



EVALUATION REPORT



PROJECT TITLE: Integrating Disabled Employees (IDE)

PROJECT REF NO: ESF/0203/090

LEAD ORGANISATION: The Lancashire Colleges Consortium

Overview of the Project Activity and Partners

The Lancashire Colleges Consortium led this project. The delivery partners were Lancaster and Morecambe College, Blackpool and the Fylde College, Bury College (who replaced Eccles College who withdrew because of delays and issues relating to inter-LSC working) and Burnley College. The project built on earlier work undertaken utilising ESF from a direct Government Office approved project. Bury College and Burnley College were new to the area of ESF supported activity undertaken within this project.

The need for the project was justified in the application by reference to:-

“Public Policy (see Opportunities for All, HMT Oct 2001) recognises that all who wish/would benefit from the opportunity to work should be supported in access to/sustainability in jobs. NOMIS data for Lancashire show that a significant proportion of those of working age who are inactive are disabled (DDA current disability/work limiting disability). The project responds to this agenda and the needs of this cohort, providing opportunities both young people starting out in working life and adults, including with acquired disabilities. A particular barrier for people with a disability is obtaining sufficient experience of work to convince future employers of their capabilities. This project, to address this issue, lays particular emphasis on supporting individuals into work experience and beyond that into “real” work.

And by

“. DfEE research (Employment of Disabled People) found a clear correlation between employment and qualifications amongst disabled people. It showed that (amongst people with disabilities) the economically inactive have, on average, left full time education earlier and have obtained considerably fewer qualifications than the economically active. Only 8% of economically inactive disabled people have a degree or higher qualification, compared with 24% of economically active disabled people; by contrast, 59% of inactive disabled people have no qualifications at all, compared with only 29% of economically active disabled people. Where they are in work disabled people are more likely than their non disabled counterparts to work in manual and lower skilled occupations and less likely to be employed in managerial, professional and higher skilled occupations. More severely disabled people are concentrated in lower level occupations.

This project was designed to offer support to individuals with disabilities. A significant factor inhibiting the employment opportunities of people with disabilities is their inability to demonstrate their capacity for “real work”. This project therefore undertook initial vocational training and then offered the opportunity for supported work experience in order that people with disabilities could demonstrate their capacity to undertake work.

The project could be divided into a number of phases as far as any individual beneficiary was concerned:
Individual needs assessment,

- an action plan
- a vocational and “work readiness” programme
- Supported placement in a work or “real work environment”
- Review of skills learnt in (this activity was undertaken in partnership with employers)

- Enhanced support into and in employment.

Each individual's programme had a number of targets – that is agreed milestones and the objectives were those of the individual beneficiary. Programmes on occasion included the development of basic skills and of core skills, including ICT skills these skills being linked where possible to vocational activities.

The previous experience of some of the project partners had already indicated what the areas of potential difficulty were likely to be :

- Local liaison with voluntary and statutory agencies – a potential support network in theory but sometimes in practice a disjointed, uncoordinated impediment to progress
- Attitudes of employers to taking people with some form of disability
- The reasonable and unreasonable fears of parents and carers
- Anxieties of some of the beneficiaries concerning fear of failure and of less secure environments.

Much of the activity of the project focussed on these areas and “milestone” reports (attached to this evaluation as an annex) real to what extent partners were successful in their attempts to overcome the issues raised above.

The overall activity perceived by beneficiaries is shown above and parallel to this the Colleges undertook a further set of activities both to support the individual beneficiaries and to ensure the delivery of the project to the specification agreed with the Learning and Skills Council.

The process of implementation and delivery had a number of elements :-

1. Contract clarification between the Consortium and the Lancashire Learning and Skills Council. This process was somewhat protracted because the system was new to both sides and because of the need for Lancashire LSC to co-ordinate activities with Greater Manchester LSC,
2. A “Project definition workshop” with all the partners to develop an agreed understanding of the project, to discuss issues and to develop an overall implementation plan. This activity should have come after contracting with the LSC but because of the protracted nature of that process took place early within the project life.
3. The establishment of local “delivery” or “implementation” groups. The form of these groups varied from College to College but typically involved a project manager or leader, curriculum staff from vocational areas and those areas specialising in support of individuals with some form of disability and representatives of local agencies.
4. The formation of a local delivery plan giving volumes, proposed achievement dates and outcomes. When these were agreed with the Consortium they provided the basis of the formal contract entered into by the Consortium with each project partner.
5. Local delivery. This comprised two types of activity:
 - Activity directly aimed at skills development and activities supporting the beneficiary (including mentorship)
 - Activity directed at working with employers and external agencies. This work included liaison with DEAs, Supported Employment, employers, Social Services, Parents and Carers, and with local voluntary and other organisations which support people with a disability.
6. Regular project meetings between the Consortium and staff delivering projects within the Colleges. These meetings had a common format:
 - Overall review of progress against targets identifying any shortfalls in local delivery
 - Reports from each project member of activity and progress on delivery of targets – including inputs from specialist administrative staff and teaching staff
 - Discussion of issues and contingency management
 - Progress report (including on occasion the distribution of draft reports) on milestone activity.
7. Local evaluation activities – including obtaining feedback from beneficiaries and employers
8. Final project dissemination activity

