



## **Disability Discrimination Act Phase 2 Regional action research projects**

### **Site final report**

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

**Region: Yorkshire and Humberside**

**Organisation: Leeds Thomas Danby**

**Executive Coordinator: Clare Macdonald**

**Sites: Leeds Thomas Danby, Huddersfield Technical College, Park Lane College, Leeds College of Technology, Morley Street Resource Centre**

**June 2006**

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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# Disability Discrimination Act: taking the work forward

Phase 2 Action Research Project 2005/6  
Site Final Report June 2006

Leeds Thomas Danby F.E. College

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## **Leeds Thomas Danby F.E. College Final Report**

### **1.0 Project Manager:**

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### **2.0 Section 2 Major focus:**

The focus of this Action Research Project has been to draw together and develop the many disparate strands in College relating to disability discrimination and the DDA in order to develop a College wide approach to inclusivity. The Project has involved the expansion of DDA related training across the College and also the development of new training; it also included the development of the College intranet to support training and development, and finally, it aimed to introduce and develop strategies in order to assess the impact of making reasonable adjustments within the College community.

### **3.0 Progress so far:**

A Working Group initially was set up to agree, scope and oversee the Action Research. An Action Plan was developed and progress periodically reviewed.

Members of the group have also met individually to promote individual aspects of the Action Plan.

The Working Group included the College's Learning Support Manager, Quality Manager, Inclusive Learning Manager, Coordinator of Support for Students with Additional Needs and Professional Development Manager. Other contributors to the work included the Dyslexia Team, Entry Level Programme Leaders, members of the IT team, Learning Resource Centre staff and, essentially of course, the students.

The Project has facilitated the further development of a College-wide approach to inclusivity. The Action Plan has enabled the work of the Inclusive Learning Manager and the Coordinator of Support for Students with Additional Needs to liaise effectively on common issues and develop a cross college approach and 'joined-up action' where appropriate.

The Project also was able to dovetail into another LSDA project running in the College, which focused on the assessment of disclosure policies relating to the Duty to Promote Disability Equality, led by the Coordinator of Support for Students with Additional Needs.

Staff were involved in three aspects:

- the mechanisms for gathering information regarding prospective learners' disabilities and medical care needs
- methods of encouraging disclosure
- ensuring the College complies with the Data Protection Act regarding disclosure and confidentiality

This combined approach has helped to raise the profile of DDA related issues within the College as a whole.

#### *Training and development:*

- Staff development has included initial training about the DDA and has also involved targeted training in specific areas. Seven initial DDA training sessions have been provided during the course of the project. New staff attend DDA training as part of their induction process and a total of 440 staff have been through DDA training.
- The training has been developed to become more 'hands-on' and to raise awareness of a range of disabilities through team 'games'.
- Activities were piloted through the Project to encourage staff to engage more with the issues of disability discrimination. For example, a 'feely bag' exercise involved staff attempting to guess the contents of a range of fabric bags containing all kinds of different objects which are used to support learners with additional needs – from keyboards to optical reading pens. The teams then had to identify and handle a range of equipment and aids and discuss how they could be used in classroom and workshop situations. This hands-on awareness raising approach has now been adopted as part of the College's DDA training and has proved very successful both within in-service training sessions and at dissemination events
- A further training activity was developed for awareness raising purposes. This is a team exercise where a number of groups have a set of cards with a range of disabilities on and each group must match them to a list of reasonable adjustments for learners. The activity generates much discussion and learning both within and between groups
- Targeted training is directed at vocationally specific groups within College. Training this year has involved separate training events for Facilities staff, Admissions staff, Hospitality staff and Arts and Media lecturers, including part time staff
- A new one day training programme open to all staff but targeting the Mental Health agenda specifically, was successfully introduced
- Extensive information about the nature of unseen disabilities (Hidden Disabilities: The Teachers Kit)\* has been placed on the College intranet so that it is now freely available to both staff and students. Hidden Disabilities: the Teaching Kit also includes a learner profile proforma which Learning Support staff will use to contribute to the individual Student Profile.

\* The term Hidden Disabilities is used as it is the title of the package, though the College is introducing the term Unseen Disabilities.

