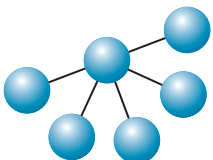


**Evaluation of  
Learning Challenge Fund  
Final Mini Evaluation Report**

**Enable South West Wales  
Neath Port Talbot College**



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Enable South West Wales - Neath Port Talbot College

### Background and aims

- 1.1.1. The Enable South West Wales project aimed to research the demand for, and provision of, learning for people with disabilities in South West Wales. The first phase of research was intended to provide data that would later enable the project to produce and implement a strategy for increasing participation, improving provision and raising engagement of disabled learners in employment and in the community.
- 1.1.2. The project was run by Neath Port Talbot College. A tutor who worked with students with special needs was seconded to manage the project and co-ordinate the research. The project ran from November 2002 to September 2003, and was followed by a dissemination event, held in January 2004.
- 1.1.3. The College identified the need for the project, noting that, although there were already good examples of provision for learners with disabilities within South West Wales, they still did not reach all potential learners. Specific examples included learners who become disabled after school age; people recovering from long term illness; and people whose disability leads to a lack of motivation and confidence to engage in learning. The project co-ordinator also noted that existing provision was not 'joined up' and there was little formal networking between providers, meaning they could not learn from each other. Moreover, disabled learners often found it hard to progress through learning provision into employment. The project aimed to research these issues to find out levels of demand for learning, barriers to entering learning, and gaps in current provision, and identify recommendations for improvements.

### Project structure and funding

- 1.1.4. The project was designed in three phases. Phase 1 was a research phase, looking for example at the learning needs and demands of disabled people; legislation; resources and sources of funding; existing provision of learning and support; reports and strategies; and aspirations and barriers to learning and employment. The research phase also involved research with learning providers, support agencies and employers, and to gain examples of good practice in collaborative provision for disabled people.
- 1.1.5. It was intended that this phase would be followed by Phase 2, in which a strategy would be developed and disseminated and new provision piloted. The College envisaged a further implementation phase after this.
- 1.1.6. Neath Port Talbot College received £31,200 from the Learning Challenge Fund to finance Phase 1. However, funding was not available for Phases 2 and 3, so the project was terminated when Phase 1 was complete.

## Project objectives

1.1.7. The project's objectives for Phase 1, as set out in the bid to ELWa, were to:

- compile a set of data on disabled people; the demand for learning; levels of employment; existing provision of learning and support; resources and sources of funding; legislation; existing reports and strategies – all of which would provide a solid basis for action in Phase 2
- work with a sample of disabled people to find out more about their aspirations, needs and barriers to learning and employment
- work with learning providers and support agencies to discover their capacity, resource needs, training requirements and to facilitate the creation of a series of networks across SW Wales ready to deliver the services identified at the end of Phase 1
- work with a sample of employers on their awareness, concerns and resource needs in employing disabled people
- collect and document examples of good practice in collaborative provision for disabled people and to disseminate these as appropriate, in order to achieve some 'early gains' in the project
- consult with key players in the production of a report with recommendations

## 1.2. LCF Evaluation Methodology

1.2.1. Shared Intelligence has been commissioned by ELWa to evaluate the Learning Challenge Fund on an ongoing basis. This comprises a mini evaluation of each of the LCF projects, as well as an assessment of the LCF's progress as a scheme.

1.2.2. The LCF evaluation programme began in 2003. The first stage of the evaluation reviewed the process of setting up and administering the Learning Challenge Fund. Project mini evaluations began in 2004. Most projects commenced activities in this year, although some were contracted earlier and, as they were short term projects, had been completed by 2004. The Enable project was one of those that was completed by the time the external project evaluation commenced. This mini evaluation is based on:

- a meeting with Principal of Neath Port Talbot College in August 2004;
- telephone interviews with ELWa contract manager and project manager at NPTC in April 2005; and
- review of project documentation and correspondence, including initial bid to ELWa and project report.

1.2.3. The possibility of consulting with delegates who attended the project's dissemination event was also considered, but this was not undertaken for two reasons: first, the event took place over a year ago; and second, doing this may have raised expectations that the project could have been continued in some way. However, this means that comments on the impact of the project are tentative and mainly made on the basis of conversations with the project co-ordinator.

## 2. PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

### 2.1. Project activities

#### Target group

- 2.1.1. The project focused its research on needs of and provision for people aged 16 and over who had disabilities including any of the following: physical disability (including those who had been in an accident leading to disability); sensory impairment; learning difficulties; mental health problems; chronic illness; or health problems that limited their daily activity. The research was limited to the South West Wales region.

