

Hijinx and Proper Design

Can we build a safe and user-friendly digital communications system to facilitate better internal and external communications, making our organisation more efficient & more effective?

— **Hijinx Theatre** creates stunning theatre performed by actors with and without learning disabilities.

— **Proper Design** builds and manages websites that solve business problems. We're pretty handy with branding, web development, e-commerce and digital marketing.

— **The Digital Innovation Fund for the Arts in Wales** is a strategic partnership between Arts Council of Wales and Nesta. It is the successor to the Digital R&D Fund for the Arts in Wales that ran from 2013-2015. The fund has supported arts organisations to experiment using digital technology to enhance audience reach or to develop their business model.

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Introduction

Can we build a safe and user-friendly digital communications system to facilitate better internal and external communications, making our organisation more efficient and more effective?

Our vision is to make it commonplace to see learning disabled actors appearing on stage and screen. With 50 professionally trained learning disabled actors across Wales, and more coming through our training academies, our challenge has three dimensions. How do we share information internally amongst our group of actors, carers, and tutors across Wales? How do we keep track of actors progress while safeguarding their privacy? And how do we showcase their talent and successes publicly?

Through a process of research and development, we have begun to build an integrated digital communications system to address each of these strategic challenges. We have tested the different components of this system and we have gathered feedback from our staff, stakeholders and the professional casting industry.

In the next three years, as an organisation we aim to achieve:

- A 25 per cent increase in the overall turnover of the organisation.
- A reduction in our reliance on public funding through the Arts Council of Wales from 25 per cent to 22 per cent of our income.
- An increase in the proportion of earned income from 21 per cent to 36 per cent.

We see this project to digitise our internal and external communications as an essential pillar of this expansion.

The internal aspect of the system will underpin the establishment of our acting academies and drama foundations in locations across Wales, creating a pan-Wales community of learning disabled actors. It will enable us to provide the effective and efficient pastoral care that is needed to safeguard our actors and help them to perform to the best of their abilities.

The external aspect of the system will take the form of a casting website, to realise the work of our academy program. Our first academy was established in 2012, and has seen our actors emerge as self-assured and highly skilled professionals. Having a dynamic public platform for our work will enable us to help more of our academy graduates to secure paid employment as actors.

The project has the real potential to change the way Hijinx communicates and works in its entirety. As well as establishing us a visible leader and agency for learning disabled actors, we believe that having a digital platform dedicated to promoting the value and successes of learning disabled actors online will have huge impact in terms of visibility and equality in the acting profession.

Our strategic challenge

Hijinx are unique in pioneering professional performance training for learning disabled actors across Wales. We see our peers not as inclusive companies but as theatre companies. This is the benchmark we set ourselves. People with learning disabilities can be performers of the highest calibre.

We work with learning disabled actors because our understanding of humanity is enriched when we view the world from a different perspective. So we cast learning disabled actors because of their disability not despite their disability. The more our work is seen the more we can change society's perceptions of disability.

Learning disabled actors are rarely able to follow the traditional drama school route into acting as they lack the qualifications to access them. The Hijinx academies are the only professional, ongoing drama training programmes for learning disabled people in Wales.

We have had some success in helping a small number of actors into roles in theatre, television and film. To increase our capacity to do so, we need to raise the profile of our actors in the casting industry, and offer some form of representation so that they can be 'found.' We also need to ensure that our pastoral care system is able to provide appropriate levels of personal support to them. We need to make sure that our staff are aware of all essential medical information and domestic achievements or setbacks that might affect their performance.

Historically our pastoral system has been based on paper records, and communication between team members by phone and e-mail. The paper records comprise a log which tracks their training and any relevant skills and experience gained, and which sets targets for personal and professional development.

Our paper based system is cumbersome for staff and we have found that record keeping is not always consistent. The paper system doesn't provide us with a simple way of tracking progress over time in a way that meets the needs of our stakeholders, including our actors, their carers, and the social services departments and third sector agencies with which we work.