#### *Reasonable adjustments:*

In order to help assess the impact of reasonable adjustments, a series of semi-structured interviews was conducted. Learners from a range of courses have been asked about their experiences and impressions of the enrolment, admissions and induction procedures which they encountered during August and September 05. A cross-section of learners were selected including students with dyslexia, learning

difficulties, students with mobility issues, blind students and students with other unseen disabilities.

The interviewer was a member of staff but had no direct links with any of the programmes or students who were interviewed. The interviewer consulted with Programme Leaders to explain the project and to ascertain times when students would be available. The Programme Leaders and Coordinator of Support for Students with Additional Needs also helped to identify students. It could be argued that this approach could skew the resulting interview results as the Programme Leaders might select learners who were the most positive about their time in College. On the other hand, Programme Leaders also could have selected learners who would express complaints in order to help flag up concerns and requests for more support, resources or equipment.

The advantage of 'pre-selecting' some students for interview meant that it was possible to identify students where support was an important issue. In a short project, this proved very helpful as it circumvented the need for the interviewer to interview students where there were no apparent outstanding issues.

As a counter-balance to students suggested for interview by Programme Leaders, the interviewer also met other students for an interview where the opportunity arose. It was evident that in many of the interviews, the interviewees contributed their most reflective and incisive points toward the end of the interview. The participant may take some time to feel comfortable with the interview process and holds back critical information until he/she feels more relaxed and feels that it is safe to voice opinions. It may also be that as the interview is coming to an end, the interviewee becomes more anxious to get major points across.

Similarly, some staff from a range of departments were asked about their personal view of provision and support for students and staff with disabilities in a short semi-structured interview. This helped to assess staff responses to reasonable adjustments, and also provided information about training and development. The sample was not large enough for any generalisations to be made, but this could be an area which would be valuable to develop.

#### *Reviews:*

A series of reviews to establish progress to date were instigated. These encompass a review of procedures relating to:

- special examination arrangements;
- confidentiality for learners;
- reasonable adjustment training.

Some of these reviews also fell within the remit of another LSDA project headed up by the Co-ordinator of Support for Students with Additional Needs, Margaret Hearn.

A review of the College enrolment process has also led to the re-design of the application form and the application process to enable the fast-tracking of learners with clearly identified support needs.

#### **4.0 Successes and challenges**

##### *Successes:*

An outside organisation, 'People in Action' was contacted to provide training and awareness raising in mental health issues. 14 members of staff attended. The day was judged excellent and participants felt it was extremely valuable. (Information obtained from the candidates' post course evaluation forms). The challenge now is how to effectively cascade the information and experiences gained to the wider College community in order to promote a non-stigmatizing community. The College is also looking beyond the awareness raising level at how to provide follow-up training, and possibly to look in more detail at positive support and appropriate responses to mental health issues in the classroom situation.

##### *Challenges:*

One of the challenges which the Project has revealed is 'getting it right at the micro-level'. Progress on the policy and procedure front appears to be developing well. However, the closer monitoring which the Project has facilitated has revealed aspects of the College which affect staff and students with disabilities in individual ways. For example, when building maintenance is taking place, perhaps engineering work on a lift, a section of corridor will be cordoned off with tape for health and safety reasons. While this benefits most College users, it can present a problem to blind students who, unwittingly, can run into the tape. Another example might be some art students painting a long mural on a corridor who unintentionally helped to create a hazard to blind or visually impaired learners by leaving cloths or paint pots on the floor.

With increasing numbers of independent students and visitors who are blind or who have a visual impairment now attending college, a communication system may need to be set up in order to inform these students of any unusual obstructions or route changes within the College. This is proving to be challenging especially where the obstructions are often of a temporary, urgent and unanticipated nature, such as lift repairs.

Another issue is IT related. The College wishes to increase the amount of support material available to staff and students on the intranet. Getting information designed and up-loaded can be time consuming.

At the moment, the main web site is Bobby compliant, (ie it complies with recommended national guidelines for accessibility, readability etc.) but a vibrant 'student friendly' magazine-style information page on the intranet is not yet fully compliant. A plain text version is available but an evaluation by students with disabilities, particularly students with dyslexia, suggests they would prefer to access the designated 'funky' version if it could be in larger, clearer print.

