Guidance for colleges and other post-16 education providers on implementing the Disability Discrimination Act

learning and skills development agency

Working in collaboration

enhancing provision for disabled learners by working with others

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Acknowledgements

Introduction

Maximising influence, gaining a better understanding, extending skills, stretching resources and getting the work done are all good reasons why practitioners and organisations engage in partnership or collaborative working. Based on evidence from 20 action research projects led by the Learning and Skills Development Agency in partnership with NIACE and Skill, this report on collaborative working explores the issues for education providers. It is divided into four sections. Part 1 examines what collaboration is, why it is important and how, in any kind of collaboration, it is essential to put the learner at the centre. Part 2 examines six different kinds of collaboration:

- Information sharing
- Collaboration at times of transition
- Collaboration within an organisation
- Collaboration between different organisations
- Collaboration with parents/carers
- Networking between staff.

In each instance there is an analysis of why each kind of collaboration is important and examples of successful collaboration in these areas, which are taken both from the LSDA DDA projects and elsewhere.

Part 3 analyses some of the factors which enhance successful collaboration both at strategic and organisational levels. Finally, Part 4 makes recommendations of what is needed to ensure improved collaboration at national, regional/local, managerial and practitioner levels.

A number of terms are used that relate in some way or other to collaborative working: team working, multi or inter-agency, multi or inter-professional, and partnership working. These terms are often used interchangeably, though they have variously had distinct definitions. Writers such as Payne (2000) agree that there are clear distinctions between multi and inter-agency or professional working. 'Multi' implies that the agencies or professionals are working together but maintaining their own distinct identities, unique skills and knowledge to deliver a service under a pre-set structure. Whereas 'inter' agency or 'professional' working suggest more fluidity between those involved where adaptations are made to accommodate and share skills and knowledge.

Collaborative working can also be applied to members of the same team, for example a course or departmental team working together to solve a problem or develop a new strategy.

Collaborations may exist as:

■ a funding partnership where one or more organisations fund work that others deliver

■ a division of work arrangement, where tasks are shared among organisations according to skills or knowledge

■ shared partnerships, where one or more organisations work together sharing their skills, knowledge and resources, creating new structures of management and responsibility according to the project need.

For the purposes of this publication, 'collaboration' or 'collaborative working' will be used as the term of choice. The term is sufficiently broad to encapsulate the many combinations of working with others that exist and those that we wish to explore in this report. Because the words 'professional', 'agency', or 'team' are not used it gives us the opportunity to include everyone we think is important in our work without creating boundaries to involvement. Saying we work collaboratively should mean including the individual learner who may be the focus of the work, as well as their carers and friends as appropriate.

Why work collaboratively

The structure and organisation of most services have developed according to government organisation and bureaucratic preferences. This has created what are known as silo structures. Each specialist department, whether it is in government, a local authority or even a school or college department, works on its own policy and procedures with little reference to others. At government level we have, in the past, seen departments developing strategies to combat social exclusion, that focus on health, education, transport, unemployment or benefits. Much of this strategy and work has been focused on specific areas of work, developing the skills of their own workforce without other government departments or other workforces. At a local level, government strategy can play out in a confusing way for both those delivering services as well as for local people. So we can have, for example, a local college, a local health care trust, a housing department and the police all working on issues of social inclusion in a targeted area of social deprivation. Without reference to one another's skills, knowledge or funding priorities, it is easy to see how overlaps and gaps in initiatives may emerge: for example, the police and local college may be focusing on youth, the health trust and housing department on young children, yet unemployed adults, older people, or those with impairments or long-term health conditions fall into an initiative-less gap. This type of silo working creates problems for both the service deliverers, policy-makers and local populations.

