

AN EVALUATION OF THE IRIS NETWORK

(FINAL REPORT)

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 HISTORY OF THE IRIS NETWORK

1.1.1 The IRIS network was set up in the wake of the Recommendations on Vocational Training for Women adopted by the European Commission in November 1987, which calls on Member States to ensure that women have equal access to all types and levels of vocational training, particularly in professions which are likely to expand in the future and those in which women have been historically under represented. The aim was both to enable women to benefit fully from the competition of the Single Market and also to address the need for skilled labour in Europe's medium and long term development. The network is intended to promote this aim through the development of collaboration between training projects, equal opportunities agencies and the vocational training/employment authorities in the member states.

1.1.2 Originally, IRIS was to be a network of demonstration or model projects in the field of vocational training for women. The criteria for membership has gradually been altered over the period of the network's existence, so as to specify a fuller picture of the 'ideal' project, but have been applied flexibly so as to encourage projects to join who have good practice to offer on specific points. The original 71 model programmes have increased to 333 members during the three years that IRIS has been operational, and in 1991 there were 300 applicants for membership. It is significant that this growing demand for membership has taken place despite the fact that IRIS does not offer major funding to projects; rather, it seems to be a testimony to the value which members attach to the network's activities.

1.1.3 The Equal Opportunities Unit of the Commission has overall responsibility for IRIS. The network is financed jointly by the Task Force and the Equal Opportunities Unit. The former provides a budget of 500,000 ecu and the latter 250,000 ecu. General co-ordination and everyday management is carried out by

the Centre for Research on European Women (CREW), an independent organisation. Member States have an input through the IRIS working group, which meets twice yearly, and includes one representative from the national training organisation and one from the national equality body of each member state. The group has an advisory role in establishing the criteria for membership of the network, and in selecting member programmes from applicants. Members also inform the Commission of national developments in the field of women's vocational training.

- 1.1.4 The official launch of IRIS took place in December 1988 at a conference in Brussels, attended by the 71 original member projects and national representatives of Equal Opportunities and Vocational Training authorities. The launch conference emphasised the need to "address the question of the follow on from women's training and the need to ensure that women benefit from training by means of higher pay and better jobs." It was also suggested at that conference that "in expanding the network, priority should be given to seeking out employer sponsored training examples", in order to assist this aim.
- 1.1.5 The main activities of IRIS began, following this conference, in 1989. These activities were partly determined by the Commission at the outset of the programme but have since been widened through discussion between CREW and the Commission. The IRIS bulletin was suggested by CREW, as were the grants for project partnerships and publicity and the electronic mail system, which began in 1990.
- 1.1.6 The objectives of the IRIS network were defined by reference to the Commission's recommendation to Member States on women's employment and training (number 87/567 of 27.11.87). The target groups were defined as women in general, and more specifically unemployed women, women returning to the labour market and working women at risk of redundancy. The programme's objectives were defined to be the promotion of demonstration projects in the field of vocational training for women, especially to encourage innovative projects and

inventorise existing projects, to disseminate examples of good practice, and to bring a transnational character to women's training projects by means of exchange visits. The actions envisaged in order to pursue these objectives were the organisation of national seminars and exchange visits of project coordinators, the publication of a detailed directory of projects and other informative documents, the setting up of a data bank on the specific initiatives being taken by Member States with regard to women's training. (See Annex C).

1.1.7 CREW, as the appointed network coordinator, extended this list of activities and objectives. It sought to introduce an additional set of instruments for disseminating good practice and promoting international exchanges of experience, by provision of financial support for partnerships, exchange visits and publicity grants. It was at CREW's suggestion that these grants were introduced, funded by means of an additional budget from the Equal Opportunities Unit. CREW also sought to introduce a dimension of evaluation into the network, which was not in the original tender document for the coordinating body. CREW also introduced national technical meetings and the electronic mail facility. CREW initiated the internal evaluation of the network's activities which was published in 1991, based on a mail questionnaire to members. For the last three years CREW has sought to introduce a research dimension to the network's activities and has requested additional funding for this purpose. Currently, in addition to this study, national evaluations of the network's activities are being carried out under the direction of the members of the Working Group on Women's Vocational Training.

1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THIS STUDY

The objectives of the evaluation are to:-

- i examine the objectives, role and operation of IRIS from the point of view of EC policy on vocational training, and in the content of the relationships between IRIS and the European Commission structures, and between IRIS and other EC networks and programmes.

- ii examine the functions and activities of IRIS as a horizontal network which promotes exchange of information and experiences between women's training programmes to find common solutions to specific problems arising from women's training.
- iii look at the position and influence of the IRIS network in the professional development of women and adults in general, and at the innovations and systematic achievements of the network.

1.3 METHODOLOGY OF THIS STUDY

1.3.1 Our study assesses the impacts and effects of the eight elements of IRIS activity:-

- the publication of the quarterly IRIS bulletin
- the publication of an annual Directory
- the publication of dossiers/reports on various network activities
- the maintenance of a database on present and past member programmes
- the organisation of annual technical meetings of IRIS programmes in each member state
- the organisation of four major seminars a year on various aspects of women's training
- the facilitation of contacts, partnerships and exchange visits between member programmes
- the provision of an electronic mail and database service.

1.3.2 It examines them individually, in terms of both absolute effects and effects relative to each other, as well as effects relative to comparable activities of other EC programmes. Our methodology also recognises that "the whole is more than the sum of the parts", and that, therefore, there are important interactions or synergies between different IRIS activities. We seek to establish, therefore, which impacts of a specific activity can be attributed to it alone and which are conditional on the "joint availability" of two or more features or activities of the IRIS network. We also seek to establish to what extent the IRIS network's

activities interact with other EC initiatives, with national networks and national policies. They may improve the effectiveness of other EC programmes. There will also no doubt be cases where the activities of the IRIS network have had "catalytic" or "leverage" effects, drawing in or unlocking resources from outside the network (e.g from employers or broader national government programmes) which assist the achievements of IRIS objectives.

1.3.3 In other words, we see the impacts and effects of the IRIS network as a complex set of separate effects of individual activities, on the one hand, and joint effects on the other hand, in which groups of actions within the network complement and support each other, as well as supporting and being supported by actions and resources from outside the network.

1.3.4 The assessment as a whole is firmly based on the concept of "additionality". We define an additional impact or effect as one which would not have taken place otherwise. Thus, we attempt to answer with as much detail and vigour as possible, the question: What have the activities of the network added to the world of women's training in Europe? This must be seen not merely as a question about outputs, but a question about processes, because the value of a network must be defined not only in terms of changes in policy or changes in the way in which programmes and local projects deliver their services. It must also be defined in terms of how it establishes new ways of learning, new sources of knowledge and new forms of interaction, any of which may lead to policy change in future, or to development and redefinition of objectives amongst the actors within the network or those whom they seek to influence. Our view is that in principle, it is important to recognise that policy evaluations are concerned with identifying and measuring additionality, although in practice it is difficult even in circumstances where one has a clear policy on/off position or suitable control groups.

1.3.5 Amongst the outputs of IRIS activities which need to be examined we can include:-

- changes in the practice, mode of operation and self-evaluation of member organisations
- parallel changes in non-member organisations
- changes in national governments' policies of the European Commission

1.3.6 Amongst the processes brought about by the IRIS network, which we examine, may be included:-

- the increased knowledge at the disposal of network members
- the increased capacity to acquire knowledge, through data-banks, sources of reference material, and on-going contacts between members of the network
- the enlargement of members' vision about their work and the development of comparative perspectives
- the increased awareness of women's problems and of solutions to them.

1.3.7 In this evaluation, we see quantification as a minor aspect of the tasks of the study, being limited largely to the cost of activities and to indicators of the intermediate outputs of the network (e.g. the number of conferences held and their attendance, the scale of data-bases and the number and frequency of users, the circulation of publications). We are however conscious of the fact that the costs of IRIS cannot be easily measured entirely in money terms. Apart from the budget of the network itself, important resource inputs are made in the form of member organisations' time, which has an opportunity cost that may not be easily reducible to money and which may be more appropriately measured in terms of activities foregone.

1.3.8 In examining the processes set in motion by the IRIS network and the results which it has achieved, we take a multi-faceted approach, including the following eight dimensions:

- 1) Profundity; have the processes or outputs been of major consequence for the organisations involved, or have they been of relatively marginal importance?
- 2) evenness - to what extent have the achievements of the network been spread across all organisations in all the countries? Have they been greater in some areas or for some types of organisation, and if so why?
- 3) certainty and replicability - have the processes set up by IRIS achieved results which are generally of predictable impact or is their impact uncertain? Can their impact be replicated, or is it a "once-off" achievement?
- 4) accessibility - are the processes created by IRIS perceived as accessible by all members of the network? Are their benefits spread over all members of the target group?
- 5) durability - are the processes and impacts likely to last? Are they capable of outlasting the IRIS programme?
- 6) Sustainability - once set in motion, are the processes involved in IRIS likely to be self - sustaining, or do they need continued support from the programme?
- 7) catalytic or leverage effects - has the IRIS programme released resources for women's training (human and financial) from outside the network, which would not otherwise have been dedicated to this goal?

Has it stimulated interest or promoted changes in policy outside of the membership of the network?

8) Uniqueness of IRIS's contribution - what has it done which other networks or programmes would not have done in its absence? Will its contribution be equally unique in the future?

1.3.10 The work has four main elements:-

1. A mail questionnaire to all the organisations who were members of the IRIS network in 1991. No less than 279 new members joined IRIS in 1992, but these will have little experience of the benefits of the network, so the questionnaire was not distributed to these relatively new members. It was sent out in January 1992, and was translated into English, French, German, Spanish and Italian. Respondents were invited to write their answers in any of these languages or alternatively in Dutch or Portuguese. Unfortunately none of the research team could read Greek or Danish.

Altogether 114 organisations replied to the questionnaire after two reminder letters had been sent. A number of individuals had responsibility for more than one project, so that in fact there were 264 named contacts for the 333 projects. Thus the response rate represents around 40% of these named contacts, allowing for the fact that a couple of individuals completed two questionnaires. This is a relatively high response rate for a mail questionnaire; in general, a researcher might expect 25-33% response. In addition to the 114 completed questionnaires, we received 15 letters from organisations where there was no-one able to reply to the questionnaire, either because the project had closed down or for some other reason, and three letters from people who had not received the questionnaire, presumably because of postal problems.

2. Background research on women's training policies and other influences on women's position in the labour market and the ways in which these have been influenced by the work of IRIS.
3. Face to face or telephone interviews with members of the EC Working Party on Women's Vocational Training. The members of the working party consist of one representative from the national training organisation and one from the equality body in each Member State.
4. Interviews with representatives of other EC programmes and initiatives whose field touches upon that of IRIS, discussing the 'interface' between IRIS and the programme concerned, and areas of potential future co-operation.

2. DESCRIPTION OF IRIS SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES

- 2.1 IRIS activities focus on the exchange of information and experience, through exchanges, seminars and publications. Unlike many EC programmes, for example NOW, there is very little funding attached. There are a small number of grants available to members for publicity and partnerships and also for exchange visits, but IRIS does not fund programmes. Events and activities are aimed not only at promoting exchanges of experience between members but also at promoting women's training and influencing policy makers, employers and other influential groups.

Seminars

Four national and one transnational seminars have been held in each of the years in which IRIS has been operational. These target policy makers in particular, but also training programmes, trades unions and employers. They focus on particular aspects of women's training needs. One transnational seminar has been held in each of the participating countries. Over the three years 1989-91, the programme has been as follows:-

1989; seminars in Spain, Greece, Portugal and Italy, with a common theme of women in rural areas,

1990; seminars in France, Belgium,, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, with common themes of in-service training and of enterprise creation,

1991; seminars in the UK, Ireland, Denmark and Germany, with common themes of new technology and women in male-dominated trades.

In 1992, there will be seminars specifically directed towards the social partners.

Exchange visits

- 2.2 Exchange visits form another main activity; groups of participants from several different member programmes spend a week visiting a number of projects on a theme basis, for example, enterprise creation. There are around six exchange visits each year. The aim is to encourage the spread of 'good practice', and, more generally, to promote European harmonisation through transnational exchanges.

Technical meetings

- 2.3 Technical meetings, discussing the activities of the IRIS network, and developments of national and European interest relating to training have been held in each Member State. These workshops are aimed at allowing member programmes, working group members and the IRIS unit at CREW to discuss these issues and possibilities for partnership in an informal setting.

Publications

- 2.4 IRIS also produces a number of publications. The IRIS Bulletin is published four times a year in English and French and gives European news on other networks/programmes and new developments, an update on other IRIS activities and a more in-depth look at specific member programmes. The IRIS Directory gives details of all the member programmes and is published in all nine official languages. The other publications are in English and French only, except for the seminar reports which are also in the language of the host country. Reports are produced annually, on IRIS activities generally, and on each seminar held as well as on the results of the year's exchange visits. The Skills Message Board listed the qualifications gained by trainees completing courses, and their progress in finding jobs or further training, but was discontinued in 1990.

All the IRIS publications are distributed to the member projects, members of other European networks, MEPs, all the equal opportunities bodies and training authorities in the Member States, employers' federations, key local authorities and trade union federations. All the seminar reports are sent to all participants. Other persons or organisations who ask to be put on the mailing list normally receive the bulletin, and in some instances conference reports as well. The circulation of each publication is approximately 4000 copies. All publications are distributed free of charge except for the directory.

Database

- 2.5 The IRIS Database holds information on members, with more extensive programme descriptions than those in the directory. Information can be provided by CREW to help members find other programmes doing similar training, partners for a partnership proposal or to answer other queries. There is also a database of contacts in organisations and groups linked to women's training throughout the EC.

Electronic mail facility

- 2.6 Electronic mail is available to programmes in all of the countries except Spain and Portugal. IRIS provides programmes with a modem and with the necessary software. The electronic mail service can be used to post messages on a bulletin board, to talk to CREW or other programmes and to access public databases and services such as telex or fax. Since October 1991, direct access to the IRIS database has also been possible through the E-mail facility..

Grants

- 2.7 Although it does not fund programmes, IRIS does provide grants to a few programmes for specific activities. Publicity grants are made to model programmes to fund publicity materials, and there are also some partnership

grants to develop transnational links. Grants for partnerships can fund production of training materials, training of trainers, exchanges of trainees or trainers, or other methods of exchanging teaching methods or 'good practice'. Originally, sponsorship grants were also available to help with the integration of women into mixed training schemes and to help women - only training schemes to build up links with mixed mainstream organisations, but these have since been discontinued.

3. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF IRIS MEMBER ORGANISATIONS AND THEIR ACTIVITIES

This section is based either on the information available in the IRIS database of member projects or from the 1991 IRIS directory. Whilst we would have preferred the more up-to-date information from the database, it was quite laborious for CREW to extract data from it country by country, so that where a country break-down is required we have used the directory.

Growth and turnover of membership

- 3.1 The current membership of the IRIS network stands at 472 projects, having grown from 71 members at the start. Since the 1991 IRIS Directory was drawn up, 279 projects have joined the network and 140 others have left. Bearing in mind the substantial rate of turnover in the network, which occurs mainly because new projects are founded and others come to the end of their funded period, it is difficult for an analysis of the network's membership ever to be completely up to date. However, in some cases this turnover consists of some projects run by a given organisation withdrawing and others run by the same organisation coming in.

Selection of projects

- 3.2 Table 3.1 shows that the distribution of projects between countries is somewhat uneven, with Italy, Denmark and Spain having more projects than the size of the country's labour force would suggest, and the UK, France and Germany having relatively few. This relative imbalance is a natural outcome of the way in which the projects are chosen. Essentially, the size of the network in any individual country is determined to some extent by the number of good quality applications coming forward, although the national coordinating units in France, Italy, Germany and the Netherlands do try to attract projects to the network. (Only 21% of applications to join the network in 1990 were rejected.)

Table 3.1 International distribution of IRIS projects compared to the size of the female labour force.

	IRIS projects:-		Female labour force	
	No	% of Eur. total	No. (000s)	% of Eur total
B	28	8.4	1517	2.6
DK	32	9.6	1313	2.3
D	16	4.8	11567	20.2
GR	9	2.7	1467	2.6
E	44	13.2	5099	8.9
F	41	12.2	10531	18.3
IRL	12	3.6	432	0.7
I	72	21.5	8576	14.9
L	6	1.8	54	0.1
NL	21	6.3	2535	4.4
P	9	2.7	2053	3.6
UK	43	12.8	12310	21.4
Total	333	100.0	57454	100.0

The selection criteria are shown in the box below

Criteria for the selection of IRIS projects	
To identify and select projects, the following criteria will apply:	
1.	Pre-training programmes may be accepted only if: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- they are directly linked to a qualifying training programme- they are organised in collaboration with organisations that provide qualifying training, or with employers or trade unions
2.	The projects must answer the training needs of either: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- women seeking work after compulsory schooling- women wanting to return to the labour market- women wanting to obtain better professional qualifications- unemployed women- women seeking retraining or promotion possibilities in non-traditional jobs or in sectors where they are under-represented
3.	The projects should train women only. However, mixed projects predominantly concerned with the specific training needs of women can also apply.
4.	Projects must demonstrate that they have financial stability.
5.	The projects must guarantee to women who have completed them an improved access to the labour market, further education or more specialised training. The projects' objectives must respond to the needs of the labour market and/or local and regional development.
6.	The projects must taken account of the family situation of the women trainees.
7.	The training should cover one or more of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- technical and scientific jobs based on the applications of new technologies- jobs where women are under-represented- local employment initiatives in disadvantaged areas or inner city areas- agriculture- environment- information/communications- communications and transport- cultural heritage- local development agents- participation in public life- public administration
(criteria continued on next page)	

Criteria for the selection of IRIS projects

Criteria for the selection of IRIS projects (continued)

8. **Projects training women in "traditional" women's areas can be included if they satisfy the following criteria:**
 - use innovatory teaching materials
 - offer promotion possibilities for women already in these jobs
 - make possible the reintegration of women in the labour market, including unemployed women
 - aim to create new jobs or economically viable small businesses

9. **The design of the training course must satisfy at least one of the following criteria:**
 - offer a well-constructed and vocationally relevant curriculum which can be transferred
 - use innovatory training techniques such as distance learning or computer assisted learning/training
 - offer modular structured courses
 - provide on-the-job training in companies
 - offer guidance and counselling services
 - provide for a trainee support programme during and after the course

10. **The training programmes should provide annual progress reports and a full evaluation report on completion**

11. **Project coordinators should be ready to invest both time and energy in exchanging information with other IRIS projects. They will also be asked to work towards the improvement of vocational training both in their own Member State and on a European level.**

Target groups

3.3 The vast majority of IRIS projects are engaged in training for unemployed women and those returning to the labour market, as shown in Table 3.2. Out of 333 projects in 1991, 70% were targeted on unemployed or inactive women, and only 8% on those who already have jobs or who are self-employed. Just over 4% of projects targeted women in rural areas, and 17 (9%) had other criteria, such as young women, socially disadvantaged women, single mothers, ethnic minorities, or else were open to all women as soon as they left school, and 54% had no upper age limit for participants. Only 18% of the projects limited participation to those under 25, and 55% of projects accepted participants of all age groups.

