Evaluation of the Equal Brighton & Hove Employer Engagement Project

Brough Dann

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Contents

Introduction

The Equal Brighton & Hove Employer Engagement Project has been running since December 2005 and is currently funded until June 2007. The project's aim is to bring together and support the numerous employer engagement agencies in the city in order to network and share best practice, as well as representing these organisations strategically in the city and acting as a lobbying voice where this is needed.

As the project approached its mid-point the co-ordinator wished to undertake an evaluation exercise of the main operational part of the project (the OEEG), to ensure the project is maximising its potential within its given timeframe, and also to identify whether there are aspects of the project that could be continued beyond June 2007.

Brough Dann was commissioned to design and deliver this evaluation. The research was undertaken by Siobhan Brough with assistance from Esther Gill during September - December 2006.

Research objectives

The key objective of the research was to evaluate the Equal Employer Engagement Group in terms of its achievements to date and its potential for development both up to and beyond the project's projected end date of June 2007. The research was designed to focus on the following areas;

1. What change has been brought about by the existence of the project?

2. What do stakeholders (particularly OEEG members) value about the Equal Employer Engagement project?

3. What can be learnt from the first half of the project's timeframe and are there improvements to be made to the project?

4. Is there a need to sustain the service the project is currently providing?

Methodology

The research used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, making some use of existing monitoring data where it existed. The three main strands of the evaluation were;

1. 21 telephone interviews (including 16 OEEG members)
2. 4 face to face in-depth interviews (including 1 OEEG member)
3. Desk analysis of existing OEEG data

A sample was chosen for the interviews to include a broad range of OEEG members, from small organisations to larger well-established ones, and ensuring representation of all the Equal client groups. Two members of the Workforce Development Strategy Group; a representative of Equal; a representative of the Business Community Partnership; a business which has engaged with the OEEG project and two organisations which have not engaged with the OEEG were also included in the evaluation.

A note on reading this report

Due the nature of the project the sample used for this evaluation was relatively small. Percentages have been used in this report for convenience, however when reading percentages relating to OEEG members, please be aware that 6%= one person.

Summary

This section lists the headline findings from the research. More detailed explanations of the data can be found in the main report.

1: Working with employer engagement organisations

Feedback from OEEG members

- 38% of those interviewed were very satisfied with the work of the OEEG project to date and 62% satisfied. None of the respondents were dissatisfied.

- 94% said networking was the most important aspect of the OEEG. Other aspects were;
    - Work placement referrals (69%)
    - Sharing best practice (44%)
    - Training (44%)

- 56% said lobbying was the least important aspect. Other aspects were;
    - The EE Forum (25%)
    - Training (25%)

Growth & development of OEEG members

- Networking
    - OEEG members were most like to state 'networking' as the main benefit their organisation had gained from the OEEG

- Training
    - Risk Assessment and Health & Safety training had been particularly welcomed, as was the opportunity for more informal sharing of best practice through the regular OEEG meetings

- Workplace development opportunities
    - 63% said the OEEG has had a positive impact on their work placements, either directly (finding placements through information circulated by the OEEG) or indirectly (through increased knowledge and skills)

- Other impacts on OEEG members
  o 69% thought the OEEG has also had another impact on their organisation. All of these were positive and focused on networking, information sharing, advice/support and the opportunity to market services to their peer group

Feedback on OEEG meetings & training events
- Evaluation forms from OEEG meetings and training events were analysed during the research. Although some events had been better received than others, generally there was a high level of satisfaction with the meetings and training events over the year.

Other stakeholders
- Three stakeholders who are involved with the OEEG at strategic level were asked what they thought the main role of the OEEG was and whether it was fulfilling this role. The comments reflected those made by the OEEG members about it being a supportive network and convenient single point of contact, as well as feeding things directly into the city's strategic level through the Workforce Development Strategy Group and thereby able to directly influence strategy.

Organisations who have not engaged with the OEEG
- During the research contact was made with three organisations which had initially had contact with the OEEG, but had not progressed to membership. It would appear that the reason that these organisations did not chose to become involved in the OEEG was partly because it does not relate directly to their area of work, and partly because they are in effect already reaping the benefits of it 'second-hand' through the other organisations they are working with.

Commentary from face to face interviews
The key points from the face to face interviews relating to working with employer engagement organisations were;
- The project suffered from a late start, compounded by the council's Workforce Development Officer being on long-term sick leave, and the fact that the original plan to have Sector Development workers could not happen. Available resources in terms of staff time have therefore been stretched considerably.

- It was hard for some of the newer projects to initially get to grips with the complexities of employer engagement, and there was perhaps a degree of naivety on their part in terms of what they could realistically achieve

- All the stakeholders felt the OEEG was achieving its objectives within these limitations and within the timeframe it had

- Partnership working was mentioned as a positive development under the OEEG

- Networking was again identified as a key benefit of the project, and of benefit to both large and small organisations

2: Working with Businesses

Impact so far

- 94% thought the OEEG has had an impact on employer engagement in Brighton & Hove. The one remaining interviewee felt unable to comment.

- The main impact was improved coherence and a key point of contact. Other impacts were;
  - o A degree of momentum, helped recently by the PR campaign with The Argus
  - o Greater collaboration and cohesion amongst employer engagement agencies

- Some felt there was still a long way to go in terms of actual businesses involved

- Of the non-OEEG stakeholders, 2 of the 3 thought there had been some impact and the remaining 1 felt unable to answer. They felt training and sharing best practice had been particularly beneficial, but were unsure whether the project had increased numbers of placements.

Commentary from face to face interviews

The key relevant points from the face to face interviews were;

- The Argus coverage was considered to be a major breakthrough

- The main impact relating to businesses is greater coherence. An incident from a few years ago was described, where 5 agencies had turned up at a business premises at the same time.

- There was felt to still be some way to go to increase the number of businesses involved, and stakeholders were frank in describing the barriers that businesses may have to engagement, including;
    o Time restrictions
    o Developing trust in clients coming on placements
    o A willingness to 'talk the talk' but not to do any more

- Stakeholders were clear that businesses need to be 'sold' the benefits to them.

- Peer recommendation was suggested as an effective marketing tool

- The city council was brought up unprompted during three of the four interviews, in terms of being one of the city's major employers, but slow in offering placements

3: The future of the OEEG

Suggestions for practical improvements

- 69% thought the OEEG could be improved or developed in some way. Suggestions included;
    o Better understanding of employment law and the implications for those taking placements
    o More staff to enable it to act as a broker
    o Changes to meetings
        ▪ Bi-monthly rather than monthly
        ▪ Smaller meetings so there is more chance to contribute
        ▪ More time in the meetings for networking and hearing what members have been doing
    o Communication
        ▪ Less or more targeted information circulated by email
        ▪ Better online resources
        ▪ Clearer branding of the OEEG
        ▪ More regular business events like the Business Breakfast

- The suggestions for improvements/developments from the non-OEEG stakeholders were;
    o The need to start engaging more proactively with businesses, building on the foundations that have been set
    o The need to monitor and to publicise the achievements of the project
    o Resources issues in terms of staff time were mentioned in relation to both of the above suggestions

Now to June 2007
- 84% wanted the OEEG to start looking at securing funding beyond June 2007 – although they were keen for the project to also continue delivering what it has been delivering in terms of networking opportunities and skills development

- 31% thought the project should now be focusing on getting work placements

- All the non-OEEG stakeholders thought the project should be looking at securing funding, although not at the risk of destabilising the work they are already doing

Monitoring progress
- During the interviews several OEEG members made comments implying that they felt unsure what the impact of the project had been and stating that they would like to see solid evidence of its success

Continuing beyond Equal
- 94% of OEEG members interviewed thought the project should continue beyond Equal. The remaining one felt unable to comment.