Learning does not happen in isolation. As well as learning formally in an educational context, learners may also be learning in non-formal situations such as community activities and in informal situations within their family or with peers. People with disabilities in particular may be receiving support from a variety of different organisations. When collaboration between practitioners in these organisations does not occur, important learning opportunities can be missed. The two examples below, taken from Enhancing Quality of Life, an action research project with learners with profound and complex learning difficulties, gives examples of the detrimental situation which can occur when collaboration does not take place:

David regularly attended a social services day centre. He showed little interest in the activities and was never known to use any formal communication. He had been at the centre for many years and the staff there assumed this was his normal behaviour. In a chance conversation between a day centre member of staff and one of his residential home care workers, the day centre member of staff learnt that, during the evening, he was in fact more alert and did use some formal speech. A medical check-up was arranged and it was discovered that David had been having repeat prescriptions for several years; that his medication needed changing and was also being administered at the wrong time of day. When this was changed he was able to participate far more actively in life at the day centre.

Another example came to light when a communication therapist was attempting to create a 'communication dictionary' for a learner who had no formal speech. In discussions with his family and various organisations who worked with him, she found that he had been taught three separate symbols for expressing 'having a shower'.

Successful collaboration can take place in a variety of different ways and with a variety of different partners. It can happen between staff within an organisation or with practitioners from other organisations. It can take place with parents, family members or community groups, or it can involve networks of practitioners involved in the same area of work. Practitioners are often very aware of the barriers which impede successful collaboration, but less clear about how these might be overcome. This report will attempt both to elicit these barriers but also to give examples, both from the LSDA DDA action research projects and from elsewhere, of how people have attempted to find creative solutions to overcoming them.

Putting the learner at the centre of any collaboration

James and Nightingale (2004) suggest that the individual, in this case the learner, should be treated as a lead agency in order to recognise their moral and legal rights over their own lives. Likewise in the LSDA thematic report 'Nothing about me, without me' (LSN, July 2006) it is advocated that the learner must be intrinsically involved in developmental work, because, without learner contribution, the work could be viewed as meaningless and tokenistic (Nightingale/LSDA, 2005). It should go without saying that the first line of any collaborative work is with the learners themselves. 'Nothing about me, without me' looks at how participants in the DDA projects sought to involve learners in the research process. Similarly, the thematic report on Disclosure (LSDA 2005) examines how individual learners need to be at the centre of deciding what information about them is passed on to other relevant staff. Many of the methods used and developed in these two documents could be equally well applied to increase the extent that learners are involved at all stages and in all areas of their learning journey, including areas which involve collaboration with other practitioners or other agencies.

2 ▎ Different kinds of collaborative work

The section below lists six different kinds of collaborative work. It will not, at this point, explore in detail the issues involved in the process of collaboration; that will come in a subsequent section. Instead it will, in each instance, give a positive example of how practitioners, both in the action research projects and elsewhere, have developed positive ways of furthering this particular kind of collaboration.

a. *Sharing of information about your organisation*

The basis of collaboration has to be that organisations and individuals have clear information about how a particular organisation works and what it can offer. This is certainly not always the case. Workers on the Aasha project, a three-year action research project working with young people with learning difficulties from a South Asian background (Maudslay 2002), found that a high proportion of the young people and their families were unaware of potential provision. Information was available from these organisations, but it was not reaching them and was not presented in a way in which South Asian families could access it. The families were very clear that they did not simply need information translated into their own language. Instead they needed direct communication with someone who could explain the services on offer.

Staff working on Project 9 of the LSDA DDA projects (on Disability and Ethnicity) also realised that they were failing to attract disabled learners from minority ethnic groups. All the sites realised that they needed to work far more closely with local black and minority ethnic community groups in order to directly explain to them the services they could offer to disabled learners. In several instances college practitioners arranged to visit local community groups. Although not always easy to set up, these one-off meetings often proved highly successful. In one instance they led to the college

bus making an additional stop at a community group and bringing new disabled learners to college. Another positive example of providing accessible communication has been established by a health project in Leicester, which uses a video link with an interpreting service and signers to enable more direct communication.

b. Transition

Collaboration between agencies is particularly important at times of transition. However, as the DfES Longitudinal Study Phase Two (DfES) discovered, transition planning is of very mixed quality, with a high proportion of young people with a learning difficulty but without a statement unable to recall having had any support in transition planning. Even where formal transition planning does take place it often works as a technical exercise rather than as a process which aims to support individual learners' wishes and views. Dee, in the study she carried out of a series of young disabled people leaving school, noted how often 'decision making' has become 'an official and bureaucratic process', and that:

The need to meet the demands and expectations of the procedures has a strong influence on some professionals which led to these becoming more important than listening to the voices of young people and their parents.

