

Lancashire County Council

Personnel Today Award
2009

Submission Document

The challenge

It's difficult to engender change that mainstreams new HR practices throughout a complex organisation. But that's exactly what we did.

We identified a structural weakness — the “ticking time bomb” of a demographically imbalanced workforce, propped up by costly agency staff — and analysed the toll it would take if left unaddressed. Our re-engineered HR products would address this, but also shape and drive the County's economic development policy and support its over-arching aim of reducing socio-economic disparities in Lancashire.

An inter-connected public policy problem with many root causes like “worklessness” is a significant barrier that demands a creative response. Our ability to target different types of jobseekers and connect them with LCC managers demonstrates the flexibility of our model.

We overcame the biggest barrier – mainstreaming HR strategic excellence across the entire organisation – by convincing senior managers that our workforce solutions were cost-effective, met corporate goals and were an appropriate response to a real business need.

What we did

We recognise how Human Resources can deliver far-reaching change within our organisation. Lancashire County Council's (LCC) priorities – boosting skills, reducing costs and planning for the future – requires innovation and cultural change. So we pioneered three new workforce programmes that go beyond HR orthodoxy and demonstrate how HR transforms the lives of employees *and* the organisation that employs them.

- *Improving the bottom line:* We developed the first-ever public sector work trial, *WorkStart*, creating a route back to work for long-term welfare recipients, expanding the talent pool available to our managers, and reducing agency costs.
- *Focus on the future:* We re-engineered our *Apprenticeship* programme to address challenging demographic trends and re-refresh our workforce with talented individuals, thereby building perpetual capacity.
- *Understanding what drives the business:* We founded *Future Horizons* to give opportunities to young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) and looked after children. Helping disadvantaged populations is a core part of the Council's business and *Future Horizons* provides qualifications, life skills, career information and advice, and a structured eight-week work placement with us or a partner organisation.

Benefits and achievements

(Appendix A)

Apprentices: This is a corporate priority, not a token effort. In 2005/06, Lancashire County Council had six administrative apprentices. For the financial year 2008/09, we have 268.

We re-engineered our vacancy management process to allow apprentices to compete on merit for entry-level jobs, helping to retain a motivated workforce, and saving recruitment costs. We developed a “grow your own” culture by centrally recruiting up to 20 apprentices at a time, saving £120,000 a year.

WorkStart: To date, we have arranged placements for 60 individuals, with 43 securing sustainable employment.

The reason I was on incapacity benefit meant it would be difficult for me to get a job. It's a label, despite the fact we have all sorts of anti-discrimination laws.

Stephen

Future Horizons: 18 young people out of a cohort of twenty, completed the pilot programme. Fourteen have gone onto secure an apprenticeship smashing our inspirational target of 50% securing an LCC apprenticeship

Getting accepted on Future Horizons was a big achievement for me. It's opened many doors for me.

Sophie

In 2007/08 we spent £7.4 million on agency staff. Our new workforce models will contribute toward £1 million in savings for the current financial year and our neutral vendor contract already reflects the decrease in demand for agency staff thanks to take-up of HR programmes by LCC managers.

Re-positioning HR as a strategic consultancy available to all means we can align our practice with the Council's vision. These savings allows us to offer more employment opportunities to disadvantaged groups and meet the Council's social inclusion priorities.