

Disability Discrimination Act and Work Based Learning



Final report from: John Palmer

Name of project: Providing Support for Employers And Placement Providers

Organization: Landmark Training

March 2006

The main criterion for including projects on this website is that they are all developmental or case study research projects undertaken as part of DDA: improving work-based learning for people with learning difficulties and/ or disabilities. The overall aim of this project was to support work-based learning providers to respond to the DDA. Project reports do not necessarily reflect good or best practice.

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The Disability Discrimination Act: improving work based learning provision for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (RC 724b)

Providing Support for Employers And Placement Providers

What we set out to do and why

Landmark Training is a training provider delivering E2E and Apprenticeship training programmes to young people in and around Newham in East London. The area has one of the most diverse populations in the country and this is strongly represented in the organisation's staffing and general ethos. For this to work effectively it is essential that its major partners in the training programmes, the employers and placement providers take a complementary stand in relation to Equal Opportunities. We see the issue of the integration of people with disabilities as a special focus which has been highlighted by the developing impact of the DDA.

What 'product' we wanted to develop

We were happy with the way that we recruit and work with our placement providers and employers. It is however probably true to say that, like so many training providers in this situation, our engagement with employers and placement providers on the issues of Equal Opportunities centres around the obligation for both parties to have an Equal Opportunities policy. We saw therefore a need to develop a model for joint training provider/employer review of equality of opportunity in relation to disability. This would enable us to enhance the way that the needs of young people with disabilities could be met.

What we did

The process of recruiting and working with our employers and placement providers is essentially one of communication. The objective therefore shaped itself into one that enabled those who recruit and work with the organisations to take the communication process beyond that of compliance. To help understand the needs of local organisations visits were made to a business association and a charity working with and for people with disabilities. The first of these had a membership base that was not representative of the economy of our part of East London. They provided a lead to another organisation that might have been more representative but this did not provide the hoped for 'open door' to any useful insight into the issues involved as they applied to SMEs the mainstay of East London's economy.

The second visit was much more fruitful but the value was primarily personal. The visit entailed a discussion with about a dozen people with what appeared to be medium disabilities (i.e. their disabilities were mostly evident but most

had had some experience of work). By way of a summary those experiences ranged from bad, like being moved on to sweeping the floor, to good, like discovering a previously unknown skill. This profile of disability did not map well to Landmark's profile (see below)

The third visit was to a potential new placement provider. The organisation was new and at the time of the visit had no staff. There was no Equal Opportunities policy and the issues involved were some way from being relevant to the situation. The visit did provide an opportunity to discuss the issues at a relatively high level and helped us to clarify thinking and communications models for the future.

What difficulties we encountered

Experience at Landmark has shown that the young people with disabilities referred for training often have additional emotional difficulties, or have hidden disabilities such as dyslexia. We also find that some who disclose their disability do not regard it as a difficulty while some do not disclose a difficulty may not achieve their learning goals, particularly as we will not necessarily know to put additional learning support in place for them.

What worked for us

This is very much a 'Work in Progress' issue. We have developed a communications model. This is really no more than a matrix of words designed to take a training provider's interviewer from the compliance point into more meaningful areas and in this way it is just a script. But it is designed to allow entry from a range of levels so that wherever you and your potential client placement provider or employer are, a route should be possible. And how far you progress along that route depends on the same characteristics, you and your client. And as we become more confident at dealing with the issues, so we will expand and develop the model

What advice we would give to other providers working on a similar area

It is important to flag up these issues with both new and existing employers and placement providers as and when the opportunity presents itself but the investment involved in such discussion will not have practical value until real learners with identified disabilities have to be placed. The more ready that employers and placement providers are for this event the better placed all parties will be to deliver an effective training programme for the learner. But as with all scripts of this nature the skills of the training provider's interviewer to work with them naturally as a source for good and effective communication are paramount. They have not been written on tablets of stone.

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2006