

Consultus

Equinex Internal Evaluation Report The 'spirit' of transnational work

Jo Muscat

Transnational Coordinator

Preface

The Equinex Development Partnership, led by the University of Wales Newport commissioned Consultus to coordinate and internally evaluate transnational activities. This report covers transnational activities during the period of September 2005 to June 2007.

The transnational coordinator/internal evaluator would like acknowledge and thank the transnational partners for their contribution, particularly Italy (OpportunitY) and Estonia (TERE). Special thanks are also extended to the beneficiaries of the Equinex Project, the Equinex management and operational team and the Development Partners for their time, support and co-operation in the work leading to this report.



Contents

1	INTRODUCTION	3
1.1	Background	3
2.0	Evaluation Approach, Methodology and Structure	4
2.1	Approach and General Methodology	4
2.2	Structure	5
3.0	An introduction to EQUAL and its ethos of transnationality	6
3.1	The process leading up to transnational cooperation	7
3.2	The transnational partner intended activities	9
3.3	The transnational partnerships in practice	11
3.3.1	Study visits and workshops between Ireland (DP9) Wales (Equinex) and Estonia (TERE)	12
3.3.2	Study visits and workshops between Opportunity (Italy) and Equinex	13
3.3.3	Joint and parallel working	14
3.3.4	Dissemination - impacting on policy	15
3.4	Management of the transnational partnership	16
3.5	Internal monitoring transnational activities Equinex as a host Member State	17
3.6	The Transnational Partnership achievements	20
3.7	The challenges	21
4.0	Exemplifying the EQUAL principles	23
4.1	Partnership	25
4.2	Innovation	25
4.3	Empowerment	25
4.4	Transnational cooperation	27
4.5	Mainstreaming	27
4.6	Equal Opportunities	28
5.0	If we were to do this again.....	29
6.0	Summary matrix	31
7.0	Sustainability	36
8.0	Conclusion	37

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Background*

The Centre for Community and Lifelong Learning at the University of Wales, Newport brought together a group of organisations in 2005 to collectively explore ways in which they could address some of the barriers faced by people from disadvantaged groups when trying to access education, training or employment.

The work of this group culminated in the formation of a new project that offered a range of activities in support of employability. University of Wales, Newport (UWN) as the lead partner submitted the project to the Welsh European Funding Office under the EQUAL programme which is supported by the Welsh Assembly Government. The project was successfully funded through the EQUAL ESF Programme.

The Project and its partners became known as the Equinex Development Partnership (Equinex DP). Funded under the Round 2 EQUAL Community Initiative which *'Tests and promotes new ways of tackling all forms of discrimination and inequalities in the labour market, both for those in work and for those seeking work'*. The partnership included a range of organisations that represented a diverse target group. A number of these organisations were locally based, working with disadvantaged groups in the City of Newport; other members operated regionally, working with disadvantaged groups across Wales.

The Equinex Development Partnership initiated a range of domestic projects that included:

- transitions officers working holistically with individuals with sensory, physical and learning difficulties,
- piloting new ways of supporting people aged 50+ into employment, ,
- developing a curriculum to address the social skills difficulties faced by people with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder.

- working with employers to examine the barriers to employing people with disabilities.
- developing a range of IT based toolkits to inform frontline workers of the issues faced by disadvantaged groups.

Transnationally, the partnership worked under two separate Transnational Co-operation Agreements which involved Member States of Estonia, Ireland and Italy.

This Internal Transnational Evaluation (self-evaluation) builds upon the Transnational Executive Summary Report which is available on the Equinex Website.

2.0 Evaluation Approach, Methodology and Structure to this report

2.1 Approach and General Methodology

An interactive methodology was adopted for this internal evaluation which was part of the remit of transnational coordination.

The purpose of this Internal Evaluation Report is to highlight the processes and learning of transnational working (from an Equinex perspective) and share the information with a wider audience. The intention of the report is to share practice both nationally and transnationally of how the project ran.

In meeting this objective the report has been prepared by drawing from a range of resources that had been initiated at the project outset for the purpose of internal monitoring. Additional, supporting evidence has been provided through a range of documents which include completed questionnaires and information from one to one interviews with the transnational and domestic development partners.

A brief example of such documentation is provided here:

Source of information:

- Existing project information i.e. the Transnational Cooperation Agreements,
- Internal monitoring and evaluation feedback forms,
- Project meeting records – minutes of meetings, workshop notes and all existing recording of transnational activities,
- Specifically generated internal evaluation questionnaires,
- Beneficiary personal statements and debriefing¹ summaries,
- Information obtained from one to one telephone and/or face to face interviews with development partners

2.2and its structure

Drawing on the above resources and experiences the report will begin by offering an introduction to EQUAL and its ethos of transnationality. It will introduce the Equinex transnational partners and the key priorities of the Transnational Cooperation Agreements.

The report aims to illustrate some of the activities of the partnership by exemplifying the five levels of transnational working:

- *exchanging information and experiences,*
- *exchanging trainees, trainers and staff,*
- *developing innovative approaches with transnational partners,*
- *importing, exporting or adopting new approaches,*
- *developing a product or a system with transnational partners.*²

It will offer the view of the Equinex team on the processes and practicalities of managing and coordinating the transnational partnership and will explore the transnational and domestic development partners and the beneficiaries' perspective of what worked particularly well and what might have been done differently. This section of the report will give due regard to the six cross cutting themes of EQUAL.

¹ Debriefing summaries were carried out after each Transnational meeting

² Five levels of Transnational Working

The penultimate section of the report will begin to work towards drawing together the lessons learned in an attempt to share practice and lessons of the transnational work of Equinex. The final section will offer the development partnership a series of discussion points as a pre-cursor towards a possible way forward post Equinex.

Please note direct quotations in the following pages are shown in italics and quote marks.

3.0 An introduction to EQUAL and its ethos of transnationality

EQUAL's Transnational Strategic Vision is ***'Building Europe, and developing common European solutions to common European problems, this means co-operating with people, organisations and institutions in other Member States, learning from each other and together developing new activities, practices and systems.'*** As such, a vital dimension and one of the EQUAL key cross cutting themes is that of transnationality.

