

Case study



Acas work in SMEs: establishing employment policies at Aslam Interiors.

Background

Aslams Beautiful Interiors is a family business selling carpets and furniture which was established just under 20 years ago. The company showroom is based in Bradford which has a large ethnic minority population, mainly Pakistani. The company employs 15 members of staff, all of whom are men. The workforce is largely Pakistani but includes Indians and white British people. Around half are British born while the most commonly spoken languages are Punjabi and Urdu. A number of religions are represented within the workforce, including Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Christianity.



The management team has historically adopted an informal and relaxed approach to the running of the business.

"The working relationship we have in our business is, and always has been, casual... because at one time I was on the shop floor as well. I don't regard myself as any different from my staff..."

Managing Director

Acas first contacted Aslams Beautiful Interiors as part of a local 'equality and diversity' marketing initiative. As a result of this initial contact, the Managing Director requested assistance in updating his employee contracts, and guidance in writing and disseminating company policies.

How did Acas help?

The Acas adviser sent the Managing Director some examples of a generic contract of employment and a grievance policy to assist him in writing his own versions. As a result, the company set about preparing contracts of employment for all staff and an accompanying staff handbook containing basic company policies. The Managing Director asked the Acas adviser to review a first draft of these. Acas provided comments and feedback relating to content, language and tone. Some of the issues discussed included holiday entitlement, discrimination clauses, and examples of what might constitute 'employee misconduct'. The Managing Director then revised his documents in light of these comments.

Outcomes: A new managerial outlook for 2005

The company has yet to disseminate the new contracts and Staff Handbook to its workforce. Following discussions with Acas, the Managing Director realised that further adaptations to company policy are needed in order to accommodate the various cultural and religious needs of his team, for example:

- He would like to include an additional section which allows different sections of the workforce to take leave to coincide with religious festivals (such as Eid for Muslims).
- He felt that his policy needed to be amended to meet particular needs associated with bereavement, such as absence at short notice given the need to bury the dead immediately, or perhaps travel overseas.

"Asian people don't work like the majority public. If we have, for example, a death in the family, they take a bit longer to mourn and it's immediately with Asians – or Muslims anyway. You have to bury the body immediately... If they're going to go to Pakistan or India or Bangladesh they need to do that, so we have to work around that system."

Managing Director

The Managing Director is contemplating how best to disseminate policy to staff who do not read English and, in some instances, their mother tongue. He has considered producing a handbook in Urdu although he has some concerns about the expense of this. When he consulted Acas, they advised that he consider disseminating policy orally.

"I suggested team briefings as a way of cascading the information so that people can get advice orally and also trying to match people up with people who could speak that language so that they can interpret on an ad hoc basis."

Acas Adviser

When asked what he felt about Acas' involvement overall, the managing Director said that Acas had been very helpful. He felt that Acas had been a spur to his producing more formal contracts and policies and was pleased that policy documents were in place. He described Acas as a professional organisation. He reported that he would be likely to consult their services in future:

"The impression I got was that they were fairly organised... Well-presented in that they knew exactly what they were doing. They were well-focused on what



went on and what they could do for us and they were also very easy to deal with in terms of 'this is what we do' and 'this is what else we do'.

Managing Director

He welcomed the flexible and sensitive approach of the adviser in the context of their culturally diverse workforce.

"It's very crucial for them to understand that it's culturally very different and that makes us a different business from any other Asian business even. That was another plus point. They were able to adapt the policy so it could work around our fundamental values and customers."

Managing Director

**For further details please contact Acas Research and Evaluation
at research@acas.org.uk**

inform

advise

train

work
with you