

In November and December 2009, KT-EQUAL hosted a residential masterclass for 49 delegates in Manchester. It was aimed at inspiring, supporting and training a new generation of researchers who are interested in improving the lives of older people and those with a disability. Feedback from the event was extremely positive and new training needs have been identified.

Building capacity

Continued excellence in ageing research is essential if society is to successfully address the challenges presented by the ageing population. The small research community for applied ageing and disability research is now expanding rapidly, because funding is now available to support not only new theoretical models of human-technology interaction but also practical technological developments for older and disabled people. So a key priority of KT-EQUAL is to build research capacity by encouraging and inspiring the next generation of researchers. This was the central aim of the masterclass. The programme was based on training needs identified by researchers at the EQUAL cross-consortium meeting in May 2009 and by KT-EQUAL investigators.

Research to benefit older and disabled people requires a multi-disciplinary approach – this is one of the central tenets of EQUAL research. So another aim of the masterclass was to bring together new researchers from a wide range of disciplines, and to provide activities so that they could develop networks and connections across discipline boundaries. Delegates' interests included architecture, psychology, social science, biomechanics, sustainability, urban design, transportation, dementia, pain, independent living, mental health, human-computer interaction, stroke rehabilitation, social networks, walking, mobility, visual and hearing impairment, nutrition, design, telecare, sensor technologies, self-care, business, assistive

technologies, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, energy, mobile devices and virtual reality.

Programme

The EQUAL story

[Professor Peter Lansley](#), Director of SPARC and Professor of Construction Management at the University of Reading, outlined how the EQUAL research agenda has developed over the last eleven years – especially the research funded or co-funded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council. He demonstrated how the various initiatives not only impacted on older people and those with a disability, but also on the researchers and academics involved: how they had developed their research and careers. He showed how increasing amounts of funding are being directed towards ageing research.

Professor Lansley also gave his perspectives on key ingredients for a great project. These included:

- understanding the language and perspectives of older people, researchers, other disciplines and professions
- aiming for solutions to real problems, valued by older people, their carers and professionals
- being aware of the need for a business case
- involving non-academic stakeholders.

The ethics of research with older and disabled people

[Professor Anthea Tinker](#), Professor of Social Gerontology at King's College London and Chairman of the College Research Ethics Committee at King's College, argued that ethical issues play an important part in EQUAL research. She outlined some of the reasons for the increased interest in ethical issues. Delegates discussed special issues in ageing research, such as the need for users to be involved at all stages of the research – including helping to decide what is researched in the first place.

Ethical research is expected to be designed and conducted in a way which meets key principles:

- research is designed and conducted to ensure integrity and quality
- research staff and participants are fully informed about the study
- participants' privacy is respected and confidentiality of data is protected
- participants take part voluntarily
- participants are not harmed
- research and researchers are independent, or any conflicts of interest are declared
- research is subject to proper ethical scrutiny by organisations and monitored over the course of the research

Designing with people

[Dr Yanki Lee](#), Research Fellow at the Helen Hamlyn Centre, Royal College of Art, explored tactics for involving older and disabled people in the design of the built environment, products and services. She pointed out that users are experts in using designs, not simply subjects for testing, and this expertise needs to be used in the design process. She demonstrated a participation model centred on active involvement through a case study with secondary school children, and explained different design research methodologies. She also gave an early viewing of the webtool www.designingwithpeople.org, as part of the EPSRC-funded i~design 3 project.

Personal safety and lone working

In EQUAL projects, working away from a university base is common. [Christine Morrison](#), from the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, discussed the issues of research safety this raises. Her interactive talk examined issues such as reliable tracing systems, and how to assess the risk by asking such questions as:

- whom are you meeting?
- where are you going?

- what are you doing?

Manchester's Valuing Older People programme

[Sally Chandler](#), Valuing Older People Programme Manager for Manchester Joint Health Unit, described the Valuing Older People initiative established in 2004. This is a multi-agency programme to improve services and opportunities for the city's older population. It was developed to respond to the perception that Manchester was not a good city to grow old in. It has challenged Manchester's public agencies, businesses and communities to place older people at the centre of the extensive plans for the regeneration and reshaping of the city.

Research has shown that a positive attitude to ageing is conducive to a longer life. For this reason, the programme has also organised a positive images campaign, including street billboards in Manchester and annual calendars. This has challenged the negative stereotypes of age, as seen in the media, and also held by some of the public themselves.

Sally was joined by one of the Valuing Older People board members, who gave a layperson's viewpoint of the initiative.

How can the media promote EQUAL research?

[Professor Trevor Cox](#), EPSRC Senior Media Fellow at the University of Salford, and Toby Wardman, Communications Officer for KT-EQUAL, organised this interactive session. They explored the benefits and pitfalls of working with the media, discussing the implications of media engagement for researchers. It built on the previous talk, exploring the image of older people in the media. An interactive session also examined the process by which news stories develop, including the key ingredients of a good news story and the process of creating a press release.

What makes a great EQUAL proposal?

[Professor Gail Mountain](#) from the University of Sheffield, Director of the SMART Consortium and Co-Director of KT-EQUAL, explored what a good EQUAL proposal might include and some of the factors that can lead to the success or failure of grant submissions. Delegates were asked to identify what they consider to be excellence and impact in research projects. The need for EQUAL research to span many disciplines and maintain the end user at the core of research activity was emphasised, and a personal account of grant reviewing was presented – including the factors that give confidence as well as the pitfalls that can result in rejection.