

Case study on recruitment Goldsbrough Home Care, United Kingdom

Organisational profile

Goldsbrough Home Care is part of Nestor Healthcare Group plc, which includes three divisions: primary care, health care staffing, and social care. The social care division provides services such as nursing home care, nursing and home care for the elderly, and specialist care packages.

Goldsbrough Home Care is part of the social care division and has around 80 branches all over the UK.

Goldsbrough Home Care employs around 15,000 workers, a huge increase compared to its 1992 workforce of some 1,000 employees. Most care workers are female and aged over 50 years. Staff shortages pose a big problem for the company. Recruitment is less difficult in the north, where there is a stronger sense of community and where many employees are committed to their role as care workers, remaining in their jobs even after the expected retirement age.

Ongoing difficulties in the sector regarding the recruitment of younger staff has meant that Goldsbrough has tended to recruit more older workers, who they hold in high esteem. Its equal opportunities policy addresses the issue of age and the company often offers older workers flexible retirement arrangements and access to training and development programmes. However, recent government regulations regarding recruitment, and training and development are deterring some older people, who would otherwise be willing to work.

There is no trade union representation in Goldsbrough, only a works council in the primary care division of the Nestor Healthcare Group. The organisation is currently trying to revitalise its communication with this works council, in order to increase its representation within the workforce.

The original initiative

The company's original training and development initiative covered three areas: recruitment; training and development; and retirement. They consisted of the following features:

- Goldsbrough ensured that its recruitment agencies and its advertisements, recruitment, and selection procedures did not discriminate on the grounds of age.
- Training focused on recruitment and on anti-discriminatory practices for management; other employees were also trained, either formally or through informal mentoring, and new employees were 'shadowed' by more experienced workers.
- Employees were encouraged to continue working beyond the state pension age, as long as they were physically able. Goldsbrough relocated any workers who could not continue working in their current jobs to more suitable jobs.

These initiatives enabled the company to recruit more people in a sector that has traditionally experienced serious staff shortages. Some initiatives – such as training, retention, and retirement arrangements – aimed to give employees as much job satisfaction as possible, in positions that they regarded as more fulfilling.

The initiatives have continued, largely unchanged. However, in the past 10 years, they have become more formalised, as recent legislation requires standardised recruitment, selection, and training and development of caregivers. The more formalised procedures that resulted have had both positive and negative effects. As the public image of caregivers has improved, Goldsborough has benefited as existing employees become more committed. However, the formal procedures have discouraged some potential job applicants, thus further hampering recruitment.

Good practice today

Along with the original initiatives, which are still in operation, three new initiatives have been introduced during the last decade: ergonomic and job design practices; health and well-being measures; and retention strategies.

1. Ergonomic advancement: Technological improvements in caregivers' equipment, along with more rigorous assessment of health and safety measures (a result of regulatory changes that affected most of the company's functions), ensure that all employees, especially older workers, are fully supported from an ergonomic point of view. This initiative was introduced partly because local authorities and insurance companies demand ergonomic improvements, and partly because the company recognises that good practice should include such improvements.
2. Health and well-being: As part of its recruitment process, Goldsborough requires a declaration of health from each potential employee. This covers both physical and mental health, to ensure that the company has a profile of the worker's abilities before placing them in the most suitable post. Goldsborough introduced this practice mainly to meet legislative requirements, which regulate most of its processes. However, it has found the health declaration to be a very useful and valuable means of promoting its employees' health and well-being.
3. Long-term retention: In view of the continuous labour shortage in the health care sector, and the constant loss of knowledge and expertise, Goldsborough developed several strategies to maintain its workforce. One strategy is the introduction of 'reward and recognition' programmes, which include bonuses, awards for carrying out specific tasks, benefit packages, and empowerment courses in local branches. Another is 'guaranteed hours contracts', which guarantee employees' working time. This is especially important for part-time or temporary workers, who need a sense of job continuity and stability. These strategies were introduced

partly for competitive reasons, because of the pressing labour shortage, and partly to make older employees feel valued by the organisation.

It is important to note that although the new initiatives were introduced to deal with changes in the market (more demand for health and care services combined with insufficient labour supply), and to meet new legislative requirements, these market and regulatory factors have affected almost all previous age-management practices in Goldsbrough Home Care.

The positive outcomes of the initiatives include a greater sense of commitment to the organisation among existing staff, as well as a greater focus on employees' health and well-being and on increasing their motivation to remain in the organisation. However, the initiatives have brought more failures than successes, especially in terms of recruitment, largely because of the scant regard for the formal procedures. Traditionally, in the health care sector, recruitment, selection, training, and delivery of services have been conducted on an informal basis. As a result, older employees have had trouble accepting the formalisation of these procedures and are reluctant to adopt new standardised practices.

Goldsbrough is currently collaborating with the Department of Health and Pensions, and with policy organisations and local councils to find practical ways not only to retain the existing workforce, but also to attract more employees. The company views this collaboration as interesting, because even the government and the local authorities – who propose useful high-level suggestions on retention strategies – acknowledge that their proposals do not offer much in terms of practical solutions. The lack of labour supply, along with the reluctance of the older workforce to accept the new regulated procedures, might prove detrimental to Goldsbrough if such practical solutions are not devised and implemented in the near future.

Further information

Contact:

Amanda Pleavin, Email: Amanda.Pleavin@bna.co.uk

Sources: www.nestor-healthcare.co.uk