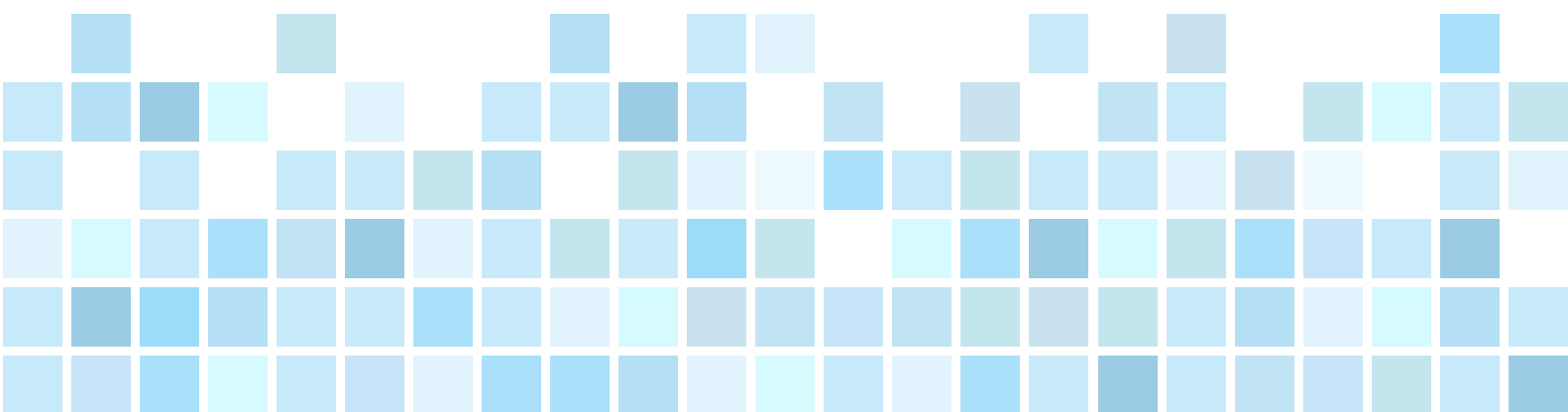


Engaging Diversity Development Partnership

# Building Diversity Awareness in the Workforces of Wales with eLearning



## *The Challenge*

To find out how e-learning and online collaboration could best be used to build awareness of diversity issues amongst large numbers of people at work.

Today, organisations bring together a more diverse workforce and deliver services to a more diverse population than ever before – issues of equality and diversity have never been more relevant to workers in Wales. The MacPherson Report brought the term 'institutional racism' into our language and has been followed by major changes in the law in all the main strands of diversity. We now know that everyone working within an organisation can be contributing to discrimination and disadvantage, often unknowingly or unwittingly. The way forward is to help workers understand the complex nature of discrimination and boost their awareness of diversity so that people's differences are valued. The challenge for the Engaging Diversity Development Partnership (Engaging Diversity DP) was to find a way of reaching large numbers of workers quickly and easily, to engage them with the key diversity issues, to inform them of their new responsibilities and encourage them to review their own ideas and behaviours.

## *The Vision*

To create an online learning solution that would raise awareness of diversity issues and help develop working practices that promote equality for everyone at work.

Much discrimination and disadvantage is unknowing and unwitting and the perceptions and actions of people within an organisation can have a significant effect on both colleagues and customers. Our vision was to provide an approach that would allow everyone to review their perceptions and deepen their understanding of diversity issues. The eLearning modules and eCommunities would provide a learning environment that would empower workers, inspire discussion and promote sharing of ideas and suggestions. This would explore new ways for people to work together and share ideas, making a significant difference to the quality of services enjoyed by all groups in Wales.

## *Our Achievements*

Created six high impact online learning modules to raise awareness of diversity issues and engage workers of all abilities on an emotional and intellectual level. Modules were created covering the subjects of Race, Disability, Gender, Age, Welsh, Beliefs and Sexual Orientation.

Successfully deployed the modules to over 4000 learners in 13 organisations across Wales.

Piloted different approaches for accessing the modules to suit different learners' levels of IT skills and practical considerations for accessing computers.

Created and evaluated new ways for organisations to use and support eCommunities for sharing ideas and best practice internally and with other organisations in Wales and Europe.

Produced research reports and sound evidence for the best use of eLearning for raising awareness of diversity issues within large workforces.