Table 3.2 IRIS member projects - target groups

	Unemployed or inactive women	Employed/self employed	Women in rural areas	Other/unspecific
B	26	0	2	0
DK	27	1	0	4
D	12	1	0	3
GR	8	0	1	0
E	27	5	3	9
F	29	3	1	8
IRL	7	1	1	3
I	40	9	4	19
L	5	0	0	1
NL	19	0	1	1
P	5	2	1	1
UK	27	5	0	11
Total	232	27	14	60
100%	70%	8.0%	4.1%	17.9%

Source: IRIS directory 1991

Note; 'other/unspecific' includes projects with multiple target groups.

**Table 3.3 Age criteria used by IRIS member projects
in admission to training programmes**

a) Lower Limit (years of age)

	16	18	25	40	Total
B	10	17	1		
DK	8	6	17		
D	6	3	7		
GR	3	1	5		
E	28	6	11		
F	24	7	11		
IRL	3	2	7		
I	30	26	16	1	
L	2		4		
NL	8	6	7		
P	1	6	2		
UK	17	8	18		
Total	140	88	104	1	333
%	42	26	32	0	100

b) Upper Limit (years of age)

	18	25	40	None	
B	0	0	14	14	
DK	1	0	7	24	
D	0	2	4	10	
GR	0	1	5	3	
E	0	9	12	23	
F	0	4	7	30	
IRL	2	3	5	2	
I	8	18	20	26	
L	1	2	2	1	
NL	0	4	8	9	
P	0	3	4	2	
UK	2	0	7	34	
Total	14	46	95	178	333
%	4	14	29	53	100

Source: IRIS Directory 1991

Sector and type of training

- 3.4 Table 3.4 shows the employment sector to which training in IRIS projects is related. The largest group are those involved with 'new technology' and scientific or technical work. In practice, 'new technology' generally means information technology (informatics) and there is therefore a strong overlap with the next category, computer-related and office skills; 64.8% of projects in the IRIS network are involved in training for at least one of these two occupational areas. Enterprise creation or management-related skills are the field of courses in a further 37.8% of projects, obviously overlapping slightly with the first group. A small proportion of projects have forms of training which are not occupationally specific (7.8%) - that is, they concentrate on training in job-search methods or basic (pre-vocational) education.

Table 3.4 Employment Sector of IRIS projects

	B	DK	D	GR	E	F	IRL	I	L	NL	P	UK	Total	%
New Technology & Scientific Technical Work	10	21	8	5	14	15	8	23	5	14	1	19	143	42.9
Administration, Computer/office skills, Clerical/Secretarial	6	2	4	1	16	9	3	18	4	4	0	6	73	21.9
Semi skilled & skilled manual work	13	11	3	0	4	3	5	8	0	9	0	12	68	20.4
Management/management consultancy	3	2	1	3	12	3	4	28	0	1	0	10	67	20.1
Enterprise creation (multi-sector)	1	3	3	0	11	1	2	20	0	2	4	12	59	17.7
Design/artistic skills + desk-top publishing + media/communication	1	1	0	0	7	1	1	8	1	1	1	4	27	8.1
Hotel/Catering + tourism work	4	3	2	1	5	3	0	5	1	0	1	0	25	7.5
Social work	5	1	2	1	1	2	0	5	1	0	0	1	19	5.7
Handicraft techniques	1	0	1	1	3	1	1	3	0	0	4	2	17	5.1
Agriculture	3	1	0	0	4	2	0	5	0	1	0	0	16	4.8
Retail work	2	0	0	1	3	3	0	4	0	1	0	0	14	4.2
Personal/domestic service	2	1	0	0	5	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	12	3.6
Teaching	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	2	1	0	8	2.4
Para-Medical work	0	1	0	0	2	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	6	1.8
Trade Union Activity	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	5	1.5
Non-specific	1	2	1	0	3	3	3	0	0	0	0	3	26	7.8

IRIS projects by training sector - at 1991. Some projects train in more than one sector, so numbers add to more than 333 which is the total number of projects. In the same way, the percentages add to over 100.

Source: IRIS Directory, 1991

3.5 Table 3.5 shows the types of training in which the projects are engaged. Altogether 72% are engaged in vocational training of whom 186 (56% of the total current network of 333) train women for promotion in their existing jobs or provide on-the-job experience for women entering or re-entering the labour market. This is an interesting point, because it means that although around 70% of projects train unemployed or inactive women, over half need to have constant contact with employers to carry on their work. Pre-training (basic or pre-vocational education) is carried out by 27% of projects, assertiveness training by 31% and enterprise training (ie, preparation for self-employment) by 16%. A training allowance is paid by 56%. Eighty per cent of projects are for women only. Table 3.6 shows the sponsorship of the projects. Only a handful are sponsored by employers.

Table 3.5 Types of training in which IRIS projects are engaged

	No of projects, EC 12
a) Vocational training for those without a job:- with a work experience period without a work experience period	106
	132
b) Pre-training	89
c) Assertiveness training	102
d) Positive action training in a private enterprise	15
e) Positive action training in a public body	11
f) Training for promotion	80
g) Re-training	62
h) Training for personnel of an enterprise	10

Source: IRIS database: each project may be counted more than once

Table 3.6: Sponsors of IRIS project (type of entity organising the project)

Adult training organisation	141
National training agency	53
Local authority	53
Women's organisation	46
Association (voluntary sector group)	34
National government body	27
School	19
Trade Union	14
Employer	14
University or higher education institution	10
Professional association	5
Employers' association	4
Welfare organisation	2
Source: IRIS database	

Child care facilities

3.5 Table 3.7 addresses the question of support for trainees who are also mothers. One third of IRIS projects provide childcare facilities, and 61% organise their course so that training takes place only in school hours, so that they are accessible to mothers whose children are already at school. Allowing for 58 projects which have both of these features, we find that 258 projects (77% of the total) have either one or the other, and only 24% of projects have neither. Given that 18% of the projects cater only for women under 25, this implies that only a very few of those projects which would have a high proportion of mothers amongst their trainees, did not provide support for them. The differences between countries in the proportion of projects providing child care facilities reflect, to some extent, the national situation with regard to the provision of public facilities. Thus childcare provision is most common in the UK and Dutch

projects, and relatively uncommon in France and Italy where there is less need. (See Section 5 and Annex A for an account of childcare provision for each country).

Table 3.7 IRIS Projects providing childcare or with training taking place in school hours

	Project provides childcare	Training takes place in school hours	School hours and childcare	Total no. of IRIS projects
B	11	18	3	28
DK	0	25	2	32
D	6	11	3	16
GR	5	5	1	9
E	17	27	8	44
F	7	25	2	41
IRL	3	4	1	12
I	3	42	2	72
L	0	3	0	6
NL	16	17	12	21
P	7	1	1	9
UK	37	26	23	43
Total	112	204	58	333

Source: IRIS Directory, 1991

In terms of their teaching methods, a surprisingly high proportion of projects (43%) use computer-assisted teaching methods, and two thirds use modular course structures. This suggests that a significant proportion of projects may have written teaching materials or computer software of a kind which would be transferable between projects. If so, in many cases the project is probably not the first user of the material and therefore will already have experience of its import and adaptation.

A small number of projects use personal assessment modules (13%) or training in job-finding techniques (12%) - features which may be regarded as important ingredients in the success of vocational training programmes for the unemployed.

4 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IRIS AND OTHER PROGRAMMES OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

4.1 The specific objectives of IRIS are to encourage good quality training for women and ensure that their needs are met within existing training programmes. Thus, there are common interests with other Commission initiatives to promote training of the unemployed and training of the workforce of both genders, as well as with initiatives on youth training and training for self-employment.

4.2 The precise way in which this community of interest should be used to develop "synergie" between the different programmes has not been specified by the Commission. In principle, there should be many opportunities for dissemination of the lessons and concerns of IRIS through the overlapping networks of PETRA, FORCE etc, and vice versa. "Synergie" can take place through mutual participation in each other's meetings, circulation of literature, and use of each other's networks of personal contacts. CREW already circulates its publications to other networks and invites them to seminars. In practice, many opportunities appear to be realised with only mixed and patchy success, as far as could be ascertained from interviews with the 'responsables' of seven other European Community programmes. These interviews did however reveal a willingness to make 'synergie' happen and several positive suggestions about steps which could be taken to ensure that it does in future. IRIS, as a 'transversal' network cutting across other EC networks which address training for specific age groups or in specific sectors, has an important role to play in providing a women's dimension to these other networks.

Overlapping Membership

4.3 As a horizontal programme, with member projects from all training sectors, skill levels and target groups, the potential membership of IRIS overlaps with a number of other EC programmes. Of the 333 IRIS members in 1991, just over 10% were also members of another network (See table below). In interviews

with representatives of the programmes listed below, the general lack of co-operation, not just with IRIS, but between all the EC programmes was commented on several times.

Table 4.1 Membership of Other International Networks amongst IRIS Projects

	No of projects ¹
PETRA	16
EWA	8
WITEC	6
EUROTECNET	5
COMETT	6
ELISE	3
EGLEI	2
COPA	2
LEDA	1
LINGUA	1
CESAR	1
SPRINT	1
ERGO	1
BC-NET	1

4.4 The relationship between IRIS and seven major EC networks

Each of the programmes whose 'responsables' were interviewed may be examined in relation to:-

- its mandate and current activities
- their overlap with the activities of IRIS
- the degree of interaction which exists between member projects at the moment
- suggestions as to how interaction and coordination could be improved.

¹ IRIS Directory 1991

We examine NOW, EUROFORM, PETRA, FORCE, EUROTECNET, COMETT and ELISE.

4.4.1 NOW

Mandate and current activities:-

NOW began only in July 1991. It will encourage and finance support services and training for women lacking to enter self-employment (including those trying to set up cooperatives). Secondly, it will finance labour market advisory services and counselling for women who are long-term unemployed, or (in objective 1,2 and 5b areas) those who are insecurely employed. Thirdly, vocational training can also be financed for these women, as can child care facilities in Objective 1 regions. NOW will operate through transnational partnerships. A further difference between the two programmes is that 80% of NOW funds will go to Objective 1 regions whereas IRIS projects are more evenly spread.

Overlap with activities of IRIS and the degree of interaction which currently exists.

NOW, the new EC programme for women, has high potential overlap with IRIS in both membership and objectives. When first introduced, NOW was publicised through IRIS, and drew upon IRIS and other existing networks to bring forward partnerships. Members of the working group also spoke of the increased attention brought to IRIS by NOW. As a large programme with a budget of 120m ECU, NOW attracted projects who also had an interest in IRIS once they became aware of it. A number of IRIS working group members are also members of the equivalent NOW working group.

From the survey of IRIS projects, it is shown that 45% of projects had already received help from IRIS in finding transnational partners for a NOW proposal, and 14% had received help in formulating a NOW proposal.

IRIS, however, retains an important role independent of NOW in two ways. NOW provides funds and technical assistance whereas the aim of IRIS is to forge contacts and to develop the know-how which is the basis of technical assistance. IRIS can be expected to have an active role in the technical assistance measures which NOW will fund to support its projects, by means of interaction and dissemination of information on good practice, the transfer of experience from local to national or international level, and the development of networks of transnational partnerships.

4.4.2 EUROFORM

Mandate and current activities

EUROFORM was launched along with NOW and HORIZON, in December 1990, and the first projects come on stream in January 1992. It is a funding programme, focusing on support for transnational projects related to innovation and new skills diffusion in relation to the training of the unemployed of either gender. Most collaborative or linked projects which relate to IRIS would find it easier to obtain funding from NOW, as a women's programme, rather than EUROFORM (the mixed programme) although 17 projects (30%) felt that EUROFORM might be an appropriate programme for their project to approach. Three projects had found partners for a EUROFORM proposal through IRIS.

Suggestions for future coordination overlap with IRIS activities and degree of current interaction:-

Whilst most IRIS projects are involved in training of the unemployed, and by implication, a substantial proportion of their clientele must be long-term unemployed, only three projects responding to the questionnaire had found partners for a EUROFORM proposal through IRIS. Clearly, there is less interest shown by IRIS members in EUROFORM since their chances of obtaining funding

are higher through NOW, the women's initiative, than through EUROFORM, in which they must compete with mixed-gender projects.

How could interaction and coordination be improved?

The main concern must be to establish mechanisms by which EUROFORM, as a new programme, can benefit from the experience of IRIS with regard to training methods, since more than half of the clientele of EUROFORM projects are likely to be women. Possibly the time is ripe for some synthetic publication or series of documents drawing together the "lessons" of IRIS for the benefit of trainers in other networks which share its concerns.

4.4.3 FORCE

Mandate and current activities:-

FORCE is concerned with training of employees rather than of the unemployed. It offers financial support for investment in continuing vocational training and innovations in training management. It provides a network for innovatory transnational initiatives in continuing vocational training, runs an exchange programme and funds international pilot projects. FORCE is a particularly large programme and one which draws in employers to transnational partnerships, working through coordinating units in each Member State.

Overlap with IRIS activities and degree of current interaction:-

Only a small proportion of IRIS projects are engaged in training women employees, since the greater part of the IRIS public consists of unemployed women.

The FORCE unit suggested that while there is scope for interaction, this is not realised. They feel that IRIS could disseminate its work more effectively, and that there is a loss of important experience because of this lack of dissemination.

How could interaction and coordination be improved?

The FORCE Unit feels that IRIS has a lot to contribute in terms of the elements of good practice in training programmes which have been developed by its members, but that insufficient written material is being produced by IRIS in a form which could be used by other networks. It was suggested that a working paper, or series of papers to set down in writing the "oral tradition" developed by IRIS with regard to training methods and social support for women trainees, would be a most valuable input to FORCE.

It was also suggested that IRIS could be more closely linked, within the Commission, with the Task Force programmes, to help to give them 'an equal opportunities' focus.

The FORCE Unit felt that a balance needs to be struck between equal opportunities work and training work. That is, there is limited purpose in training women unless employers will actually hire them.

FORCE could help IRIS contact employers, through its coordinating unit in each Member State, as FORCE clients are considered to be both sides of industry, and there is potential for partnerships established through IRIS to be taken forward with FORCE funding.

4.4.4 PETRA

Mandate and current activities

PETRA is a youth training programme, with up to 100,000 individual trainee exchange visits envisaged for the period 1992-94. It has a 400 member European Network of Training Partnerships, and a network of "youth initiative projects" in which pilot training and employment schemes are designed by the young people themselves. Additionally, there is a research network consisting of fourteen research partnerships. Each partnership brings together research institutions chosen by national governments to take part in joint research on issues related to youth training. PETRA's methods of networking parallel those of IRIS. There is an annual directory giving a profile of each ENTP project and a database is being developed which includes inter alia, a list of the working papers, teaching materials and course modules prepared by each ENTP member. Summary reports have been prepared for most Member States on recent development in training policy and practice.

The main differences between PETRA and IRIS are that the former has a research network, as well as a system of Programme Assistants in each Member State - national coordinating teams of up to three people, jointly funded by the Commission and by national authorities.

Overlap with IRIS activities and degree of current interaction:-

PETRA is the EC programme with the highest actual overlap of membership with IRIS. In 1991 16 projects were members of both programmes, and of the projects responding to the questionnaire 13 projects (23%) also belonged to PETRA. The PETRA unit referred to attempts to increase linkages, through for example, the use of information held on database, but there is no major co-operation at present, although there is a low level of information exchange between the two projects, mainly in terms of publication exchange.

How could interaction and coordination be improved?

There appears to be an opportunity for collaboration in the field of publications and database development. PETRA's publications and database could be used to disseminate the training materials and course modules prepared by some IRIS projects.

4.4.5 EUROTECNET

Mandate and current activities

EUROTECNET is concerned with provision of innovative actions in the field of vocational training to deal with technological change and with identifying new skill needs in the workforce.

EUROTECNET, like IRIS, does not fund projects. It is a network of 'best practice' projects as proposed by Member States. The programme involves both sides of industry, and is closely coordinated with FORCE, COMETT and PETRA through the Human Resources Task Force. The first phase of the programme (1985-88) was concerned with training for new information technologies.

The second phase of EUROTECNET focuses on a broader range of human resources issues related to technological change, and their organisational implications.

It is attempting to identify training needs and appropriate training methods in relation to computer - controlled design and manufacturing systems, technologies to protect the environment, and biotechnology.

Overlap with IRIS activities and degree of current interaction:

In principle, EUROTECNET appears to be of strategic importance to IRIS, since training in new technologies for which there is a labour shortage would appear to be an important avenue of advancement for woman, and it is important that the gender barriers which exist in traditional forms of manual work should not be allowed to persist to the same degree in new forms of manufacturing technology. However, there is little interface between IRIS and EUROTECNET in practice, although 15 EUROTECNET projects, 5.5% of the total, have women's training as their main objective, and 6 IRIS projects are also members of EUROTECNET.

