

POSITIONS EVERYBODY...ACTION!

Getting Disability Rights Legislation Working Jenny Shaw and Kevin Murfitt, Deakin University

Abstract

The Australian Disability Discrimination Act (1992) encourages institutions to develop Action Plans to embed disability issues in all policies and procedures.

Jenny and Kevin, together, have 30 years experience in the Australian University and Disability support system. Both have written, developed and implemented Disability Discrimination Action Plans and are convinced that Action Plans are an effective tool towards the creation of an inclusive environment.

This presentation will assist participants to identify key issues, strategies and personnel to ensure that the requirements of people who have a disability are deeply embedded in the system.

Jenny and Kevin will walk people through the process and philosophy taken at Deakin University to create a tool that is embedding change and facilitating the development of an inclusive environment in: curriculum, teaching, building, service provision including library services, information technology, study skills, in fact all facets of University life.

The presenters will talk about the potential and pitfalls of the process thus far and seek input from participants to refine the strategy to be useful for all.

Positions Everybody.....ACTION!

Under our Disability Discrimination Act (1992), Action Plans can be developed and lodged with HREOC as a public statement of an organisation's commitment to the development of universal or inclusive practices.

Action plans can assist the philosophical shift prescribed in the DDA from the predominance of "specialist" disability support services to a more inclusive or universal mainstream model of service provision. In a tertiary education setting this means that all areas of the institution are responsible for the provision of access and equity to their programs and facilities, and shifts the focus of a specific disability support service to more of a resource rather than a specialist support centre.

Action plans can also be used as a defence against discrimination claims if adhered to by the institution. Other benefits of an Action Plan are: can develop prescriptive requirements specific and relevant to a particular organisation rather

than trying to interpret and implement broader standards under legislation; gives management better ability to design and plan in inclusive practices, or accessibility into organisational plans rather than reacting to unanticipated needs and demands; more cost effective in planning and design than retrofitting; gives customers clarity of what to expect or look forward to thus good promotional tool.

Following are the major landmarks to consider when developing and implementing an action plan under the movie theme Jenny and Kevin use in their presentation:

1. Producer/Director/s

- * Get commitment and support for the project from top Management by developing a scope which highlights points above about Action Plans and how Action Plan philosophy fits into organisational policy and strategic plan.

- * Identify funding for development of Plan. Necessary for ownership and impetus for change. Need to avoid the risk of getting lost in day to day role as would happen if no funding available.

- * Identify project personnel. Need to be dynamic people comfortable and expert in Universality principles and knowledgeable about the systems and connections throughout the organisation.

2. Casting (identifying the major stakeholders etc.)

- * Brainstorm people like heads of department's students ancillary services, Executive Groups and key individuals.

- * Design process and strategy for consultation. For example, get onto agenda of already timetabled Executive Group meetings, work with student representative bodies to facilitate student forums; advertise in "Trailer" or Scope that individual appointments available where requested.

3. The Trailer (marketing the project)

- * Identify and implement the most effective communication and promotion medium for project Scope to be distributed to all stakeholders along with information about consultations. e.g. broadcast email, newsletters, communique or support letter from President or V.C.

- * Consultations are a crucial awareness raising exercise in themselves and main focus should be for project team to reinforce Inclusive Practices already in place

and seek information on issues or areas where Inclusive Practices need development.

* Ensure statement included in trailer regarding the confidentiality of comments received. No identifying info in plan and all info only to be used for this project unless permission sought.

4. Developing the Script

* Finalise literature search (you should have initiated this when developing the Scope), collate consultation information.

* To assist in covering all issues and areas you should develop, look at: a) all points a student experiences from application, enrolment, to graduation and beyond; and b) look at the different sections or departments of your institution and ensure their unique role is covered. As the plan is designed to assist departments fulfil their obligations to staff and students final structure of plan should be that which makes actions make sense or are easy to follow from that perspective. e.g. section for each department; or universal actions then each departments. Or chronological actions i.e. application, enrolment etc, then others as required like policy and staff issues.

Roadshow (distribute draft for comment)

* Give ample time for people to comment (no less than 4 weeks) and make yourself or project workers available for clarification or assistance. Give variety of modes for comment like phone, fax, email, thy individual appointments etc..

The Editing Suite (modify draft and produce final cut)

* Write actions as clear and simple as possible with timelines and designated personnel responsible.

* Give management and steering committee a final opportunity to look at the document before final production.

Launch

* Target important individuals and groups e.g. management, all who contributed through consultations) with invitations in plenty of time as well as broadcast invitation to all constituents.

* Launch is initial phase of crucial implementation process so get media and make it as high profile as you can.

Distribution and implementation strategies.

* You should have copies available on disc and in print at Launch and include in invitations request for people who cannot access disc or print to request format required with RSVP

* Launch to be accessible include on invitation requests for sign interpreters etc. Whole process essential to be accessible.

Monitoring and Review.

* Crucial to identify and include as action body in institution responsible for monitoring and reviewing implementation of plan. For example at Deakin we have Equal Opportunity Advisory committee which reports regularly re all equity matters and advises management. We built in an annual review of implementation of plan into EOAC responsibility.

**Kevin Murfitt
Disability Liaison Officer
Division of Student Life, Student Services
Deakin University, Geelong 3217**

**Phone: 03 52271428 Fax: 03 5227 2829
Mobile: 0427 425424
email: kfm@deakin.edu.au**