MLA Disability Survey 2005

Summary

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1. Introduction and Background
In 2001, MLA undertook a first national survey of provision for disabled users of museums, libraries and archives. This highlighted a growing body of good practice, as well as significant barriers in most areas affecting access and equality for disabled people. Access for disabled people was widely seen as wheelchair access and commitment to disability access was lacking at senior and board level n museum, library and archive services.

Aims and Methodology of the 2005 Disability Survey
The main aims of the 2005 survey were to determine the extent to which :
- disability access has become integral to the workings of museums, libraries and archives
- measures have been taken to remove common access barriers and provide accessible services

Data was gathered through an on-line self completion questionnaire sent to respondents of the 2001 survey in England. 116 replies were received of which 42% were from libraries, 33% from museums 22% from archives (22%).

2. The Survey Results: Key Findings

2.1 Policy awareness and attitudes to disability
- Awareness of the Disability Discrimination Act extends to the duty to change policy, practices and procedures where these disadvantage disabled people (89%) and new duties of the DDA 2005 (59%).
- Awareness the anticipatory duty under the DDA 1995 is surprisingly low (46%).
- The DDA is seen as strong driver for recent changes in access (80%).

Of the respondents many believe that:
- Disabled people have the right to the same quality of services (99%)
- Disability access is an ongoing process (98%).
- Disability access is about more than wheelchair access (89%)
- Disability should be represented in collections (82%)
- More disabled people use museum, library and archive services than five years ago (67%)

2.2 Training
The majority of respondents (83%) provide at least general disability awareness training for staff and about half extend training to all staff. Although the majority of respondents indicated in 2001 that disabled people make better disability trainers, these are used by only 31% of respondents.

A layered model of training is emerging, with many respondents providing training about the access requirements of specific groups of disabled people.

2.3 Audits
There has been an increase in the proportion of respondents carrying out formal disability access audits since 2001. About 1/3 archive services and a smaller proportion of libraries and museums have not yet undertaken an audit. Audits have generally been found to be very useful in securing additional resources for improvements, in enabling prioritisation of action and budgets.

2.4 Consultation
Active consultation with disabled people is not frequent and tends to be largely through informal conversations. A growing number of sector organisations are working with a range of local organisations on access for disabled people.

2.5 Including disabled people in the delivery of services
- Disabled people are under-represented in the sector workforce. 73% of respondents employ disabled staff and 66% have disabled volunteers, but they account for up to only 5% of the workforce in most services.
- Few disabled people hold positions in management and at board level.

2.6 Policy, Planning and Budgeting
- Nearly all respondents have an Equal Opportunities policy that refers to disabled people (95%) and less than half have access policies for disabled people (46%). Benefits of having a specific access policy include providing a useful framework for action.
- Less than half of respondents (43%) have an access plan for disabled people. Benefits of having such a plan are wide-ranging and include mainstreaming disability access into general service provision, monitoring effective delivery,   supporting funding bids and partnership work.
- A small majority of respondents make budget provision for access for disabled people, though this is still less than half, with 63% making provision in revenue funding and 52% in capital funding.
- A majority of respondents now have a nominated staff member taking a lead and a growing proportion of these hold positions at board/management level.

2.7 Providing accessible environments and facilities
Basic provision of accessible environments and facilities for people with physical disabilities has steadily increased since 2001, but the needs of people with other disabilities are less well met and…

2.8 Improving access to information and collections
The 2005 survey indicates an increased awareness of the marketing opportunity disabled people present. Respondents use a broad range of methods for targeting promotion and publicity to disabled people.

Access information and information in accessible formats is increasingly available, but is insufficient to meet the information needs of disabled people:

- Basic information about disability access is in main service and information leaflets (86%)
- Websites provide more detailed disability access information (69%)
- A specific access leaflet is available (29%)
- Service leaflets (57%) and access leaflets (27%) are in large print
- Induction loops are available (73%)
- Sizeable barriers remain for disabled people to access information about
- There is a developing trend in representation of disability culture and the contributions of disabled people in collections
- Outreach and education programmes for disabled people have increased significantly since 2001

2.9 Technology and access to collections and information

Provision ranges from magnifying glasses and adjustable tables to adaptive computer technology such as joy sticks and speech to text/text to speech software, CCTV magnification and scanning pens. However the potential of technology as a tool for access is far from fully exploited and accessible technology, such as websites, is only beginning to become part of policy and planning considerations.

2.10   Perceptions of MLAP and need for guidance identified by the sector

MLAP is recognised as proactive and successful in supporting the sector to improve access for disabled people. The MLA Disability Portfolio (78%) and the MLA Disability Checklist (63%) were found to be helpful and useful in assessing and developing access provision for disabled people. Sdfse

Respondents indicated that they require further support in addressing access for people with learning difficulties, people with mental health difficulties and people with dyslexia, electronic access and new technology, alternative media, marketing for disabled people, best practice and low cost examples.

3. Conclusions

Real improvements in access for disabled people have taken place over the past five years and this needs to be celebrated. Access and equality for disabled people in the cultural sector remains, however, 'unfinished business'. The long term removal of remaining and emerging access barriers requires ongoing and systematic commitment. This would also ensure that organisations meet the DDA anticipatory duty, about there is a low level of awareness in the sector.

The survey reveals a range of needs to support continuous improvements in access and equality for disabled people to take place in the sector. There is a need for:

- Improved understanding of capacity building needs to enable the development of specialised training tailored to meet sector need (e.g. accessible exhibition design, access for people with dyslexia)

- Access audits to have a broader scope, to include policy and planning, the needs people with sensory impairments, people with learning difficulties and people with mental health difficulties and e.g. displays, exhibitions, events and technology. There is a need for an improved understanding of the capacity building needs to support this development.
- Active consultation with disabled users and non-users at a local level and surveys of disabled users and non-users at a regional/national level.
- More disabled people to be represented in the sector workforce, at every level of an organisation.
- Keep widening the range of accessible information and to use marketing opportunities
- Make collections more representative of disabled people and communities
- Make collections more accessible, particularly for people with learning difficulties, people with dyslexia and people with sensory.

Recommendations

Museums, libraries and archives should all actively:

- adopt a planned approach to change and make disability access and equality integral to everything they do, including "mainstreaming" disability access provision in budgets and collections policies.

- use their leverage to affect change beyond their organisations, specifying the need for disability access and equality in all tender briefs and require that tenderers provide evidence of requisite skills.

MLA and the MLA Partnership should actively:

- continue to provide leadership and promote good practice, using the leverage provided by the strategic programmes it manages
- develop new guidance to meet evolving need in the sector
- develop action to meet strategic sector need identified in this survey
- continue to undertake Disability Surveys to inform evidence based planning and chart progress

The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) and the nine regional agencies work in partnership to provide strategic direction and leadership for museums, libraries and archives across England. Together we work to improve people's lives by building knowledge, supporting learning, inspiring creativity and celebrating identity.

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