At the recently held seminar on the Human Capital Investment Operational Programme (HCI OP) 2007-2013, I asked that Intermediate Bodies and Public Beneficiary Bodies ensure that they meet their Communications and Publicity obligations under the Programme. In particular, we requested material for a Newsletter and I am delighted to say there has been an immediate response from across the Operational Programme to our request, to the extent that we are now able to publish this Newsletter containing information on various activities and projects undertaken with the assistance of the ESF.

I think the stories contained within these pages illustrate the valuable contribution that the ESF makes to many individuals and organisations in Ireland and further demonstrates the need to let those stories be told through mediums such as this Newsletter. I would urge all HCI OP 2007-2013 participants to continue to address the information and publicity requirements for the duration of the Operational Programme.

Our thanks, therefore, to all those who contributed material to this issue of the Newsletter and we look forward to receiving in the coming months a steady stream of news on events, publications, conferences, success stories, newspaper articles, photos etc., all containing the appropriate logos, of course!

Willie Mc Intosh
Head of ESF Managing Authority

Chair – HCI OP 2007-2013 Poster

Investing in your future
Back to Education Initiative (ESF 1.3)

On the 19th June 2009 over 400 learners from BTEI, Adult Literacy and Community Education came together to receive FETAC certificates and celebrate their achievements. To mark the day each learner was invited to take lollipop sticks and draw or write what their learning experience meant to them. Pictures of individuals were also taken. There was great enthusiasm as people thought about how to fit three or more years experiences onto a small stick.

All the sticks were collected and this chair - visually representing individuals stories and success was made from them - examples of some quotes: “Gave us Opportunities”, “Fun”, “Laughter”, Learning, Creative, “Changed my life”, “Learning is exciting”, “Always let your light shine”

This chair is on permanent display in our VEC’s head office providing a source of discussion and inspiration. This piece of art represents over 400 learners, 30 tutors, 500 plus FETAC awards and up to 1 million euro of investment by the Department of Education and Science, The National Development Plan and ESF.

Together we are making a difference and investing in people’s future.
Disability Activation Project (ESF 2.2)

In January 2008, the Department of Social and Family Affairs obtained approval under the European Social Fund, Human Capital Investment Operational Programme 2007-2013, for a cross-agency programme to develop and assess new approaches to promoting participation in the economy on the part of people with disabilities.

The high level objective of this interagency project, entitled “The Disability Activation Project”, is to develop and test a comprehensive employment strategy-based on individual case management of people on illness/disability welfare payments - that will have the capacity to increase their rate of employment. The project has commenced in the BMW region, in Mullingar, Co. Westmeath. It is envisaged that the strategy, when developed and tested, will form the basis of a working model for activation of people on illness/disability welfare payments which can be rolled out on a country-wide basis.

The project brings together the key organisations, including DSFA, FÁS, HSE, VEC and the Community/Voluntary sector, involved in supporting people with disabilities to access employment and devise methods of intra and inter-organisational working and service delivery that will be characterised by accessibility, relevance, connectedness, coherence and effectiveness.

It is also engaging with the demand side of the labour market – Employers - to ensure that the benefits of enhanced supply will actually result in transitions to sustainable employment on the part of people with disabilities.

The project is developing measures to promote the recruitment of people with illness and disability by enhancing their potential to compete on an equal basis within the labour market through the provision of a range of supports. The project has run a number of programmes to date, including an ‘Enabled for Life’ course in Athlone, Co. Westmeath.
Participants were awarded their certificates at a function held in Athlone on Friday 11th December 2009.

Pictured on the occasion, from left to right are Grainne Gillespie (course participant), Miriam Magnier Flynn of ‘Career Decisions’ (course providers), Anne Holt (Disability Activation Project Facilitator), Flor O’Donoghue (Enabled for Life Course Facilitator), Gerard McKeon (course participant) and Scott McKenna (course participant).
Equality Mainstreaming Approach (ESF 2.9)

Mainstreaming Equality: Promoting equality and accommodating diversity in further education, training and labour market programmes.

The Equality Mainstreaming Unit has been established with funding from the European Social Fund, (through the Human Capital Investment Operational Programme 2007-2013) and from the Equality Authority. The main objective of the Unit is to contribute to addressing labour market gaps in Ireland for specific groups that are experiencing inequality across the nine grounds covered by the equality legislation. These are gender, marital status, family status, religion, race, age, disability, sexual orientation, membership of the Traveller community.

