



The projects and their findings

Thanks to sterling efforts of project leaders all final project reports were completed, more or less within the deadline, during the summer. The result is a very strong body of work covering so many aspects of working with disabled learners in the post school sector. Very many thanks need to go to all the sites that participated and in particular to learners whose contributions helped so much to ground the projects in reality.

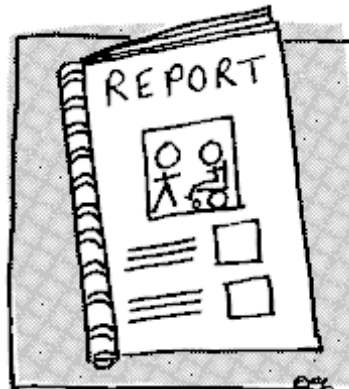
The reports are in the process of being edited and being put on the DDA website. Do try and read in full any of those which particularly interest you. They provide fascinating reading and cannot easily be summarised. However, despite their different topics, there were several key themes which tended to recur in every project. These included:

- An enthusiasm for the process of action research. Participants valued enormously the opportunity to be guided on how best to

reflect on their practice and initiate new developments.

- A parallel enthusiasm for network meetings. All those involved realised how seldom they actually had time to meet with others to explore issues and recognised the importance of doing this.

- A strong assertion that support for learners with disabilities and learning difficulties involved a 'whole organisation' approach. People felt that too often this area of work was seen as being the responsibility of a learning support team and that, ironically, such specialisation could actually work against inclusion.



Alongside this was an urgent plea for more staff development so that all tutors felt confident in supporting disabled learners in their learning programmes.

- A recognition that work in this area tended to consider learners with physical and sensory disabilities, learning difficulties and dyslexia, and a realisation that far more

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needed to be done to ensure the most appropriate support for learners with more 'hidden' disabilities – mental health difficulties, autistic spectrum disorders and acquired illness and disability such as M.E.

- The urgent need for better developed partnership working between education and other agencies.

Finally, and arguably most importantly, was a recognition of the importance of listening to learners. All sites found that learners views provided them with some of their most important insights. They recognised how post school education and training providers are not always very good at listening to learners and also that staff often held deep rooted assumptions about what disabled people needed which were often at odds with what disabled learners actually said.

Sally Faraday, Research manager



Project Briefings

The project reports provide fascinating reading and include important messages for the full range of staff across the post 16 sector. However, we are fully aware that the majority of staff

in the post 16 sector simply do not have the time to read through 19 long reports! To address this we are now in the process of writing a series of Project Briefings which summarise the key messages for a range of different staff.

A range of briefings is being compiled for:

- Strategic, policy makers
- Executive/senior strategic managers
- Staff responsible for DDA implementation
- Learning difficulty/disability specialists
- Tutors
- WBL providers.

Briefings are also being produced on topics such as:

- Learner involvement
- Staff development
- Funding
- Premises

Following the format for the yellow leaflets, they will be short and will include the main points relevant to a particular role in a particular sector, illustrated by pertinent examples and quotations from the reports.

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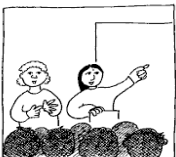
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In addition to the Briefings, there will be several publications. These will be longer than the briefings and will cover particular themes which are reflected throughout some or all of the projects. Publications will be written on topics such as:

- Learner involvement
- Still Ain't Misbehavin'
- Support including access to resources and premises
- Employment
- Disclosure
- Risk assessment
- Learning difficulties curriculum
- Mental health
- Working in partnership

Briefings and publications will be distributed as they are completed in 2005. It is important that you start thinking about how you might most effectively disseminate these in your organisation to ensure that they are both read and acted upon by staff you work with.

Liz Maudslay, Skill



Regional Events

Throughout the autumn term regional DDA events have been held. These were designed for staff with management responsibility for the

DDA. Participants chose topics for further regionally based action research. The topics are:



- West Midlands: Developing a whole organisation approach to staff development involving learners.
- Yorkshire and Humberside: Developing a whole organisation approach to staff development involving learners.
- South East: In implementing the DDA, how can we reconcile the competing needs of individuals, organisations and legislation?
- East: Information Sharing.
- London: Staff Development: champions and reaching part-time staff.
- South West: Raising awareness: working with partners including employers.
- East Midlands: Improving information flows between organisations / managing transition information for the learner
- North: Developing staff skills and

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developing best practice guidelines.

