

Disability Discrimination Act Phase 2 Regional action research projects



Executive coordinator final report

Project title: Staff development: champions and reaching part-time staff

Region: London

Executive Coordinator: Caroline Stacey

Organisation: Greenwich Community College

Sites: Greenwich Community College, Bromley Adult Education, Lambeth College, Hammersmith and Fulham Adult Education, College of North West London

June 2006

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Disability Discrimination Act: taking the
work forward

Research and development projects
2005/6

London Region Final project report

Disability Discrimination Act: taking the work forward Phase 2 Action Research Projects 2005/6 Final Report

1. Project co-ordinators report for the London region – Caroline Stacey

Five colleges took part in this action research project in the London region between September 2005 and June 2006. Each site had a project co-ordinator who took full responsibility for the project in their own institutions and who also involved many other staff and students over the two years. As well as this summary report, individual site reports, giving much greater detail of individual projects are also available, along with copies of many of the resources produced as a result of the work undertaken.

Site co-ordinators

Ian Bevan – Bromley Adult Education

Graeme Hill – Lambeth College

Brenda Griffin – Hammersmith and Fulham Adult Education

Caroline Stacey – Greenwich Community College

Linda Austin – College of North West London

Executive summary

This project undertook to examine strategies for staff development related to the DDA and inclusion and was particularly interested in ways to reach part time and non specialist staff. It was undertaken by five London colleges, each at different stages in their development towards inclusion and looked at a range of strategies to inform and develop staff. Because of the spread of providers involved, the project was able to test a variety of models designed to have an impact on the day to day practices of teachers and support staff when working with learners with disabilities. Each College undertook to test one of more methods which were then evaluated and results and common experiences evaluated. From our 'actions' and evaluations several key themes have emerged. These are:

- defining the parameters of what is 'essential information' for part time staff, given the complexity of DDA legislation and it's myriad implications for teachers working with individual students.
- the need to embed DDA training particularly during initial teacher training and in new staff induction sessions for both academic and administrative staff, rather than providing optional one off events which may or more likely may not be attended by part time staff.
- to then give opportunities for individuals to work with more experienced staff to develop different strategies for meeting individual needs.
- linked to other equalities training and including practical sessions which invited staff to examine their own assumptions when working with learners with disabilities
- communication – particularly with learners as experts on their own needs
- there needs to be a wide range of possible sources of information and these are better received and more likely to be used when directly connected to current classroom activity, in effect owned by the staff.

- longer term 'issue' based training in small teams / individually is far more effective than large one off events / whole college training days particularly if these can be related to specific concerns with an individuals support.
- there are ongoing misunderstanding about what is required of College staff under the DDA and what can be funded by the LSC additional support funding mechanism. Sometimes this was a difficulty with definitions. "Some ESOL tutors refer students who they feel are not progressing as well as their peer group. If a learning difficulty is then identified the students would be entitled to learning support. However many tutors have got the message that because of the funding mechanism language support is not available to any students on a language course and therefore don't make the referrals and difficulties go undiagnosed and remain unaddressed."

The sites final reports and action plans show that the research project has been both stimulating and of practical use for those involved and that the support received, particularly from other sites and from the Learning and Skills Development Agency has been very useful for keeping the projects on track over the two years.

At least two sites are planning to continue the work started and all made significant progress towards achieving their aims.

2. Major focus 'Staff development for Inclusive learning - working with Inclusive Learning champions and reaching part time staff'

3. Progress to date

Following the initial meetings where the project co-ordinators were able to share their own particular concerns about staff development in the sector, each site undertook work on different strategies;

- **Bromley** has been able to involve learners in the production of the training materials and have produced a DVD to use with staff on their teacher training course and for staff induction. This was then followed up with a series of information sheets to be made available to staff where students had disclosed specific support needs.
- **College of North West London** undertook a major project with ESOL staff to design and implement a diagnostic assessment for Specific Learning Difficulties amongst learners on ESOL programmes. This was followed up by intensive work with curriculum staff to develop strategies for learner support.
- **Greenwich Community College** used both formal and informal methods to gather information on staff training priorities and preferred modes of delivery and as a result have worked on a range of strategies to reach part time staff. Tutor handbooks and information leaflets on individual issues were designed and promoted in a range of formats and promoted both formally and informally with staff. Much work was done on decided just what was the **essential** information to give to everyone and which had to be made available for access when issues arose. This was particularly important as information on technical aspects of support and resources available can quickly become out of date. Some subject specific training was also offered

face to face. Learners were then surveyed to see if there had been any change in the support offered.