- All three of the non-OEEG stakeholders thought the project should continue

- 50% of OEEG members interviewed would be willing to pay a membership fee. One organisation said they would not. The remainder were unable to comment, either because it would depend how much it was or because the decision would not be made by them. There was a question as to whether a membership fee system would be sustainable.

Funding

The non-OEEG stakeholders were asked how they though the OEEG might be funded in the future. Suggestions were;

- Business sponsorship linked to the city's big development projects such as the King Alfred or the Marina, or to large employers

- The city council, through Neighbourhood Renewal, Economic Development or Learning & Skills

Commentary from face to face interviews

The key relevant points from the face to face interviews were;

- That the OEEG has done a good job done over the past year in setting the foundation for the future of employer engagement in the city, and this work should continue, although the OEEG would need to develop in some way once the Equal programme ends

- Continuity was felt to be important in terms of maintaining momentum and maintaining the confidence of businesses, which could be harder to win back a second time. The co-ordinator's role is seen as key to the success of the project, and central to its current achievements.

- The current structure of the Equal Employer Engagement project, with the OEEG feeding into the city's Workforce Development Strategy Group, was felt to be a good structure, with the WDSG currently strong in terms of its membership and capacity for taking the programme forward

- There were questions whether BCP is the right place for the project to be placed, but equal doubt as to how constructive it would be to place the project in the city council

- The suggestion was made that the OEEG develop along more sector-based lines with the Care sector suggested as one sector for development in this way

- Sector development was felt to allow the work of the OEEG to be more strategically tied in with the other aspects of decision-making in the city, such as planning around population trends, and the development of the Employment Plan

- The interviews highlighted that funding is going to be a key issue and not one with an easy answer. Interviewees clearly felt it was something that the Workforce Development Strategy Group should be turning their attention to.

- Two of the interviewees were asked for a response to the idea of business sponsorship. Responses to this idea were positive and the concept was developed in one of the interviews into the idea of using secondments from local businesses to support the project.

Conclusions & Issues for discussion

This section looks at the conclusions that can be drawn from the analysis of the data gathered during the research. The conclusions are grouped under the project's original research objectives. The research also identified some issues to be explored further, and these are included in this section.

What change has been brought about?

The main change that has resulted from the existence of the Equal Employer Engagement Project is the degree of collaboration that now exists between employer engagement agencies. OEEG members and other stakeholders commented that whilst this had often been suggested in the past, it took the creation of this project to make it happen. The benefits of this are many, but include a greater understanding of activity across the city, enabling clients to be referred between agencies easily and resulting in less duplication of effort. Employer engagement organisations and other stakeholders agreed that a key point of contact for businesses was a useful service, and in fact a business stakeholder interviewed for the research wanted this to be taken even further, so their business would have one point of contact through which they could plan a year's worth of engagement activity, including securing any necessary funding or support.   It was also felt that the current project co-ordinator was a good contact point for businesses as she is confident dealing with the business sector, and has enormous enthusiasm for the project which helps encourage businesses to participate.

What do stakeholders value?

The evaluation shows that the OEEG project is fulfilling its key objectives of providing a support network and structure to those organisations working in employer engagement in the city, whilst improving their skills and standardising best practice across the sector. Levels of satisfaction within OEEG members and other stakeholders are generally high, and the evaluation picked up repeated praise for the hard work and dedication of the project co-ordinator. This consistent picture is particularly impressive considering the range of organisations that the membership of the OEEG encompasses, from small single-worker projects to large government-funded bodies.

For those OEEG members either new to employer engagement or new to the city, the OEEG network has proved particularly invaluable, enabling them a single point of access to all the key people they need to meet. Several members also mentioned that the meetings enabled informal contact between agencies, which makes it much easier to understand what other

agencies are doing and also to arrange more formal meetings with them at a later date. A clear connection is implied between these more efficient working practices and the quality of the services agencies are able to offer their clients.

In terms of skills developed, OEEG members commented on the value of having improved skills in Health & Safety and Risk Assessment. There was some suggestion that increasing these skills could potentially make organisations aware of how sub-standard their practice had been before, leading to a drop in confidence. However where this was brought up, it appeared to be part of the process of developing and learning, and not an issue in the longer term.

What can be learnt?

Feedback from some of the new Equal-funded employer engagement projects in particular highlights how difficult the area of employer engagement can be to initially understand and begin to work in.   Whilst the OEEG project has been enormously supportive, there was perhaps an assumption early on that all members shared an understanding of what was meant by 'employer engagement' and this may not necessarily have been the case. There are many areas for a new project worker to understand, from social and psychological issues to the complexities of the benefits system and this learning process needs time before a new worker can effectively begin to find placements for their clients – many of whom will face enormous physical, mental or social barriers to getting into the workplace. It is important that future developments continue to bear this in mind, and an efficient support network is maintained for small or new projects to be nurtured in the early stages, perhaps supplementing networking and training with the use of a mentoring system.

Is there a need to sustain the service?

The research indicates a strong interest in continuing the OEEG – or something like it – beyond the end of the Equal funding, for the reasons already stated in the conclusions (improved networking, skills development etc). There was a question whether the OEEG would follow the same format, or whether it would take on a different one. The suggestion was made by strategic stakeholders that an employer engagement service be developed along sector-specific lines, as this would allow for stronger tie-in with the city council's employment and skills development strategies. This is an area for further discussion at strategic level. There was strong support for the continuation of the co-ordinator in her current role if the OEEG is to continue.

Issues for discussion

Raising awareness in the business community

OEEG members and other stakeholders were impressed with the work of the OEEG co-ordinator to date in raising the profile of employer engagement in the city, particularly the development of a strong working relationship with The Argus, which was considered to be a major achievement. However there were questions about whether this has had any impact on the business sector itself at this stage, and whether the city's business community really is more aware of employer engagement than before the project started. Stakeholders and OEEG members agreed that solid groundwork has been laid and now the project needs to focus on the engagement of actual businesses. At the time of the research a Business Breakfast was about to take place, and it would be worth exploring whether OEEG members feel more positive about the profile of employer engagement in the business community after this event.

Comments made by strategic stakeholders would suggest there is also a need to develop dialogue with businesses in the city. This is not just about businesses 'understanding' about employer engagement but rather a two-way process, with employer engagement agencies also developing greater understanding of the real constraints that businesses - especially small businesses - work under, so that both sides can be brought closer together for their mutual benefit.

Brokering placements

There appears to be some confusion over the role of the OEEG in relation to brokering placements. Whilst its objectives are focused on enabling agencies to broker placements themselves, some agencies seemed to expect the co-ordinator to be a direct broker of placements, and are expecting to see more of this brokerage in the remainder of the project. This issue is further confused by the fact that the co-ordinator has brokered placements where the possibility has arisen, and would appear to have good skills in this area. The position of the OEEG co-ordinator on this issue needs to be clarified.

Understanding Equal targets

There is a need for clarity also around Equal's targets. These appear focused on developing the skills and confidence of employer engagement workers, rather than on increasing the number of businesses, but not everyone who was interviewed during the research seems to have taken this on board and some OEEG members were asking what there was in terms of statistics on numbers of businesses engaged through the OEEG's work.

The importance of the co-ordinator

The current co-ordinator was clearly identified through the research as the project's key strength, and interviewees rarely talked about the project without reference to her skills and dedication. This strength could be the project's vulnerability in terms of the potential for the project to maintain itself should the current co-ordinator be unwilling or unable to continue in her role. This is obviously a common problem within small organisations. It may be worth exploring whether, to build sustainability, the work of the OEEG should be mainstreamed into the work of an existing organisation, or perhaps the city council. However the pros and cons of this would need to be fully considered, and strategic stakeholders suggested that there were benefits in the OEEG co-ordinator being seen by businesses and agencies as something of a 'free spirit'.

