

Opportunity Knocks

Why recruiting from marginalised groups is good for your business and good for the local economy

Brighton & Hove is a city of contradictions. There are high levels of unemployment, yet many employers find it hard to recruit suitable staff. Nearly a third of adults are educated to degree standards, yet there are 40,000 more who have no basic skills. House prices continue to skyrocket, but wages remain stagnant, well below the national average. Our chic boutiques and cosmopolitan restaurants hide areas of severe deprivation.

'What we're seeing is a serious dual economy,' says Claire Mitchell of the Business Community Partnership, who chairs the Operational Employer Engagement Group (OEEG). 'The gap is growing and getting worse all the time. Economically and socially, it's an unsustainable situation.'

'At the moment, the universities are turning out 7000 graduates every year, a large percentage of whom stay in the city,' Claire continues. 'Many of them end up taking jobs for which they're over-qualified, and which could be filled by the many unskilled local people looking for work, leading further marginalisation. Meanwhile, a lack of training provision in areas such as construction and tourism means that employers look beyond the city to fill skills shortages.'

Many marginalised people find themselves in a catch-22 situation: they can't get a job because they don't have the work experience, but they can't get the work experience unless they have a job. One way to turn this vicious circle into a virtuous one is through companies offering work placements.

'This is good for the employer, who gains extra staffing support without extra staffing costs,' points out Claire, 'while the person

on the placement gains valuable skills and experience. It may result in paid work, or just a reference. Either way, everyone benefits.'

A Professional Approach

There are some 45 different agencies and organisations in the city trying to get target groups into work, and it's fair to say the system needs to be rationalised. Some SMEs are inundated with requests for work placements, which may not be appropriate to their business, while others are never contacted at all. Levels of service and support vary considerably.

The OEEG aims to provide a professional, co-ordinated approach to promoting equal employment opportunities in Brighton and Hove, sharing best practice and setting standards. The focus is on the needs of the business community and how employers can benefit from diversity and engagement with marginalised groups. It is supported by Equal Brighton & Hove, a city-wide initiative funded by the European Social Fund which aims to help marginalised people get into training and gain employment.

Employers can find out more, by attending the Recruitment Breakfast at the Hilton Metropole on November 28th. 'It's a great opportunity for businesses to find out why good recruitment practice is necessary, and why it makes perfect business sense,' explains Claire Mitchell. Numerous organisations will be there to showcase their services. In addition, there will be information and advice on everything from the latest legislation to corporate social responsibility, and excellent opportunities for networking.

The free event, which runs from 7.30-10am, is hosted by City Business Club in conjunction with the OEEG and a number of high-calibre partners. The Mayor, David Smith, will officially open the event, Martin Searle Solicitors will be offering recruitment tips, while the Metropole are laying on their services for free, although there is a nominal £12 charge to cover breakfast costs.

Space at the Recruitment Breakfast is limited, so book your place now!

Contact Daniel Brain at the City Business Club on 01273 667788 Ext 597 or email db3@ccb.ac.uk.

To find out more about Equal Employment, contact Claire Mitchell on 01273 774796 or email claire.mitchell@bhbc.org.uk.

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