



BRITISH LIBRARY

**INTERNAL DISABILITY CONSULTATIONS
BOSTON SPA AND
ST PANCRAS**

November 2009

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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 allocated time for specific 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 employee consultation. A companion report focuses on external stakeholder feedback.

Consultation process

The Library used a variety of methods to invite disabled employees, and those with an interest in disability, to take part in this internal consultation.

A disability consultant, who supported the Library on a similar consultation in 2006, returned to facilitate the employee focus groups.

Two focus groups were held:

10th November, Boston Spa and

17th November, St Pancras

Confidentiality

At the facilitator's request, the groups understood and agreed to the need to treat what was said in the meetings as confidential. No comments made were to be attributed to the contributor in the notes. The results of the focus groups would be recorded, summarised and shared at a high level and would be viewable on the website as before, with good and bad points raised.

Setting the scene

At each focus group it was explained that since the first consultation in 2006, the Library had put together 65 actions. However over the 3 years, other action points had arisen, for instance from a national benchmarking of disability which showed that more actions were required around recruitment, career progression and training opportunities, and this resulted in a plan for these areas.

One of the results of the information from the previous focus groups was extra funding in 2007 from the Library e.g. for training and access initiatives for staff such as British Sign Language courses, stages 1 and 2.

The Library has also developed Race and Gender Equality schemes around the same time.

In 2007 the Library took part in a Disability Standard benchmarking exercise and was doing well achieving Gold Level. In 2009 they had entered into the benchmarking exercise again and did very well, coming joint top with BT, and Best Public Sector Employer and reaching Platinum Level for the Library.

It was explained that the Library recognises that there is still lots to do and that they would use their findings of this consultation, the review of the last 3 years and the Disability Standard report to help them with the new Action Plan and future consultations. Also that the Library was disappointed with some of the results around disability in the staff survey and wanted to discuss these results today to inform about improvements that were needed.

British Library Staff Survey

The groups focused on the findings of the staff survey, in relation to the feedback given by employees who declared themselves disabled and those who preferred not to give their disability status. These employees gave less than average responses in many areas of the survey, and some feedback was negative.

The survey focused on the following areas:

- Working with the Library
- Life at Work
- Line management and supervision
- Leadership and strategic direction
- Communication and Values in Action

As far as possible the discussions were kept to these areas, although inevitably it was not possible to adhere rigidly to this agenda. In this report, an attempt has been made to group feedback under the

survey headings, but points made may also be covered in other areas as well.

The report

This report comprises an account of the issues raised at both the Boston Spa and St Pancras. No points raised are attributable to any individual participant. In anticipation of the report being of particular interest to the Disability Action Group, the disability consultant has recommended actions based on the feedback from contributors.

BOSTON SPA

10TH NOVEMBER 2009

There were 14 participants in this focus group, including HR support. The facilitator was Mary-Anne Rankin – Disability Consultant.

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

Pan-disability

- 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
- It was considered that disability awareness material on the Intranet was no substitute for face to face training. Endeavour to reintroduce more face to face training
- Put in place face to face disability equality training for all employees who have not yet received this but especially senior management, HR, line managers, and specific teams within the eIS Directorate in order that they have the confidence and awareness in order to appropriately manage disabled members of staff
- Training should also cover the role of Access to Work and how to approach the scheme for support
- Review the situation regarding flexible working hours which can be hugely helpful to disabled employees. Consider whether this can be offered to disabled staff of all Grades
- Consider initiating as a reasonable adjustment the keeping of a separate record of absences i.e. disability-related leave, disability-related sickness absence and non-disability-related

- Once the Reasonable Adjustments Policy is in place, ensure that this is well communicated to all employees
- Complete the existing plans to increase awareness throughout the Library of the Disability Equality Action Group and its role e.g. via the Diversity Newsletter and Equality at Work day
- Consider using Shelf Life or the new Diversity Newsletter to further raise disability awareness e.g. publishing features on assistive technology and stories of the positive difference that reasonable adjustments have made to the employee and the team
- Explore how communications can be made more accessible to people with visual impairments and dyslexia, for example, and encourage the use of Plain English and reduction of acronyms in Library communications
- Ensure that all forms of support available to employees around the subject of disability are well promoted on notice boards, in publications, on the intranet etc.
- Consider how disability “champions” or “experts” in subject fields could be developed as a resource to all within the Library
- Consider the reinstatement of the role of the Welfare Officer. The participants felt the role of the Welfare Officer was very beneficial to staff as they had previous knowledge and experience of the Library. Employees could go to the Welfare Officer for impartial support and had a much valued intervening role which they felt was not available from the Employee Assistance Programme.
- Continue with the mechanisms in place to ensure the Executive Team are in touch with views and opinions of staff, including those of disabled employees e.g. through the Disability Champion/ Disability Action Group and staff surveys.

