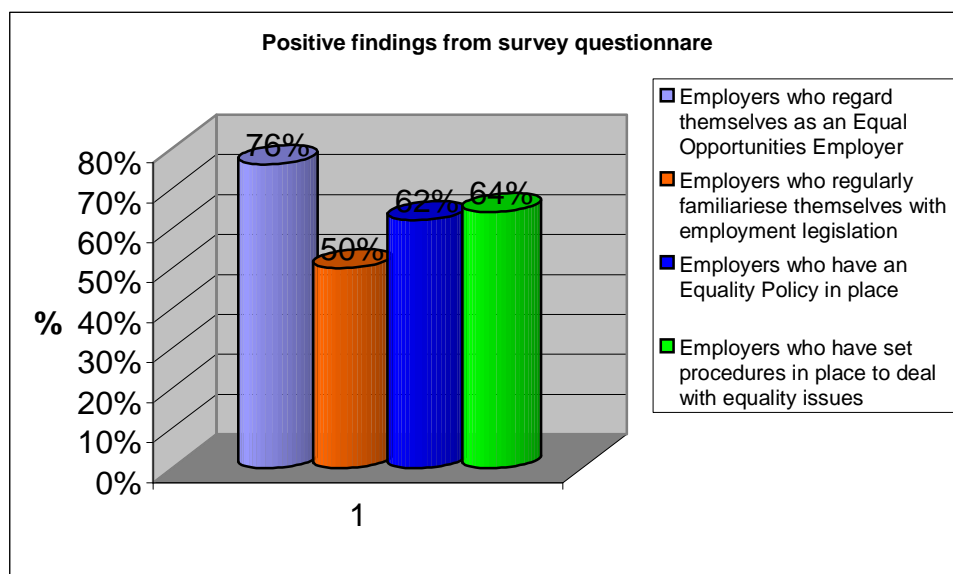
Some of the information gathered is surprising: often, indeed, surprisingly positive. Several employers indicated that they targeted excluded individuals when advertising vacancies. Overall, however, the information gathered confirmed what the Working Group suspected through its work in the area of equality and diversity. While there was a certain level of awareness of and positive orientation towards equality and diversity and some impressive initiatives underway, there is considerably more work to do.

This particularly includes changing attitudes, making real changes to the work environment and taking positive action in relation to the recruitment of those in marginalised groups.

Awareness

In the first instance, an impressive 62% of employers indicated that they had an Equality Policy in place while 64% indicated that they had procedures in place to deal with equality issues.

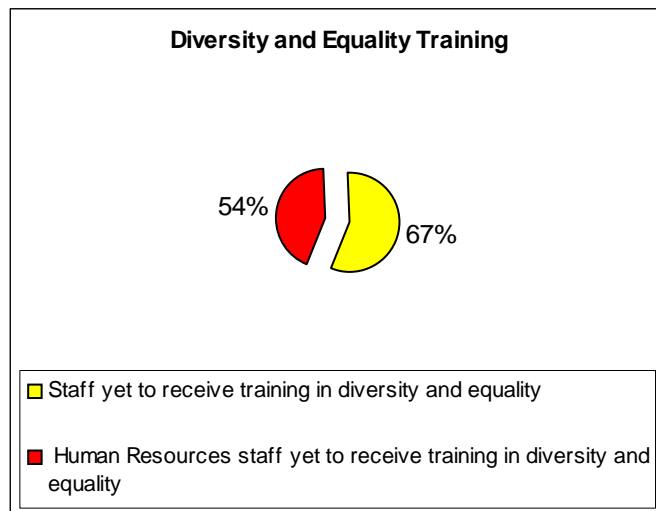
Table 3



Training

67% of respondents indicated that their staff had received no training regarding awareness of equality and diversity.

Table 4

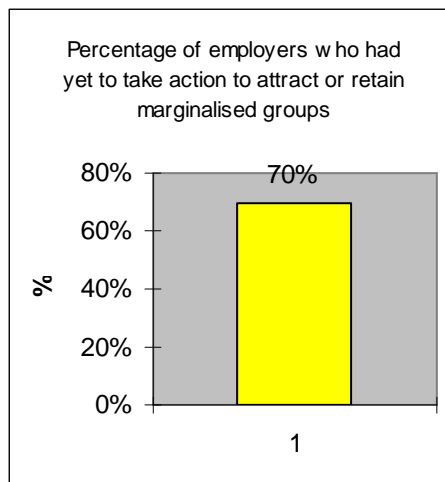


However, more interestingly, 54% indicated that those responsible for recruitment in their companies do not receive such training. This is of concern given that one of the aims of this study was to identify supports needed by employers in the area of diversity and equality.