Funding

Whilst there was much praise for the project and its achievements, and enthusiasm for its continuation, suggestions for its future funding were noticeably thin on the ground. Strategic stakeholders were quick to suggest solutions that involved other stakeholders and less enthusiastic about making any suggestion of a commitment to the future financial support of the project themselves. It is clear that the OEEG's continuation is far from guaranteed, and there may be much hard lobbying work to be done if the apparently much-welcomed work of the Equal Employer Engagement Project is to continue.

1: Working with employer engagement organisations

The prime objective of the Operational Employer Engagement Group (OEEG) is to develop the skills and confidence of organisations who are working in this field. This section looks at how successful the project has been in meeting this objective, and how OEEG members and other stakeholders have responded to the project over the past year.

Feedback from OEEG members

In terms of general satisfaction levels, all of those interviewed were either satisfied or very satisfied. None of the respondents were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

How satisfied would you say you are with the work of the OEEG project to date?
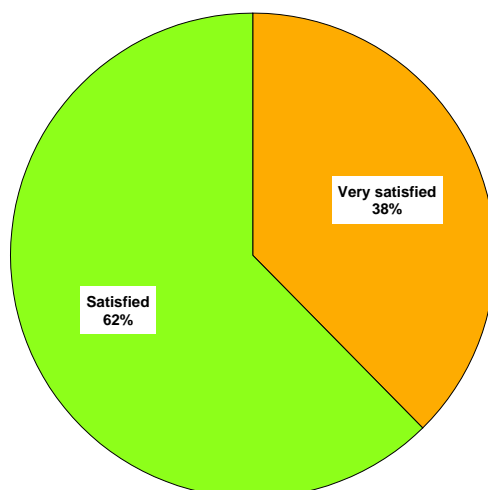
During the telephone interviews OEEG members were asked which aspects of the OEEG they felt were most important to their organisation. Networking was the most common choice, with 84% saying this was one of the most important aspects of the project (see chart on following page). Work placement referrals was the second most common choice.

Can you tell me which of the following aspects of the OEEG are most important to your organisation?
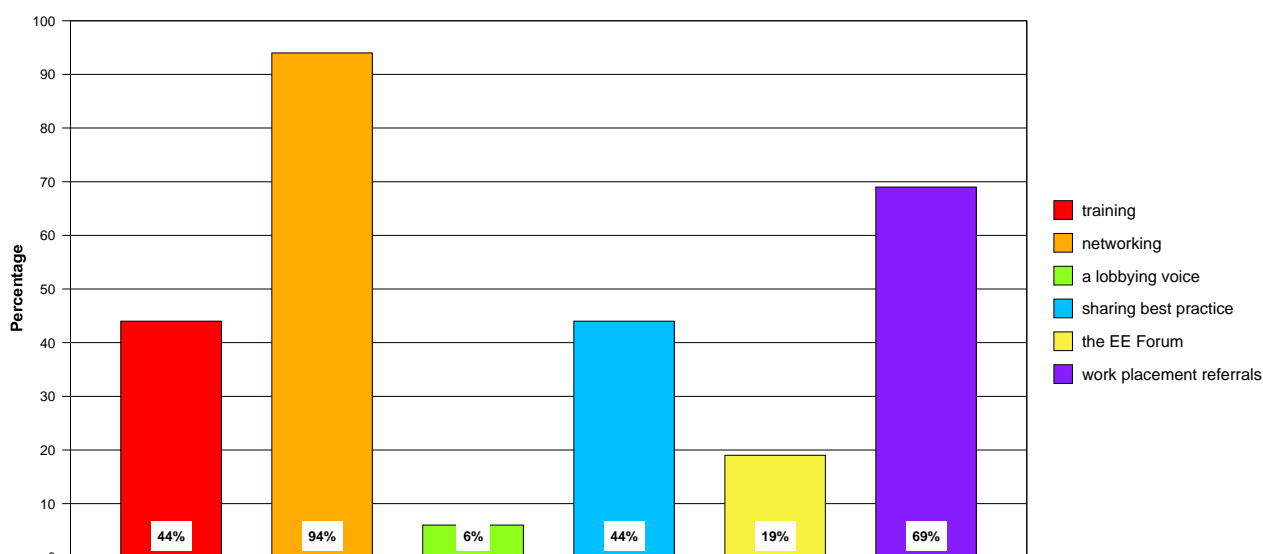
This was supported by the comments that many interviewees made during the research about the important role the OEEG plays in providing a forum for regular networking (see also Growth & Development paragraph on following page);

> *"It's a really useful group to share ideas with . . . I had to go out and network by myself before - there was no other group of providers, just more social-work based groups."*

> *"I have found the project a fantastic opportunity to talk to lots of people and organisations that I didn't know were there."*

> *"Meeting up, recognising faces and having that personal contact has been great - that contact is really important. Doing it all by email wouldn't be the same."*

OEEG members were also asked what they felt was the least important aspect of the OEEG for their own organisation. The most common response was 'a lobbying voice' (see chart on following page). However when asked what they thought the OEEG project should be focusing on between now and June 2007, lobbying came out as a top priority (see Section 3 'The future of the OEEG').

The next least important aspects were training and the EE Forum, although comments made during the interviews suggest that those who did feel the need for training have found it enormously beneficial (see Growth & Development paragraph on following page).

In terms of the EE Forum, comments seemed to indicate members regard it as something of a mixed blessing – whilst it can be a lot of information to read through, it is fresh information and a useful tool for keeping abreast of developments;

> *"The EE Forum is a bit of a double-edged sword - sometimes there's too much information, but lots of it is good information and I have been able to post questions which is very useful. Also you know you'll get information as soon as it's available."*

> *"The emails going back and forth through the EE Forum enables me to keep up to date. It's not all relevant, but it's still good to know what's going on. I'm better informed now because of the Forum - it helps us to give better information and advice to clients."*

Which are the LEAST important to your organisation?
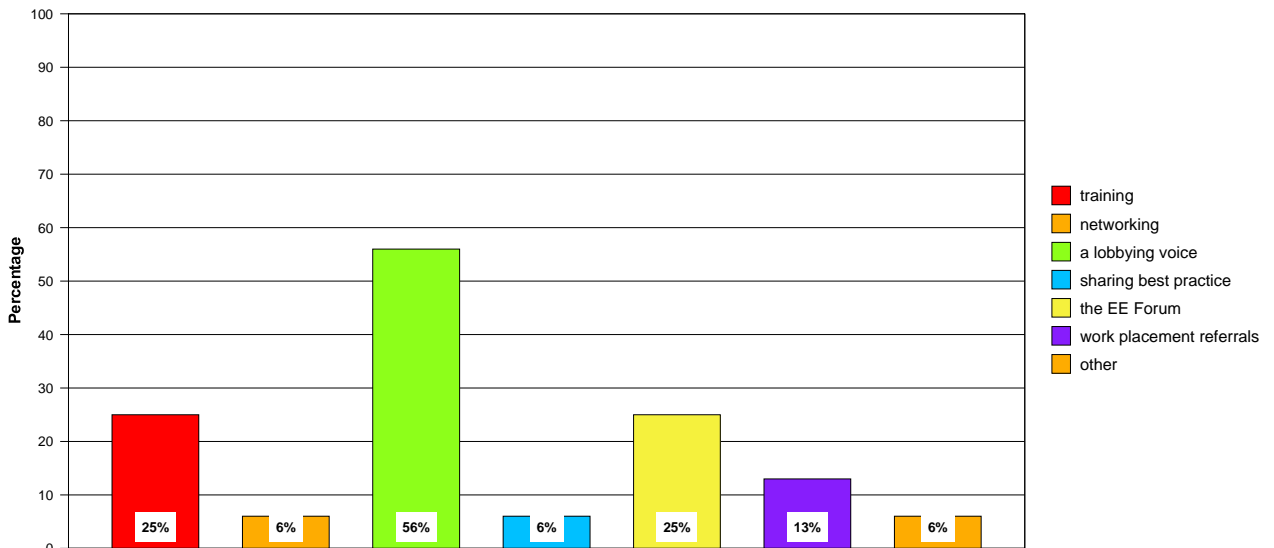
The person who chose 'other' made the comment; *"none - they're all very important"*.