Mental health

- Complete the development of a Mental Health policy and communicate this to all employees

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- Provide mental health awareness training to line managers in particular in order that managers understand the stresses so that they did not inadvertently cause unnecessary damage / distress
- Consider establishing a relationship with external bodies who can offer specialist help to employees with mental health issues, and a process means for accessing this support. Training for managers should include advice and training on the support that is available for people with mental health issues

Full Boston Spa report

Working with the Library

- Many of the focus group members had long service with the Library. No one expressed unhappiness about working for the Library, their lack of satisfaction and frustration was with respect to their difficulties in getting their impairment related reasonable adjustments, and the lack of disability awareness of their line managers
- It was felt that people who have a disability are more likely to stay with an organisation for a longer period of time, and that people with a disability tend to be lower paid than those without a disability

Life at Work

- Flexible working is considered a 'God send' as a person's impairment can mean that it takes longer to get up in the mornings and some have a time consuming routine of medication
- However only people in certain Grades have access to flexible working hours, which had had a direct impact on one individual who was looking to go for a promotion to a Grade A, where flexible working was not an option. They felt that this was discrimination
- The Library does not have a policy of disability leave so health related appointments are still recorded as sickness absence unless the employee uses their annual/flexi leave. Whilst the practice is to separate an employee's record of absences into disability related absence and non-disability-related sickness, it is still included in the trigger monitoring. Disabled employees are therefore concerned about their levels trigger as managers can take formal action under the managing attendance policy. These trigger levels cause considerable anxiety to disabled staff especially those with impairments which cause ill health or mental health issues, as these can result in long periods of absence. The

group felt that a policy around disability leave was needed as at the moment, staff are using their annual leave/flexi leave for hospital appointments

- Some organisations e.g. councils, have a disability leave policy and these absences don't count towards their sick leave and flexi updates are given to people
- It was also felt that sick notes did not do justice for the situation as a disabled person might just have a cold but this, when combined with their other impairment(s), may be a more serious illness
- Many members of the group stated that they use annual leave when they needed to go to impairment related health care appointments. They are concerned that it would otherwise reflect badly on their sickness record and trigger levels.
- Many felt it was up to a line manager's discretion whether time off was given for appointments, and that there were "good" and "bad" managers within the Library
- When one individual was given a hospital appointment for a Friday afternoon, their line manager had asked for it to be changed for no reason which the individual felt was unreasonable. Another, who has to go to hospital at least once every 2 months, had suggested to Line Management that they would receive the 2 hour standard update and that they would make the rest of the lost time up themselves
- Disability issues were raised around the management of attendance which seemed to be focused on the need to keep sick leave down

Diversity/disability training

- An individual raised the fact that the recent Equality Online training had only been available via a computer but previous equality training sessions had been face to face

One to One/Team meetings

- There was a concern about the decline of One to One, team briefings and other team meetings and more reliance on electronic communications. When they had team meetings, they would be asked if they had any issues they wished to talk about, but since the meetings stopped, there was no longer the opportunity to do this. However one individual felt a lot more positive about the e-mail culture because they would dread having to discuss their issues with their line manager and risk people overhearing their discussions
- An individual said that in 20 years of working for the Library on another floor there had never been a problem, but that since they had received a promotion, there had not been a meeting in a year and they have not been asked if they were OK
- The group discussed that in their experience, communications were mainly done via e-mail and face to face discussions were now infrequent. One individual recollected that years ago there used to be weekly team meetings, but now everything is done electronically. Another member of the group said that last month was the first proper meeting their team had been involved in for the last 6 months. The individual felt that coming together as a team was important. Another individual made the point that it probably was not the line managers fault as they seemed to be under increasing pressures with their remits

CIC (Employee Assistance Programme) v Welfare Officer

- All participants would welcome the return of a Welfare Officer. Someone impartial to go to for support when things might not necessarily be going forward as they had an intervening role, for example via HR or the line manager, and when issues may not always be about equipment. It can be embarrassing to discuss