Minister Haughey opens the conference

The Equality Authority hosted a major conference on promoting equality and accommodating diversity in Vocational Education and Training (VET) on November 10th, 2009 in Dublin Castle. The conference was organised and supported by the Equality Mainstreaming Unit in DJELR, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and the Department of Education and Science.

It seeks to achieve this by facilitating and supporting institutional change within providers of further education, training and labour market programmes and within small to medium enterprises by strengthening their capacity to combat discrimination, to promote equality and to accommodate diversity.

This focus of this year’s conference was on the theme of equality in a time of change and
on the ongoing relevance of promoting equality and accommodating diversity in the design and delivery of vocational education, training and labour market programme.

The conference was formally opened by; Mr Seán Haughey TD, Minister for Life-Long Learning and School Transport. Other speakers included Professor John Field on the theme of Promoting Equality through Life Long Learning and Dr Helen Russell from the ESRI who drew together findings from three of the studies on the topic of inequality/discrimination in the labour market on the grounds of nationality prepared by the ESRI for the Equality Authority’s Discrimination Research Series. These studies found that discrimination and inequality remain a concern in the Irish labour market and that recession increases competition between workers and reduces the bargaining power of employee vis à vis employer. This, potentially, may lead to a greater risk of discrimination. It will be important to keep equality issues on the agenda and to remind all concerned that freedom from discrimination is a right protected by law.

Speakers in the second plenary session included Fiona Hartley, County Wicklow VEC, Eddie Higgins and Nuala Keher of EQUAL Ireland, and Siobhan O Dowd, of Pobal on the very practical implications and challenges of equality mainstreaming in practice.

The Equality Mainstreaming Unit will publish conference proceedings early in the New Year.

Carole Sullivan
Head of the Equality Mainstreaming Unit
Equality Authority

Conference Delegates
Integration of Migrants
(ESF 2.10)

Minister Curran and course sponsors/organisers

Dublin, 13th October 2009; Business in the Community Ireland's unique collaboration, entitled ‘EPIC ‘Employment for People from Immigrant Communities’ was today recognised by Minister for Integration, John Curran TD for its successful contribution to social inclusion.

The Minister acknowledged the success of EPIC at the most recent graduation ceremony from the programme, which saw 125 participants receive certificates of completion from the Minister. Since its inception in 2007, 1097 people from 53 different countries from Germany, Spain and Latvia to Angola, Iraq and Bangladesh have been referred to EPIC. Of these, 680 people have been eligible to participate and nearly 500 of these have been successfully placed in either training or education (36%) or in employment (64%).

Although recent figures show a rise in the number of immigrants returning home, EPIC has experienced a 25% increase in numbers from 2008 to 2009. Placement trends for 2009 show that education placements are rising from 21% in 2008 to 28% in 2009, considering current external factors employment placements are down slightly to 30% but many are still finding successful employment opportunities. Currently, there are 31 immigrants waiting to begin the programme.
Speaking at the graduation ceremony, Minister for Integration, John Curran T.D. said “I congratulate the EPIC programme on its continued success and on achieving such significant results. It directly assists people to find employment or enter further education and ultimately to become self sufficient. In these difficult times all sections of society have a contribution to make to the economy which is evident by looking at the shortlist and the winners of last weeks permanent TSB Ethnic Entrepreneur of the Year Awards 2009 as well as today’s graduates. Ireland has been fortunate in the type of migrants that it has attracted; these migrants have made significant contributions to the economy in the past and will no doubt continue to do so in the future. I also welcome the important role corporate Ireland has to play in social inclusion. ”

EPIC has two key business partners who have worked closely with our training programme since 2008. CPL, a Dublin based recruitment agency, has provided 234 clients with mock job interviews and BT has provided IT skills training for 170 clients to date. The graduation ceremony was held as part of National Corporate Responsibility Week 2009 to show how effective collaboration between community and business can have successful results.

Paddy Richardson, Manager of the Employment Programmes at BITCI commented that “The programme continues to deliver huge benefits to clients in terms of improving their English, improving their job seeking skills and raising their confidence. Training and employment play a crucial role in social inclusion for immigrants in Ireland and the uptake and demand for the programme shows how this unique collaboration between government, NGOs and business is a really effective way of providing a much needed service.”

The programme is a partnership project with the Government,
State Agencies, Business and NGO sectors which identifies immigrants that experience difficulties accessing appropriate employment and supports them in the process by providing individual guidance, specialised training and personal development opportunities. Managed by Business in the Community Ireland, EPIC is funded by the Office of the Minister for Integration and the European Social Fund Human Capital Operational Programme 2007-2013. BT and CPL are the business partners for this initiative.