The Equinex Development Partnership has given this key principle practical expression through the formation of two Transnational Partnership(s), in which Equinex has worked with Development Partners from Ireland and Estonia (Transnational Cooperation Agreement 1) and Italy (Transnational Cooperation Agreement 2)

The ultimate aim of both these transnational partnerships was to work collaboratively to seek ways in which to develop solutions to common multi-faceted barriers that surround the broad target group of 'disadvantaged' beneficiaries. The strategic aspiration of the four Transnational partners (Estonia, Ireland, Italy and Wales) was to use their learning to inform National, Regional and European Policies of enabling measures and practice that may offer solutions for disadvantaged people to access the labour market.

3.1 *The process leading up to transnational cooperation*

The process leading to the Equinex transnational partnership began at the practical level with reference to Equal Cooperation Data Base (ECDB). This database offers project planners an opportunity to view the summary details of available partners, make contact and ultimately engage in dialogue to determine a viable common working theme. During this process potential partners typically determine the value of the partnership and begin to assemble a viable work plan, which leads to the completion of a Transnational Cooperation Agreement (TCA).

The resulting TCA becomes the working document of the partnership and includes a time frame with specified outputs, outcomes and products which are collectively known as 'deliverables'.

Equinex began identifying transnational partners in 2005, with exploratory involvement through email and telephone correspondence with Development Partnerships in Spain and Portugal, and two separate potential partners in Ireland and Italy. There were also potential partnerships explored in the Czech Republic, Estonia and Sweden.

After a brief period of correspondence Portugal, Italy³ and Wales began to identify areas of possible collaborative working. Subsequently this led to the formulation of a partnership.

The Equal Project proposals were submitted to Member State Government Offices. Unfortunately, Portugal was not successful in their EQUAL application at Member State level and was therefore ineligible for transnational participation. As a consequence Equinex (Wales) and OpportunitY (Italy) agreed to continue the working relationship in Portugal's absence.

³ The Italian project is entitled OpportunitY

A meeting in Estonia in the early part of 2005 was noted as *“incredibly interesting”* by the Equinex Project Manager and the Transnational Coordinator who attended this meeting. Estonia as an accession country within Europe, presented not only cultural learning opportunities for the Equinex partners but also opportunities for further work post EQUAL. Estonia had already engaged and involved themselves in an Equal partnership with three other Member States. The Estonian meeting had gone particularly well and Estonia was keen to work with Wales. This led to Estonia introducing the Welsh Equinex project to the extended Estonia transnational partnership. A series of teleconferences took place with all the partners and work began on the development of a Transnational Cooperation Agreement.

In parallel Equinex had also identified a partner in Ireland that mirrored an element of the domestic activity that Equinex was to undertake. The Equinex partnership felt that there were learning points to be taken from Ireland in terms of their past successes with European Funds. This partnership was seen as an opportunity to learn together and to share practice.

It was therefore not unusual that the Equinex Development Partnership viewed the partnership with Ireland as the most useful to pursue.

The partnership negotiations with Estonia, Italy and Spain collapsed when there was a request from Italy for a sum of money to be paid as ‘administration’ of the Transnational Cooperation Agreement (TCA). Wales had by this time written the TCA for the transnational partners. The TCA was at the point of submission to Managing Authorities in Member States when Wales took the decision to withdraw from the partnership. This was in view of the request for an ‘administration’ payment. In a separate dialogue Wales spoke with partners in Estonia as a courtesy gesture. Estonia gave due consideration to the situation and later felt that the relationship with Wales had begun on a firm footing and so they also declined the partnership, taking the view that they would partner Wales and Ireland.

As a result a new Transnational Cooperation Agreement was developed with TERE, the Estonian partner, and DP9, the Irish partner. A separate working relationship was established with OpportunitY Italy, which subsequently resulted in a further Transnational Cooperation Agreement.

Equinex (Wales) welcomed the three nation's collaborative working, believing that there was much to learn and share from each other. As Equinex had been proactive in developing the collaborative working practices with the three Member States, it transpired that Equinex led on two separate Transnational Cooperation Agreements. These working partnership agreements were later to be known by the Equinex Domestic Development Partnership as TCA1, which involved Estonia, Ireland and Wales and TCA2 which involved Italy and Wales.

Key point 1

The process of identifying suitable partners can be resource intensive, requiring a high degree of commitment to establish the aims and objectives of each partner. This becomes more complicated as the number of partners interested in joining together increase. Equinex interacted with nine separate partnerships before progressing with two transnational cooperation agreements.

3.2 The transnational partner intended activities

The Transnational Cooperation Agreement (s) offered a range of activities that underpinned at least three of the five levels of transnational working:

Exchanging information and experiences – underpinning this particular element was a range of study visits and workshops. This exchanging of information and experiences was a testing ground for partners to get to know each other. This engaged the DP in developing an understanding of partner's domestic strategies and background to domestic activities, which led to a stage where the partnership could begin to formulate a set of joint tangible objectives. This period of dialogue in which knowledge exchange took place, enabled the partnership to progress the Transnational Cooperation Agreement.

Exchanging trainees, trainers and staff - the development of support measures to enable beneficiaries to fully participate and engage with the

transnational partners. This partnership objective was to emerge as an exchange of personal beneficiary experiences between Italy and Wales which offered a cross over of awareness raising to partners in Estonia.

The aspiration here was to grow and nurture this element to more than simply exchange of experience, to take it one step further, in order to produce a tangible and valuable outcome.

Developing innovative approaches with transnational partners – Equinex' transnational approach demonstrated a range of innovative practices and measures. In the first instance the partnership itself was innovative by way of its own diversity.

The partners worked across a broad range of disciplines with different target groups creating an innovative aspect to the transnational partnership. This innovation may be presented as planned and unplanned. Planned in terms of bringing together and engaging a set of partners working with a diverse target group: and unplanned in terms of the processes that led to the partnership 'gelling' and evolving to define tangible joint activities.

Importing, exporting or adopting new approaches – there were three specific elements to this theme. The intention was to work closely with the Irish partners (DP9) in a practical expression of importing and exporting tested methods of practice. This, to support in the development of a target group specific psychometric profiling tool.

