



Disability Discrimination Act Phase 2 Regional action research projects

Executive coordinator final report

Project title: Developing a whole organisation approach to staff development involving learners

Region: West Midlands

Executive Coordinator: Hilary Allison

Organisation: Warwickshire College

Sites: Warwickshire College, Zenith Apprenticeships, Royal National College for the Blind, Shropshire County Training

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The main criterion for including projects on this website is that they are all developmental or action research projects undertaken as part of DDA: taking the work forward. The projects aimed to help providers implement the DDA and to improve practice to meet the requirements of learners with learning difficulties and disabilities more effectively. They do not necessarily reflect good or best practice.

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**West Midlands Regional Project
A whole organisation approach to staff development involving learners**

1. Name and Executive summary

Regional project Co-ordinator Hilary Allison Warwickshire College

Organisations involved in the project

Shropshire County Training (Trevor Hedges & Kay Smillie) WBT

Royal National College for the Blind (Iris Corfield & Anne Towner) Specialist FE

Zenith Partnership (Donna Pender) WBT

Warwickshire College (Pam Clothier Katherine Skudra Barbara Port & Hilary Allison)
FE/HE

Executive Summary

Involvement in this project has been a very worthwhile experience for all of the sites who have taken part. There have been many difficulties with workloads, change of job roles and illness.

Meeting deadlines has been difficult for many but it is a credit to the dedication of those involved that 4 of the 5 sites who were initially involved have managed to complete, although the final report from one of the sites has not yet been received. One of the strengths and interesting aspects of the group was their diversity;

- student cohort, ability/disability, residential, full time and part time provision
- size of institution, number of learners and staff, single and multiple site operations
- accommodation,
- the difference in operation related to funding mechanisms covering WBT, General FE Specialist FE and E2E.

This diversity has enriched conversations and understanding of other “sectors”. Initially it was difficult to see any link or thread through the diverse projects as each site had identified very specific activities linked to their needs, their learners and intended outcomes.

A regional perspective has emerged, that is that the projects complete the cycle from building a development programme, identifying person specific training related to job role, developing a training package for students and staff and finally a system to mentor and support in the workplace.

All of the projects have commented on the value of involving the learners

2. Major Focus

2.1 Shropshire County Training

To develop through consultation a training program that would give an experiential training program for staff and students

- To research the obstacles that learners with disabilities face and to establish what their experiences were and to develop ideas about what issues were most important to include in staff training and development,
- The research to include a large number of learners with a variety of disabilities.
- To complete case studies to included a wide range of disabilities.
- To record all evidence was plus an evaluation of planned activities
- Use the information in the development of the staff training session to highlight the areas to be concentrated on.
- To develop activities that provide a variety of obstacles to impact on people's mobility, spatial awareness or sensory perception.
- A questionnaire was developed to provide thorough discussion points relevant to the organisations activities and asked participants' 'what would you do?' This also allowed us to focus on etiquette, behaviour and communication.

2.2 Royal National College for the Blind

To develop an annual staff development program through consultation with students

The major focus of the project was to

- Review existing methods and investigate new ways of obtaining learner feedback, with a particular focus on providing information for Staff Development
- Review and evaluate the previous annual programme and in consultation with CMT, plan and implement a Staff Development programme which anticipated and responded to the needs of current and anticipated learners. The programme will need to react to changing training needs and to the demands of a changing learner base.

The anticipated outcome of this was a rolling staff development programme recognised and valued at all staff levels across the college.

In both areas RNCB aspired to extend and improve communication channels with the learners and staff.

As a college which specialises in the education of learners with a visual impairment, the majority group would be a minority group in sector colleges. Part of the aim in this project was to challenge, and encourage learners to challenge, the stereotypical view of disability. The trend in Specialist Colleges is that more learners now are accepted with additional impairments or with challenging behaviour, so there are often have learners who have an impairment(s) in addition to Visual Impairment e.g. Hearing Impairment, physical impairment, autistic traits, or who are from a BME group – some of which may prove more challenging in group dynamics, others may have issues

common only to their particular 'group'. There are therefore minority groups within learners with a visual impairment – which is normally recognised as a minority group. This creates complex issues when trying to elicit information by accepted “norms” i.e. focus groups and surveys

