

## **Written evidence from Central YMCA [NDS0031]**

### **About Central YMCA**

Central YMCA was established in 1844 and is the world's oldest YMCA and today, is one of the UK's leading health, education, and wellbeing charities, with the goal of helping people to live happier, healthier, and more fulfilled lives.

Central YMCA also works towards helping to give people access to life-changing opportunities and part of this is delivered through our awarding organisation, YMCA Awards, and our nationwide training provider, YMCA Training.

YMCA Training, an independent learning provider, was established in the late 1970s and works closely not only with individuals, but also employers, supporting them by delivering tailored courses to suit their needs and requirements. YMCA Training merged with Central YMCA in August 2018 and delivers training courses and apprenticeships from pre-16 to Level 5 in a wide range of sectors ranging from business management to horticulture, sport and leisure and health and social care.

YMCA Club is our London gym and as the site of the very first YMCA the gym remains the largest in the capital and it's where we develop our pioneering new techniques and ideas. We believe everyone should have the opportunity to get healthier. That's why we built our first gym in 1881 and why today we welcome around 3,500 concessionary members which range from elite athletes training for the Olympics, to cancer rehabilitation patients.

YMCAfit is our fitness training provider. Through YMCAfit we want to produce outstanding instructors who go the extra mile and inspire everyone to improve their health and fitness. We founded the award-winning company in 1984 and back then created the first Exercise to Music course. Since then, we've trained more than 100,000 people in subjects as diverse as sports massage therapy, exercise for older adults and postnatal exercise.

### **Evidence for the inquiry into the National Disability Strategy.**

Central YMCA applauded the publication of the National Disability Strategy in 2021 and look forward to seeing evidence of its impact in later years. As a charity very much involved in the education and training of disabled individuals, we would like to provide evidence of our programmes which we feel have had the most positive impact on disabled people's lives and facilitated opportunities for further education or employment.

### **Challenging the status quo.**

Central YMCA believes that disability should never be a barrier to participation in employment and that practical careers have the capacity to transform young people's health, happiness, and well-being. It is therefore crucial that we provide a route to support engaged individuals with a passion for practical subjects, so they are properly equipped to lead fulfilling lives.

The Charity conducts regular equality audits to ensure our policies are effective and we remain reflective of the communities in which we operate. We place an emphasis

on Equality to enable us to better understand the underachievement of and challenges faced, particularly by disabled learners.

We have two initiatives, one currently active, that have provided opportunities for disabled people to engage in practical qualifications and employment. In addition to these two initiatives, which really on external funding and are therefore vulnerable to commercial pressures, we have a high percentage of disabled learners enrolled on our full time DfES funded provision from which we would like to share our experiences.

## **InstructAbility - Promoting inclusion within the fitness industry.**

In 2011 Central YMCA developed the InstructAbility initiative with Aspire – a national charity supporting people with spinal-cord injuries. Unemployed disabled people were trained in the skills needed to work as fitness instructors and the majority of those that completed the course went on to secure permanent employment. The scheme, delivered by YMCAfit tutors, provides disabled people with free, accessible fitness industry training and qualifications followed by a voluntary industry work placement. By supporting disabled people to take up a fitness career, we can help to encourage other disabled people in the local community to access leisure facilities, participate in inclusive fitness activities and enjoy an active lifestyle.

More than 1000 disabled people have qualified as instructors through the InstructAbility scheme, and we have helped to deliver over 60,000 inclusive fitness sessions. More than 70% of graduates have gone on to secure offers of employment.

InstructAbility is the only project in the UK and worldwide that is focused on enabling disabled people to become part of the leisure and fitness sector workforce. The initiative has enabled more disabled people to access training and employment opportunities and reduce the physical and attitudinal barriers they face and has made fitness facilities more welcoming to disabled customers.

What does the programme involve?

Phase 1: An 18-day training course delivered over seven weeks. The course is designed to give participants the skills, knowledge, and confidence to begin their fitness career and includes comprehensive learning resources and all the guidance and support needed to complete the qualification. Successful completion will lead to an internationally recognised qualification, the YMCA Level 2 Certificate in Gym Instructing and a Level 3 Exercise & Disability qualification.