How to encourage an employee to declare a disability

- Disabled employees would be more likely to declare a disability if they felt that managers understood disability issues, the support that was available and how to access and provide this support
- Maybe more willing to declare a disability if there was a trusted person outside the organisation but who knew the organisation – such as a Welfare Officer
- It was suggested that the Library adopt a “Champion” for areas of disability, and that in the past they have had these but the individuals have since left and have not been replaced

Shelf Life (or now more appropriately the new Diversity Newsletter which has just had its first edition in September which is in the same format and same circulation)

- This publication was seen as a good method of delivering information around disability, and raising it as an important issue. Perhaps features on accessible IT, reasonable adjustments made for employees, positive stories of the difference that the reasonable adjustments had made to the employee and the team. Disability features have already been planned for the second

edition as part of raising the profile and to coincide with launching the new 3 year plan

- The group discussed the stigma surrounding dyslexia and mental health and it was suggested that if these were included in the newsletter, then it could create more management awareness
- It may be a good idea to do an article on what we offer for the Library's disabled readers, such as adaptive equipment, exploring if these adjustments would also benefit its employees

Line management and supervision

- A member of the group with a good long service record feels an overall commitment, is proud to work for the Library and enjoyed their job. However they currently feel let down and frustrated by the failure of the BL to meet their work related impairment needs. An assessment identified the need for specific software. However the HR member they contacted did not know much about the Access to Work scheme and also eIS were unfamiliar and unhelpful with adaptive equipment and 5 months later they were still unable to do their job and felt that the Library had failed them

Access to Work

- 6 participants have used the Access to Work scheme. All felt that their line managers and the HR person contacted did not know much or enough about the scheme. The group thought that there was a training issue surrounding Access to Work and that some of HR did not have the correct expertise
- It was felt that within the BL, there was a general lack of knowledge or availability of knowledge, surrounding visual impairment. The individual recollected a time in the 1980's where a member of staff had tunnel vision and they had worked with Access to Work and PACT at the time for help. The individual went on to explain that they felt visual impairment problems had not

sunk into the organisation's consciousness when it came to employees. The individual thought that experiences should have been well documented and remained accessible for future use

- Another member had found out about Access to Work from their equipment supplier. Because no-one at work knew about the service, it was frustrating and the process took a long time as they didn't know where to start
- When a member had sought advice on software through Access to Work, instead of the manager responding positively and asking what the benefits would be to the employee, they immediately asked how much the software would cost. It was suggested that finance was another barrier to making reasonable adjustments. One manager questioned whether the department were getting their money's worth from the individual, and it was discussed that they couldn't get their money's worth until they allowed them to take on the extra duties of the role now the equipment had been sorted
- Although the Intranet provides contact information for Access to Work, the contact number is incorrect and there is no information provided on what information the employee or line manager will need to have readily available to give to the Access to Work helpline

Reasonable adjustments

- When employees move to a new job role they automatically have a Work Station Assessment. Why couldn't the Library put in place a mechanism for tailored assessments for those who people knew to have various impairments?
- It was felt that the Library was failing to understand that reasonable adjustments tend to enable disabled employees to work better and achieve more than if the adjustments were not in place

- The group felt strongly that eIS needs to be more aware of and proactive in providing assistive technology e.g. a member asked about some software as they were having trouble seeing text on the computer. eIS had responded saying there was nothing they could do, even though when it was explored further, there was sufficient software being held at the London site. Why did eIS not find out what was available for readers and link in? The individual also explained that even the Work Station Assessment was visual via a computer in tiny text so could create a barrier for individuals with a visual impairment
- It was explained to the group that a Reasonable Adjustment Policy has been developed already and was to be introduced to the Library shortly and that this included mental health

Lack of disability awareness amongst managers

- Providing disability equality training information only on the Intranet was not considered sufficient. It was felt that face-to-face training for all staff was needed (not just for the groups already trained) and that this should be an action within the Action Plan. The group suggested the Library should offer awareness training and provide a staged process of sharing knowledge and cascading information as at the moment there is nothing set. It was suggested that a very simple process was needed
- Participants felt that there was a lot of ignorance about disability within the Library. Awareness raising and training was needed in order to change this culture
- If Grade C's have to attend a course on managing attendance, why not also a disability awareness course. Also there are regular manual handling courses, but the majority of staff are based in front of a PC and nothing is highlighted around issues affecting the use of a computer screen

