Case study: ALFIE – Action learning for inclusive education

The ‘Action learning for inclusive education’ (ALFIE) Outstanding Teaching, Learning and Assessment project, delivered from 2016 to 2017, was a partnership between Gloucestershire College and National Star. National Star is a specialist Further Education (FE) residential college for students with learning difficulties, profound physical disabilities and those with additional needs who are preparing for work.

**OTLA2 Outstanding teaching. learning and assessment**

**Region: South West**

What was the purpose of the project?

The aims of the project were to:

* support teachers to undertake action research in order to improve their practice
* focus on developing specialist pedagogies for use with people with additional learning needs
* form an updateable resource for practitioners across the FE sector.

What did the project do?

The partners set out to achieve their aims by:

* creating an ALFIE website that helps practitioners carry out action research, including downloadable reflective work sheets and videos of practitioners and learners talking about their experiences of carrying out research
* hosting on the website a searchable library of action research papers focused on effective inclusive practice
* creating an online professional development programme using the expertise of practitioners working with learners with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
* creating website content, including films of learners discussing the impact of their involvement in current research
* conducting action research projects with staff following the Level 5 Diploma in Teaching Disabled Learners.

What challenges did the project face?

Keeping action learning research projects within the project timeframe was challenging. Regular correspondence and tutorials with teachers mitigated this risk and supported research practice.

Gathering quantitative data within this timeframe was also problematic. However, qualitative evidence was provided by filmed interviews with teachers and learners which were posted on the [ALFIE](https://alfie-portal.herokuapp.com/) website. These indicated a wealth of in-depth subjective reflection by project participants.

What outcomes did the project have?

The project resulted in an online resource where practitioners can upload their research papers. These offer valuable materials for other practitioners working with learners with SEND. By the project end, seven teachers had used the resources to conduct action research programmes involving 120 learners.

What difference did the project make?

This partnership project enabled:

* participants to gain a deeper understanding of learners and to reshape their practice
* participants to carry out research in a way which helped them to learn much more about themselves as teachers
* learners to contribute fully to the research process and to reflect on how it was enhancing their experience and developing their skills and knowledge in the process.

Users of the ALFIE site across the FE sector are able to gain a greater understanding of inclusive practice and teachers have access to training and support for conducting practitioner-led action research (PLAR). Teacher evaluation and self-reflection has also been enhanced.

Where can I find more information?

The [ALFIE](https://alfie-portal.herokuapp.com/) project website offers a range of resources to support PLAR covering: an overview of the subject; beginning research; formulating research questions; planning research; collecting and analysing data; referencing reading; and identifying and reflecting impact. The website also includes resources in different formats (PDF and video) and a portal for uploading and accessing research papers.

For more information contact David Finch, Director of International Development and Research, National Star dfinch@nationalstar.org. and Jane Finch, Project Manager and Specialist Teacher Educator, National Star jfinch@nationalstar.org.

“I have carried out questionnaires with 30 learners and interviewed four in person. I have had some interesting outcomes from the interviews, for instance one learner with dedicated 1:1 support said that she found it difficult to work with someone sitting next to her and that she would like more opportunity to problem solve herself.” Teacher comment