

## The Partnership

The East Renfrewshire Employability Partnership (EREP) is a fairly recent creation borne out of the activity which was already taking place in the area. Current members include East Renfrewshire Council which leads and convenes the partnership, Skills Development Scotland (SDS), Job Centre Plus, Careers Scotland, Voluntary Action to represent the third sector, the Chambers of Commerce to represent employers. The council are represented through a number of different departments – Education, Economic Development and the corporate presence through HR.

In 2006 the Council commissioned a report looking at the issues of employability and out of those ideas, suggestions and discussions came the employability partnership. The first meeting took place in February 2008.

The Key Aims being:

- Co-ordinated approach to employability across the authority.
- Avoid duplication of services.
- More “bang for your buck” – added value.
- Better use of resources and more focus deployment.

The Council saw a number of benefits in establishing a partnership from sharing resources and attracting more resources and genuinely providing a good service. East Renfrewshire, as an authority, wants its people to have ambition and to believe they provide the best innovatory service in the country.

## The Challenges

### Strategy

The strategy was formed around what is needed, not what could be done with the existing resources. So this was an immediate challenge for the partnership. A key to success will be the culture established within the partnership and engaging with groups the public sector often leaves outside the net – the private sector.

The challenge is to address the imbalance between touchy-feely front-end stuff and dealing with true private sector business. Often the employer intermediaries partnerships include are just training providers.



### Partners

Engagement with employers in a mutually beneficial manner is one of the current challenges. EREP have a partnership group looking at community engagement and a partnership group looking at employer engagement. John Bergin who Chair's the Partnership says “It's the side of the fence we don't spend enough time. We are starting to have interesting examples of good practice. I think we have an opportunity to shape this and place a heavy influence on the demand side of things – supply is abundant.”

### Membership

Building walls and protective environments where members could safely operate in silos, was a pattern that many partner organisations were familiar with. The Partnership is determined not to let that happen to their embryonic entity.

It became apparent that one of the biggest challenges will be at an operational level and not necessarily at the strategic level. It is a hearts and minds cultural shift that needs to take place in an open and systematic manner. The members were faced with the realisation that what we're doing just now is not fit for the strategic purpose and so some significant changes must be made.



## The Solutions

### Strategy

Buy-in was found to be crucial to enable the partnership to work effectively. Commitment, energy and enthusiasm were made visible at a strategic partners level to make this partnership work.

The partnership may have very little resources, but the strategic buy-in is enabling it to pull together innovative work. To gain the buy-in the partners worked on the strategy, developed the strategy, agreed the strategy – that became their starting point and from this a great willingness to work together has emerged.

### Partners

**“I think we’re just entering the stage of moving from the meeting, to, “This is what I need you to do” – if you want to work in partnership, this is what it means. As were we’re just entering that territory I don’t get the sense that people will baulk at that.”**

John Bergin Partnership Chair, who realises the importance of the partnership not getting stuck in first phase development - moving into implementation and action is crucial.



### Impact On Service & Practice

Currently there is only anecdotal evidence of impact. For example, the partnership looked at what the Council delivers in terms of Employability courses. This was compared with Community Learning and Development providing the same service to effectively the same target group. The outcome has been a question for the partnership – why do both?

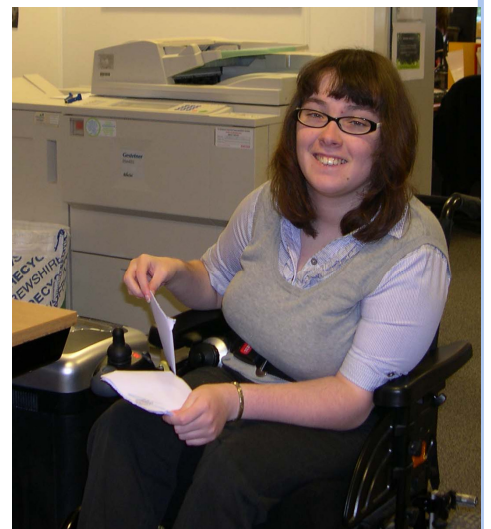
Community Learning and Development have just completed a strategy, of which there are certain parts related to employability and they wanted to establish monitoring groups to check the progress of each of their themes. The partnership’s strategy group agreed to monitor those employability objectives and that saves duplication.

## Support

EREP did not receive direct advice from the Scottish Government when setting up, but has welcomed the more formal structures and support coming through the Employability . However, partnership practitioners are now looking for specific and targeted information they can lock onto and use with ease. One example being, where’s the best place to train employability key workers? What skills do they need to be consistent with other partnerships? Where’s the forum that can help them learn? Consistency across practice is crucial and SE can help with that. The exchange of information through networking and web-based events have been appreciated in 2008 and their progression anticipated into the future.

Monitoring and evaluation frameworks – for consistency across the country – is an important areas for EREP. Additionally, how can the partnerships inform better policy and decision making and get real information at a national policy level.

An emerging area is developments in qualifications for employability at practitioner and manager level.



## Next Steps

The partnership's work with employers is limited, face-to-face contact has been minimal for example. The partnership wants to re-organise resources – uncover the ones being misdirected and pull them into the right activity. This could be supported with a toolkit outlining what the partnership offers employers and how they can get involved.

It has been considered that the Council could do more to create opportunities for the most disengaged as it is the single biggest employer in the area. So this will be a priority for in future activity to set an example for the private sector.

Champions in the private sector is another emerging activity that will be exploited through the contact with the Chamber of Commerce.

John Bergin is very conscious that there's a real danger that this work becomes the council's work. One thing he believes should be discussed is the Chairing. "I probably see myself more as Chief Exec rather than Chair."

However, John said, "We've a real opportunity hear within East Renfrewshire to get a good meaningful, strong, positive partnership and I think you could say we have all the right ingredients – we just have to cook and serve them with skill and style."