Research Questions

We developed the following overarching research question:

Can we build a safe and user-friendly digital communications system to facilitate better internal and external communications, making our organisation more efficient and more effective?

To answer this broader question we investigated the following:









We carried out the following activities as part of our research and development:

Implementation of the internal communications platform

The internal communications platform was developed using three existing digital platforms (Salesforce, Slack, and Wordpress) which were integrated into a single communications system and the functionality adapted for our needs. The platform was implemented first in our Cardiff Academy, and then rolled out other academies. Staff were provided with basic training and were able to report any issues directly through the platform itself.

Development of the external communications platform

The external communications platform, which takes the form of a 'casting' website, was developed as an extension of the internal communications platform, with a central repository of data. The site has been developed to a beta stage, which is fully functional but not yet publicly available.

Digital data capture and user feedback

Data from the usage of the platforms was collected, including the activity of every user, reports of issues experienced and requests for feature changes.

Staff survey

We carried out a survey of the 6 academy staff using the internal communications platform, to understand their experience of using it and the impact it had on their work, including their views on the impact on the experience of our actors and stakeholders.

Stakeholder interviews

We carried out informal interviews with stakeholders at our annual showcase events, to understand their views and concerns in relation to our new communications system. In total we spoke to 20 parents/carers and social services contacts in North, West and South Wales. The responses reflected a range of views, including those who were more enthusiastic and those who had more reservations. We completed more in depth interviews with two stakeholders: one senior social services contact, and one of our board members, who is the parent of one of our actors.

Business support

We commissioned a business advisor to help us develop a value proposition, and to undertake a financial modelling exercise to inform our ongoing business planning.

A full timetable and budget is included as an annex.



We made the following changes to project delivery:

Systems integration:

To create the casting site, we originally planned to integrate the internal communications system with a publicly available website. We did create some proof-of-concept integrations between the various parts of the system, however the current version of the internal communications system, the actor database and the external facing website are all separate. We found that some older features of the existing tools we had chosen to customise were arcane and very difficult to integrate successfully compared to newer features. With time as a major factor we opted not to allocate time on the purely technical task of fully integrating all elements into a single system. Instead we felt it was more valuable to focus on how best to present our actors to casting agents, and we brought this aspect of our R&D forward compared to our original plan.

Interviews with stakeholders

Our intention was to carry out six interviews with parents, carers, social services and our third sector partners, following our more informal consultation at our annual showcase event. However, though we identified a longlist of people to approach, we found that our stakeholders were not able to make themselves available in the short timescales we had planned for this exercise.

Our digital communications system

How can our new digital system enable our academy staff to communicate effectively with each other and with stakeholders?

The central basis for our communications system is a common type of software known as a Customer Record Management (CRM) system, used widely in the public and private sector.

One of the important considerations in designing an integrated system is understanding how the different elements will 'talk' to each other. The simplest way to do this is by using APIs, short for Application Programming Interface. APIs make programming easier by providing a series of building blocks that the programmer can put together to produce the functionality they want.

Data storage and reporting: Salesforce

We chose Salesforce (SFDC) as the CRM system we would use, on the basis that it has a powerful and well documented API that is set up to offer integration with a wide range of other web-based systems. SFDC is available for free to registered charities for up to ten registered users.

Hijinx tutors use SFDC directly for managing actor records. Salesforce offers the ability to customise its interface based on the type of user logged-in. This allowed us to create a 'fieldworker' view of the inputs needed for day-to-day activity. Salesforce also offer their Salesforce1 mobile app meaning each of our academies can access and enter records in a purpose built mobile app with no further development needed.

We created a reporting tool that would allow tutors to produce reports on the progress of Hijinx actors, for internal purposes and for sharing with stakeholders. The reporting tool is a single-page app (SPA) built in React.js consuming data from SFDC.

Casting site: Wordpress

To create the casting site, we chose to use Wordpress (WP) as well-documented, free and open-source, with a large community of developers and good support available at no additional cost. The site uses a custom post-type for actors and custom fields to describe their training, skills, experience and other relevant information. Custom taxonomies were created for voice character, voice quality, special skills and for essential medical information. This allows site visitors to view actors grouped by specific qualities.

