

Creating a more inclusive workplace culture WJ GROUP

BACKGROUND

WJ Group is an independent specialist road marking business dedicated to permanent and temporary road markings, road studs, high friction and safety surfacing, asphalt repair, Hydroblast line removal and surface retexturing.

The company currently has around 450 employees, operating from 9 depots in England and Scotland. The business was formed by Wayne Johnston and Martin Webb in 1987.

WHY ADDRESS FAIRNESS, INCLUSION AND RESPECT (FIR)?

- ✓ *“It’s the decent way to work. If you want to be a responsible company then you should treat people with fairness, inclusion and respect”* - Paul Aldridge, Managing Director, WJ South Limited
- ✓ To attract and retain younger talent; the “millennial generation” wants to work for businesses that focus more on people than profit ¹
- ✓ To support the industry to change; many companies want to ‘do the right thing’ but might be struggling to catch up with other sectors

IMPACT & BENEFIT REALISED

- ✓ Whole workforce has been trained in FIR
 - All 450 employees (from Managing Director to people that sweep the depot yards) have been briefed on what FIR means, why it matters and how to achieve it
 - FIR is integrated into all inductions
 - Employees understand what language and behaviour the company considers appropriate for the workplace (whatever views people might hold privately) and managers and supervisors know they are supported by senior management to enforce these
- ✓ The company has recruited its first, female road marker apprentice
- ✓ The company confidently meets the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty
- ✓ Aiding successful delivery of 3 contracts under the British Standard in collaborative business relationships (BS 11000)

WHAT WJ HAS DONE

Paul Aldridge, Managing Director of WJ South Ltd, attended a FIR workshop hosted by client VINCI Construction UK, in London in October 2015.

¹ <http://www2.deloitte.com/global/en/pages/about-deloitte/articles/millennialsurvey.html>

The ideas discussed resonated immediately. Paul recognised that his company could work to become a more inclusive business at the same time as working to become a more sustainable and collaborative one – the agendas are all connected and contribute to business success.

WJ Group organised **5 seminars around the UK** in January 2016 at which all 450 employees were briefed on what FIR means, why it matters and how to achieve it. The FIR in Construction Toolkit materials were used at these. Because internet connections might have been slow at the seminars, WJ UK asked for, and received, the Toolkit materials in advance from the Supply Chain Sustainability School, so that they could be run from a laptop. The materials were also stored within the company's learning system for future use.

The Toolbox talk on 'Language' proved particularly useful at these seminars. It captured people's interest and stimulated open discussion around, for example, how immigration is discussed; how everyone is entitled to their opinions but that there are boundaries around what might be expressed in the workplace. WJ UK explains that "we won't tell people what to think but we have to manage how our people behave at work".

Key WJ UK personnel have attended the **half day FIR workshops** organised by the FIR in Construction project. For example, Croydon Depot Manager Dave Clark attended the FIR workshop hosted by VINCI in London. Dave was subsequently involved in the shortlisting and interviewing of potential new apprentices, and this process has resulted in the appointment of WJ's first female road marker apprentice. WJ does not believe that the two facts are unrelated – discussion at the workshop helped Dave to help his team to approach recruitment with a fairer mind set².

WJ personnel have also attended **key client briefings** at which the importance of FIR has been discussed (for example Skanska supply chain briefings and Amey's supplier diversity forum). Paul believes that WJ's reputation has been enhanced by being able to explain, at these, how WJ has already started work to embed FIR systematically across their business – which is also helpful to other participants.

Everybody joining WJ UK is now required to complete a **FIR e-learning module as part of their induction**.

Senior contracts manager Andrew Fawcett attended a FIR workshop hosted by Balfour Beatty in Solihull and has joined the **FIR Ambassadors Network**. He took part in the first training event, in Birmingham on July 15th 2016, and will use the network to further develop FIR good practice around WJ.

² In the UK only 1 in 57 construction apprentices are female. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/mar/14/apprenticeship-system-gender-inequality-workplace-women> Anecdotally, it seems that female applicants for apprenticeships are far less likely to be shortlisted and offered a position than their equally (or even lesser) qualified, male counterparts. The situation appears similar for all people (male and female) who have minority ethnic heritage.

Moving forward:

- WJ expects FIR to be further integrated into “business as usual” so that it’s part of methodology for dealing with people at all levels of the business and within the supply chain, with clients and members of the public
- The business is keen to develop diverse, local supply chains in the areas in which it operates
- Paul Aldridge is about to start a 3 year role as Chair of Road Safety Markings Association (RMSA), which is the trade body for the sector. He expects FIR to feature in his work

LEADERSHIP

Paul Aldridge, Managing Director of WJ South Ltd provides particular leadership around FIR within WJ. This is with the full support and participation of all other leaders in the business.

INVESTMENT

Minimal cash investment has been required to progress FIR within WJ. Expenses include travel costs associated with travelling to workshops, seminars etc.

Personnel time has been invested in participation in workshops, seminars and training, but this is viewed very much as part of “business as usual” rather than any additional cost or burden.

WJ has a similar perspective on other types of training and development, for example in health and safety, sustainability, customer care and in specific skills. The company employs apprentices, has its own driver training programme (all new operatives who join WJ are provided with LGV training, entirely free of charge³), is a member of the 5% Club and has become a partner in the Supply Chain Sustainability School. WJ Commercial Director Andy Stubbs is also a STEM Ambassador. Additionally, the business has worked with Construction Youth Trust and on programmes to help ex-offenders back into the workplace. WJ has also donated rainbow zebra crossings for Pride in London events for the last few years.

All of this activity is viewed as complementary – helping to make WJ an inclusive and successful business.

TIPS

- ✓ Businesses should be run with consideration for the triple bottom line; economics, and also social and environmental impact
- ✓ Any business delivering services that are ultimately funded by the public purse should recognise that they have a very wide customer base and therefore should behave fairly, respectfully and inclusively

³ Most LGV drivers in the UK are required to pay for their own training

- ✓ Communities are extremely diverse. Working on the highways involves being invited into those communities; managers and personnel must be able to understand diversity and work inclusively
- ✓ The days of wolf whistling and casual racism are generally (although not always) over in construction, but a 'herd mentality' and element of bullying remain. Individual companies and people must tackle this so that improvement can continue.
- ✓ If you are a company that makes a continuous and meaningful effort to behave well, then you are more likely to be 'invited to the table' by current and potential future clients and key stakeholder.

Part funded by:



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