2.3 Zenith Partnership E2E

To develop a buddying program to enable employers to better support those trainees with disabilities

The major focus of this project was

- To develop learners, employers and colleagues understanding of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA).
- Encourage employers to access the training already being offered to benefit their understanding of DDA and enable them to support trainees in the workplace in addition to give both parties a broader understanding of their rights and responsibilities.
- To further develop employers to fully understand confidentiality and reasonable adjustments as recommended in the trainees Educational Psychologists report enabling full discussion in the trainee review
- The project would be an opportunity to discretely address the identified issues, knowledge of DDA, through innovative means i.e. developing a buddying system for trainees.
- enable the development of on going targets to support the learner as agreed by the Educational Psychologist that could be reviewed as part of the learner's standard review
- To develop a more focused confidential discussion on trainees needs and effectively widen the participation of this group of learners

2.4 Warwickshire College

To develop grids which clearly identify the appropriate DDA training for both teaching and support staff

The main focus of the project was

- To clearly identify the training that was needed for all staff to exceed compliance with DDA
- Ensure that those who have worked closely with DDA fully understood the implications of the act for all staff and appreciate the breadth of knowledge needed.
- Develop a grid to clearly identify training needed for both teaching and support staff at all levels within the organisation enabling managers during review and development to advise their staff on the most appropriate training for their needs
- To analyse data, conduct focus groups and consult with user groups to ensure that the training being delivered was fully addressing some of the complex and specific issues for students with LDD.
- Use all current research being undertaken to feed into the project and the college DED
- Audit training being delivered

3. Progress

3.1 Shropshire Training

Initial research ensured that the training programme would address the needs of what may be termed minority impairments and conditions and covered an age range from 16 to 52 years old both male and female. The conditions included

- severe dyslexia, dyspraxia and poor social skills
- EB (epidermis-bulosa) a skin disorder resulting in the loss of her fingers and toes and causing some restriction of mobility
- a particular wheelchair user, following a stroke 5 years ago resulting in slow speech and weakness in arms and hands
- a student with a very high IQ but quite severe dyspraxia, spatial awareness, communication difficulties and a speech impediment
- a learner computer course with a severe visual impairment
- a student with curvature of the spine and dwarfism syndrome on a computer course
- a non-independent wheelchair user with severe learning difficulties who is unable to communicate verbally. Who visited the centre with a carer,
- a student recovering from ME (myalgic encephalopathy/ chronic fatigue syndrome) and mild dyslexia undergoing an apprenticeship

Props were developed and purchased to simulate the conditions analysed Furthermore a learner session on disability has been adapted from the staff session to meet learner needs, involving similar activities however far less time is spent on the impact of DDA and a greater focus on communication and etiquette.

One of the difficulties perceived is that care must be taken that learners are not allowed to treat the exercises as a joke and consider disability amusing. The sensitivity and seriousness of the issues addressed must be emphasised.

Learners must be clear about appropriate behaviour during the session and awareness raised about how many people in the group could have a disability that others may not know about, and other people in the training centre that they do not know. They are also asked to consider people's lives outside the centre, their families, friends etc and the likelihood of disability there. The issue of disabled learners in the group and ensuring they are not disadvantaged or uncomfortable in the session is necessary to consider.

3.2 The Royal National College for the Blind

- Much of the project time was spent in developing communication techniques to elicit information from this very diverse cohort.
- Focus groups have been recognised by the college as being a way of eliciting feed back from the majority of the learner body. Conversely the group dynamic is not inclusive for learners with Asperger's / Autistic traits or hearing impairment. Written questionnaires have been trialled in the past, but the stress

caused to many learners has resulted in a move to an interactive group discussion.

