

THE EMPLOYER FORUM ON DIVERSITY One year on:

Bury's Employer Forum on Diversity has now been meeting for a year now with employers attending on a quarterly basis. Following our Diversity in Action! Conference in May 2002, the Forum was launched in July 2002 at The Village Hotel in Prestwich and has proved to be a very popular success story.

We invited a selection of employers covering the public and private sectors to participate in the forum for a period of three years and already over 30 companies have signed up to the initiative. Human Resource and Personnel managers represent their organisations and work with the officers from Bury EST to examine the best in current policies and procedures around human resource management. Members of the forum include:

Bury MBC, Greater Manchester Police, Bury College, Bury Primary Care Trust, B&Q, Manchester United, Marks and Spencer, Asda Stores, Senior Hargreaves and McDonald's Restaurants. They represent various sectors such as retail, leisure, transport, services and manufacturing and the full membership list is available on our website together with minutes of meetings held so far. Having identified the main barriers to workfaced by economically disadvantaged people, the core work will be to pilot new and innovative methods of recruitment, selection and retention.

By actively working with the personnel teams of companies and organisations we hope to give a boost to more varied opportunities for the recruitment and retention of people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The outcome will be to enable employers to recruit from a wider potential labour market within the communities they share and serve.

Since the initial launch there have been regular quarterly breakfast meetings held at the Europa business centre close to the heart of Bury. We have invited expert speakers to attend the meetings and speak on a range of topics of interest, for example there have been speakers from The Commission for Racial equality, ACAS, and Age Positive.



WORKSTEP

Contract gained:

Bury EST is celebrating the award of a new WORKSTEP contract. WORKSTEP is a national scheme run by Jobcentre Plus that funds support for disabled people to gain employment. The scheme is funded through a mixture of monthly and staged payments for people entering and leaving the scheme. We are expecting to help most participants to progress off the scheme as they gain sustainable employment so freeing up places for new clients.

We bid for the contract as part of a consortium that includes Barrowmore Industries in Chester and Local Authority agencies in Wigan, Oldham and Stockport. The 125-place contract covers the Greater Manchester area and guarantees the funding of 25 places in Bury. Though the contract has been awarded on a temporary basis until April 2004, we are hopeful that this will be made permanent. We understand that this is the first time that a consortium of supported employment agencies has been awarded a contract like this.

Tony Henson and Philip Austin are currently working on the WORKSTEP project but we are about to appoint a team leader to develop and lead the scheme. We have already supported 15 people into work through WORKSTEP and expect to be running a full contract shortly.

Further information is available from Tony Henson on: 0161 253 6588.

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Joseph starts at: Village Hotel

Joseph Geelan loves his job! Since starting just before Christmas he's made great progress. In fact he's been nominated by other members of staff for 'employer of the year' unfortunately he has to have been working for the company for six months in order to claim that title legitimately. However, he's also been nominated for 'best newcomer' and stands a very good chance of winning that prize.

When we asked Joe whether he would like to apply for the job of male leisure cleaner at a local hotel he was a little unsure. He had plenty of voluntary work experience as a shop assistant at a local charity shop. He was also keen to take up some kind of paid employment. But when offered the opportunity he seemed a little worried. That's only natural; fear of the unknown can often be a significant barrier when it comes to taking a big step such as entering your first paid job.

We contacted the hotel on his behalf and asked about the vacancy. The hotel had difficulty in filling the post - it had been vacant for some time. We asked if it would be possible for Joseph to try the job for a few weeks. This would help the hotel by having someone to fill the vacant post for a two week period. It would also give Joe the opportunity of trying the work to see if he would like to consider applying for the post. Additionally it would give BEST staff the opportunity of training Joseph 'on the job' while monitoring and assessing his progress.

In such a situation, during a two week period, we can provide someone like Joseph the opportunity of receiving one-to-one on-the-job

training for a few days and then stepping back to monitor/assess how much he has learned and can do independently. If he experiences any difficulties with any of the associated tasks we can then go back give additional training to enable him to perform all the tasks needed to do the job successfully. A work trial can also give some insight into a client's personal attributes and so we can monitor time-keeping, reliability and how such an individual interacts with other staff members. Again, we can help with making the necessary adjustments in these areas, if necessary.



At the end of the two week period we then held a review meeting with all involved: Rebecca Owen, the HR manager of the hotel; Joseph and me as his Placement Officer. The review meeting focused on how Joseph had performed in the post; whether he enjoyed doing the work and if he would like to apply for the job or one similar. In this case, Rebecca was very impressed with Joseph's progress and was quite happy to offer him the post on a permanent basis as no-one else had applied.