- **Lambeth College** has undertaken an in depth evaluation of the Inclusive Learning Champions project involving both the champions, staff who worked with them and the effects on learners over a two year period.
- Hammersmith and Fulham focused on their front line staff in community venues as it was felt that these staff were often the first contact students had and were particularly hard to reach with standard methods of training.

4. Successes and Challenges

Successes came from very positive responses from staff who were targeted for training, particularly when longer term relationships were established and where development happened as a natural progression to meeting the needs of learners on a practical level. So as with all learning it was much better when it could have an immediate practical application! Staff reported that they felt better informed about the law and spirit of the law and better informed about the range of support available. Several staff also reported that they now had the confidence to ask the right questions and seek help if they needed it.

In all projects a marked improvement in the relationships and understanding between different groups of staff – particularly between Learning Support specialists and subject / curriculum specialists, has been seen. Small group and individual meetings were rated as one of the most beneficial aspects of the projects by the staff involved at Lambeth, CNWL and Greenwich.

There have also been positive responses from students where they have been directly involved.

At Bromley, Greenwich and CNWL the developments and materials produced have been embedded into the ongoing staff induction and development programmes. Projects have also begun to be seen outside their originating institutions. Bromley have presented their project to the local LSC, Hammersmith to their local partnership board and staff at CNWL have set up staff development sessions at other colleges. The project has also been raised at various internal forums such as Academic Boards, staff development groups, Senior management teams etc

There were also substantive challenges caused by time pressures / unreasonable workloads for those who were co-ordinating or working on the projects at several of the sites at times during the two years. Projects worked much more effectively when the project co-ordinator was able to merge the project directly with their own work and when developments were seen as part of the 'core business' of several departments and not just the learning support team.

At several sites additional issues were discovered once the projects were underway.

“ On reflection this is a very large area that should be examined in more depth.....the project was to support part time staff in their teaching however it also raised the issue of how we identify a learning difficulty for a student who has poor spoken English, and no evidence from their educational background available. It was felt that

it would be practically impossible to follow a formal route of diagnosis by an educational psychologist.” CNWL

Changes in the funding available also changed the project focus in some cases as internal structures in Colleges changed. (Two sites changed co-ordinator during the first year, another co-ordinator gave up full time working and carried on the project as a consultant and another has just been made redundant.)

For Lambeth a shift in College funding priorities resulted in their major change of emphasis for their project which had to become reflective and looked back on what had been achieved rather than taking the opportunity to progress the project onto the next stage. However because the Inclusive learning champions model had been so well advanced at the college at the time the research began it was felt that it would provide useful research with clear lessons for the sector.

At Greenwich getting involvement from part time hourly paid staff proved difficult – even when payment was available for them to attend meetings, as many part time staff have limited availability and are often working at other institutions. The college is working towards setting up external access (via the internet) to the staff intranet for all staff to improve communication. This already works well for a small number of full time staff who have remote access from home.

Hammersmith found it too difficult to interview students because of lack of appropriately experienced staff to carry this out.

5. Outcomes and benefits

- **Bromley;** A training module for tutors, developed in consultation with learners and specialist agencies. This includes a video of inclusive teaching in action and an interactive presentation and exercise, to be incorporated into the 7407 teacher training programme.
- **CNWL;** An assessment tool to help identify ESOL learners with SpLD has been devised and successfully piloted. Extensive staff development has taken place both at CNWL and at other Colleges. A major feature of these developments have been the 'skilling up' of curriculum staff to both recognise and feel confident about adapting their own teaching strategies.
- **Greenwich;** A new ACL tutor handbook, staff training audit, individual leaflets for staff and students on all aspects of support provision at the College, learner focus groups on the range of support available via Student Services. A range of small scale staff development sessions identified from a staff needs analysis. There has been a consistent effort to raise the profile of the support services and expand the role of staff to play a much greater part in supporting colleagues to devise more appropriate teaching strategies for students with disabilities in their classes. A much greater use has been made of partnership work and team teaching to raise the skill levels and confidence of teaching staff.
- **Hammersmith;** Staff development sessions for support staff in three centres, these have been augmented by individual support from the Admin

manager and the project co-ordinator. This will have been the first introduction to DDA for many of these staff. Heightened awareness amongst Admin staff that learners who may have been attending provision for a number of years may still not be aware of what is available to them. Staff have been very positive and keen to take part in the training audit (90% response rate) which has already highlighted specific gaps in knowledge.