The sequence of activity was different in each of the partners:

Blackpool and the Fylde College recruited 32 beneficiaries to the project (target 25) and recruitment commenced in Feb 2003 with the majority of beneficiaries on board by May 2003.

At **Lancaster and Morecambe** College 44 beneficiaries were recruited (against a target of 27) and recruitment began in September 2002 with the bulk of beneficiaries on the programme by the end of the year. However a few further beneficiaries were enrolled on the project on a roll on roll off basis.

At **Bury College** the target of 22 beneficiaries was achieved early in the projects life with 21 beneficiaries recruited in September 2002 and 1 in October 2002.

In **Burnley** recruitment was much later with recruitment starting in May 2003 with another in-take in October 2003.

The project proposal anticipated that TUC Learning Services, would “carry out parallel activities to raise the

awareness of workplace learning reps on key issues around securing inclusion in workplace learning and train workplace reps in securing good practise in creating a positive environment for disabled people in the workplace". This anticipation was not fully realised – the LIF/LID activity on which that expectation was based was reduced in scale and volume and eventually concentrated on increasing learning reps understanding of ethnicity issues. The training for learning reps was just beginning as this project came to an end.

Achievements of the Project

What is perceived as an achievement very much depends on the individual or group making the judgement but from any perspective this was a successful project.

1. From the perspective of achieving the set targets in terms of recruitment the project was successful. Target recruitment was 21% over the target for the project. Other targets for outputs and outcomes were hit or exceeded except the number of beneficiaries gaining qualifications, which was 20% off target and number in work or further study that was 4% off target – a marginal shortfall.
2. In terms of engaging employers the project had notable successes. The "stock" of employers willing to accept individuals with disabilities was increased and, more importantly employer attitudes were changed. The fundamental concern prior to employers being involved in the project was a concern with the things that someone with a disability would be unable to achieve. With involvement in the project a number of employers were able to recognise that for any employee there were limitations to what an employee could achieve but equally there were areas where employees with or without a disability could succeed (indeed on occasion) excel. Staff working on the project recognised throughout that it was important for employers to share in success and for their input to be acknowledged. Although not initially intended as a feature of the project, the project supported the changes for a number of employers that are required to put into operation the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). The project put employers in contact with expert staff from Colleges aware of the implications of the DDA and a number of employers benefited (c.f. a dissemination event on the DDA held at Blackpool and the Fylde College) from expert advice on changes that they could make to ensure that they observed the detail of the Act.
3. For Colleges themselves there were notable "internal" achievements. When questioned a number of College staff from different Colleges noted the impact that the project had had on internal procedures and on the creation of effective liaison within the College. Certain Colleges (notably Lancaster and Morecambe) had long established mainstreaming links within the College and a set of policies within the College that supported integration of people with disabilities into the mainstream life of the College but such procedures and protocols were not in place elsewhere. In so far as this project helped to breakdown any college ghettos for staff and students and create a more integrated experience the project helped both individual experience and a lasting experience. Early in the project a number of staff involved in the project spoke either of their initial unease or unease on the part of colleagues in working with people with a disability. That this unease was reduced or removed is a project achievement.
4. An important achievement for each of the delivery partners was the securing of enhanced working relationships with local statutory and voluntary agencies. It could be argued that these should have already existed and been exploited. In a number of instances those relationships did already exist but in others they did not appear to be well developed prior to project commencement. Whichever was the case the opportunity to work closely together and to focus on achieving particular outcomes was perceived by project partners as very useful and as enhancing relationships based on a better understanding of what could, in reality, be achieved by each of the local partners. It should be noted at this point that personal relationships and their impact were crucial in achieving outcomes. A number of the project staff commented either on the effectiveness of local partnership actions with particular agencies or the ineffectiveness of certain agencies. Much of this could be explained either in terms of all parties having a full understanding of statutory responsibilities and commitments and the willingness of agency staff to focus on the benefit of collaborative action for "their" clients. Where professional responsibilities were seen within the context of collective activity progress was much greater than when staff worked solely on pursuit of their own organisation's agenda.
5. Whatever the achievements of the project in achieving the set objectives and volume outcomes these achievements are put into perspective by the transformational impact on the lives of some of the beneficiaries. Case study material is appended to this evaluation which illustrates this effect graphically.