The second was the intention to work closely with Estonia (TERE) to explore, test and adapt models of teleworking as a possible solution to employability. The final element was to work closely with Italy (OpportunitY) on a parallel survey study.

Developing a product or a system with transnational partners – this theme was to offer an opportunity for partners to progress the new approaches and develop pieces of joint or parallel research.

The aspiration was that in bringing together the capacities of four Member States, common solutions could be sought to common problems. The intention was that this work would culminate in one or more final product(s) that would be valuable in enabling partners to achieve a common product that would be beyond them individually.

The common aspiration of all the transnational partners was to work towards and deliver a number of key messages to policy makers on the transnational work undertaken. The ultimate aim and purpose of these five levels of transnational engagement was to influence at European and National Level the learning of the partnership. The partnership agreed that in order to bring this to fruition they would begin by delivering a final dissemination event in Brussels.

Key point 2

The Transnational Cooperation Agreement (s) broadly set out the key features of both partnerships. Practical expression to the key features had engaged the partnership in developing innovative approaches.

The first step to this development was the exchange of information and experience which added to the whole transnational learning experience. As put by one of the transnational partners *“the partnership has been an opportunity to get a fresh perspective on things, learning from good practices and developing team working skills”.....*

3.3 The transnational partnerships in practice

The transnational partnership undertook a range of activities throughout its two year period. The Internal Evaluation produced an Executive Transnational Summary Report which profiled three transnational activities: the beneficiary art project ‘*Going for Gold*’, Survey Study –Italy and Wales, and the Teleworking Comparative Study - Estonia and Wales. A brief overview of these is provided later in this section and a more detailed view of these three activities may be found at the Equinex website www.equinex.newport.ac.uk.

In an attempt to offer a logical format to this following section of the report each of the actions are presented in the same sequence provided above as levels of transnational working.

3.3.1 Study visits and workshops between Ireland (DP9), Wales (Equinex) and Estonia (TERE) Exchanging information and experiences

Hosting State	Participants	Workshops	Study visit (s) Themes
Wales	Estonia and Ireland	Mentoring and support for disadvantaged groups: psychometric testing, e-learning and development of training courses, teleworking and flexible working practices	Regeneration Domestic partner visits
Ireland	Wales	Disadvantaged groups and employability	Social enterprises Cultural visits
Estonia	Wales and Ireland	EQUAL Projects in Estonia	Education Cultural visits
Wales	Estonia and Ireland	Thematic work shops – circle of support measures	Social Skills Cultural visits
Ireland	Estonia and Wales	Final meeting before dissemination	Youth project Irish Society for Autism

An example of the workshops that took place in Wales:

Partners listened to presentations on the theme of circles of support available by practitioners working within the national projects. This led to partners' taking part in an interactive session in which an introduction was made to the concept of community time banking. This exchange of practice resulted in the Irish partnership, DP9 adopting the Community Time Bank Model for replication in Westmeath Ireland.

Partners worked in small groups to consider the issues surrounding the themes of support for three key areas: working with disadvantaged people: the use of diagnostic or assessment tools: and teleworking.



3.3.2 Study visits and workshops between Opportunity (Italy) and Equinex

Hosting State	Participants	Workshops	Study visit (s) Themes
Wales	Italy	Launch of Equinex project	Employment supports Cultural
Italy	Equinex	Launch of Opportunity project	Economic development and employability
Italy	Equinex	Beneficiaries supported by British Sign Language Interpreter, share their experiences with Italian project partners.	Social Cooperatives
Wales	Italy	Beneficiaries from Italy and Wales take part in a Work shop on 'telling your story'	Economic development and employability
Wales	Opportunity	Newport regeneration Visit by business people from Desio to Newport to share practice on regeneration strategies.	Regeneration
Italy	Equinex	Final meeting before dissemination. Beneficiaries supported by Transition officers and NCC Access Supported Employment Team, met with their counterparts in Italy and took part in a drama workshop facilitated by Tim Anderson from Solas.	Exchange of experiences between beneficiaries.



A study visit to Desio, Italy enabled beneficiaries and support staff from the Equinex Project to visit a number of different social Cooperatives and present their experiences to counterparts in Italy.

Equinex also hosted an extra-ordinary meeting for business people from Desio and Monza within the Lombardy region of Italy. They were keen to explore the regeneration plans for Newport and any measures in place to support employability of the local workforce. The interest and linkage here was that the Lombardy region was experiencing similar needs to Newport. Desio had lost a major manufacturing company that had employed a significant proportion of local people in the region and Newport had seen a major decline in the traditional steel manufacturing industry. Desio et al were keen to explore economic and regeneration factors with Newport and to share practice and knowledge.

Equinex partners, in particular Newport City Council organised a full day of workshops and presentations. This included presentations from Square Grip – National Steel Reinforcement Company based in Newport, Newport Council's Economic Development department, Newport Unlimited, Newport and Gwent Enterprise amongst others.

3.3.3 Joint and parallel working:

Importing, exporting or adopting new approaches

Through exchange of practice and information, Equinex had, in the first year of work, laid a foundation for joint and parallel work. This took the shape of three action projects which were to be known as: a comparative study on teleworking, a motivational survey study and a beneficiary arts project.

These projects engaged with both Transnational Cooperation Agreements, with the intention of bringing together the four TCA Member States, that is, Estonia, Ireland, Italy and Wales in a final dissemination conference in Brussels. The final conference had been written into both TCA's and was to be a vehicle for taking the transnational messages '**common solutions for common problems**' to a policy level audience.

As mentioned earlier the detail of these activities and how they ran has been discussed in the Transnational Executive Summary Report.

3.3.4 Dissemination - impacting on policy

Developing a product or a system with transnational partners

In progressing the work of the transnational element of Equinex, the intention was to consolidate *Exchanging information and experiences* and *Importing, exporting or adopting new approaches* to achieve a final joint piece of transnational work that would bring together the work of the two TCA's to a platform for dissemination and influencing of policy. This was an aspiration each of the partners had expressed in the initial agreements and worked towards in their joint activities and parallel work. In November 2006 the Equinex Development Partnership prepared a discussion paper to offer ideas and explore the partnership dissemination strategy.