How could interaction and coordination be improved?

The EUROTECNET office suggested that more information exchange would be beneficial. They emphasised on the need to work together to maximise achievements not just between IRIS and EUROTECNET, but between all EC training networks. There is a need for a systematically worked out common approach. Between IRIS and EUROTECNET specifically, it would be useful to identify of common guidelines for women's training projects, and to exchange information in relation to the training of women in SMEs. Within EUROTECNET's approach to developing qualifications based on "core competences", collaboration on aspects particularly relevant to women could also be valuable.

4.4.6 COMETT

Mandate and activities

COMETT's main focus is the transfer of high technology, internationally, between universities and enterprises. It is based on 158 University Enterprise Training Partnerships. These may be of a regional or sectoral kind, each bringing together up to several other partners who may include academic

institutions, enterprises and professional associations. Funding is provided for transnational student and graduate work placements, exchanges of personnel between industry and academia, and pilot training.

Overlap with IRIS activities and degree of current interaction

According to the IRIS directory, 5 members are also COMETT projects.

Within COMETT, there are about 20 projects/partnerships which have a focus on women's training, and COMETT's secondary objective is the promotion of equal opportunities in advanced technology training,

How could interaction and coordination be improved?

There are opportunities to improve links between the programmes, in particular by enabling members of each network to access the other's database information. The interface between the two networks could be of considerable importance to a minority of IRIS projects - for example those involved in enterprise creation, teacher training or training for para-medical work or computer programming. But for at least two thirds of IRIS projects, there is little potential overlap between COMETT and IRIS services.

4.4.7 ELISE

Membership and current activities

ELISE (The Network on Local Employment Initiatives Information Service) provides an information service with the objective of promoting local employment. It holds information on Commission programmes, organisations and local projects, and also provides an inquiry service through its databases. ELISE produces a regular newsletter about current developments of interest to LEIs (ILEs) and has an extensive library on related topics.

Overlap with IRIS activities and degree of current interaction:-

All IRIS projects are on the ELISE database, and 20-30% of projects identified by ELISE include women's training and/or employment as an important objective. As an information service, ELISE also helps projects find out which EC and national networks are available or appropriate. Thus it can, and probably does help potential members find out about IRIS. At the time of writing, it has been decided by the Commission that ELISE will not continue.

4.5 Some general perspectives on European networking in the training and employment field

4.5.1 A comparison between IRIS and the other European Community programmes mentioned above suggests that it is helpful to examine the operation of IRIS in the context of some general observations about the way in which networks do work or might work.

4.5.2 A general approach to the evaluation of European networks might include the questions displayed in the box below. Whilst it is not within the terms of reference of this study to conduct a comparative evaluation of different networks, it is appropriate to pose these questions with regard to IRIS and to see how a comparison with other European networks can help to answer them.

Key questions about IRIS and other European networks

- Who are the intended final beneficiaries of the network? (eg. women, the unemployed).
- Which intermediaries should be involved, in order to help the beneficiaries in the way intended? (e.g. should the network address employers, professional associations, women's organisations etc?)
- Whose organisational goals should be the driving force which determines the nature of the network's services: (e.g. the goals of the Member States' training authorities, of employers, of training providers?)
- What kind of services or activities can best achieve the goals of the network? (eg. conferences, publications, databases).
- What sort of organisational structures are most effective to achieve these goals - at local or regional level, at national level and at community level?

4.5.3 *Who are the intended beneficiaries of IRIS?*

The answers to the first question (displayed in the Table 4.2) help to highlight the distinctive role of IRIS and NOW as the only two European networks with their particular target group, which however overlaps with that of EUROFORM, PETRA and FORCE. The table displays the direct beneficiaries, i.e. those who are immediately involved in the mechanisms of the network. Although IRIS projects are mainly for women only, some also include male trainees whilst developing specific support for women.

Direct Target Groups or Intended Direct Beneficiaries of European Networks									
	Individuals				Employers and Institutions				
	Unemployed		Employed		Students	Employers	Universities colleges and researchers	Training providers	Trade unions
	Women	Men	Women	Men					
IRIS	*	*	*	*				*	
NOW	*		(In certain regions)						
EUROFORM	*	*							
PETRA	Youth				apprentices /trainees under 28	*	*	*	*
COMETT					*	*	*	*	
EUROTECNET			*	*		*	*		*
							(researchers)		
FORCE			*	*		*		*	*
ELISE	intended beneficiaries are LEIs, and, indirectly, those who are or will be employed or trained in them								

4.5.4 *Which intermediaries should be involved?*

It has been recognised in IRIS from the start that the involvement of employers is critical to the success of the projects to train the unemployed - as sponsors, as providers of work experience for trainees, and as providers of jobs for those finishing training. About 20% of IRIS projects, according to CREW, do training on contract to employers. In common with NOW, IRIS has however experienced some difficulties in gaining interest and support from employers, particularly with regard to participation in seminars. This did improve last year when in-service training was made a seminar theme and some employers presented case studies to the seminars. Some employers will also be involved in the forthcoming IRIS fair.

There are two possible ways by which involvement of employers could be increased. One would be closer links with networks that do have strong employer involvement - that is FORCE, EUROTECNET and PETRA. Another (taken up in section 7) would be the development of some advisory services to employers.

Given that part of IRIS's remit is to promote the concept of training for women, the question may be posed whether it would explicitly seek stronger participation by women's organisations which are lobbying for the same goals, and also with the educational sector. Closer links with PETRA's Programme Assistants might help to strengthen ties with educational bodies. This issue is also raised under the section of this report dealing with publications and meetings of IRIS.

4.5.5 *Whose organisational goals should be the driving force?*

Developing good practice in training is obviously intended to help the trainees, but a network of this kind cannot be driven by the trainees themselves, only by training providers, the social partners and official bodies.

Thus, there is some inherent risk that the services operated by the network may develop in such a way as to serve the interests of the intermediaries, rather than the ultimate public. For example, exchange visits are regarded as interesting and enjoyable, whilst writing working papers on training methods, although it may have great value in defining and disseminating good practice, might be a less popular activity unless people could be paid to do it. As in the case of employers, it may be important to ensure that inputs into the network are appropriately rewarded. Otherwise, an expectation may be generated that everyone 'consumes' the network's services more than they contribute to their 'production'.

Two features of the PETRA programme provide valuable examples in this context:-

- 1) the Youth Initiatives Projects, in which trainees themselves are mainly responsible for the planning, organisation and implementation of a project. This establishes a 'grassroots' or 'bottom-up' element in the development of innovative training schemes.
- 2) Specific funding for the preparation of country reports and for research projects.

4.5.6 *What kind of services or activities can best serve the goals of the network?*

This question will be dealt with in section 3.5. However, it is worth highlighting some types of action which are not carried out by IRIS but which do exist in other European networks, merely to place them on the 'agenda' for consideration of what services or activities IRIS might provide if it enters a second phase:-

EUROTECNET:-

- establishment of European training consortia, involving SMEs, larger enterprises and vocational training systems.
- setting up of a clearing house to facilitate the exchange of teaching materials
- linking projects with experts who are carrying out research

COMETT:-

- facilitating partnerships between training providers (in the case of COMETT, institutions of higher education and employers).

PETRA:-

- production of model course materials and teacher training materials
- production of materials for career guidance
- research reports
- country reports on vocational training policy and practice.

4.5.7 *What sort of organisational structures are most effective?*

Some other networks (PETRA, FORCE, and EUROTECNET) have coordinating units within each country. Several members of the IRIS working party have expressed a view that IRIS could become more attractive if there was greater animation and coordination of the network within each country.

This could be done in one of three ways, the choice of method depending on national circumstances:-

- 1) IRIS could set up its own national coordinating units in countries where it does not already have them. (It already has in France, the Netherlands, Germany and Italy.) These would need to be funded either by the Commission or by national governments, or they could be jointly funded. The present coordinating units are entirely funded by national governments.
- 2) IRIS could develop close links with the coordinating units of the other programmes, drawing upon their resources and giving them an 'equal opportunities' dimension.
- 3) A single non-governmental organisation could act as the coordinating unit for several programmes. In France, for example, RACINE receives funds from the French government to carry out a coordinating role for EUROTECNET, PETRA and IRIS.

Another issue concerns the location of IRIS within the Commission. One view is that IRIS would be able to contribute a stronger 'equal opportunities' perspective to the Task Force programmes if it was itself placed under the Task Force umbrella. On the other hand, it has naturally close links with NOW and EUROFORM which are DGV programmes, although they are run through the ESF whereas IRIS is attached to the Equal Opportunities Unit.

5. THE POLICY CONTEXT: WOMEN'S TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT AT NATIONAL LEVEL

5.1 Introduction

This section is based on a study of documents relating to national training policies and, in the case of the sections on the operation of the IRIS network, on telephone interviews with one or both representatives of this country on the Working Party for Women's Vocational Training. The purpose of this section is firstly, to establish what have been the opportunities, constraints and problems for IRIS work in each of the Member States, and secondly to examine to what extent IRIS work has responded to the key issues concerning women's employment and training in each country. Since it is not a funding programme IRIS cannot initiate projects, but it can seek to influence policy by generating debate and providing information. Thirdly, by asking what general policy developments have been taking place independently of IRIS, this section provides the basis for consideration of the additionality of IRIS effects.

Fourthly, it addresses the question of who are the key actors in the women's training field in each country, and whether IRIS activities have been effectively linked in with local institutional frameworks.

5.2 The relationship of policy developments to employment trends

In all Member States the 1980s have seen an upward trend in women's participation in the labour force and a rising share of jobs taken by women. Women returning to work are increasingly recognised by employers as an important sources of labour particularly since many of them are willing to accept part-time work which plays an important role in the growing service sector in some countries, much as the UK and Germany, employers have been keen to recruit women as a substitute for a declining supply of labour in the school leaver age group.

On the other hand, unemployment amongst women has fallen back more slowly than male unemployment in the late 1980s and since 1990 has begun to rise again. The market for female labour is dominated in some countries by the first of these phenomena and in others by the second.

In all Member States except the UK and Ireland, women form a higher proportion of the unemployed than they do of the labour force and their unemployment rate is higher than that of men (Table 5.1). Women are under-represented in official programmes for the unemployed in Portugal, the Netherlands and the UK.

Table 5.1 Percentage unemployment rates by sex and age band - EUR12 - 1989

	Total			Under 25s			Over-25s		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
EUR 12	7.0	11.9	9.0	14.9	20.1	17.4	9.6	5.5	7.1
B	5.4	13.3	8.5	12.7	21.8	17.0	5.5	12.9	7.2
DK	5.8	7.8	6.7	7.9	9.2	8.5	5.0	7.2	6.2
D	4.4	7.3	5.5	4.5	5.9	5.1	4.3	7.7	5.6
GR	4.9	12.7	7.8	17.2	36.2	26.1	3.4	7.3	5.0
E	12.7	25.2	17.0	27.0	42.1	33.8	9.7	12.9	12.7
F	7.1	12.7	9.5	16.1	24.1	20.1	5.7	10.4	7.8
IRL	16.1	18.8	17.0	24.9	21.9	23.6	14.1	17.3	15.0
I	7.4	17.4	11.1	26.3	38.8	32.1	4.2	11.1	6.6
L	1.4	2.7	1.8	3.6	3.9	3.7	1.0	2.3	1.4
NL	6.8	13.2	9.3	12.9	14.5	13.7	5.6	12.8	8.1
P	3.4	7.2	5.0	8.5	15.4	11.6	2.1	4.9	3.3
UK	7.1	6.1	6.7	11.2	8.3	9.9	6.0	5.5	5.8

Source: A Social Portrait of Europe: Eurostat

5.3 *The policy response to labour market trends*

Where demand for female labour has tended to outstrip the supply of women with appropriate skills, proposals for positive action programmes for employed women or for recruitment to the private sector have been more readily accepted by employers or have even been initiated by them. Thus, the examples given in the box below come from countries with a relatively low female unemployment rates. In these countries, positive action programmes have been driven to some extent by the demand for women's labour.

By contrast, in most of the countries where female unemployment is high relative to the European average, women are prominent as participants in government programmes for the unemployed, and official measures in relation to women's training have concentrated on providing basic professional skills to unemployed or inactive women (see examples in Box 2).

Box 1 Positive action policies linking in to employers' demand for labour

Country	Policy
Germany	Shortage of young people for apprenticeships addressed by promotion of opportunities to young women - "Girls in Men's Jobs" Campaign
Luxembourg	Shortage of residents in workforce addressed through encouraging women's participation, and through training of migrant women
UK	Local actions by TECs are expected to relate to skill shortages experienced by employers
Netherlands	Local Education Centres organise 2 to 3 day training courses for women in management skills at the request of individual employers
Italy	Employers showing interest in retraining women in traditionally male skill areas, (although level of interest not quantified)

France, the UK and Flanders all have programmes designed to take the "individual" approach, building up a programme for the person concerned from a menu of options that will make them more attractive to employers

Box 2 Official measures aimed at giving unemployed and inactive women basic professional skills

Country	Policy
Italy	Course aimed at women setting up a small business; "Retravailler" courses for women wishing to return to work
Greece	Vocational training courses for long term unemployed women
Ireland	"Return to work" courses for inactive women
Portugal	Training for long-term unemployed women. Enterprise creation programmes for women.
Spain	Training courses for women returners

Table 5.2. Comparative statistics on women's employment

	Women as % of labour force ¹	Women as % of unemployed ¹	Women as % of trainees in official training programmes for the unemployed ³	Female activity rate % ¹
Belgium	47.0	60.8	70.0	35.7
Denmark	47.1	50.2	61.0	59.9
France	49.2	57.2	n.a.	46.0
Germany ²	48.1	52.1	n.a.	42.1
Greece	46.2	61.2	73.0(a) ⁴	35.1
Ireland	45.2	33.8	44.0(a)	33.7
Italy	46.6	57.6	n.a.	34.6
Luxembourg	48.1	n.a.	n.a.	34.1
Netherlands	49.6	52.0	43.0(a)	41.7
Portugal	45.3	60.4	40.8(a)	46.5
Spain	45.1	50.4	49.6(a)	31.4
UK	45.9	41.3	34.0(a)	51.4
Euro 12 (average)	47.0	52.2	n.a.	41.7

¹ Source: EC Labour Force Survey 1989

³ Source: PACEC research for this study. Data are for 1990 (a) or 1991 (b) depending on the country

² Federal Republic

⁴ However, this proportion is much lower in courses run by local authorities and NGOs.

Table 5.2 continued

	% of women who work part-time ¹	% of self- employed who are women ¹	% of long- term unemployed who are women ¹	Women's unemployment rate
Belgium	24.9	24.4	62.0	13.0
Denmark	40.1	14.9	57.1	8.9
France	23.6	24.0	59.8	12.6
Germany	3.1	24.0	49.1	7.5
Greece	8.0	18.9	69.5	12.4
Ireland	16.7	11.1	28.9	16.5
Italy	10.9	23.3	60.2	17.4
Luxembourg	17.0	21.4	n.a.	(2.3)
Netherlands	59.9	27.5	45.8	11.9
Portugal	10.0	42.1	64.9	7.4
Spain	11.9	24.2	56.1	25.3
UK	42.9	23.7	28.6	7.1
Euro 12	27.9	24.4	53.3	12.0

One of the challenges facing the IRIS network is how to capitalise on employers' willingness to institute positive action programmes in countries where policy is 'demand-led' to encourage more employers to become involved and to publicise successful examples of in-company programmes. There is however, much less opportunity to do this in countries or regions where the main preoccupation of policy-makers is to provide qualification training to the unemployed. In these areas unemployed women are inevitably in strong competition with men, so that training which will help women 'create their own jobs' assumes relatively larger importance than in economies where women's training policy is 'demand-led'. In practice, the countries where measures for women are driven by concern for the female unemployed are also the ones with large numbers of unemployed women in rural areas, whose needs were highlighted by the IRIS conferences in Greece and Italy in 1989. Clearly enterprise skills are especially important for unemployed rural women. But so far Portugal, Spain, France, Belgium and Italy are the only countries with official national programmes specifically to help women entering self-employment.

- 5.1.2 The IRIS network has drawn attention to the importance of childcare facilities in enabling women to enter employment. Comparison of tables 5.3 and 5.4 shows the association of high levels of publicly funded childcare provision with higher levels of participation of mothers with young children in the labour market. However, it is not necessarily a one way relationship; in countries with a high level of female participation in employment, the pressure for these facilities may be greater. Other forms of childcare play an important role in some countries. In Greece, for example, there is a reliance on neighbours and relatives, particularly grandmothers, for childcare in many areas, since the formal childcare that does exist is concentrated in Athens. Regional disparities in levels of childcare are common, with provision generally being higher in cities.

Table 5.3 EC publicly funded childcare services as a percentage of all children in age group

	Children under 3	Children from 3 to compulsory school age	Age when compulsory schooling begins
Belgium	20%	95% +	6 years
Denmark	48%	85%	7 years
France	20%	95% +	6 years
Germany	3%	65-70%	6-7 years
Greece	4%	65-70%	5.5 years
Ireland	2%	55%	6 years
Italy	5%	85%	6 years
Luxembourg	2%	55-60%	5 years
Netherlands	2%	50-55%	5 years
Portugal	6%	35%	6 years
Spain	n.a	65-70%	6 years
United Kingdom*	2%	35-40%	5 years

Source : Childcare in Europe 1985-1990 (European Commission 1990)

* Government statistics in European comparisons commonly include playgroups within UK provision for this age group. These are not included in the EC Childcare Network comparative tables as these are based on publicly funded places providing education or care for a significant period of time. Although a substantial minority of children attend playgroups in the UK, their average attendance is only 5 hours per week (compared with, for example, 30-40 hours per week in French nursery education), and only a third of playgroups receive any public funds, with an average grant covering less than 10 per cent of running costs. Informal provision of this kind such as drop-in centres and parent and toddler groups are excluded from these comparisons.