**About EPIC**

EPIC (Employment for People from Immigrant Communities) is an innovative programme open to all adults from EU states entitled to work in Ireland and those from non-EU states with stamp 4. The aim of EPIC is to assist this target group to find employment and/or further training and education in Ireland. Currently, EPIC is a Dublin-only initiative.

EPIC is funded by the Office of the Minister for Integration and the ESF. Managed by Business in the Community Ireland, the programme is run in association with SPIRASI. Other partners include BT, CPL and FÁS.

The programme consists of:

- Professional English Training for Employment
- Interview Skills training
- A series of Life and Work skills information sessions presented by a range of national and local organisations (See Appendix for list)
- I.T. Skills training
- Assistance in finding employment or further education and training.
- One on one career guidance advice
- Free access to computers for online job searching
- Mentoring service available

*Investing in your future*
• Advice for entrepreneurs

• Social Support Officer to assist with issues regarding social welfare benefits, childcare, housing, education grants, etc.

• A Certificate of Participation upon completion of the programme

Our Social Inclusion Programmes
Business in the Community Ireland, in addition to it work on advising big business on corporate responsibility, run a number of innovative social inclusion programmes focusing on education and employment. These programmes are: EPIC, Schools' Business Partnership, Linkage, Ready for Work, The Mentoring Service and Prisons Project.
Eight young people from Kilkenny City forego two weeks of their school holidays in July of this year (albeit two wet weeks!) to attend a full-time course with Kelron Health and Safety Company. Funded by the European Social Fund and the Irish Youth Justice Service, Compass Garda Youth Diversion Project provided the opportunity for the young people to attend the course with the view of increasing their skill set to include basic health and safety work practices. The course consisted of seven modules including Occupational First Aid, Manual Handling, Interpersonal Skills, Preparation for Work, Sales Skills, Fire Warden Training and Patient Handling (Nursing home and Creche). According to Sharon Kelly, Director of Kelron Health and Safety, “The group really enjoyed the training and got on very well in it. We adapted it in places for their age but in the main, they did really well”. It was a lot to ask of the young people but it was felt that prolonging the course over a few months might affect attendance and consistency. “I didn’t think I’d go but my Mam said it was worth doing. I’m glad I did it now cos I won’t get the same chance again. It will be good for my CV too” said Carolena (15).
Skills Training (ESF 1.1)

Mr Vladimir Špidla, European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs & Equal Opportunities travelled to Moyross, Co. Limerick on July 3rd, where he met and applauded a group of FÁS trainees from Southill who are participating in a new Hair & Beauty Training Course in the Limerick Enterprise Development Park (LEPD) initiative.

The initiative offers a number of vocational training programmes specifically developed for young (18 – 25 years) unemployed persons in the regeneration areas of Moyross, Southill, Ballinacurra Weston and St. Mary’s Park. Delivered by FÁS, these courses include Hairdressing, Office and ICT (Information Communications Technology) skills and Construction Skills.

An essential component of the course is the dedicated guidance and mentoring offered to participants prior to and during the course. Learners also complete a four-week placement with an employer, which for many is a significant `first-time` experience in the workplace. Accredited under the National Qualifications Framework at major awards levels 3 and 4, FÁS is committed in assisting these individuals to gain access to recognised qualifications and improve their employment prospects. Supported by the European Social Fund, the courses are in collaboration with the City of Limerick VEC, who provide educational inputs, and the Local Employment Service who provide career guidance support to participants.

The unemployment rate for the regeneration communities is approx. 20% double - the national average. Coupled with the recent downturn in the local economy, FÁS has responded to this challenge and is in the process of introducing a work-
based programme (internship) to assist participants in gaining an entry to work.

With its main Training Centre located in Raheen, FÁS also offers community employment for adult learners, community-based training programmes for early school leavers and guidance and advice services through the Local Employment Services located in the regeneration communities.

Paying tribute to the local community’s efforts, Commissioner Špidla also acknowledged the support of the various agencies and their numerous collaborative initiatives for the regeneration of the local communities.

**Note from ESF MA:**

Details of the Information & Publicity Guidelines relating to the **HCI OP 2007-2013** have already been circulated to Intermediate Bodies. The Guidelines are also available to download from our website [www.esf.ie](http://www.esf.ie) and should be consulted on a regular basis to ensure compliance.