Case Study

Working with Basildon Primary Care Trust to improve working relationships

The background

Basildon PCT was set up in April 2003 and employs 400 staff. The trust recognises a number of NHS trade unions but the Joint Staff Forum (JSF) that was established was not considered to be very effective. The new management team did not have much experience of negotiating with trade union representatives, and the Forum did not directly represent the majority of staff at the Trust.

As a result, the JSF was poorly attended, tended to get bogged down in trivial issues and failed to address more serious matters, such as the development of a common set of policies and procedures for the new organisation.

How Acas helped

Acas was approached to advise on how the effectiveness of the JSF could be improved. The Trust wanted to increase the number of representatives on the Forum and broaden its remit. With Agenda for Change just around the corner, a strong emphasis on partnership working was needed.
Acas facilitated joint workshops for members of the Forum that looked at the way in which employer and employee representatives worked together and how employment relations could be improved. Action plans were drawn up at the end of each day, and a special working group was set up to take forward an agreed action plan. Key priorities included the need to work together to increase the number of staff representatives and training for Forum members on a range of HR issues.

The results

According to the Head of HR, the action plan formed the basis of the JSF's work for the following 12 months. There have been several key outcomes. Employee representation within the Trust and involvement in the Forum have both increased, which has also led to an increase in the number of accredited trade union representatives and in trade union membership. Management representation on the Forum has been strengthened and the overall effectiveness of the JSF has been greatly improved. As the Head of HR has noted: “When you walk into the JSF now, the room is full.” The Forum is now able to deal with more substantive issues, and the harmonisation of staff policies and procedures is nearly complete.

The improvement in working relationships has meant that the action plan has been progressed further, and Acas has been called in again to deliver training sessions around broader HR issues as well as on partnership working. Partnership principles have now been incorporated into the Trust's recognition agreement. The progress that was made ensured that the Trust was much better prepared to implement Agenda for Change.