The paper was presented and discussed at subsequent management meetings with each of the transnational partners. It became known that one of the partners was not in a position to disseminate their findings and they announced at this meeting that they would not be taking part in dissemination activities in Brussels. The remaining three partners welcomed the Equinex paper and were keen to take forward the ideas presented. The paper was shaped into actions and timescales and each of the partners contributed to the planning and dissemination event. Extracts of this paper are appended to this report as Annex A.

As three partners progressed with plans to disseminate in Brussels they took a decision to present themselves as 'the Tri-Equality Partnership'.

The partners worked collaboratively over the coming months to complete a range of tasks to enable a professional and valuable dissemination. Subsequent actions included OpportunitY designing the Tri-Equality logo, Estonia translating information to German (English, German and French were the suggested working languages for the conference). The months leading up to June 2007 were both challenging at a practical level, and rewarding at a strategic level. The Equinex partnership had been passed the lead role in coordinating the activities for the dissemination.

Key point 3

The process of engaging and working on a practical level presented challenges for all transnational partners. These were often outweighed by the benefits of transnational work. As one partner offered *“this experience has been a worthwhile opportunity to link with partners that one would not have known otherwise - to learn from and to share experience. This has been particularly successful with beneficiaries”*

3.4 Management of the transnational partnership

The Transnational Partnerships operated under the formal direction of a Management Group which was composed of named representatives from each of the Transnational Development Partnerships. The detailed, operational management tasks were shared across the Development Partnership. Accordingly, on visits and related activities the hosting country took responsibility for such matters as the production of reports and minutes, the arrangement and distribution of workshop itineraries, domestic arrangements and the like. In its operation, the model that may best describe the management of both partnerships is akin to the Consortium Organisational Model of rotating or shared co-ordination⁴. Of particular significance for this Internal Transnational report, is the monitoring and evaluation process that was adopted. The Domestic Development Partnerships were assigned individual responsibility for monitoring and evaluating their own domestic project. The Management Group(s) had a joint responsibility for internally monitoring and evaluating the transnational project.

⁴ Equal Guide on Transnational Cooperation – operational models page 65

In practice this latter transnational monitoring and evaluation activity had been aided by the use of a proforma/questionnaire administered at each Transnational meeting. This questionnaire was developed by members of the Equinex and DP9 Development Partnership and adopted by all the Transnational Partners.

3.5 Internal monitoring transnational activities

To monitor activities the transnational partnership adopted an internal monitoring and evaluation method which consisted of questionnaires distributed at each of the transnational meetings. The questionnaires began with detailing the aims of the meeting and followed through with a series of questions which covered such topics as practicalities i.e. the venue, participation and other issues for example: mainstreaming opportunities.

The process of collating the information rested with the hosting Member State, however, in practical delivery, it became an Equinex team activity.

The intention was that an analysis of the collated information would be presented at each transnational meeting and this would result in each meeting taking on board the views of the participants to further meet their needs and aspirations.

Key point 4

The intention of using these questionnaires were that hosting Member States would collate and disseminate the questionnaire information to support a process of working towards productive meetings that maximised the limited meeting time.

Equinex as a host Member State

Estonia TERE and Ireland DP9

Questionnaire response rate for Equinex as a host ranged from 72% to 75%.

Collective responses offered: 100% of respondents felt the venue used was accessible; all required equipment was available and had met their requirements.

100% of the respondents felt encouraged to participate, with the majority suggesting that more time could be allocated to the workshop and that these would benefit if they were smaller groups.

The responses for other issues were more varied and offered an added dimension to the transnational agenda. It became apparent that in responding to these questions the focus of meetings had expanded to include not only the transnational cooperation agreed work plan, but an added dimension of partners' specific agenda. An example of this was the emergence of links between partners in additional activities that were outside the direct actions of the work plan but within the *'exchange of practice'* remit. This engagement and widening of participation was a clear example of partners networking and exchanging practice. One such exchange of practice was a link made between the School of Education at the University of Wales, Newport (a partner in the Equinex project) and DP9 (Ireland) offering to support the Irish tender on psychometric testing. Another example was the 'Time Bank' project from the Centre for Community and Lifelong Learning at the University of Wales, Newport, that with some further exploration and 'know how' exchange was taken up by DP9 as a potential pilot in Ireland. There was also exchange of practice and learning between the National Autistic Society (Equinex Partner) and DP9 Ireland in sharing of practice on the Social Skills Curriculum.

Key point 5

In practice it became evident that the transnational partnership had developed a wide scope and perspective in exchanging practice. DP9 had taken up the opportunity to potentially develop a new initiative based on the Wales Institute for Community Currencies Time Bank Project.

"Westmeath has recently appointed a Volunteer Co-ordinator and he has obtained agreement to implement the Newport volunteers 'credit' model. This was not in our EQUAL strategy but it relates to current issues in Westmeath"

Italy, OpportunitY

In a similar fashion the Equinex Team collated and reported on the hosting of the Italian Partners.

The return of these sets of questionnaires was lower than the previous DP9 and TERE response rate. The rate of response was approximately 50% for this partnership. One reason for this could have been the added complication of translation of forms and responses from English to Italian and then Italian to English and the time involved in such activities.

The overall response to the venue was that it was accessible and had met requirements. A domestic partner raised an accessibility issue experienced by a project beneficiary. The beneficiary had been refused access to a taxi (which was being used to take the beneficiary to the venue) because she was using a guide dog.

100% of respondents offered that they were encouraged to participate in the meetings and that there were opportunities for wider networking activities. The responses for other issues were generally centred on the future work of the partnership and participants were requesting more information on the planned work. Again, the questionnaires indicate a similar pattern to that of DP9 and TERE where partners through networking begin to form and formulate wider exchanges of practice.

Key point 6

EMERGING LESSONS

Across both partnerships there were key messages to be drawn:

More communication both inter and intra DP would be beneficial.

More time for networking and more time for discussion at workshops.

The prospect of joint work was flagged up as a concern in particular when key people were not sustaining the momentum.

