I’DGON Launch 6th April 2004

The EPSRC EQUAL Initiative

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A new style of science
EQUAL: corner stones

• **Multidisciplinary**
  – physical science/engineering/design + social/health/medical science

• **Collaboration**
  – with intermediaries: industry, health care providers, social services, charities etc

• **User focus**
  – involving older people and disabled people
First three rounds of support

- Built Environment
- Design for All
- Rehabilitation
  - 34 projects from 1 year to 3 years
  - £30,000 to £300,000
  - Total Funding £5.4m
  - 42 research teams
  - 27 universities
EPSRC EQUAL 4th round

• Recent funding decisions
  – Five large consortia
    • going outdoors
    • telecare
    • smart homes
    • stroke rehabilitation
    • inclusive design
  – over £500,000 each
Main Themes

• Housing
• Accessibility and design of buildings and urban spaces
• Sensory issues (hearing, seeing)
• Cognitive issues (dementia, stroke)
• Inclusive Design

www.equal.ac.uk
Has EQUAL made a difference?
to policy and practice - examples

• Aiding Policy Development
  – input to Housing Policy, Long Term Care Policy, Telecare……
  – new ways of thinking about inclusive environments, product design, social inclusion…..

• Input to Regulation
  – Building Regulations, British Standards, Italian Standards, EU legislation…..

• Assisting the Professions
  – better design practice, better guidance to OTs, transport ….

• Supporting Clients of Industry
  – better, more effective, efficient and inclusive public buildings and products……
Has EQUAL made a difference?
EQUAL crosses boundaries to business

• 39 Projects and Consortia
  – 24 have a business dimension
  – most others have an economic dimension

• Most relate to the needs of a government, other organisations and society in search of cost effective approaches to improving Quality of Life and Independence
Has EQUAL made a difference?
to the research world

- 1997
  - few established teams
  - largely isolated individuals
    • pioneers
    • very little funding
  - Multi & Interdisciplinary research - difficult to get support
  - no research community (outside of medical & clinical areas)

- 2004
  - many competent new teams
  - many new individuals
    • from other fields
    • young researchers
  - Multi & Interdisciplinary research accepted by funders
  - emerging research community but it still lacks critical mass
What makes a successful programme?

• **Main indicators**
  – Quality - First class researchers
  – Commitment - Making sure that the research is applied

• **Contra-indicators**
  – Over-intellectualisation
  – Keeping older people and disabled people at a distance
The EQUAL Research Network
Maintaining Momentum

• Research Workshops

• **Encouraging**
  – New People into Ageing Research

• **Linking**
  – National and International Activities

• **Interfacing with**
  – Charities, Government, other networks etc

• **Lobbying**
  – Policy Makers, MPs, Ministers, Journal Editors

• **Web site** as a source of research information and dissemination
The Network

• “Leading-edge of research meets sharp-end of practice tempered by the realities of ageing and disability”
  – a good formula
Success of the Network

• Considerable demand for information
  – government - policy and practice
  – standards and regulations organisations
  – charities, local authorities, industry…..
  – employers

• Scientific content not a barrier
  – to involvement of wide range of professionals, lay people, older and disabled people
  – good vehicle for communication of science to the public
Conclusion

• EQUAL
  – new activity
    • exciting, high standards
    • valuable contribution
    • but very complex
    • community is small
  – those at the sharp end
    • understand aspirations of older people
    • can identify opportunities for effective application of science and engineering
  – revitalising multidisciplinary research
    • new blood, new aspirations
We have only just begun

• **Neglected Issues**
  – infrastructure for getting research into practice
  – economic and business cases need more attention
  – what about the older worker?

• **Concerns**
  – needs of older people are increasingly matched by confidence and capacity of researchers but not by funding
  – development has been hampered by attempts to “co-ordinate” ageing research (*top down is problematic*)
  – funders need to do more to involve older and disabled people, intermediaries and researchers in policy discussions (*bottom up more effective*)
The ultimate aim of EQUAL
www.equal.ac.uk