## Creating High Impact eLearning

The Engaging Diversity DP created six awareness raising eLearning modules. They focused on the affective (feelings) domain and the cognitive (thinking) domain. Each was delivered in a 'documentary' style with a combination of narration, images and music to engage learners with the issues. Learners could contribute their own ideas of how best to tackle discrimination and complete a short quiz. All modules were delivered through the eCommunity 'learning environment' with opportunities to share ideas with others throughout. Progress, scores and feedback were tracked through a learning management system with reports made available to partners within each organisation.



### Best Practice Findings

Collaborate widely with learners, practitioners and partners in the development of the scripts and key messages for learning modules. This helps eliminate unintentional bias and ensures content is meaningful to learners.

Create modules that engage as well as inform. Rich media elements improve the message and hold a learner's interest, although this approach can be time consuming.

Provide variety in the modules – keep the subject matter moving, vary narration and imagery. Create optional interactive sessions for learners with more knowledge or familiarity with eLearning.

Be aware of the different levels of IT skills of learners. Some learners will have never used computers before – design the modules for minimal use of mouse and keyboard.

Make the eLearning modules accessible for everyone – for example, using transcripts and narration.

*"I think it is good that you do not need particularly good IT skills to be able to access the modules."*

### Case Study

When developing the eLearning module on 'Gender', the Engaging Diversity DP first produced an initial script and circulated this to a mix of people. These individuals then met as a focus group to exchange ideas. Working with others provided a clearer perspective of shared meaning within the learning and also eliminated unintentional bias, prior to the production phase. The group also reviewed the imagery as the module was developed to ensure it was appropriate and compelling. The collaboration ensured the final result would have maximum impact on learners.

## Building Vibrant e-Communities

An eCommunity is a broad term that has different meanings to different people. Its meaning can range from many people visiting the same website, engaging in learning or social networking, to people actively working as a group together using the full complement of communication and sharing tools. The difference between these eCommunities is the number of participants, the purpose of the eCommunity and the range of tools used. Most users prefer to start with tools they understand, so beginning an eCommunity with e-mail is a good first step. Also many people prefer to read rather than contribute – this means they are interested participants but are not clearly visible. eCommunities worked best where there was good moderation, a clear purpose, appropriate tools and confident users who understood the benefits.

### Best Practice Findings

Identify the purpose of your eCommunity and what you wish to achieve before you start.

Encourage participation by providing clear guidelines about what can be written and who can view it.

eCommunities work best when they are guided by a skilful moderator.

Learners need time to 'get the habit' of communicating through eCommunities and they prefer to use the tools they are familiar with.

If it is quick and easy for everyone to add content, knowledge banks can be built rapidly and information shared effortlessly through eCommunities.

eCommunities can facilitate very effective communication, increase participation, share ideas, save time and reduce everyone's carbon footprint.

*"The eCommunities were useful in sharing ideas about best use of the modules and how to follow up on them."*

### Case Study

The Engaging Diversity DP was a member of the Collaborative Learning Transnational Partnership with Equal Programmes from Portugal, Poland and Slovakia. An eCommunity was set-up to stay in touch and share ideas and ultimately played a central role in making the partnership workable. Within this eCommunity, the discussion board became the main vehicle for communication, taking over from email. The wiki (editable web page) features enabled us to compose reports and recommendations together. Finally the use of Skype (online voice and video calling) and video conferencing introduced live communication which replaced the telephone.



## Creating Awareness

Creating awareness of diversity issues across a large workforce is a challenging undertaking. The effectiveness of the modules and eCommunities in building awareness of diversity was dependent on how they were deployed. Learners needed space and time to complete the modules and this was arranged either formally or informally. Within some organisations, the modules enabled learners to see their workplace as a diverse social organisation comprised of individuals with different needs, rather than just a single 'workforce'.

The modules also provided a 'language' to discuss issues that were previously difficult to raise at work, such as sexual orientation. Universally, the primary gain was a common awareness that equality and diversity is about treating people fairly according to their needs.



## Best Practice Findings

Use a variety of methods to enable learners to engage with the modules, making them available for individuals or groups – at personal workstations or within IT suites.

Focus on creating a purposeful learning environment without distractions for each learner.

Enable discussions to take place either formally or informally around the issues.

Make the modules universally accessible and encourage learners to make their own arrangements to complete them.

Provide blended learning opportunities when appropriate, where the modules can be viewed by a group so that the content can be discussed in an open forum afterwards.

Highlight the importance of feedback questions to learners so that they are empowered to put forward their own solutions. Explain who views the feedback and how it is used.