Internal communications: Slack

For our internal communications we chose to use Slack – a free-to-use online team communication tool which provides a searchable log of conversations between team members. Instead of sending multiple emails, the tool allows conversations to happen in a series of 'channels' that function like a chatroom or a message board. Slack offers a huge number of pre-built integrations into other services and therefore reducing the need for additional development to customise it for our needs. We created a proof-of-concept connection from SFDC to Slack which alerts all relevant staff if there is an incident during one of the academy sessions. This happens as soon as the record is added and allows the team to respond to issues the moment they are reported.

Feedback from staff

How much time and money can our communications system save, and how can this saving be reinvested in delivering our organisational aims?

Our aim with this project was to reduce the time spent on reporting and internal communications whilst improving the accuracy of the records we keep. We sought the views of staff at each stage of the project to gather their suggestions and concerns.

Hijinx core staff and freelance tutors from around Wales were gathered at a training session in September. The focus of the day was introducing them to Slack and the new Salesforce database. Hijinx staff working on the DIFAW project demonstrated both systems on iPads and signed staff up to Slack. More detailed training has taken place one-on-one.

We asked our staff to estimate, prior to the introduction of our new digital system, the time they spend each week on progress monitoring and reporting to stakeholders using our existing paper-based system. Their estimates ranged from between around 10 per cent and 25 per cent. We are continuing to monitor this to see if the system is able to produce a measurable impact in time saved.

Ease of reporting

Surveying staff following the roll out of the digital systems at each of the academies, they noted a number of positive benefits of moving to a digital system. In particular the ease with which information could be stored, queried and reported. The nature of the previous paper-based system was such that producing a report would involve physically going through sheets of paper stored in a central location. When recording information, staff reported running out of forms, or running out of space on the forms, and being unable to reach others' handwriting. The digital system in this respect was more flexible, and allowed instantly accessible reports from any location.

Consistent and timely communication

They reported that the digital system improved consistency of reporting, and facilitated improved sharing of information between staff. For example, where a member of staff was away for one session and covered by another member of staff, reports from that session might not be available to them when they returned, as they would not have an opportunity to collect the handwritten notes written by the staff member that had covered them. In contrast, the digital system ensured that the notes could be compiled during the session and could be available immediately.

Staff concerns

Staff also raised a number of concerns and disadvantages to the digital system compared to the paper version. Concerns were raised about the security of the data, and the potential for confidentiality to be compromised where information was being recorded whilst other people were present. For some staff, typing on a touchscreen tablet computer was slower and less accurate than then writing by hand, whilst other staff took the opposite view. The systems' reliance on internet access was also identified as a vulnerability, particularly where a network might be insecure or unreliable. Staff also reported issues caused by the software running slowly or crashing whilst they were using it.

We continue to develop the policies and working arrangements that will help staff to overcome these issues, and we continue to monitor any time savings.

Feedback from parents and carers

Will parents and carers of our actors be willing to support our new system?

We presented the casting site and our complete new digital communications system at our annual showcases in North, South and West Wales. This gave us an opportunity to speak with parents and carers about their views. We spoke to 20 individuals, including those who had more positive and more mixed views.

Achieving our social purpose

Where parents and carers held positive views, this was where they saw the casting site as a natural extension of our current work. Parents and carers whose sons and daughters had already accessed paid work were supportive of a platform to enable more people to access those opportunities. Increasing the exposure of Hijinx actors was seen as making a contribution to addressing the organisation's social purpose, to change society's perceptions of people with learning disabilities.

Safety, security and accessibility

Where parents and carers expressed concerns, these fell into four categories. Data security was raised in relation to the personal information stored about our actors, and particularly where this information was being accessed over public wireless internet connections.

