

Embracing Diversity

EMPLOYER FORUM ON DIVERSITY

Minutes of the Employer Forum Meeting Held on 13 April 2005 at the Bolholt Hotel, Walshaw, Bury

Present

Robert	Alcock	Eurest Catering	Marie	Nicholson	Jobcentre Plus
Joanne	Alcock	Village Hotels	Louise	Openshaw	City Facilities Management
Phillip	Austin	Bury EST	Laura	Parkinson	Workstep contract manager
John	Beech	Jobcentre Plus	Les	Pearson	Bury MBC
Fred	Bowen	Bury EST	Sue	Pearson	Bury EST
Joanne	Calcutt	Greater Manchester Police	Chandra	Rajasooryar	Jobcentre Plus
Alan	Costello	Early Years Development Children's Partnership	Stuart	Reich	BCR Chemicals
Gerrard	Curran	Chamber Link	Lee	Salad	Bury EST
Karen	Davies	Highfield Care	Catherine	Shawarby	Highfield Care
Huw	Davies	Bury EST	Lynda	Smethurst	Bury EST
Anthony	Henson	Bury EST	Beverley	Unsworth	Cameron House
Andy	Johnson	Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI)	Holly	Wallace	Ambers Attic
Sarah	Kay	L'Oreal Golden	Steven	Walters	Metrolink
Steve	Mason	Greater Manchester Police	Carol	Watts	Inland Revenue
Lt Cuong	Huynh	Royal Navy	Cecilia	Woods	Jobcentre Plus

Apologies

Jonathan	Butterworth	Bolholt Hotel	Victoria	Proudlock	Manchester United
Patrick	Connellan	Cormar Carpets	Tim	Quirk	Coop Financial Services
Barbara	Forber	Inland Revenue	Peter	Rabbits	ACAS
Cath	Hignett	NHS Trust	Kirsty	Roberts	NHS Pennine Care
Ingrid	Hitchon	Molygran	Bill	Robinson	Armed Forces Careers
Wendy	Holt	Ambers Attic	Susan	Rose	Tesco stores
Janine	Howard	Village Hotels	Caroline	Schofield	Bury MBC
Janis	Haworth	Bury College	Alison	Todd	Bury College
Alicja	Kinsey	Senior Hargreaves	Andy	Walkden	Homeworking Bury MBC
Michelle	Lomax	PACE	Peter	Weidenbaum	Trumeter Ltd
Lutha	Magloire	Army careers	Anthony	Wharton	Archlight Bending
Edwin	Partridge	Holts Brewery	Carol	Woodhams	Mcr Met University
Graham	Parry	Cormar Carpets			

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MINUTES

1. WELCOME TO MEMBERS

Fred Bowen welcomed members, new members and invited guests to the meeting. Also present at this meeting was the lead inspector for ALI (the Adult Learning Inspectorate), Andy Johnson. The Adult Learning Inspectorate were due to prepare an inspection of the service delivery of the workstep programme by Bury EST. Andy had been invited to attend this meeting as part of the process of evaluation of employer engagement. A number of unavoidable last minute apologies had been received and Fred apologised for the brief delay to the start of today's meeting, he had been expecting some late arrivals.

2. MINUTES FROM LAST MEETING

Fred asked for approval for the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 12 January 2005. These minutes were approved as a true and accurate record.

3. MATTERS ARISING

Apologies were once again offered, the Bury EST 'Employers Pack' was still awaiting completion and eventual presentation of a draft product was nearing completion. Fred explained that the pack was in the final stages and was now at the printers. The pack was expected very soon and it would certainly be ready for the next meeting.

There were no further matters arising from the minutes.

4. PROJECT PROGRESS TO DATE

Funding Update

Fred invited Huw Davies to give a brief update to members on funding issues.

Regardless of the Equal funding coming to a close, Huw was pleased to announce that the Employer Forum would be continued and that he looked forward to a calendar of interesting meetings and the future ongoing support of the employers.