'Had someone else applied for the job during the trial period' commented Rebecca, 'then I would have been obliged to ask Joseph to apply formally for the job. At the interview I would have taken into account his progress on the work-trial since his difficulty with communication skills would have made the formal process of interview difficult for him, and he may have been placed at a real disadvantage. I suppose the work trial could be termed a 'reasonable adjustment' in the recruitment process for someone with a learning disability.' Indeed, one of a range of reasonable adjustments that could be made in the recruitment process.

Fred Bowen, Bury EST's Employment Consultant, has coined the phrase 'working interview' for work trials where there is a vacant post in the offering. Working interviews is just one example of innovative thinking developed by the Bury EST team and Employer Forum members. There is always the danger that traditional recruitment procedures can be fairly uniform. The selection criteria may be geared to selecting personnel with a certain set of skills at the expense of other equally valuable attributes that may be missed, skills that may make the workforce much more flexible in practice.

Being flexible and imaginative in the recruitment procedure may be one of the key techniques in ensuring a more diversified workforce, surely an asset for any company regardless of structure or size. It may also help 'level the playing field' for disadvantaged individuals, making employment much more accessible to many.

Valuing People Update

Bury's Learning Disability Partnership Board is meeting regularly to coordinate the development of a number of strategic plans which aim to improve the quality of life of local people. Plans have been drafted for employment and the modernisation of day services and these are available on our website. Plans are also being drawn up for housing and workforce development. The Partnership Board is keen to

make the process as inclusive as possible and has been involving service users and family carers in the work of the groups producing the strategies. Bury People First has also been actively involved.

Bury Council will soon be advertising for a person to take the Valuing People agenda forward. The job, described as an Integrated Commissioning Manager, will take a lead role in the work of the

Partnership Board and in commissioning new services.

All Partnership Board meetings are open to the public and further information is available from Huw Davies at Bury EST or from Naomi Davies at N.Davies@bury.gov.

THE EMPLOYER FORUM ON DIVERSITY

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The forum's meetings have been very well attended and local employers such as Marks and Spencer and Unified Dyes have been cooperating in providing work trials and placements to assist in preparing potential employees for the workplace. These initiatives are beginning to influence the interview and selection process and we expect further development will assist us in achieving the aims of the EmbracingDiversity project. We are particularly pleased that jobs have been secured for our customers as a direct result of the forum's activities.

The forum offers a chance for members to discuss specific issues and consider case studies. The sharing of 'best practice' and development of an effective model to tackle the barriers to gaining employment will be a major step forward in promoting the interests of disadvantaged groups.

The Employer Forum on Diversity welcomes interest from all employers and there is a shared view that efforts should be made to involve small businesses. We have been formed close working relationships with the Chamber of Commerce and the Business Link Service, which will assist in raising awareness of the project amongst smaller employers.

Bury EST is also actively working with related agencies in the Borough such as the Early Years and P@CE ("People Add the Competitive Edge") partnerships and the Home Working service. All of these agencies offer the specialised assistance that employers request when looking at issues around work/life balance and diversity management policies.

Employers are invited to discuss their interest in the EmbracingDiversity project by contacting the Bury EST Employer Consultant, Fred Bowen on 0161 253 6588, emailing to fred@buryest.org.uk or posting queries and comments on the Embracing Diversity website at www.embracingdiversity.org.uk



What is Diversity Management anyway?

Equal Opportunities and Diversity Management? Are they one and the same or should they be considered as separate issues in the management of people in the workplace?

Diversity management should go hand in hand with Equal Opportunity policies. Equal opportunity tends to be about Personnel Departments treating people in a uniform way and focussing on particular groups. Diversity management moves us on a step further by not relying on positive action for particular groups and instead focussing on the abilities and needs of individuals. In this day and age we would expect all businesses and organisations to promote equal opportunity in the workplace and indeed to have policy statements that reflect the principles of equality. What we must remember though is that in order to treat people fairly we need to treat people differently. We all have our own skills and abilities to offer and we are all very different.

Rarely do we see a job vacancy advertised without the organisation reminding us that they are an "equal opportunity employer", usually now coupled with the "positive to disabled" two ticks symbol. The original reasons for the introduction of equal treatment centred around ensuring that women in the workplace had the same opportunities as males in terms of jobs and pay levels. Though there is still some way to go, it is fair to say that these values and initiatives have largely been embraced.

There have of course been extensions to equal treatment policies with the introduction of further

legislation on race and, more recently, disability issues. Further legislation is due later this year on religion and sexual orientation. Diversity in the workplace concerns and should involve everyone from the company director down. Workforce diversity is not solely a personnel or human resource issue, though managers in these roles are seen as the key staff to influence the ethos of a company or organisation and effect change within their environments towards valuing diversity.