- Through working on this project it is recognized that certain “Focus Groups” need to be conducted on a one to one basis, if there is to be meaningful consultation
- There is recognition and a greater understanding of students who have multiple impairments and that a variety of consultation techniques need to be used
- One of the outcomes of earlier focus groups highlighted the need for staff training in assistive and enabling technology. This has been acknowledged as an issue for some time and a number of approaches have been used to encourage staff to develop / update skills. A new approach based on a carefully worded survey of staff ICT competence was devised and an innovative programme drafted for those staff who work with learners who rely on assistive technology being targeted as high priority for training.
- The consultation process has ensured the training sessions delivered to staff comply with the needs of the **current** student body

3.3 Zenith Partnership E2E

- All the main targets have been achieved within the action plan. There has been a great team effort to roll out the new initiative at two of main sites available to learners with additional support needs
- The project manager is far more confident after discussion with employers and students that reasonable adjustments in the workplace are being made. Furthermore, employers are much more aware of the legal duty that the DDA imposes and how they can address individual needs specifically in terms of reasonable adjustments
- The E2E teams are stating that they can clearly see how the buddying system adds value and supports learners in their work placements.
- A further target was identified half way through the project to generated a training video for colleagues and employers as a training resource
- The overall benefits for the programme are: increased disclosure rates, retention and progression rates.
- The benefits for employers are: opportunity to engage in good practice, opportunity to add value to a young person’s life and the opportunity to work with possibly future employees.
- The video is an excellent training resource for learners and staff

3.4 Warwickshire College

Two grids have now been completed

- Training modules for Academic Staff comprising 52 titles
- Training modules for Support Staff comprising 40 titles
- Training exercise for identifying training needs

Additional issues progressed

The process was started by a disability analysis of student cohort. This enabled the team to identify if there were any gaps in the training offered to staff. It appeared that all aspects of disabilities that are recorded in the MIS system were covered although there were some areas identified that needed a more focused / specialist approach, particularly in the area of Deafness and Visual Impairments. Both of these issues have recently been resolved.

A deaf Support Unit started operating in September 2005. Eight staff have been employed to satisfy the needs of students. Thirty students are now receiving specialist support. In addition the staff will also develop training courses for staff, students and fee economic courses.

Through the project arrangements have been made with the RNIB to deliver staff training in January on visual impairments. The team are aware that the number of students with visual impairments enrolled at the college is lower than the national average and that this needs to be addressed.

Without doubt the focus on the project enabled the team to identify the specific gaps

4. Successes and challenges

4.1 Shropshire Training

- A major success of the project has been the development of a learner session on disability that has been adapted from the staff session to meet learner needs. Involving similar activities however far less time is spent on the impact of DDA and a greater focus on communication and etiquette, which is essential within the workplace.
- A second activity has been introduced. The learners are asked to carry out a mini audit of the training centre to look at accessibility. This focuses the learners on the social model of disability which they can then compare with the individual model established in an earlier exercise. The film, 'Talk' is also introduced and discussed, highlighting the DDA's requirements for meeting the needs of disabled people through the social model.
- Learner involvement and feedback has been essential in the continued development of both staff and learner training. The learners bring a variety of different issues to each session and they are fed back to the training coordinator to inform staff.
- It has been identified that on certain occasions meetings with individuals may be required to establish how they feel about the session and what involvement they feel is appropriate. It may sometimes be considered appropriate to deliver the session on a 1:1 basis to provide the support needed.

4.2 Royal National College for the Blind

- RNCB has a particular challenges arising from the fact that it is a relatively small residential college. Many staff have a high level of specialism and cover

more than one role, with no obvious cover for absence or staff development. Additionally they may work in more than one team. Part time, hourly paid, residential care, catering and maintenance staff working to different rotas which creates a challenge for attendance at staff development activities, timetabling and organizing meetings with learners

- The pilot grid of staff development and training needs was developed through consultation with learners the list was cross referenced with the recently updated database of staff roles in the college organisational chart. The topics to be covered were discussed and prioritised with selected colleagues and management.
- At an early stage in the project it was identified that staff needed to update their ICT skills and assistive technology. This has been identified in learner and lesson observation. A training course is to be trialled which will address ten key competencies described at Basic, Intermediate and Advanced skill levels. These meet with the support needs highlighted by learners throughout this project on different levels / courses of study.
- An annual calendar will benefit all staff to plan their personal development with minimal effect on learner contact time, and has been designed to meet the disclosed needs of a diverse group of learners, all of whom have special needs.