Table 5.4 EC employment participation rates of mothers of children aged 0-4, 1988

	Figures as percentage		Total in employment
	Full time	Part time	
Belgium	37.0	15.8	52.8
Denmark	45.9	28.9	74.7
France	37.5	14.2	51.7
*Germany	15.6	18.1	33.7
Greece	33.0	6.5	39.5
Ireland	19.0	6.0	25.1
Italy	34.9	4.9	39.9
Luxembourg	27.1	9.2	36.3
Netherlands	4.2	24.8	28.9
Portugal	54.5	6.2	60.7
Spain	24.0	4.2	28.2
UK	11.3	25.3	36.5
Euro 12 (average)	24.8	15.1	39.9
* Federal Republic			

Source: Cohen, 1990

Table 5.6 EC - Labour force participation

Economic activity rates: by sex 1988 (the civilian labour force aged 16 and over as a percentage of the population aged 16 and over)

	Males	Female	All
Belgium	62.0	36.7	48.9
Denmark	75.2	61.0	67.9
France	67.0	67.2	56.7
Germany (former federal republic)	70.7	42.0	55.6
Greece	69.0	36.3	57.8
Irish Republic	73.6	35.4	54.2
Italy	66.9	35.0	50.4
Luxembourg	69.9	34.7	57.7
Netherlands	70.4	42.3	56.2
Portugal	71.6	47.0	58.6
Spain	67.0	32.5	49.1
UK	75.5	57.5	63.0

Source: (Statistical Office of the European Communities) - Social Trends 1991

Training for women in non-traditional skills is a type of measure which can take place in either 'demand-led' or 'unemployment-led' policy frameworks. Examples of national programmes of this kind are found in Denmark, Portugal, the Netherlands, Spain, Belgium, Germany, France and Ireland, although it must be recognised that the bulk of this type of work probably takes place in locally sponsored actions. Where such programmes exist, there is an opportunity for IRIS to disseminate the experience of its own projects and help to build good practice. Where they do not exist or exist only on a small scale, a strategic choice may be made whether to try to encourage them or to help more women enter main stream programmes in order to cross gender barriers. There is some evidence from Denmark (and, on an anecdotal basis for the UK and Greece) that women trained in non-traditional skill areas have a higher rate of unemployment than women trained for 'traditional' women's jobs. However, where they do get jobs, women in 'non-traditional' areas are likely to have higher earnings. This

lies behind the concern in Belgium, for example, to raise the proportion of women in manufacturing industry. The male-female earnings differentials shown in Table 5.7 may, to some extent, reflect the extent to which women have penetrated 'non-traditional' areas although it is not the only factor.

Table 5.7: Earnings Differentials between Women and Men

	Women's earnings as % of men's in manufacturing industry in 1988	
	Manual workers	Non-manual workers
Belgium	74.2	63.8
Denmark	84.2	n.a.
France	79.5	65.0
W. Germany	73.1	66.5
Greece	78.2	67.3
Ireland	67.9	n.a.
Italy	n.a.	n.a.
Luxembourg	58.0	55.3
Netherlands	75.4	63.7
Portugal	68.0	71.5
	(1989)	
UK	67.9	54.6
Spain	n.a.	n.a.

Source: data extracted by the UK Equal Opportunities Commission from Earnings, Industry and Services (Eurostat, 1990)

In some countries specific guidance and counselling measures have been developed for women on a large scale. Examples are given in Box 3. Clearly there is a potential role for IRIS in the identification and dissemination of effective models for this type of work in so far as they can be said to constitute an essential part of a women's training and career development package.

Box 3 Guidance and counselling measures	
Country	Policy
The Netherlands	Reorientation interviews with women receiving National Assistance benefits. These are carried out by the Municipal Social services and the Employment Offices in co-operation, at the women's own request.
Germany	Return to work courses aim to build self confidence and teach job search and interview techniques rather than new skills
Italy, France	'Retravailler' courses run on a large scale by local groups

The Institutional setting for IRIS work

5.4 In disseminating its work and generating debate, IRIS needs to identify the appropriate institutional vehicles in each Member State, so that officials of the appropriate bodies and levels can be made aware of projects and findings. This is made more difficult in some Member States by the existence of regional bodies for the implementation and sometimes design of training policies, making the necessary points of contact numerous and geographically dispersed. In the UK, for example, training provision is in the hands of 82 separate Training and Enterprise Councils in England and Wales alone. In Germany many aspects of employment policy are administered by the Lander, and in Denmark by counties or municipalities. In Greece, France, Ireland and Portugal, on the other hand, labour market administration is relatively centralised. Strong positive action policies however can be and are laid down by central government in otherwise relatively decentralised policy delivery systems, such as in, Belgium and Spain, as shown in Box 4.

Box 4	Examples of positive action targets set by central government in decentralised training systems
Belgium	Increasing the participation of women in the manufacturing sector from 20% to 25% by the end of 1992
Ireland	Each region has at least one course per training centre targeted to achieve a significant switch to female participation each year Targets for increasing the number of young women entering apprenticeships have been accompanied by a pre-apprenticeship training course to increase the number of female applicants.
Spain	Each region has an equal opportunities officer responsible for positive action initiatives within the national employment plan, Plan FIP

In addressing the question of how IRIS does and can seek to promote women's training and employment, one is immediately conscious of the limitations posed by the network's construction and budget:-

- 1) Although the network is 'inside government' to the extent that it is led by the Working Group on Vocational Training, the members of the Working Group are not supported by a staff dedicated to IRIS work and provided by IRIS. There is no system of national Programme Assistants as with PETRA.
- 2) With the exception of the Working Group members, the network basically consists of the member projects coordinated by CREW. These projects are outside the policy making structure; if they influence policy, whether of government or of the social partners, it must be through policy - makers' knowledge of their work or coincidentally through interchange and movement of personnel. Thus, whilst IRIS events can provide a venue for meeting and debate involving policy - makers and employers, the latter are not actually members of the network. In this respect, as we have seen in section 2.3, IRIS operates

differently from the Task Force programmes, whose structure incorporates policy makers and employers as partners in the network and as intended direct beneficiaries. Perhaps because of this limitation of its membership, we find no positive evidence from the interviews or from reading of IRIS publications that there has been significant interaction between the network and the positive action programmes led by, or addressed to, private sector employers at national level, such as the Belgian and German programmes referred to later on in this section. However, a few projects responding to the mail questionnaire claimed that their methods and practices had been adopted in national programmes for the unemployed, especially in Spain and Portugal.

3) Because it has no research or evaluation function or capacity outside of the member projects, IRIS is not necessarily able to assess the strength or transferability of models emerging from national programmes. It can do so only in as far as member projects exemplify these national models, but there is no guarantee that the projects applying for membership will adequately represent a particular type of national "specialism" which would be of interest to the community as a whole.

5.5 The Opportunities and Constraints of each National Context

5.5.1. In this section we examine the following questions:-

- * What are the special features of interest in women's training policy in each Member State?
- * Who are the main actors involved in women's training?
- * What are the main constraints or problems for the occupational advancement of women in each Member State?
- * What are the most innovative or distinctive features of IRIS projects in each country?
- * What are felt to be the main strengths and weaknesses of the way in which IRIS operates in each country?

Further details about the measures which have been adopted in each country are found in Annex A. The information is drawn from the background research and from the telephone interviews with members of the Working Party (except in Belgium, where it has been impossible to contact either of the representatives after several attempts).

5.5.2 **BELGIUM:-**

Features of special interest in national developments

- 1) Legal provision for paid educational leave for all workers, and for "career breaks" for women having children, which provide more favourable conditions for periodic retraining and training for career advancement than is the case in several other member states.
- 2) The Kempen Strategic Plan, launched in 1990, which aims to develop a day nursery network to support technical training projects for unemployed women.
- 3) Courses in farm work and farm management for women provided by the UPAF (Union of Agricultural Women).
- 4) In the Flemish community, special orientation courses for women returners at which child-care is provided.
- 5) A positive action programme for women in the private sector, funded by the Ministry of Social Emancipation. This provides short courses for women in management, and advice to companies wishing to set up positive action programmes.

Main actors involved

- * The regional training administrations:- VDAB in Flanders and FOREM in Wallonia.
- * Schalude Associeés, a training institute for managers (the vehicle for the positive action programme mentioned under (5) above)

Constraints and problems:-

- * The large numbers of low-skilled, long-term unemployed women for whom prospects of work in the private sector are very poor.
- * Some difficulty experienced by women in vocational training courses because of poor technical background.

Distinctive specialisms of IRIS projects:-

- * Special pre-training courses for women planning to enter trades in which women are under-represented (B008-01, BM026-03).
- * Training in farm management (B011-02, 011-03)

5.5.3 **DENMARK**

Features of special interest in national developments

- 1) "Open Computer Workshops" widely available through official and voluntary sector training provides, which enable women returners to gain basic "computer literacy" on a "drop-in" basis and through formal courses.
- 2) Special consultants attached to some job centres, whose task it is to develop training for women.
- 3) A government campaign against sex stereo-typing at work.

Main actors involved:-

Labour market administration in Denmark is highly decentralised, with local authorities having a major role in the operation of training programmes for the unemployed.

Constraints and problems:-

Positive action is well-developed in Denmark which may be regarded as a net "exporter" of training practice rather than an "importer", within the IRIS network.

Although Denmark has relatively extensive child care provision for children under seven, child care facilities for the 7 - 10 age group, who have a very short school

day, are rather limited. This is a source of difficulty for mothers seeking to work full-time.

Distinctive specialisms of IRIS projects in Denmark:-

- * Open access workshop in computer technology, of the type described in (i) above: DK 007-02
- * a number of courses on stock management and transport
- * a course for CNC machine operators (DK 005-02)
- * generally strong emphasis on modular structured courses and computer assisted training.

THE OPERATION OF THE IRIS NETWORK IN DENMARK¹

Knowledge about the IRIS Network amongst politicians, training providers and employers is almost non-existent. Amongst civil servants the IRIS network is well known to those who work on women's training issues.

The major contribution that IRIS has made to women's training in Denmark is its role of facilitating links with other projects across Europe. The contribution it has made to the NOW programme by assisting projects to find partners is considered to be very valuable and would not have been easily brought about without the network. The IRIS directory was regarded very highly as a source for information on other Projects and was vital in developing partnerships. This

¹ **The information in this section is drawn from two interviews, one with the present government representative on the IRIS working party, Vibeke Thornhoj, who has only been involved with the IRIS work for 3 months and felt that the former co-ordinator, Dorte Lutzen, would have a better view on the importance of IRIS. Dorte Lutzen thus provided most of the information in this section.**

is more important for the NOW programme, because of projects having to find their own partner, unlike the PETRA programme which arranges the partnerships centrally.

Although IRIS is appreciated for providing a forum of exchanging ideas, the interviewee felt that the Danish projects made a major contribution by injecting new ideas on women's training into the network. Because the Danish government has a good record of sponsoring women's training programmes, women in Denmark were able to develop women's training at the grassroots level, which contributed much to the innovative thinking on women's training. However, having had the opportunity to present ideas to a wider forum of interested women across Europe, Danish women have been able to consolidate their experience and gained much encouragement from the exchanges. Positive feed-back is considered by Danish members to be as important as learning about various developments in women's training.

The ideas and programmes that IRIS offers are thought to be excellent, but there are major administrative problems, making it more difficult for projects to participate. This is mainly to do with refunding expenditure incurred by going on exchange visits and to conferences. It takes 8 to 12 months to get expenditure reimbursed, usually too long a period for advancing large amounts of money. It was felt that CREW and the EC Equal Opportunities Unit should manage the network in a less bureaucratic way.

Language problems were identified as another area of concern. Because some of the seminars/conferences were held in French with no translation provisions available, the Danish participants were unable to be fully involved.

IRIS is considered to be an important network, but in need of greater financial support. It is described as a 'low budget' initiative, which could be more effective with more substantial funding similar to that of PETRA, which is more influential because of its stronger financial basis.

5.5.4 GERMANY

Features of Special Interest in National Developments

1. a government campaign to encourage more young women into non-traditional areas of work,
2. government encouragement to employers to develop 'Women's Promotion Plans',
3. new special measures for women's training being introduced by the eastern Lander, in the context of the overall employment crisis there

Main Actions involved in Women's Training

Whilst the legislative framework for training and for positive action policies is determined at federal level, implementation of training programmes is carried out mainly at the level of the Lander. There is a network of Lander equal opportunities officers. Trade Unions have pressed strongly for positive action in the workplace.

Constraints and Problems

The crisis in the eastern Lander has thrown so many people out of work that the prospects for 'demand led' positive action are now very poor. Additionally, many nurseries in the eastern Lander have closed, creating acute difficulty for working women who formerly relied on them.

Distinctive specialisms of IRIS projects in Germany

- * training in environmental conservation related areas (D007-01 in solar energy generation and the use of water power: D010-03 to help unemployed rural workers re-train as environmental inspectors)

- * pre-training and support for women entering mixed courses in non-traditional areas (DM003-01, DM016-01)

The operation of the IRIS network in Germany

IRIS has been swift to respond to the needs for women which arise from the employment crisis following reunification. The Federal Government has recently funded GIP (Gesellschaft für Informationstechnologie and Pedagogik) to co-ordinate the IRIS network in Germany. GIP commissioned an extensive survey of women's training needs and employment problems in the eastern Lander, which was reported in the IRIS bulletin in Autumn 1991. IRIS projects have been active in advising their eastern counterparts and setting up new projects for women in East Berlin.

Awareness of the IRIS network is fairly high amongst civil servants concerned with labour market policies and training in particular and amongst politicians who have taken an active interest in promoting equal opportunities, but it is little known amongst private sector employers.

The growing interest in women's training opportunities amongst politicians arises out of a wider debate on skill shortages on the one hand and increased awareness of equal opportunities issues on the other. It has given IRIS prominence amongst this group, albeit only recently. It is believed that IRIS will have greater impact in the future, because of a developing interest in training geared towards women. The networking of women's training projects has helped to make their presence more visible and demonstrates an existing need and demand for training that addresses the particular situation of women. Although this need is recognised in

the Labour Promotion Act (AFG), the realisation of this legal basis requires political input, and of course funds. Thus the existence of a network helps to increase pressure on politicians and provides ample evidence of wide demand for women's training opportunities.

The lack of interest from employers in women's training programmes implies a need for a wider publicity campaign, which it is hoped to achieve through the publicity campaign planned by GIP. This may compliment the governments' own initiative on raising awareness through publicity campaigns, which encourages employers to show greater flexibility when recruiting labour and to view women as potential employees especially in areas of work where they are under represented. In this connection, it is noticeable that despite the impression that some German companies have adopted women's training policies which could be of national and international interest, only one of the IRIS projects is a company sponsored scheme.

5.5.5 GREECE

Features of Special Interest in National Development

Positive action programmes for women are focused on the unemployed and are heavily dependent on ESF funding.

Main Actions involved in Women's Training: Problems and Constraints

Women contribute almost three quarters of the trainees on mainstream programmes for the unemployed run by the national labour market, administration, OAED. Specific measures for women have been few.

The General Secretariat of Equality works closely with the ILE network to provide enterprise training for women, an issue of considerable importance given

major cultural business facing women entrepreneurs and a large number of unemployed women in urban areas with good qualifications. Since over a quarter of the Greek labour force are self-employed or business proprietors, the difficulty of women in starting enterprises is a major handicap for them. Other training schemes funded by the secretariat have to prove them worth quickly in order to attract repeated funding, hence courses are generally limited to a few months' duration.

The YWCA has been active in piloting the 'Retravailer' module in Greece.

NOW will fund an information centre on training programme and job opportunities for women.

Distinctive Specialisms of IRIS Projects in Greece

- * training for women with higher educational qualifications to enter management portions in male-dominated fields.

The Operation of the IRIS Network in Greece

Only nine projects have joined IRIS in Greece. This may be because of a lack of support from Government institutions. It is perhaps regrettable that only one of the projects in the network is involved in enterprise training; given the importance of this field for Greek women, it would be valuable for IRIS to attract and support more enterprise - related projects in Greece. It is also perhaps surprising that the YWCA, although well 'networked' internationally, is not part of IRIS.

Compared to Italy, Spain or some northern Member States, Greece has not experienced a strong development of positive actions for women in employment, nor of specific support for women in the mixed training schemes which are the general form of provision for unemployed women. Thus, an adequate structure

for the exchange of information with other countries is perceived by the General Secretariat for Equality as an important need, and the experience of participating in IRIS is recognised as having been very valuable. However, in the future the role of IRIS may be sustained by the new NOW co-ordinating unit.

5.5.6 SPAIN

Features of Special Interest in National Developments

1. specific attention to training of women on non-traditional skills, in the context of the national employment plan
2. formation of a commission for positive actions in companies
3. The important NOW programme already established as a result of central Government initiatives.

Main Actors involved in Women's Training

Good co-ordination exists between INEM (responsible for training and labour market measures at national level) and the Instituto de la Mujer.

Each region has an equal opportunities officer, responsible for women's issues in training and employment.

The concept of a national employment plan facilitates centralised positive action initiatives even in the highly regionalist system of implementing employment policy.

Constraints and Problems

Spain has a female unemployment level more than double the European average, reflecting the very serious employment difficulties in this country for both women and men.

Distinctive Specialisms of IRIS Projects in Spain

The 44 Spanish projects have between them a wide variety of experience, especially in enterprise training work, some projects specialising in farm management and others in marketing and exporting.

The Operation of the IRIS Network in Spain

IRIS has been strongly supported in Spain both by the Instituto de la Mujer and, by INEM, but it is regarded as having little value added, for the following reasons:-

1. the objectives, structure and responsibilities of the network are felt to be poorly defined.
2. the feeling that what is needed is large scale, well planned actions, rather than the small-scale, local project based approach of IRIS.
3. the fact that positive action in Spain is already highly developed, so that the existing programmes need very specific ideas about training methods. It is felt that IRIS does not meet this need, and concentrates too much on relating general problems about women's training.

