



BRITISH LIBRARY

**EXTERNAL DISABILITY CONSULTATIONS
PAN DISABILITY AND
MENTAL HEALTH**

November 2009

INDEX

Introduction3

Pan Disability

Recommended actions 5

Full report 7

Mental Health

Recommended actions 15

Full report 17



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EXTERNAL DISABILITY CONSULTATIONS

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Purpose of the consultation

In 2006 the British Library carried out initial consultations involving disabled people. The purpose of these consultations was to consider issues that may affect disabled people in respect of the design and delivery of the Library's Disability Equality Scheme and 3-year Action Plan.

Now, at the end of this period, they wish to further involve disabled people in the development of their new Action Plan from 2010-2013.

In 2009 the Library's Disability Action Group formed a Mental Health Sub-Group in 2009 to focus on mental health issues. This year's consultation therefore included time to specifically focus on mental health issues.

The intention was to give both external stakeholders and disabled employees the opportunity to raise issues that they would like the Library to consider going forward.

This particular report is on the external stakeholders' engagement. A companion report focuses on employee feedback.

External stakeholder involvement

A disability consultant, who was involved in the 2006 consultation, was asked to organise and co-facilitate this consultation. In conjunction with the Library, the focus groups were advertised through the Library's remote and on-site media and interested stakeholders were identified and invited. Attendees comprised:

- disabled service users and readers
- disabled individuals without experience of the Library
- representatives of organisations of and for disabled people
- those who partner or use the Library services and
- some key service and disability leads from the Library

Some of the participants who contributed to this report, were also involved in the initial consultation.

Two external focus groups were held on 13th November. The morning group had a broad pan-disability focus, whereas the afternoon group specifically explored the area of mental health.

The Library set the agenda for the pan-disability focus group. Whilst not excluding input on other topics, participants were asked to concentrate in particular on the following issues:

- Remote access – digital, websites, document supply
- Physical access
- Customer service
- Events and exhibitions
- General facilities
- Reader facilities

There was an open agenda for the mental health focus group.

The focus groups were made fully inclusive by the provision of an accessible venue, induction loops, BSL interpreters and speech to text.

The report

This report comprises an account of the issues raised at both the pan-disability and mental health focus groups. No points raised are attributable to any individual participant. In anticipation of the report being of particular interest to the Disability Action Group, the consultant has drawn together the feedback from the contributors to produce actions from the consultation .

PAN DISABILITY

The following list summarises the potential actions identified from the feedback from participants (the full details follow in the main body of the document):

Remote access – digital, websites, document supply

- The dependence on imaging and digitisation severely disadvantages blind service users, many of whom are academics. Explore ways of providing information in a format that they can access using assistive technology
- Explore ways of ensuring that electronic document delivery does not discriminate against other disabled readers e.g. those who are dyslexic
- Training and awareness in this area of provision should include disability awareness focusing on impairment specific issues e.g. visual impairments, deaf and hard of hearing, physical impairments, learning disability, autism, epilepsy, mental health etc.

Physical access

- Seek specialist advice on whether there are ways of assisting blind and partially sighted visitors to independently navigate their way around the building e.g. by providing a tactile map, the use of tactile floor texture and colours, for example on entering reading rooms, restaurant, toilets etc. Consider supporting text signs with pictograms, to assist those with autism, dyslexia and learning difficulties. Pictograms would also assist visitors whose first language is not English
- Carry out a review of the carrels in reading rooms and make whatever changes are possible to enable their use by disabled readers, particularly wheelchair users, and those using voice activated or screen reading software. Ensure that the carrel designated as 'special needs' is always available for use and not used as a general storage facility, that account is made of the capacity to hold a personal assistant / wheelchair / guide dog. Also that the air conditioning currently does not extend to the carrels. Consider Sound-proofing individual carrels

Customer service

- Continue to ensure that all customer service staff regularly receive disability equality training. The feedback from the group was how “fantastic” the service staff are, but there are small areas that need addressing. For instance not all staff are fully conversant with how all the accessible equipment works in the reading rooms, use of induction loops and sometimes the porters / security by the reading room doors have tried to turn away Guide dogs

Events

- In order to ensure that disabled people are aware of the Library’s facilities and events, it is strongly recommended that Marketing includes disability organisations in its database used for promotional purposes. Many of these have regular publications in which they could help with promotion of the Library’s events and facilities, in order to ensure that this information reaches disabled people
- Continuously assess what improvements can be made to displays and information to ensure that access is, as far as possible, provided for visitors with different impairments
- An individual asked whether there were audio described tours of the exhibitions or of the Library

Reader facilities

- Continue to ensure the Library’s responsibilities under the Disability Equality Duty are met in respect of all aspects of service delivery
- Continue to review and enhance how disability equality and access is included in the Library’s procurement policy and that the responsibility is placed on Library providers to meet the need of disabled people. Review the training needs of those responsible for procurement as required to meet this

- The group members asked that the Library continue to explore whether the British Library could provide a catalogue for accessible documents held across the Nation or at least become a reliable signpost to the location of these documents

Full pan-disability focus group report

British Library participants

Representatives from Diversity, Policy and Disability team, key service leads for Customer Services, Facilities, Building Access and Security.