The key to the successful introduction of a diversity policy will be training in the workplace with all employees and regular monitoring of performance. We feel that this will be particularly important at supervisory levels. In many instances all that may be required is some extra thought and some very inexpensive adjustments being made to the policies and procedures of companies and organisations.

A diverse team is a team in which every member of staff regardless of their age, gender, race, religion, disability, sexual orientation and regardless of how they operate, or what they look like are valued as an individual and not as a member of a group.

Companies and organisations have a moral, social and, increasingly, legal responsibility to promote diversity. But this is not the only reason for action. It is clear that most people would prefer to work for a caring employer so a positive image and profile projected to the community will benefit an organisation in many ways. There is a strong business case for the employment of a diverse

workforce that reflects the diversity of the community it shares and serves. It produces ties that bind companies to its customers. When we consider the retention of quality personnel there are also benefits for the employer in reducing often unnecessary recruitment and training costs by working with employees at an individual level to ensure that they are supported and encouraged to deliver their full potential.

A truly diverse and representative workforce will inform and influence the development of products and services that are provided for the community. Some companies are producing real evidence of improved performance and enhanced profits with the development of services and products that have been influenced by employing a diverse workforce.

A good example would be a South East branch of Lloyds TSB that have changed from having mainly white counter staff to a more diverse range of staff in terms of gender and ethnicity and as a result of this have seen the volume sales of financial products and services rise by 30%.

There is also a legal case for adopting diversity management if serious consideration is given to compliance with current and future employment law. There are examples of some organisations facing huge legal costs and damage to their reputations through poor employment practice and procedures. The lessons are surely there for us to see now: a happy workforce is a productive workforce.

The Pace Network,

Pauline Parrett

A new and innovative project was launched in Bury on 2nd October 2002 – specifically geared to increasing productivity and competitiveness through effective use of best people management practices supported by leading edge Information Communication Technology.

The PACE Network aims to provide a regular networking and discussion arena dealing with key personnel issues. This forum will work to meet the needs of individual human resource practitioners and those responsible for people management in companies of all sizes. The forums will meet on a regular basis at venues across the borough.

In addition, advice and support on best people management practices and the application of Information Communication Technology – the Internet and email - will be available to SME's in the borough.

A further development under the project will be a Virtual Learning Network. This web-based network, accessed via the Internet will allow businesses access to up to date information on people management issues, good practice procedures and a range on on-line resources and links.

This ground-breaking project, funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), is the first of its kind in the UK and offers local business access to a comprehensive package of advice, analysis, training opportunities, information sharing and progression towards sustainability.

For further information on the next forum meeting, or to book your appointment with one of the team, contact Pauline Parrett or Amanda Ramsbottom on 0161 797



Homeworking: Creating a Balance,

Andy Walkden

Homeworking is one of a growing range of flexible working options that can benefit both organisations and employees. The Bury Homeworking project has been set up to help people and organisations reap these benefits.

At one time, homeworking was the predominant form of work. However the Industrial Revolution led to the creation of complex organisations, because it was more economic and efficient to create places of work where peoples' relatively cheap time could be organised around expensive machinery.

Now the ICT Revolution has brought work organisation full circle. Relatively cheap machinery (PCs and modems) makes it possible, more efficient and more economic to organise work around peoples' expensive time. Growing availability and usability of ICT has also given the predominant image of homeworking (grey economy, sweatshops, "slave" labour) a welcome positive boost.

Employing homeworkers offers organisations two benefits at a time when the words of Heraclitus

"There is nothing permanent except change" have never been truer.

Firstly it can help an organisation keep employees (retention). Secondly it gives organisations access to the full labour market (recruitment). Both of these are important in maintaining a skilled workforce in a climate of change: changing demands on organisations and people, changing lifestyles and aspirations, changing demographics, changing technology and changing skills needs.

The Industrial Revolution also fundamentally separated peoples' home life from their working life. Over the decades, society has begun to realise the human cost (and in a climate of change the organisational cost) of this separation. Homeworking offers people a chance to bridge this divide and balance their working life and home life.

With the organisation of work coming full circle, people and organisations need to relearn how to take advantage of homeworking. The Bury homeworking project offers advice and guidance to people and organisations.

Early Years development and childcare partnership

Getting The Balance Right For You And Your Employees

Bury Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership is part of Bury MBC. The partnership aims to support local business assess the work / life balance needs of their employees and provide tailored solutions to those needs. EYDCP works in partnership

with other organisations to offer a full range of work/life balance advice and support.