4. the opportunity for specific collaboration with Greece, Portugal and Belgium through the SOFIA programme, involving seminars, conferences and visits.
5. the fact that INEM and the Instituto de la Mujer have proposed three major programmes to be funded by NOW in 1992-
 - 'Diana' - a pre-training programme
 - 'Clubem'- a job clubs programme for women
 - 'Clam' - a self-employment programme

5.5.7 **FRANCE**

Features of Special Interest in National Developments

France has two special national programmes for women; the FNE-FI programme for unemployed women with few qualifications, and an initiative to provide training, advice and loans for women entrepreneurs. Priority groups of women have double the usual level of funding in the national programme for unemployed people wishing to create their own enterprises. There is a large number of local groups providing 'retravailler' courses, which were first developed in France. They are networked through the Retravailler Association.

In general, French policy on women's training has been that it should be in the mainstream programmes, not programmes specifically for women. Current French policy is on producing individualised training plans for each person and this approach will have to be adapted by women to suit their needs - admittedly big job! Childcare is one of the biggest single preoccupations in women's training.

Main actors involved in women's training

National training programmes are designed and funded in a centralised way by ANPE, but delivered partly through a large number of non-profit training providers which have contracts with it, as well as operating their own local training programmes with funding from a variety of sources. The Retravailer association, mentioned above, has 47 centres.

Constraints and problems:-

Single parents and women who have neither work experience nor family support are regarded as groups particularly vulnerable to poverty in France, and this is especially true of immigrant women. The FNE-FI programme has been set up to address these groups.

Distinctive Specialisms of French IRIS projects:-

- * a strong emphasis on job-finding techniques, pre-training and career counselling
- * emphasis in several projects on the European labour market and orientation to job opportunities in other countries.

Operation of the IRIS Network in France.

In France a single co-ordinating unit, RACINE, has responsibility for IRIS, PETRA and EUROTECNET. It is funded partly by the French government. To start with IRIS was very little known in France at all. But since the National Seminar in 1990, it is gradually becoming better known. Ministers, advisers, training and education people, educationalists, even primary school representatives were invited and many of them attended - this has been the beginning of understanding of what IRIS is about.

Politicians have become aware of IRIS and women's training, they often ask about the recommendations of IRIS, especially regional and local politicians who are closer to delivery of training.

Civil servants concerned with employment and training issues have also become aware of IRIS. Some training providers know of IRIS, and more are asking for information about it, but as there are very many training schemes and providers, IRIS cannot have reached them all yet. Not so many of the voluntary organisations know of IRIS or use it.

As stated above, IRIS has performed its first role, that of getting known. It meets three times per year and women have started to work together to formalise and organise things and this is a contribution to women's training 'scene' in itself, but its main contribution will probably be from now on. The aims and objectives of the NOW programme are clearer and women will want and be able to work to these, and this provides a focus. It is hard to say whether there is a conscious process of learning from other countries, this has not been 'measured'. Again, the first three years are only a beginning; it is a huge task because of the major differences in government structures and programmes.

There are some problems in IRIS which need to change if there is to be a real transfer of experience. For example, the aims and objectives of IRIS were not well defined in the beginning, they were drawn too widely and too large. The right priority between quality and quantity was not chosen; quantity won. This may not have been too terrible for the first phase but it is vital the second time around that IRIS goes for quality in training programmes and does not make the same mistakes again. Further, all the funding for IRIS goes to CREW, to cover the 12 Member States. This is far too large and undertaking with the result that each country does not have enough IRIS money. This should change. Linked to this, IRIS does not reach the localities, there is a feeling that it is all carried out by civil servants and the local training groups do not have enough room to move, to change and direct IRIS. Finally, three meetings a year are not enough, there

should be more of these; and IRIS should publish more, this is one way to get the message of quality in training across to such a wide audience as we are dealing with.

5.5.8. IRELAND

Features of special interest in national developments

- 1) a regional target approach; each FAS region has nominated at least one course per training centre as a vehicle for achieving greater female participation.
- 2) A pilot pre-apprentice training scheme has been launched to try to increase the number of female apprentices.
- 3) There is a specific 'return to work' module for woman in the main training programme for the unemployed.

Main actors involved in women's training

Training in Ireland is highly centralised, with FAS, the national training agency, providing sponsorship for the bulk of programmes. Some schemes are also run by county education authorities.

Constraints and problems

Many women live in small rural settlements so that access to training is difficult for them. Childcare provision is especially poor in rural areas.

Distinctive specialisms of Irish IRIS projects

- * Two projects are unusual in that they are sponsored by a major public sector employer, the Electricity Supply Board.
- * Some projects illustrate the pre-apprenticeship and 'return to work' modules referred to above.

Operation of the IRIS network in Ireland

The development of the network in Ireland has been relatively slow. The conference held in 1991 increased awareness to some extent, particularly in FAS and among women's groups but was less successful at attracting employers or politicians. Since the conference training providers are becoming more interested in getting involved in IRIS.

The most successful activities in the Irish context are the exchange visits. These have stimulated interest which has led to a network between different FAS regions. The weaknesses were in

- 1) The lack of interest of employers.
- 2) The lack of resources nationally for promoting and co-ordinating IRIS, which has led to disorganisation and a reduced impact.
- 3) Lack of interest in IRIS as compared to funding programmes.

The working group members felt that the lack of funding made it hard for projects to get involved in IRIS activities and that the network would benefit from more organisation and a clearer definition of aims.

5.5.9. ITALY

Features of special interest in national developments

- 1) Provision of courses for women who want to set up their own companies, run by the Ministry of Labour in conjunction with the Commission for Equality of Opportunity. This responds to very low participation by women in the mixed programme to encourage young entrepreneurs.
- 2) Extensive provision of 'retravailler' type courses, from which at least 60% of participants find jobs.

Main actors involved in women's training

The Italian Commission for Equality of Opportunity has been very active in the four years of its existence, developing partnerships for positive action and new legislative frameworks for it.

The FORCE programme in Italy is initiating a number of positive action projects.

A number of Catholic associations and pressure groups linked to political parties and trade unions have also been active in initiating local programmes.

Problems and constraints

The diffuse nature of training activity, with many regional and local initiatives and a very large number of sponsors, make it difficult to inventorise and network training providers. Many Italian women work at home, making it difficult to reach them by programmes to facilitate career advancement.

Innovative features of IRIS projects in Italy

The very strong IRIS network in Italy, with 72 projects, reflects the main specialisms mentioned above, with an emphasis on 'retravailler' courses and training for enterprise creation and management, including farm management.

The operation of the IRIS network in Italy

The strength of the IRIS network in Italy may be attributed in part to the mushrooming of 'equal opportunities' initiatives since the Commission of Equality of Opportunity was set up in 1988. In this context, the creation of IRIS was timely and has provided the means for exchanges of experience with other countries which would otherwise have been impossible to obtain. A centre of information and documentation regarding women's training has recently been set up at national level, with the help of IRIS.

There was concern from one spokesman that IRIS should not become a means of 'ghetto-izing' women's training, or of detracting from the very important work being done by FORCE, in introducing a positive action focus to programmes involving private employers.

The IRIS Italian conference of October 1989 drew significant numbers of participants from the private and cooperative sectors and was one of the largest ever IRIS events, with over 300 participants.

5.5.10 NETHERLANDS

Special features of interest in national developments

- 1) Special training centres for returning women, with child care facilities run by the national labour market administration. These give a prominent place to non-traditional skill areas.
- 2) Special orientation ('retravailler') courses for women.
- 3) an array of programmes to train women for management positions.
- 4) 'Centres of Expertise' of women's higher vocational training, set up with partial government funding in three cities, to provide leadership and demonstration projects in this field.

Major actors in the field of women's training

Training in the Netherlands is organised by the Central Employment Board and the Regional Employment Boards. The social partners are involved at all levels and the municipalities are also involved at sub-regional level, as well as a large number of voluntary organisations.

Constraints and problems

Legal guarantees of parental leave are relatively weak in the Netherlands. In other respects, positive action is well developed.

Distinctive specialisms of IRIS projects in the Netherlands.

The Dutch projects include a large variety of experience in technical training of women in non-traditional skills, including electrical engineering, heating systems installation and computer-aided design. There are also some projects offering special support to migrant women.

Operation of the IRIS network in the Netherlands

It is difficult to judge the level of awareness of IRIS. Civil servants and training providers form a small "circuit", and are thus reasonably aware, but in general, politicians and employers do not know of IRIS. The national conference in Utrecht in June 1990 had a considerable impact, but really needed a follow up event. There is a national coordinating unit for IRIS, run through CIBB.

One of the interviewees is thinking about creating a consortium with IRIS in the framework of the NOW programme. There are also two important national networks based around the Women and Work-shops and the Women's Vocational Training Centres, and a number of other networks in the field of vocational education and equal opportunities. This raises questions about the additionality of IRIS activities in networking.

Although IRIS can act as a multiplier of existing initiatives, and has played a role in stimulating NOW initiatives, one of the interviewees commented on the possibility that these effects would have been present even in the absence of IRIS.

5.5.11 PORTUGAL

Special features of interest in national developments

- 1) Women participating in official training programmes receive a child care allowance.
- 2) Employers may in some cases receive 100% state funding for training of women.
- 3) There is a national programme offering special financial help to women entrepreneurs.

Major actors in the field of women's training

Most programmes are sponsored by the national training agency, the IEFP, often in partnership with private employees.

Constraints and problems

The proportion of women amongst the unemployed is particularly severe in Portugal. The decline of the textile industry, and the lack of opportunities for women seeking work in rural areas are major contributory factors to this problem. The proportion of women who are self-employed is very high relative to the average for the European Community; this presents a potential problem of intense competition between many women engaged in labour-intensive traditional craft work, which is also subject to a considerable degree of foreign competition in the European market as a whole.

Characteristics of IRIS projects

There are only nine projects in Portugal, four of them involved in training women for enterprise creation, but none in non-traditional skill areas.

Operation of the IRIS network in Portugal

The development of the network in Portugal has been relatively weak, owing to a number of factors:-

- 1) Because IRIS is not primarily a funding programme, it is not attractive to employers.
- 2) Lack of funds has prevented representatives from attending meetings in Brussels.
- 3) There is no national coordinating unit for IRIS.
- 4) Exchange visits have been hampered by language problems.

It is felt by the Portuguese representatives in the Working Party on Women's Vocational Training that the Portuguese authorities should have a say in the choice of projects to participate in exchange visits, and also that IRIS literature should be more widely distributed.

5.5.12 The UK

Special features of interest in national developments

The institutional framework of training in the UK is highly decentralised, relying on the concept of 'individual action plans' for the unemployed trainee, and tailoring of local delivery to local labour market conditions. Thus, within the context of a general concern for equality of opportunity, official training programmes are designed in a way which stresses adaptation of programmes to individual needs rather than positive action as such. Unemployed women aged 18-25 who would not otherwise be able to take up training are guaranteed an allowance for childcare costs.

Major actors in women's training

Delivery of training programmes is the responsibility of a large number of local Training and Enterprise Councils, which are employer-controlled although state funded. A group of sixty UK companies have come together in a campaign called 'Opportunity 2000', to draw up positive action plans. The Engineering Industry Training Board, a tripartite sector training body, has taken steps to attract women to engineering occupations because of the shortage of skilled labour experienced by employers in this sector.

Constraints and problems

In general, child care provision is poor and labour force participation of women with children under school age is lower than in any other Member State except the Netherlands.

Characteristics of IRIS projects

The specialisms most common in U.K. projects are training in computer

programming and in construction trades.

The operation of the IRIS network in the UK

At least two thirds of IRIS projects belong to the Women's Training Network, an informal network of women's projects which are funded by the ESF. It came together independently of IRIS but IRIS has help to formalise its activities. It monitors the activities of Training and Enterprise Councils and also works with them.

IRIS has had no real impact on national policy in the UK, because of the lack of any formal mechanism through which this could take place. The view was put out that the UK IRIS conference was 'preaching to the converted' and that few employers attended. It is felt that more could be achieved if there was a national IRIS coordinator.

6. THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF IRIS AT EUROPEAN LEVEL

6.1. The influence of IRIS on women's training

Changes in training practice:-

From the replies which we have received to the questionnaire, it appears that relatively few IRIS projects can point to changes in their training methods or training practice which they have adopted as a result of information obtained through the IRIS network. According to some Working Party members (for example, in Spain) this is because the discussions and messages about the nature of training methods have been too general. According to some observers it also relies too much on an 'oral tradition' - an exchange of views at meetings and conferences which do not reach those who were not present. It appears that what is needed is much more detailed written material, such as working papers and exchanges of teaching materials or curriculum plans.

Evaluation:-

The influence of IRIS is a more diffuse and subtle one than the adoption of changes in training methods; it seems that it helps people to set their work in context, and to evaluate what they are doing. A number of replies to the questionnaire have indicated that feedback from other projects is an important benefit of exchange visits, and a few have stated that presenting their work to other projects, either through exchange visits or through national meetings, has helped them to think more systematically about what they are doing. In the case of Italy, these effects have been particularly strong in so far as members of the network have met together with a view to developing common methods of evaluation to be applied to all of their projects. In Spain also, a national meeting on evaluation methodology has been held. In Denmark, systematic evaluation of projects has been carried out with the help of teams of university researchers.

However, as far as we know, no such attempt at establishing common evaluation methods has been made in any other country. According to CREW, the membership feels a strong need for evaluation, but does not have the resources to carry it out. It seems clear that the possibility of establishing a common evaluation practice depends on two factors; firstly, a strong national coordinating structure, which at present only exists in four Member States, and secondly discussion of this theme at the level of the network as a whole, with supporting documentation and possibly technical assistance.

Exchange visits appear to have had an evaluative function for those who have hosted them. The host project prepares background documents on the local labour market, which provokes them to think about their work in its local context and possibly to clarify their understanding of that context. Host projects have noted the importance of receiving feedback from visiting projects, both positive and negative. (This is apparent from CREW's annual reports of exchange visits as well as from the questionnaires).

Publicity and profile-raising:-

Hosting exchange visits gives projects greater local publicity and prestige. It draws them to the attention of officials and of the press. These are effects which are appreciated by the host projects, and which in turn may draw them to the attention of employers or make it easier for them to obtain or retain funding. But these secondary effects cannot be clearly demonstrated, and in any case it is not clear that the 'publicity effect' could not have been achieved more cheaply by other means. Moreover, if the question is posed 'for which projects in country X should publicity be given, in order to raise the profile of women's training and attract more resources to it?' it is not clear that the answer would be in terms of giving publicity to the particular IRIS projects which host exchange visits. This is partly because the IRIS network is composed of projects which put themselves forward, rather than projects selected as examples of 'best practice', as it was originally. Thus, it sometimes does not include projects which have

achieved particular prominence as examples of innovation or good practice in their own country. But also, any IRIS project which can obtain matching 'national' funding can apply for an exchange visit. Several respondents to the mail questionnaire said that they thought there should be some consultation at national level to decide which of the national projects should put themselves forward for hosting exchange visits or for visiting other countries.

Access to funding:-

There is general agreement amongst members of the Working Party, and some evidence from the questionnaires, that IRIS has helped projects to gain access to European sources of project funding. This is partly because IRIS has facilitated applications under NOW and EUROFORM, and partly because it has led to greater knowledge of ESF procedures in general. But the latter effect may be relatively small in countries where the preparation of the Operational Programmes is relatively centralised, such as France. No less than 44% of those projects returning questionnaires report that IRIS had helped them find partners for a NOW proposal, and 4% had been helped to find partners for a EUROFORM proposal. This effect may be largely attributed to the database facility and is almost certainly additional in most countries; that is, these projects had no other way of making the same contacts. (The exception may be Spain, where the Spanish government has put forward three substantial pilot programmes for funding through NOW.) It might be argued, on the other hand, that only a small proportion of these projects will succeed in actually obtaining funding through NOW or EUROFORM, and that increasing the number of applications does not increase the amount of European funds to be shared between them. However, a larger flow of applications does give the NOW programme a greater choice of projects to fund, and there is no doubt that NOW needed some networking mechanism to bring projects together to formulate proposals.

6.2. The influence of IRIS on the conditions of women's employment and on employers' practices

IRIS appears to have had very little influence on employers' practices. This is partly because the network has had relatively little contact with employers. One of its recognised difficulties is that few employers have attended conferences (although the Italian conference had relatively more success in this respect, with about 19 participants out of 300 representing the private or cooperative sectors.)

As stated in section 3, at least 70% of IRIS projects are engaged in training of the unemployed or of inactive women. This may be one reason why contact with employers is not easy to achieve, although it is clearly important in order for these projects to relate their work to employers' demand for labour and to secure jobs for trainees. A minority of projects are however involved in positive action programmes within enterprises.

The acknowledged difficulty which the network has had in attracting attention from employers may be partly due to the kind of membership which IRIS has. In some countries (for example, the UK and Germany) the network does not contain examples of some of the most important employer-led initiatives in positive action for women.

IRIS has not produced literature or publicity materials specifically for employers or employers' associations; its literature goes only to members of the network and of the Working Party, unless other enquirers make specific requests of CREW. Thus, the only ways in which IRIS reaches employers, unless they ask to be put on the mailing list are through invitations to conferences and seminars, or through the work done with publicity and partnership grants. One member of the Working Party thought that IRIS could act as a 'lobbying group' to raise the profile of women's training amongst private sector employers. This would clearly require (unsolicited) distribution of appropriate literature amongst them, or an attempt by CREW or by IRIS projects to publish material in journals which employers read,

in order that once-off contacts and invitations to IRIS events might fall upon 'prepared ground'.

Discussion at IRIS events appears on the whole to have accepted almost without question the value of training women for 'non-traditional' occupations, despite alarming evidence from Denmark (where this form of training is particularly well-established) that the rate of unemployment amongst women trained for these occupations is far higher than amongst women trained for 'traditional women's jobs'. There is a need for development of collective strategies for overcoming this problem, particularly now that unemployment in Europe as a whole is starting to rise again, with the implication that employers are less likely to look to women crossing traditional 'gender boundaries' in order to meet skill shortages. But it is difficult to see how development of national or European strategies to address gender boundaries could be possible, unless IRIS was adequately resourced for labour market research and for advocacy work with employers at national level.