External participants

Disabled readers and service users, members of disability organisations, disability experts from key university libraries, Share the Vision, RNID, Leonard Cheshire, Action Disability, Livability, Guide Dogs for the Blind, University of the Third Age etc.

Facilitators

Disability Trainer/Consultant and Disability Consultant

Issues raised

Remote access – digital, websites, document supply

- Strong feeling that visually impaired readers are disadvantaged when accessing the document delivery service. When an inter-library loan is delivered electronically, for security and copyright etc, the documents are restrictedly supplied so that they can only be viewed or printed for a limited period. They may be needed over a longer period e.g. by someone visually impaired, or with learning difficulties and a reasonable adjustment to this would give more equality of access. For instance there may be a way to provide the documents to an approved intermediate body with less restrictions for those needing material over a longer period. This issue has implications for other impairment groups too
- The Library explained that this is being looked into. Other areas may need to be addressed e.g. intellectual property and copyright which is an area that the Library is involved in leading. Also Share the Vision has written to the Library and discussions have started. The Library is aware of this and exploring this will be on the new action plan

- The dependence now on imaging and digitisation severely disadvantages blind service users. When the online facility started there was no .pdf format, and people were putting real text online, but this has disappeared. Many sighted users don't appreciate that blind people cannot use the images. 'Echo' is being used now so people can view ancient texts in the original but this format is totally unavailable to blind people. It would be good if, as the national library, the British Library could champion this issue. It is an area that seems to totally contravene the DDA everywhere and somehow organisations get away with it. The access needs of blind academics are not being met. An awareness raising exercise is needed around this. The Library has been given funding for the Newspaper Programme and ensuring newspaper are accessible for blind people should be built into the project from the start otherwise it is too late
- Early English Books online, based in Oxford, have tried to provide a text box with an Optical Character Recognition version of the adjacent image. However this does not work with 18thC texts. The text was adapted as much as possible when the accessibility issue was raised, but there was a problem with lack of funding
- Imaging is very cheap – but this almost closes the academic door to the totally blind. The question was raised as to whether books/text in audio format could help but this was not felt to be equal as it would not be possible to cut and paste, or flick through
- If a blind reader could download files onto their own machine, it could be 'OCRd'. Whilst the printing styles may differ and cause issues, those making the point felt that most materials, if they can be downloaded, can be converted with an Optical Character Recognition programme
- In Southampton a parallel edited Word file was made. British Library was also involved
- Protected e-books in Adobe Digital Editions format are inaccessible, and a letter is supposed to be going out to university librarians and educational professionals warning them that carrying such books might

mean they are in breach of SENDA. This is the part of the DDA requiring educational institutions to make reasonable adjustments to ensure the curriculum is accessible. The aim is for librarians to pressurise Adobe into building accessibility into their products by building accessibility into their purchasing and procurement policies. The British Library should build this type of provision into their procurement policies as far as is possible

- Some of the readers in the group have found that the Library catalogue is not all that user friendly and has some glitches e.g. responding that nothing is stored on William Shakespeare. One of the readers uses the Bodleian Library catalogue first as easier to use and then returns to the British Library catalogue
- In respect of people with autism, most are very good at Information and Communication Technology so shouldn't have any problems with remote access. However they may find it difficult to follow information on an overloaded website. The recommendation is not to put too many subjects on one page and not to make each page too busy

Physical access

- There is no use of tactile floor markings to assist a blind person to independently navigate the British Library. The RNIB is a good place to see this in use, as too is the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris
- A tactile map of the building could also be helpful
- The accessible lift from the main floor was out of action – better signage to the alternative lift would have been helpful
- On the way to the main entrance, where the ramp is on the sidewalk, there is a bit of a lip, which makes it a bit tricky for some wheelchair users. This is possibly not on the British Library's site and a council area but it is still an issue for British Library visitors
- There was an appeal asking the council for more parking for Blue Badge holders, both on-site and on adjacent roads
- Whilst carrels in the Reading Rooms are soundproofed from the main

Reading Room, they are not soundproofed from one carrel to another.