Growth & development of OEEG members

Networking

OEEG members were asked what benefits they though their organisation had gained from the work of the OEEG project. The strongest benefit for members was the good, quality contact that the OEEG provides with other agencies through the monthly meetings. This has enabled them to build up relationships with other agencies over a period of time, and to build up a clearer picture of the local operational 'landscape', which in turn supports their own organisational development;

"Meeting other agencies, realising that we're not far off the mark, which has been confidence building."

"It's good to forge relationships in the City on key strategic issues - this group supports our work and benefits our business."

"Networking. We do it anyway, but it's widened through OEEG - it's good to have face to face conversations with people to put faces to names . . . This networking does and can happen in other ways, but is more direct through OEEG."

"Having a better understanding of the 'landscape' of other providers, which helps me to understand what's unique about my project, and also means I have been able to utilise the expertise in other projects to help our understanding of particular issues."

This is particularly important for those working in isolation;

"Networking enables us to give a better service to clients - we find out about other initiatives. I'm quite isolated in my work so it enables me to find out about other work going on in the city."

Training

The other key benefit to OEEG members has been the training and skills development that the project has offered them;

"I took part in a workshop on Health & Safety and as a direct result of that am attending a Risk Assessment training day tomorrow. All of this will help me with my job."

"It's improved my knowledge of employment law, which is important."

"Six of us went on a 'risk assessment' course, which was absolutely brilliant and the reduced rate meant more of us could do it."

In terms of skills improvements, comments from OEEG members indicated that there is also an informal skills-sharing taking place within the group, which is particularly useful to those new to the field of employer engagement;

"Sharing best practice in terms of what works and what doesn't is really useful to apply to my own work. Which interventions work for which groups has been useful to know."

"It's valuable to learn about how other members operate and we've learnt things from them - how they market their work etc."

Workplace opportunities

Just under two-thirds (63%) said that the OEEG has had a positive impact on the work placements their organisation delivers. Of the 16 organisations interviewed, 3 had found placements directly through the OEEG - either through information circulated in the group or because another OEEG member had provided an opportunity - and 1 organisation had offered a placement through the group;

"It's given us opportunities for work placements - we've done two placements now that have come through the OEEG"

"We offered a work placement at our organisation to the group and there was a very swift response."

One interviewee commented how this was having a direct positive impact on clients;

"Having placements available to offer clients makes it feel 'achievable' for them. It also makes my life a lot easier. Even if the placement isn't right for them it shows that it's not simply me running round trying to place them - it shows that others are working on it too."

Others felt the impact had been more indirect, through an improved knowledge of the sector and through the development of their own skills;

"My scope has been broadened. I look further afield because I know what others are doing."

"The training has had a positive impact."

". . . we are able to make better recommendations to clients."

Has the OEEG had any other impact on your organisation?

69% of the OEEG members said it had. All of these impacts were positive, and were largely related to the impact of increased networking and also information sharing, whether this is direct information on placements;

"Karen sending out the vacancies from businesses. It's an additional source of information - someone else out there looking for you."

> *"Yes, in the form of regular updates on vacancies through email and meetings - this has been useful."*

Or simply advice and support;

> *"Because of the information sharing I know a lot more about employer engagement work across Brighton & Hove that I wouldn't know if it wasn't for the OEEG."*

> *"Claire Mitchell is very helpful - proactive and friendly. I have rung her for information and advice which has been very useful."*

Two organisations had found it a useful way of marketing their own services to their peer group;

> *"It's raised awareness of our work which has been good - enabled us to speak to lots of organisations in one go, which saved us a lot of work. This has been one of the most useful things for us."*

> *". . . we have been able to market our own workshops through the OEEG - this has been very effective."*

Two interviewees mentioned the work with the Argus as a particular benefit, as it was raising the profile of employer engagement overall.

Feedback on OEEG meetings & training events

Those attending OEEG meetings and training events have been asked since March 2006 to complete short evaluation forms at the end of each meeting in order to pick up their response and any suggestions they might have for future improvements or developments. These evaluation forms have been analysed and the resulting charts can be found in the appendices. The key findings of this analysis are shown below;

OEEG meetings
- In terms of overall enjoyment an average of 73% over the year rated the meetings at 5 or 6 (with 1=very poor and 6=excellent). This high level of satisfaction has been relatively steady with a slight increase over the year.

- In terms of the meeting content, an average of 71% gave a 5 or 6 rating. Although this is a good average over the year, levels of satisfaction with content are inconsistent, with a lot of fluctuation month to month.

- Feedback on networking again shows fluctuations, with an average of 74% rating it at 5 or 6 over the year, but results per meeting ranging from 93% in April to 50% in November

- Ratings for the meeting venue in terms of location and access have shown improvement over the year and an average over the year of 60% rating it as 5 or 6

- Attenders are asked whether they have made any useful business contacts during the meetings, and over the past 6 months 75% of attendances have resulted in making useful business contacts

To conclude, it would appear from the completed evaluation forms that satisfaction with the OEEG meetings is generally good. Evaluation forms are monitored with any comments logged and actioned, giving a robust mechanism for OEEG members to suggest developments or content for future meetings should they wish to do so.

OEEG Training events
- 73% rated their overall level of enjoyments as 5 or 6 over the four training sessions

- 80% rated the content relevance at 5 or 6 over the four sessions, although this ranged from 57% for the PR Workshop to 100% for the Health & Safety Workshop

- 64% rated the delivery style at 5 or 6, although again this varied from 36% for the PR Workshop to 90% for the Marketing Workshop

- 76% rated the venue as 5 or 6

- 97% of attenders said they would attend future OEEG training events

Satisfaction levels overall were markedly lower for the PR Workshop in July than for the other three sessions. Comments indicate this may have been partly related to the venue, which was hard for some OEEG members to get to, and partly to the delivery style of the trainer. The variation in ratings across the four events perhaps demonstrates the difficulties

in providing effective training for OEEG membership, which ranges from those with very little experience to those with many years working in the field. As with the meetings, comments are logged and actioned and so the mechanism is in place for the continued honing and development of a tailored training programme.