- It was suggested to the group that “champions” or “experts” in subject fields would be more useful than training all managers. This is partially because of the funding required to train every manager but also because it may be some time before the manager may need to apply what they have learnt e.g. around reasonable adjustment / access to work. After time their recall of what was learnt would lower and yet a “champion” or “expert” would be continually improving their knowledge and awareness in this area and be an expert who could provide a better more informed and faster result

Leadership and strategic direction

Executive Team

- When asked if the Executive Team were in touch with views and opinions of staff, including those of disabled employees, an individual’s comment was that this was “aspiration, not reality”.

Strategic planning

- It was suggested that senior management who discuss strategy, need disability equality training in order to properly understand disability needs.
- Re Leadership and Strategic Direction, the general consensus was that people are not interested in communications because most of them are unrelated to their roles e.g. communications about IT regarding systems most people have not heard of before and do not even use. Why are these sent out indiscriminately? Sometimes relevant emails are deleted by accident as people receive so many irrelevant ones in the first place
- The group asked about the Disability Action Group, as they’d not had many communications about this and not all members of the group were aware of its existence. Since the group was keen on Shelf Life and the way it was distributed, and the new Diversity

Newsletter had the same circulation, they were asked whether they had seen the new Newsletter which had an update on the Disability Action Group. Not all the group had seen this. The Diversity newsletter is circulated to all staff the same as Shelf Life. The only difference being in the delivery in that only those without a PC received a hard copy – those with a PC needed to download or print from an intranet news item that was released several times. This was the most hit-on intranet news item for the month so many people did source this

Communication and Values in Action

Communication

- It was not felt that the communication methods used by the Library were easy to access/read and that the information itself was often heavy on acronyms, which some did not understand. It was felt that the use of Plain English would make the information easier to read, meaning that more people would read it
- The Intranet was discussed and group members agreed that important information on the front page of the Intranet disappears too quickly and gets replaced by less important information within hours, and some staff do not have access to a PC
- Office Notice used to be delivered in hard copy to all staff, but now it is just generated on the Intranet, whereas each employee receives a hard copy of Shelf Life, which people are likely to read as it is short and compact
- The group agreed that there was too much information on the Intranet to wade through
- Those with dyslexia find the Intranet difficult to use and would rather information was divided up into what was relevant to specific departments so that they could easily locate exactly what they need to read

- It was felt that the Library had decided on a “one for all” method of communication which excluded some people with impairments. One individual with a visual impairment explained that they receive information in all different fonts, sizes and colours and that until the software they are trialling, Lunar, is bought for them, then they can’t see a lot of the text. Another member of the group was familiar with the Lunar software and explained that it could be bought on a flash drive in order to be mobile for any computer. The individual trialling the software had not been told about this
- It was explained that there had recently been a Diversity newsletter and a hard copy of this went to all staff that didn’t have access to a PC and the rest went out electronically. It was stated that if people wished to receive a hard copy of the letter they could. The group asked if this offer could not be made re other newsletters/publications?

Mental health issues

1 in 4 people have some form of mental health issues in their life, such as depression or anxiety etc. and these can be long or short term illnesses.

Background was given to the participants i.e. the reason why the Library was interested in mental health and wished to cover this at the meeting. This included the involvement of "SHIFT", who help to remove the stigma of mental ill health and improve what organisations and managers do; setting up a Mental Health Sub Group in January 2009; already preparing for policies and procedures on mental health for the workforce and service and there was mention of other policy work that had a bearing on this. The participants were asked to support the Library's initiative by sharing what they thought the Library could do in this area.

- It was discussed that people who have mental health issues have good days and bad days, and that they are quite vulnerable. A mental health condition can be short or long term
- The group felt that a Welfare Officer could be very helpful to individuals facing mental health issues as some may find it difficult to approach their line manager
- If an individual were to approach their line manager the likelihood is that the line manager would not know how to deal with the situation, nor understand the need to address the issues being raised
- Training around handling mental health issues was seen to be very important in order that managers understand the stresses so that they did not inadvertently cause unnecessary damage
- It was recognised that training had its limits, and could not turn a line manager into a counsellor, but that it should give them sufficient knowledge and resources in order to provide appropriate