Concerns were also raised about whether information held on our system might be shared in ways that would not benefit our actors. The concern was raised by several parents that the perception that an actor was working could cause an unnecessary investigation by government agencies into their financial circumstances, potentially causing an interruption in the payment of welfare benefits.

Some of the parents and carers were concerned about raising the profile of the actors, whether this could put actors at increased risk of bullying or abuse, and whether presenting actors in this way could perpetuate stereotypes. Some parents were also concerned that the opportunities for paid work would only be available to a small number of Hijinx actors.

Ongoing engagement

As we continue to develop the casting site, this feedback provides us with the basis for ongoing engagement with parents and carers. We are able to clearly present this project as a natural extension of our work, to support our trained actors to apply their skills and gain paid work, and ultimately to change our society's perception of people with learning disabilities. To address parents' and carers' concerns, we must demonstrate that:

- Data is stored and processed with the highest standards of security, appropriate to the highly sensitive nature of the personal data held on our system.
- A clear access policy restricts the use of the data to a specific set of uses in a specific set of circumstances.
- We are able to proactively prevent inappropriate use of data, and to ensure the highest standards of online safety for the vulnerable individuals we support – including guarding against bullying and grooming.
- Opportunities arising from the casting site will benefit all our actors in a way that is appropriate to their needs and circumstances.

Feedback from sector stakeholders

Will our local authorities and our third sector partners be willing to support our new system?

At our annual showcase we were also able to present our work to some of our partners – the local authority social services and third sector organisations responsible for supporting people with learning disabilities in the localities in which we work.

Similar to parents and carers, there was enthusiastic support where people perceived to be new opportunities for our actors, and in some cases there were concerns expressed that we might inadvertently typecast our actors for ‘the disabled role.’ Concerns around data security and access were also raised.

One of the distinctive areas of interest amongst our sector stakeholders was around the importance of tracking actors, and how a digital version of our service would be valuable to them. As one of the social services managers told us via a follow up email: “Any system that can track and report progress in a simple way has got to be good... As a commissioner I am interested in knowing how the students are doing but I am also mindful that Hijinx staff don’t want to get too weighed down with manual reporting processes.” They also added, “I think it would be really helpful if some of our other providers had similar systems.”

We are confident in the outcomes tracking system that provides the basis for our internal communications platform, having developed and tested this prior to this digital project. Whilst we understand there is still a need to fully develop the appropriate policies and agreements that meet the needs of our sector stakeholders, we continue to develop this working closely with the established relationships we have with them and drawing on the expertise available to us on our board of trustees.



The market for learning disabled actors

What options are there for our casting site to create new revenue streams?

We commissioned a business advisor to help us to formulate a value proposition to provide the basis for changes to our business model to support the casting site and the services we will provide.

Our business advisor consulted with Hijinx staff, senior managers involved in training at public and private sector organisations, and with three casting assistants. On the basis of this consultation, they identified three products and the markets they would serve. Against each of these products a longlist of actions was identified, for us to consider and prioritise within the scope of our current resources.

The full report is included as an annex.

Casting agency

Our business advisor confirmed that, according to his investigations, a casting agency specialising in actors with learning disabilities had not been tried before. He identified that the major barriers to overcome in this respect included:

- A perception that people with learning disabilities cannot act.
- A tendency only to cast actors with disabilities in roles as characters who are disabled, and to cast actors without disabilities in roles as characters who do have disabilities.
- A tendency to consider 'disability' in relation only to physical disabilities.
- The poor reputation of some of the existing agencies for actors with disabilities.

He also brought our attention to need to highlight the support Hijinx is able to offer to the actors as the 'unique selling point' of our product, a prominent message in all our marketing activities. He highlighted the importance of a high profile to be able to reach our market effectively, and to maximise opportunities for free publicity, particularly in the trade press. He also identified the need to seek appropriate legal advice on contractual issues to protect both Hijinx and our actors.

