

Brief notes from a joint workshop held between jobseekers and employers 24 November 2004

Advice and guidance

- Concerns expressed on the proposed changes to Jobcentres - especially for disadvantaged groups, ie using more IT service and reliance on telephone service. Some people thought the public perception/image could put people off – clarification needed.
- There were also concerns from jobseekers regarding a lack of contact from the Connexions service.
- There were concerns with school careers input. Schools could offer more support, interview techniques, Do's and Don'ts.
- Some information on local employers and types of jobs would help at school. More effort could be put into targeting those who are due to leave school and are looking for jobs, - 6 months before.
- More work with outside agencies to provide interview skills. Involve employers and arrange for mock interviews.

Employers offered to conduct mock interviews and support clients to overcome fears and gain useful techniques.

Actions

- **Bury EST will be providing feedback to and arranging for clients to meet with representatives of Jobcentre Plus and other agencies.**
- **Bury EST and forum members' clients could arrange for mock interviews to assist them if they are due to attend an interview or just wish to experience being interviewed. Some forum members have already provided this service and Bury EST have offered office space for this purpose.**

Job adverts

- Job adverts could be more widely distributed. For example, community centres would post adverts and flyers at no cost. Another example that works well is by informing services like Bury EST who already have a list of clients who are job seeking. Ask people who produce local newsletters to include vacancies.
- Some local radio stations advertise jobs for free as a community service and to attract listeners. There is a new local station for radio and TV, Channel M. This could be worth pursuing.

Action - Bury EST to provide information on recruitment alternatives and possible contacts. This information could be included in the employers pack.

Job applications

- Asking for qualifications that are not always relevant to the job. Some basic testing to establish abilities would be more acceptable. Sometimes qualifications are asked for that are not always necessary to be able to do the job.

The Inland Revenue gave an example that where an applicant does not have GCSE's they would carry out some basic Maths and English tests.

- Application forms could be much simpler to fill in and employers could offer support to individuals to complete a form. The easier it is to apply the more response you are likely to get.

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- Job descriptions may require regular reviews to assess their accuracy to the job tasks. In some cases they could be re-designed to encourage interest and possible application from excluded groups.
- A re-assessment of the job may allow for some job carving or identify an opportunity for job sharing.

Action - Bury EST are currently working with a company on their application process and forms. They will be piloting a simple application form that will be more friendly to the user and a draft of this form will be offered for comments to the forum members in the near future.

- Some clients felt that the employment laws and legislation that employers have to comply with could also create a barrier to employment of a disadvantaged person.
- Criminal records – some disclosures may not be relevant to the job.

A discussion with the client would help and this could be followed by the completion of a risk assessment. A letter with a brief description of the criminal record would help.

- Recruitment days have proved to be popular due to the informality. These have also allowed for the job seeker to ask more of their own questions and gain a clear understanding of the organization. This was seen as an effective way of advertising the vacancies and meeting with a larger number of possible applicants.

- During the application process qualifications are asked for and in some cases these could have been achieved in another country. How is the validity and recognition of a foreign qualification checked to satisfy the employer?
- Are the qualifications asked for always necessary to be able to do the job?

On the issue of qualifications gained in another country there is an organization called NARIC (National Academic Recognition and Information Centres) and ENIC (European Network of Information Centres). These organizations would check the comparability of international qualifications. In some instances local colleges could also help.

Action - Bury EST to provide contacts and relevant information and include this in the employer packs along with any costing for this service and who would need to pay.

- Application forms were seen as a barrier to ethnicity clients – did this influence the selection panel? This is where community recruitment could be helpful.

Some employers could not understand why there was a problem with the application process. This must be a perception of the selection process being influenced if the form is filled in by an ethnic minority. A majority of employers would offer help, support and where possibility, flexibility.

Clients who have attended focus groups and workshops with employers should include this information on their CV's. This was seen to be a positive input from the job seeker to trying to resolve the circumstances that have caused them to be unemployed or not progressing into employment and this action would be seen as very positive on their behalf.

Interview Procedures

- Practical forms of interview were seen as a simpler and less stressful method of assessing the individual's ability to do the job.
- At the interview stage it may not always be appropriate for the employer to interview on a one to one basis.
- Job seekers feel that they have to always meet the 'needs' of the employer. This should be a shared responsibility with the employer demonstrating that they are prepared to meet the 'needs' of the individual, especially at the interview and selection stage.
- A number of clients were concerned about their dress code when attending interviews - what were the expectations of employers?
- There were also concerns about dress code at work - what were the general thoughts of employers?

On the issue of dress code for interviews it was not seen as a particular issue for the employers providing the client was comfortable and presentable, but, please don't forget it does impress the employer if the client is smart.