The diversity of domestic projects did not naturally fit with two transnational agreements.

It may be noted here that although lessons were emerging there were areas in which remedial action was taken. Therefore the emerging lessons presented here could be somewhat dated.

An illustration of one concern raised by partners was the undefined joint working at earlier stages of the project. Although partners raised this as a concern in the earlier days, as the partnership evolved and gelled, joint working areas emerged naturally.

The partnerships' *'newness'* had many positive aspects: the innovative nature of getting to know each Member States' areas of expertise; culture; sharing of new practices and ways of *'doing things'*, were interesting aspects that contributed to the 'gelling' of the partnership.

However, in some respect this 'newness' also presented a challenge and this aspect is explored further in a later section of the report. It may also be pertinent to note here, that at least two of the four Member States had not worked transnationally before and the majority of the DP Partners across all four Member States had not worked transnationally. Once again, this offers both positive and less positive aspects to the experience of transnational work.

3.6 The Transnational Partnership achievements

The following section attempts to list the collective achievements of the transnational partnership(s) – in offering these in bullet form, it does not do justice to the overwhelming achievement of four Member States working together in an innovative partnership and in the *spirit* of transnationality.

- The development of two brand new TCA's.
- The engagement and 'buy in' of the Domestic Partners across four Member States.
- Development of a range of actions across two separate TCA's.
- Delivery and co-ordination of these actions to produce final joint testimonies of researched work.

- Enabling the engagement, involvement and full participation of beneficiaries in designing their own transnational project.
- The hosting of a range of workshops.
- Exchanging practice and knowledge resulting in transference of practice.
- The successful dissemination of the transnational work in Brussels.

The final products of the transnational partners are available from the Equinex website – these are listed here:

- **Joint report** – Estonia and Wales a comparative study on teleworking
- **Joint activities** – Italy and Wales beneficiaries tell their stories (a CD will be available offering the stories disseminated in Brussels)
 - Exchange of beneficiaries and support staff report (Italy and Wales)
 - **Report of Visit to Ireland** (Estonia, Wales and Ireland)
 - **Internal Transnational Report** – an executive summary and a full report.

3.7 The challenges

Equal Mid Term Evaluation offers the view that transnational Partnerships often face a series of implementation issues during their Action 2 and 3 phases, which tend to focus on delivery and partnership management issues rather than set-up and developmental work. This has been no different for Equinex and its transnational partners. After extensive discussion with both transnational and domestic development partners it has been possible to categorise these issues under two broad themes:

Delivery issues. In order to meet the objectives laid out in the TCA, flexibility and creativity have been an important element. The challenge had sometimes been evolving the partnership in the same direction. An example of this has been the joint work between two member states, where a less tangible output was delivered than expected. Under the theme of joint working there was a partnership expectancy to produce a comparative study.

This valuable piece of work could not be fully realised within the short period of time allocated. It was a piece of work that evolved by exchanging experiences and developing a deeper understanding of domestic partner priorities. Nonetheless, the transnational member states did carry out a valuable piece of work and although were not able to offer a comparative or joint research element, the learning outcome was positive in determining that any future transnational work needs to factor in such elements as focused meetings with the research delivery partners, the allocation of the correct level of resources to carry out the task and clear priorities of work.

Key point 7

The innovative nature of projects results in an evolving structure of delivery. One of the challenges of managing evolving projects is to ensure that partners evolve in the same direction. As one of the transnational partners offered *“the ways of work have been very flexible, creative and democratic”*.

Other issues A staff change within the lifespan of any two-year project generally offers challenges and can potentially have an adverse effect on transnational projects. Although, two-years is seemingly a substantial period it must be noted that during the lifespan of the project there were four full partner meetings, therefore any changes in key staffing i.e. management and/or delivery presented challenges.

Key point 8

Staff changes, domestic priorities, practicalities and delivery are natural challenges for any projects. These challenges are compounded in transnational work.

It is generally accepted that within organisations projects are often peripheral to their core work. In acceptance of this generality of project work transnational work can sometimes be viewed as peripheral to projects.

If organisations view transnationality as a ‘bolt on’ to projects and a means to access the EQUAL Programme funding, it can offer challenges that are not within the control span of the wider partnership. Prioritising transnational work in such cases is very difficult particularly if the appropriate resources are not allocated.

There are examples where Member states involve themselves in a number of transnational programmes, with seemingly inappropriate resources to deliver.

One such example was an Equinex Transnational Partner who stated:

“Commitment to other work and other trans-national partnerships (involving 3 other countries) has been a concern for us ”. Suggesting that balancing a range of transnational work with a range of domestic priorities presents both professional and personal concerns and constraints. This impacted on the deliverables of the Equinex Transnational Partnership and raised concerns among the Equinex DP.

Key point 9

Transnational Co-ordination requires appropriate staffing resources to ensure it has a profile within the domestic project and the TCA targets are met. As one partner offered *“it is too easy to fall into the trap of out of sight out of mind”*.

4.0 Exemplifying the EQUAL principles

EQUAL is funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) and aims to develop and test innovative approaches to challenge discrimination and address inequalities in the labour market. It is based around the following principles:⁵

- **Partnership** – being based around a model of Development Partnerships (DPs) comprising organisations with shared interests working on a collaborative basis.

⁵ Update to the Mid-Term Evaluation of the UK-GB EQUAL Community Initiative 2000-6
ESF Division of the Joint International Department of the DWP and the DfES

- **Innovation** – with new ideas being developed, trialled and mainstreamed.
- **Empowerment** – where disadvantaged and excluded groups play a role in the development and delivery of EQUAL activities.
- **Transnational co-operation** – with activities with partners in other Member States aiming to add value through the exchange and transference of ideas and experience.
- **Mainstreaming** – where the lessons from EQUAL influence policy and practice at the local, national and European levels.
- **Equal opportunities** – with the programme supporting equality and diversity as a cross-cutting principle.

This section takes the views of beneficiary and participating partners on each of the EQUAL principles and endeavours to exemplify, in a practical expression, each of the principles.