Funding has been received from the Deputy Prime Minister's Office for a project encouraging access to employment for ethnic minorities. The "Invest to Save" programme will bring £700k into Bury over 2 years and we have funding for 2 Placement Officers and the Employer Consultant role. We're also looking to submit bids for European funding to Jobcentre Plus and the Learning + Skills Council this summer. These bids will focus on supporting disadvantaged youths through the provision of employment and basic skills support.

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5. EMBRACING DIVERSITY – Project Evaluation

The Embracing Diversity project is now in the final stages of delivery and an important element to these is the evaluation process. Bury EST staff had recently participated in a service provider evaluation event. Fred gave brief feedback and highlighted one of the main outcomes had been the success of the project work that had centered on the employers. This project had, for the first time, allowed for research work to take place and a much greater emphasis had been placed on understanding and meeting the needs of employers.

The establishment of the Employer Forum and the strength of attendance had given the opportunity for employers to learn from each other, share best practice and benefit from professional speakers on a variety of related subjects. The topic for this forum meeting was to give the employers the chance to offer some feedback from their involvement with the Embracing Diversity project.

A number of employers were invited to speak of their experiences and at this meeting there were speakers from Greater Manchester Police, (Steve Mason, HR Manager) and Building Chemicals Research, (Stuart Reich, Director). Last minute apologies were received from Graham Parry and Patrick Connellon from Cormar carpets who had offered to speak at this meeting.

6. EMPLOYERS FEEDBACK

Steve Mason, HR Manager, Greater Manchester Police.

Steve had prepared a presentation and began by reminding the audience that he had been involved in the project for 2½ years. During this period he had learned a considerable amount by attending a majority of meetings which had contributed to his personal development.

Steve had supported the project and had offered work placements to a number of mental health clients. This had in some cases led to the clients gaining full time employment. A key factor had been the change in attitude of the workforce towards people with disabilities and Bury EST staff had been helpful in the workplace in raising awareness and transferring the learning of how to support an employee with disabilities.

This project had also recently influenced policy development and there had also been changes and inclusions to job descriptions and application forms. These changes had meant that applicants were encouraged to request adjustments in the job descriptions to allow for their individual needs. Steve firmly believed this to be a move in the right direction in terms of giving people a fair chance of gaining employment and being supported in the workplace. He stated that this was only the beginning and if GMP were to attract job seekers that they intended to be an employer of choice. Steve reminded the employers that he was being competitive and intended to attract all those looking for employment in Bury to be encouraged to apply for work at GMP.

In reflecting on previous meetings Steve highlighted the forum meeting of July 2004 where the subject of retention and work life balance had been discussed. As a result of learning from this

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meeting he had implemented a strategy to deal with long term absentees from work in a very supportive way that had seen a dramatic effect upon the numbers of employees returning to work. In a short space of time the figure had been reduced from thirteen to two.

Fred thanked Steve for his feedback.

❶ **A copy of the presentation is included for your information.**

EMPLOYERS FEEDBACK cont.

Stuart Reich, Director, Building Chemicals Research.

Fred introduced Stuart to the forum and invited him to give a talk on his experiences; his company had employed a number of clients and also offered work placements. A number of these placements had led to full time employment for people from minority ethnic communities.

Stuart commenced by giving a detailed account of a client who was an immigrant from Iran, his skills were numerous and his educational background was that of degree status achieved in Iran. A considerable amount of patience and understanding combined with willingness by the employer to be flexible had assisted the individual to gain a UK work ethic and allowed him a sense of belonging. The workforce had also been supported to accept people from different backgrounds and learn of some changes that may be necessary to accommodate their cultural differences.

2 other clients had been employed at the Radcliffe site and proved to be very committed to their work, reliable and productive. It had been a pleasure to see how 2 people with different cultural backgrounds had been successfully integrated and respected by the rest of the workforce. They had now become part of the firm and were encouraged to become involved in social activity.

Stuart valued the support he had received from the staff at Bury EST and almost saw the service as the HR department of BCR.

