



My experience as a mentor for The Leadership Academy Pilot Programme.

I recently attended the graduation ceremony for the Leadership Academy. It was a pilot scheme to improve the leadership skills of disabled people, run by Disability Rights UK as a 'recognised center' of the Institute of Leadership and Management - ILM (of which I am a Fellow). I've been involved since its inception as a mentor, and helped to promote and develop the scheme.

The aim of the Programme is "to empower capable, confident disabled leaders in all sectors of employment and also address the need for greater equality in the workplace, to improve the employment position of employees living with a health condition or disability, whilst providing employers with access to a wider pool of talent."

Scheme participants had access to and ongoing support from a mentor, a coach, training sessions, and participated in Action Learning Sets – each working on a disability-related project. The Action Learning Sets (live project presentations) reported the outcomes of their projects at the graduation ceremony. The results were truly impressive – not just for the many excellent and practical ideas that were generated (some of which I shall steal shamelessly), but most of all for the confidence and spirit exhibited by the participants.

I've mentored two people through the Academy. It hasn't been easy. I've had to help them through some difficult times, and some challenging issues. Mentoring is often difficult, but mentoring people with disabilities and long-term health conditions brings particular challenges. Not just in terms of the issues dealt with, but also the logistics and practicalities. My own life experiences have really helped me – enabling me to empathise, and to share ideas about how I've coped with difficulties and achieved successes. My mentoring experience on the Academy has given me a real lift,



working through issues with my mentees, and seeing them grow in confidence and capability. It's been rewarding for both them and me.

The keynote speaker at the ceremony was Baroness Jane Campbell. Jane Campbell is distinguished and doughty fighter for the rights of disabled people. She is a cross-bencher in the House of Lords, independent of political party, and is co-Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Disability Group. She gave an inspirational and witty address, describing the graduates as “stars”, urging them to be ambassadors for disabled leaders and wishing them great success in their careers. Indeed, many of the graduates had already secured promotions or were exploring new career opportunities.

Although the pilot has concluded, the Academy will continue, with a new cohort starting later this year. I'm going to carry on mentoring the two people I've worked with through the pilot, and volunteer to mentor more people in the next cohort.

If anyone wants to register to receive information as soon as it's available, they are welcome to email Katrina.morris@disabilityrightsuk.org, who is responsible for the management of the Leadership Academy.

A fundamental tenet of Disability Rights UK's attitude to leadership is that disability provides leaders with a “unique advantage”. That might sound like a strange thing to say. But, as a disabled person myself with long-term health conditions, I can relate to it. Disabled people need to work differently, and often think differently. Unlocking barriers provides access to a broader pool of talent and provides access to unique talents. So, let's champion difference and see companies lead in real “authentic leadership”.

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