4.3 Zenith Partnership

- The main successes are that the buddying system has been successfully rolled out and learners with additional needs are now fully supported in their workplace. The system is straight forward.
- The buddying system is then set up the learner's workplace to ensure that the learner's employer is fully aware of the support that the learner is accessing at college. This information will enable the employer to make reasonable adjustments in the learner's workplace. The Educational Psychologists feedback and recommendations are discussed with the learner's permission in their workplace with the learners work buddy. Recommendations made by the Educational Psychologist are implemented and reviewed. This process is central to the buddying system effectiveness. This process appears fairly straight forward and ensures that everyone working with that young person is aware of the learner's support needs.
- The main challenge was generating the training video which on the surface appeared very straight forward. This target was added to the original action plan, generating the training video was very time consuming. Having watched the video that further time will need to be spent to ensure that the sound levels are of a higher quality. This is some thing that will require further attention beyond this research project.

4.4 Warwickshire College

- The process has identified the vast range of training that needs to be stated and included as “DDA” training. . It has been a revelation as to just how many diverse training sessions are included to date in the grids.
- The charts will prove extremely useful in the staff appraisal process ensuring that managers and staff understand whether the training offered is appropriate for their job role. It will enable the managers to be more confident and prescriptive in their recommendations
- Some of the covert issues are not always obvious to staff or managers when appraising the options. Many staff do not realise that they are actively involved on a daily basis with DDA issues that arise. Therefore some training offered may not appear to be relevant to them. The charts will reinforce the breadth of training that is needed for all staff, to comply with DDA
- Examples of this are; for driver’s disclosure and confidentiality is deemed to be essential; for administration staff data protection specific to DDA. is also deemed to be essential
- The training is evaluated and a monitored through HRD this means that lists of attendees can be drawn off so that Managers will know what training their staff have taken specific to DDA4 and empower them to make recommendations
- Part of the success of the project to date, is the team and their job roles, which in terms of DDA compliment each other: - Integration Manager, Health and Safety Manager, Diversity and Opportunity Manager and a Student Liaison Manager this ensures all aspects relevant to DDA are covered. It is crucial that these personnel work together to ensure a balanced menu of training that includes all aspects of DDA which in reality are closely linked rather than just the particular, for example Health and Safety. All of the team members are now able to discuss cross issues related to DDA and recommend courses of action to colleagues
- Analysis of MIS disability data in turn has become a challenge although not in the context of the project, the fields recorded for LSC returns are inadequate for DDA The categories have now been extended to ensure compliance, this will enable full analysis of all disabilities
- The need for specific data from the staff data base has proved problematic in consequence a new system has been identified and purchased to comply with the Disability Duty this shortfall of information was discovered whilst developing the project
- A recent training addition has been developed following the project teams analysis of complaints the college has received from students and their advocates. The session “knotty Issues” has been developed by the curriculum team, targeting staff that recruit and tutor, addressing the issues highlighted in the research. Not surprisingly the issues were around;- Entry Criteria, Medical Condition, Special Equipment, Personal Equipment, Personal Care, Behavioural Issues, Disclosure, and Admission

5. Outcomes and benefits

Three of the projects are easily transferable to other institutions

The buddying system has now successfully been rolled out, learners who have been supported by their work; buddies speak very highly of this support.

Employers are more informed about this group of students and are now more willing to take on this cohort of trainees because of the enhanced understanding and structured support

The staff and student training program developed by Shropshire was praised by many who took part in the activities at the regional celebration focusing on simple tasks with simple equipment the message was very clearly understood by those present.

However it must be stressed that this type of experiential training must be handled with extreme delicacy and delivered by an experienced trainer

The grids developed by Warwickshire College will ensure that staff are aware of the complexity and the issues that underpin the DDA and what is relevant to their role.

This also acknowledges that it is everyone's responsibility and that no one person can be an expert in all aspects of disability.

It has been acknowledged that some discussions should be led by those with particular expertise of the particular impairment. **There is a need for impairment specific "Specialists" who can fully explore issues with students**

RNCB's research into addressing the complexities of a minority group i.e. visual impairment and the minorities underlying this **made the participants extend their understanding of addressing the whole issue and not just the obvious impairment**

A key aspect of the project for all sites has been that Focus group data will contribute to the SAR / Quality Improvement Action planning within teams and inform the DED

It has been recognised that a high profile staff development program increases the awareness and inclusivity continues to improve the program content (lesson observation stats)

One of the unexpected benefits has been the collaboration between projects sites to share training

Pre project Warwickshire College was working with another specialist college to improve their inspection grades in Equality and Diversity, in return the dedicated Aspergers College provided training at the site on a cross college training day.