#### Research activities

- 2.1.2. The bulk of the research was carried out through mainly quantitative survey questionnaires, which also included some open questions. These were aimed at providers of services for people with disabilities (including support services; this was not restricted to learning providers) and at users of these services.
- 2.1.3. The project team distributed 59 questionnaires to providers of services for disabled people age 16 and over. 44 were returned to the research team.
- 2.1.4. 'Users' – the disabled people themselves - were accessed through support organisations (statutory and voluntary) and through education, training and employment agencies. The project faced some difficulties in gaining contact details for disabled consultees owing to data protection regulations and the fact that many people with disabilities are not 'known' to the system, since this requires that they disclose their disabilities.
- 2.1.5. 308 'user' questionnaires were distributed, and 184 replies were received. When broken down into different areas and types of disability, this is a relatively small sample. The research could perhaps have been improved either through distribution of a greater quantity of questionnaires or through carrying out more face-to-face research in order to get more detailed data.
- 2.1.6. Having said this, several face-to-face interviews with providers and some service users were also carried out by the research team, although the report does not make clear how many face-to-face interviews were undertaken. These interviews were used to build case study examples of good practice, three of which were included as detailed appendices in the report, with shorter examples incorporated throughout the main text of the report. These examples were identified through the questionnaires sent to learning providers. The project team discussed which examples should be researched further and visited as many of these as was possible to do in the time.
- 2.1.7. The research team also reviewed existing statistics and documentation on numbers of people with disabilities and employment rates within south west Wales and the Neath Port Talbot area. These statistics were included in the introduction to the report and in an appendix. The legislative context was also summarised in the main report.

## 2.2. Project progress

- 2.2.1. Apart from issues around timing, the project progressed according to plan.
- 2.2.2. The project initially underestimated the length of time the research would take – the original bid suggested this would be complete within 5 months. In fact, the team found that devising the questionnaires and getting clearance for these took much longer than expected. When carrying out the research, the team had to alter its methods as it found the best way to contact disabled learners would be through support organisations that they were in touch with. This was not the first approach that the team took. These methodological changes to the research approach are discussed in more depth in the project's Enable South West Wales report and would be important learning points if similar projects were to be carried out in future.
- 2.2.3. Writing up the project and putting the report together took a further 3 months, as the report had to be produced in large print, in Braille and translated into Welsh before it was published.

## 2.3. Project outputs

- 2.3.1. The main output of the project was the research report, 'Enable South West Wales', published in September 2003.

### **Scope and findings of the report**

- 2.3.2. The research report found some gaps in the training of staff at provider organisations. This included awareness of legislation such as SENDA (Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001) and the DDA 1995. The research was completed prior to the DDA Amendment, which came into force in October 2004.
- 2.3.3. The research also indicated that there was a lack of support workers trained in British Sign Language and that more organisations needed to recognise that deaf people needed not only to communicate with their support workers, but with their peers as well.
- 2.3.4. There was also a clear lack of transition options for some people post 19 years, who had learning difficulties and/or complex difficulties.
- 2.3.5. Other barriers identified by providers included a lack of inter-agency working and referral; perceived negative attitude of mainstream learning providers to community classes (e.g. details of these are not included in student entry packs); fear of disclosure of disability because of negative attitudes of others; lack of specific provision for people with mental health problems; and the cost of improving physical access in older buildings.
- 2.3.6. Service users with disabilities often felt that they faced negative attitudes from peers and staff, and that staff lacked skills to deliver to their particular needs. The report looked at 'common barriers' that the research had uncovered, and included illustrative quote from users and providers to show how these affected them, and/or had been overcome.

- 2.3.7. The report identified a number of examples of current good practice from providers in South West Wales and beyond.
- 2.3.8. The report did not, however, provide a comprehensive picture of the types and scope of learning opportunities available to people with different kinds of disabilities or draw any conclusions as to whether current provision was adequate. There was also no discussion of whether people with disabilities were less likely to access learning provision than people without disabilities and whether there was a need to drive up demand. Finally there was little discussion in the report of employers' needs, experiences and concerns regarding employing people with disabilities, although this had been one of the project's objectives. The project set itself very broad objectives, which given the timescale and the availability of data, were unrealistic. Nevertheless, the findings that the research did uncover were regarded by all consultees as of very high quality and usefulness.

### Report recommendations

- 2.3.9. The report recommended the following:
- the formation of small regional network groups involving multi-agency representatives. The aim of these networking groups would be to decide on common issues to be addressed in widening participation and social inclusion;
  - extension of links with local day centres to widen participation in learning and training for service users;
  - the design and agreement with a range of agencies and disabled people of a format for disclosure of need that is not seen as discriminatory; and
  - the establishment of a South West Wales 'user' forum group. The aim of this forum group would be to research and identify the barriers to learning and training within the South West Wales region, with the view of expanding throughout Wales.