If you need to work with a reader, or with voice activated software, you can be overheard in adjoining carrels

- It is difficult to fit in a personal assistant / guide dog as well as the disabled person into a carrel
- A wheelchair user who needs to use voice recognition software, cannot use a carrel as these are not wheelchair accessible
- On one occasion the staff in Rare Books could not find a key to the 'special needs' carrel. As this carrel is not often used, it often becomes a store room – on one occasion porters were needed to clear it of scanners, computers etc which took 40 minutes
- The air conditioning does not extend to the carrels so they can be hot and airless – the doors can't be left open if using speakers etc.
- One female wheelchair user had just experienced a problem using the accessible toilet near to the BIPC. The electronic door would not open and the emergency button was almost hidden
- The accessible WC in the basement is not big enough for a wheelchair user with a PA. There is however a large foyer outside the cubicle and the door into this can be locked
- Physical access is not an issue for people with autism as autism is not a physical disability. It would be useful to use pictograms on signage to assist people with autism who have a low IQ and to avoid unnecessary signage. Don't cause a sensory overload for people trying to find their way to the right reading room

Customer service

- British Library visitor information should include details not only of disabled parking facilities, but drop-off points. This is particularly important where side streets may be one-way/no entry
- The feedback about staff in general, was that they were fantastic, giving excellent customer service. As far as disability awareness of front-line staff is concerned, this was thought to be quite good. There

are examples of where this could be improved e.g. the people on the porters desk in Rare Books have, on several occasions in the last few years, challenged a person with a guide dog, saying that dogs were not allowed

- Leonard Cheshire organises events and presents potential challenges to the Library as they often bring a large number of disabled people to the Library all at the same time. However, the staff have never been thrown by their requests and they have always been catered for
- The question was raised about whether the Library's brochures of events are available in alternative formats. It was explained that the leaflet topic is being worked on. They don't display leaflets in alternative formats but aim to provide these on request. The design team is mindful of the best colours to use for various impairments but leaflets can be a complex area
- Customer service by e-mail particularly suits people with autism who may be distracted by visual or auditory input. Customer service by telephone requires an understanding attitude. Training would help the Library's personnel to understand that autistic people take everything literally and may therefore be confused by an instruction or statement which has a double meaning.

Also in respect of face-to-face customer service for autistic users, an understanding attitude is required. Tips include not exaggerating eye contact. People with autism are distracted by long term eye contact and feel nervous when being gazed at. Don't stare at people with autism and limit your eye contact.

Some people with autism need time to think over their answer. If they don't reply immediately, it doesn't necessarily mean they aren't listening. It can mean that they are still thinking about their answer

Events

- A blind participant had never been aware of any Library events being advertised and wondered where they were promoted

- Apparently there are funding issues around marketing. Most promotion is carried out on the website, but many visually impaired people do not have computer access. This is not just an issue for visually impaired people. One in three members of U3A do not use a computer. There is a cost increase when hard copies are produced
- There is currently no advertising through disability organisations or disability media. The Library would welcome ideas about specific targeting
- The RNIB has several publications in various formats which could promote British Library events
- The BIPC sends out very useful emails as does the reader bulletin (circulation more than 45,000) - if other departments took a similar approach, with a newsletter to interested groups, and including disability organisations in the circulation list, these organisations could disseminate the information in other formats
- One participant produces a news magazine (for blind and partially sighted people?) called Looking Good, that appears twice a year, which could help with publicity
- Visitors with sight impairments or dyslexia may have problems with reading printed information. Simple changes such as using strong colour contrasts and matt, rather than glossy labels, with larger print would be helpful for example in the exhibitions
- The level of the display cases is just a bit too high for those in wheelchairs, people of short stature and children. Angled display cabinets could be helpful
- Rest seating within exhibition areas would be appreciated, particularly by older visitors and those with mobility difficulties
- The Library sometimes offers signed tours for deaf visitors but maybe not often enough. These need to be well promoted to deaf people to ensure that they are well attended
- The V&A have a system when planning exhibitions, of inviting disabled people in to comment on the exhibition and to review notices and

placements. Perhaps the British Library could follow suit

- People with autism may find it difficult to attend the opening of an exhibition, because this may be very busy and cause sensory overload. Invite people with autism to visit the exhibition on a later day