Phase 2: Following the training phase, qualified disabled instructors will undertake a twelve week (3 days/week) voluntary placement in a public or private fitness gym. Volunteer instructors will undertake community outreach to engage other disabled people in fitness and exercise sessions. The volunteer placements have led to an over 50% conversion into full time paid employment.

### **Prerequisites**

To enrol you must be:

- disabled
- over 16 years old
- unemployed
- experienced and/or knowledge in using gym equipment
- able to complete a pre-course assessment
- available to attend an induction

### **Partners**

Sport England, The Aspire Centre for Disabilities, YMCAfit.

### **Case Studies.**

Learner feedback, InstructAbility Graduate

“I enjoyed the course, although it was a bit intimidating learning differently with a disability. The instructors were really supportive, giving extra time to subjects if needed. We worked together as a group to get each other through it, using our own strengths and weaknesses. It puts you on the right path to working in a gym with confidence.”



Full profile: <https://www.ymca.co.uk/health-and-wellbeing/profile/YMCAfit-graduate-leads-the-way-with-accessible-fitness-class>

Aspire Video: <https://youtu.be/oMHQ8TMCNZQ>

“Having a disability does give you a different perspective on a lot of things, people do treat you differently, and I thought this InstructAbility course might give me this confidence back, which it has!”

“During my time being disabled, I looked at other forms of disability, not just my own. We adapt for each individual client.”





### **Awards for InstructAbility.**

2013 – The Prime Minister’s Award for the Big Society.

“One year on from the opening of the London Paralympic Games, InstructAbility, a programme that provides free fitness industry training for disabled people, has been recognised by Prime Minister David Cameron with a Big Society Award.

Successful graduates of the programme include individuals with spinal cord injury, spina bifida, cerebral palsy, limb loss and other conditions affecting skeletal and neuromuscular function.”

Prime Minister David Cameron said:

“This time last year we were celebrating the start of the greatest Paralympic Games ever. Today I’m delighted to be recognising the work of a programme which is doing so much to secure the games’ lasting legacy. InstructAbility is encouraging more talented people with a disability to work in the fitness industry and creating the role models that will inspire others to get active.

The Big Society Award adds to the recognition already garnered by the programme; in 2012 the programme was awarded the prestigious Inspired by London 2012 mark and gained the Spark of Innovation award by the Fitness Industry Association.

### **Hortability, ‘Promoting Inclusion in the Horticulture Industry’.**

The Hortability programme provides learners with a City & Guilds Level 1 Award in Practical Horticulture Skills qualification. The programme is tailored to meet individual needs, with a reduced tutor learner ratio, combined with work placement for those participants who are work ready to create real opportunities for employment whilst improving self-efficacy, self-image, and confidence.

The ‘Hortability’ initiative began at Central YMCA’s Salford centre in 2019 and, in its third year, has attracted young people with a range of disabilities including anxiety, depression, hearing impairment, arthritis, learning difficulties and disabilities, autism and limited mobility. The programme is supported and partially financed by the Monday Trust and has resulted in over 100 young people gaining the qualification with over 50% resulting in full-time employment.

## Outcomes

- Opportunities for individuals and communities to develop social and economic independence
- Support for better mental or physical health
- Support for enhancing financial capability
- Using adult learning as a tool to contribute to the achievement of the government's wider social policy goals
- Pastoral care provided to enhance the learning process and work placement outcomes.

Horticulture contributes £9 billion to the UK economy every year and employs around 300,000 people, yet 70% of businesses say they struggle to find the skilled workers they require. We believe that by encouraging more disabled people to consider and become qualified horticulturists they will create a more socially inclusive workforce that closely resembles the full range of customers of facilities service.

This unique project addresses key areas of social inclusion and equality of opportunity, affording an underrepresented group the chance for personal development that will contribute positively to social change.

The combination of tailored training and the potential of a work placement is fundamental in removing significant barriers to employment, health and well-being.

