

Case study



The Metropolitan Housing Partnership

Delivering diversity training can be challenging due to its sensitive nature. Acas was asked to deliver training to a large UK housing organisation, comprising seven different businesses spread across the UK. Acas delivered a consistent programme of training to over 1000 employees, successfully raising the profile of diversity across the organisation¹.



Background

The Metropolitan Housing Partnership originated in the 1960s "to provide housing for migrants from the West Indies". At the time of training, the organisation had 1,050 staff spread across the country and it incorporated six diverse businesses offering:

- Buildings for public sector workers;
- General needs housing;
- Housing for asylum seekers and refugees (The Refugee Housing Association);
- Housing for people with disabilities and support needs such as the elderly and disabled (Step Forward);
- As well as regeneration, community and support services.

The need for Acas' services

A considerable number of customers and nearly half of the Metropolitan Housing Partnership's staff are from minority ethnic groups. Diversity is therefore high on its agenda. A review conducted by the Housing Corporation identified that the business had good plans for diversity but needed to integrate these more effectively. The Board and senior management of the Metropolitan Housing Partnership felt that training would help to raise the profile of diversity and ensure that it became part of company culture.

The organisation wanted a training provider with experience in the field and a flexible and collaborative approach. They also required a team with sufficient capacity to deliver workshops nationwide.

¹ This case study is based on interviews carried out by Turnstone Research and Consultancy with the Acas adviser, as well as the Diversity Manager and the Learning Development Manager for the Metropolitan Housing Partnership. We are grateful for interviewees' assistance and reflections on the Acas project.



How did Acas help?

Acas was invited to deliver approximately fifty diversity training workshops across the organisation. Most workshops took place in London and Nottingham. They drew together staff from different offices and a variety of job descriptions and levels of seniority.

Each workshop lasted a day and comprised:

- A brief outline of key legislation such as the DDA (supported by handouts provided by Acas)
- An overview of existing company policy (eg the bullying and harassment policy and the customer charter outlining employee rights)
- A discussion about what constitutes discrimination, using an Acas video
- Case study exercises about how best to tackle challenging scenarios

Before rolling the training out, Acas conducted a pilot project in order to fine-tune the course content. This enabled MHP staff to suggest changes to the course and ensured that case studies were tailored to the business.

The Outcomes

The organisation's Diversity Manager praised Acas' delivery:

Considering the size of the project, I think it's been a massive success.

Acas trainers were felt to have delivered a high standard of training. The Diversity Manager commented that they were especially effective at engaging all workshop attendees and helping to generate constructive debate about diversity issues.

They've been very good at getting people to suggest solutions to the case studies that we have.

The positive outcomes of the training programme were described as follows:

- Managers were able to communicate the company's diversity policy and related policies to all members of staff across the business.
- Staff awareness of the company diversity programme and related policies was actually shown to have improved in a staff survey following training:



The difference between 2003 and 2004 is very significant, so that's a great example of the impact that the training has had for MHP.

MHP – Learning Development Manager

- Training created an opportunity to communicate the businesses' broader vision and goals.
- Workshops brought together staff from different parts of the business which helped to create a greater sense of unity.
- It encouraged wider debate about diversity-related matters, across the business.

What the training has done is stimulated the debate and that's been really beneficial for us.

MHP – Diversity Manager

- It had made staff more confident that, should they raise issues of bullying or harassment, they would be dealt with fairly.

They are more confident that if they raise issues they will be dealt with in an appropriate and fair way.

MHP – Learning Development Manager

- Members of staff are now better equipped to tackle customer complaints effectively

They certainly know their roles and responsibilities in ensuring that we remain an employer of choice and a first rate provider of services to all communities.

MHP – Learning Development Manager

Conclusions

Overall, therefore, Acas was able to meet its client's expectations, delivering high quality training on a large scale. Acas' collaborative approach was considered central to the success of the project. The pilot project also contributed positively, providing adequate time to fine-tune course content and ensure consistent delivery across the group.

For further details please contact Acas Research and Evaluation at research@acas.org.uk