Positive Action -Access

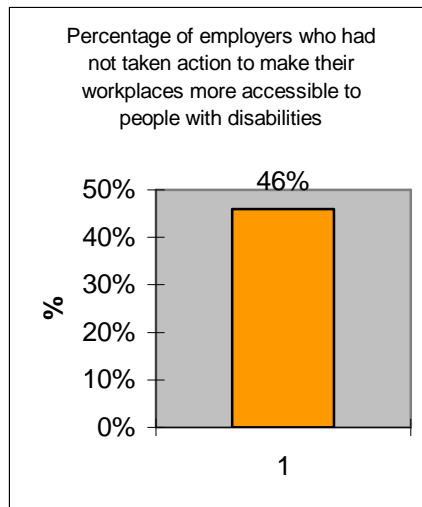
70% of respondents indicated that they had taken no specific action to attract and retain excluded individuals. Indeed only one employer (with over 200 employees) had taken positive action in this regard.

Table 5



One interesting fact to note is that 46% of those surveyed indicated that they had taken no action to make their workplace more accessible to, or suitable for, employees with disabilities. This is something to be considered more fully in the context of 2003 being designated European Year of Disability.

Table 6



Career Progress

A significant number of employers indicated that they did not monitor the career progress of the groups specified in equality legislation nor did they carry out exit interviews when these (or any other employees) left employment. There is possibly valuable information that could be used to develop equality and diversity practices by carrying out such exit interviews.

On the positive side, a few - particularly the larger – employers indicated that they do respond to and take action on information received from exit interviews.

Experiences of Diversity and Equality

Relatively few respondents reported negative experiences of diversity or equality issues. In fact, some of the respondents indicated that while there was initial concern or distrust among employees regarding the recruitment of certain people experiencing exclusion, these feelings abated with time and persistence. Other respondents reported the benefits of a diversified workgroup with some positive experiences recounted.

Equality Cases

The fact that only one employer indicated that a case had been taken on equality grounds against him/her is indicative that in terms of legislation few employers seem to be in blatant breach of rules and regulations.

Misconception

Finally, there was an indication from some of the respondents that their understanding of a diverse workforce meant only the inclusion of women and non-nationals and, possibly, the physically disabled. There was relatively little reference to other groups, specified under the Equality legislation, including Travellers, Ex-Offenders, Ex Drug Users and Older People. This is an issue which also requires highlighting and positive action.

SMEs

The information gathered from this group is both informative and unique. While it would be too simplistic to describe the respondent SMEs as homogenous, nonetheless, a definite trend emerged from the questionnaire's findings: that SMEs have specific needs - particularly in terms of information and training and keeping up to date with developments and legislation.

50% of smaller employers have an equality policy in place and 55% have a Harassment or Bullying Policy. However, 50% have **no** procedures to deal with equality issues. 75% of SME respondents indicated that they have not familiarised themselves with legislation and developments compared with only 25% of the larger employers.

When asked to suggest methods of increasing their awareness on equality and diversity, respondents (from across all categories) suggested initiatives such as training updates, newsletters, networking, diversity training, workshops and local conferences.

Despite fewer resources, SMEs were more likely than their larger counterparts (particularly employers of more than two hundred staff) to seek to attract and employ individuals that are most excluded. In fact, many of the more progressive practices in this area came from small employers.

There may be a variety of reasons for this trend - one of which may be the fact that at least some of those to whom the questionnaire was sent are in the community and voluntary sector, whose ethos actively promotes the empowerment of the most excluded. Another may be that a small employer, with no public profile or seemingly less to offer an employee than its larger or multi-national neighbour, may not be in a position to compete for the 'traditional' employee and may seek or recruit staff from sources not previously thought appropriate or attractive.

Whatever the reason, the fact remains that some smaller employers are seeking and recruiting individuals from excluded groups and, where this is happening, the experience is often a very positive one for the company and employees.

Conclusion

The overall finding of the survey is that the level of awareness among employers in the Greater Blanchardstown area regarding equality and diversity appears to be reasonably good. Many employers have policies and practices relating to Equality and Diversity in the workplace and procedures for dealing with complaints if they arise. Best practice occurs where those from excluded groups are employed in an organisation that promotes awareness training and have a positive orientation towards diversity.

The survey's results indicated that the larger the organisation, the greater the understanding of equality and diversity issues and the likelihood of adherence to best practice in terms of appropriate documentation and procedures. There is a concern, however, that this understanding and awareness does not move on to the next stage: **Employment**. It was found that even employers with very high standards in relation to other aspects of equality and diversity do not appear to take specific action to target and recruit the most excluded individuals may be more often by default than design. This is something that needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

The other major finding is that while SMEs in the area may utilise more progressive methods in terms of attracting and recruiting the most excluded, nonetheless, they have specific needs in relation to awareness, training and policy/procedure development. A number of methods of meeting their needs has been identified by the respondents themselves and these should be evaluated and considered.