Live training agency

This is an area in which Hijinx already operates, initially in respect to contributing to the training of medical students and for a range of other public sector and private sector clients since. Our business advisor suggested the way in which we could package this as a product to be offered to others, and strategies for reaching each of the potential markets for this product based on the client base we have developed to date. He emphasised the need for a clear pricing structure, and the importance of adapting the language we use to appeal to our potential clients – for example, whilst we might describe a session as 'forum theatre,' he suggested we could frame this as "controlled opportunities for interaction with trained actors."

Training videos

Our business advisor proposed to us that training videos might be one way in which we could reach a wider client base. He suggested that current videos available on the subject of disability tend to be of a low quality and that this could represent a gap in the market. Whilst this could be a very difficult market to break into initially, he suggested that if we could establish the model by working with some of our existing clients, we could potentially use this as a basis for a partnership with an existing training video company who would then handle the marketing and sales operation.

Next steps

Can we build a safe and user-friendly digital communications system to facilitate better internal and external communications, making our organisation more efficient and more effective?

Through this process of research and development we have developed a secure internal communications system and a public-facing casting site. All elements of this system are based on existing low- or no-cost software that we have had customised to our needs. These separate elements can provide the basis for the development of an integrated digital communications system that meets the needs of our staff, our stakeholders and the professional casting industry. We have identified a series of options for the further development of the system in the coming weeks and months.

Our internal communications system

The internal communications – based on SFDC and Slack – are now up and running in our academies in all parts of Wales. This will now require a period of time to bed in. In particular, staff and tutors need time to explore the best way of using the scoring functionality, to evaluate how best to track the personal and professional development of our actors. We will continue to evaluate the system through regular e-surveys with tutors in each region.

Some of our sector stakeholders have expressed an interest in the system we have developed for monitoring the personal and professional development of our actors with learning disabilities. We believe this presents an opportunity to further spread the public benefit of this work and potentially to develop new income streams. We are now committed to developing a greater understanding of how the system we have developed could be customised to the needs and circumstances of our partners.

Our external communications system

We have identified two priorities in relation to the development of our external communications system: the live training offer, and the casting site itself.

To establish our live training offer we will now seek to broker new relationships with medical and healthcare training providers across Wales. We have identified a list of targets and are in communication with our existing contacts to see how our casting site can help us to sell the package we have on offer.

In relation to the casting site itself, further technical development is needed to bring it to completion. Once the site is fully set up, we will be able to user test the site with casting directors and producers. In parallel to the technical development, we will need to refine the brand identity of the agency and to continue to add detail to the new business model to support it.

We have already experienced an overwhelmingly positive response from our existing contacts in the arts and media, and those contacted by our business advisor. We also see a drive from within the industry to achieve much greater levels of diversity in representation in both on and off-screen roles, and we feel that our casting site has the potential to make a valuable contribution.

Still, we anticipate challenges in relation to the scarcity of good roles for learning disabled actors, and the long-standing misconceptions about people with disabilities. Hijinx remains committed to our vision, where the appearance of actors with learning disabilities on stage and screen is commonplace. Our new communications system provides the potential for a powerful new tool for us to realise it.

Project team

Vanessa Morse, Marketing Manager, Hijinx.

Digital Innovation Project Leader since Sept 2016
Vanessa is responsible for developing and implementing Hijinx's Communications Strategy, including web, digital, print, social media. She has managed numerous digital projects at Hijinx, including the company's consultancy with Native HQ via the Social Media Insights scheme. As part of the Senior Management, she has helped shape the organisation's strategic direction. She is currently exploring the potential to develop a new income-generating stream of work at Hijinx, developing job opportunities for learning disabled actors.

Clare Williams, Chief Executive, Hijinx

Clare is instrumental in leading Hijinx's mission, business planning and fundraising. She authored Hijinx's application to the Digital Innovation Fund and led the brain-storming, question-asking sessions which resulted in a successful application.

Jonathan Dunn, freelance digital producer

Jonathan has a long standing relationship with Hijinx as its film maker, photographer and digital producer. As well as producing the extensive set of images and films for the casting website, Jonathan has helped roll out Slack to Hijinx's staff and tutors across Wales.

