

ALL THINGS BEING EQUAL...



A new initiative, 'Building Smarter Communities', has been launched to develop a more inclusive Scottish workplace, writes Michael Feeley

Left to right: Dr Craig Thomson, principal of Adam Smith College Fife; Charlie Watt, senior director in business Scottish Enterprise National; Leigh Berridge, Equals Building Smarter Communities' initiative project manager and director of Adam Smith College; David Martin, MEP and Vice President from 1989 - 2004 and formerly senior vice-president of the European Parliament disembark from the new Mini MOU bus.

The Worklife Adaptability Partnership (WAP) launched its 'Building Smarter Communities' project last month, an initiative that aims to combat all forms of discrimination and inequality in the Scottish workplace. The initiative hopes to engage both

employers and employees from small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in challenging the traditional workplace and encouraging innovation.

WAP is the recipient of £4.2 million from Equal, a European Social Fund programme.

investing £100m into the UK. This is the second round of funding, aimed at testing and encouraging new ways of promoting employability, entrepreneurship, adaptability and equal opportunities.

The overall aim of the 'Building Smarter Communities' initiative is to develop a more inclusive Scottish workplace, which will contribute to Social Justice and allow SMEs to operate more competitively. To achieve this there are several projects covering the following areas:

- using technology to encourage business economic growth in rural and disadvantaged areas;
- educating employers about the worklife balance ethos;
- engaging with groups who find it difficult to work due to rurality, ethnic culture, disability, gender and age;
- focusing on anticipated labour and skills shortages in the context of the demographic time bomb.

The Worklife Adaptability Partnership is working with local authorities, colleges and universities from all across Scotland to deliver the Smart Communities Project, which is in fact an umbrella for four different projects:



The people of Raploch get to grips with ICT.

- Productive Remote Working
- Innovation through Open Source Software
- Mobile / Wireless Technology
- Mini MOUs (Mobile Online Learning Initiative)

Leigh Berridge, Equal's 'Building Smarter Communities' project director believes the initiative will greatly assist the Scottish community: "The 'Building Smarter Communities' project is involving so many Scottish organisations and universities purely for the benefit of the Scottish people. The aim is to ensure that local businesses, their employees and

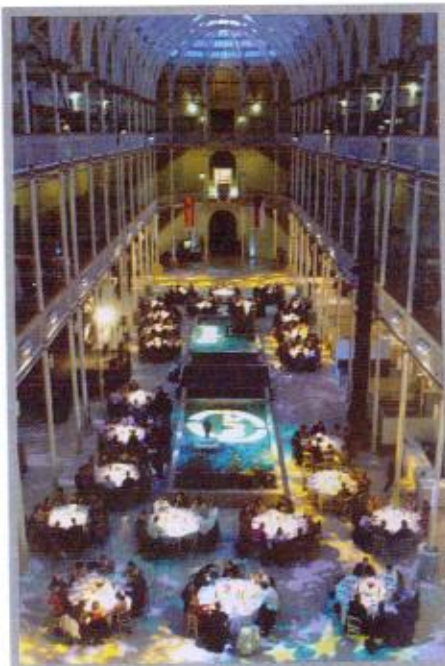
employers, will be able to work free from inequality and discrimination, and have the same access to training and resources despite their location or background."

As an additional benefit, Equal is a transnational initiative, which enables the transfer of knowledge and best practice between partnerships both across the country and the European Union including Ireland, Spain, Poland, and the Czech Republic. By sharing the results of programmes carried out by WAP and other partnerships, it enables the different organisations to learn from one another and ensure a

real value add for future policy development.

Berridge said of the initiative: "The concept of partnership is enshrined in the fabric of the Equal initiative – between member states, national organisations and perhaps most importantly the partnership between all of the participating organisations and the beneficiaries they seek to support. It is our hope that WAP will expand during its life and that we will continue to attract interest in and support for our aims and objectives."

www.equalscotland.co.uk



The 'Building Smarter Communities' initiative launch event.