

Executive Summary

A Background

Set up in 2006, the Sir John Cass's Foundation (SJCF) London Ambassador Scheme was developed as a collaboration between two projects: **Strand 1 AchieveAbility National Network**, building on the best practice of the National Aimhigher Project AchieveAbility for Specific Learning Differences (SpLD), and **Strand 2 LETG ThisAbility** for Learners with physical and sensory impairments, and/or autistic spectrum conditions (ASC), building on the preliminary work developed by the Aimhigher London East Thames Gateway Partnership (LETG).

The London Ambassador Scheme recruited university students with disabilities to deliver outreach activities to Learners with similar disabilities in schools and colleges in the Sir John Cass's Foundation beneficial area of inner London boroughs. The objectives of the London Ambassador Scheme included targeting specific Learners to raise their awareness of the opportunities in Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE), as well as their aspirations to aim for HE, and so increase their representation in FE and HE.



The following targeted outcomes were agreed by Sir John Cass's Foundation, AchieveAbility and LETG ThisAbility Project Officers, as measures of the short-term and long-term impact of the London Ambassador Scheme on its targeted Learners:

- Identification of the barriers that Learners with disabilities encounter
- Improved retention of Learners with a disability
- Increased Learner/parent/teacher awareness of support available at HE and opportunities in HE
- Increased application rates to FE and HE
- Support successful transition from schools to FE and HE
- Increased confidence, motivation and success of young disabled Learners to progress to FE and HE.

B Research Methodology

Two evaluation reports were submitted to Sir John Cass's Foundation for Year 1 (2007) and Year 2 (2008). Following submission of the second report, Sir John Cass's Foundation gave agreement for the London Ambassador Scheme to run for a further year, until summer 2009.

Alongside outreach activities delivered to Learners with disabilities, action research and evaluation of the Scheme's impact was carried out from 2006-2009 with a view to assessing the Scheme's short and long-term effectiveness. The aim was to publish the findings together with supporting recommendations that would develop and disseminate good practice.

This project aimed to assess and measure the impact and effectiveness of the first two years of the London Ambassador Scheme's Strand 1 and Strand 2. The evaluation process involved collecting, managing and analysing feedback from the strands' participants in relation to the Scheme's targeted objectives and outcomes. Information was collected from a wide range of sources that included the key participants – the Learners – their parents/guardians, teaching staff and ambassadors.

The SJCF London Ambassador Scheme reached over 500 Learners from 2006-2009 and worked with 40 secondary schools and colleges (Appendix 1).

From both strands, the evaluation saw contributions from 65 Learners, 26 parents/guardians, 25 teaching staff and two ambassadors (Table 1). Contributions to the evaluation came in varied forms, including telephone interviews, face-to-face recorded interviews, questionnaires completed by hand, online or electronic documents and email. Learners who contributed to the evaluation were diverse in their age groups, ethnic backgrounds and disabilities. Where the information was provided, Learner profiles are shown in Appendix 2.

Table 1:

Contributions made to the London Ambassador Scheme evaluation over Years 1, 2 and 3

London Ambassador Scheme participants who contributed to evaluation	Year 1 2006-07	Year 2 2007-08	Year 3 2008-09
AchieveAbility Learners (Year 1 cohort)	8	8	22
AchieveAbility Learners (Year 2 cohort)	-	14	9
AchieveAbility Parents/Guardians (Year 1 cohort)	0	11	-
AchieveAbility Parents/Guardians (Year 2 cohort)	-	6	-
AchieveAbility Teachers (Year 1 cohort)	9	-	9
AchieveAbility Teachers (Year 2 cohort)	-	6	9
AchieveAbility Ambassadors (Year 1)	0	0	-
AchieveAbility Ambassadors (Year 2)	0	1	-
LETG ThisAbility Learners (Year 1 cohort)	22	9	17
LETG ThisAbility Learners (Year 2 cohort)	-	13	9
LETG ThisAbility Parents/Guardians (Year 1 cohort)	0	5	-
LETG ThisAbility Parents/Guardians (Year 2 cohort)	-	4	-
LETG ThisAbility Teachers (Year 1 cohort)	3	-	7
LETG ThisAbility Teachers (Year 2 cohort)	-	2	7
LETG ThisAbility Ambassadors (Year 1)	1	0	-
LETG ThisAbility Ambassadors (Year 2)	0	0	-



C The findings from the evaluation

This report is unable to represent all the Learners involved with the London Ambassador Scheme as it was based on the feedback that could be accessed by the Scheme's Evaluation Officer from AchieveAbility and LETG ThisAbility Learners, their parents/guardians, teaching staff and ambassadors. However, the findings provided positive evidence of the short-term and long-term impact of the London Ambassador Scheme for some Learners, both in relation to its targeted outcomes as well as other successes. Dissemination of the findings have taken place through the following events and briefings:

2006	This Ability workshop at the North London Aimhigher Conference
2006	Project profiled at the LETG Aimhigher Conference
2007	LETG This Ability briefings at two Local Authority events
2007	Project profiled at the AchieveAbility National Network launch at the House of Commons
2008	AchieveAbility reports to the AchieveAbility Steering Group and disseminated nationally
2008	Project profiled at the Aimhigher Conference
2008	Article in The Skill Journal
2008	Article in My Future Choices – The magazine for the Transition Information Network
2009	Project profiled at the Action on Access Conference

D Evaluation for Years 1 and 2

Of the targeted outcomes that had been agreed for the Scheme, it was the following that offered the more tangible measures of the Scheme's immediate impact on Learners:

- Identification of the barriers that Learners with disabilities encounter
- Increased Learner/parent/teacher awareness of support available at HE and opportunities in HE
- Increased confidence and motivation of young disabled Learners to progress to FE and HE.

