

CASE STUDY: A benchmark for a holistic approach to conflict at work



NHS Grampian is the third largest Teaching Health Board in Scotland with 17,000 staff.

Need

- Reduce the cost of conflict
- Support managers in handling conflict without the need for HR support.
- Review and update procedures to include an effective early resolution option.

Project

- Training in-house mediators
- Establishment of strong support for the in-house service
- Policy review
- Development of Train the Trainers programme to enable internal roll out of training.

Outcomes

- Improved confidence and skills of line managers.
- Qualified in-house mediators well supported.
- Delivery of early, local and successful mediation across the organisation.
- Internal capability to roll out training at low cost.

The Brief

A series of surveys indicated a problem with bullying behaviour, and there were some long standing disputes which were proving difficult to resolve and produced lose/lose outcomes, which were detrimental and costly and added no value to the organisation. There was anecdotal evidence that managers were 'not good' at handling conflict, often going to HR for support. Procedures and process was lacking an effective early resolution option, so the only way for cases to go was up.

A series of steps were taken by NHS Grampian to improve practice around bullying and harassment and conflict generally:

- Developing a new Dignity at Work procedure.
- Running education and awareness sessions for staff at various levels.
- Producing a leaflet to raise awareness of rights and responsibilities.
- Training Confidential Contacts to support early and appropriate dispute resolution and improve responses to bullying and harassment.

Identifying an expert partner

NHS Grampian decided that it needed to work with an expert partner in order to design and deliver a process to address existing shortfalls and create a sustainable ongoing conflict management resource.

- **Building momentum, identifying an expert partner and scoping** – an internal stakeholder group advised by the Dignity at Work Officer (DWO) identified CMP as a potential partner, and initial scoping suggested an innovative approach, incorporating an in-house mediation resource and internal conflict management training initiative.
- **Stakeholder evaluation** – CMP were commissioned to

deliver a one-day conflict management training pilot to the stakeholder group and a selection of staff in order to evaluate content, style of delivery and cultural fit. This evaluated very positively and CMP were confirmed as the preferred expert partner.

Building support, finding resource and confirming project plan and milestones

Support was secured within the HR and Grampian Area Partnership Forum (GAPF), and funds secured from the GAPF Endowment. The project was structured around the following ingredients and milestones with a strong partnership ethic:

- Robust fair recruitment programme
- Awareness-raising for recruitment and general education re conflict management
- Delivery of a 6 day accredited mediation training programme
- Delivery of a 3 day training of trainers programme
- Mentored delivery of trainers to deliver a 1-day conflict management course
- Ongoing support from CMP for mediators and conflict management trainers
- Ongoing support on infrastructure, process and awareness raising

The Project

Mediator and Conflict Management Training (MCMT) initiative implementation

A jointly designed recruitment campaign to find volunteers emphasised that this was a competency-based recruitment process open to all employees. A Job Description and Person Specification were provided by CMP, and local publicity promoted the initiative in-house. Information sessions were also run to give people a realistic preview of the role and its responsibilities. A selection and assessment process was particularly comprehensive, and gave every opportunity for a wide range of staff to apply and secure a training place. Candidates were screened and scored on their applications, and OPQ¹ Questionnaires completed. An assessment centre process was used, with a range of activities assessing potential, and a final group of eight was selected for training.

Eight candidates successfully completed CMP's OCR Certificate in Mediation Skills and progressed on to a three-day train-the-trainer course, designed specifically for NHS Grampian by CMP, to enable them to deliver a one day conflict management programme. Trainers were

¹ The Occupational Personality Questionnaire (OPQ) provides in-depth information on how individuals fit within a work environment, how they will work with others and their performance potential against job competencies.

mentored and assessed by CMP on their live delivery of, and four were assigned to the trainer pool for subsequent course delivery.

Recognition event

NHS Grampian congratulated and recognised staff of the new pool of in-house mediators and conflict management trainers with a celebratory event attended by senior union reps, senior management and CMP lead practitioner.



Developing the MCMT initiative

Promotion and awareness raising

Over 150 people attended a launch of the mediation initiative over three interactive workshops; which also advertised the availability of places on up-and-coming one day conflict management courses run by the MCMT pool. This was part of an ongoing awareness-raising campaign including roadshows, mention on induction and appropriate training courses, and direct promotion of mediation through the one-day conflict management courses.

Gate-keeper and local development role

The DWO became the mediation service gate-keeper, able to deal effectively with referrals and requests for information and to coordinate allocation of casework. Continuing development for MCMTs was delivered locally and in ongoing support and sessions for trainers and mediators facilitated by CMP.

Embedding the Service

Funding was secured for a second group of MCMTs and the same process was followed to recruit and select, resulting in six additional mediators and four additional trainers.

- Funding was also secured for a co-ordinator who was one of the successful mediation trainees in the second tranche.
- Ongoing support for the MCMT group has continued with a mixture of local and external expert provision.
- The training has been linked with NHS Grampian's People Management Programme.

Strengthening investigation processes

To strengthen the investigation processes of dispute resolution, CMP delivered its ILM Endorsed three-day Investigation Skills programme to a cadre of eight investigators.

Outcomes

- The members of the MCMT now conduct ongoing awareness raising events and are widely recognised across the trust as champions for early conflict resolution.
- Two of the MCMT jointly delivered a one-day course for other Scottish NHS Boards.
- Feedback on the mediation and training has been very positive.

Outputs

Since 2007 NHS Grampian has invested in:

- An in-house mediation and conflict management training initiative.
- Significant policy infrastructure innovation emphasising early resolution.
- Significant stakeholder mobilisation towards 'holistic' conflict management.
- Modernisation of formal process and particularly bullying and harassment investigation.
- Supporting and sharing best practice with other organisations who are seeking cost-effective, proactive ways of managing conflict at work.

NHS Grampian has achieved the following Key learning outcomes

- Workplace mediation provides managers with a new option for conflict resolution.
- Skilled mediators achieve a relatively quick turn-around and empowering, win/win outcomes.
- Feedback from users suggests that the mediators are perceived as independent, impartial and neutral.
- The NHS Grampian MCMT initiative has been featured as a best-practice model "Review of NHS Mediation Services Approaches in NHS Scotland" *Brightpurpose Consulting October 2009*.
- The project was given as an example of best practice in a workshop at a national mediation conference.