Stronger links with FORCE and other Task Force programmes could help IRIS to make more effective links with employers.

6.3. The influence of IRIS on women's enterprise

As shown in section 3, a significant minority of IRIS projects are involved in enterprise creation. This is an area of work which may grow in importance, due to the emphasis placed on it by NOW and because women confronted by rising unemployment levels may increasingly seek to create their own jobs. Because IRIS is not primarily a funding programme, it cannot (and does not expect to) affect the scale of these projects' activity, any more than it can affect the scale of training activity, except in so far as it helps member projects and others like them to attract more resources than they otherwise would have done. It can however, in principle, affect the degree of success enjoyed by newly launched women's enterprises by improving the quality of training which their promoters receive.

In projects which help people (whether women or men) start their own enterprises, it is difficult to make a separation between training and technical assistance. Because it has been set up as a training network and because enterprise training projects constitute only a minority of its membership, IRIS has not specifically addressed technical assistance issues such as how to conduct market research for new enterprises or the degree of competition experienced by women in different lines of business.

IRIS has made a unique contribution to European debates on women's enterprise, which does not seem to have been raised in other networks, in drawing attention to the role of women in farm management. It has identified and publicised the fact that many women become entrepreneurs through becoming involved in the management of existing farms, often through inheritance, which means that their needs are somewhat different from those of people starting new enterprises. IRIS has networked projects which specialise in training women farm managers in Belgium, Spain and Italy.

6.4. The contribution of IRIS to other European networks and programmes

As shown in section 4, the relationship of IRIS with other European programmes is on the whole characterised by a feeling, on their part, of unexploited potential. There is a widespread view that IRIS has a lot to say on women's training and employment which could be of value to other networks, especially to FORCE and PETRA, but which is in danger of not receiving sufficient circulation and exposure if it is not written down in some detail. A series of working papers could contribute something of real value to other networks, but in order to write them, it would be necessary to divert resources from some existing IRIS activities or to increase the budget which it has at its disposal. Since IRIS is the only European Commission sponsored network of projects training unemployed women, its potential contribution to 'know-how' in this field is unique; there is only a small overlap with PETRA and the LEI programme.

IRIS has contributed significantly to NOW by attracting attention to it and bringing forth applications for funding.

6.5 *Relative value of IRIS activities*

6.5.1 The overall influence of IRIS on training practice

There is considerable scope for IRIS to influence training methods among member projects. Just under a fifth (19.0%) of projects responding to the questionnaire said that their curriculum or training materials had been influenced by IRIS contacts, and similar numbers had been influenced in the nature of any pre-vocational training component, and in trainer training. But the nature of selection procedures, of work placement organisation, and of modules on personal assessment, career planning and job search methods, had been very little influenced by IRIS; less than ten per cent of projects said they had been influenced or helped by IRIS contacts in these areas. Often a larger organisation had laid down from above that the project should have one of these special modules which until a couple of years ago would have been considered 'innovative'; 21% of respondents said they were required to have a module on personal assessment, 31% that they were required to have a career planning component, and 26% that they were required to have a module on job search methods. But in the majority of cases, the way in which these components of the project were carried out was based on 'just our own ideas'. In interpreting these responses, it is important to be aware of the constraints faced by the projects in adopting new models and practices. As shown in the table below, 40% felt that the quality of their work had been constrained by national or regional programme rules, and over half felt that it had been constrained by lack of funds.

Projects felt less able to influence national policies and programmes, although some had been used as a model by national training organisations. Seminars and conferences provide the main channel through which IRIS can influence policy at a wider level.

Looking at the type of IRIS contact which had generated the adoption of new methods, nearly all of these were derived from exchange visits, only three from a seminar and none from publications. This suggests, as do the replies to some other questions, that some of the most profound effects of the network's activities are confined to those projects who participate in exchange visits - that is, only about half the total membership.

6.5.2 *Exchanges and grant schemes*

The project exchanges, publicity and partnership grants are the most expensive IRIS activities per programme reached (see Table 6.2), but also produce the most benefits to those projects taking part. The most commonly recognised benefit was finding out about the work of projects in other countries, and sharing experiences. This extended in some instances to the development of joint projects, sharing or development of teaching materials, and trainee exchanges. Feedback on one's own project (positive or negative) was also mentioned as a benefit, as was publicity. It seems that international links raise the profile of a project within its own country (although it is not clear to what extent this actually leads to changes in policy or to leverage of more resources). The benefits, in terms of evaluation stimulated and methods and materials exchanged and developed are largely additional. The only other ways of achieving similar benefits mentioned by projects were other EC or national networks. However, the organisational and networking aspects of what IRIS provides are probably more influential in generating additional benefits than the funds. IRIS grants represent on average only 4.8% of the annual funding of the projects which receive them, and often they are received so late that the activity would not be possible if the project itself could not fund it in the short run. The 'host' programme receives funding from IRIS to give visiting projects a talk about their training methods, and to organise meetings with employers and trainees.

Altogether 33.6% of survey respondents had hosted exchange visits and 56.4% had taken part in them as visitors. The opportunity to share experiences and ideas and to make contacts were mentioned as benefits by the largest number of

projects taking place in exchanges. In addition, around 10% felt that the ideas that they had gained during an exchange would help in the future development and planning of their projects and some projects mentioned specific aspects of research or methodology that they had used or adopted from another project. The exchange visits also result in the evaluation of the host project by the visitors, and self-evaluation is stimulated among those seeing other projects. Although there may not be immediately obvious benefits in terms of methods adopted, this process of evaluation of host projects and comparison and self-evaluation by visitors was felt by one working group member to be the most significant benefit of the network. The exchanges were the most popular activity among the projects responding to the questionnaire. Asked to measure how useful participation in activities was on a scale of 1 - 5, exchanges received an average score from those who had taken part of 4.0.

Fewer projects are able to take part in exchanges than in other transnational activities, and the cost per organisation reached is considerably higher, 1975 ECU per organisation in 1991. The programme of exchanges is oversubscribed; one of the main reasons programmes gave for being unable to participate in an activity they had wanted to take part in was an unsuccessful application for a place on an exchange visit. However, more specific benefits were listed as resulting from exchange visits than from any of the other IRIS events. A condition of taking part in an exchange visit is that all participants must write an evaluation report about their experiences. These reports are used as the basis for the annual dossier on exchange visits prepared by CREW. It would be desirable to have fuller reports, so that the feedback from participants could provide further detail on the 'transferable' experiences of the projects which are visited. However, CREW has no authority from the Commission to withhold payments in the case of inadequate reports.

6.5.3. *Technical meetings*

Technical meetings also have significant additional benefits in countries where other networks of women's training projects do not exist, and account for a much smaller proportion of IRIS resources than exchange visits and grants. These meetings had been attended by 27.3% of respondents, and the main benefits reported were sharing of experience, ideas and information (37% of attenders) as well as ideas and knowledge useful for planning and development (17%).

Technical meetings accounted for only 2% of the central IRIS budget in 1991, although they may involve financial input from member projects or other sources such as the national training authorities in the individual countries. Projects responding to the questionnaire rated them as highly on a scale of usefulness from 1 - 5 as the seminars, and as high a proportion of those who had attended them mentioned specific benefits that they had gained from their participation. Projects from France, Spain and Portugal had attended the greatest number of national technical meetings - the French projects had on average each attended two meetings in the time that they had been a member of IRIS. The topics discussed were diverse, and generally felt to be relevant. However, there is again no written output required from these meetings; benefits are thus limited to the programmes taking part, or at most become part of the "oral tradition" of IRIS. This again limits the durability of the benefits. The extent to which benefits are additional varies between countries. If no other national networks exist, IRIS creates links and may stimulate additional national networking between women's training projects. Some of the projects felt that IRIS should encourage this national networking to a greater extent.

6.5.4 *Seminars*

Seminars account for the largest proportion of the central IRIS budget. They are the most accessible activity for member projects, of whom 65.5% had attended a seminar in their own country and 41.8% in another country. Although the seminar report provides a written record of the official events of the seminar, and adds to the durability of the benefits, some of the main benefits that projects feel

that they get from seminars are the opportunity to make contacts and talk to others with similar interests and problems at an informal level. While the seminars are also aimed at participants from outside the network, there is less success at reaching these groups, particularly employers. This limits the additionality of benefits from the seminars to the extent that they are "preaching to the converted".

The IRIS publications reach a much wider audience, the majority of the circulation being to non-members. They thus have a much lower cost per organisation reached. The benefits from them are less intense, and a number of projects felt that these would be increased if there were more features on specific projects' activities and methods. This would also provide another way for projects to increase the international dissemination of their activities, a benefit that is largely additional; projects disseminate their work to a much greater extent at a national level.

Activity	Budget (ECU)	% of total budget
Seminars*	280168	36
Exchanges	144174	19
Partnership Grants	118244	15
Publicity Grants	43522	6
Bulletin	44394	6
Directory	42079	6
Database	24775	3
Technical Meetings	14615	2
Co-ordination	58698	8

* Member states also contribute to the cost of the seminars - in 1991 these contributions were -

Ireland - FAS, 7558 ECU

Germany - BMBW, 24066 ECU

UK - Employment Department, 38002 ECU

Denmark - Arbejdsmarkedssty Relsen, 40112 ECU

Table 6.2 Relative Cost of IRIS Activities - 1990-91 Budget and Usage

Activity	Number of Organisations Reached	Aimed At	Cost (ECU)	Cost per usage/organisation reached (ECU)	Average score for "usefulness" (1 - 5)	Other Comments
Seminars	460 directly 4000 including conference report	IRIS members, policy makers, social partners, researchers etc.	280168	609	3.7	Cost to seminar participants of travel, accommodation, etc
Exchanges	73	IRIS members	144174	1975	4.0	
Evaluation Meetings	91*	IRIS members	14615	161	3.7	Cost to participants of travel, may be cost to host organisation in some cases
Partnership Grants	13 partnerships involving 32 organisations	IRIS members	118244	3695	**	
Publicity Grants	7	IRIS members	43522	6217	**	
Bulletin	6000	IRIS members, policy makers, social partners, other training organisations etc	44394	1.85	3.7	Coverage depends on extent to which each copy is read
Database	850* uses by IRIS members	IRIS members, other training organisations and others	24775	29		Non - IRIS members pay for use of the database. This reduces the cost per use by members
E - Mail	38 organisations connected	IRIS members, working group	46363 (setting up costs 1989-90)	1220	**	Running costs included in budget for co-ordination

- * Estimates based on average participation/use/by projects replying to questionnaire
- ** Activities involving only a small number of projects have not been rated

Seminars and exchanges are the most expensive IRIS activities, accounting between them for 55% of the total IRIS budget in 1991. The seminars were attended by participants from approximately 460 organisations, and the exchanges involved 73 organisations.

The budget for seminars includes the cost of the seminar report, which has a circulation of approximately 4000 copies per seminar. The report is distributed to all IRIS members, seminar participants, education and training bodies, policy makers, the social partners and others. Thus the results of the seminar are to some extent disseminated beyond the direct participants. The seminars were attended by representatives from 460 organisations in 1991, giving a cost per organisation reached directly of 609 ECU (costs here exclude the substantial contribution to seminar expenses made by member states, which can be seen in table 6.1). Including the circulation of the seminar report to around 3500 organisations in addition to seminar participants, approximately 4000 organisations are reached directly or indirectly, giving an estimated cost per organisation reached of 70 ECU. However, the extent to which the benefits are increased by the seminar report is dependent on the targeting of the report distribution. The extent to which recipients outside the network find the reports useful is hard to judge. Of IRIS members replying to the questionnaire, an average of 5 people read every conference report. The reports were felt to be less useful than the bulletins or annual reports, but were still relatively popular.

The seminars are aimed not only at member projects, but also at policy makers and other groups with an influence on women's training and employment, in particular employers. There has not been a great deal of success at achieving participation by this group, according to the working group members. This limits the extent of the additionality of the benefits from the seminars in that they are to a large extent "preaching to the converted" rather than reaching groups with very little knowledge of good practice in women's training. Participants who are already involved in women's training are likely to be more aware of the things discussed, and able to obtain the benefits in other ways.

Projects responding to the questionnaire reported the main benefits of seminars as being the opportunity to share experiences and information, and to make contacts in other

countries. A number of members of the working group felt that, despite the general lack of success in attracting outside groups such as employers, the seminars did create awareness of IRIS in the country concerned, and also raised the profile of women's training.

6.5.5 *The publicity value of IRIS events*

IRIS events also provide a way in which projects can disseminate information about themselves; nearly 60% of respondents to the questionnaire had used IRIS events in this way. On a national level the additionality of this activity is limited as other channels for dissemination are available; local newspapers were used by over 70% and national professional journals by half the projects. On an international level, projects have fewer ways of disseminating information about themselves, but there are still some other channels available to them. Ten percent disseminated their work through international professional journals, and just over ten percent through other EC networks. Both at a national and an international level, contributing to a conference or seminar was one of the main ways in which projects felt that they had contributed to the network. However, only three projects that had adopted specific methods as a result of their participation in IRIS had learnt about these as a result of taking part in a seminar or conference.

6.5.5 *Electronic Mail*

At March 1992, 33 programmes and 5 members of the working group are connected to the E-mail system, an increase from 16 members in spring 1991. This is a total of 38 users out of a possible total of around 280 programmes and 20 working group members in 1991, given that the system is not available in Spain and Portugal. The running costs of the E-mail system are included in the co-ordination budget, but the setting-up costs of 46363 ECU in the 1990-91 budget gives a cost per project connected of 1220 ECU.

Only four projects responding to the questionnaire used the E-mail system. These used it for receiving and sending letters, for contacting working group members or the EC, and for access to telex and fax facilities. The major reason given for not using the E-

mail is lack of information. Nearly 20% of projects said that they were trying to be connected to the network, or that they needed more information. A quarter of the projects were not able to be connected because they had no suitable equipment. However, 10% of projects felt that they had no need of the service. The additionality of benefits from E-mail is low compared to other IRIS activities. The database facilities are accessible without being connected, and activities such as contacting other projects can be achieved in other ways. The usefulness of E-mail for those projects that are connected is limited if only a few projects are connected, since the bulletin board, for example, will be useful only if widely read. The intensity of the benefits of rapid and easy communication between projects will be greater, the larger the number of projects connected, and the more that projects use the facility.

6.5.6

Publications

There are 4 issues of the bulletin per year, each having a circulation of around 6000. The cost in 1991 of the Bulletin was 44394 ECU, a cost of 1.85 ECU per copy. The text is written by CREW and by journalists commissioned by CREW. As with the seminar reports, the number of organisations reached depends on the targeting of the copies distributed. Of IRIS members replying to the questionnaire, an average of 4.8 people per project read the bulletin regularly, and on a scale of 1 - 5 for usefulness, it received an average score of 3.7. The cost of the annual report is included in the budget for co-ordination. The circulation is the same as that for the bulletin. It was read regularly by an average of 4.0 people per project, and received an average score for usefulness of 3.6.

The benefits from publications are generally less intense than those from other activities. None of the projects reporting that their methods had been influenced by IRIS actions, for example, said that they had found out about these from the publications. However, a number of projects said that they found the publications generally useful and informative, comments borne out by the number of people regularly reading each issue. The main negative comments referred to language difficulties. It is useful to compare the experience of IRIS in this context with the experience of the ERGO Programme.

ERGO News, the quarterly newsletter of the ERGO Programme, was originally published in English and French only, like the IRIS Bulletin. When Spanish and German editions were also started, the circulation rose from around 4000 to around 9000 organisations. Half of those making suggestions about IRIS publications, over 10% of respondents, referred to language problems. A number of projects also felt that detailed features on specific projects' activities and methods would be useful. This suggests that the publications could form a channel for dissemination of interesting methods to a greater extent than is the case at present, increasing the direct benefits to member projects. It underlines the need for more detailed written material which has been referred to in interviews with members of the Working Party.

The production of the directory cost 42079 ECU in 1990-91. Copies of the directory are circulated to member projects, and to many EC policy makers. It is also sold, but sales receipts amounted to only 950 ECU last year. Most projects thought the amount of information included in the directory was about right; fifteen percent would have liked more information. The main suggestion for improvements to the directory was for the inclusion of more information on projects' methods. The benefits from the directory are similar to those from the database; it provides a way for users to find other training projects with similar interests and to develop contacts.

6.5.7

Database

Of projects replying to the questionnaire, a quarter had used the database in the last year, using the database approximately 280 times in all. If all the projects used the database to the same extent, this would suggest that approximately 850 requests for information from the database were made in 1991. The database cost 24775 ECU in 1991, 3% of the total IRIS budget, and on this estimate, twenty nine ECU per request for information. However, organisations other than IRIS members can use the database on payment of a fee, and as with the directory, income from these charges is not taken into account in the budget for the database. Projects using the database use it primarily to gain contacts, as do users from outside the network, particularly with the aim of developing partnerships for other EC projects. This function is one that IRIS carries out for a number of

projects; 48% of those responding to the questionnaire had found partners for a NOW proposal through IRIS. The main suggestion for improvement to the database was for more detailed information on projects. The benefits from the database include the benefits to other EC programmes, particularly NOW, of projects finding appropriate partners for actions. These benefits are largely additional, in that there are few other channels available to projects which provide this service.

6.5.8

Grants

The grant schemes are the most expensive IRIS activities per organisation reached. The publicity grant scheme cost 43522 ECU in 1991. Grants were given to seven projects, a cost per project of 6217 ECU. The grants enabled projects to publicise their activities, with the aim of spreading good practice, and raising the profile of women's training. There were thirteen partnership projects in 1991, with a total budget of 118244 ECU, 9096 ECU per partnership. Partnership projects involve the development of teaching or other aspects jointly between two or more IRIS members. Among projects replying to the questionnaire who had received grants, they represented an average of 4.8% of the projects' total budget, although they were on average 50% of the budget of the activity for which it was given. The number of projects who can receive grants is small, given the limited amounts of money available, and the benefits from the grants do not extend beyond the direct beneficiaries to any great extent. The benefits include publicity and information materials and the chance to develop partnerships further and to take part in visits to the other projects involved. This involved for some projects the development of joint training materials, and in one case, work on an EC qualification. These materials are not widely disseminated among other member projects. This lack of recorded output limits both the extent of the benefits and their durability, particularly where projects are short lived.

