

18 North West E.Net Limited



North West E.Net demonstrates how a body established to provide support, advice and training to member organisations working with people with disabilities is able to combine member participation with empowering people with disabilities to participate in decision-making.

What it Does

North West E.Net (E.Net) is a networking and development company that promotes equality and diversity in terms of training and employment for disabled people, especially people with learning disabilities.

E.Net provides networking and partnership building activities between members; information dissemination; funding advice and capacity building. It also has contracts with the Employment Service to deliver New Deal for Disabled People services and European Social Fund (ESF) to deliver supported employment. E.Net operates as the lead partner of a consortium made up of its members to deliver these programmes.

How it Came About

Individual organisations that promote training and employment for disabled people in local organisations in the North West came together in 1995 to explore areas of common interest and opportunities for mutual development. The response from the initial meeting was good and participating organisations operated as an informal network for about two years. Following this period, the organisations decided to develop the network into a formal partnership.

It was agreed to constitute as a Society for the Benefit of the Community under the Industrial & Provident Society Acts and to apply for Exempt Charitable Status. Since then the group has developed in strength, promoting partnership working and networking, as well as developing areas of service provision.

E.Net recognises that disabled people are a socially excluded group, and are subject to high levels of prejudice and discrimination. In recognising this, their aim is to enhance the abilities of voluntary and community organisations who are delivering services to disadvantaged groups in the North West through co-ordinating the networking activities of member organisations, and through this, to focus on the key issues that arise through these activities.

The Society also aims to promote and support the continuing development of a high quality training and employment provision that actively includes the disabled community in the region. This is done through empowering disabled people to participate in the decision-making processes of E.Net through active involvement in the development of the network.

Governance Structure

E.Net has an Executive Committee of twelve, elected from the membership. Of the twelve current members, two are people with learning difficulties. The staff report to the Executive Committee.

E.Net has quarterly open members' meetings, which help to keep the Executive Committee in touch with the concerns of the membership.

Facts & Figures

- Organisational Type – A Society for the benefit of the community
- Legal Form – Industrial & Provident Society
- Date Established – 1995
- Location – Clitheroe, Lancashire
- Number of Members – 33 member organisations
- Number of Workers – Three staff, two male and one female, no disabled people and no one from minority groups.
- Turnover – £350k in the financial year ending December 2002.



The E. Net Office

Participatory Practice

Quarterly membership meetings are well attended with around 25-30 people present. Member organisations can send more than one person and many do so.

Member organisations are also encouraged to send people with disabilities so that they are engaged in the network.

Network meetings are held at different venues around the North West to make it easier for all members to attend at least some of the meetings.

Members' meetings normally comprise:

- Training items on a matter of interest to members (e.g. the workings of the Disability Discrimination Act);
- Information sharing on the activities of E.Net; and
- Information sharing between member organisations on their own activities.

The Executive Committee is elected at the AGM from member nominations. All Executive Committee members stand for re-election each year and all are elected on the basis of one member organisation one vote. People with learning difficulties represented on the Executive Committee are elected in the same way as all other members of the Executive Committee.

People with learning difficulties on the Executive Committee receive the same induction training as other Directors. However, they are supported by a mentor from their own organisation who is allowed to attend the Executive Committee meetings to provide guidance and support if needed. E.Net reports no problems with this arrangement so far.

E.Net produces regular members' newsletters containing information of use to members.

Stakeholder Engagement

Disabled people are on the Executive Committee and represented at all members meetings. This is an important part of the culture of the organisation.

E.Net's membership is made up of social enterprises. However, there are some local authority supported employment and training projects which feel an affinity for E.Net's practices. These projects receive newsletters and are invited to open meetings, but cannot become full members because they are part of a local authority. E.Net has amended its rules to allow for 'associate members' to cater for these projects, but in fact this has never been formalised.

Measures of Success

The organisation has been accredited with the Investor in People Award, along with the Positive about Disabled People Award.

The organisation has also been successful in obtaining a contract with the Employment Agency for New Deal for Disabled People programmes in the area.

Key to Success

E.Net is member led and member driven. As a member-based organisation, it exists to serve the needs of its members, without whom, the Society would not be able to continue.

Its culture in prioritising equality and diversity strategies is very attractive to its membership base.

E.Net has been assisted in its development process through Trinity Community Partnership, a multi-activity community project in Clitheroe, which have managed accounts and strategic development.

Vision for the Future

Promoting training and employment of disabled people across the North West more effectively, especially through the New Deal for Disabled People.

The organisation states

"It is vital to ensure that E.Net and its staff team remain representative of the needs of disabled people."