



Open Access Training Case Study – Cheswold Park Hospital

Background to the Organisation

Cheswold Park Hospital is a secure psychiatric hospital for men in Doncaster, South Yorkshire. The hospital was opened in 2006 and is run by Riverside Healthcare Limited. The hospital has between 300 and 350 staff including part time and bank staff.

Participation in the Open Access training

Cheswold Park Hospital's HR staff usually attend a number of Acas training courses each year to ensure they keep up to date with HR law. In relation to the period of interest to this study, two staff members attended an in depth session on Internal Investigation Skills on 21 and 22 July 2010 and Equality Training on 21 October 2010. The staff attended these sessions because they wanted to improve their knowledge of the subject area, and learn how to comply with legal requirements relating to the subjects. In addition to this, they were keen in developing new policies and procedures around this area. In particular, with regards to the Investigation skills training, they wanted to support their investigating officers in conducting investigations and develop their knowledge around good practices around investigation procedures.

"...so the idea was we would go and learn a bit more about how Acas recommended we do investigations for disciplinary and grievances and other staff related issues and then utilise that to develop their own in house investigation training.."

Both of the training sessions covered legislation around the subject area and practical case study exercises. The staff felt the delivery style of the training sessions worked well. The fact that the training was delivered to a small, informal group meant that participants could explore issues in more depth, ask questions, and share experiences.

"The format worked really well for us as there was a lot of opportunity to ask questions throughout."

Another aspect that they also felt worked well was the tutor's approach which included sharing his experiences of being an investigator; this gave them a practical understanding of the issues being discussed.

"I understood everything he said, his style was brilliant, all the exercises were great and he was also able to bring his own experiences of being an investigator."



Outcomes of the training

This training session has resulted in a number of outcomes. The HR members feel they have a good understanding of the subjects addressed at the training, and, as a result are more confident in dealing with matters linked to the training. In addition to the skills and knowledge acquired by the HR team, the organisation has since developed an action plan around policies that need to be reviewed, and, following on from that, introduced a number of new policies and practices and revised existing ones.

A key area that the hospital felt required an urgent review was their disciplinary and grievance policy linked to their current absence and bullying policies. In addition to the above, the hospital has also developed a management toolkit and appointed welfare officers to support the changes made in the organisation.

Developing a management toolkit

Based on the knowledge acquired at the training sessions, the HR team have developed a toolkit for investigating officers to help them understand the investigation process and their role. The toolkit includes details of an investigating officer's responsibilities, checklists for different stages of the process and a hardcopy of the policy. The plan, in the longer term, is to run in house training sessions to further support their investigating officers.

Appointing welfare officers

One key area that the training highlighted was that the investigation process could in some cases lead to stress for both the employee being investigated and the witnesses involved. In order to overcome this problem, the hospital has assigned an independent welfare officer who maintains regular communication with the staff involved in the investigation process.

Overall, the hospital believes they have learnt two key lessons; one around the importance of communicating with all staff involved in an investigation, and the other, on the importance of having independent welfare officers to support staff going through the process.

Impact of the training

The hospital's revised disciplinary and grievance policy has led to a number of key impacts which include:

- a reduction in the number of formal grievance investigations;
- fewer staff absenteeism; and
- improved relations between management and employees.

Reduction in the number of formal grievance investigations

The HR members who attended the training feel they are more confident and proactive in providing advice on discipline and grievances issues to their managers. This includes



encouraging managers to resolve issues before they become serious. In addition, they also believe that their staff feel more confident about raising these issues. HR believe this approach has resulted in more issues being brought forward, however this has inevitably resulted in a reduction in formal investigations.

“The fact that we have more people coming forward and raising issues, informally, is a good reflection of the fact that they now feel that they can say something to somebody. I think before there have always been issues but I’m not sure if anyone would’ve been confident that they would have been dealt with properly.”

Fewer staff absenteeism

The hospital feels the emphasis on ongoing communication, during the investigation process, and the creation of a new independent welfare officer role, has helped reduce the number of absences taken due to stress associated with the investigations.

Improved quality of investigations

Prior to the training, investigating officers had a limited understanding of how to conduct an investigation. The introduction of the new toolkit is said to have increased their officers understanding of their role, and the different stages of the process around investigation procedures. This in turn has led to a reduction in the errors made around this area.

“The policies are there and we ask people to read them but they don’t necessarily read them... but because it’s in here [the toolkit] it makes them read them and follow it as well so we don’t have as many mistakes that happen.”

Improved relations between management and employees

As a result of an improvement in staff’s understanding of the grievance and disciplinary investigation processes, the organisation feels their hospital staff have become more supportive and sympathetic to those who are involved in investigations, this they believe has helped reduced the stress of employees involved in the process.

Summary of benefits of the training

The hospital believes the training has helped to refresh the HR members and investigating officers’ understanding of disciplinary and grievance investigations, and good practice approaches around this area. The HR team regularly attends Acas training and appreciate the amount of information that Acas’ tutors are able to convey in a manageable format.

“I feel that they [Acas’ tutors] manage to get a lot of information into a very short space of time but you do seem to take all that information in, I don’t know how they do it.”