4.1 Partnership

There were a range of comments from the DP that offered both a positive and less positive perspective of transnational partner work. In very few cases partners felt that transnationality presented an added burden whilst overwhelmingly others felt that it was a vital part of the project and an opportunity to enhance domestic work and offer long-term benefits. As one partner offered; *“effective working could not have been achieved without an effective partnership. These are new networks that would not have otherwise formed”*.

Key point 10

The overriding DP message was that Equinex had successfully brought together a diverse range of transnational partner organisations (which in itself may be noted as being a source of innovation). Through a process of transnational learning and development the results that emerged was a successful rapport with Member States in which to explore common areas of work and interest.

4.2 Innovation

Innovation seemed to inter-weave in most of the aspects of transnational practice and was a fairly difficult principle to attribute a stand alone practice example. Transnational partners felt that innovation had been *“process-oriented, concerned with new methods of work”*. One of the transnational partners offered the example of, *“the way we carried out the comparative study of teleworking was probably the closest thing to innovation, in a sense that a member of the Estonian team had the opportunity to spend two weeks in Cardiff to work jointly on the research”*. This expression of partnership work was innovative and as the same partner put it, *“This visit certainly had a strong empowering effect”*.

In a DP context partners felt that the innovative aspect of Equinex as a whole had driven members of the project(s) development teams to make sure that Equinex projects were not duplicating work. Other members of the DP felt that the principle of innovation should be strongly attributed to the strategic decision of Equinex to fully engage beneficiaries in transnational activities and the development of measures that enabled beneficiary participation. Following the conceptual distinction of categories of innovation as described by Equal Guidance ⁶ each of the examples presented by the transnational and the domestic DP lend themselves to the conceptual distinction of ‘process orientated’.

4.3 Empowerment

Evidence of empowering aspects of Equinex in the context of transnationality abound. In a succinct attempt to offer just a couple of examples of practice, just two points are expressed here, one from the transnational partners perspective and one from the Domestic partners perspective.

⁶ Measuring and sustaining innovation – a guide for Development Partnerships
GB Equal Support Unit, page 8

Transnationally, one partner offered *“empowerment has taken place both in terms of personal and group development through team working and developing a common transnational interest or objective”*.

Another partner, in a similar fashion, felt that the transnational work had offered both personal and organisational empowerment but added that they had embarked on a transnational learning curve which had been inspired by Equinex.

The Equinex DP felt that beneficiaries were enabled to participate in transnational activities and that this had *“enabled Equinex to use transnational visits as a stage for beneficiary self development and to raise awareness of the barriers and issues faced by disadvantaged groups”*. An example of this was the talks and presentations delivered by beneficiaries at a range of transnational visits both hosting and visiting.

The beneficiaries worked towards a ‘showcase’ event in Brussels where Equinex, TERE and Opportunity came together to disseminate as the Tri-Equality Partnership. Equinex invited⁷ four beneficiaries to participate in this event which also included an informal meeting with a key staff member from the Director General’s Office for Employment and Social Affairs. The four participants met and discussed their personal barriers to employment.

At a debrief session organised by Equinex the participants all reported that the Commission Representative, *“was willing to listen...”*. One participant offered that *“the trip went really well, it was organised and precise with conferences and speeches”*, adding, *“ I didn’t want to come home”* and another offered, *“it was really interesting”*. Participants expressed at this debrief session that they were keen to do more of this work and one of the suggestions was for Equinex to support beneficiaries to showcase their experiences to a range of policy makers and domestic organisations , for example the Welsh Assembly Government and the new Commission for Equalities and Human Rights.

⁷ An invitation to participate was used

In comparing the practical expressions of the above examples with the Equal Guidance on empowerment⁸ it is evident that the Equinex Project has clearly promoted individual and collective empowerment. The transnational element of the project has involved beneficiaries in project development and self-evaluation and worked collaboratively with all project stakeholders to find ways in which to change attitudes, systems and structures by raising awareness of the issues and barriers faced by disadvantaged groups.

4.4 Transnational co-operation

There is substantial and substantive evidence that transnational co-operation added value to the domestic project, which was exemplified by the exchange of practice between DP9 and Equinex Partner RISE – in the adoption of the Learning Time Credit concept, The National Autistic Society and DP9 in the transference of expertise in the area of social skills curriculum development and a number of further practices that have been noted and attributed to the work of Equinex. As a DP member put it “*Transnational work presents a valuable addition to domestic activity, it widens innovation, learning and shares best practice*”.

4.5 Mainstreaming

In a transnational context it is too early to identify any meaningful mainstreaming practice. Transnational partners felt that it may be valuable to identify good practice in other Member States and use these as a means of adding credibility to influence policy suggesting that “*it would help to strengthen one’s arguments or give more credibility to one’s case*”

Transnational partners also felt that the opportunity to disseminate in each participating member state would be an opportunity to demonstrate joint transnational outcomes. These opportunities are generally accepted as a ‘natural platform’ for transnational projects to disseminate.

⁸ Empowerment – a guide for Development Partnerships

There is however, a further opportunity or added value element for Equinex that would not necessarily be a 'natural' progression but may be more noted as one of serendipity and forward planning on the Equinex Team's part. There is opportunity to highlight and raise awareness of the activities of Equinex at European Level over the next few months. The Equinex project has taken full advantage of creating a platform to present to policy makers at Director General Level. Equinex are planning a series of meetings in Brussels which may emerge as a catalyst for dedicated policy influencing at EU level.

4.6 Equal opportunities

Equinex has worked with a wide range of groups that experience disadvantage and often have complex and diverse needs.

This suggests that equal opportunities cannot be viewed in isolation as it requires a more in-depth view. The Equal guidance refers to equality and diversity as independent and distinct terms and offers: ⁹

- *The focus of equal opportunities practice is fairness – developing policies and practices that tackle inequalities to make sure that all personnel across all sectors are treated fairly and that service users do not experience discrimination.*
- *Diversity strategies recognise the importance of equality but concentrate on the complex needs and rights of all sections of the community, recognising multiple disadvantage and discrimination.*

At the very heart of the Equinex DP was the core principle of equality and diversity. These were best demonstrated by the passion of the project and the drive to involve and include beneficiaries as key stakeholders. Equinex was keen to support and enable their full participation in transnational activities and to learn from them what their barriers to employment were.