Other stakeholders

Three stakeholders who are not OEEG members were also interviewed during the telephone research. These three were interviewed as they have all had involvement with the OEEG at strategic level. They were asked what they felt the main role of the OEEG was, and whether it was currently fulfilling this role. The comments made largely reflected and developed those made by the OEEG members themselves, in terms of the OEEG being a supportive network;

> *"To enable members of the group to engage more effectively with employers. They've had their capacity developed and built trust so the can refer employers to each other, and employers feel they get more value. Also members have more support - some of them are quite isolated and it's tough work, with lots of knock-backs."*

And the OEEG being a convenient single point of contact for businesses;

> *"My problem [as a business] is that there are so many different organisations, anyone bringing them together is just great, I think it's a good idea."*

Although the suggestion was made that this go further and the OEEG become a single point of contact for funding streams as well (although this stakeholder went on to recognise the practical difficulties in realising this idea);

> *"It would be great if there was someone who could round up everybody into a one-stop shop - organisations, funders, everyone - so I could sit with them and plan our next 6-month engagement programme in one go, rather than a bit here, a bit there."*

One stakeholder commented that the unique aspect of the OEEG was that the co-ordinator feeds back comments directly into the city's Workforce Development Strategy Group, giving the OEEG direct access to those able to make changes at strategic level;

> *"The OEEG enables us to feed things back and get policy changed."*

Organisations who have not engaged with the OEEG

During the research contact was made with three organisations which had initially had contact with the OEEG, but for reasons that were unclear had not progressed to membership. Of the contacts at these three organisations, two had left or had their role re-structured, one of whom was now un-contactable. Brief telephone conversations were held with the two people who could be contacted. One of the projects is working closely with an organisation which is a member of the OEEG, and did not feel the need to double up on attending meetings or receiving the information directly. The other organisation is working in employment skills and training, but does not place clients other than in their own organisation, therefore although they were aware of the OEEG and what it did (and are in fact working with a number of the OEEG members including Working Links, Job Centre Plus and the Working Together project) they did not feel it was useful for them to become a member.

In conclusion, this brief exploration would suggest that the prime reasons for these organisations choosing not to become directly involved in the OEEG are because it does not relate directly to their area of work, or because they are in effect already reaping the benefits of the OEEG 'second-hand' through the other organisations they are working with.

Commentary from face to face interviews

This section looks at comments made during the in-depth interviews which relate directly to working with employer engagement organisations.

In terms of the OEEG, stakeholders commented that the project suffered from a late start;

> *"I think the whole Equal project itself has been really troubled in getting off the ground . . . and that makes it very difficult for the projects with the funds really, to get any momentum."*

> *"Equal was put back unfortunately . . . the funding meant it didn't happen on time and I guess some stuff, and this included our way of starting the project, was all a bit 'hiccupped'."*

This was compounded by a key contact at the city council (the Workforce Development Officer) being on long-term sick leave, and the fact that the original plan to have Sector Development Workers could not happen;

> *"[The OEEG] has missed out mightily on not having the sector workers that we were expecting, the part time sector-specific workers that we were expecting to run along with this project and that wasn't anybody's fault, the host organisation we were targeting found in the end that it couldn't host, therefore there was no employer for these people to be attached to."*

Comments made during the interviews also highlighted how hard is has been for some of the new employer engagement projects to fully understand the complexities of work placements within the timeframes of the projects;

> *"It was absolutely new to me . . . and so the induction to it was too casual, looking back at it now . . . I didn't know about Benefits . . . if you get it wrong, it's a very important issue in somebody else's life."*

> *"… in fact I did organise a work placement . . . for a guy two years ago now, and that went very well and that was lovely, but we did no Risk Assessment because we didn't know we needed to do Risk Assessment, we spoke to his mum and said 'are you at ease with him doing a placement?'. . . actually the council were involved as well so maybe they did all that paperwork side of it."*

Comments also highlighted the severity of some of the difficulties their clients face in getting to a work-ready stage;

> *"The guys and girls that I work with are on a hell of a long journey - if you want to call it a journey - back to employment and however much time and energy you put into them, you can't speed that journey up and you can't stop somebody dropping off the edge of wellbeing."*

However, all of those interviewed felt that the OEEG was achieving its objectives within its timeframe;

> *"I think two things that jump out at me, one is the number of good quality employers that Claire's managed to get in touch with, and the other thing is, that through doing that, she's managed to keep people, the employers, interested in what she's doing and actually I think set the foundation for continued good quality employer engagement."*

> *"I just think that Claire's worked really hard under very difficult circumstances and achieved a lot in that time, and in spite of all the adversity, she keeps going to achieve her objectives and that's admirable really."*

Partnership working particularly was mentioned as a something that has been developed through the OEEG;

> *". . . it's brought the voluntary and statutory sectors that bit closer in talking to each other."*

> *". . . that's got to be a major achievement of Equal, to enable that many more people or organisations to come together to talk about the issues and share practice."*

As with the telephone interviews, networking was identified as a benefit, and of equal benefit to both large organisations and small in terms of enabling them to more effectively manage their own resources;

> *"We rely in national marketing and we rely primarily on our partners to do that engagement work for us, so the existence of a group where we can inform and influence everybody out there, both those contracted by us, and those who are partners with us . . . we don't have the resources to do it ourselves."*

> *". . .when you meet somebody and they're talking quite openly about their client group and you talk about what you offer, the service and your client group, then relationships are made."*

On a practical level, the monthly meetings were felt to be a good thing as it allows for relationships to be built over a period of time, and for issues to be put in front of the group on a monthly basis, making them more likely to be pushed forward;

> *"For a lot of organisations if you're talking about a partnership that meets quarterly, if you miss one out, it's a long gap, there's a long gap and a lot happens . . . even if a 100 organisations, if only a third of them could turn up for each . . . that would be a massive amount of network."*

2: Working with businesses

This section looks at the impact stakeholders thought the OEEG has had on businesses, and how these relationships might be developed further.

Impact of the OEEG on employer engagement

All but one of those interviewed thought that the OEEG has had an impact on employer engagement in Brighton & Hove (see chart below) – the remaining interviewee felt unable to comment.

Do you think the OEEG has had an impact on Employer Engagement in the city overall?
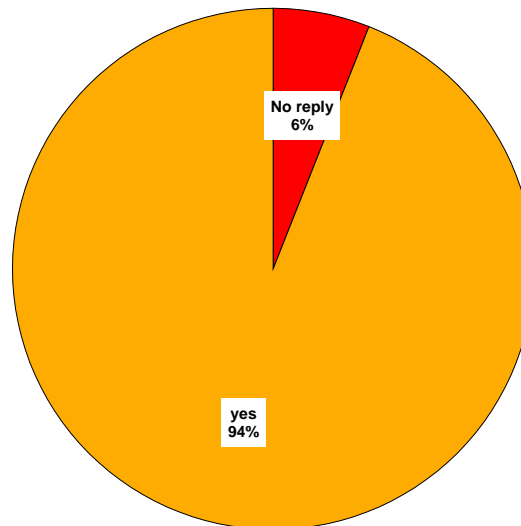
Interviewees were asked what this impact was.   The main impact was felt to be that the OEEG provides a coherence which was previously lacking, and gives one key point of contact;

> *"It's really good for employers to speak with just one organisation - and makes the system more efficient for us."*

> *"It's given employer engagement a centralised focus - not bits & pieces all over the place."*

Also that the existence of the OEEG has raised the profile of employer engagement locally, and brought it some momentum;

". . . when you say you're part of the OEEG group people immediately know what you're talking about."

"Claire's very persistent and dynamic in her approach, and I think they get involved because she makes them feel this is something they really should be involved in."

Which has been supplemented by the development of a consistent PR campaign with the Argus;

"It's raised the profile of employer engagement, made employers more aware and positive about it. There's been a lot of stuff in the Argus and publicity about the Business Breakfast."

". . . it is beginning to have a voice and raise profile of the group, e.g. through the Argus."

Other comments suggested that the OEEG is encouraging local employer engagement projects to work with greater collaboration and cohesion;

"It's got people realising they've got to work collaboratively not competitively, and they're more likely to get employers on board."

"It's been the catalyst for a lot of people who were thinking along the same lines but haven't been able to get in the same room and talk. You need someone to drive that behaviour."

"There's more awareness of other providers - I was surprised how many similar providers there are working with the same target groups."