Dress code at work depends on the job being done. In some jobs there would be a need for specific clothing to be worn due to health and safety issues in these cases the employer would usually provide the necessary clothing. In some jobs like offices the dress code is usually casual – but again smart. If your work involved reception work, for instance, meeting and greeting, then there may be a requirement for a more formal dress code. This would be discussed with the individual.

- It would help if people who are interviewing had knowledge of clients with mental health issues. It would be useful to have somebody with experience on the panel for support.

It is still necessary to overcome people's perception of clients with mental health issues. Many disadvantaged people still "carry a label". An example is care-leavers who have experienced being singled out for special treatment or specific mentoring when this is not always necessary. In some cases of disability it may be necessary to offer a high level of support but not always. Some clients felt like they were being singled out for special treatment and wished to get rid of the label and stereotyping.

Personal health issues

- What happens if the client becomes ill again?

When and if clients become ill again it should be no different to any other situation where the employer and employee work together on the issue. It helps if the employer has access to information to help them to deal with any issues that arise and gain a better understanding of the individual.

- When health declarations are completed where do they go and what happens to them?

Health declarations are not seen until after the interview process and this information is confidential and would be protected under the Data Protection Act.

Employers would be required to destroy this information if they were not offered the job.

Work experience

- Job tasters, assessment days, company visits, work experience, work trials and working interviews were all seen as good flexible practices that would assist clients who found it difficult to get a job or decide upon a career. These

methods could prove very cost effective to the employer in deciding that they had recruited the right person for the job.

- More work experience places would be really useful for clients.
- Work shadowing and buddy systems are still seen as very beneficial.

Awareness and culture

- Employers may benefit from a more flexible approach to different individual's needs.
- Allow workers to work on a rota and choose their own shifts with colleagues. This would empower staff to make decisions and could eliminate problems with colleagues. This practice would also aid balancing work and home responsibilities/family friendly policies.
- Ethnicity clients had identified that their particular cultural beliefs could present a difficulty with some occupations i.e. hotel work/catering. Part time working may help. Employers may find it helpful to attend events and promote their vacancies. This would also raise the profile of the employer to the community.
- Language skills are an issue for the individual to deal with - could mean time out for attending courses. Health and Safety issues could be an issue for someone with little knowledge of the English language and culture.
- Is there a legal situation with regard to 3 month probationary periods for ethnicity clients?
- Application forms could be much simpler to fill in and employers could offer support to individuals to complete a form. The easier it is to apply the more response you are likely to get.
- Health and Safety legislation could lead to problems for care-leavers.
- Individual attitudes are still seen as a barrier to people getting jobs. This could make a big difference if the individual is involved in the decision making process.
- It would be very helpful if employers encouraged people to have a look around before interview. They could see the reaction of people and begin to build a realistic picture of the work environment.

A hotel representative reported that in spite of advertising many vacancies the response from ethnic minorities was virtually non existent. Not sure whether this was due to their application form or process. To overcome this they are prepared to offer site visits and tours of the various departments to anyone interested in working for them.

Action – Bury EST could offer valuable information on ethnicity – produce fact sheets on the different holidays, festive seasons, dress codes, cultural backgrounds and awareness.

A prison representative spoke of many job opportunities but due to the culture of prisons the security clearance is a lengthy process. It may be useful to visit mosques and provide drop ins for clients. This would also give the opportunity to target parents and get them on their side – the parents could have some considerable influence.

- Could employers encourage training for people who interview on disability awareness. Allow for the clients key worker to attend the interviews for support/ help with prompting and reminding the client. These would be considered ‘reasonable adjustments’.

Action – Bury EST could offer support to employers on disability awareness.

Reasonable adjustments

- Learning disability clients were concerned about other members of the workforce being unhappy due to some adjustments being made on their behalf – this could be seen as they are not technically doing the same job. This could create resentment and demands for wage adjustments.

A flexible approach is required to deal with situations of this kind and if properly handled and explained to the workforce this should eliminate any issues arising. This is again an issue for staff training on disability awareness.

Issues such as this can be resolved by initially looking at the job and seeing if there is a possibility to adjust the job description. It may be possible to ‘carve’ out certain tasks to make the job more suitable to clients with a disability. This can also reduce the need for multi tasking in some jobs.

Employers welcomed the opportunity to attend sessions with clients and thought this was a valuable exercise. There were a number of requests to repeat this type of contact and share experiences with client and employer where there were definite learning themes to share and build on.



Further information from Bury EST on 0161 761 4662

www.burvest.org.uk

www.embracingdiversity.org