Dan McGowan, Academy Director

Dan oversees Hijinx's five training academies for learning disabled actors, including course content, recruitment of tutors and new students, relationships with key stakeholders. Dan's experience with the Academies and as an actor, director and performer, was instrumental in planning the development of the Salesforce system and Casting site, particularly in the early stages.

Amy Griggs, Welfare, Hijinx

Amy is responsible for ensuring the welfare of Hijinx's 50 actors across Wales. She is based in Cardiff but is closely connected with tutors and students in Carmarthen, Aberystwyth and Prestatyn. During the course of the Nesta project, Amy has led the testing of the Salesforce database in the Cardiff Academies, assisted with the roll out of the system to other academies, and collected feedback from tutors on the system.

Marc Heatley, Proper Design

Marc has worked as a designer and web-developer for more than 15 years, first as a freelancer and more recently with his company Proper Design, founded in 2014 with partners Andrew Shankie and Ben Jones. Having previously worked in third-sector and arts organisations Marc's aim is to design solutions around the needs and capabilities of his clients.

Timetable and budget

Phase	Description	Task	Delivered By	Days	£	Non-Tech Partner	Days	£	Completed By
I - Customise SFDC & Wordpress	Digitise the offline tracking/targets/ logs of each Academy member into SFDC	Wordpress Integration	Proper	—	—	Core Staff x 4 @£100. <i>Data input training</i>	1	£400	End August 2016
		SFDC Customisation	Proper	—	—	Core Staff x 6 £100. <i>SalesForce training</i>	1	£400	
II - Actor Records	Using data from SFDC to present actor progress in a visual/useful way. The CMS will serve a SPA that pulls the data from SFDC directly using a framework like REACT.	SPA data model	Proper	—	—	Support Staff x 5	1	£350	Tech development - End of September 2016
		SFDC API abstraction							
		SPA design & styling		—	—				Population – End Jan 2017
		SPA build							
		Population	Hijinx	—	—				
		Charting Implementation	Hijinx	—	—				
III - Internal Communication Network	Creating a confidential social network for tutors, actors, support staff, volunteers and acting networks to share experiences and successes using web-based messaging tool SLACK.	Adaptation for Hijinx.	Hijinx	—	—	—	—	—	Integration into SFDC - Early December 2016
		Integrating SLACK into SFDC.	Proper	—					Roll out / Implementation – End Dec 2016
		Build pages for proper practice videos and other resources.	Hijinx	—					
		Charting Implementation	Hijinx	—	—	Support Staff x3 @ £100	1	£300	
IV - Casting Agency Site	Public non-confidential data on an actor-centric website.	Casting Agency Site Design	Proper	—	—	Support Staff x1 @£75	25	£1,875	Filmed/ Photographed content complete and uploaded – Mid Dec 2016
		Site Build	Hijinx and D+D	—	—				Design - End of January 2017
		Filmed Content/student profiles	D+D	10	£2000				Population – End Feb 2017
Additional Fees	—	—	—	—	—	iPads for Support Staff x5 @£320	—	£1,600	—
Totals						Project Management/ Staff training	10	£2,000	—
TECH SUBTOTAL				£ 28,791 (inc VAT)		PROJECT SUBTOTAL		£7,125	
OVERALL TOTAL		£35,916							

Hijinx Theatre Commercial activities

Value proposition

Dr Martin Price
Consultancy.coop LLP
October 2016



1. Background

Hijinx has sixty students at five acting Academies around Wales. These are people with learning disabilities (LD people) who meet regularly for professional training in acting skills in order to become LD actors.

The aim is to develop a sustainable business which provides meaningful employment and income for actors, income for Hijinx

Hijinx has three potential business streams:

- A casting agency
- A live training agency offering bespoke Role Play and Forum Theatre
- Producing training videos

A web-based system is being developed to manage the process and keep information about the students / actors.

