

# Equal opportunities is a win-win situation

by **JAMES LANCASTER**

## Firms urged to employ within community

PICTURE: JIM HOLDEN

**EMPLOYERS** are being urged to shelve their prejudices to help thousands of marginalised people back into work – and solve their recruitment problems in the process.

According to Equal Brighton and Hove there are 10,000 unemployed people in the city who want to get back into work but find it almost impossible to get a job.

Over-50s, ex-offenders, school leavers, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and members of the transgender community are often overlooked, the group said.

Meanwhile employers – particularly in the tourism, sport and leisure and construction industries – are reporting staff recruitment and retention problems.

Claire Mitchell, Equal's employer engagement co-ordinator, said employers should look on their own doorstep for enthusiastic staff with local knowledge and a willingness to learn.

She said: "Employers often take the quick-fix solution by employing students, graduates and foreign workers who, in many cases, are not seeking long-term employment.

"This creates a false economy. You can keep wages low but a lot of these people have very little local knowledge and that reflects badly on the business.

"For example, if I go to a hotel I expect the person at reception to know where the best bars and restaurants are. If they look at me blankly, I feel pretty miffed."

Equal, part of the Business Community Partnership, aims to find work for "marginalised" groups who have made their home in Brighton and Hove.

The organisation, which receives funding from Europe, offers training, a mentoring service and work placement schemes so businesses can "try before they buy".

Ms Mitchell said: "With the average cost of recruitment about £5,000, employers have nothing to lose from engaging with us, even to offer just work experience.

"In fact businesses have a lot to gain. They fulfill their corporate social responsibility, they can apply for their Community Mark and they become an employer of choice. It's amazing how many client referrals you get if you are seen to be the kind of business that

actually cares about the community you are based in. It's good for business.

"There are people who really want to work in this city but have been pushed to the sidelines. Through mentoring and training we can get these people back into work and playing an active role in society. It's good for everyone – a win-win situation."

Miranda Martin, from Brighton-based community law firm Martin Searle, said there was still an "awful lot of ignorance" surrounding the recruitment process.

She said: "People are fearful of difference so they tend to recruit in their own image. White, middle-aged men will tend to employ white, middle-aged men.

"One in five come under the Government's description of disabled. That's a huge pool of people and it would be silly to ignore them. Remember, disabled people are consumers too.

Steve Hayman, from building firm Integra Build, has taken on homeless people, hearing-impaired students and is involved in the Construction Futures programme, which aims to help disadvantaged children get ahead in the building trade.

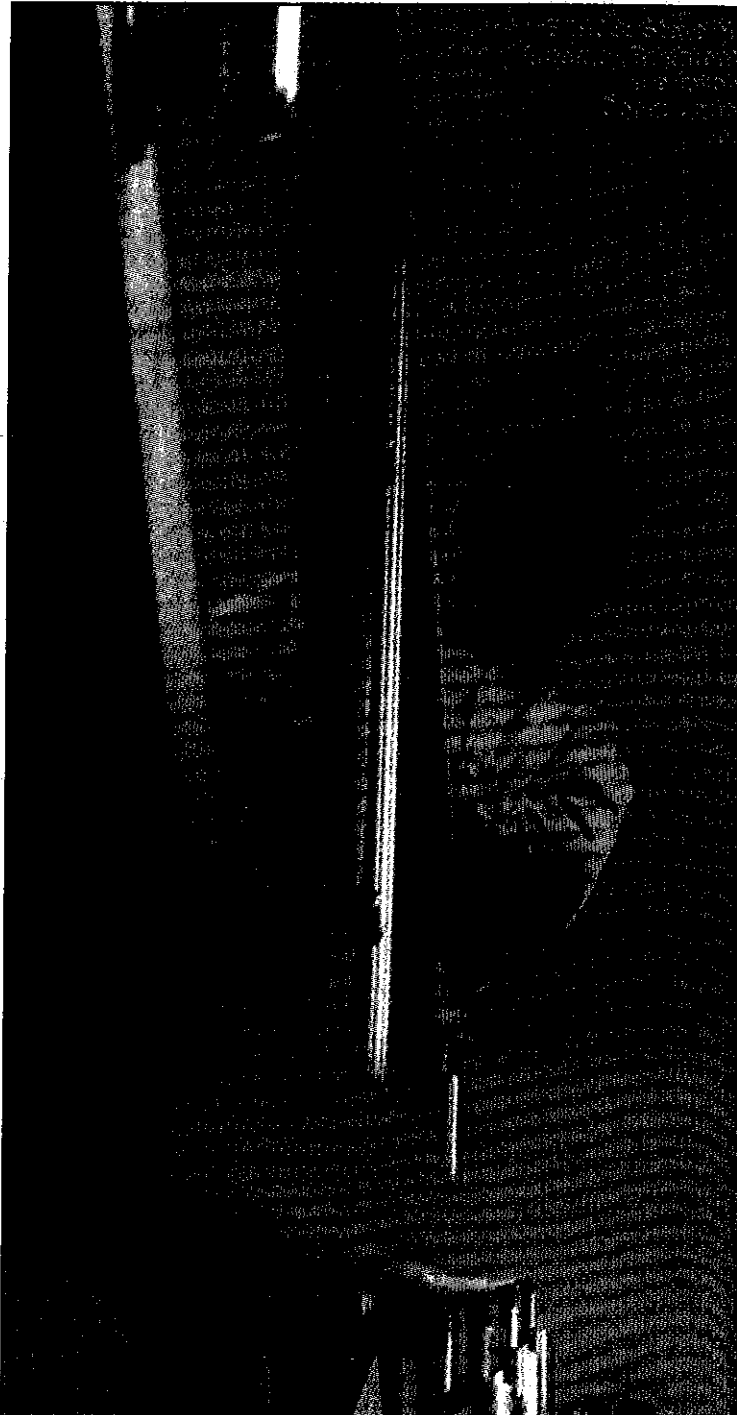
He said: "It has always been part of our company ethos because we are part of the community and most of our employees are local.

"On our own we make a small difference. If everyone did a bit, just think what a difference we could make.

"We have one employee who used to be homeless who is absolutely brilliant. We initially gave him work experience and he took the bull by the horns. So business can benefit from this as well."

● Equal Brighton and Hove, in association with The Argus-sponsored City Business Club, is holding a recruitment breakfast at Hilton Metropole Hotel on Tuesday, November 28, from 7.30am to 10am. The event costs £12, including breakfast. Visit [www.ccb.ac.uk](http://www.ccb.ac.uk) or call **01273 667756** for more details.

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