Areas of Innovation

The areas of innovation that were identified in the initial project proposal were :-

1. Through continuing emphasis on building integrated provision, and especially new/additional work to

tackle the critical sustainability in work issue, preparing and supporting continued learning, mentoring/networking, and work with the workplace and workplace mentors, including learning reps.

2. Through College, Hub co-operation in testing the potential of adaptive technology in local, community and workplace centres to meet the need for flexibility including where health related issues interrupt the continuity of programmes.

In relation to the first of these such innovation certainly took place. All too often College provision has been oriented solely towards the achievement of qualification outcomes and to “retention” issues. Skills that individuals need to gain and retain employment have been neglected in favour of this core mission and responsibility has sometimes been taken later by Job Centre Plus. Whilst such a division of responsibility, in so far as it responds to current funding (and funder) constraints and imperatives, is understandable, in the case of people with disabilities such a disjunction is a serious impediment to their progress and achievement. This is not only because it is more effective for an integrated approach to be adopted but also because benefit issues may impede or prevent appropriate later interventions. This programme, through supplying both input and support to individuals and to employers, ensured both integration and opportunity.

Although this was a feature of the project greater work is needed to fully test this area of innovation. Colleges utilised adaptive technologies and IT/ITC based learning programmes on an individual need basis. Although evidence suggests that this use of IT/ITC was supportive Colleges did not adopt it as the key innovation to test but rather as an enabling device. In order that a full evaluation of impact could be undertaken it would have been necessary to adopt a proper experimental methodology with a matched control group not having available to them that type of supportive intervention because of the potential detriment to individuals and the need that would have arisen to restrict the support available from the project Colleges did not adopt this approach. What was done was extensive use of adaptive technology, where required, to enable individuals to benefit. Each of the Colleges had extensive access to a wide range of adaptive technologies including CCTV, text readers, voice software, switches, height adjustable desks etc. for use with the beneficiaries and reports from staff show how this software and hardware was used to promote a reduction in disadvantage experienced by individual because of their disability.

Although these were the areas of innovation identified prior to the commencement of the project further innovation was identified as the project progressed. This innovation fell into two areas:-

Internal organisation suitable to promoting the access of individuals to mainstream provision and to work.

The linkages created through promoting the DDA with firms led to promotion not just of the project but also of ancillary training on issues such as health and safety. This was innovative in approach and in the involvement of different College groups and specialisms in delivering to firms.

Identification of Areas of Good Practice and Areas for Improvement

Good Practice is the subject of one of the Milestone reports attached to this evaluation as an annex.

Areas for improvement.

The areas for improvement that were subsequently noted in relation to project delivery were limited. The project was generally considered to be effective in reaching its target groups and provided appropriate interventions. Issues around the creation of local partnerships were few and are noted above.

In terms of improvement of College systems of support, as has already been noted, the project demonstrated the effectiveness of specialist work placement support officers both in terms of support to firms and beneficiaries. Overall the issue of purpose is one which is central to Colleges – as indicated above- Colleges often feel that their purpose is to achieve a particular vocational outcome, a perception reinforced by the funding methodology and by the inspection regime (including SAR mechanisms) however if the ultimate benefit to the beneficiary is seen as the prime purpose of the intervention then the (currently unfunded) support into work becomes the prime focus. As observed elsewhere, with students without a disability the transition from study to work is either accomplished without further intervention from statutory organisations or with the support of Job Centre Plus. With students with disabilities additional support on transition can be useful and a general area of improvement will be to implement such systems.

Lessons Learnt

Broadly the lessons learnt from this, very effective project relate to the following areas:-

1. The need for local agencies and organisations to work effectively together rather than each pursuing its own targets. For this to occur two conditions need to apply
 - Understanding of the roles, functions and activities of staff within each organisation as well as of the targets and organisational drivers.
 - A willingness to support others in their actions rather than single-minded pursuit of project goals. The purposive action that is sometimes applauded by managers may be counterproductive if such an approach fails to engage other agencies and individuals in support of mutually beneficial outcomes.
2. That current funding methodologies do not enable the kind of actions undertaken by this project and that if the effectiveness of this project in delivering the sought for outcomes is to be replicated additional funding beyond that available through mainstream is necessary.

