

# Embracing Diversity

## EMPLOYER FORUM ON DIVERSITY

### MINUTES OF THE EMPLOYER FORUM MEETING HELD ON 16 OCTOBER 2002 AT BUSINESS LODGE, EUROPA HOUSE, BURY

Fred Bowen welcomed members in attendance, and introduced Edwin Partridge as a new member to the Forum. Edwin is the HR Director for Joseph Holts Brewery, Manchester.

A short discussion followed on the suitability and time of the meeting.

- The venue received very favourable comments.
- Europa House is central to Bury and has reasonable access to the motorway network.
- This venue also provided quality accommodation and good boardroom style with adequate space.

Some concerns were voiced on the start time of the meeting. Members with families had experienced some difficulties and in some cases special arrangements and provision for childcare had been necessary.

Future meetings would take place at Europa House and members were in agreement to re-schedule the start time to 8.30 am for a 9.00 am start.

### Forum Launch Meeting Wednesday, 31 July 2002

The findings and outcomes of the first meeting had been circulated to the members and a report followed on the main actions arising from that meeting.

- To set up a Steering Group to establish a future plan and vision.
- To arrange presentations/talks on Diversity issues by invited guests.

### Steering Group

A small group of members from the first meeting met on Wednesday, 18 September 2002.

**Note:** A full report of that meeting is included in this pack for your information.

### Presentations and Talks

Fred had acted on the request to invite a speaker on Diversity issues and recently been in discussion with Carol Woodhams.

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Carol is a Lecturer at Manchester Metropolitan University and had agreed to attend the Steering Group meeting and to attend the next Forum meeting to give a talk on Diversity Management.

At this point of the meeting Carol was introduced to the meeting. Following a short introduction, Carol delivered an excellent presentation on her specialised subject that was very well received by the members.

The content of the presentation encouraged a question and answer session with some very interesting topics of discussion:

- The Business Case: Reducing staff turnover and saving on recruitment costs.
- “Positive to Disabled” symbol – “Equal Opportunities Employer”- are these out of date?
- Could now be considered to be minimal and meaningless- have lost their power.
- To what extent is Diversity image, and to what extent is it sound business?
- Diversity is new, little data available. Easier for large employers than small.
- Larger companies and organisations are now concentrating on Diversity Management and Training, eg British Gas, Ford Motor are now developing Diversity Management Teams to work in conjunction with their Human Resource Teams.
- Managers are inflexible in their approach to the way the job is done.
- Analysing the job to be done plays an important role in accuracy of descriptions.
- Would visits to other companies be of benefit to members?
- General positive response to visiting and talking to HR personnel in larger companies.
- Ideas, feedback requested. Bring your problems to the meetings. Real life examples would be useful.

**Note:** A copy of the slides for the presentation has been enclosed for your information.

## **Questionnaire**

As discussed at the recent Steering Group meeting, Bury EST, for the Project would need to establish current baselines with the Forum members and monitor and measure the progress of members Diversity Management in the workplace.

In order to assess these baselines a questionnaire would be required. An initial draft of a questionnaire produced by Carol was presented for members’ comments.

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There were few adjustments required and the questionnaire would be finalised and circulated at a future date with the members. There were also plans to circulate a similar questionnaire on a wider basis with the assistance of the Chamber of Commerce to establish an area wide baseline for comparative purposes.

Carol has offered to analyse the information from the questionnaires.

Members' co-operation would be appreciated with this exercise.

## Mission Statement

As a result of the Steering Group meeting, the following draft Mission Statement for the Employer Forum was tabled for member's comments:

**“To continually increase awareness amongst employers of the opportunities and benefits of employing a Diverse workforce”**

It is proposed to adopt this statement. Any further comments or suggestions from members who were unable to attend this meeting would be welcomed and considered.

## Website Development

Huw Davies, Manager for Bury EST, informed members of the launch of the Embracing Diversity website - [www.embracingdiversity.org.uk](http://www.embracingdiversity.org.uk)

As the Project progresses the site will develop and present opportunities for members to contribute and link in to the site with possible job opportunities. Huw invited members to comment on the site and asked for ideas for content.

## Newsletter

Fred outlined his plans to produce a Forum Newsletter. Members would be invited to submit articles of interest to the business of the Forum.

## Partnership Organisations

Fred informed members of the other organisations working closely with Bury EST.

PACE: People Add the Competitive Edge.  
EYDCP: Early Years Development Children's Partnership.  
HOMEWORKING: Working from home - balancing home and work.

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These organisations provide valuable contacts for all managers involved with human resource issues, childcare and work-life balance issues. These are related issues to Embracing Diversity and further close partner working and combined employer events are expected to take place throughout the Project.

The respective managers for these organisations will be invited to attend the future meetings of the Forum.

## **Transnational Equal Seminar Meeting**

A recent visit to the UK by our Equal partners from Spain and Italy took place on 8, 9, 10 October 2002. Sharing their project workings and initiatives with the Embracing Diversity Project operating across the Boroughs of Stockport and Bury proved to be very interesting and informative.

Future meetings are in the planning stage and the next seminar meeting is to be arranged in February 2003 and there will be an opportunity for some of the employers participating in the Embracing Diversity Project across the Boroughs to visit the partners in Spain and Italy to share best practice and innovative workings.

Members are invited to visit the website where reports of the transnational meetings and visits will appear as the Project progresses.

## **Small Business**

Comments were raised by members of the difficulties facing small businesses, in Diversity Management issues, in relation to integration problems and a lack of resources.

It is hoped to work with smaller businesses and represent their needs.

## **Any Other Business**

There being no other business, members were thanked for their attendance and the meeting closed at 10.30 am.

## **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting was scheduled to take place on the 15 January 2003. However, will members please note that this date has been re-arranged. **THE DATE OF THE NEXT FORUM MEETING WILL BE WEDNESDAY, 22 JANUARY 2003.** Details and the agenda will be sent out prior to the meeting.

**Fred Bowen**  
**EMPLOYER CONSULTANT**