(Dee, 'Whose decision, Conclusions, Limitations and Implications')

One of the LSDA DDA projects focused specifically on issues relating to transition. Sites in this project explored a variety of ways of making the transition process work for individual learners, and of enhancing collaboration between the various organisations involved in the transition process. Tamworth and Lichfield College developed 'transition passports' in which learners could record important information which they could then share between agencies. Cambridge Regional College established a 'transition forum' to improve working relationships between different agencies. Oaklands College set up a transition subgroup of the Local Learning Disability Partnership Board, which enabled learners themselves to give advice and feed into the organisation on the transition process.

Other sites in this project, and other DDA projects, focused on the important area of post-college transition. Manchester Adult Education Service set up a college leavers' multi-agency transition group to enable social services and adult education practitioners to develop the best ways of supporting learners when they left college. Another site, Joseph Priestly College, working with the DDA project on supporting adults into employment, used the project to develop the format for an action plan jointly compiled between the learner, the college and the employer to ensure that essential information was shared as learners made the transition into employment.

c. *Collaboration within a single organisation*

Colleges are often very large organisations and, with mergers, often become even larger. Adult and community learning organisations may be smaller in terms of staff and learner numbers but, at the same time, consist of many small sites spread over a wide geographical area. If disabled learners are to receive appropriate support, collaboration needs to occur not just between organisations but within a single organisation. Several sites in different LSDA DDA projects addressed this issue of disseminating information internally. It was recognised that increased specialism in the area of learning difficulty and disability could have the negative effect of making non-specialist staff feel that they had no role in providing support. Individual organisations explored different ways of ensuring that all practitioners were aware of issues relating to disabled learners both by formal staff development sessions and by the dissemination of guidance material (see thematic report on Disclosure, LSDA 2005). At times the project enabled practitioners to examine in detail where there was a need for additional guidance and staff development. For example, Liverpool College realised that ESOL staff were using the services of the Additional learning Support team far less than other areas of the college. They explored the reasons for this and arranged for specialised guidance and staff development for their ESOL staff.

d. Collaboration between organisations

Collaboration between organisations contains many challenges which will be explored in detail in the following section. However, when achieved, it can also bring huge rewards to learning. One simple but positive example is given in the QCA Curriculum Guidance for learners with learning difficulties:

A young woman is working in a supermarket and very much wants to be promoted from her current job as a shelf stacker. Collaboration between her employers and a local numeracy class enable her to use the class to gain the specific skills required for work on the till with the result that she gains her promotion.

Project 10 of the LSDA DDA projects specifically focused on person-centred planning in education. All of the sites worked collaboratively with other agencies to try to create holistic programmes of learning. Practitioners realised that effective collaboration did not just involve creating more holistic programmes for individual learners. In one case, a college revised both its assessment procedures and its curriculum offer to ensure that it was in line with current developments in the local Learning Disability Partnership Board. In another instance, a provider realised that the historical pattern of one-year courses was not the most appropriate to correspond to the general pattern of learners' lives. In conjunction with other agencies, and with learners, it developed a programme of short courses directly related to activities learners were taking part in during the rest of their time – one on interviewing skills to improve their work on creating a Gateway newspaper, one on local history, and one on the skills required to draw up a person-centred plan.

Practitioners in other projects used some of their time to explore potential partners. For example, Lewisham College was very keen to create better progression routes into employment for its learners. Practitioners had been sure that they would create their own Supported Employment project. However, after listening to a talk by a Supported Employment worker, they realised that this facility might already exist in their own borough. On making enquiries, they found that there was a local Supported Employment project and they changed their plan and instead looked at ways in which they could collaborate more closely with this organisation.

e. *Parents as partners*

Historically, post-school education has often viewed young people coming to college as adults, and has hence sometimes sought to minimise the involvement of parents. It is true that young people often have views that are different from their parents, and it is important that practitioners recognise this and do not allow parents' views to override that of the young person. However, it is also true that parents are often the people both who understand the young person and are also their strongest advocate. It is therefore important for practitioners to recognise the need to collaborate with parents.