Our speciality is childcare and we have a vital role in ensuring the availability of good quality, accessible and affordable childcare in the Bury area. As Employer Links Manager my aim is to provide Bury employers with advice and support from what exists in the local area to how to set up onsite childcare provision.

EYDCP currently works with two of Bury's larger employers, Bury MBC and Fairfield General Hospital, providing advice and support on non-

financial childcare support that they can offer their employees to retain current and attract new staff from a wider pool of applicants. However, all employers can benefit from our advice and support.

So if you would like to discuss 'how to be an employer people want to work for' EYDCP can help you:

- Diagnose your company's work-life balance needs
- Construct an Action Plan to address any needs
- Help you monitor progress against any plan
- Provide a free guide to work-life balance

For further details contact Andy Walkden on 0161 253 5935 or email a.j.walkden@bury.gov.uk

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LOCAL EMPLOYER NETWORKS

Job Retention Pilot

As part of the Embracing Diversity project Bury EST has established a working partnership with Bury Primary Care Trust and Redbank group Practice in order to pilot a Job Retention service that will accept referrals through General Practitioners. Initially, this service is aimed solely at Redbank patients who acquire a disability or illness that threatens their employment status.



Rod Goodwin, one of our Employment Officers is now based partly at Redbank and has already had over twenty people referred to him. In addition to seeing people referred directly by the Group Practice staff, Rod will be available on Friday afternoons to give general informal advice. Any Redbank patient who wants to access this service should phone the receptionist who will pass the information on to Rod who will then contact the person concerned.

Rod will work very closely with other health professionals in terms of ongoing treatment. With regard to work, Rod will try to help reduce

the threat of job loss by contacting employers on behalf of the patient and negotiate with regard to any workplace adjustments that will enable the patient to return to work at the earliest possible time.

Rod has noticed is that it is becoming apparent, even at this early stage, that direct contact with employers is not always needed or even desired by the patient. In some cases, all that may be needed is an opportunity for people to explore their problems with someone who is willing to listen and give some independent advice and guidance. This may be enough to enable the person to act effectively on their own behalf.

It may well be the case that personal problems outside of work are creating problems that are interfering with work. In these circumstances, Rod will investigate other sources of support for the patient.

This service can also benefit any employers who are involved, as Rod will be willing to help and support employers to meet their obligations with regard to current legislation, e.g. The Disability Discrimination Act and, if necessary, help them to formulate a Retention Policy that will benefit both themselves and their employees in the future.

In order to assess the effectiveness and possible future expansion of the pilot scheme, we will need the project to be independently evaluated and to this end some effective work has taken place recently between ourselves and senior staff from Bury PCT.

SEEDFIELD CENTRE CAFÉ

Bury EST has now officially taken over the management of the café at Seedfield Resource Centre. The centre offers a base to various community and local authority services including staff training facilities and also houses a day centre for people with disabilities. We are retaining the existing staff team of Mike, Sue and Maureen and are about to interview for a café manager. The café will operate a morning snacks and lunchtime meals service though we hope to offer buffets in the future. The café was threatened with closure during 2002 but was reprieved following consultation.

Bury EST will be offering NVQ training in catering at levels I and II to disabled

clients, probably in collaboration with Accrington & Rossendale College. Tim Hall has been managing the changeover with Mike and they are setting up new systems, suppliers and menus. The café has acquired a new coffee machine and changed some of its suppliers to provide an improved yet value for money service. We are preparing new menus in readiness for a re-launch in September. We are always keen to hear your comments and would be particularly interested in any ideas you have for changes to the menu and brightening up the café décor. Please pass your comments on to Tim on 0161-253 6588 or by email to tim@buryest.org.

Inclusive Fitness:

Tony Henson

Service users and staff at Bury EST are participating in the Inclusive Fitness Initiative, a nationwide pan-disability pilot project enabling disabled people to access sports training and fitness equipment. Of the 90 local authorities applying to join the pilot scheme, Bury MBC's Castle Leisure Centre was one of the first to be approved and to benefit from its share of the £1m lottery grant from the English Federation of Disability Sport.

According to Yvonne Hall, Bury's disability sports coordinator "the IFI is raising awareness of the value of training and increasing the opportunities for improving levels of health and fitness for disabled people." Each member of the fitness team has been trained to provide appropriate induction to the project, which, according to Yvonne, is also enabling disabled people to progress into other sporting and leisure activities.

As well as involving physically disabled people, Yvonne is keen to stress that the project also includes people with learning disabilities, sensory impairment and emotional or mental health needs.

Tommy, a Bury EST client, has found that the scheme has improved his diet, reduced his alcohol intake and boosted his self-esteem, particularly at work. According to Tony, Tommy's placement officer, the Monday morning sessions are just a "great way to kick start the week".