In practice this aspiration presented challenges. A DP member offered the following example: *“beneficiaries had the choice and opportunity to engage and heighten cultural awareness, to meet and exchange stories with others from diverse backgrounds; this would not have usually happened. Whilst this has enabled some beneficiaries to participate not all beneficiaries have been*

⁹ Equal Opportunities a guide for EQUAL projects page 9

able to take up this opportunity – for some of the client group the risk of attending a Member State event was not at all practical in terms of the risk factors and implications. Beneficiaries may require physical and psychological support to enable their participation”.

The Equinex DP carried out risk assessments prior to beneficiaries attending transnational events; they also took valuable advice and worked closely with experts from Newport Social Services to ensure appropriate support measures were in place for beneficiaries. These measures presented a cost to the project. The project recognised that not all project beneficiaries were enabled to participate transnationally and lessons have been drawn from this. The project also recognised that the level and degree of support that may be required in some instances is unattainable under current funding streams.

Key point 11

The overall view of the transnational partners was that “*each partner has had every opportunity to make an equal contribution to the transnational work*” and summed up by one of the beneficiaries as “*the work has been very enjoyable and fun, it has been hectic but worthwhile, and I would like to do this again*”!

5.0 If we were to do this again.....

The key messages that partners would like to share is that transnational work presents challenges, but it also presents many opportunities. The benefits of working transnationally, for this partnership at least, far out weigh any implementation/delivery challenges. The key learning points drawn from the work leading up to this report offer the following learning points:

Communication – there were differences in culture, work patterns, practice and language. In practice, when working to tight timescales these differences can be difficult to manage.

The context and content of language is often lost in translation contributing to decreasing the flow and understanding of what is being communicated.

The difference in work pattern and work practice is a further element that may decrease productivity of the partnership – particularly so if one partner is working to timescales and another is not.

Sustainability and longevity of partnership – the partnership(s) needed time to form, storm and norm. As a new partnership the timescale of Action 2 did not allow the partnership to take full advantage of building on this new, productive relationship.

Transnational work raised the level of understanding of transnationality and both trans-national and domestic partners viewed this increased understanding and awareness as a positive experience. It was felt that in learning from this experience it contributed to increasing mobility..

Key point 12

...and as offered by transnational partners

Getting the messages across to all DP members:

“Probably it could be very important to spend much time to involve the most of the partners/people into the activities”

One of the many benefits of working transnationally

*“The opportunity to explore and develop new ideas
To replicate models of good practice from partner countries to our own”*

The importance of factoring in ‘getting to know you time’

“Every partnership takes time to develop and after two years of transnational co-operation it can be said that it has been a valuable and mind-broadening experience to see how things are done in other organizations and other cultures”.

Building transnational relationships

“To have one transnational partner is better for the first experience and for the relationship. Important to have a good network and good communication among the transnational partners and try to maintain the same staff to let the project have stability”

6 Summary Matrix of findings

Drawing from the information gathered and expressed in the preceding pages of this document the following matrix has been used to summarise the key points highlighted.¹⁰

Key questions and issues	Possible indicators and performance targets	Evidence suggests	Possible practice level suggestions for future transnational activities
<p>Resources – Are these adequate to deliver the aims and objectives of the transnational cooperation?</p>	<p>Budget information/costs broken down by activity (Lead body role)</p>	<p>The lead body has made provision for repayment of travel costs to all DP participants</p>	<p>DP capacity, resources and the valuing of transnational activities may have enabled smoother participation at DP level.</p> <p>Equinex was keen to involve beneficiaries at transnational meetings and made provision possible for their participation. Future projects may wish to consider the added resources required for beneficiary participation.</p>
<p>Actions and activities – Are these appropriate to the goals set out in the TCA? Are they well planned and carried out?</p>	<p>Activities, outcomes and outputs as described in the TCA</p>	<p>The TN Partnership followed a structured work plan (TCA) which was monitored at Management meetings. Each TN partner contributed to the activities on the workplan</p>	<p>Maximising and enhancing communication – between transnational co-ordinators may have enabled a smoother process.</p>

¹⁰ framework adapted from the EQUAL good practice guide on transnational work

<p>Participation – Is participation in the transnational partnership both widespread and inclusive? Is it real or token?</p>	<p>All partners with defined tasks and roles All partners attending all meetings</p>	<p>TN partners had clearly defined tasks – evidence suggests that Equinex was often passed and seen as the lead in the role of TN activities.</p> <p>Initially, TN work was not clear to the DP who were not generally familiar with the strategy and boundaries of TN work.</p> <p>Beneficiaries undertook a ‘real’ key role in dissemination of Equinex DP activities.</p>	<p>Increased TN involvement – measures to ensure all TN partners deliver the agreed actions. Develop intra-working methodologies.</p> <p>Raise awareness of TN work at the earliest stage possible to DP.</p> <p>Budgetary consideration to be given to individual needs for participation.</p>
<p>Impacts – What impact has the transnational partnership had on job creation, employability, social inclusion, equality of opportunity? What impacts on learning? What impacts on labour market strategy? Has there been learning in one Member State from policy or practice in another?</p>	<p>DP partners and transnational partners</p> <p>Politicians and policy makers attendance</p>	<p>Learning and deeper understanding of equality practices across participating member states.</p> <p>The TN partnership delivered a successful showcase seminar at Brussels Employment Week in June 07.</p> <p>Equinex also met with politicians and WHEB to develop a strategic approach to take the key messages to politicians.</p>	<p>Impact work is ongoing and remains to be completed. The emerging practice lesson is the involvement of politicians and policy makers is a crucial factor in this area. Equinex engaged the help of WHEB to support in fielding policies and policy makers to make an impact at EU level. This may not have naturally occurred had the project not been involved with Member States.</p>