However four interviewees made the point that in terms of developing relationships with the potential employers there is still a long way to go;

"It's raised awareness of placements across the city, but there's still a long way to go. We need to increase the actual number of placements."

"So far it's not really there yet with getting employers on board – it's still building relationships with employers through things like the Business Breakfast."

Comments from non-OEEG stakeholders

Of the non-OEEG stakeholders interviewed, 2 of the 3 thought there had been some impact on employer engagement in the city, and the remaining 1 found it difficult to comment.   The stakeholders felt the training and the standardising of best practice had been particularly beneficial;

> *"Previously there were a number of activities being called 'employer engagement' which weren't really – for example fund-raising under the guise of employer engagement. It has to be clear, or you're not going to get the response you want. We don't have numbers, but it has standardised things making it easier to relate to employers - they're less wary."*

But one was unsure as to how much impact the project has had so far on increasing numbers of placements;

> *"It does tend to be the same people over and over again - I don't know if they've managed to engage anyone new."*

Commentary from face to face interviews

This section looks at comments made during the in-depth interviews which relate directly to working with businesses.

The achievement of getting Argus coverage was mentioned as a breakthrough in raising the profile of employer engagement in the city;

> *"I think certainly Claire's done a lot of work in breaking into the Argus thing . . . because the meeting I went to they were like 'oh no we can't possibly spare the space' but they were obviously persuaded by Claire's argument . . . so to have achieved that it's quite mind boggling."*

The main impact relating to businesses was the coherence that the OEEG provides. One interviewee described in detail an incident that had happened before the OEEG's existence, and which was one of the catalysts for moving towards the formation of the OEEG;

> *"I guess what particularly sparked it was a specific event that took place with AMEX who had five separate agencies in the lobby on the same day queuing up unaware that one another were there to see the HR business partner . . . Now with someone like AMEX, they can recover from that, they'll probably sort of curse us all individually behind our backs afterwards, and take a deep breath and then get on with life, but*

when that sort of thing happens on a smaller scale with SMEs in particular, the chances are that they'll then block everybody in future."

Putting effort into building relationships with businesses was seen as absolutely key to successful employer engagement;

"That's been a very clear message from other partners that I've spoken to and I understand that . . . when I've go someone cold calling trying to sell me something and I just don't want to know because I think I haven't got the money and if I've got the money and I want to spend it, I'll investigate."

Two of the four interviews included comments from stakeholders that they felt the OEEG has not yet succeeded in significantly raising the profile of employer engagement in the business community. Stakeholders were frank in describing the barriers that businesses may have to engagement, even if the willingness is there;

"It's difficult still to get employers to give time away from their busy schedules to discuss things . . . I think deep down a lot of employers would like to but they can't always do it."

"I think the idea of working in partnership is difficult for some smaller businesses to understand . . . they just want to get on with their own stuff and they know their own business . . . I think if you're running your own business, you need to feel sure that that person can be trusted, that they actually can do something . . . I think people want to but I think it's just tricky. "

"If I was a small employer, I wouldn't be that rushed to take one of my guys on . . . They show reliability to us but we're very, very flexible, we don't promote our business so that we're over-capacity on customers, so we're always able to do it if it's just the two paid members of staff. The realities of it is that they've done brilliantly doing this, but the next big step which is that hotel over there with some sod of a head chef who's not going to care for you, that's a bit tougher."

One stakeholder commented that some businesses can be happy to 'talk the talk' without entering into any meaningful engagement;

"They talk the talk but they don't actually walk the walk so you need to challenge and test and put things in place to make sure that they're not given any opportunity to not face up to their obligations, but it's not easy!"

The comment was made more than once that businesses need to be 'sold' the benefits of the process to give them motivation to develop their engagement;

> *"Employers are there to be sold a benefit, they're not there to be sold a process."*

> *"I think it's the contact with employers and making those contacts positive because that is the most difficult thing . . . to just say to employers "keep talking to me about your problems and I'll try and keep coming up with solutions . . . it doesn't have to be now but just tell me when there's an issue and I'll come up with a solution", it's that sort of brokering position which is very good."*

Peer recommendation was suggested as an effective tool for selling on benefits to other businesses;

> *"With employers, I think that if the right ones have been contacted - and so far so good - then what we need to do now is just to tease out whether those employers work with other employers because there's nothing better than peer group recommendation, so the next trick will be just to make sure that all the employers that have said to Claire 'yes I'll do something', or 'thank you very much, I enjoyed that, I'll come back for another worker at a later date', they are talking positively to their peer group."*

The subject of the city council was brought up unprompted during three of the four interviews, from the perspective of how apparently slow it has been in offering placements, despite being one of the city's major employers;

> *"The city council itself, a very good example in that hearts and minds were won within one or two individuals years ago, but it's taken us this long, you know, two/three years of hard graft . . . to really begin to see some results coming from it."*

> *"It's been very difficult to get enough placements in the council, it's not a general unwillingness, it's just internally . . . to organise that person and to think about a legitimate job that they could do."*
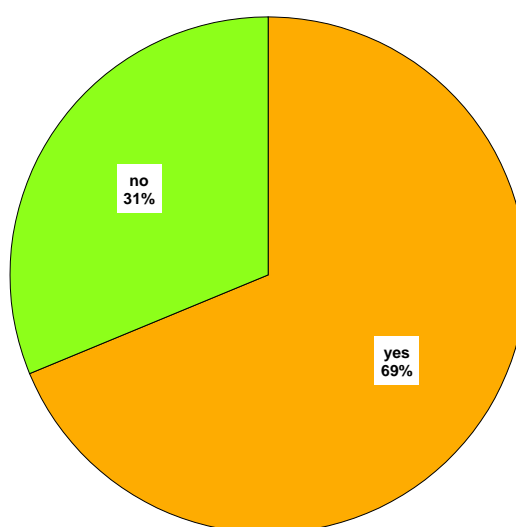
3: The future of the OEEG

This section explores suggestions made during the research for ways in which the OEEG could improve and develop between now and June 2007. It also explores what stakeholders thought should happen to the OEEG after that time.

Suggestions for practical improvements

69% of interviewees thought the OEEG could be improved in some way (see chart below).

Are there any ways you think the OEEG could be improved overall?

Suggestions for improvements ranged from the minor (time allocation in meetings) to the major (securing the future of the network), but covered three broad topics, which were:

1. Growth & development
2. Changes to the structure of meetings
3. Communication (internal and external)

Growth & development

One interviewee suggested that there needed to be an improvement in the understanding of employment law within the OEEG and the seriousness of the implications for those taking up placements;

> *"If it's going to continue it's going to have to be managed by people who have an understanding of employment and employment issues. . . Although Claire goes and negotiates she doesn't have a full understanding of employment issues - for example there are specific criteria set by the Job Centre for someone to be able to do a work placement and not lose benefit . . . When you're dealing with people with benefits*

> *you really need to know what you're talking about . . . some of the job descriptions she's been circulating have been inappropriate."*

Although there was also recognition that as a new project it was still 'feeling its way' and could learn and develop from its experiences;

> *"Like all projects, you do what you can, improve it, make mistakes, learn from that and you build on it."*

Another interviewee felt that more staff would benefit the project, and enable it to act more consistently and proactively as a broker;

> *"More staff - a whole group to broker placements would be great. They provide a very positive 'face' to employers, but are limited by lack of staff. A database of employment opportunities would be really useful."*

Changes to meetings

The suggestions made for changes to meetings were;

- Bi-monthly rather than monthly meetings
- Smaller meetings so there is more chance to contribute (i.e. running each meeting twice with two smaller groups, rather than one big group)
- More time in the meetings allocated for members to update on what they have been doing and for networking; *"It would be good to hear more from members - tips, ideas etc".*