support and guidelines on managing staff with mental health issues

- The group agreed with the initiative already underway e.g. that a mental health policy would benefit the Library
- It was agreed with and felt that there was a stigma attached to mental health that wasn't attached to other impairments
- The group then discussed that depression perceptions are different, and that one person can say "oh, I'm so depressed" when really they're just a bit fed up with their job, which is very unlike the kind of depression some people experience which severely impairs their days
- People have different forms of depression and each chooses to deal with this in their own way. Managers can't second guess how a person may feel or react
- The group felt it was important to note that the Library should also support individuals who may not have mental health issues themselves, but may be supporting a husband, wife, daughter or son. Supporting a close family member can also affect the carer and it was felt that this should also be taken into consideration by line managers
- The group are aware that CIC provide counselling sessions but they were also aware that these sessions were limited and didn't feel they were very helpful as you couldn't speak to the same person each time. They can arrange phone sessions 24 hours 7 days a week, they can see the counsellor on site or they can arrange to have a visit to their home or meet in a neutral place. There is also the option of going to see the regular CIC counsellor on site on a Thursday at Boston Spa, if required. The group explained that sometimes people with mental health issues feel so worn down that they just don't have the energy to seek the help they require

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- It was also identified that it is very difficult to find a private space in which to talk confidentially to a distressed member of staff. There is no dedicated room for this kind of discussion
- One person suggested that it would be good to have a Helpline promoted in Shelf Life / Diversity Newsletter
- A member had promoted a mental health day that was happening in Leeds on the Library's Intranet. With greater promotion of this condition, more people would recognise that many people experience a period of mental health concerns
- It was suggested that people with mental health issues could benefit greatly from referrals to external bodies who could offer specialist help, and that they often needed support in seeking this support. Managers would also benefit from advice and training as to what is available to support people with mental health issues

ST PANCRAS

17TH NOVEMBER 2009

There were 15 participants in this group, including HR support. The facilitator was a Disability Consultant.

The following actions are recommended

Pan-disability

- 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
- It was considered that disability awareness material on the Intranet was no substitute for face to face training. Endeavour to reintroduce more face to face training
- There is in place disability awareness and equality training for all employees but there needs to be more face to face for particularly senior management, HR and line managers, if they have not already received the face to face training, in order that they have the confidence and awareness in order to appropriately manage disabled members of staff. Appropriate training is also recommended for specific teams within the eIS Directorate. Training should also appropriately cover the role of Access to Work and how to approach the scheme for support
- Review the situation regarding flexible working hours which can be very helpful to disabled employees. Consider whether this can be offered to disabled staff of all Grades where it may be helpful as a reasonable adjustment (e.g. the right to request flexible working or adjusted hours may not be applied / or is inadequate.

- Consider initiating a policy for reasonable adjustment of keeping a separate record of absences i.e. disability-related leave, disability-related sickness absence and non-disability-related
- Once the currently proposed Reasonable Adjustment Policy is in place, ensure that this is well communicated to all employees
- Consider using Shelf Life or the new Diversity Newsletter to raise disability awareness further by publishing features on assistive technology and positive stories of the positive difference that reasonable adjustments have made to the employee and the team etc.
- Ensure that all forms of support available to employees around the subject of disability are well promoted on notice boards, in publications, on the intranet etc.
- Encourage the use of Plain English and reduction of acronyms in Library communications. Explore how communications can be made more accessible to people with visual impairments and dyslexia, for example
- Ensure that disabled employees have equal opportunities to access career progression training
- Review the provision and process for providing British Sign Language interpreters for Deaf employees to ensure that wherever possible this is provided, particularly with respect to important meetings and training

Mental health

- Complete the current initiative of the development of a Mental Health policy and communicate this to all employees
- Consider providing appropriate mental health awareness training to line managers in particular in order that managers understand the stresses so that they did not inadvertently cause unnecessary damage

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- Consider providing training to self selected employees so that they have the necessary skills to provide Mental Health First Aid to employees and possibly service users