<p>Awareness and learning – Is there evidence that partners or others have learned about developments and new ways of thinking about labour market issues?</p>	<p>All partners disseminating their work in all partner countries</p> <p>Aspects of work translated into other languages for dissemination (either by producer or by user)</p>	<p>Evidence suggests that transnational working is a new concept for a number of TN and DP members – this in itself has offered a new way of working and has initiated a broader thinking of labour market issues in terms of what methods and processes are in place across the participating Member States</p> <p>Some translation of documents did happen. Particular reference to this is the leaflets that were developed for the Brussels dissemination event.</p> <p>The TN working language was English and business was conducted in English</p>	<p>Intra dissemination is planned toward the end of the project. Estonia has offered Wales the opportunity to speak at a high level conference. Reciprocal arrangements will be made between Estonia and Wales and Italy and Wales.</p>
<p>Processes and management - Has the partnership been well-planned and managed?</p>	<p>DP partners and transnational partners Work completed to time Work completed to budget Partners having fulfilled their planned roles</p>	<p>The evidence base for this section relies heavily on the self-evaluation process of Internal monitoring through questionnaires and a number of Equinex DP one to one interviews, additional questionnaires (TN and DP) and feedback.</p>	

<p>Outcomes and products – How complete and effective are they?</p>	<p>Products and outcomes that were planned Differences and amendments noted Assessments of their quality and fitness for purpose</p>	<p>The TN partnership has achieved a substantial proportion of the planned outcomes and products.</p> <p>-workshops in each Member State -exchange and share of experience and a range of reports.</p> <p>A product group was set up by Equinex to work on such elements as quality of products.</p>	
<p>Future collaboration between the partners – Is it likely that this will take place after the work of the EQUAL transnational partnership ends?</p>	<p>Instances of partners making direct use of materials of the partnership Evidence of partners changing policy or practice in the light of partnership discussions Partners identifying related work interests</p>	<p>Evidence of partners identifying related work interests exist albeit in early stages. The challenge is will these new interests evolve far enough over the remaining period of Equinex.</p> <p>Particular reference here on the interest of Rise to develop dialogue with partners in Italy.</p>	
<p>The added value of transnational co-operation - regional, National and EU levels?</p>	<p>Achievements against planned results Achievements against planned results</p>	<p>There is an emergence of added value that can be tracked through the achievements of the TCA planned results.</p>	

7 Sustainability and the longer term landscape

As part of the Transnational Cooperation Agreement between Estonia, Italy, Ireland and Wales there was a commitment to disseminate at a European level. The partnership had collaboratively and unanimously agreed to undertake dissemination activities in Brussels if appropriate, i.e. they had substantive outcomes/practices/lessons to disseminate. Accordingly each of the partners set a dissemination budget and agreed to focus a schedule of activities for dissemination.

An opportunity to disseminate the results and outcomes at an Employment Conference in Brussels in June 2007 emerged and it was decided that three of the four original partners would take forward a profile of activities and products for sharing of practice and influencing of policies at European level. The strategic objective of this action was to influence emerging policies and/or the delivery of policy at peer and higher sectoral level.

As already reported Equinex led on this transnational activity and also took the opportunity to engage in discussions with Wales Higher Education Brussels and a Welsh Member of the European Parliament. These meetings emerged as a vehicle to progress the Equinex agenda, and it is expected that a range of actions will be developed. These actions will lead to formulating a platform for Equinex to disseminate and share three key messages to an EU Policy audience in 2007. The messages have been loosely and thematically approached as: transnational work, support measures for disadvantaged groups, support for employers.

Both domestic and transnational partners echo the view that further and future collaboration would be welcome. The partnership has built a solid foundation to work from and it would be a great loss if this was not extended to provide further learning. Should an opportunity arise for further joint Transnational work it maybe as a continuation or may go through a metamorphosis, but the essence of the ground work would have been undertaken under EQUAL Round 2 and is wholly attributed to Equinex.

Further there are a range of funds at European Union level that may be appropriate for Equinex to take forward. These would include the successor to EQUAL which is Progress. In addition to Progress there are a varying range of EU funds available -, however this depends on the future direction that the partnership wishes to take. The University's Centre for Community and Lifelong Learning as a lead body to Equinex has developed a range of skills and know-how that would be invaluable to the progression of any future Transnational Programme. This could be harnessed once the Equinex partners decide how they wish to progress their collective agenda.

8 Conclusion

It may be noted here that the External Evaluation developed its own methodology and there has been little dovetailing of internal (self-evaluation) and external evaluation.

This internal transnational self evaluation has pointed out in its reporting that transnational partnerships are inherently dynamic and liable to raise challenges at implementation stage that require negotiation and resolve. This report offers a snapshot of how the transnational work ran in practice. Its starting point was transnational partners joining together, with no existing joint working history, little knowledge of domestic priorities and less knowledge of each others culture, work practice or ethics. They did however have one particularly unique quality: They believed in the '*spirit*' of transnational working. To return to the EQUAL Guide on Transnational Work "*the real Transnational builders have this little extra, you know, they are not nine to five workers. They invest huge amounts of time and energy in it; they believe in the cause they are working for*". This quote reinforces the ethos in which both the Equinex DP and its Transnational Partners worked tirelessly and enjoyably towards during their collaborative working relationship that spanned two-years.

As a result of this two-year work, evidence suggests that this transnational working partnership has offered a positive learning experience to its contributors, participants and wider partners, which has included a significant number of organisations for whom transnational work has been a new experience. The present section therefore gathers together some final observations and 'issues' raised by the partnership.

These observations are not all of the same 'weight', their inclusion here does not mean that nothing has been done to respond to them, as there are other factors that may be either restricting or pressing on a response.

- It will be clear from this report that Equinex played a full part in the organisation and delivery of both TCAs – illustrated perhaps most vividly in the activities of which have been reported on in the section *'the Transnational partnership in practice'*.
- There has been a general willingness and a strong commitment among transnational DP members to participate in and learn from transnational activities.
- The Transnational and Domestic Partners wish to continue and build upon this working relationship and have offered views in which they confirm the value of working collaboratively in a transnational context therefore:
- There is no doubt that the work of this transnational partnership will leave a 'legacy'. The challenge will be the ability to continue post EQUAL and the documenting of how this legacy will manifest itself.

The departure here maybe more aptly put by EQUAL' opening statement to Monitoring and Evaluation:

"A man of genius makes no mistakes - his errors are all volitional and are the portals of discovery".