Communication

The key issue was the amount of information circulated by email through the OEEG, which some organisations found problematic;

> *"I receive a lot of emails every day, and it loses its impact and doesn't address the fact that there are many different styles and formats of information and we all respond differently to them."*

> *". . . some filtering of information for groups so you get more targeted information would be good."*

Two interviewees also suggested the development of better online resources; *"like information, training etc online".*

One interviewee wanted to see clearer branding of the OEEG and a regular repeat of events

like the business breakfast;

> *". . . clearer branding of the OEEG and better external communication, and more regular events like the forthcoming Business Breakfast - not too frequently, maybe once a quarter, but involving businesses."*

Non-OEEG suggestions for improvements/developments

All 3 of the non-OEEG stakeholders had suggestions for improvement. Two of these related to the need to start engaging more proactively with businesses;

> *"They should be getting out there and engaging a lot more employers - not just the usual 'hard core' businesses."*

> *"To me, it's really successful, but how do we increase participation in terms of engagement in the city, especially in the private sector? Everybody's so busy."*

However this also raised the issue of resources;

> *"I get the sense the members are increasingly looking to Claire to be an Employer Engager, and she hasn't got the time to do this."*

> *"It's a shame the Sector Workers never came off - that's left a gap in terms of analysis and strategic work, which would have been useful (like Constructing Futures). Having said that, it would be a more sustainable route to develop the skills of those already doing it (rather than just do it for them)."*

The need to monitor and publicise the achievements of the project was also mentioned, although again the resources issue was raised;

> *"They might be doing this already, in which case they should be shouting to the rooftops that they're doing it, so businesses think 'I should be part of that'."*

> *"If I could put another person on the team it would be good - someone a bit more office-based, to write things up."*

Now to June 2007

OEEG members were asked what they thought the project should be focusing on between now and the end of the Equal funding in June 2007. Whilst members were keen for the OEEG to continue doing what it has been doing in terms of delivering training and providing networking, 84% wanted the OEEG to start looking at securing funding beyond June 2007, and 44% wanted it to focus on lobbying, to raise the profile of the group and secure its future;

> *"It needs to look at how they're going to continue with some sort of service - what will the legacy be? The project could be picked up by the council or the Job Centre?"*

> *"Making sure results and benefits are shared externally as well as internally - that this is beefed up. That will have an impact on securing funding beyond June 07."*

One interviewee brought up the importance of an effective exit strategy;

> *"To start looking at minimising the damage when or if the project ends - if it just suddenly stops the ripples could go on for a very long time. It needs a really good exit strategy."*

31% thought there should be a focus on getting work placements and this view was mirrored in comments made throughout the interviews;

> *"Lots of good groundwork has been laid, now it's time to really get employers engaged before the project ends."*

> *"We need more referrals with new businesses - this will happen through raised awareness and strong, clear messages about the group."*

Non-OEEG members

The 3 non-OEEG stakeholders all commented that the OEEG should be focusing on securing funding;

> *"It's great they're getting the evaluation done, and if it is a 'yes, this project is working' then it is going to need to focus on funding."*

However there is the need for the OEEG to be able to focus on continuing the work it is already doing and not get distracted by chasing funding or developing new strands of work;

"I think it should be focusing on what it's already doing. There are some interesting developments, like the Social Enterprise Hotel, but Claire & Karen need to be careful that their remit doesn't get too stretched."

Monitoring progress

During the interviews several of the OEEG members commented that they felt unsure what the impact of the project had actually been, and they would like to see evidence of its success;

"Can't answer whether OEEG has had an impact on employer engagement in the city - there's been lots of meetings, but I'm not really sure what the impact is."

"If it's going to continue it should be reviewed - what parts have worked and what parts haven't?"

"I buy into the principles, but impact and success are questionable at this stage . . . What are the success measurements? How does the group measure its success? Are there any 'numbers' available on increases in work placements? . . . lots of good stuff but what does this equate to?"

Continuing beyond Equal

All but one of the OEEG members interviewed thought the OEEG should continue beyond Equal (see chart below).

Do you think the OEEG should continue beyond the end of it's current funding?

don't know
6%

yes
94%
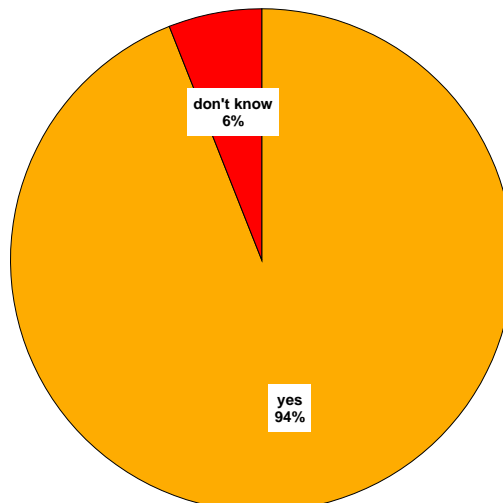
The remaining one was unsure what the OEEG's role would be when the Equal projects themselves end, and therefore felt unable to comment;

> *"Who is it going to continue for after June 07? Lots of those projects are funded by Equal so won't exist."*

All three of the non-OEEG members also felt it should continue;

> *"Anybody trying to get more employers involved can see that it should continue, otherwise what will happen? There'll be a total lack of continuity."*

Membership fees

Half of the OEEG members said they would be willing to pay a membership fee (see chart below).

If yes, would your organisation be willing to pay a membership fee?

don't know
44%

yes
50%

no
6%
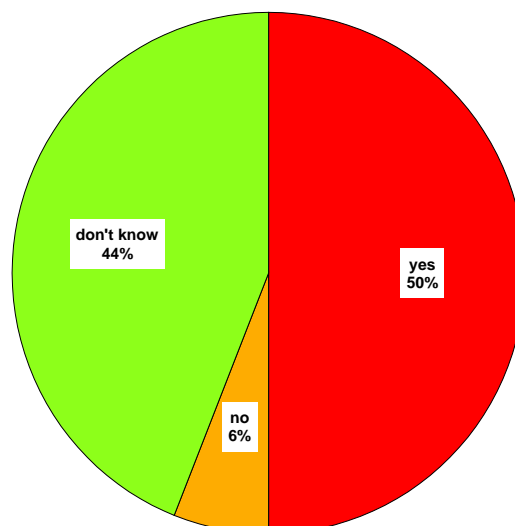
7 said payment of membership fee would be dependent on how much it was and 3 said they couldn't comment as the decision whether to pay would not be made by them, but by a central office or at managerial level;

> *"It would depend how much the membership fee was - I can't really comment on that."*

> *"The decision on a membership fee wouldn't be made locally - I really don't know whether we could pay."*

There was some concern that a membership fee would lead to a degree of exclusivity;

> *"Membership fee would depend on budget and amount - this is not sustainable for OEEG as so many groups are on very tight budgets. If OEEG has a membership fee will that exclude some people / organisations? One of its strengths has been the involvement of so many groups."*

Funding

The non-OEEG stakeholders were specifically asked how they though the OEEG might be funded in the future. One suggestion was a business sponsorship deal linked to the city's big development projects, or the city's major employers;

> *"If it gets some momentum, businesses might carry it themselves. The OEEG could get an annual sponsor, maybe tied in with big projects in the city - for example Karis are the main contractors for the King Alfred development, they might be interested in being a sponsor? Or the Hilton Metropole, they're a big relatively affluent company with a big local profile. It'd be harder for smaller local companies - it just wouldn't make good businesses sense - it would have to be the larger companies."*