Stuart went on to share some of his years of experiences whilst working in several countries and employing people from many different nationalities and cultures. Taking the British way of work to countries in the Middle East had proved to be difficult and it was almost impossible to conduct business unless changes were made to practice. Working times had to be changed, allowances for religious holidays and prayer times were introduced until it was possible to ensure an acceptable level of production.

These experiences had been invaluable in giving Stuart an understanding of working with different people and he hoped that other employees and employers could learn from these.

Fred thanked Stuart for his contribution.

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Discussion groups

In order to gain further feedback and involve all the employers' present delegates were asked to participate in round table discussions that would be facilitated by staff from Bury EST.

The discussion groups were asked to consider the following

- What did you think about your involvement with the project?
- What were your first impressions of working with Bury EST and the clients?
- How do think the project went?
- Have there been any actions/adjustments in your organisation as a result of the project?
- Do you have any learning that you feel you can pass on?
- Has the project influenced your organisation in any way?

Feedback from the discussion groups

There were 4 groups formed to discuss these headings and the following is a summary of the responses from delegates.

What have been your experiences of using Bury EST?

- CRB checks are a problem in the care sector – ancillary job roles are better
- Feel it's important that even though we have employed the client that the client still receives occasional visits from us.
- Rathbones placed a client and when he became fully employed problems developed and Mum approached Bury EST for support. They now understand what is wrong with him and can approach him in the right way.
- Why can't Bury EST liaise with other providers so we pick up clients when they drop off!
- Employing / placing people has raised awareness and created a positive image with children, parents and other staff .
- Clients are very committed and motivated
- The job matching has been done accurately. Paperwork very thorough.
- Bury EST have helped me overcome the problems we have had recruiting staff via conventional routes.
- Impressed by the support that Placement Officers have provided to client and employer and the vetting system that is used to identify clients that have got the key skills required to fill vacant positions.
- EST staff have been receptive in learning about the sector.
- Bury EST needs to advertise their services more widely, possibly through the Chamber.
- Job Retention – needs more focus and advertising.
- Adjustments – have been a big eye opener for employers. Change the way you work with every employee.
- Our confidence in clients grew over time in the placement. Good matching of clients to a job.
- Co-operation from colleagues has improved over time.
- Finding out the reason why a client didn't want to work was interesting and not always obvious.
- Wrong assumptions about disabilities and why someone couldn't work. The barrier was sometimes the preconceived ideas.
- One thing I've found is that the disability isn't always the barrier but people's preconceived ideas create a barrier.

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- Good record of people progressing.
- Keeping each other up to date was good.
- There is funding available for employers through the job centre via routes such as access to work which employers need to be better informed about.
- All feedback about Bury EST has been good.
- Feedback from the JCP meeting with our clients seems to have led to a new type of advisor being introduced which should ease the DEA's case load.
- Been involved with Bury EST for about 6 years.
- A good relationship has been built up.
- Started with a phone call about a caretaking job. The client involved is still in work (6 yrs later) and got the job based on his interview performance and not the disability.
- The support from Bury EST has definitely helped with my staffing issues.
- Have a better understanding of mental health issues through working with clients and staff from Bury EST.
- We have employed other clients from Bury EST since then - sometimes successful, sometimes not. However it's never put me off using the service.
- Bury EST has definitely educated me.
- Communicating with staff about a new member joining has got easier over time as they have got to know more about us and what we do. At first it was a bit of a barrier with existing staff
- I have advertised the jobs as work placements and as such staff have become more accustomed to new people starting work.

What have you gained from the forum?

- Unless you come to a meeting you don't realise how many different people are involved in the forum.
- Good mix of people from the public and private sector.
- Excellent opportunity to share best practice and learn from peers.
- Steven contacted Steve Mason (GMP) 2 days after a meeting where he mentioned his diversity programme. Since then he has received help on his own diversity programme.
- Excellent networking opportunities.
- Feel that employers are part of a team as well – can call on other members to help.
- Retention session involving Dr Thomas gave me some ideas which I've incorporated into GMP HR to reduce stress sickness levels amongst staff.
- I have used Bury EST staff to contact and try to recruit people from ethnic communities.
- Through the forum, links have been developed with other members eg Jobcentre Plus & EYDCP.
- With regards to school budgets it can be a problem when trying to extend working hours on a job role.
- I feel that if you have someone right for a job you need to push it through regardless of disability
- I now have a greater awareness of the issues surrounding working 16 hours plus.
- My awareness has increased due to the topics discussed.
- It has helped me when dealing with different types of customers.