- North West: Flexible approaches to provision: investing in multi-agency partnerships.

These events had several aims:

- To disseminate key findings of the project
- To look at how these might be best embedded into the ongoing work of a particular region
- To select a topic for an action research project for the region
- To disseminate other interesting work which is happening in the region

In addition the events include a presentation by a member of the LSC Strategic Review Team who are carrying out a review of provision for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities.

There will be two more events in each region, one in the spring and one in the summer, and participants at the first event have the opportunity to advise on the kind of inputs they would like at these future events.

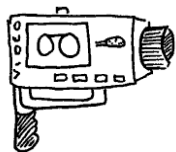
Each region will carry out the new action research project (led by one organisation and including four to five others). Project sites will also have the opportunity to attend national meetings which bring together all the regional projects and take part in action research training.

Further information will be posted on the LSDA's projects website as it becomes available:

<http://www.llda.org.uk/programmes/dda/index.asp>

Dr Gillian O'Toole, LSDA researcher





Learners' Experiences DVD



South Trafford College Learning Centre

Since we first catalogued the Learners' Experiences DVD late in October it has been constantly out on loan. The Learning Support Department and Leisure and Tourism have so far borrowed this material. Initial feedback indicated that the material was well presented and contained extremely useful information.

It was also indicated that we should try and get as many members of staff as possible to take a look at the DVD, particularly tutorial staff. With only one copy this would have been a very slow process so we applied for an extra copy which we have now received. This new copy will be passed round the Learning Centre staff so that we can put together some comments for inclusion in our College Newsletter in order to publicise it to all members of staff.

Liz Barton, Learning Resources Advisor



Newsletter artwork

The drawings featured in this newsletter come from the CHANGE picture bank.

CHANGE is a national organisation. It is for people with learning disabilities, including people with learning disabilities who are blind or deaf.

If you wish to contact the organisation and find out more about the people at CHANGE then please use the various methods of contact given on this page.

Address:

CHANGE units 19-20
Unity Business Centre
26 Roundhay Road
Leeds
LS7 1AB

Telephone: 0113 243 0202

Fax: 0113 243 0220

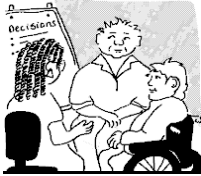
Minicom: 0113 243 2225

Web address:

www.changepeople.co.uk

Email:

changepeople@btconnect.com



Action Research: research for change



The first phase of the DDA projects has just been completed and there is a wealth of messages emerging. Messages which illustrate areas of improving practice, but also issues that have emerged such as the need for ongoing staff training, what is a 'reasonable adjustment', and the need to rethink attitudes particularly relating to cultural differences and mental health and challenging behaviour. Practitioners stressed the value they have got from participating in action research – in terms of professional development, increased opportunities for networking with others both inside and outside their own organisations, and in terms of professional and personal satisfaction in improving practice.

This article shows three brief selections from across the projects to illustrate the issues that were faced by practitioners when carrying out their research.



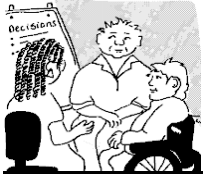
Awareness of cultural differences

One project focused on issues relating to learners with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. One of the strongest messages to come from this project was the need to have an awareness of different cultural and religious backgrounds in order to be able to understand learners from diverse backgrounds. It was clear that without this understanding and awareness these learners would be at a real disadvantage. Here is how one member of a focus group described what it meant to be a Sikh:

Sikhs are often thought of as a religious group but they are in fact a nation. Sikhism is a way of life - not just a religion. Religion is part of Sikhism but Sikhism is a way of life. There are intercultural similarities but Sikhism is very individual and that is why on forms, Sikhs would like to be acknowledged.

One key problem that staff found when they tried to discuss issues relating to disabilities and/or learning difficulties with this group was that there are no comparable words to disability and learning difficulty in the Punjabi language; that their equivalent words

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Action Research: research for change

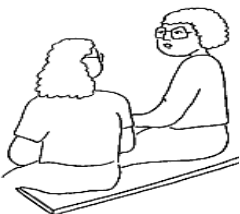


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translate into English as 'ill' and 'sickness'.

Similar problems were identified with Somali interpretation where for example schizophrenia translates as "He's out riding amongst the clouds" (Icarus, 2000); in Bengali one definition for disabled person is 'beggar' or 'poor thing', while the Sudanese phrase for disability translates as 'excuse'.