The other suggestion currently being explored is the city council's funding streams under various departments, including Neighbourhood Renewal, Economic Development and Learning & Skills. One of the OEEG members also suggested the council as a future supporter the project;

> *"At the end of the day it's the Local Authority's responsibility really. They've got their targets and it's not fair of them to say to the voluntary sector 'you pay to deliver our targets'. It should be part of the Local Area Agreement - it would hit so many targets for the council. It's got to be mainstreamed, otherwise it's just separate and random."*

Commentary from face to face interviews

This section looks at comments made during the in-depth interviews which relate directly to the future of the OEEG

Continuing the OEEG

Stakeholders felt the OEEG had done a good job over the past year in setting the foundation for the future of employer engagement in the city, and that this work should continue;

> *"I'm convinced that we need a new scale of the Employer Engagement group post Equal, that's one of our questions, 'do we need it?' Yes we do."*

Although the point was raised that the OEEG would need to develop in some way once the Equal programme ends if it is to maintain its usefulness and focus;

> *"Yes I do, I think it's a very useful forum . . . and it could continue to be useful after Equal . . . my fear is that it might continue but it wouldn't have a Core centre . . . if you take Equal away, what are you left with? Another partnership and there seems to be a lot of partnerships."*

Continuity was felt to be important in terms of maintaining momentum;

> *"I think it's going to be terribly important that we do keep those things going and we don't lose those opportunities we've created."*

And also in terms of maintaining the confidence of the businesses, which once lost could be harder to win back a second time;

> *"If you engage with a group of employers and then pull back, trying to build the bridges the second time is always very much harder, so once you've established the links, you need to keep those links going."*

Current structure

It was clear from the interviews that the co-ordinator's role is key to the success of the project, and that this role is regarded as central to the current achievements of the project;

> *"You need somebody like her who always has a 'can do' attitude and always manages to get to see MDs and the right people in bigger companies."*

> *"I could probably name you 20 people in my orbit that I regard as important for Brighton & Hove and I would say Claire's one of them . . . it would be good to keep her."*

The current structure of the Equal Employer Engagement project, with the OEEG feeding into the city's Workforce Development Strategy Group, was felt to be a good structure, with a strong WDSG capable of taking the programme forward;

> *"I think the Workforce Development Strategy Group has pretty much got everybody there."*

> *"The Workforce Development Strategy Group . . . that's the strongest starting point that you can have, because anyone who knows Brighton & Hove is there and anyone who knows Employment and Training is there."*

The interviews did raise some questions about whether BCP is the right place for the project to be placed. However there seemed to be an equal amount of doubt as to how constructive it would be to place the project in the city council;

> *"The weakness in my proposition of having Claire adopted by the city council would be that she'd be seen as a city council employee, and once you get tagged by that, you're tagged, and although I think the city council has got a reasonable reputation amongst the employers, employers are always happier when somebody's a free spirit."*

Developing the OEEG

During three of the four interviews the suggestion was made that the OEEG develop along more sector-based lines;

> *"It would be good. . . to make sure that what [the OEEG] has been doing is in keeping with the stated key sectors that are important for employment, and so therefore her work would dovetail with Economic Development, would dovetail with the LSC's policies and our Training Providers and so on and so forth, and all helping to make sure that the existing and the foreseeable occupation related work that has to go on, is being done."*

One example sector that was suggested for development in this way during the interviews was the Care sector;

> *"I was talking to a guy, we were talking about getting disabled people into work. . . and he was talking about . . . 'of course you can't have disabled people working in the care sector because they wouldn't be able to lift patients' . . . actually there's a lot of people with particularly mild to moderate learning difficulties, who would be great working in a care centre looking after old people, looking after children."*

This would allow the work of the OEEG to be more strategically tied in with the other aspects of decision-making in the city, such as planning around population trends, and the development of the Employment Plan;

> *"Where Workforce Development is concerned, the city is good but . . . it would be good through Claire's mechanism to have the agencies talking about what's going to happen within four years, because the one thing you can plan on actually, is based on demography because that is not going to change - subject to a disaster or a freak of nature - it's not going to change."*

> *"[The OEEG] has given everybody a great foundation and that ought to work into the creation of the Employment Plan For Brighton & Hove, and then I think we'll have something to give back to the employers, which will be another reason for them continuing to be involved with public sector or discretionary funded organisations."*

As well as tying in with strategic planning, there were comments in the interviews about the potential for 'added value' in the work of the OEEG;

> *"I think if it is delivering some of those real added-value work like the actual collection of work placements, and all the members of the Operational side and the Strategy agree with that, then the group itself can be seen to be adding value rather than just being hubs for meetings."*

Particularly in developing cross-agency working around employer engagement;

> *"It is this intelligence-led cross agency working involving employer engagement and making sure that the right sort of employers are talking with the people that actually could offer them solutions, so the legacy would be . . .a sort of Employment Solutions Brokerage . . . it's that sort of spirit, that sort of thing could be what follows."*

Funding

The interviews highlighted that funding is going to be a key issue to address for the project to continue, and not one that currently has an easy answer;

> *"I just know that Sussex Enterprise don't have very much money, the Chamber doesn't have any money, the Enterprise Agency doesn't have any money, EBS is due to finish because their funding is ending, BCP again it's vulnerable to funding for the same reasons that everyone else is, the council is equally difficult, so it's whether the role of that OEEG role becomes amalgamated with someone else's post so that that work isn't lost, i.e. incorporated say into the council's Workforce Development Officer's post, so that they took that on."*

Particularly in the light of the competition for funding in the city;

> *"People are trying to work to a Business Simplification Agenda and the other Business Support Agencies who might be engaging with employers, are struggling for funding themselves, there's many mouths being fed by one bird."*

Although interviewees clearly felt it was something that the Workforce Development Strategy Group should be turning their attention to;

> *"How we fund it is something else and I guess that's really to be taken back to the*

> *Strategy Group who have key players who can influence the funding."*

The interviewees clearly felt that if the OEEG is working strategically then it should be supported;

> *"It would be good now for people on behalf of Claire, to actually be lobbying the Economic Development and Enterprise Board people . . . and say "look, can we not put some Revenue Funding aside for the next few years to keep this going because the results are very promising, but (1) we want to go up a level of sophistication and (2) we want to link it with all sorts of planning considerations that are around, like the new Brighton & Hove Plan?"*

Two of the interviewees were asked for a response to the idea of business sponsorship, which had been suggested during the telephone interviews. Responses to this idea were positive;

> *"The actual sort of 'ask', the number on the cheque to run it for a year would be nothing, it's a tiny drop in the ocean . . . and they can see the benefit of employing people they would maybe not have normally considered, it really has a knock on effect and they'll get publicity out of it, so that's an excellent idea not just from a funding issue but also that it will lead to people being employed."*

The idea was developed in one of the interviews into the idea of using secondments from local businesses to support the project;

> *"You might be able to get people on secondment for a year from businesses to work with her, obviously you've got to have that stability, one person continuously, but there might be somebody's decision to say 'we can't put in funding but we'll send someone over'."*

However the reality from the interviews was clear; there is a need for someone at strategic, decision making level to make a clear commitment to addressing the funding issue if the will is genuinely there for the project to continue;

> *"It's in a very delicate position because if somebody's not coming up with the cash to pay for it out of say Regeneration Funding or European Union Funding, you then get the problem 'well if they're not going to pay, who is going to pay?', because the employers are not going to pay, the LSC's not going to pay, Jobcentre Plus is not going to pay and so you go on and on, suddenly you find a 100 reasons not to pay for it, but it is actually. . . [it's] a wonderful cementing activity where employers feel more involved with what the city council is trying to achieve."*

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