

Category: Employee Engagement

Organisation: The British Library

Date: October 2007

EFA overview

In 2005 the British Library completed an external audit of existing policies which mapped the extent of policy work required to comply with the Age Regulations. The library joined the EFA in November that year. They carried out a comprehensive overhaul of the library's policies, encompassing legal requirements and demonstrating best practice within the organisational context. Once an Age Action Group was set up, innovative approaches were used to consult with and engage workforce at a time when radical changes associated with the new 2005-2008 business plan were already underway. The success of this approach, including library-wide cascade mechanisms, has led to their incorporation in the implementation of public sector duties on disability and gender.

Initiative

A swift overhaul in the way age diversity in policy, practice and culture is viewed in the British Library (BL).

Aims and purpose

- To agree, deliver and implement age neutral policy and practice in a flexible, consultative and responsive way to ensure compliance with the new laws.
- To fully address the change required and apply best practice

Business drivers

Current:

- Re-organisation and change to meet the business challenges of "Redefining the Library for the 21st Century"
- Redeployment, retention and succession planning challenges for very specialist roles with multi language and cultural knowledge
- New communications and involvement policy

In the future:

- Business case – demographics indicate that the workforce will contract and create a competitive employee led labour market.
- Eradicating ageism and thus reducing the risk of claims by ensuring high awareness and best practice policies.

Approach taken

The process was started by a report produced by HR and endorsed by the Executive Team and Board to engage and lead from the top. It outlined a full plan for organising and implementing the change required compliance with the forthcoming laws and good practice.

Included in the report was:

- legal background and overview including the economic and demographic environment
- a synopsis of the proposed regulations and employer obligations required in terms of compliance and best practice covering areas such as objective justification, retirement, service related pay and unfair dismissal.
- the impact of delays to the regulations
- what the changes meant for BL's age policy at a strategic and operational level
- recommendations, options and plans - best practice for the priority and broader employment policies around diversity and social inclusion

An intranet announcement in December 2005 regarding the forthcoming legislation was followed by a personalised verbal communication cascade.

An Age Action Group was set up to act as a steering group. They liaised with consultation groups for methods of engagement which lead to the design of inclusive and age positive policies.

Communications and awareness training was undertaken to confront preceptions and encourage inclusion. By February 2006, 150 senior managers had signed up for an HR Exchange about age legislation – the highest attendance ever achieved for a non-mandatory exchange of information.

To mark the introduction of the laws in October 2006 all employees received a letter telling them how the legislation will affect them and the Library. This was accompanied by an age aware bookmark containing key messages to serve as a reminder. Messages were also posted on wage slips.

Barriers

- Engaging the leadership
- Managing and engaging managers and trade unions with regard to the transitional policy for retirement/retention and general cultural change
- Keeping interest over the year and to ensure a successful launch
- Managing the Well Being Initiative which would be discriminatory post October 1 2006 since it assumed staff over the age of 45 would require a larger sick leave entitlement.

Impact

- The results of colleague opinion survey in January 2007 showed marked improvement in information, communications and participation in change within the organisation and commitment to diversity including age
- An increased interest in other groups working on other diversity initiatives that cross referenced age
- Management, employees and unions were happy that the pre October retirement and retention process was transparent and fair
- Use of HR advice line shows the level of employee awareness
- Successful retention of business critical and key skills beyond the previous retirement ages of 60-63 (depending on grade)

Monitoring

- British Library check and maintain records of the impact of age policy and practice across the current workforce.
- They operate the cascade and team brief system to impart more information and communication and receive 360° feedback.
- Currently testing an open house day for employees to find out about different directorates, raise issues and get responses.
- Employees can write in their opinions and observations to the internal newsletter for responses from a manager or other employees.
- A colleague opinion survey is held every 16-18 months to measure opinion.
- No one can recruit or be on a panel unless they have attended the recruitment and selection course which includes age diversity awareness.
- A planned retirement process is now in place. BL monitors who chooses to leave between ages 60-63 and who stays on.
- Performance management review for everyone which include personal development plans and compulsory consistency checking.

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