Most importantly, according to Yvonne, the Inclusive Fitness Initiative is about people, whether disabled or non-disabled, getting together in a friendly, safe environment and improving their health and fitness whilst having a great time.



News in brief...

Congratulations to: Ben, Janet, Tim, Pauline, David, Linda, Gary, Paul, Ewen, Richard, Julie, Sandra, Nafeesa, Kerry, Alex, Diane, Colin and Alan, who have all gained paid employment recently.

Congratulations also to Clive, who has started voluntary work for Oxfam and to Robert, Wayne, Lee, Martin and Julie who have all attended courses at the Link IT Suite in Radcliffe.

The Social Exclusion Unit has announced a consultation project around social inclusion and employment for people with mental health problems. Bury EST will be responding to this and further information is available from Huw or by visiting www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk

Katrina Sartini has retired after working at Bury EST for the last 7 years as Employment Officer working particularly with people with mental health needs. Katrina was very popular with staff and clients alike and will be deeply missed. She has promised to keep in touch and we wish her well as she gives up Greater Manchester for "the good life" in Dumfries and Galloway.

Huw Davies, manager at Bury EST, has been re-elected as Chair of the Association for Supported Employment. The Association represents and supports some 150 supported employment agencies around the UK and is involved in lobbying Government departments around disability and employment issues. Fred Bowen delivered a presentation on our EmbracingDiversity project at the 2003 AFSE conference in Nottingham in May.

Fred Bowen and Huw Davies attended the biennial conference of the European Union of Supported Employment in Helsinki in May.

They gave a presentation on the EmbracingDiversity project that was very well received by the 160 or so delegates at that particular session. The Conference drew together nearly 500 delegates from around the world to hear about developments and good practice.

Bury EST has secured funding to introduce a new quality assurance package called ACIS: the Accreditation and Continuous Improvement System. ACIS has been developed by Castle Personnel and offers a framework for ensuring that systems and practice are in line with inspection standards. It is hoped that the system will be introduced over the latter part of 2003.

Huw Davies is attending the Joint Working Group on Learning Disability and Employment. The group brings together senior civil servants from the Department for Work & Pensions, the Department of Health, the Department for Education & Skills and disability organisations and reports to the Valuing People initiative. It meets quarterly to consider how to improve access to employment for people with a learning disability and has heard evidence from a number of key civil servants and organisations. Topics discussed have included the new Green Paper, "Pathways to Employment", diversity within the NHS and Government departments, support for people working between 5 and 15 hours per week and various Government

COMPLE@T Katrina Sartini

This Café project in Rochdale has now been in business for over a year. The café is a community project for people with Mental Health Difficulties, living in the Bury or Rochdale areas. In October 2002, the café was launched as an Internet Café and has 6 computers available to customers.

Bury EST has had 2 clients working as volunteers, and training is available on a wide range of subjects including the BFH Certificate, Health & Safety, 1st Aid and Leadership Skills. Future training is being planned and will include Cooking and Business Skills.

More volunteers are needed so the project can continue to grow. Positions available may include Cooks, Kitchen Assistants,

ABILITY SUITE

Manchester United have recently opened their Ability Suite, which will be used as a match day facility for Disabled fans. Bury EST attended a consultation event which explored at how the Suite could be used between match days. For further information contact Lee Salad.

EMBRACING DIVERSITY

Embracing Diversity project Staff from Bury EST and Stockport Employment Services met up with their European partners from Italy and Spain to share learning and best practise on a range of policy issues that support disadvantaged groups into employment. The transitional element of the Embracing Diversity project will be our feature article in the next issue of Connect.



Bury EST is funded by BuryMetro, the Department of Health and the European Social Fund.

A reminder of our current staff:

Huw Davies
Lee Salad
Lynda Smethurst
Trish Hilton
Rod Goodwin
Dennie Ford
Vacancy
Tony Henson
Fred Bowen
Michael Dean
Anne Clarke
Phillip Austin
Asghar Ali
Fran Naylor-Oakes
Tim Hall
Sharon Cummins
Carolyne Gee
Joseph Campbell
Charlotte Easterbrook

Manager
Project Coordinator
Business Support Officer
Administrator
Employment Officer (Job Retention)
Placement Officer (Learning Disability & Youth)
Employment Officer (Mental Health & Ethnicity)
Employment Officer (Workstep programme)
Employment Consultant
Placement Officer
Placement Officer
Placement Officer
Placement Officer
Placement Officer
Placement Officer
Placement Officer
Placement Officer
Clerical Officer

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