In the Aasha project (Maudslay 2003), the project worker met one young Bangladeshi man who had just left special school. His father was adamant that he should not attend a further education college. He felt that the building was too big, his son would become lost, and there were too few opportunities for him, as a father, to talk with the staff. The college concerned had always maintained an approach which emphasised the independence of learners, but they realised that, in the light of this discussion, they needed to modify this approach to some degree. They arranged for more open days when parents could become involved and meet with staff and other learners. On sharing this with the father, he agreed to let his son attend college, where he is now happily settled.

f. *Networking*

Another type of collaboration which is essential to the improvement of practice is the opportunity to network with other colleagues working in the same area. One of the main findings of the LSDA DDA projects was the benefit gained by practitioners through entering into the process of action research. Over and again in their evaluation of the projects, they would emphasise the importance of sharing ideas with others and hearing about different ways of working. Networking can occur both in formal contexts, such as a one-off conference, or in more informal, ongoing groups. The DDA action research projects have been followed by a series of regional events at which practitioners could choose to become involved in their own regional action research project. It is to be hoped that some of these regional networks will continue and become self-sustaining groups.

A number of studies and publications have identified factors that promote successful collaborations (James and Nightingale 2003, Grewal et al. 2004). These range from factors to do with the relationship between the organisations themselves to how individuals or teams of staff work together.

a. *Collaboration at a strategic level*

Effective collaboration between agencies requires support and guidance from above. At national level, DfES and the LSC need to collaborate with the Department of Health and the Department of Work and Pensions, and take a clear lead in producing guidance as to how agencies might best work together to deliver holistic provision for disabled people.

At regional and local level too, key players need to bring together different agencies to ensure they are working together and not in isolation. In some areas, this is beginning to happen. The recent Valuing People publication, 'Valuing People and Post-16 education', gives several examples of Local Learning Disability Partnership Boards establishing subgroups which specifically bring together workers from a range of agencies to look at how education can work with other agencies to deliver the most appropriate learning opportunities to people with learning difficulties. In the examples given in the section above, too, there are instances in which education practitioners have used the Learning Disability Partnership Board as a forum for developing collaboration and creating a more holistic offer.

In the Eastern LSC Region, the LSC has taken the lead in attempting to bring together different organisations to respond more appropriately to the requirements of young people with disabilities and learning difficulties. The impetus for this came from their realisation that several school leavers were having to continue their education in specialist residential colleges far away from their homes because of a dearth of locally-available provision. In working together, the agencies realised that young people with special educational needs are subject to a range of different kinds of assessment. Working in collaboration, they devised a set of protocols which attempted to bring cohesion to these different approaches and ensure that they were all based on the principles of person-centred planning. Following on from this, agencies are working together to try to create a collaborative approach which will mean that young people with more complex needs can have their learning requirements met locally through the combined services of a variety of different agencies.

Funding

Collaborative working between agencies often breaks down over discussion about who should fund what. In a state of scarce resources, it is understandable that such disputes should occur, but they are not in the best interests either of learners or providers. Money tends to go further if it is shared, and provision which brings together resources is likely to be more cost-effective than that in which one organisation tries to do everything. This does not necessarily mean a total pooling of resources, but it does mean organisations having the flexibility to use funding jointly in collaboration with another organisation. Sometimes funding is allocated over relatively short periods of time. This creates difficulties for many projects and partnerships that aim to be sustainable, and don't want to fall into the trap of spending resources quickly. Clearer guidelines as to how multi-agency funding might be facilitated could help to alleviate the stalemate which often occurs between organisations.

