



An Excellence Gateway case study

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Hopwood Hall College: Equality Peer Ambassadors

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Outline the aim

To train up a minimum of 12 learners as peer Ambassadors and champion equality and diversity issues that are relevant to learners and young people in the Borough of Rochdale. The project will target all age groups – 14-16, 16 to 18 and 19+ learners.

Each learner group will lead on one of three identified protected characteristic groups and will receive tailored training, support and coaching from experts who currently champion and work on the equalities agenda. The project was set up to look at equality issues that were pertinent to young people and specific to their backgrounds, communities and to the local area of Rochdale.

Aims:

- To develop a minimum of 12 Equality Peer Ambassadors from the student body.
- To support mentors to better understand relevant Equality and Diversity issues and challenge organisational decisions from an informed position.
- To be a point of support and advice from a learners perspective for both learners and staff dealing with issues of equality tension, bullying and negative attitudes or behaviours.
- To enhance and shape the provision of learner engagement and how it is developed and delivered in the future.

The challenge

The main idea for the Equality Peer Ambassadors project was to help build on the Colleges' Student Leadership Team and provide support, advice,

guidance to the team to enable them to act as role models to other learners in the College.

The idea was to equip learners with the knowledge, skills and techniques to have meaningful conversations about controversial issues in a safe arena. This would allow them to dispel myths with facts, challenge stereotypical attitudes and raise awareness, tolerance and understanding amongst the College community on all equality issues.

Also we wanted to support the learners to challenge and debate to build their own resilience so that they could work with their peers to share knowledge and perspective from an informed position.

Partnership organisations

Hopwood Hall College – to recruit learners, provide the staff support, carry out training on Equality legal requirements, exploration of definitions, allocation of groups, administrative arrangements, holding the showcase event (the Learner Voice conference)

Rise 2010 CIC– delivery of training on specific equality area to the 3 groups (knowledge). Deliver the accredited aspect of the project (philosophical enquiry) through 2 full days training (skills/tools sessions). To help shape and support the delivery of learner led workshops at the learner voice conference and act as consultative mentors to the learners.

SAPERE (communities of enquiry) – for registration of learners, certification and accreditation. Qualification was: SAPERE Level 1: Introduction to Philosophical Enquiry in Education).

The outputs

The main outputs of the project were:

Recruitment: at least 12 Equality Peer Ambassadors. We successfully recruited 16 learners but 1 dropped out and 15 completed the training.

Training: 15 learners and 2 members of staff were trained in specific equality specialist areas and in Philosophical Enquiry methods. Therefore 17 individuals were trained as part of the project in 3 different groups.

Event: The project involved an opportunity for the learners to showcase their skills through 3 workshops at the College's annual Learner Voice Conference which took part on 15th May 2012. The event was a great success with 34 learners and 9 staff members attending and taking part in the workshops.

The three workshops all ran Enquires to debate and discuss issues. In summary, the groups and their enquires were:

Group 1: Race, Religion and Belief and Age - Is it right for religious groups to express themselves in this way?

Group 2: Sex, Disability, Gender identity, Sexual Orientation, Marriage and Civil Partnerships - Should people in civil partnerships be allowed to adopt babies?

Group 3: Socio-Economic issues, Community Cohesion and Preventing Violent Extremism – Rochdale Sexual Exploitation Case: Why did it take so long for the case to go to trial – from it first being reported to the police to the investigation?

Resources: at the start of the project all participants underwent an online assessment to provide an indication of their ideas, perspective and views. This assessment will be repeated at the end to see if learners' have shifted in their view points.

The trainers used a number of presentations, resource materials, workbooks, stimulus materials and worksheets to deliver the sessions.

Learners also produced all the resources for their own workshops – including posters, presentation, objects and activity resources.

Certification: registration forms, feedback evaluation forms to accrediting body, certificates.

The impacts and outcomes

The main impact and outcomes of the project were follows:

Actual:

- Learners understand the law in relation to Equality and Diversity and how these play out in real life scenarios.
- Learners and participants consider the views they hold on specific issues and through enquires learn to question divisive narratives and constructively challenge topic areas.
- Raise awareness and understanding of equality issues which support the College's priorities to understand and remove barriers that learners may face including tackle unlawful discrimination and harassment, advance equality of opportunity and fostering good relations between different people.
- Learners work together across the College community.

Expected:

- Learners able to provide advice, support and assistance to fellow learners to discuss and debate, effectively challenge and role model mutual respect and acceptable behaviour / attitudes towards others.
- To equip and develop learners as active citizens and role models within the College and in the wider community.
- Change of views – from individual assessments

Evaluation: Evaluation and feedback has been captured in a number of ways to measure the impact of the training and delivery of workshops. These include the assessment of learners before and after the project, photographs

of the workshops, verbal feedback from learners with some captured on video, evaluation forms from all participants from the Learner Voice conference and a final evaluation day with the trained learners (still to take place).

The main impacts, outcomes and outcomes of the project have already been realised and a further final evaluation session is scheduled for 11th June 2012 where the certificates will be presented. We will be discussing the next steps with the trainers and the staff team in June 2012.

Some of the outcomes of the project will be on-going into next academic year when SLT members will be able to act as mentors / buddy for new learners.

We will also continue to develop the group to enhance their understanding of topic areas which require further exploration such as sexual exploitation, understanding of religions and socio-economic issues.

