

BLACK COUNTRY
EQUALITY
DIVERSITY &
CONFERENCE
2009



BCTG's first Equality & Diversity Conference took place in the Stadium Suite of Banks Stadium, Walsall on the morning of Friday 13th March 2009.

Compered by Sue Beardsmore, former BBC Midlands Today presenter, the invited audience were wide ranging and possessed varying degrees of knowledge regarding the subject of Equality & Diversity. Over 130 learning providers who work with learners from various programmes such as Kickstart Life, Entry To Employment, Apprenticeships and Train To Gain came together to hear a number of speakers talk on a number of different themes around Equality & Diversity.

The first speaker of the morning was Mike Bell, Director of Area, Black Country, Stoke & Staffordshire Learning & Skills Council. Mike has worked for many years in and around Birmingham and the West Midlands region, in various roles within the Civil Service, Birmingham Careers & Education Business Partnership and also CEO of Birmingham & Solihull Connexions Service. His conference presentation was thought provoking and made everyone think about the importance of employing a diverse workforce, reinforced by statistical information within his actual presentation – how to not do so could result over the coming years in economic suicide for employers. The next speaker of the morning Jagdish Singh Shemare has also had a varied career, but is currently Senior Policy Adviser for the Equality & Human Rights Commission. His presentation majored on the business case for diversity and the current emerging trends within the new Equalities Bill currently passing through Parliament.



Sue Beardsmore, former BBC Midlands Today presenter.



Jagdish Singh Shemare
Senior Policy Adviser for the Equality & Human Rights Commission



Mike Bell
Area Director of, Black Country, Stoke & Staffordshire Learning & Skills Council.



During the coffee break that followed delegates were encouraged to spend some time visiting the “Marketplace” stands situated within the main room and network with agencies that work within the Equality & Diversity arena. There were representatives from Gender Matters in Wolverhampton the largest agency working with transgender clients in the country, ACAS, Strategic Migration Partnership, City of Wolverhampton Multifaith Chaplaincy and Gay PRIDE. The “Marketplace” was also open after the Conference close and during the lunchtime. It was very well attended, and the evaluation forms revealed an appreciation of it's existence, asking for more agencies to be present at any future events!

The second part of the morning gave a variety of speakers the chance to talk about the benefits of engaging with Equality & Diversity – and delegates heard from Adrian Lawrence from MGTS, a provider in Coventry who are a Beacon provider awarded a Grade 1 in their inspection in March 2008. Adrian spoke about the measures put in place within the company to ensure that at Inspection the Leadership & Management Grade (of which Equality & Diversity is a contributory grade) was good because of the practices that were in place within the company. He shared with the delegates some of the good practice in place.

Following on from Adrian, the delegates were treated to a series of speakers. The subject area was regarding Peer Review & Development – BCTG have their own Peer Review & Development Group who have been looking at Equality & Diversity since it's inception in February 2008. The Group have undertaken a series of reviews on each other as “critical friends” under the theme of Equality & Diversity. Their emerging findings from these reviews reveal a general lack of real discussion at Learner Review stage, and also a lack of knowledge regarding the subject at employer placement level. The second year of activity will see the Group looking at ways of helping the wider provider base get to grips with these issues. They have been involved in an LSC commissioned booklet designed for 14-19 year olds within the Black Country on Equality & Diversity, and are now moving onto helping assist with the production of a DVD which will be used as a teaching tool within the classroom to inform debate on the subject of Equality & Diversity.

Preceding the BCTG Group's presentation, there was a short presentation from Tom Milligan, Operations Manager from Deloitte LLP, who manage the programme on behalf of LSIS – Tom spoke about the national perspective of Peer Review and how it works to help the sector work together to improve their self-assessment processes and to develop their capacity for self improvement.



Adrian Lawrence
MGTS Coventry



Tom Milligan
Operations Manager Deloitte LLP



Some of the BCTG Peer Review & Development Group



Our evaluation forms indicated several delegates who were interested in Peer Review, and hopefully they have now used the contact details within the presentation to contact LSIS and gain further information.

As mentioned our Peer Review Group have been working collaboratively with BCTG, the LSC and Mitchel Neate from Gloop – to pull together an Equality & Diversity booklet and DVD which will engage the 14-19 young people within the Black Country. The booklet entitled “The Amazing Thing about Teens” – Stuff You Should Know is in its final stages of production – and should be available for distribution by the end of June. Some members of the Peer Review Group have used their own learner cohort as “sounding boards” to discuss what they want to see from a booklet of this nature - our graphic designer (Mitchel Neate) has looked at the journey a young person takes in life from the age of 14 through to 19 and the enormous changes that take place in anyone’s life as they go through their teenage years. The pages not only look at all seven strands of diversity and refer the reader onto websites etc., to gather more information about legislation and specifics - but they also set out what other things you can legally do at each age between 14-19. You will be amazed! It is hoped that the booklet with its bright presentation and thought provoking content will stimulate debate and discussion amongst the cohort in a classroom setting and beyond.

Finally the morning was brought to a close with our keynote speaker Dave Heeley. Dave is probably known to you because he has the distinction of being the only blind person in the world to have recently run seven marathons in seven continents in seven days! However he has also led a very full life before he decided to keep superbly fit!

Running his own company, making furniture to his own design in his workshop, even having a regular stint on Insight Radio called DIY with Blind Dave! Added to which he is up for most challenges that a fully sighted person would think twice about – water ski-ing, cliff jumping in Corfu, driving round Brands Hatch, driving tanks in Scotland and abseiling, to name but a few. He has raised £375,000 for the charity Guide Dogs for the Blind, has met the Queen and attended functions at the House of Lords always ably assisted by Wicksie.

His presentation was inspirational (the word most used on the Evaluation Forms!), and he was described as awesome and remarkable – I think everyone would agree with that.

The morning was an outstanding success – delegates filled in evaluation forms and left them on the tables, all of them stating that they had enjoyed the morning and the array of speakers and exhibitors, and that it had been thought provoking and informative.



Dave Heeley keynote speaker



Some of the BCTG team and guests