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How could Bury EST improve the service that they provide to employers?

- Support is needed to help the client do work task to the standard required for them to be offered paid employment.
- Placement Officers need to spend more time in the workplace to become familiar with the employer's business and potential jobs.
- Overseas clients need a cultural induction to working in the UK. This could be provided by EST or by the employer who is supported by EST.
- I felt he could have done better in helping to assess a job role. He delegated the analysis to another manager without briefing about Bury EST first and what we did. It came across to the manager that he was being told how to do the job which wasn't good. In future I need to deal with Bury EST regarding job analysis or brief other staff properly beforehand.
- I'd like to see a larger selection of clients being put forward.
- I felt that after job analysis had been done by Bury it wasn't always followed up.
- Very committed staff at Bury EST with lots of time given. I've experienced many different working styles from staff and wouldn't really change anything in the way Bury EST work.

What do you want from the forum in the future?

- I would like more networking to be encouraged. How can best practice be shared? How can we communicate better and network? Who is happy to help / which employers? I'd like a little more guidance.
- I'd like to see 'Champions' in certain areas. Employers who have had a success in a certain area could be signposted as a point of contact to advise other employers. They could also be used to promote the service more
- As this was my first forum I felt it was a good experience. It was good to see that I was not the only one and that there were other employers working towards the same goals.
- I feel there's a need for a long term commitment to sort issues out.
- The subjects covered were great however we need more diversity on the topics so that employers attend all of the meetings. If more subjects were covered it would be more likely for employers to attend as there would be a subject of interest to them being discussed.
- The forum has opened my eyes especially with regards to personal development plans
- Workshops / Presentation / discussion on the following themes
 - How to deal with staff prejudice / curiosity regarding employed / placement clients whilst at the same time ensuring client confidentiality.
 - Support in raising staff awareness about a diverse workforce
 - Health and Safety / Risk assessment in the workplace
 - New UK European legislation and what impact it will have on the workplace.
 - Raise awareness amongst forum employers about the policy / strategy for the future economic development of Bury.
 - A workshop on the theme of recruiting a diverse workforce. This would be valuable for new members and act as a refresher for existing members
- Invite new interested employers to talk to people who have done it and gone through the process
 - Dispel some myths
 - Ask how they did it
 - Help people to understand different backgrounds

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- Diversity awareness days organised for employers eg – visits to community centres, mosques etc.
- Employers to become involved in meetings and discussions with national & regional policy makers on areas such as skill shortages and literacy/numeracy.
- More specific workshops/sessions on areas such as retention, sexual orientation and the implications of forthcoming legislation on age discrimination.
- Maria Nicholson (Jobcentre Plus Partnership Manager) offered to provide a session for a future meeting. The subject would be on the Disability Services provided by Jobcentre Plus.
- More work to be done on recognising ability to do the job – not on qualifications and set interview methods.
- Look at improving social skills from all groups of job applicants – including highly qualified people.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There being no other business the meeting closed at 10.45 am.

8. THE DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Fred expressed his thanks to everyone who had attended and in particular to the speakers, Steve Mason and Stuart Reich and the Adult Learning Inspector, Andy Johnson.

The next forum meeting will be held on Wednesday, 6 July 2005. In line with previous summer meetings this will be a mid morning meeting with a 9.30 am arrival time for tea and coffee and a meeting start of 10.00 am. The meeting will close at 12.00 noon and members will be invited to stay for a buffet lunch.

The meeting will be held in the Hayloft Suite at the Stables Leisure Centre, Bolholt Hotel, Walshaw Road, Walshaw, Bury.

Further information will be forwarded with the agenda and venue details.