An important consideration is that most of the students and their families are in receipt of various benefit payments and there are limits on how much each individual can earn, weekly and annually in order not to jeopardise their situation. For this reason, Hijinx will act as an agent and will be paid by the client. Hijinx will have an equitable written agreement with the LD person and or their family which will be fair to the LD person and allow it retain funds to develop its work.

2. Casting agency

Acting is a competitive and unpredictable market with uncertain financial return. However, running a casting agency can be lucrative and fits in well with the acting Academies' and Hijinx's theatrical productions. It also adds to Hijinx's prestige and reputation. This sort of agency specialising in LD actors has not been tried before. It is very much in tune with Hijinx's aim to change society's perceptions and prejudices about LD people

The Product

The aim would be to provide work for the actors being trained at the Academy and provide opportunities to put into practice what they have been learning. The web-based database of the actors being produced will provide a showcase for the actors. This will allow for good showcasing of the actors and for selection by physical characteristics. E.g. hair colour or acting age etc. Hijinx will also be able to provide a detailed profile each actor and provide the best match to a role.

The Market

The market here is theatre, television and film casting directors, producers and scriptwriters. There are significant barriers to casting actors with disabilities, particularly those with a learning disability. Writers, Casting Directors and Producers tend to cast a disabled actor for a disabled role, rather than think of them as an actor who happens to have a disability. Disabled actors tend not to be considered for a role not specifically identified as a disabled character. There is an overwhelming tendency to play safe and cast a non-disabled actor in a disabled role. Another prejudice is to only conceive of disability in relation to wheel-chair users.

The big barrier to get across is that LD people can actually act.

Existing agencies which claim to provide disabled actors often have poor reputations and could not provide the support which Hijinx can to a LD actor. This must be the USP for Hijinx and needs to be very clear in all the marketing literature.

Action Plan

- The website needs to be as professional as possible and clearly state the added value that Hijinx will provide in terms of a support package for each LD actor.
- Each actor must have an up to date show-reel and voice-reel to demonstrate their appearance and capabilities.
- Strong relationships need to be built up with the Casting Directors Guild. Hijinx must build on its existing contacts here.
- Relationships should be built up with local casting agencies in Wales for mutual referrals.
- A standard written contract with a fair fee structure has to be set up to protect both Hijinx and the LD actors. It should reflect the extra support that Hijinx will be providing and will be higher than those of a standard agency. Appropriate legal advice should be taken.
- Consideration should be given to creating a fund to pay for actors' expenses to attend auditions in London or elsewhere in the UK.
- All opportunities for publicity should be taken. A high profile is going to be an essential part of the marketing strategy. There needs to be a marketing strategy via the trade press generating as much free publicity as possible.

3. A live training agency offering bespoke Role Play and Forum Theatre

This is a market which Hijinx has already piloted, following strong support from individuals involved in the training of doctors at the University Hospital of Wales. This uses most LD people and could be built up into a lucrative business over time.

The work takes several forms:

1. Communications skills – giving experience of dealing with real patients with a learning disabilities. Currently this is undertaken at Cardiff and Bridgend with Year 4 medical students.
2. Examinations - Objective structured clinical examinations (OSCEs) are a standard part of the examination system. They consist of short 7/8 minute quick-fire sessions with “patients” presenting symptoms for the students to diagnose. Standardisation and uniformity are key in order to provide the same experience for each examination candidate.
3. From time to time, the General Medical Council assesses and may help with retraining doctors whose competency has been questioned. “Patients” are required to assist in this work. Generally, sessions are videoed and the video used for subsequent analysis.

In Cardiff communications skills training is delivered for 100 students for day – 50 in the morning and 50 in the afternoon. 1.5 hours for each scenario. 3 days per year. It is delivered by three actors and a support worker. In Bridgend there are smaller groups – 10 / 12 For examinations, four people are required because intense concentration is needed to make each exam as comparable as possible.

The Product

The product is hands-on training on dealing with vulnerable people. Trained LD actors with support able to provide communications skills training or examinations for medical professional trainees.