Whilst discussing this collaborative arrangement one of the sites stated they were desperate for this training, they were invited to the next cross college training day to meet the trainer. They and have since arranged training for staff at their venue.

In return for the introduction and training a session was given on Visual impairment.

All sites were invited to attend a training session for a Senior Managers given by Bond Pearce solicitors on The New Duties.

All this at no cost to any of the organisations

Without doubt the involvement in the project has enhanced the understanding of the complexity and difference that different sectors are wrestling with

6. Emerging themes

- The realisation by all sites of the complex issues that everyone is facing on a day to day, no two issues are the same and that there is no quick fix to many of the problems
- The willingness shown by those with disabilities to discuss and advise about their specific issues initially was a surprise; all you have to do is ask. If the person has confidence that things will improve they are happy to discuss ways that can be developed to assist their progress
- The constant need to develop new training programmes as the DDA develops. Continual, planned, stimulating staff development is crucial for staff to feel confident that they have the knowledge to fully comply with the act.
- The importance of consulting students in a way that is most appropriate for them
- The title “focus group” has become a catch all phrase which does not adequately cover the needs of many learners with multiple disabilities. Historically issues were focussed around the main disability through working on this project all institutions have become very aware that the secondary disabilities or culture maybe a more inhibiting factor to eliciting information and that a “focus group” approach is not applicable to all
- Training students to enable them to understand their rights and responsibilities for themselves and others and involving them in the training of staff and other students.
- The importance of involving, training and supporting employers to enable them to “employ” those with additional needs
- The increasingly complex needs many have “labels” which are new, time needs to be taken to understand how and if we can support them,
- The complexity of gaining meaningful information from students with multiple disabilities and the necessity to train individual staff to specialize in eliciting information from those with specific (secondary) disabilities i.e. autism, dyspraxia
- It is crucial to train staff to have the confidence to refuse places to those who pose a threat to themselves, other students or staff (or know who to contact) if their needs cannot be fully met
- It is increasingly apparent that The Inclusion Manager, The Health and Safety Manager and a range of other staff cannot work in isolation. A whole college approach needs careful planning
- The importance of statistics and consultation in broader terms, by looking at the complaints received and student surveys it is possible to analyse whether specific training needs to be developed on a particular topic. Has the institution got the reserves, personnel to act promptly?
- Fully Involving students in the process by , MIS, in addition to focus groups or one to one, team meetings and committees
- Having the support of Senior managers who value the work and the involvement of people external to the project i.e. LSC external advisories, advisors and Governors

7. Useful resources and data

- All sites agree that students were their most valuable source of information (this was a theme that emerged throughout the project)
- All sites made extensive use of MIS systems to identify the percentages of specific disabilities and backgrounds
- Community advisors and disability groups made valuable contributions
- As regional co-ordinator I found the discussion with other co-ordinators valuable
- Acknowledgement is given to the support given by the LSN team in particular Al Lockhart, Christine Rose and Sally Faraday and to Irene Coton of Warwickshire College who co-ordinated regional events and chased up reports

8. Key messages

Without doubt the key element to the success of the project has been **the willingness by students to openly discuss their needs** and become actively involved in the development of the various aspects of the Regional project. This discussion has given an insight into the real issues faced by some on a continual basis and through this discussion has given a greater understanding of how we can address the issues and support them in their learning

Understanding that a secondary impairment may have a greater effect on the students' ability to communicate in a "focus group", to enter meaningful conversation. Subsequently trying to develop strategies on how to resolve these very individual and difficult obstacles.

The key message is **that there is no set, right or wrong way** everyone is very individual in their needs and therefore alternative strategies need to be developed with each individual.

Managers need to be aware that "good practice" takes time

The process **cannot be a one off** as each year there is a different cohort of students with differing impairments.

The importance of setting up **support systems for students and training for employers** to enable them to engage and comply with DDA

It has also been recognised that the involvement of Senior Managers, Governors and representatives of the LSC is crucial, giving added perspective to the development of the project.

9. Finance

Much of the finance was spent on travelling and accommodation with train fares varying between £60 and £140 per person this took the majority of each sites allocation. Accommodation was required by two of the sites prior to the National meetings as it was impossible to arrive before midday by train.