Key elements of the project are the potential end users, the general public, who will benefit from contact with these individuals creating greater social awareness.

## Partners

The Monday Trust.

The British Association of Landscape Industries (BALI), the UK's largest Trade Association for professional Landscape Designers, has supported Hortability through their 'Go Landscape' programme, an education, skills and careers initiative, designed to inform and inspire new recruits and combat industry issues.

Notcutts who have provided the work placement opportunities.

<https://www.ymca.co.uk/education-training/subjects/hortability-course>

In addition, this year we have completed a course with Mencap Basingstoke who are an independent registered charity striving to enable people who have learning disabilities to gain the best quality of life they can through providing services to promote their physical and mental well-being through leisure, recreation and social activities. They also seek to support people to achieve greater independence and control over their lives.

## **The Study Programme – Promoting Inclusion in 16-19 education.**

The Study Programme, funded by the Department for Education and Skills, is a vocational programme for 16–19-year-olds and provides an alternative to A Levels. Central YMCA has been delivering the Study Programme since its launch in 2014 within its 15 training centres across England. Every academic year learners register on a full or part time course to gain English and maths GCSE, if they have not already achieved this, and a vocational qualification. Central YMCA registers over 2000 learners every year on this programme, a high proportion of which have learning difficulties or disabilities.

A significant proportion of school leavers are not ready to go to FE college or study for A Levels, or even T Levels, and need to progress from level 1 qualifications. Transitions between levels of study and achievement of qualifications require progression stages that are flexible and allow young people to be assessed and placed at the appropriate level at any stage in their training programme. Central YMCA learners, who enrol on our provision at 16, often face a massive gap, not just in terms of making it to a level 3, but also in being able to even enter the current study programme at levels 1 or 2 as they have been assessed as being at entry level 3. This is largely due to learning difficulties such as dyslexia and dyspraxia or mental health issues revolved around challenging and chaotic home lives and lives in care.

Added to this our study programme has a work placement aspect and therefore the basic elements of employment skills are an essential requirement. As many of our learners are months away from being work experience ready, let alone 'apprenticeship ready' then the first stages of our programmes are spent training the learners in employability skills as opposed to focusing on a vocational route. Knowledge and skills taught include health and safety, employment law, use of IT, punctuality, and professionalism.

Central YMCA has recently launched two new programmes which are a precursor to the study programme and enables tutors to assess learners and adapt their programmes accordingly. The first is called 'One step ahead' for learners who are assessed as requiring additional support before embarking on a level 1 or 2 and the second is 'Step Up' for 16-year-olds who have the potential to embark on a study programme with a work placement and require a much shorter intensive preparation.

The current Study Programme has been one of the most flexible and versatile programmes for classroom-based study for 16-19 learners in recent years and has enabled Central YMCA, as a provider, to focus on progression as opposed to outcomes. The journey for the learner has become of paramount importance as opposed to the ultimate achievement of qualifications and we would not want to lose this focus in a new transition programme. Therefore, the employability aspects of any transition programme are key and, in our opinion, should become the focus as opposed to the gaining of an award or qualification.

### **Definitions of Disability.**

For education and training purposes the definitions of learning disability or difficulty are unclear often leading to incorrect assessment of need. As learning disabilities may well have a long term and negative impact on an individual in terms of aspiring to their goals and achieving employment Central YMCA feel that they should be

classified in the same way that physical impairments are assessed and allocated funding. There is no disabled allowance in 16-19 education provision for those with learning difficulties, unless this extends to a formal diagnosis of autism, or indeed, for those suffering from mental health issues and challenges. Yet, as a training provider Central YMCA must extend a considerable amount of its charity reserves in providing the additional support these young disabled learners require to succeed. If clearer definitions of learning disabilities and assessment of additional support are not formalised there will be a dwindling number of training providers willing to accept these young learners and it is commercially non-viable.

Central YMCA has more evidence that it could submit to the committee on the practical aspects of working with those with disabilities and would like to reiterate the desire to continue a dialogue by giving oral evidence to the committee when evidence sessions begin.

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