Reader facilities

- The National Library in the USA is also the National Library for Accessible Content. Participants wondered if the British Library could be a repository for accessible formats. There is currently no nationwide resource and the Library is the obvious first point of contact. If the Library could not be the national repository, could it hold a catalogue to indicate the location of texts in alternative formats nationally to avoid duplication of efforts? If the Library does not have sufficient resources to manage this alone, could it be a joint initiative? Perhaps CILIP could organise it for the country, with Birmingham and London holding various sections of material. Perhaps COPAC, the Union Catalogue of all academic libraries, could be involved
- There was a meeting at BL in 2005, organised by University of Central Lancashire. Mainstream publishers were present and had positive intentions for e-books but only 2 concrete things came up - BL seemed reluctant to act as the depository for alternative format books and there was agreement that it should not be the RNIB. So despite positive efforts nothing happened
- The Library has just secured funding to further continue the digitisation of the newspaper collection. The group felt therefore that it was the perfect time to address accessibility so that funding can be provided for this. Will the collections be loaded as scanned images? - (refer to earlier comments on images and text for accessibility for sight impaired people) Once a project has begun it is difficult to change. Accessibility needs to be put in place at the beginning of the project to ensure that disabled readers and service users are not excluded from the service
- There was concern amongst the blind group members that although

the British Library is a National library, its services were not available to all as some impairment groups are discriminated against

- As a public service provider, the Library is subject to the Disability Equality Duty. The Library could place the responsibility for accessible formats on its suppliers. Accessible formats should be part of the Library's procurement policy
- It was agreed that the Library's website is accessible in its design. However when conducting a search of the integrated catalogue, some of the information can say 'no holdings for William Shakespeare'
- The present reading rooms in the British Library are very good for many people with autism, as the carpet creates good acoustics and most readers are silent. It is important for people with autism to apply the rules in the reading rooms in a strict way. People with autism take rules in a literal way and expect the staff to impose the rules in a strict way. If an exception to the rule is made, try to explain it to a person with autism who may object

MENTAL HEALTH

The following list summarises the potential actions identified from the feedback from participants (the full details follow in the main body of the document):

- Complete current initiative to develop and implement a mental health policy in respect of service users and employees. Agreed this policy should cover:
 - dealing with mental health service users whose behaviour may be threatening to Library staff, and
 - line management issues when dealing with an employee who may be experiencing mental health issues
- Put together a programme of mental health awareness training. Ideally this should be available to all staff, whatever their role, but compulsory for senior management, HR and line managers. It is recommended that this training is delivered by an organisation such as SHIFT (who already have a relationship with the Library)
- Explore ways of establishing a culture within the Library that says something like 'we understand that our service users and employees include those with impairment related needs. We will continue to develop our understanding of these and how to meet them'. Developing this culture would give employees greater confidence in disclosing that they have a disability
- Ensure that appropriate, easily accessible and well promoted support mechanisms and resources are in place to assist employees with mental health issues and those managing these employees
- Look into the BBC's Advanced Statement initiative whereby the employee makes a written statement about their mental health situation, describes how they behave when things are going badly and indicates advance warning signs to assist line managers to recognise the onset of mental health vulnerability
- Maintain the ongoing relationship with SHIFT and continue to research the Mindful Employers project

- Continue to seek examples of good practice in other organisations and the Employers' Forum on Disability, in respect of enhancing provision e.g. reasonable adjustments, such as flexi-time, for employees with mental health issues

Full mental health focus group report

British Library participants

Representatives of the HR Policy, Diversity, Disability Team, and from the Library's Disability Action Group / key service areas

External participants

Disability experts: from key University Libraries, Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust etc.

Facilitators

Disability Trainer/Consultant and Disability Consultant

Issues raised

Training

- The stigma of mental health issues makes it hard to discuss adjustments to work especially with line managers. Line managers need to be confident about where to draw the line between being supportive, versus not being specially trained. This training could be part of their induction process. They need their awareness raised, guidance on the framework in which they can operate and their limitations. Possible training providers include SHIFT and MIND
- The stigma is not helped by TV crime programmes disproportionately showing the 'baddies' having mental health problems, which impacts on the public view of people with mental health issues and associated fear
- One of the University libraries provides a course on mental health first aid to raise awareness. This is a two-day course for managers. Once trained, they become a resource to other managers or employees who may want to raise a concern
- Staff training at libraries teaches that good customer service, a smile and good approach works. 50% of all disabilities are hidden, including mental health problems