Full St Pancras focus group report

Working with the Library

- Concern was expressed that although the Library's training advice around heavy lifting included guidance that they should not lift heavy items above shoulder height, in reality the nature of the role often required the need to retrieve or place heavy items on very high shelves. This was seen to put employees at risk, particularly those predisposed to muscular skeletal conditions. It was mentioned that there were foot steps available for use in these areas, but a participant said that these were not always stable. It was felt that when the building was designed and built, Health and Safety practices were not taken into consideration. In an ideal world it would be good if only shelves below shoulder height were utilised or at least all heavy books were stored here rather than on higher shelves
- It was stated that some staff members did not have access to the internet which they felt that they should have. It was stated that this was a Directorate decision and not simply Library policy
- The group was told about the BBC's Advance Statement initiative and asked whether they felt this could be helpful within the Library. (An Advance Statement is when an employee provides a written account of the impairment related issues they may face, advance warning signs and guidance on appropriate forms of support.) A group member stated they had already made an advanced statement, but was then still placed in unsuitable roles

Life at Work

Reasonable adjustments

- It was felt that if the Library created a culture of meeting impaired staff's needs, they would gain more from their staff. It was felt that the Library may currently view this as a chore or an added expense

- It was felt that the Library was a good organisation but that management needs to recognise that disabled people are responsible people who want to work. Disabled employees requesting a reasonable adjustment did so to enable them to perform their role more easily and thus be more productive. It was felt that the Library should understand this better rather than employees feeling guilty about having impairment. Another group member felt that the Library cared more about its disabled readers than staff
- It was felt that a reasonable adjustment may involve the reallocation of duties if an element of a person's job can irritate an existing impairment. A group member commented that a couple of years ago a number of staff were displaced and put into Library Assistant roles which are very physical. That impaired staff members were also placed into physically demanding roles, which resulted in more sick leave as a result and the burden being placed on other team members. The staff member said this led to them feeling guilty and some impaired staff members left the Library as a result. There was a feeling that they were put into unsuitable roles regardless of their impairment and that the Library tried to be caring but created the wrong environment with regards to staff with impairments
- Access to Work was considered to be an excellent scheme but it was not felt that managers were aware of it

Flexible working

- A participant mentioned that Library Assistants were not on flexible hours because of the nature of their role being a service role. It was explained that flexible hours were only available to Grades B and below, but that arrangements could be made with individual line managers for flexible working. Some conditions, such as migraine, may not be considered a disability but could still

be disabling. There was a strong feeling amongst participants that they felt the need to use annual leave for impairment related absences

- Some employees may find it easier to manage their impairment and energy levels if flexi-time included the option to have a day off during the week, by working longer hours, with shorter breaks on the other days

Disability equality training

- It was seen to be very important that the IT department were conversant with adaptive technology, including text-phones, in order that they were able to facilitate and incorporate the provision of appropriate reasonable adjustments. At the moment this is lacking
- Employees receive Equality training on-line, which is mandatory for all staff. Previously there was Equality training for managers using a CD, but this training was not mandatory. Most of the group raised their hands when asked if they had received disability awareness training. If managers are found not to have completed this training, this is followed up. The training is disability awareness, rather than disability equality training. It was felt that the Library needs to understand the difference between equality and awareness. Disability equality training sees disability as an equal opportunities issue whereas disability awareness training is more about giving employees the confidence to provide appropriate assistance to disabled people. It was felt that the Library's training should include both these elements and should be undertaken regularly by managers and colleagues. One participant said that a manager gave talks to the general public and front line staff regarding disability awareness. The group member stated that this should be made available to all staff

Career development

- A group member stated that career development talks should be automatic for staff with disabilities, regardless of PMR marking and that there should be a separate budget for impaired staff for training opportunities giving them the opportunity to attend more courses
- A group member said they had been put off applying for courses as they had been refused training if it was not relevant to their role. They felt that this hampered their opportunities for career progression

Line management and supervision

Sickness and disability related absences

- It was agreed that sickness in terms impairment is still seen as a negative in regards to managing attendance. It was felt that managers were under pressure to investigate sickness absences. Those present felt guilty when then needed an absence from work. They also felt that the Library tries to be flexible, but is not in touch with reality when dealing with managing absence
- An individual stated that they did not know how long they were going to be off sick and that they may be off sick for a couple of months depending on their impairment. They felt under lot of pressure not to be of sick and so used their annual leave instead of sick leave. Other group members shared this feeling and tended to use their annual leave for disability related absences, including attending hospital appointments
- One person said that even though their manager is excellent in considering the employee's needs, they still have to do their job when managing attendance. They stated that they felt proud to work for the Library, but felt more stress trying to get back to work when they were ill

