

Open Access Training Case Study – Newcastle Futures

Background to the Organisation

Newcastle Futures is a small not for profit organisation with between 20 and 40 staff members. The organisation was formed in 2007 with a number of secondees from the public sector to provide tailored support to help local people into employment.

Participation in the Open Access training

Newcastle Futures do not have a formal HR function, and in the past have adopted the HR policies of secondees' home organisations. However, the organisation has recently recruited direct staff and therefore feels the need to develop its own HR policies.

"A third of people we employ now are direct employees so we cannot just emulate public sector, we were trying to ensure that what we did followed private sector,... we had to have our own policies in place so that's where Acas was very supportive and helpful to us."

Members of the management team attended a number of Acas training sessions including Equality and Diversity, Redundancy and a Getting it Right Session on Disciplinary and Grievances policy. The main reason for attending all of the training sessions was to improve the team's knowledge on these issues, and to help them develop clear and fair policies.

The session outlined management and staff's responsibilities around disciplinary and grievance issues and provided practical examples and handouts.

The management team feel that all of the sessions were pitched at the right level and provided a range of different examples of good practice.

"We went away using some good examples given by some of the other people, facilitated around the table. So it brought it all to life and we walked away with some really good resources which we could use in the future."

Outcomes of the training

The training sessions have led to a number of outcomes. The management team believe they now have a good understanding of the subjects addressed at the training sessions, and feel more confident in dealing with issues that arise relating to these subjects. Newcastle Futures has also revised and formalised their existing policies, to ensure it meets the needs of their organisation.



Revising the disciplinary and grievance policy

Following the training, Newcastle Futures revised their Disciplinary and Grievance policy to ensure it focused on their organisation's structure.

Ongoing review of all policies

Newcastle Futures also regularly review all their HR policies, including their Disciplinary and Grievance policy, to ensure that they are up to date with any changes to legislation. These policies are reviewed every 6 months by senior management.

Ensuring staff understand all policies

Newcastle Futures ensure all their HR policies are circulated to their staff every 6 months, their staff are then asked to sign that they have understood and read these policies. However, after some discussions with their staff it became clear that not all staff had a full understanding of all policies. To overcome this issue, the organisation now outlines the main points of a different policy at their monthly team meetings to ensure all employees are aware of, and have a better and consistent understanding of all their policies.

The training has also raised Newcastle Futures awareness of the need to develop clear, unambiguous HR policies to ensure that all staff understand the company's and their own individual responsibilities.

"We've understood that you have to be clear that you know what you're doing, don't leave anything ambiguous at all. That if it's not in the policy and its not followed your in trouble. So make sure everything is in that policy that should be in the policy and that you review it regularly."

Impact of the training

With regards to the longer term impact, Newcastle Futures believe the revisions made to their Disciplinary and Grievance policy, alongside other HR policies has reduced the number of cases on employee grievances. This has resulted in a fairer redundancy process and improved staff morale.

Improved staff morale

As a result of the revised disciplinary and grievance policy, Newcastle Futures feel their senior management now have a clear understanding of how to address issues around this area which has given them confidence to explain the policy to their staff. This in turn has led to staff feeling more comfortable and motivated in their work.

"The training was about getting us prepared and equipped to feel that we're managing our HR process correctly. Which gives you the confidence and then in that sense makes your employees have faith you know what you're doing"



Reduced cases of employee grievances

Following the introduction of the revised Disciplinary and Grievance policy, management have become more aware of potential issues, and are more proactive in trying to resolve problems before they escalate to formal grievances. This has led to a reduction in the number of formal grievances that are made.

Fairer redundancy process

Newcastle Futures believe they now have a fairer redundancy process as a result of changes made to their HR policies and practices. For instance, one of the key areas they learnt from the training was how much notification for redundancy was needed by law; this has ensured that redundancy processes carried out within the organisation meets legal requirements.

Summary of benefits of the training

The training sessions the organisation believes has equipped them with the knowledge needed to develop coherent policies. The training packs provided at the training sessions are also used as useful references to address ad-hoc issues.

“These things might not come up until a while after the course and it’s quite nice to have the material to refer back to just so in your head you know you’ve got it right.”

They also feel the combination of the training and having access to Acas’s advice on an ongoing basis, sets Acas’s training apart from other training sessions.

“I think the training plus the advisory service is what we like about it....Most training courses you go on, you get the training that’s it and then you go...but that there is that advisory service that connects to it and it doesn’t seem separate... And we can meet the trainers again. Think that’s a really good thing to have.”