b. Collaboration at operational level

Collaboration between practitioners from different agencies faces many challenges. Over time, organisations build up, often subconsciously, certain distinct ways of working. They develop their own culture and their own priorities, which might be different from the organisations they are working with. They might have very clear boundaries, and feel uneasy either about stepping beyond these or about having others encroaching on what they feel is their particular area of work. They may feel a sense of ownership about an area of work they feel they are particularly good at, and feel threatened by thinking that others might want to take it over. Such difficulties can be exacerbated by the fact that practitioners from different agencies might well be on very different salaries, and have different conditions of work. Several organisations working with people with disabilities or small community groups are on precarious, short-term funding, and may see collaboration as having the outcome of allowing other organisations to take over their role. In addition to this, the DDA project working with local black and ethnic community groups found that these groups were often approached to be part of a collaborative bid solely because the approaching organisation needed to say their bid was representing the wider community. They then found there was no accruing benefit to them and, understandably, this made them reticent about interagency collaboration. While the issues listed above refer specifically to work with external organisations, similar issues might arise in connection with collaboration within an organisation.

In 'Enhancing Quality of Life' (Skill, 2000), one site specifically focused on collaboration between agencies. The factors they list as being important for successful collaboration are:

- support from top management
- a named person responsible for coordinating the work
- time to attend meetings and visit each other
- clarification about boundaries
- a working understanding of what each agency does
- trust, respect and shared beliefs.

(p. 44)

The rest of this section will look in more detail at these issues and examine some essential prerequisites for successful collaboration.

Understanding each other's work

This may sound straightforward, but in fact understanding the different ways in which different organisations work is a complex business, and may well require more attention than a simple one-off meeting. The site focusing on interagency collaboration in the 'Enhancing Quality of Life' project was a statutory organisation providing employment for disabled people. The agencies this organisation worked with were a voluntary organisation providing leisure opportunities, a South Asian community organisation, the Learning Disability Team and the Communication Therapy Team. Each of these organisations had very different aims and approaches. Misunderstanding of how other organisations worked arose, and they found that monthly meetings alone were not sufficient to rectify these, and that they had to allocate some of their time to job-shadowing each other's organisations. Although this was expensive in terms of resources, members felt it was time well spent, in that it gave them a real working understanding of how they each worked.

One of the hardest barriers that many workers experience is that of protecting their professional boundaries. Fears of information or practice sharing are natural, particularly during the early or formation stages of partnerships. However, if trust and assurances are developed, these feelings can dissipate, often leaving those involved feeling more confident and assured about their professional role. For example, an action research project was convened by Norwich City College and Norfolk Health Authority to identify the sexual health education and learning needs of adults with learning difficulties. The action researchers were teachers, nurses and residential care workers from both statutory services and private, for profit, organisations. The atmosphere at the first few meetings was noticeably hostile. Professional suspicions had left each of the participants convinced that the other knew little of how to 'care for' or 'teach' or 'counsel' adults with learning difficulties. Over the weeks each researcher shared a little of their data. These data not only revealed evidence about the sexual health topic but also illuminated the conditions, circumstances, contexts and challenges that they were working under, and the ways that their professional training helped them to interpret situations and take actions. It was these insights that

enabled the group members to warm to one another; they learned to understand one another's roles and skills, which enriched their practice while the integrity of their professional identify remained intact. In fact, they felt more confident about their own roles.

Different collaborations will need to find different ways of achieving this shared understanding of each other's work. In one of the DDA projects looking at access to education for people with profound and complex learning difficulties, a college agreed to put on joint staff development sessions for college staff and also local social service practitioners. Joint training enabled participants from both agencies to share ideas and establish a common platform of values from which they could further their collaborative work.

Clarity about roles and responsibilities

Defining exactly what each other's roles are is important in collaborative working. Lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities can lead to actions being duplicated, not done or interpreted in different ways. Of course, many collaborative arrangements will be made with organisations or individuals whose roles and responsibilities may blur at the edges. See, for example, the sexual health project mentioned above.

In these cases, it is vital that the allocation of individual tasks or actions is well understood. One of the sites in project 20 tried to identify, collaboratively with learners, the role of learning support workers in a very large college where a number of departments were offering similar support work.

Sharing the workload and sharing a project can reduce the feelings of isolation and create a feeling of 'can-do' even when difficulties arise. There are other benefits of collaborative working; these include the sharing of skills, resources, information and networks. Larger partners may have the capacity to store reference and resource materials, while other organisations may have specialist knowledge or valuable networks.