The research showed the danger of assuming that the concept of disability was 'culturally neutral' and that different cultures had different concepts of what constitutes a disability and different terms to express disabilities. When translated literally these may appear offensive. However, it concluded it is important to remember that people are using the words available to them in their language and one could not judge behaviour (which was often very supportive of the disabled person) purely by the translation of the words they use.



Contrasting Ways of listening to learners

One site recognised that the experience of learning was far more than just learning about a subject but

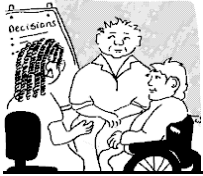
about their time at the college as a whole. Some learners found, for example, going round a large campus was intimidating and this needed to be taken into account when looking at their needs and their individual learning plans. These plans would be reviewed throughout the year to see if targets were met and to set new targets.

This next example illustrates that it is not always straightforward or easy to involve learners and that it requires sensitivity and understanding. Whilst it is very important to consult learners and involve them as far as possible it is crucial that this process is not to their detriment in any way.

One site asked one learner with mental health difficulties to take part in a consultation exercise. However after initially agreeing it caused him a great deal of anxiety and he eventually withdrew. He was given assurances that there was no problem in not taking part. This highlights a crucial message for practitioners in seeking to involve all learners in that,

Some learners, whose input would be valuable, find it difficult to take part in formal consultations and attention needs to be paid to how to involve them in our processes and

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Action Research: research for change



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procedures.

Another project when looking at effective transition recognised the importance of ownership for the learner. In developing a 'Transition Passport' they recognised the right for the learner to own it and the passport 'should include things ... that will help people understand their needs better, especially those things that are not included in 'official' documents but are very important to the individual'.



Addressing parental concerns

Finally, two projects looked at some of the real issues and concerns of parents and carers that college staff needed to understand in order to enable learners to participate fully and move forward in their learning. One site found, for example, that parents were afraid of change. Some feared that their sons and daughters may be forced into work; others wanted things to stay the same, fearing the consequence of change.

Another site found that parents viewed integrating their young people into mainstream courses as 'horrifying'. They were worried about moving them from a 'safe' environment. Although staff were able to allay these

fears, we recognise that change can be unsettling, and something that we all experience at different points in our lives.

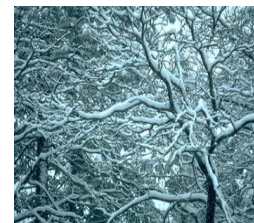
These examples illustrate the need to work with parents' existing attitudes and to try to understand what lies behind them, their fears, their concerns, and anxieties. Only in seeking to understand are we able to move closer to breaking down and removing barriers.

These snippets clearly demonstrate that implementing the DDA is much more complex than simply providing auxiliary aids or ramps.





Learning and Skills Council Improving Choice East of England Pathfinder



Developing Local Inclusive Provision in the East of England for Learners with additional support needs in collaboration with Partner Agencies

The Learning and Skills Council's eastern region proposal to Improve Choice for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has been successful in securing £3.6 million to develop local, inclusive provision for this group of learners. The duration of the project will be over a three-year period with the first enrolments taking place by September 2005. The Pathfinder is about collaboration with a range of other agencies to create an infrastructure of educational, living and employment opportunities. This will create the opportunity to offer a range of individualised, flexible, educational programmes involving a wide range of providers.

The partnerships in each local LSC area are busy developing proposals, which have to be submitted by the 15th December 2004, for assessment in line with previously agreed criteria. Each partnership group will concentrate on planning the development of provision to meet

local need and working to establish expertise in specialist areas of disability.

For any further information please contact your local Learning and Skills Council office in the eastern region.

East of England Region:

Bedfordshire and Luton

Tel: 0845 019 4160

Email: bedsandlutoninfo@lsc.gov.uk

Cambridgeshire

Tel: 0845 019 4165

Email: cambridgeshireinfo@lsc.gov.uk

Essex:

Tel: 0845 019 4179

Email: essexinfo@lsc.gov.uk

Hertfordshire:

Tel: 0845 019 4179

Email: hertsinfo@lsc.gov.uk

Norfolk:

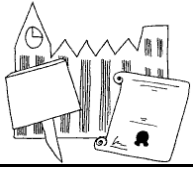
Tel: 0845 019 4173

Email: norfolkinfo@lsc.gov.uk

Suffolk:

Tel: 0845 019 4180

Email: suffolk.info@lsc.gov.uk

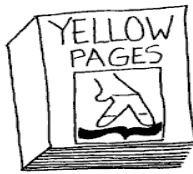


Legislative update – October 2004



Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities

October 2004 brings a number of changes to the Disability Discrimination Act and other legislation that will affect disabled students.