Three quarters of projects receiving grants had experienced substantial delays before the grant payment was received, the delays being an average of 17 weeks. This raises questions about the additionality of the activities financed; if the projects have had to wait for reimbursement for 4 months, it suggests that the projects would in fact have been

able to pay for the activity without the grant. In general, projects felt that the conditions for grants were sensible and that there was a quick response to applications, but a number felt that the amounts available were inadequate.

6.6 An overall assessment of benefits in relation to objectives

6.6.1 *A re-statement of objectives*

As stated in Section 1, the objectives of the IRIS network are to promote demonstration projects on women's vocational training, encourage and inventorise innovative projects in this field, disseminate examples of good practice, and bring to projects a transnational dimension by means of exchange visits and transnational partnerships.

6.6.2 *Encouragement and inventorisation of women's vocational training projects*

CREW has succeeded in developing a database and directory of projects which are intensively used and greatly valued by the network. There were very few suggestions for improvement of these services from any of the projects or interviewees.

The services provided by CREW have attracted an increasing number of projects into membership, so that there has been an eightfold growth in the number of projects over the period of the network's operation

Entry into membership depends to a large extent on the individual projects, although in countries where national coordinating units have been set up, they have been able to seek out particular projects and encourage them to join. There are some gaps in the range of projects which have been drawn into membership, notably that some major initiatives by governments to encourage positive action in training by employers have not been adequately represented in the membership of the network so far.

Activity	Benefit	Group Reached by Benefit	Depth of Benefit	Additionality
SEMINARS	Raising awareness of women's training issues	Social partners, policy makers	Moderate - few employers attend seminars, but successful among civil servants involved in training	High
	Enabling projects to exchange ideas information	IRIS members	Moderate	Low for national seminars, higher for transnational
	Making contacts for partnerships		Moderate - national seminars High - transnational seminars	High
	Opportunity to disseminate information		Moderate - other methods of dissemination likely to reach wider audience	Low
	Learning about specific issues covered in seminar	IRIS members, social partners, policy makers and others who receive conference report	Low - issues not covered in great depth	Depends on issues covered
EXCHANGE VISITS	Exchange of information/ideas between projects in different countries	IRIS Members	High	High
	Exchange of training materials/research findings		High	High
	Evaluation		High	High
	Learning about new training methods/new solutions to problems		Moderate	High
TECHNICAL MEETINGS	Exchange of ideas/discussion of common problems	IRIS Members nationally	High - projects in same country don't have language problems and likely to face similar problems	High where no other women's training network, low otherwise
	Development of new training materials/ qualifications etc		High	
	Information about other EC projects		High	
	Stimulating national networking activity	Women's training projects nationally	High	

PUBLICATIONS	Information about specific topics such as NOW programme	IRIS Members, social partners, policy makers, research institutes, other training programmes, women's organisations, universities, MEPs, government bodies and others receive copies of publications	Moderate - depth of coverage limited	Moderate
	Dissemination of information about other IRIS activities	IRIS members and prospective members	Moderate	High
E - MAIL	Exchange of information between IRIS members, working group and CREW	IRIS members and members of the working group connected to E - Mail	Low - partly as a result of the small numbers connected	Low
DATABASE	Information on possible contacts for partnership or other activities	IRIS Members and other training organisations, other EC programmes who have a larger pool of applicants	High	High
PUBLICITY GRANTS	Opportunity to publicise own project	IRIS Members receiving grants	High	Moderate - delays in grant payment limit, possible participation to those projects that can afford to wait for refunding of money
	Higher profile for women's training generally	Women's training organisations	Low	Low
PARTNERSHIP GRANTS	Developing joint training materials/methods	IRIS members involved in partnership	High	High
	Exchanges of trainers/trainees		High	High

6.6.3 *Diffusion of examples of good practice*

There is a firm impression from the mail survey of projects, from several members of the Working Party and from some interviews with 'responsables' of other European programmes that more detailed information about projects' training practices is needed in order to achieve greater transfer of successful training methods and practices between countries and between projects within one country. Something undoubtedly has been achieved, particularly through exchange visits and partnership grants. But in this aspect of its operation, the network has under-developed potential. This point is considered further in paragraph 6.7.2 below.

6.6.4 *Giving projects a transnational character*

IRIS enabled 73 projects in 1991 to participate in exchange visits. According to the mail survey, over 57% of projects have taken part in one at some time. In addition, 32 organisations were involved in partnerships supported by partnership grants in 1991. The network has also helped 48% of projects (according to the survey) find partners for NOW proposals. All these benefits have been largely 'additional'.

6.6.5 *Organisation of specific activities*

CREW has extended the range of activities set out in the original tender to include the partnerships and publicity grants programme. The network has also taken steps to evaluate its own work and that of the member projects, particularly in Italy and Spain where discussions have been held on establishing a methodology for project evaluation.

The publications, whilst widely read, widely appreciated both within the IRIS network and by other European networks, and good value for money, do not seem to meet the demand felt by several projects and several members of the Working Party, as well as by the FORCE programme, for more detailed information about training methods. There is scope for a new publications strategy which would include more detailed working papers and also literature specifically directed towards employers. Funding

would be required for journalistic services to write such documents, since it is not practical to expect the member projects to write more than they do without payment.

The seminars have been valuable but are sometimes felt to be too general. There is some demand from the member projects and from the Working Party for smaller, more specialised working groups and meetings to cater for specific interests, including the training of trainers.

The tender document (Annex C) envisages 'the building up of a data bank on specific initiatives being taken in Member States as regards vocational training for women'. The IRIS data bank has been limited to projects which are members of the network. Whilst this has performed a valuable function, there are some suggestions in the mail survey that more information should be circulated about the sponsoring organisations of the projects, which are larger and more permanent in nature than the projects themselves.

6.6.6 *Involvement of specific actors*

IRIS has succeeded in attracting to events participants representing a wide range of organisations, including training providers, labour market administrations, equality of opportunity bodies and the social partners. Some members of the working party have felt that the response from employers has been disappointing so far. However, it has to be said that this has been improved recently. The events set up by CREW for the year ahead are strongly targeted at employers. Additional ways of attracting employers are mentioned in paragraph 4.5.4 and in paragraph 7.1.

6.7 **An overall assessment of benefits; the eight dimensions**

6.7.1 *A re-statement of the eight dimensions*

In this section we refer back to the approach set out in paragraph 1.3.8, where we identified eight dimensions of the benefits of IRIS:-

- * profundity
- * evenness
- * certainty and replicability
- * accessibility
- * durability
- * sustainability
- * catalytic or leverage effects
- * uniqueness.

This approach is now used to summarise the conclusions of Chapters 5 and 6. We also consider the cost-effectiveness of the network.

6.7.2

Profundity

On this dimension, the results of the evaluation are somewhat pessimistic. Less than one fifth of projects responding to the survey reported changes in actual training practice as a result of their participation in the network. It appears to have had relatively little influence on national policies or on employers' practice. This is partly due to the small scale of the network and in some cases of its component projects, which are essentially of a local nature and, according to the survey responses, have an average of 67 trainees each (the largest being 570 and the smallest three). Other reasons for the generally small scale of the network's effects is the insufficient development of national coordinating structures and insufficient development of detailed written materials for evaluating and disseminating the experience of the network. The responses to several parts of the questionnaire demonstrate a widespread demand for more detailed information about projects' activities and methods, in publications and at seminars. To a lesser extent, lack of profound effects may be due to language problems and cultural barriers. This is the type of problem which may be expected to be gradually overcome as the experience of European networking develops, and here there may be a 'synergie' between the accumulated experiences of IRIS, NOW, ERGO, and other programmes. However, it must also be appreciated that networking within countries may have more profound results than international networking, because

communication is easier, and that the network has had a more powerful influence in those countries with good internal networking of IRIS members (e.g. France, Italy). In order to achieve more profound effects on policy and on the transfer of good practice, more resources are needed for national coordinating structures and for publications. As stated in paragraph 4.5.5, participants in the network's activities would need adequate incentives to produce detailed written material on training methods. But CREW may also need greater authority to persuade projects taking part in exchange visits to contribute feed-back reports of good quality, fully as is needed to the process of reporting back on these visits.

6.7.3 *Evenness*

The influence and value of the network has been rather uneven, both in comparing its operation between countries and in comparing the benefits for different projects. The reasons for inter-country variations have been examined already in Chapter 5. The reasons for uneven benefit between projects have to do partly with the level of effort and interest devoted to IRIS by the projects themselves, partly to their different resources. They also have to do with the obviously uncertain and unpredictable trajectory of interpersonal contacts; sometimes a great deal may develop, sometimes little. This may be an inevitable difficulty of networking and apart from addressing problems of accessibility and communication, it may have no easy solution.

6.7.4 *Certainty and replicability*

For the same reasons, investment in any particular form of activity, like exchange programmes or conferences, is subject to a high risk factor. It is difficult to guarantee that methods of bringing people together which have worked once, will work as well on another occasion or in a different context. Planning of the future activities of the network should therefore involve the spreading of risk over as wide a range of participants as possible and as wide a range of activities as possible. It could be argued that this might involve a shift from activities with a high cost per participant to those with a relatively low cost per participant. However, as pointed out earlier, the

exchange visits are both the activities with highest cost per organisation involved and those with the greatest benefits.

6.7.5

Accessibility

A number of problems have been cited by survey respondents as limiting their access to IRIS events; lack of funding for travel, some problems of language and translation resources, and the late payment of some grants. The activity considered most valuable (exchange visits) is considerably over-subscribed and it could be considered how to reduce the funding per participant in order to enable more people to take part. Production of more extensive reports, with their possible sale to organisations outside of the network, would be one possibility. Another (suggested by some respondents) would be to reduce the standard of hospitality offered at seminars and conferences (hotels, meals etc.) in order to make more funds available for other activities.

The major problems that prevented projects from taking part in events or reduced the benefits from them were lack of money or inability to spare staff time, and language problems. A number also received information too late, or had not received sufficient information about events to enable them to participate. There were few suggestions for improvements to seminars. A few projects felt that smaller, more interactive events would be helpful, and as with all IRIS activities, some projects had language problems. One project also commented on the lack of facilities for the disabled. The main suggestion for improvement to exchanges was for detailed background information in advance on all the projects taking part, and, again, for translation facilities. A number of projects also reported problems in claiming expenses.

6.7.6

Durability

The benefits of the network are relatively recent, in so far as IRIS is only four years old and most members joined it much more recently than that. Thus, durability is

the most difficult aspect of the benefits to measure, particularly since the present study can only take a 'snapshot' view of how member projects are working. What is clear is that most of the member projects are very temporary in nature, lasting usually one to three years. Sometimes, however, they are attached to larger organisations, which may be sponsors of several member projects. In these cases, the larger sponsoring organisation is in effect the link to the network and its membership of IRIS outlives that of the individual projects. Thus the stability of the IRIS network is greater than at first appears. Two survey respondents suggested that the 'unit of membership' should be these larger organisations, rather than the individual training projects, a point which is taken up in our recommendations. A further constraint on the durability of benefits is the lack of detailed working papers on training practice and its evaluation, which has been mentioned earlier.

The seminar report increases the potential durability of benefits by giving a permanent record of discussion and conclusions. Other than this, the durability of seminar benefits depends largely on the length of time that participants remain involved in women's training, and the extent to which there is continuity in organisations. However, informal discussion and the opportunity to meet others involved in similar training areas seems to be one of the main benefits gained from seminars by IRIS projects participating, something that cannot be recorded in a seminar report, and which is not disseminated beyond the immediate participants. As there is little written output from exchanges, the benefits are focused largely on the projects taking part and last only as long as the life of these projects. As has been seen, many IRIS projects are short lived. Three quarters of the projects responding to the questionnaire do not have funding guaranteed after 1993, and two-thirds have funding guaranteed only for 1992.

6.7.7

Sustainability

Could the network reach the point where it could continue of its own accord without funding or other intervention from the Commission? It seems clear that such a point must be a long way off. There is a clear impression from the mail survey that IRIS is opening up a new world of international contacts for the member projects which they

could not have obtained otherwise, and that this is very dependent on Commission funding. The national component networks are less dependent on Commission funds, but they are in most cases still weak and have not reached their full potential. They require greater resource inputs in order to do so.

6.7.8 *Catalytic or leverage effects*

It is not clear whether the IRIS network has released resources for women's training which would not otherwise have been devoted to it. This could come about through publicity given to individual projects, or through the influence of seminars or publications upon employers or training providers. Such effects may exist but if so, we suspect they are small in scale. Likewise, changes in policy outside of the member projects have probably been small. Only nine projects claimed that other organisations had used their programme as a model, and three claimed to have had an influence on their national training authority. However, 25 projects in all thought they had some influence on national policy - including on employers, local authorities, research, education and equal opportunities policy.

6.7.9 *Uniqueness*

What IRIS has achieved, could not generally have been achieved by an alternative international network, although there is some minor overlap with PETRA, ELISE and ERGO. At national level, the degree of 'additionality' contributed by the IRIS network is very variable. In some countries where parallel networks and actions are well developed, such as the Netherlands, the UK and Spain, it appears that IRIS has not provided benefits in terms of in-country networking which could not have been achieved by other means. In others the degree of additionality of the benefits has been much greater.

Asked to consider whether the benefits they had obtained from IRIS could have been obtained in any other way, the survey respondents said 'yes' or 'to a great extent' in respect of only 18.4% of identified benefits. Half of the benefits could only have been

otherwise obtained in a much more limited way, and 32.7% of them not at all. As stated earlier, the large and rapidly growing demand for membership suggests in itself that IRIS provides services which local projects want and from which they derive real value.

6.7.10

Cost-effectiveness

The achievements of IRIS have been quite good in relation to the fairly small budget with which CREW has to operate. Apart from the addition of funds to cover partnership and publicity grants, the budget of the network has not been expanded to cope with the greatly increased number of projects, nor has it been increased to reflect inflation since 1988. The basic budget for all functions except the partnership and publicity grants has remained constant at 500,000 ecu per year since the first year of operation. Whereas initially this came to 7042 per member project, by 1991 it amounted to only 1501 ecu per member project. The Commission's budget for CREW's services has been supplemented by contributions from the Member States' governments for seminars and for operation of coordinating units, but we have not been able to obtain information on the full amount of these contributions. Including the budget for partnership and publicity grants, the total funds from the Commission amounted to 2252 ecu per member project. In fact, this budget also covers services to people and organisations outside the network who attend seminars or receive publications.

No suggestions were made by anyone about how the network could be run more cheaply, except for a couple of respondents to the mail survey who felt that the level of hospitality (meals, hotel accommodation) at conferences and seminars could be trimmed, and the savings devoted to exchange visits which are over-subscribed.

There is a general impression that the programme is under-funded and that an increase in the budget would bring about a more than proportionate increase in benefits, because it could help to consolidate and disseminate what has already been achieved at the same time as funding new activities.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The need for more written material on the lessons and achievements of IRIS

- 7.1. IRIS has achieved something of value which must not be lost. Its database, its ongoing series of publications and the informal network of inter-project contacts which it has developed need to be preserved, whether within NOW or as a separate network. But the achievements of the network are fragile, due to the high turnover of projects and the fact that much of the exchange of information which the member projects have found to be of value, has not been written down in sufficient detail to be fully exploited by other programmes and networks, or to influence employers. The level of detail is important: what training providers want is transferrable teaching materials, methods of training trainers, and practical approaches to counselling and pre-training. In some countries and for some types of training, there might even be scope for developing advisory services to employers about the integration and training of women.

IRIS needs an injection of resources in order to produce a series of working papers setting out what its member projects have learnt about identifying women's training needs, and about how to improve training methods and practice. It also needs resources to produce some specific literature for employers, which could call their attention to the database and to work on training methods, and detail the work of those member projects which would be of most interest to employers. At least in the immediate future, such resources will need to be found through contributions from national governments or through collaborative arrangements with other European programmes.

The need for evaluation of individual projects

- 7.2. IRIS has revealed a need for help by member projects in evaluating their own work. A body of data of considerable international interest to training providers and possibly to employers could be obtained by assisting member projects to carry out evaluations according to a methodology which had certain common elements.

IRIS needs additional resources to develop suitable evaluation methodologies at national level and to coordinate these in such a way as to permit cross-national comparisons. This implies that funds would be needed for meetings, for technical assistance to projects or to each national component of the network. It would be desirable to establish a small fund for 'evaluation grants' to help individual projects translate questionnaires or other documents relevant to evaluation, dedicate staff time to this function or employ consultants to help them carry out evaluations. Again, it is likely that such funds would need to be sought through an approach to Member States' governments.

The need for wider distribution of publications

- 7.3. IRIS needs a new publications strategy to ensure that its work is more widely known, particularly amongst employers. This would involve the development of new publications (e.g. detailed working papers, case studies of individual projects) as well the wider distribution of existing publications. If such publications are wanted by those who would receive them, it should be possible to charge for them and to cover at least a part of the cost, but at present only the Directory is sold and other publications are distributed free of charge.

IRIS needs resources to advertise its publications to people and organisations outside of the network, and to carry out their wider distribution on an experimental basis. In the longer run, wider distribution should be expected to cover its own costs, and CREW should therefore be permitted to charge for all publications distributed outside of the network's membership.

(See also recommendation 1 on specific literature for employers, and recommendation 8 about translation of publications)

The need for coordination units at national level

- 7.4. IRIS seems to have worked better in those countries in which a national coordinating unit has been set up. Such units have the capacity to 'dynamise' the network at national level, improve its communications and present its work to important national actors. They can also provide a focal point for coordination at national level between IRIS and other European networks. PETRA presents an example of a programme which has provided, jointly with Member States' governments, resources for the staffing of national coordination units so that they can carry out research and information functions.