Leadership

Literature on successful team working shows that teams are far more likely to be effective if they have clear leadership. However, inter-agency teams are often expected to happen naturally, with no one person or agency responsible for providing structures for communication or reviewing progress (Lacey, 2001). The danger of this is that either a stronger partner takes *de facto* control without this ever having been formally acknowledged, or no single agency takes the lead, and hence the collaboration ceases to happen. While it is clear that the work of collaborative teams will be greatly strengthened if there is clear leadership, it is also apparent that this is not an easy role to take. The boundaries of the role need to be clearly laid down, and everyone needs to be clear where other members have specific expertise which the leader does not have the authority to manage.

Support of senior management

Collaborative work is likely to be far more effective if it has the active support of senior management from all agencies involved. To begin with, this gives the work authority and status. In addition to this, collaboration is likely to involve flexibility in patterns of work which will need to be sanctioned by senior managers. Collaborative work, if it is effective, is likely to lead to suggestions of changes in practice – for example, practitioners working with the Learning Disability Partnership Board in the instance cited above, realised as a result of their collaborative work that they needed to restructure their curriculum offer. If senior managers have been involved in the process from the start, they will be aware of these developments, see the rationale behind them and be more likely to build them into their overall planning process.

Collaboration takes time

Effective collaboration takes time. This might be time to attend official meetings, it might be the time to visit other organisations, or it might be time for informal catching up with staff in another organisation or another part of your own organisation. Senior managers need to be aware of the importance of collaboration, and be prepared to allocate time for it into an individual's workplan.

However, it is also important to recognise that the issue is not simply one of time, but of the way in which time is used (Lacey, 2001). Practitioners tend to have traditional ways of working which do not always facilitate collaboration. Lacey gives the example of a therapist who usually sees an individual client for 20 minutes three times a week, but chooses on occasions to work for a longer period but less often with the same individual, so that other staff can incorporate therapeutic methods within their own classroom work.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality tends to be cited more than anything else as a barrier which prevents organisations collaborating together. Of course, it is essential to respect an individual's confidentiality – indeed, providers have a duty under the Data Protection Act not to pass on any sensitive information in a written form without the express consent of an individual. However, Lacey (2001) has also shown that the issue of confidentiality can be used as an excuse by agencies to withhold information in the interest of maintaining power and control.

In collaboration which involves practitioners from different agencies or across a single agency working with a single learner, it is essential that the learner should be seen as a key player at the centre of any information sharing. In this way, individuals themselves have control over what information is shared and what they wish to remain confidential. In collaborative work between agencies, confidentiality needs to be an issue which is discussed so that the group can work out the best way of dealing with it. In the site dealing with collaborative working within the 'Enhancing Quality of Life' project, they dealt with it by bringing together each organisation's confidentiality policy and devising a specific composite one for the project as a whole.

Shared protocols for passing on information

In the example from 'Enhancing Quality of Life' cited above, the agencies developed a shared protocol for confidentiality. Agencies working collaboratively also need to establish shared protocols and processes for how best to share, with the learner's consent, and pass on information. The staff development exercise attached as an annexe to this document shows the misunderstanding and blocks which can occur when these protocols are not in place. Agencies need to ensure that there is a shared understanding of definitions used, and of types of assessments carried out, and also that there are transparent procedures for how to pass on information in a way which provides real benefits for learners.

A positive approach to working with others

The issues listed above highlight the fact that multi-agency collaboration is not always easy. It requires sensitivity, openness and an ability to respect differences. However, all the sites working on the LSDA DDA Transition Project were extremely positive about the way in which their work with other agencies had undoubtedly resulted in improved outcomes for their learners. They also acknowledged how it was often easy to assume that other agencies might be unwilling to work collaboratively. The results of the project belied this, and several sites commented upon their pleasure and surprise at the willingness and desire of colleagues in other organisations to work in a multi-agency way. As the representative from Cambridge Regional College noted:

A major unanticipated outcome was the enthusiasm of partner organisations and the ability of all those who participated in the action research.