Learners also want to build time in to practice their skills to carry out enquires in the future. The College's learner engagement structure can be developed to build this into the SLT development programme for the next academic year.
15 learners who received the training (SLT)
34 learners who participated in the 3 workshops

Profile of SLT is very diverse and included full time learners and 3 apprentices:

- 56.25% Male and 43.75% Female
- 31.25% from Black or Minority Ethnic backgrounds
- 25% with a disability or learning difficulty
- 75% aged 16-18 and 25% over age 18
- 43.75% stated no religion and the remaining stated either being Christian or Muslim and 1 prefer not to say.
- 12.50% stated they were LGBT with 1 unknown.

The workshops benefited those belonging to equality groups but it also benefited others too. The session helped build a mutual understanding and allowed space to share personal experiences and ask questions which can be seen in the comments below.

From the group of participants – all either said the session was either very useful or useful in enhancing their understanding of the topic area. Comments included:

- It allowed me to express my identity for the first time.
- Good to have everyone involved and voice their opinions in a safe space.
- Opportunity to meet different people and learning about different areas of equality and diversity.
- Useful to explore the reasons of religious dress and how/why the college is supportive of people wearing religious dress.
- Allowed us to engage with learners about contentious issues.
- Very active for all learners.

- The overall day was a big success in allowed us to talk about pressing issues within the borough at the moment in a safe and calm environment.
- Showed the importance of being able to have open discussions.
- I enjoyed hearing other people's opinions, even when I didn't agree with them. I liked that everyone got to speak their mind

Working relationship with LSIS

LSIS were helpful in allowing Hopwood Hall College to work flexibly within the timeframe for the project.

The email and telephone support and guidance at interim reporting was especially useful to shape the desired outcomes to meet the needs of the learners.

Overall – another positive experience from LSIS.

Good value for money

Original output was for 12 trained equality ambassadors and we put through 17 participants for the same costs.

Effective communication from all partners working on the project – including teaching staff who allowed learners to be absent from some classes to allow for training to take place.

Value for money can also be seen by HHC using existing learner voice events to cascade and showcase the learners work. This can be modelled for future conferences where learners lead the delivery.

The work supports the College's commitment to Equality and Diversity and the project will contribute to how community cohesion, dealing with bullying / harassment and work to support learners is developed in the future. This project provided the opportunity to explore cohesion elements of the recent sexual exploitation case in Rochdale which has had much media press. Learners and staff both appreciated the chance to explore the issues surrounding this case and to ask wider questions which were not discussed at the time (eg care home systems, role of parenting, sentencing etc).

Senior managers involvement

The project has senior management buy in from the start. Monitoring was arranged via the College's Equality and Diversity Steering group which is chaired by the Principal.

The Director for Quality and Student Support, Assistant Principal and Principal were all present at the Learner Voice Conference and received direct feedback from learners on the impact of the day.

Learner involvement

All learners (15) involved in receiving the training were also involved in shaping the equality areas they were trained in. At the start of the project they had the opportunity to share their ideas and identify key trends on each of the equality characteristics that were priorities for learners. This was facilitated through a group meeting and the feedback provided the drivers for the issues / topics and ideas that were explored through the training delivered and resources developed.

Raising awareness

Through the College's learner engagement mechanisms
Through the Equality and Diversity Meetings
2 x LSIS showcase events
Marketing and PR in the college

Continuity of project, after LSIS funding

The Equality Ambassadors will continue through the Student Leadership Team and, with the support of the Learner Participation Officers, will use the training to have meaningful conversations with other learners.

Next year, the SLT will be utilised to support E&D and the learner experience through buddying up with new learners, acting as role models at events, open days and enrolment, and mentoring through incidents involving behavioural issues, bullying or other prohibited conduct.

If possible, we would like to cascade the training onto other learners and are having a planning meeting to see if this is possible for the next academic year.

Did you experience any difficulties in implementing the project and how did you overcome these?

Tight timescales for delivery Vs availability of learners to attend training. This was overcome by clear lines of communication to staff team and learners. We also asked LSIS if the project could be extended till the end of May which they agreed.

It would have been good to have slightly longer to develop the SLT to practice their skills to undertake Philosophical Enquires so that they were more confident in the delivery. To overcome this, we had put in place extra one-to-one sessions if needed so that groups had practice sessions to run through their content with the other groups.

We will use the time available till the end of the academic year to see how we can support the group for the future and also provide them with time to build on their skills and techniques.

The lessons learned

We were overwhelmed with how positive the learners engaged with the agenda of Equality and Diversity and how generous they were with sharing their experiences with other people.

Most of the learners wanted to discuss and learn about more than one group so we identified cross cutting themes of stereotypes, perception, language, attitudes, barriers, discrimination and harassment which acted as different lenses for groups to explore ideas through. This was a very effective technique and meant that learners did not feel like they had missed out.

The Learner Voice Event not only built the confidence levels of those delivering the workshops but allowed other learners to engage in topics that were of interest to them. I was impressed that learners wanted to talk and discuss issues close to them and the local area but also they tended to stay away from the areas that are more frequently discussed such as age, disability, sex.

Learners were particularly enthusiastic that the training had a qualification attached to it.

We worked with external trainers to help with the delivery. I would strongly recommend that other organisations work with them if they wanted to replicate this training in their own settings.

If I had the opportunity to run the programme again I would try replicating the project with a bigger group of learners with more time built into a longer period of time to develop the knowledge, skills and technical understanding of the group

Additional comments

I would like to thank LSIS for the opportunity for funding this project and thank you for allowing us to meet the end of the project for May 2012.

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