This is in packages of 1, 2 or actors with a fixed fee for preparation and then a fixed fee for each day or half day session. Preparation can be incorporated into standard Academy sessions.

This model can be used for medical students, other Health Service professions and for GP training and revalidation.

It is also applicable in a wider sense for any organisation public or private which has customer-facing staff who may need to deal with vulnerable people. This is a large market, which needs to be packaged carefully with a simple pricing structure. Particularly for the commercial market, the use of terms such as Role-Play and Forum Theatre may be off-putting. In publicity and marketing material, non-threatening descriptions may be better, with, for example, an emphasis on controlled opportunities for interaction with trained actors.

A live training agency offering bespoke Role Play and Forum Theatre

The Market

Health Service

- Trainee Doctors, Nurses, Dentists, Optometrists, Pharmacists and any other health professionals who need hands-on experience.

Other public services

- Police or prison-officer training on dealing with LD people
- Law courts and the legal profession

Private sector:

- Customer service – retail or those who visit people at home or who interact by phone.
- Shops, cafés, public transport, banks, the wider hospitality industry.

It would be worth canvassing opinions from LD people asking them which services they find difficulties accessing and asking them to describe interactions.

Large companies centralise their training so it would sensible to start local with local companies already known to Hijinx such as Chapter Arts café and Admiral Insurance.

Training involving real people is labour-intensive and expensive. This is unlikely to appeal to companies with large numbers of staff. For these, video may be a better bet

Action Plan

- Obtain the paper on the benefits of encountering LD people on communications skills of trainee doctors.
- Recruit referees who will vouch for the benefits of this approach.
- Draw up a one-page document describing the package on offer which can be tailored for each customer.
- Draw up a list of Health Service professions which could be targeted. Research contact names and get appointments to meet. An alternative might be an invitation to an event hosted by the Medical School in Cardiff or Bridgend with some practical demonstrations to show how the programme works, followed up by one to one visits to firm up interest.
- Once this is consolidated move on to other public services and then private sector.

4. Training videos

Large companies use on-line training for their customer-facing staff. This often includes short video clips – 2 or 3 minutes or even longer ones – 15- 30 minutes.

Current training videos on customer service for people with disabilities are quite poor. They tend to be old-fashioned and quite didactic. There is a gap here for comedy videos with a compelling message, similar to the Video Arts videos pioneered in the 1980s by John Cleese at Video Arts.

The videos need to be simple and interesting. Humour would make them more memorable. They could be developed and rehearsed as part of the day to day running of the Academies, perhaps using the experience with Forum theatre.

The Product

Short punchy humorous videos illustrating what can go wrong when front line staff interact with LD people. They need to be crisp, modern and look professional without preaching.

The Market

There is a large market for this with organisations which have large numbers of customer-facing staff. Breaking into this market may be difficult, but should be possible if some compelling pilots are created with local existing partners.

As with role play, the starting point should be to work with the actors to create situations based on their real experiences of how organisations provide service to LD people.

Videos have a reasonable shelf-life, but will need updating so this could be a good long-term prospect.

Large UK-wide corporates prepare their budgets a long time in advance and will probably want content which is delivered with their staff and branding. The way in here is to use the existing contacts with Lloyds Bank and Companies House (the Civil Service system)

Rather than creating a sales and marketing operation, it may be better to use the pilots to enter into a partnership with an existing training video company, providing added content for their existing operations.

Action Plan

- Develop a small number of pilot videos based on actors' experiences with existing partner organisations such as Admiral and Chapter café.
- Work out a costing structure for producing a 2-minute or 15-minute video, and work out a pricing and delivery structure.
- Use the pilots to approach locally based customer-service organisations with the offer of bespoke videos for them to use in training.
- Use the pilots to approach larger UK organisations using existing contacts.
- Use the pilots to approach organisations which provide on-line training such as Video Arts with an offer based on providing compelling content for them to market.

5. Next steps

This document is the start of a process of developing a strong business. The next steps are to:

- Prioritise activities within existing resources
- Develop an outline business plan itemising the potential returns from each activity.