Dissemination of Good Practice including Details of Dissemination Materials Produced

Dissemination was undertaken through :

- 1) The project implementation group who had access via the regular meetings (and the minutes/notes of those meetings to the experience of other College partners
- 2) Through a projects dissemination event held in January 2004 at Myerscough College
- 3) Through the distribution of the "Best Practice" and other Milestone products in hard copy format
- 4) Through the publication of the products and this report on web sites.

Case study

Case study material is included in the Milestone annex.

Views of customers and/or partners

Each of the delivery partners undertook reviews of the effectiveness of the project and of the views of partner organisations at local level. These included a beneficiary satisfaction survey. Results from the partners activities reveal high levels of satisfaction in relation to content, delivery style and support.

These local surveys will be augmented in mid 2004 with a follow up survey by the Consortium. Where this reveals issues or examples of good practice they will be followed up with the beneficiary and with the delivery organisation.

Comparison of how the project dealt with Information Communication Technologies, Equal Opportunities and Sustainability

In relation to "Cross Cutting" themes:-

Equal Opportunities

The Consortium stated in its original application that

"This project is focused on disabled people and thus has a very direct relationship with achieving equal opportunities in access to and success in learning/access to employment. We in addition recognise and take specific action to support people who face a further level of disadvantage"

and that

- “Gender – other things being equal, disabled women are less likely to be economically active than disabled men.
- Severity of disability – economic activity rates are lower among those with disabilities where the effects on day to day activities are continuous rather than intermittent (the effect is more noticeable among women than men).
- Ethnic origin – for disabled women (but not men) the likelihood of economic activity is lower among those of non white ethnic origin.
- Living with a working partner increases the likelihood of economic activity (especially for men).
- Having dependent children significantly reduces economic activity rates among disabled women.”

Through the projects work with both employers and beneficiaries there has been a noticeable increase in awareness as well as a direct impact on individuals.

On ICT

We have already made the observation above that adaptive IT/ITC was used within this project to reduce the level of disadvantage experienced by beneficiaries caused by their disability. The use of IT/ITC for communication between partners and for ensuring the effective administration of the project was also a key element as was the publication of guides etc for dissemination via electronic media. As observed in the opening of this evaluation IT was also the subject of some of the training so that individual beneficiaries had knowledge of wand, indeed the ability to use IT (at a fairly basic level in most cases) where such knowledge and skill was required in their work/work experience placement.

On Sustainability

The key intervention in relation to sustainability made by this project relates to the full and effective use of human capital. By the projects intervention not only were individuals supported (it could be argued in a couple of cases that their lives were transformed) but also that through action with employers to raise awareness of how they could respond to the DDA, to the needs of their existing workforce as well as to the needs of our beneficiaries we promoted sustainability.

In other ways “normal” training activities took place within environments that had been audited against the “action for sustainability” benchmarks.

Sustainability of the Project’s Activities (Exit Strategy/Mainstreaming)

As indicated above the core activities of this project are outside the scope of mainstream funding at present and therefore the projects exit strategy was always to integrate those aspects of the projects outcomes that had been effective but not to look for full replication.

The key outcome of the project that it is susceptible to mainstreaming is the integration of work preparation activities for people with disabilities into mainstream vocational provision. This is planned to be undertaken in the 2003/04 and 2004/05 academic years by project delivery partners.

The partners will not only integrate the best practice features indicated in the mainstream guide but will also explore whatever additional funding routes are/ become available so that core activity of this project can be maintained.

In addition to the above it must be noted that the project has a positive “heritage” in terms of a number of soft outcomes that will be susceptible to integration into mainstream provision. These include

- Greater skills amongst some College staff
- Improved internal integration within delivery partners to support mainstream integration of people with a disability.
- Increased numbers of employers willing to offer work placement
- Increased numbers of employers well informed about employing people with a disability (including the implications of the DDA)
- Better understanding on all sides of the interests and activities of voluntary and statutory organisations at local level and thereby enhanced support services.

Details of tools used to evaluate the impact of the project

This evaluation was undertaken in line with the project application. Specialist expertise was used to construct this report based on

- Hard data derived from statistical returns. These were, themselves, based on ILR data.
- Minutes of and observation of local and project implementation group meetings
- Interviews and discussions with staff employed by project delivery partners
- Discussions with Consortium staff
- Data on student satisfaction etc. collected by delivery partners.

SIGNATURE:

Name Jon Piggott

DATE 29.01.04