DDA Part 2: work placements

Work placements are currently included under 'student services' in the DDA Part 4 (Education), meaning that college and university staff must take into account a person's disability when arranging work placements, and liaise with the work placement providers to get support set up. However the DDA has not, until now, covered any discrimination which actually takes place when a student is on placement.

The DDA Part 2 (Employment) now includes people who are on a work placement as part of a vocational training programme. Work placement providers are therefore now required to ensure they do not have discriminatory practices and make reasonable adjustments for disabled people on work placements. The length of a placement may be a factor when determining whether an adjustment is reasonable or not. 'Vocational training programme' is likely to include most students who are doing a placement as part of a further or higher education

course. It may not include students who do a work placement as part of a more general course, such as GCSEs or life skills.



DDA Part 2: qualifications bodies

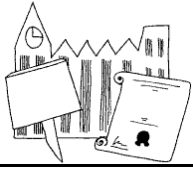
The changes to the DDA Part 2 also mean that qualifications bodies are covered for the first time. These are bodies such as CORGI, Institute of Carpenters, Law Society and the Nursing and Midwifery Council, who regulate entry into a profession or trade. They must not discriminate against disabled people, and although they are still able to set the professional standards (called "competence standards") for entry, must ensure that these standards are 'objectively justifiable' – i.e. they are clearly defined and are a distinct requirement for that trade or profession. They are also required to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people, including to the assessment of competence standards where necessary.



DDA Part 3: physical access

The final parts of the DDA Part 3 (Provision of goods, facilities and

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Legislative update – October 2004



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services) have been implemented from October 2004. This means that providers of goods and services must take reasonable steps to remove or alter a physical feature which makes it difficult for a disabled person to use a service, or provide the service in an alternative way.

Although this does not include physical access to education, which comes on board in September 2005, it does include Students Unions and any other services which are open to the general public, such as conference facilities.



Housing Benefit Regulations

From September 2004, students who would normally be eligible for Housing Benefit, and who are living in accommodation owned by their educational establishment, are eligible for the Benefit. Previously, 'halls of residence' were not included in the Housing Benefit regulations because of government subsidies for college accommodation. But as these subsidies have decreased, and cost of living in halls has increased, the government has amended the Housing Benefit regulations to include student accommodation owned by

colleges and universities.

For example, lone parents, student couples with children, and disabled students, will be eligible for Housing benefit. Students should apply through their home local authority.

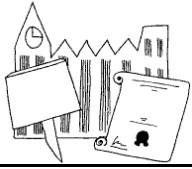


Disability Discrimination Bill – public sector duty and general examinations

The disability discrimination Bill was mentioned in the Queen's Speech in November. This builds on the draft Bill published last year, which has been through pre-legislative scrutiny by a committee of MPs and Peers.

The Bill will legislate for a public sector duty on disability equality, similar to the duty in the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. Public sector bodies, including education providers, will be required to eliminate unlawful discrimination and improve equality of opportunity for disabled people. There will be specific duties on a number of bodies, including HEFCE, the LSC, and governing bodies of education establishments, to publish Disability Equality Schemes and report on

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Legislative update – October 2004



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progress made. Education providers are likely to be required to monitor admission and retention of disabled learners. The DRC is expecting to produce a draft Code of Practice on the public sector duty in early 2005. The duty itself is likely to come into force in December 2006.

After lobbying from Skill and other organisations, the Government has agreed to include general examination awarding bodies in the full Bill. This should mean that GCSEs and A Level exam boards are covered by the DDA. We await details of the regulations around this.

Skill policy team, October 2004



Want to know more?

For general enquiries contact DDAProjects: DDAProjects@lsda.org.uk, or look at the website on: <http://www.lsda.org.uk/programmes/dda/index.asp>

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Newsletter Contribution

If you would like to contribute to future DDA newsletters with your progress or anything else that you feel to be relevant then you could be filling this space! Send all relevant articles or documents to Al Lockhart Smith.

Any comments or advice in terms of content readability and design are also welcome.