Disclosure

- People in the group felt that labels are good sometimes. It can be helpful to know that there's a reason for how you are feeling but unhelpful if the label sets off stigma issues
- Diagnosis for mental illness can be hard to get and take time; can also take time to get right drug balance and the individual may not be able to work in this period; if working, management needed; disclosure also an issue. When someone returns to work from a period of mental ill health, the person may not be given certain jobs for fear of them having a further breakdown
- Disclosing a mental health issue may become more difficult at senior grades – the risk of jeopardising promotion prospects or losing respect from other staff
- People don't want to declare even to a doctor, who will put their mental health issue on record. This in itself creates a stigma as assuming that an incident in the past will be repeated in the future is wrong, and can affect the employer's decisions
- The sound archive is storing oral histories. The Library has archives of histories of people with disabilities who recorded their experiences e.g. of the last few people in asylums in the UK
- All agreed that high profile celebrities talking about their personal experience of mental health issues can be very powerful and make it easier for others to disclose that they themselves have difficulties

Managing mental health issues

- The BBC now implements an Advanced Statement initiative (easiest with new employees) when the employee makes a written statement about their mental health situation and describes how they behave when things are going badly, signs for line managers to recognise that may indicate an imminent problem, and frank discussions with their line manager who can share his/her concerns too. The BBC is finding this very useful

- Oxford and Cambridge Universities provide similar support to their students, giving them the opportunity to describe their condition and support needs
- A participant was of the opinion that managers in general nationally needed awareness training to be able to manage employees who may have mental health issues e.g. where they do not perceive they may have a mental health issue but their behaviour potentially indicates otherwise or where an employee is absent a lot and gives e.g. flu as a reason and this being the cause is in doubt with regard to behaviour. (This would be to a level appropriate for a line manager as the area of mental health is so complex managers managing employees who may have mental health issues do not have the skills to diagnose mental health symptoms or to provide counselling as that role should be provided by specialist practitioners. However, they may be able to share concerns or signpost sources of assistance).
- British Library has a responsibility to make staff aware of help opportunities for managers and employees - notices on notice boards, fact sheets, Employee Assistance Program with face to face or phone meetings etc. Seeking support at an early stage is very important. The Library also has a health and well-being day annually which focuses on stress
- The Library has Occupational Health and Legal advisers; people and managers may also go to the EAP program for advice and be redirected. It is a 24 hour program; self referrers may be redirected and offered a short term aid program geared to their needs
- The Union is also supportive and some people would rather talk to a Union rep rather than the employer
- Policies are being evolved to help front line staff who may be the subject of abuse. A challenging reader once negatively affected several of the staff, so awareness is developing. The Library has some "hot spots" for anger, for instance where a person cannot register to take out books because they do not have the correct identification papers

and have come a long way. Personality disordered people can be disruptive sometimes and hard to handle. Managers may not always know how to react when there is an incident. They need to know where to get support. Support systems are valuable resources. HR and senior management need to embed knowledge of available support for line managers

- In an incident it may be hard to decide whether to escort the person out of the building or call an ambulance. If a person 'explodes' you may not know if they are just being a nuisance or have a mental health issue and could be escorted out politely. The Library is formalising a procedure for handling 'difficult' people or people having a mental health crisis
- Having well trained friendly staff may be a focus for people not getting help elsewhere. Being a public venue, for some people it could just become a place to sit and 'be'. At one of the University libraries one student with Aspergers came to the library and just sat for hours until the library closed, doing nothing
- The Library does ask readers if there are any impairment issues the Library should be aware of and long term employees use the disability declaration service, especially where their situation has changed over time
- Apparently just as blind, deaf and physically impaired people may have 'assistance dogs' some people with mental health issues have a 'comfort dog' to help them cope. It was thought that this could be considered by the Library if they had advance notice
- Flexitime can be of huge assistance to people with mental health issues and help them to manage their good and bad days
- A Quiet Room can be helpful. There are some rooms in the Library for Prayers and for staff meditation and quiet
- Access to Work can assist in respect of employees with mental health issues. If someone gets into employment using Access to Work and declares their problem, Access to Work will pay for a substitute

employee, if time off is needed

- At the University Library students with eating disorders asked permission to eat in the library. If there is medication required - there is a locker facility. The British Library may need to make a judgement on a case by case basis; medication can be left at the security desk. One of the Universities had exceptions with dry foods too which is allowed into the room but monitored. They investigate each case and aim to find a compromise
- The DDA is about levelling the playing field by making adjustments but there are guidelines needed for what is or is not acceptable behaviour. Differentiating between those who are a nuisance, and those having a crisis, may not be an issue unless they are stressing out others present. The Library has a duty of care for all its service users and employees