## 2.4. Dissemination

- 2.4.1. The report was disseminated through a conference, held in January 2004. By this time the college was aware that the project would not be funded for a second phase, so the conference aimed to discuss future activities with deliverers and stakeholders. This event was funded by the college, rather than through the Learning Challenge Fund.
- 2.4.2. Over 65 delegates attended the conference, representing 35 local organisations. The conference included talks by providers and sharing good practice that had been identified through the project.
- 2.4.3. The conference also incorporated workshops that looked at how the agenda could be taken forward. Suggestions included:
- providing awareness training for front line staff;
  - setting up a strategic SWW partnership group;

- involving training providers, voluntary sector, adult education, social services and DWP;
- prioritising actions that did not need money;
- using funds that were already available;
- joint collaboration – working with joint funds on a county basis;
- including all who wanted to be involved (e.g. businesses);
- using schools as physical resource and expertise base; and
- conducting an audit of what provision was available.

## 3. PROJECT OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

### 3.1. Outcomes and benefits

3.1.1. According to the project co-ordinator, immediate project outcomes included:

- identification of gaps in provision and barriers to participation in learning, as outlined above;
- development of closer relationships between providers of learning for people with disabilities;
- identification of good practice that could be shared between providers;
- generation of enthusiasm and new ideas on how to take provision forward.

3.1.2. The dissemination conference was seen as particularly successful. As well as being well attended, the conference enabled providers to get together and discuss the issues raised in the report. As the co-ordinator put it, "we found we were all reinventing the wheel". Delegates at the conference confirmed the recommendations of the project report, which had proposed that networking groups of learning providers should be set up.

### 3.2. Longer term impacts

3.2.1. As stated above, the project did not progress to its planned second and third phases. Nevertheless, there were some longer-term outcomes of the project. Again, in the view of the project co-ordinator, these included:

- raised awareness of the issues among learning providers in South West Wales, and better knowledge of each other's activities; and
- greater enthusiasm and motivation in the sector.

3.2.2. There are also some examples of initiatives that have developed as a result of the LCF project. Neath Port Talbot College has expanded its own outreach programme in response to the research findings. The project co-ordinator has been involved in an advisory capacity with a project developed by the local mental health team, using Objective 1 funding. It is also possible that there are other examples of activity developed as a result of the project that this mini evaluation was not able to uncover.

3.2.3. However, the project has not resulted in the co-ordinated approach to developing provision in South West Wales that was originally hoped for. This had made the project a negative experience for the project co-ordinator, who has now gone back to her previous job, which "feels like demotion". It was felt that the project led to many good ideas and enthusiasm, which was then not taken forward, and therefore, that some effort was wasted.

## 4. CONTRIBUTION TO LCF OBJECTIVES

### 4.1. Aims of the Learning Challenge Fund

4.1.1. This section looks at the extent to which the Enable project contributed to the aims and objectives of the Learning Challenge Fund. In summary, the key objectives and success criteria for the LCF, are as follows:

- innovation and new approaches in learning provision;
- a strategic approach at national, regional and local levels;
- collaboration between learning providers leading to improved learning networks;
- improving access and widening participation;
- delivering more and high-quality learning outcomes from existing resources; and
- effective mainstreaming of successful projects.

4.1.2. The contribution of each project towards the aims of the LCF is being assessed, partly to see whether the projects that were funded 'fitted' with the LCF's aims, and partly to see whether the LCF as a whole achieved its aims. Therefore, this section summarises both the intentions of the project ('fit'), and the achievements of the project in terms of the LCF aims.

#### **Innovation**

4.1.3. The first phase of the project was not in itself innovative, as it was simply a research study, using conventional survey methods. However, it was a clear aim of the project to uncover good practice that could lead to development of innovative approaches to provision of learning opportunities for people with disabilities. Therefore, the project proposed innovative outcomes but did not actually achieve these in its first phase.

#### **Strategic approach**

4.1.4. By building up networks between learning providers, uncovering duplication and identifying gaps in provision, the project made a clear contribution to fostering a strategic approach to provision of opportunities for disabled learners in South West Wales. It was the project team's intention that this approach could later be rolled out to the whole of Wales. Had the project been taken further it would have also fitted with local and national strategies around widening participation and promoting equality of access and opportunity, as well as helping to address economic priorities such as increasing skills levels and reducing economic inactivity.

#### **Collaboration**

4.1.5. The project did not set up specific collaborative activities between learning providers (although later some such activities did develop), but through carrying out the research, the team helped to raise providers' awareness of one another's work, both within South West Wales and beyond. This culminated in the

dissemination event, which was well attended, with over 65 delegates from 35 local organisations.

