

CASE STUDY: Introducing Mediation into a University Setting



Northumbria University, in Newcastle upon Tyne, is an expanding multicultural learning community, with excellent links with further and higher education, industry and commerce throughout the UK, Europe and beyond.

Need

To create an in-house mediation service, sited within the HR team.

Project

CMP Resolutions provided accredited mediation training for 16 mediators. They continue to provide support, advice and training.

Outcomes

- 🔥 Strong supportive links with the three Unions.
- 🔥 A successful mediation service set up and operating
- 🔥 Mediation support provided to staff and students.

The Brief

Northumbria University approached CMP in early 2009 to look at setting up an in-house mediation service.

The reason for wanting this was to establish an in house informal route for resolving conflicts which sat alongside the more formal grievance, respect and dignity at work procedures.

The Project

CMP Resolutions worked with Northumbria University to deliver two OCR accredited 'Certificate in Mediation' courses. The first was delivered in September 2009 the second set of training was delivered in January 2010 both by our chair and founder John Crawley. CMP continued to provide support to Northumbria through their telephone helpline, and mediation service set up materials.

Outcomes

The University has had a number of cases of mediation since November 2009. These have generally gone well and the training has been fantastic in getting these off the ground. **No cases dealt with have since gone on to a formal process** so in terms of prevention of escalation the University considers these extremely successful.

After the second tranche of training a working group was established which included HR, Management and Trade Union representatives. The Terms of Reference of this group include: developing a Mediation Service document, conducting the Equality Impact Assessment of this policy and link with the Student Union. This working group meets regularly and works

alongside the mediators. This process allows for a reflection on the development of the service and consideration of the wider implications of the policy on the full range of university staff. All members are very positive about the potential for mediation. The group are also looking at how mediation is evaluated and which tools are used to collect data – refining and developing the current evaluation forms that are used.

The University have established a mediation coordinator with training from CMP and also ongoing networking opportunities for the mediators to come together to reflect on practice and to hone skills. A refresher course has been delivered in January 2011; supporting the mediators in keeping their skills and practice up to date. The mediation service document is soon to be signed off by the working group and after this the Group will disband and the mediators will continue to meet bi-annually.

A key role of the members of the working group is to brief their respective departments. The mediation service will then be officially launched with a corresponding communication strategy. This will include: line management briefings, briefings for the Student Union and Occupational Health, publication on the internal website and an article in the internal newsletter.

The CMP training has not only helped provide the skills for mediating but also to give a really strong process and structure to mediation. This works extremely well. Northumbria use a co-working model which supports the mediators in feeling more confident and reflecting back to grow and improve skills. All mediators debrief both with each other after a session and with the coordinator on an informal basis.

One factor that has really made this project take off is the involvement of the Union Representatives. The relationship with the Unions was good to start with, but involving them in the training and in the working group has cemented their understanding of mediation, how it can really support their members, and what the union rep role is within the mediation context. Those reps who have completed the training now mediate; reaffirming that a great mediator is a great mediator regardless of your background or other 'hats' you might wear.

For Northumbria University the links with the student body are crucially important and they actively encourage students to consider mediation before the submission of a formal complaint. The aim of this approach is to ensure that matters can be resolved satisfactorily and expediently for all parties thereby re-establishing good relations and improving the student experience.