

**University of Manchester  
BA (Hons) Learning Disability Studies**

**PARTNERSHIP STEERING GROUP**

**A new BA programme in learning disability studies at the University of Manchester was set up in partnership with a group of adults with learning disabilities.**

**What is the Steering Group for?**

- **To contribute to the management and delivery of the BA programme**
- **To review the work of students and staff**

**Who is on the Steering Group?**

- **3 from Manchester People First and 2 each from Bury and Tameside People First**
- **3 student representatives**
- **The course tutors**

**What does the Steering Group do?**

- **Teach sessions on social policy, about the Valuing People White Paper and HIV issues**
- **Observe and assess students on placement**

**How was the Steering Group set up?**

**“I said to Iain [the Programme Director] we should have a sub-group with the university and learning disabled adults – so the students can learn from *us*, so they don’t come with their *own* agenda”**

**(Daniel Docherty)**

## Why do members of People First come to the Steering Group?

**“Some of the students are quite surprised that we’re able to do things and speak out for other learning disabled adults... some come with assumptions that we’re all in day centres” (Daniel Docherty)**

**“I hope the students learn something... that’s very important to us... How it feels to be disabled, what sort of things we go through every day of our lives” (Richard Hughes)**

**“We want a say in how services should be... fitting services round us not fitting us into services” (Brendan Regan)**

**“This is more important than going to the [local] Partnership Board... We’re teaching the students from fresh here who will work for the services in the future and could *change* things. It will rub off on the services” (Richard Hughes)**

**“If we don’t get involved now we’ll never get the changes we’ve got to *fight* for... We’ve got to get people on our side, our way of thinking *now* or it will be too late” (Brendan Regan)**

**“Students need to learn from past mistakes... shutting us away... *but we’re here!* Segregation in schools... it still goes on... it’s a bad idea, we don’t get the education we need” (Patricia Phillips)**

**“Students have said to me: ‘I didn’t think you would know about sex... you have the same knowledge I’ve got, you know just as much as me” (Daniel Docherty)**

## **The Programme Director's view...**

**“The students have discovered that knowledge doesn't just come from books or lecturer's mouths... many have said to me they were surprised how much they've learned [from members of the Steering Group]”**

**“The role of the Partnership Steering Group is to act as consultants and advisers to the Programme Director about the management of the programme”**

**“In relation to participating in the appointments process I have had to be upfront about the limitations the university places on the involvement of the Partnership Steering Group. However the Group has developed an increasingly active role, for example:**

- creating a feedback form for student placements, for people with learning disabilities to give feedback on students' support role**
- producing guidelines for students on how to work with people with learning disabilities**
- contributing to job and person specifications for appointments to the Course Team**
- observing students working with people with learning disabilities so that their views can be taken into account in the assessment process**
- joint teaching, for example on sex and relationships issues”**

**“There is a concern about the low representation of women within the Partnership Steering Group, despite all our efforts so far...”**

## What has the Partnership Steering Group learned?

### Support

Some members of the Steering Group need support with some of their work. They have sometimes found it hard to get the right kind of help.

“We’re looking for volunteer supporters to work with us, like for support with teaching” (Patricia Phillips)

“If the Steering Group is going to be independent and work alongside the university, the Support Worker should be independent” (Daniel Docherty)

### Parents

“It would be valuable to have parent involvement, but we haven’t got a parent representative yet... not one of *our* parents, we wouldn’t allow them.” (Richard Hughes)

### Ground Rules

The Steering Group has developed some ground rules to ensure that people with learning disabilities play an equal part. Here are some of them:

- Only people with learning difficulties can Chair meetings
- Student members cannot support members of the Steering group who have learning disabilities
- If a member of staff wants to put an item on the agenda they go through Iain [Programme Director]
- No jargon – explain things clearly
- Give people time to speak
- No patronising people