Acknowledge the achievements of learners through quizzes, scores and certificates.

*"The training works on hearts and minds"*

### Case Study

One local council in Wales used a variety of approaches to meet the different needs of learners. Some completed modules at their own desks, some used an IT suite and some attended workshops where the modules were shown 'cinema style' to a whole group. A system was set up for learners to 'vote' and record their answers so that quizzes and feedback could still be used. The blend of different approaches suited the different needs of learners, taking into account their differing IT skills and enabled e-learning to be delivered to staff without computers.

## Supporting Organisations

Managing the large scale rollout of a training programme within an organisation is a complex and difficult task. Managing a training programme where eLearning is a new medium and where the content is as emotive as it is informational is even more daunting. For all partners this research project was the first time they had attempted to deploy a large scale diversity eLearning programme and there were multiple challenges to overcome. Firstly, the technical infrastructure for the programme to run smoothly had to be established. For many learners eLearning was unfamiliar and an internal marketing push was needed to promote the programme. Finally, a sophisticated reporting process was needed to track learner's progress. Many lessons have been learnt – the programme has in some situations exceeded expectations and opened the door to a new way of working and learning within the organisation.

*"This programme has provided us with a firm foundation to develop an eLearning strategy."*

## Best Practice Conclusions & Recommendations

The modules and eCommunities provided a mechanism for running a large-scale training programme across multiple sites that would not otherwise have been possible.

Take time to overcome any technical deployment issues such as firewalls and proxy servers to ensure a trouble-free experience for learners.

Market the programme internally so that managers and individual learners understand why the programme is being offered and can participate actively.

Gain the commitment of senior management for the programme so that the learning is closely aligned with organisational objectives.

Establish a monitoring and recording system to ensure that the progress of individual learners and the programme as a whole can be kept up to date.

Consider how best to use the information and feedback flow from the learners as they complete feedback sections in the modules or contribute to eCommunity forums.

Highlight and publicise successes where best practice is either developed or confirmed. Make sure this information is shared quickly and widely to show to everyone the value of sharing ideas.



## Case Study

A local council in Wales had reservations about trying eLearning. They took time prior to deployment to solve technical issues, to establish an effective tracking process and most importantly, to gain senior management commitment for participation with the programme. The result of this careful preparation was that the final launch had few teething problems, learners were properly briefed and feedback was encouraging. Soon the programme had built up its own 'critical mass' with learners asking for an opportunity to undertake the training. The organisation is now looking to extend the eLearning approach to other areas.

## Making the Difference

eLearning programmes have the potential to **change attitudes and deepen understanding** of diversity issues, when planned and implemented in a structured way.

Gaining Senior Management **commitment** to an organisation-wide programme is vital to its success and acceptance by staff.

**Marketing** the programme internally greatly helps its success – everyone needs to be aware of the programme and why it is needed.

Changes in perceptions and attitudes are best developed through **constructive discussion** and the modules were most effective where they were followed by either formal or informal conversation between individuals who had completed them.

**Blending** the learning with some face to face activity, either with workshops or discussion forums, can enhance the value of the modules as well as making them accessible for those with low IT or basic skills.

The modules work best when learners are given the **right space** to view them without distractions and when each module is separated by a gap of several weeks.

eCommunities can offer effective ways of sharing information, keeping everyone up to date and creating and **sharing best practice**. Their success is dependent on having a clear purpose, participants who are familiar with the tools and effective moderation.

With careful design and flexible deployment eLearning is **suitable** for those with low IT or basic skills.

To meet individual needs modules and eCommunities should contain **supporting information and guidance** aimed at different user groups such as managers or customer facing staff.

Organisations should **build on their success** by collecting and using the feedback and suggestions that come from the modules and the eCommunities.

## Our Partnership

Agoriad Cyf  
Bro Morgannwg NHS Trust  
BTC Group Ltd  
Carmarthenshire County Council  
Ceredigion County Council  
Construction Skills  
Conwy County Borough Council  
Countryside Council For Wales  
Denbighshire County Council  
Flintshire County Council  
Gwynedd County Council  
Powys County Council  
Prince's Trust Cymru  
Scope Cymru  
Stonewall Cymru  
Torfaen County Borough Council  
Welsh Language Board  
Welsh Local Government Association  
Wrexham County Borough Council

## Transnational Partners

Bolina, Portugal  
Mentoring poprzez IT, Poland  
Strojnícka Fakulta, Technická Univerzita, Slovakia

For more information visit our website and join our eCommunity

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