National developments with regard to NOW and to the Task Force programmes vary between Member States. In particular, NOW has prioritised Objective 1 regions and therefore there is considerable variation in the budget and way of operation of this programme. In some countries, there may be advantages in having a coordinating unit which maximises the transversal links between two or more European programmes by working with others besides IRIS, whereas in others the distinctive role of IRIS may be more effectively carried out by having a unit which is exclusively dedicated to this network.

IRIS should have a national coordinating unit, staffed by two or three full time workers, in each of the eight Member States where it does not already do so. Discussions should be entered into between the Commission and Member States' governments to see how such units could be financed, possibly through NOW technical assistance or by re-allocation of funds from other areas of the IRIS budget.

- 7.4. **Links with other European networks**

IRIS should establish stronger links with the Task Force programmes, at national and international level. FORCE is especially important because of its size, its multi-sector scope and its strong links with employers. This network is particularly disposed to collaborate with IRIS.

Consideration should be given to the most appropriate ways of doing this within the Commission. Whilst the close links which IRIS has and will continue to have with DG V programmes suggest that it would be inappropriate for IRIS to move under the Task Force umbrella, regular linkage mechanisms need to be set at national and international level up by which the work of IRIS could be coordinated with that of FORCE, PETRA, and EUROTECNET, and could provide an equal opportunities focus for the Task Force programmes.

7.5. Selection of projects

In order for IRIS to 'export' each country's strengths and specialist 'know-how' in women's training to other Member States, it is important that these specialisms are reflected in the array of member projects at national level. 'Model' projects representing these specialisms could exist in the network alongside those which are there because they hope to learn from others' experience rather than 'export' their own models. The selection of projects to take part in exchange visits and international meetings, and to receive IRIS grants, should reflect a systematic examination, at national level, of what the national component of the network hopes to give to and receive from other countries.

Members of the Working Party on Women's Vocational Training should be asked to identify projects which are representative of their own country's strengths or specialisms and make sure that some projects which reflect each of these specialisms are invited and encouraged to join the IRIS network. They should also be involved in the selection of projects for grants and exchange visits.

7.6. Feedback on grant funded activities

There is a need to maximise the benefit of exchange visits, partnership and publicity grants for the network as a whole, through writing of reports which can be widely disseminated or form the basis for other publications.

Every beneficiary of an IRIS grant, including both the host and visitor projects for exchange visits, should be required as a condition of their funding to produce a substantial written report on their activities. This condition should be strongly enforced. These reports should be used to provide the basis for a detailed synthetic report which would enable practitioners who have not taken part in the visit to share in its benefits, in terms of lessons for training practice. CREW would need funding to produce such reports, including funding for translation costs so that they could be widely used.

7.7. Funds to go to meetings

Some IRIS projects have wanted to attend international meetings, but have not had sufficient funds to travel.

The Commission should enter into discussion with Member States to try to establish a principle of joint funding for a travel grant scheme. National coordinating units could handle applications for grants, and select one or two projects to attend each seminar who could then report back to others in their country.

7.8 Languages of Publications

Publications should be translated into as many languages as possible. At the very least, a German and a Spanish edition of the bulletin, Directory, annual reports and exchange visit dossiers should be attempted.

7.9 Addressing language problems in meetings and exchange visits

Several projects have found that communication during exchange visits or during seminars was impeded by language problems.

A flexible fund is needed to provide facilities for interpreters or translation of documents where necessary. In some cases, it might be of greater value to offer particular individuals from a project's staff the opportunity to attend an intensive language course

to improve their skills during three or four months prior to a visit rather than spend the funds on interpretation.

7.10 Disbursement of grant funds

The fact that projects often have to wait several months to receive funds from the Commission reduces the additionality of grants for exchange visits, publicity and partnerships.

Fast-track procedures need to be instituted to enable payments to be made more swiftly, thus helping organisations which cannot afford to advance the money initially from their own funds.

7.11 Reducing turnover in the IRIS Network

The durability of the benefits of IRIS is prejudiced by the fact that there is a high turnover of projects and that many members only have funding for a short time. It would be desirable to anchor the network to more permanent organisations as well as to individual training projects, at the same time as making sure that practitioners in direct contact with trainees continue to be adequately represented. The more permanent organisations might include federations of training organisations, trade unions, employers and regional labour market authorities. But extending the membership should not be done to the exclusion of small projects which are sometimes highly innovative..

Membership of the IRIS network should be extended to organisations which sponsor, co-ordinate or fund training and positive action programmes for women. A separate category of membership should be set up for them, with membership criteria reflecting the need to draw in organisations making a significant contribution to women's training or to positive action programmes.

7.12 The role of the Working Party on Women's Vocational Training

The members of the Working Party have an important role to play in consolidating and advancing the achievements of the IRIS network. In the short run, implementation of the above recommendations would imply three important tasks for them:-

- a) trying to secure funding for a national coordinating unit, where there is none already, and for additional resources to complement and extend the Commission's own budget for IRIS, which is clearly a limiting factor on the work of the network,
- b) encouraging new projects to join the network, as indicated in paragraph 7.5,
- c) actively participating in the selection of projects for grants and exchange visits to maximise the benefits to the network of these budgets.
- d) helping to ensure good coordination at national level between IRIS and other European programmes
- e) helping to pursue new strategic directions for the IRIS network through their contacts with other policy-makers and with the social partners

7.13 Strategic directions for the IRIS network

In its future work, IRIS will need to address current developments in the European labour market and also in the work of other European training networks. In particular, it will need to address:-

- * the continuing high unemployment rate of European women, and the fact that their unemployment rate is higher than that of men in most Member States

* women are more likely than men to suffer precarious conditions of employment, and to lack opportunities for in-service training and promotion; breaks to have children often make it difficult for them to return to work at the same level or to have the same prospects for advancement in their careers as do men. There are still very few women entering private sector management positions.

* the fact that although women are an increasing proportion of entrants into the European labour force, there is still resistance to their entry into jobs historically dominated by men, and women trained for jobs in which women are under-represented do not necessarily find it easier to obtain employment

* the setting up of national coordinating units for the FORCE programme and the need of the FORCE programme for information and ideas about how an 'equal opportunities dimension' could be inserted into in-service training

* the need for IRIS to have a watching brief in relation to the role of women and of special services for women in other Task Force programmes

* the need for IRIS to support and inform the implementation of new projects for women's training and enterprise, and also complementary measures, under the auspices of NOW.

As responses to these needs, certain strategic objectives could be envisaged for IRIS in 1992-3:-

* to draw into the network employers who have developed plans for the continuing training of women or who have developed career structures for women which accommodate child care breaks, and to provide concrete lessons on the operation of schemes of these types for application in FORCE

* to stimulate research on the reasons for continued unemployment of women who have been trained in 'non-traditional' skills, ideally by cohort studies which would track samples of such women through their careers following training,

* to examine the process of recruitment and integration of unemployed women, and use the forthcoming seminars which will target the social partners in order to acquire concrete lessons in this field which can be applied for the benefit of women jobseekers in the Member States

* to stimulate research on problems of women in precarious employment

* to stimulate research and action on the entry of women into management positions

* to examine the relative merits of women-only and mixed training, with particular reference to those training needs which are the subject of FORCE actions at national level.

8. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

8.1. Introduction

8.1.1. IRIS is a network of local training projects for women, brought together in order to promote women's training and employment and financed by the Equal Opportunities Unit of the European Commission and by the Task Force Human Resources. Since its inception in 1988, IRIS has grown from a mere 71 projects to 469. It is managed by CREW on behalf of the European Commission and advised by the Working Party on Women's Vocational Training.

8.1.2. The present evaluation study is intended to examine the influence of IRIS on women's training and employment, at national and international level, and its role within the context of other European Commission programmes and networks. The study is based on four different sources of information; an overview of training and employment for women in each of the Member States, interviews with representatives of European programmes, interviews with members of the Working Party on Women's Vocational Training, and a mail questionnaire sent to all current member projects of the IRIS network.

8.2. Description of IRIS Services and Activities

IRIS operates through a continuous series of national and transnational seminars, supplemented by technical meetings at national level. These are organised by CREW. CREW also publishes a bulletin, conference reports, annual reports and a project directory. It answers enquiries about projects by means of a computer data-base. IRIS projects may apply for financial assistance to take part in exchange visits to other projects, and about six visits are organised each year.

Small funds are available for publicity and partnership grants, which are intended to assist the dissemination of good practice.

8.3. The Characteristics of IRIS projects

- 8.3.1. There is a high turnover of member projects, so that membership of the network is often not continued from one year to the next. The main reasons for this appears to be that most projects are funded by their sponsors on a short-term basis.
- 8.3.2. About 70% of IRIS member projects in 1991 were engaged in training unemployed or inactive women, although over 50% either provided on-the-job experience in the context of such training, or were working with women who already had jobs. About 16% of projects work with self-employed women.
- 8.3.3. The most common employment sectors to which training is aimed are office skills, informatics and computer-related work. About 40% of projects offer training in enterprise creation or management-related skills, frequently in combination with other specialisms. Many others train women for occupations in which women are under-represented.
- 8.3.4. 18% of IRIS projects restrict admission to women under 25, but more than 50% admit women of all age groups. A large range of minimum and maximum age limits are found amongst the others.
- 8.3.5. Most of the projects take special steps to make training accessible to women; about 75% either offer childcare facilities or make sure that attendance by trainees is only required in school hours. About 80% of projects are for women only. More than 50% offer a training allowance.
- 8.3.6. Many projects use modular courses or computer-assisted learning techniques, but only a small proportion integrate modules on job-finding techniques with

vocational training, or use personal assessment modules. There is, however, strong representation in the network of 'Retravailler' courses and of assertiveness training.

8.4. The role of IRIS in relation to other European networks and programmes

8.4.1. IRIS has performed an important role in relation to the early stages of NOW, by helping women's projects make contact with transnational partners.

8.4.2. IRIS publications, as they exist at present, are widely circulated and appreciated.

8.4.5. However, there is a felt need for more written material describing in detail the lessons about training practice which have emerged from the IRIS network. In terms of its actual and potential input to other European programmes, there is a general impression that IRIS has a considerable potential, but that this potential is not at present being fulfilled.

8.4.6. There is need for administrative mechanisms to ensure closer collaboration between IRIS and the Task Force programmes, at international and national level. IRIS could play a significant role by providing an 'equal opportunities focus' for the Task Force programmes, and disseminating the lessons of IRIS on the needs of women within training programmes and the ways in which programmes need to be adapted for them.

8.4.7. FORCE's national coordinating units could help IRIS make closer contacts with employers at national level, a need which has for some time been recognised by the IRIS network.

8.4.8. Looking at other European programmes as models of how IRIS could be improved, there appears to be a case for national coordinating units with adequate funding for national policy reviews and other research functions. There is also a case for setting up partnerships involving employers, which again would require

specific funding. The members of the Working Party on Women's Vocational Training could have an important role in seeking additional funding and national level and generating new partnerships.

8.5. The Operation of IRIS at National Level

- 8.5.1. Assessment of the role of IRIS needs to be set in the context of national policy developments and the employment situation of women in each of the Member States. Section 5 of the report attempts to do this by providing a summary of key points of interest in national employment policy, the institutional frameworks through which training is delivered, and the main problems and constraints in the field of women's training in each of the countries. This helps to identify whether the membership of the network in a given country reflects the main 'exportable' strengths of training practice there and addresses the main problems from a national point of view.
- 8.5.2. The density and prominence of IRIS projects varies considerably between countries. In a few cases they do not reflect some developments which appear to be important from a European point of view; particular omissions are examples of positive action plans in private companies which are linked to major national initiatives for action in the private sector. The members of the Working Party may be able to help to draw more of these kinds of actions into the network in the future. None the less the impact of IRIS in terms of the number of projects networked and the publicity given to them has been good in relation to the relatively small scale of its budget.
- 8.5.3. The work of IRIS has been slow to get off the ground and the network is still little known amongst employers and politicians in most countries. This is partly a reflection of the limited budget, and due partly to the fact that IRIS projects represent the 'leading edge' of equal opportunities policy expressed in training, so that one would expect some resistance to the kinds of ideas which they represent. Moreover, because of the exponential growth in the number of member

projects, and the time-lag before the present scale of the network can be expected to have an influence, it is likely that the full impact of IRIS activities, particularly in the last two years, has not yet been felt.

- 8.5.4. In countries where a national coordinating unit has been set up, IRIS has achieved rather more than in the others, both in terms of interaction between projects and in terms of their visibility to policy-makers. Coordinating units are an important channel for dissemination of information about the projects at national level, thus attracting attention to the lessons and achievements of the network and drawing more projects into it.
- 8.5.5. In some countries the period since 1988 has seen an upsurge of positive action programmes. Whereas in Italy this trend has been accompanied by a very strong growth of the IRIS network, which appears to have complemented other developments and had a definite 'additional' effect, in Spain and the Netherlands the 'additionality' of IRIS is questioned. In Spain, this is because of the apparently rather general nature of the contribution which the network has apparently been able to make to innovations in training practice, and also because of the strong role played by central government in developing proposals for NOW (so that IRIS did not help individual local projects to generate proposals in the way that it has done elsewhere). In the Netherlands, IRIS is only one of several networks of women's training projects so that it has a lower relative profile than in most Member States.
- 8.5.6. The overall impression is that IRIS is a potentially useful network, but that its potential is somewhat under-utilised. This is partly due to lack of funding, partly to alleged in clarity of objectives, and partly due to lack of sufficiently powerful or detailed 'output' in terms of lessons on training practice. Where there is no national coordinating unit, it is difficult to identify a formal mechanism through which IRIS as a whole can have an influence on national policies, although a few individual projects do claim to have done so. A better scenario for making use of the individual projects' achievements might be one in which a strong and active

coordinating unit in each Member State was able to channel the lessons of the network, and its perceptions of the obstacles faced by women in training and employment, through the members of the Working Party to policy-making structures, who in turn would be able to make use of these findings in their dialogue with employers.

8.6. The Achievements of IRIS at European Level

- 8.6.1. IRIS has not, on the whole, led to specific changes in training practice within national programmes, and only 20% of the projects reported having adopted changes or innovations because of ideas they had obtained through IRIS. This is probably due to insufficient dissemination of its findings by means of working papers or detailed written reports which could be accessible to those outside the network, or to members within the network who have not made a specific personal contact. However, it may be important not to have too high expectations of the influence which innovation in women's training can have, because of the factors referred to in paragraph 8.5.3.
- 8.6.2. IRIS projects feel a need for evaluation, but often do not have the resources to do it systematically. In Italy, there is an attempt to establish common evaluation methods between all the IRIS projects. In the network as a whole, the opportunity for self-evaluation is recognised as one of the positive benefits of hosting exchange visits. There is a need for an evaluation function at the centre of the network.
- 8.6.3. IRIS services are highly valued by the member projects and their benefits are largely 'additional'. With regard to the relative value of different IRIS activities, the database, technical meetings and exchange visits have the highest overall benefits. The last two could be still further improved. Partnership grants are also highly valued, but concern only a few members. Electronic mail has relatively low benefits, partly because the failure of many members to connect reduces its value for those who are connected.

8.6.4. IRIS helps projects get access to funding, particularly through NOW. This effect is largely 'additional', but not in every country, the main exceptions being Spain, where major NOW proposals have been put forward by central government, and the Netherlands, where a number of inter-project networks exist alongside of IRIS.

8.6.5. IRIS has had little influence on employers' practices, partly because the network has had relatively little contact with employers, who have been poorly represented at conferences despite numerous and widespread invitations. It has not taken specific steps to disseminate literature amongst employers. Securing greater impact on employers' practices needs to be one of the network's future priorities, although this is likely to be difficult to achieve.

8.7. Recommendations

Subject to discussion with the Equal Opportunities Unit with the Working Party on Women's Vocational Training and with CREW the following recommendations can provisionally be made:-

- 1) More written material (working papers, special literature for employers) is needed to set out what IRIS projects have learnt about training methods, in order that others may benefit from this experience.
- 2) IRIS should help its members carry out evaluations of their work according to a methodology with certain common elements.
- 3) There is a need for wider distribution of publications, particularly to employers.
- 4) There is a need for national coordinating units to be set up in those countries which do not already have them.

- 5) There is a need for stronger links with the Task Force programmes, at national and international level.
- 6) Selection of projects in future should try to ensure good representation of each country's strengths or specialisms in training practice. There is a need to identify projects which would fill in gaps in the range represented, and invite them to apply for membership. In particular, there is a need to attract more projects which represent positive action in enterprises, and to link IRIS's work in this area with that of the Task Force programmes. Recommendation 12 below also refers to work with employers.
- 7) Participants in exchange visits, as well as beneficiaries of grants, should be required to make a fuller and more formal feedback for the benefit of the network as a whole.
- 8) Funds are needed to help projects travel to international meetings.
- 9) Publications should be available at least in Spanish and German as well as in French and English.
- 10) Additional funds are needed for translation and interpretation in conjunction with exchange visits and seminars.
- 11) Grant funds should be sent to projects more rapidly
- 12) Membership of the IRIS network should be extended to organisations with a longer life than individual training projects, for example federations of training providers, regional labour market authorities, trade unions and employers.

13) The role of the members of the Working Party on Women's Vocational Training will be an important one in the near future, in searching for additional funds for IRIS, trying to set up coordinating units in those countries which do not yet have them, encouraging more projects to join the network and selecting the most appropriate projects for grants and exchange visits.

14) Strategic tasks of the network in the immediate future will include:-

a) addressing problems of unemployed women including those trained for male-dominated trades, and stimulating research about them,

b) attempting to secure a role for the IRIS network in the provision of technical assistance to the NOW projects, subject to the availability of additional funding,

c) generating awareness of the issues in women's training raised within IRIS, and of the achievements in terms of good practice which have been developed by its projects

d) thus creating an important dynamic for the implementation of FORCE, and imparting to it a strong equal opportunities focus. This will entail new ways of working with FORCE, which will in turn help to strengthen the network's links with employers.

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(The above materials were supplemented by reports previously written for the European Commission by PACEC and its associates in several Member States)