A major challenge is the volume of training and cascading of training required to cover all the requirements of learners and staff in regard to the DDA. The College's externally provided IT system does not currently identify differentiate full and part time staff. This presents a challenge to the Staff Development team who have to set up and maintain an additional database to ensure that all part time staff in community venues (where more staff are likely to be on short or limited hours contracts) are also provided for in terms of DDA training. Plans are in hand for a modification to the system.

Training for students may also be another challenge. Students already are introduced to concepts of disability discrimination through equal opportunity topics which are raised during the formal College induction period. Further training to build confidence may be relevant. It has been observed, for example, that students 'hang back' if they seen a blind person walking hesitantly in the public areas, rather than checking to see if any assistance is needed.

Project members interviewed a few members of staff about how effective they thought the college was in supporting both students and staff with disabilities. Although this was not a major focus of the Project, it became obvious that there would be many valuable views that could and should be collected, in order to help the College gain a 360 degree overview of DDA related issues.

### **5.0 Outcomes and benefits**

The Project has increased the College-wide awareness of DDA and associated issues through staff development.

Improved procedures have resulted from the various reviews of College processes which have been prompted by the LSDA project. Improvements to enrolment procedures, application forms and disclosure procedures benefit learners and frequently improve the administration of the procedures for staff by clarifying and simplifying them.

The establishment of a Cross College working group involved in the Project has enabled information about developments in various areas to be pooled more effectively than before. It has enabled the identification of areas of strength and areas which need to be developed further within the College. This increased connectivity has enabled a more holistic approach to taking the work forward.

Another spin-off has been that DDA related issues have actually provided an important and interesting common theme for staff from different sections of the College. Over-arching issues can contribute to the development of teamwork and shared values.

The one-to-one interviews with learners and staff contributed information that could not easily have been derived through any other method and revealed the importance of obtaining and acting on feedback at a micro-level.

Being a member of a regional network has proved both beneficial and enjoyable. Meetings have been hosted in turn at each organisation, and have promoted a better understanding of both the common and different issues faced by each organisation when implementing the DDA.

### **6.0 Emerging themes**

The implementation and embedding of the DDA provides a serious, challenging and significant common aim for all members of the College.

Continuing vigilance is not just about major items but also about micro-aspects which colour the learners' day to day experience - such as litter bins out of place in corridors,

desks which are not high enough/counters not low enough, heavy doors, maintenance obstructions or unemptied waste bins in toilets for people with disabilities.

The value of external presenters to kick start a training theme and to lend it 'gravitas' has been noted (such as training about mental health issues).

The DDA is a serious issue, but enjoyable, stimulating material and thought provoking delivery can still be used when dealing with serious issues.

Information placed on the College Intranet is valuable (such as Hidden Disabilities: the Teaching Kit) but needs to be flagged up. Its purpose must be explained clearly and it must be easy for staff and students to navigate to it and around it.

Qualitative data, in the form of semi structured interviews with learners and staff, provide a valuable alternative source of data by which to assess the effectiveness of reasonable adjustments.

## **7.0 Useful resources/ sources of advice**

Hidden Disabilities: the Teaching Kit

Access for all DfES 2001

ESOL Access for all 2005 DfES

Basic Skills for Adults with learning difficulties or disabilities DfES 2003

Ferguson S (2002) Student mental health; planning guidance and training. Lancaster University  
<http://www.studentmentalhealth.org.uk>

Mental Health Handbook –  
People in Action Training team

## **8.0 Future work**

Staff development in the area of DDA related issues and in supporting learners with disabilities is an on-going theme for both new and existing staff.

Further extensive training about the Disability Equality Duty is scheduled for Staff Development days in July 06.

The College hopes to continue obtaining insights into the day to day experiences of staff and learners by conducting regular semi-structured interviews and reviewing the outcomes of the interviews.

An Additional Support/Learning Support enquiry desk staffed throughout enrolment sessions will encourage learners who may not have disclosed their additional support needs previously, to discuss any needs they have in a confidential setting. The value and effectiveness of this provision will be monitored and reviewed during Autumn 06.