

The British Council - Public Sector Outplacement

The Challenge

The British Council is the United Kingdom's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. Its purpose is to build engagement and trust for the UK through the exchange of knowledge and ideas between people worldwide. The Council employs over 7000 people in more than 110 countries, with about 1200 being UK appointed.

In 2009, a strategy was launched to double the impact of its cultural relations activities. Many of these initiatives would engage external partners rather than limit the Council to its own resources. The new objectives called for significant organisational transformation. The transformation would make some roles redundant. It was hoped that many would depart through a Voluntary Early Retirement (VER) plan and, whilst not ruled out, compulsory redundancy would not form a major part of the plan.

It was anticipated that more than 300 staff would leave the organisation by the autumn of 2010. There would be a staged reduction, starting in March 2010, and proceeding for about six months. The majority of people affected would be working in London, Manchester, Belfast, Cardiff and Edinburgh, but it was possible that some would be based overseas.

The re-structure would affect staff at all levels, from junior to senior management, but only from some divisions in the organisation. The VER package would include financial compensation and outplacement support. The purpose of the outplacement support would be to enable staff to make a successful transition into new careers outside the organisation.

The challenge was to develop a programme that provided support at the appropriate time, whilst people remained focused on the job. For example, some people had been accepted for VER a full ten months before they would leave. Service excellence would continue to be delivered. The British Council was anxious to treat all staff fairly and embrace best practice. It was critical that the Council was seen to be an employer of choice and that its image and international reputation was protected.

The Solution

Cepec Career Management partnered with Tribal Resourcing and, together, they were selected to provide the solution and deliver the outplacement support. The contract is well underway:

- A strong partnership has been developed with the HR Team at the Council, with Cepec Career Management providing the day-to-day seamless working relationship and transfer of services and information.
- Those employees, whose request for VER has been accepted, are permitted to access their outplacement programme three months before they leave. Everyone is seen by Cepec within a week of making contact.
- All employees enjoy the same individual programme. They receive up to nine hours of one-to-one advice with their career consultant. Together, they discuss career options and carry out their agreed job search campaign. They choose up to three days of workshops, to compliment the campaign and may also look at other options like business start-up and consultancy.

- Everyone is given access to an online career transition solution, offering a step-by-step guide to effective job-searching, thousands of targeted job leads, psychometric tools, networking and much more.
- The programmes are delivered in all five cities, although the majority are in London and Manchester.
- There is regular full reporting on the progress of the programme and the Key Performance Indicators. The Service Level Agreement is invariably exceeded.

In summary, the aim of the initiative is to ensure that those leaving secure new careers and that a positive message is sent to those who remain. Cepec and Tribal will be judged on the outcomes.

The Outcomes

At the mid-point in 2010, the outcomes are exciting:

- Over three quarters of those eligible have taken up the offer of outplacement support. Over 250 individuals are currently benefiting from the programme. Early users of the service have gone back to their British Council desk, spread the good word and encouraged others to sign up.
- Individuals are asked to provide feedback after their initial meeting with their career consultant. Everyone reported that the meeting and the consultant match was Excellent or Very Good and that they believed the programme would help them move forward.
- Workshop attendees are asked to provide written feedback after the event. Without exception, the feedback on the course-content and the consultants has always been Excellent or Very Good.
- Employees start their outplacement three months before they leave. Naturally, employees are permitted to take time off to attend consultant meetings and workshops. Line Managers and HR Managers are reporting considerable positive feedback from the whole initiative.
- Of those who have left the British Council by the end of May, over 10% have already secured a new career, half are job searching and the remainder are taking further education, enjoying a career break or involved in voluntary work.