Feedback received showed evidence of meeting all the above targeted outcomes. There was wider awareness of the barriers encountered by Learners after their participation in the London Ambassador Scheme, with one parent/guardian even admitting that she used to think the Learner's writing difficulties were due to laziness, but now realised they were not. There was wider awareness of the support and opportunities available at HE, with all Year 1 LETG ThisAbility Learners for example claiming to know at least a little bit more. And there was overwhelming evidence of increased confidence and motivation of young Learners to progress to FE and HE. Learners offering feedback said they felt more confident and better about their disability since taking part in the London Ambassador Scheme. Teachers commented on how the Scheme opened up their eyes to the fact that Learners with disabilities might be able to go to university when they might not have thought it possible before.

E Evaluation for Year 3

Feedback drawn from the tracked LETG ThisAbility and AchieveAbility Learners over 2008-09 offered an indication of how far the longer term targeted outcomes, outlined below, were met by the London Ambassador Scheme:

- Improved retention of Learners with a disability
- Increased application rates to FE and HE
- Support of successful transition from schools to FE and HE
- Increased success of young disabled Learners to progress to FE and HE.

The task of seeking comparative evidence of these measures proved to be impractical due to data restrictions limiting access to official records. However, assessing the targeted outcomes in terms of the proportions of tracked Learners remaining in education, applying to FE and HE and progressing to FE and HE offered alternative evidence of the London Ambassador Scheme's success. Indeed, tracking the Learners over 2008-09 revealed high proportions of the tracked Learners remaining in education.

There was strong evidence of support of successful transition from schools to FE and HE. Advising and preparing Learners for transition from schools to FE and HE was a key part of the London Ambassador Scheme. While ongoing support for successful transition was not an objective of the AchieveAbility project, it was for the LETG ThisAbility project and measures were taken to offer further support to Learners following the delivery of the Scheme. The evaluation saw one Learner enter university following ongoing support from her ambassador; a comment from one of the teaching staff suggested that neither the Learner nor her parents/guardians would have considered university a possibility before the intervention.

F Conclusion

The contributions to the Year 3 evaluation therefore highlighted the very positive outcomes of the London Ambassador Scheme in relation to its objectives for young people with disabilities - raising their awareness of the opportunities in FE and HE and their aspirations to aim for HE, as well as increasing their representation in FE and HE.

Other issues also emerged from the Year 3 evaluation findings as they highlighted other areas that could be worked on to enhance the London Ambassador Scheme's objectives of widening participation in FE and HE among young people with disabilities. They broadly echoed issues identified from the Year 2 evaluation on the short-term effectiveness of the London Ambassador Scheme and these are outlined below:

- **Sustained support**
- **Customisation**
- **Target groups**

Comments drawn from tracked Learners and teaching staff provided supporting evidence of the issues that, if addressed, would enhance the effectiveness of other projects like the London Ambassador Scheme. Highlighted concerns over Year 3 included the need for ongoing support for Learners, such as financial advice. The need for ongoing support for Learners' changing transition needs, such as when they left school, was also highlighted. As one Learner announced, referring to his dyslexia, the disability doesn't "stop when leaving school". Comments received also highlighted the need for a 'greater communal understanding' of disabilities and the potential benefits of targeting wider groups such as teachers who themselves could have limited aspirations for disabled students.



Overall, the evaluation of the London Ambassador Scheme's first two years collected positive feedback relating to its impact on Learners. Immediately after the Scheme's intervention, there was evidence of wider awareness of the barriers encountered by Learners with disabilities as well as of the support and opportunities available at HE.

Feedback relating to increased confidence among Learners and motivation to progress to FE and HE was overwhelming. In the longer term, the evaluation saw a high proportion of school-leaving tracked Learners progress to FE and HE.

The London Ambassador Scheme has had the added benefit of engaging with wider groups of people to support and understand the needs of young people with disabilities.

Feedback received highlighted areas that could enhance effectiveness and formed the following recommendations:

- 1** Learners need ongoing support for dealing with their disability to help them successfully meet the requirements for entering college and higher education.
- 2** Earlier and more detailed identification of Learner disabilities, in particular SpLD and multiple disabilities, so that access can be provided to better provision of appropriate support throughout a Learner's educational life, across transition points.
- 3** The Scheme recognises the support currently provided to Learners with disabilities in schools, FE colleges and HEIs. Its findings nevertheless emphasise the need to enhance ongoing support, in terms of information, advice and guidance (IAG) to assist with progression to HE and FE, better signposting of where to get advice and help with accessing financial support and ensuring that support is in place on transition to FE and HE.
- 4** Sustained support through training of Learners to become ambassadors in future Schemes could add to the benefits gained from the Scheme.
- 5** A Unique Learner Number (ULN) which stays with an individual throughout their education rather than the current Unique Pupil Number (UPN) which changes when an individual progresses to a different institution i.e. FE college or HEI, would greatly facilitate tracking and gathering empirical evidence for projects such as the London Ambassador Scheme.
- 6** Further ongoing development of the Scheme, tailored to meeting the needs and transition stages of Learners, would enhance its positive impact on young people.
- 7** The positive gains that have already come out of the Scheme should be built upon in partnership with wider groups of people to help towards realising the goals and objectives of raising the aspirations of young people with disabilities to progress to FE and HE.