The needs identified by **all** involved in this study were:

- Information/updates on equality legislation and related developments
- Workshops, local conferences/round table talks with similar local industries
- Relevant Newsletter
- Supports to implement policy
- Process to manage diversity
- Case Studies on other local organisations

- Training of Managers in diverse and multi-cultural work environments
- Employers' support network
- Mentoring to support transition to employment
- Collaboration of Employers and Trade Unions on issues of equality and diversity
- Provision of a local Equality and Diversity Support Officer

These issues need to be addressed and opportunities will arise, in the first instance, through work carried out through the Blanchardstown EQUAL Initiative.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank all members of the Working Group and all employers, employees and the unemployed who participated in both the qualitative and quantitative research. We would also like to thank Blanchardstown Library staff for their helpful and kind support.

The research process was a rewarding undertaking and had a positive impact on all involved. This was particularly demonstrated in terms of the opportunities provided for employers in the Greater Blanchardstown Area to work together and become involved collectively in this most useful, informative and exciting project.

APPENDIX 1

EMPLOYMENT EQUALITY ACT, 1998

The Act outlaws discrimination in work against a number of specified groups. This discrimination relates to pay (excluding pensions) and non-pay areas. The groups covered are as follows:

- **Gender** (no discrimination because of their gender)
- **Marital status** (no discrimination because one is married, single, widowed, separated or divorced)
- **Family status** (no discrimination because of responsibilities for a person under the age of 18 years or someone over 18 years of age but who is disabled and requires support on a continuing basis)
- **Sexual orientation** (no discrimination because of heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual orientation)
- **Age** (no discrimination on the basis of age - the range of ages covered is 18-65 years except in the case of vocational training when the age drops to the current school leaving age)
- **Disability** (no discrimination because of disability. Disability includes both physical and mental disabilities and will cover not only the more obvious forms of disability but also conditions such as epilepsy, diabetes, coronary heart disease, cancer gone into remission, depression and so on).
- **Race** (no discrimination on the basis of race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins).
- **Religion** (no discrimination against any individual because of religious background or outlook).
- **Membership of the Travelling Community** (no discrimination because of membership of the Travelling Community).

APPENDIX 2

Blanchardstown Employment Equality and Diversity Project

Equality and Diversity Questionnaire

Section 1

Equality and Diversity Awareness

1. Are you familiar with the terms of the Employment Equality Act?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	Somewhat <input type="checkbox"/>
2. Do you regard yourself as an Equal Opportunities employer? If 'yes', please explain.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	Somewhat <input type="checkbox"/>
3. Do you regularly familiarise yourself with legislation and developments relating to equality and diversity?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	Somewhat <input type="checkbox"/>
4. What might increase your awareness in relation to issues of equality and diversity? Please specify.			
5. Are similar terms and conditions of employment extended to employees across all nine categories* specified in the Employment Equality Act? If not, please specify any areas of difference. <small>*Nationality, family status, marital status, disability, member of the Travelling Community, sexual orientation, gender, religion, age.</small>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>		No <input type="checkbox"/>

Section 2

Equality and Diversity Human Resources Policies and Practices

6. Do you have an Equality Policy or equivalent?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
7. Do you have a Bullying/Harassment Policy or equivalent?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
8. Do you have formal or informal procedures designed to deal with equality issues? If so, please specify.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

9. Have staff been trained in the area of equality awareness?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
10. Have those responsible for recruitment been given specific training in relation to the Employment Equality Act?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
11. Have recruitment application forms been analysed to remove discriminatory or unnecessary language or questions?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/>
12. Have you taken any action to recruit specific, potentially-marginalised or disadvantaged groups, taken action to increase equal opportunities for them or taken any action to increase their inclusion in the workplace? If so, please specify.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
13. Have you monitored the career progress of employees across the nine categories* specified in the Employment Equality Act? If so, what are your general findings? <i>*Please refer to question 5.</i>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
14. Do you have any family-friendly policies and facilities such as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paid Maternity Leave • Paid Paternity Leave • Job Sharing • Career Breaks • Flexi-time • Crèche Facilities Please specify any others which you have.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
15. Have you taken any action to make the workplace more accessible to or suitable for employees with disabilities? If so, please specify.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
16. Do you carry out 'exit interviews' with employees leaving your organisation to ascertain the reasons for leaving, including reasons of discrimination or inequality? If so, what do you do with the data gathered?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	

Section 3

Issues and Concerns regarding Equality and Diversity

<p>17. Have you any comments in relation to the observation of the Employment Equality Act in your workplace? If so, please specify.</p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>18. Have you encountered any specific issues - positive or otherwise - regarding equality and diversity in the workplace? If so, please specify.</p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>19. Have you encountered any discrimination in your workplace? Please specify, if appropriate, outlining any action taken by you.</p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>20. Have you been asked by any employees to introduce specific measures or take particular action in relation to any of the nine categories outlined in the Employment Equality Act? If so, please specify.</p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>21. Have you been subjected to any claims under the Employment Equality Act or related legislation? If so, please specify.</p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p>