

## Background to the Organisation

The organisation under discussion is a public sector SME operating in the transport sector.

## Participation in the Open Access training

Three members of staff attended two training workshops: Discipline and Grievance; and Conducting Investigations.

Being part of the public sector, the organisation already had a number of policies in place, however employment law was perceived to becoming more complicated. It was hoped that the training course could provide some clarity and help avoid future problems.

“You hear about an increase in cases, and we [in this country] appear to be heading for more tribunals. We want to avoid that and thought it would be good for us to go on a course.”

The training they attended involved a variety of different activities including: group work; question and answer sessions; open discussions; and examination of case studies and real-life scenarios. These were found to be the most useful aspects of the training as it allowed them to make decisions based on real life cases, to discuss these decisions and to discover the outcomes of these scenarios.

“You were given the answers of why they [tribunals] reached a decision and what they considered in reaching a decision. You were given the pitfalls to wade through.”

The staff members who attended the training felt that the most valuable aspect of the training was the factual scenario which practically demonstrated how the process works and how decisions are reached.

“I found it absolutely brilliant, it was put over extremely well, they were extremely knowledgeable.”

“It took the mist away about why it’s [employment law] getting more complicated, which does help, it makes you stop and think and look from a wider perspective”

## Outcomes of the training

This training session has resulted in a number of outcomes. The management team feel they have a strong understanding of the subjects addressed in the course, and, as a result are not only more confident and effective in dealing with matters linked to the training, but are also more able to prevent issues occurring in the future. In addition to the skills and knowledge acquired by the management team, the organisation has modified its approach to dealing with complaints, grievances, and disciplinary issues, and reviewed and revised a number of policies.



## Revision of practices

Previously all issues relating to complaints, grievances, and disciplinary issues were dealt with formally as a matter of procedure; however the training has helped instil a different mindset, particularly with regard to the examination of wider issues, which demonstrated the value of initially addressing issues informally before taking a formal route. One example demonstrating the value of this new approach was around a back-pay issue. Similar issues had arisen previously which had been dealt with formally and had proved time-consuming and complicated to investigate, when a new complaint about back-pay arose after the training course, it was dealt with informally and was resolved (in the employee's favour) in an efficient and a shorter timeframe.

"From my perspective I can handle things better, because you know the rules... You defuse situations before they get to that stage [tribunals], because you can talk to staff about it in more depth and gives wider knowledge."

"Previously what would happen was that a grievance would come in and we would deal with that as a formal grievance. Whereas following advice received from the workshop, much more emphasis was put on informal resolution. It seems to have worked and now we have very few grievances which become formal grievances, which can only be a good thing."

## Policy review and revision

The organisation has also reviewed its **Absence and Attendance Management, Contracts and Written Statements**, and **Disciplinary and Grievance** policies as a result of the training.

The main revision made to its **Absence and Attendance Management** policy was on the number of days that employees could take off sick. Previously employees were required to produce a medical certificate for sickness absences of 15 days (including days not worked), this has been amended to absences of 10 consecutive working days.

All three policies were revised to mirror the headings used in the Acas Code of Practice and to make reference to the code where this was relevant. Other revisions were around minor wording and rephrasing to make them accessible to both staff and the management team.

"Some policies are woolly and we wanted them to be more specific. Certainly from where I'm sat they're more exact, so when you deal with it everyday you can be more accurate."

Overall, the main benefit of the training the organisation believes was the knowledge gained by the staff who attended the training. This has helped them to change the management team's approach to disciplinary and grievance procedures.

## Impact of the training

The revision of the management teams approach had led to a number of key impacts which include:

- fewer cases of staff grievances;
- improved communication within the organisation; and
- improved relations between management and staff.



## **Fewer cases of staff grievances**

The management team feel they are more confident and proactive in providing advice around potential discipline and grievances issues. This includes trying to resolve issues informally before they become serious and require a formal investigation. This has resulted in less cases being pursued formally and therefore a reduction in costly investigations.

“From a management perspective looking at resolutions, even in the case of disciplinaries, at an informal level if at all possible, rather than escalating them immediately into a formal issue ... What we’ve seen is a significant reduction in the number of disciplinaries relating to misconduct and from grievances relating to employment relationships or the manager/employee relationships.”

“We haven’t had many grievances, so from a workload point of view it’s brilliant. Grievance investigations can be lengthy and can be complex. A reduction in formal grievances can only be a good thing. Things are being dealt with at an informal and localised level.”

## **Improved communication within the organisation**

As a result of an improvement in staff’s understanding of the disciplinary and grievance investigation processes, the management team feel they are better equipped to defuse potential situations.

“From my perspective I can handle things better, because you know the rules... You defuse situations before they get to that stage [tribunals], because you can talk to staff about it in more depth and give wider knowledge.”

## **Improved relations between management and staff**

In addition, though there haven’t been any major issues with poor employee relations within the organisation, there has been a ‘them and us’ attitude over the years between operating and office staff. There was a perception that this was improving partly due to the change in approach used by the management team.

“Relationships are improving and there is a little more respect than there used to be... The fact that [the management] are no longer ‘jumping the gun’ [straight to a hearing] may have been a contributory factor in this.”

## **Summary of the Benefits of the training**

The organisation believes that the training has helped, in some cases to refresh the management team understanding and approaches to disciplinary and grievance issues.

Though they had not been aware of Acas training previously, other staff have subsequently attended Acas training sessions, and there are plans in place to utilise Acas’ services in future.

“The knowledge I gained in one day is helping me perform better, which has to be good doesn’t it? I talk to people a bit different in the way I handle it. You can fall foul by not being so knowledgeable. Now I’m more professional...For me it’s a big tweak.”

“It made us think differently and outside of the box.”