- A member from the group felt the Library should record impairment related absences separately. They felt that the triggers for action under the Managing Attendance policy should be reviewed and the number of days increased for those with a disability. Then there would be less guilt and pressure felt by people with a disability as a result
- A member of the group said managers still had little knowledge on hidden disabilities. Just because someone did not have a visible disability they were considered OK or it was considered not to be a big issue
- Another member of the group asked why the sick leave triggers had been changed for the older employees who may be more likely to have developed impairment, or a disability. The group was informed that this was due to a change in the Age Discrimination Act

Communication

- For some, long meetings with complicated communications, are difficult and it was felt that managers should be made aware of this
- They felt that communications tended to be written, rather than verbal, which could be a problem for those e.g. with attention deficit disorder or dyslexia. People could feel overwhelmed with long written communications. It was felt that there was not enough time to read everything as they were very busy. They felt that in their area of the Library, they should have monthly or quarterly meetings
- It was felt that the Library should provide facility time for impaired staff to read through the information provided by the Library
- Employees needing British Sign Language communication mentioned that they sometimes had to organise their interpreters

- themselves through Access to Work and that they had to book them 4 – 6 weeks in advanced as interpreters are in short supply
- A manager who organises courses explained that they took the responsibility for booking BSL interpreters for their courses but that they could not guarantee this provision as there was a national shortage of signers in proportion to people requiring sign language. On occasions courses were announced at too short notice to book an interpreter. This sometimes led to an interpreter being sourced from some distance and requiring accommodation, which added to the cost
 - Another individual stated that there was a lot of paperwork when booking an interpreter for an external course, but that the Access to Work website was helpful with this. They also commented that they had to check their directorate's budget before they could order an interpreter
 - An individual said they were told by their line manager they could not get a text-phone as they had been told by IT that it could not work with the Library IT system which they couldn't understand why this was.
 - Another group member stated that the website had a lot of communications which was good, but that the communication style did not meet the needs of Deaf employees. Information is not conveyed in British Sign Language (BSL) to make it accessible to employees whose first language is BSL. Some communications can be quite lengthy and complicated and this can be very difficult to process for BSL users

Mental health issues

- It was explained to the group that this time last year, an organisation called SHIFT had given a talk to the Disability Action Group. There was an overwhelming interest from the participants not just in terms of organisational interest but from a personal

perspective as well. The Mental Health Sub Group was set up in January 2009 with 10 committed members to look at best practice and organisational need and to develop a mental health policy for staff and service users They were also gathering information for a 3 year plan

- It was explained that the Library is also working on a Domestic Abuse Policy and a Prevention and Management of Abuse to Staff at Work Policy around the abuse of staff and they were aware of the impact of any abuse from readers on staff members
- A group member said that they would want the Library to be more open. That the general public was more aware of mental health issues because of more celebrities coming forward, but that it was still taboo. The individual felt that society and the Library should treat mental health the same as other illnesses, that in the past they would not talk about their problem but now felt it was best to be open about their issues, which could also help others
- The group was asked who they would approach if they had anxiety or stress. An individual stated that they had used the counselling service provided by the Library by their Employee Assistance provider, and that they had also sought external support
- The group was asked if anybody else had used the Employee Assistance Programme provided by the Library and if it was effective. They were also asked if it was not effective, why it wasn't. A group member commented that the counsellor came once a week and if they were unable to get away from their duties at that time, they could not use the service on that date
- It was explained to the group that through the Employee Assistance programme staff can arrange phone sessions 24 hours 7 days a week, they can see the counsellor on site or they can arrange to have a visit to their home or meet in a neutral place. There is also the option of going to see the regular CIC counsellor on site once a week if required.

- There was a comment that there was no place to recover if someone had a short 'episode'. That a recovery room would be useful
- The group was asked if they had heard of Mental Health First Aiders. These would be staff colleagues who had received limited training on supporting people with mental health issues and were able to provide limited mental health first aid. They may also be able to act as a 'middle person' between someone experiencing mental health issues and their line manager. The group thought this may be a good idea. However it was also felt that this First Aider could come under stress themselves as this would be a second job for them in the organisation
- The group was asked if they had any issues of vulnerability when serving the public. A group member said they could recognise a member of the public with a mental health issue as they had suffered themselves. They continued that they would like to become a counsellor themselves because of their own experience. It was felt that an excellent form of disability awareness training would be to be able to talk with people who have personal experience of disability
- Group members were asked if a buddy system or mentor would be useful and some saw this as a positive thing to have