### **Improving access and widening participation**

- 4.1.6. The project fundamentally aimed to improve access and widen participation through identifying learners' needs and gaps in current provision, which would be addressed through subsequent stages of the project. For example, the research identified some gaps in provision (such as for deaf learners) and also carried out research into the reasons why disabled learners find it difficult to access mainstream provision.

### **Delivering more and high-quality learning outcomes**

- 4.1.7. Again, the project intended to lead to development of more learning opportunities through its second and third phases, but this outcome was not achieved during the project's lifetime.

## **4.2. Sustainability and mainstreaming**

- 4.2.1. As with several of the other shorter-term Learning Challenge Fund projects, the Enable team had hoped that further funding from ELWa would be available to take the project forward after the research phase. The intention to progress to a second and third phase of the project was included in the original bid, and the College was advised at the time of bidding that there would be further rounds of LCF funding, although it was not promised further funding. After Phase 1, the College approached ELWa for funding for a co-ordinator to continue building networking activities, but this application was declined. The main reason for this appears to be because there were no subsequent rounds of the Learning Challenge Fund and funding simply was not available.
- 4.2.2. The College considered other funding options, including Objective 1, but found that these all required projects to be undertaken on a very local basis and it was not possible to build a project that would cover the whole of South West Wales. As the core aim of a further project would have been to build networks across the region, these other funding options were not pursued.
- 4.2.3. The co-ordinator still feels that there is a need for providers to network and share their knowledge and experience. Several examples were raised around projects taking place in other parts of Wales that could be introduced in the South West if there were someone with time to go and research them and let people know what was going on. It was pointed out that tutors to special needs learners rarely had time to build their knowledge around developments in the sector and new ideas. The value of a co-ordinated learning network around learners with disabilities would be to link up providers and stop them from constantly 'reinventing the wheel'.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND LEARNING POINTS

### 5.1. Conclusions

- 5.1.1. The Enable project was regarded as very successful by the College and project co-ordinator, and seems to have raised enthusiasm and 'struck a chord' within the sector. The report uncovered some important gaps in provision, barriers faced by disabled learners and areas of good practice. Although the report was not as comprehensive or robust as the original bid suggested it would be, the project team was constrained by a short timescale and lack of available data. The project was perhaps a bit over-ambitious but nevertheless resulted in findings that were beneficial to all involved.
- 5.1.2. Feedback on the dissemination conference (which was funded by the College and not LCF) suggests that providers of learning for people with disabilities did feel that there was a need to learn from one another, and supported the report's recommendations to set up networking and joint working within the sector.
- 5.1.3. The project seemed to fit fairly well with the LCF objectives, at least in its intentions. However, the eventual outcomes that would have contributed to the LCF aims were not achieved for the most part, because the project was not continued.
- 5.1.4. As with some of the other LCF projects, the Enable team had expected to be able to access further funding to carry the project on. However, the LCF was stopped and no further bidding rounds took place, so this turned out not to be possible. The project would have benefited from an alternative exit strategy. As it was a research project, and it was not clear what the research would find or recommend, ELWa could not have committed to further funding until after the first phase in any case. The project and ELWa could have considered future funding options in more depth before the project started. This might also have helped to guide the research in looking at areas that could have attracted follow-on funding, from one or more sources.

### 5.2. Learning points

- 5.2.1. From the experience of the project itself, key learning points would be that: :
  - adequate time is needed to be allowed to set questionnaires up and agree them with all relevant parties;
  - accessing learners with disabilities through support organisations they are in touch with is an effective way of researching this group;
  - there is considerable potential for providers within the sector to learn from each other; and
  - there is a need for more provision for learners with disabilities.
- 5.2.2. The report could have been strengthened by surveying a larger sample of beneficiaries and supplementing the quantitative survey with qualitative research with users, to allow a wider number of issues to be uncovered. Although the questionnaire included open questions where people could write in answers, it is often easier to gather this information through conversation – especially as at least some of the group being surveyed would have been likely to have literacy

difficulties.

5.2.3. In terms of ELWa's role in managing the contract, learning points would be that:

- expectations needed to be more carefully managed at the start of the project, so that ongoing funding was not assumed – it is not ELWa's fault that this funding was not available, but the project should not have assumed it would be; and
- possibilities for exit strategies should have been thought through at the start of the project, particularly as the outcome of the research could not be predicted. Considering possible outcomes and potential funding streams at the start could have meant that the disappointment around the termination of the project could have been avoided. Since the project was short term, lasting less than a year, researching potential funding streams for various continuation options would have been possible.