4 ▌ Recommendations for improving collaboration at national, regional/local, managerial and practitioner levels

At National level

Recent government documents (for example 'Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People') have been clear on the need for improved collaboration between agencies. However, they are often less clear about the strategies which need to be in place for this collaboration to occur. There is a need for transparent, national guidance on how best to respond to the requirements of disabled people in a holistic way. This would include:

■ clear guidance on the roles and responsibilities of different agencies which would include how best to respond to the difficult boundary between what is the responsibility of education and what is the responsibility of health and social services

■ national procedures for how to bring together and share funding where this is appropriate

■ guidance on ways in which organisations can work together to develop joint assessment procedures and joint protocols for effective inter-agency working.

At Regional and Local LSC level

Regional and Local LSCs are in an ideal position to bring together information about different agencies and to develop procedures which will enable them to work better together. They need to:

■ create a database of different organisations with clear information about how they work which can be easily accessible by providers

■ bring together information about numbers and potential numbers of disabled people in their area and ensure that this informs their planning processes

■ facilitate inter-agency forums

- ensure that education is represented on Local Learning Disability Partnership Boards and that local providers are clear about how they can receive information from the Board and also input to it

- develop, in accordance with national guidance, local and regional protocols for collaborative work and local and regional joint assessment procedures

- facilitate local networks for educational practitioners working with disabled learners.

At managerial level in post-school education

Managers in post-school education organisations need to recognise the importance of collaborative work and of their role in it. They need to:

- be aware of the data collected by regional and local LSCs and ensure it informs their planning – this will involve being flexible in their curriculum offer and being prepared to alter traditional programme offers if there are external changes which need to be responded to

- recognise that collaborative work takes time, and allow for this when devising practitioner work programmes

- look into the potential of organising inter-agency staff development programmes

- ensure that information about their offer is accessible throughout their community, eg by working more closely with local minority ethnic community groups

- ensure that they have effective and clearly monitored collaborative working between their learning support staff and all other staff within their organisation.

At educational practitioner level

Practitioners are key to ensuring that collaboration works to the benefit of individual learners at an operational level.

To begin with, it is practitioners who need to ensure that the individual learner is at the centre of the collaboration process. They need to ensure that they are involving individual learners when collaborating with others. This includes ensuring that information and documentation is accessible to all learners.

Secondly, practitioners need to ensure that they are involved in the full range of collaborative activities listed in Part 1 of this report. These include:

■ sharing information about their offer

■ collaboration at times of transition both into and out of education

■ collaboration with other practitioners within their own organisation

■ collaboration with external organisations

■ collaboration with parents

■ networking with educational practitioners in other organisations working in a similar area of work.

They need to check whether they are involved in these different kinds of collaboration, and whether the results of this collaboration might require them to change certain of their traditional practices.

Finally, practitioners need to look at the issues involved in successful collaboration as detailed in Part 3 of this report. These include:

■ understanding each other's work

■ clarity about roles and responsibilities

■ clear leadership in any collaborative project

■ the support of senior management

■ time to collaborate

■ agreed protocols for confidentiality

■ shared protocols and procedures for passing on information

■ a positive approach to collaboration.

In responding to these challenges, practitioners need to ensure that they:

- gain a real understanding of the way in which practitioners in other organisations work, the different cultures they are a part of and the different challenges they might face

- are clear about the distinct roles and responsibilities which different organisations bring to collaborative work

- are clear about who is leading in a particular collaborative project and also about the boundaries of this leadership role

- ensure that senior managers are aware of collaborative developments and seek to gain their support

- recognise that collaboration takes time, and present arguments to senior management for the importance of being allowed to use time in this way; also look into ways they might be able to restructure their time to facilitate collaboration

- understand the sensitivity of confidentiality in collaborative work and be prepared to work with others to draw up joint protocols for confidentiality

- devise joint protocols and procedures for passing on information, always ensuring that the learner is at the centre of any sharing of information

- approach collaborative work positively with the belief that in general practitioners in other organisations will wish to work together to respond holistically to the requirements of individuals.

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