

# NEWS RELEASE

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## **Implementing Flexible Working Practices in South Yorkshire Conference at Dearne Valley College Thursday 13 November 2003**

Difficulties with juggling competing commitments at work and at home are often cited by women as a significant reason why they do not apply for jobs. Objective 1, the European Union investment programme, has organised a conference to look at the issues involved in introducing flexible working into an organisation and the benefits that such working practices can deliver for the employer and employee alike.

**Implementing Flexible Working Practices in South Yorkshire** is showcasing local organisations that have introduced flexible working. Rotherham Primary Care Trust and IKEA will both tell the 100 delegates about their experiences and the benefits that they and their employees have enjoyed. Sheffield Chamber of Commerce and Industry will tell delegates about the work that they are leading with a group of pilot small and medium sized enterprises to introduce flexible working. The conference on Thursday 13 November starts at 9:15 and finishes at 2pm.

The European Union is investing £10 million to tackle gender imbalances in the labour market in South Yorkshire as part of the Objective 1 Programme. Introducing flexible working is seen as one of the principal keys to surmounting barriers to employment faced by women.

Cinnamon Bennett, Objective 1's Gender Adviser said: "Objective 1 aims to transform the South Yorkshire economy. However, if South Yorkshire is to become a successful modern economy it is vital that we make the most of the skills and abilities of everybody in our society. Many women are excluded from applying for jobs because of home commitments. However, the employers featured at the conference show that the business case for flexible working arrangements is stronger than ever as employers find they can improve their services and save in recruitment costs by introducing it."

Objective 1 funding is supporting pilot projects with nine employers in South Yorkshire including the four local authorities (South Yorkshire's largest employers), South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue and four small and medium enterprises co-ordinated by Sheffield Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The new projects are offering the employers the opportunity to re-examine their working time practices and to improve their business performance at the same time.

"These pilots will provide best practice role models of what can be achieved. We will roll out their experiences to other interested employers in the coming months" said Cinnamon. "Sheffield Chamber, working with the other Chambers in Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham, is training business

advisors in work-life balance issues so that the pilot's experience can be shared as widely as possible."

## **Note to editors**

The Objective 1 programme is working with three small businesses and Sheffield Chamber of Commerce, four South Yorkshire Local Authorities and South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue to develop work practices which enable organisations to meet the change in demand for services in a 24/7 economy and at the same time help men and women to with their family responsibilities and other interests

Over 90 people are attending a conference on November 13<sup>th</sup> at Dearne Valley College to hear about these new projects, as well as hearing about existing good practice in South Yorkshire.

Delegates will be hearing about the family friendly employment practices in a local call centre and how flexible working practices are already helping to improve working lives in an NHS Trust. The group of local small businesses who have gained funding and Sheffield Chamber will be sharing information on their new flexible working/work-life balance projects.

The Objective 1 Programme in South Yorkshire is a £1.8 billion investment programme that draws on over £700 million from the European Union's Structural Funds that are provided to help Europe's poorest areas regenerate their economies and create jobs. South Yorkshire is one of those poorest areas with fewer businesses and fewer and less well-paid jobs than other European regions.

South Yorkshire was designated as an Objective 1 area, which is the highest category of European support, at the Berlin Summit in 1999 along with Merseyside, Cornwall and the Scillies and West Wales and the Valleys. The Objective 1 Programme in South Yorkshire was launched in July 2000 and runs until the end of 2006.

To date the Programme has committed over £395 million of European money to over 360 projects in South Yorkshire. Objective 1 funds are supporting the development of new businesses, helping businesses to innovate and grow, supporting the development of skills and training, supporting social enterprises, supporting the economic development of deprived communities in South Yorkshire, helping to bring forward the development of sites and premises for increased economic activity and helping to tackle both financial and transport bottlenecks that inhibit economic growth.

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