- **Lambeth;** the whole organisational approach used by the College in the furthering of Inclusive strategies, whilst introducing the SENDA Legislation, is a model that may potentially have relevance to future large scale initiatives. Certainly the expertise and experience gained by the Inclusive Learning Champions was significant in terms of their own professional development.

A wide range of tangible resources have been produced by some projects

- Support Sheets to be used at reception(Hammersmith)
- DDA – Admin PowerPoint presentation to be included in the Admin Handbook (Hammersmith)
- Report to Admin Manager re further training requests and feedback from the questionnaires(Hammersmith)
- Power point training module for 7407 (Bromley)
- DVD showing training being used (delivered by disabled learners themselves) (Bromley)
- ACL tutor handbook covering DDA / good practice (Greenwich)
- Assessment tool for ESOL learners with specific learning difficulties

6. Emerging themes

- Even within 'big' projects, it is the micro, person to person or small group work which is most effective in changing practice. These may need to be 'seeded' by big whole college policies or events, but it is essential that these are followed up with opportunities for individual coaching / discussion where staff can relate what they have heard to their own experience.
- For most sites the opportunity to raise the issues **again** within Colleges have been very useful. It is important to keep issues alive in organisations. In FE we have become used to some initiatives being only 'flavour of the month' whilst others are quickly assimilated and become usual practice. The general level of awareness of disability issues in colleges is now much greater than it was at the beginning of the Inclusive Learning initiative, 10 years ago, but the turn over of staff and changing nature of the groups accessing further education means that these messages have to be regularly repeated and re enforced.
- Confirmation that the fluid nature of part time staff makes it very difficult to ensure full knowledge re referrals and support available. Lack of opportunity for part time staff to attend training. (Out of 350 invitees to a PAID training event with lunch etc at Greenwich, only 22 were able/ interested to attend)
- A review of the impact of the Inclusive Learning Champions project at Lambeth has highlighted the need to ensure that there is clear accountability

and measurable outcomes when trying to embed work of this kind across a whole organisation. Champions were required to produce termly reports on activities undertaken and to liaise directly with the Head of Department/Schools for the curriculum area they were working in to ensure that the whole management team was aware of what was happening on a day to day basis. It was also important to take account of the additional time it would take for these managers to see people.

7. Useful sources of advice

- other sites - staff from one site attended training at another, materials being developed are likely to be transferable across all sites.
- Working with other Colleges which have a broadly similar population/intake has been useful.

8. Key messages for staff development

- Successful projects need to be supported from the top down in order for real shifts in organizations to happen.
- 'One-off' staff development sessions have their place but how developments are followed through in the long term is what makes the difference. This is a model which is often used with middle managers but not so common with teaching staff. Longer term projects delivered in smaller chunks, with time to consolidate in between seem to be most effective, particularly where there is a 'champion' or other key link person available to discuss small changes with on a regular basis.
- Change seems to happen most effectively where there is a gradual but consistent push which keeps being reinforced. This is where the two year project was an advantage.
- Simple ideas are often best and are far more likely to be taken up i.e. clear laminated etiquette sheets for reception staff.

DDA training needs to be embedded into initial teacher training / included in staff induction sessions and be linked to teaching observations / appraisal etc. New standards for teaching (replacing old FENTO standards) need to be devised to take this into account and to emphasis the huge benefits in terms of access that improved use of technology in the classroom can have.

9. Finance

Sites used the finance available from the project in a number of ways and in all cases the project was also supported by funds from the colleges. The majority of the funding was used to either fund release time for staff to complete the administration of the project – complete reports, attend meetings and training events etc and to fund the development of production of resources.

10. Future Work

Many of the changes that will promote the best educational opportunities for people with disabilities are those which are running alongside the learner focused ethos being promoted by colleges. Each site views the action research project as part of

the wider developmental activity of their Colleges and will hopefully be able to make use of what has been achieved when looking at Disability Equality Action plans.

7. Further comments

Despite the time pressures all project sites felt that the work undertaken had been worthwhile and would certainly under take further work of this kind if available.