Regional meetings were very successful each site hosted in turn although again the travelling involved was fairly arduous and costly.

These meetings were very successful not only in terms of the project but also to see how institutions were operating and other issues were being developed.

Warwickshire College used the Regional pot to host a Christmas meeting with a superb lunch, also a final celebration day at the same venue.

Other funding was used to buy project time and secretarial services

10. Future Work

Due to the short time span all of the projects are in the pilot phase and during the next academic year it will be possible to evaluate their effectiveness.

All participants are working to produce their Disability Equality Statement by December, much of the findings will feed into this document, particularly under the headings of consultation and staff development.

11. Further Comments

Strengths of the West Midlands Team

All the sites had an involvement from senior Management and Principals that was an excellent mix of specialities which gave breadth to the discussions, three sites had more than one member of staff involved which ensured that Regional meetings were well attended and at least two people working on the project

Shropshire:

- 1) The Director of Training and Equality
- 2) The Training Manager

RNCB:

- 1) The Staff development Officer
- 2) The Disability Co-ordinator

Zenith:

- 1) The training Manager E2E

Warwickshire College

- 1) The Diversity and Equality Manager
- 2) Inclusion Manager
- 3) Health and Safety Manager
- 4) Student Liaison Manager

- The three of completing sites were Grade 1 at inspection, the other was a very strong Grade 2. Three sites were Beacon Colleges. These indicators show a commitment by the institutions to develop their provision and strive for excellence
- The willingness to share materials and information some additional to the project brief
- Meetings scheduled at each site which gave a greater understanding on background to the specific project, it was also very enjoyable
- All sites had been involved in previous LSDA projects and understood the rigours and expectations on developing further initiatives
- The LSC Coventry and Warwickshire Disability Manager played an active role and attended meetings
- Warwickshire College governors attended meetings when on site and were also present at the final “Celebration Day” when all projects were given one hour to present their findings (report sent to LSN attached)

Issues

- The National meetings were all sited in London the venue was particular difficult to access from North of London. There were particular problems for the rural sites who on occasions had to spend the previous evening in London this, the time factor and high rail cost meant that the members did not attend all the National meetings
- The training was a repeat of the previous project inputs and whilst of value to those who had not been involved in previous projects felt to be superfluous to those who had
- There appeared to be confusion as to which templates were being used for reporting purposes
- An engagement criteria for sites applying to be involved the projects would have ensured that the manager was at the right level in the Institution to gain support from CMT and had sufficient time, not a full teaching role, to develop the project applied for.
- Currently there is a finite pot which is not satisfying the increase in demand for support needs as the act becomes more widely understood, particularly with the increase in students with complex difficulties, this appears to be more of an issue in rural areas. It is hoped that the LSC will resolve this anomaly

Disability Discrimination Act: taking the work forward Research and development projects 2003/05

Project Title: Developing A Whole Organisation Approach To Staff Development Involving Learners

West Midlands Region

On Wednesday the 10th May the West Midlands project team had a great day at the Warwickshire College Moreton Morrell Centre.

The campus is the Centre for the Agricultural and Equine programmes

<http://www.warkscol.ac.uk/equistudy/lifeatcollege/hall.asp>.

The Hall is situated in over 400 acres of countryside approached through a drive of huge Wellingtonian Trees it really is a very impressive venue which is always heavily booked for weddings and functions. An added bonus was that it was a beautiful day.

I am sure the venue brought out the best in us all and the presentations of each project one hour per site were very well received by our visitors and guests. We were delighted that Sandra Durkin from the LSC was present as she has been very supportive of the project from its inception. We also had Governors Senior Managers and representatives from disability groups. A wonderful lunch was enjoyed by all

Moreton Hall is a listed building with very impressive steps to the entrance we were able to use our chair lift which is discretely sited at the side of the building all our disabled guests were very impressed, they were not so impressed when the lift stopped working when we were moving the last guest down!!

Fortunately Roy is our disability advisor and made full use of the experience to make notes and recommendations to the installation company and our advisories at a later date, another disaster turned into an opportunity.

We had invited students to attend from all the participating sites and it was unfortunate that on the day none of them were able to come even though incentives were offered We all felt that we had given our projects a full airing and sharing useful feedback was welcomed from our guests.

It really was a great day