



Deaf Unity

Deaf Careers Fair

2014

Conference

Report

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Introduction:

The first ever Deaf Careers Fair/Conference in the UK took place on 7 May 2014. It built on Deaf Unity's highly successful Deaf Learners Conference, held in May 2013. That conference identified a number of challenges faced by deaf students seeking to transition from an academic environment to an employment environment. One of those challenges was in enabling deaf students to develop the 'softer skills' sought by employers, on top of their academic studies. This makes competing on an equal footing to their hearing peers extremely challenging, especially in the highly competitive employment market seen today. Deaf students, graduates and the unemployed are unable to gain the same access to learning and development opportunities as hearing students when at university, and as a result, are placed at a disadvantage.

Alasdair Grant, Deaf Unity's Deaf Alumni Project Co-ordinator, wrote an article about those challenges in the Association of Graduate Recruiter's "*Recruiter*" Magazine. This article can be found at: <http://content.yudu.com/Library/A26j74/GraduateRecruiter/resources/index.htm?referrerUrl=http://free.yudu.com/item/details/898521/Graduate-Recruiter>. It highlighted a couple of challenges that those deaf job seekers face when compared to their hearing peers: (a) many existing careers fairs throughout the UK do not have adequate communication support in British Sign Language, Lip-Speakers, or Speech to Text Reporting to enable deaf graduates to access those services and to learn more about their chosen industries in an accessible environment beyond the confines of their formal academic learning; (b) many learning and development training companies do not provide any services that are adaptable for deaf job seekers; (c) the competencies expected by employers do not take into account the unique language and culture experienced by deaf job seekers, thereby giving the wrong impression of their true performance.

In order to address those issues, Deaf Unity decided to run a 'Deaf Careers Fair'. It was designed to raise awareness over the aforementioned issues, bring together all pertinent stakeholders, and take the first step in creating a deaf-appropriate event that would be beneficial to all: employers and seekers alike. A diverse workforce is seen as extremely important in terms of benefitting from a range of skills and experience within a company. It allows the organisation to better understand their customer base - their interests and concerns - as well as often improving the marketing strategy of the goods and services the company offers. The fair sought to impress the Human and Resources professionals with the skills owned and showcased by the Deaf attendees.

The fair also aimed to provide an accessible platform for the participants to seamlessly interact: something lacking in most careers fairs. The Deaf Careers Fair had a range communication support workers to enable deaf job seekers to adequately communicate with employers and to learn directly from the employers as to what skills are paramount from an employer's perspective. It also enabled employers to learn more about deaf job seekers and a missing segment of the recruitment market.

In short, the aim of the 2014 Deaf Careers Fair was to bridge the gap between qualified deaf graduates and Equal Opportunities employers and the employment consultants supporting deaf job seekers. The fair built on the 'next steps beyond the issues' covered at the 2013 Deaf Learner's conference.

The programme:

The Careers Fair adopted the following programme:

09:00 Commence setting up fair
09:30 Stall holders, presenters, and exhibitors breakfast
10:00 Careers Fair Opened with a speech from Paul Burstow MP
10:15 Second opening speech from the GLA's Head of Diversity and Social Policy
10:30 First Seminar Workshop (Tracey Abbots from the Business Disability Forum)
11:00 Stall Browsing
11:20 Second Seminar Workshop (Jeff Brattan-Wilson from the Royal Association of Deaf People)
11:50 Stall browsing
12:10 Third Seminar Workshop (Clarion - DWP Work Programme and People with Disabilities)
12:40 Stall Browsing
13:00 Lunch and networking opportunities
14:00 Fourth Seminar starts (Mark Nelson – Remark setting up and running my own business)
14:30 Stall browsing time
14:50 Fifth Seminar Workshop (AGR – Chief Executive Stephen Isherwood Recruitment Myths)
15:20 Stall Browsing time
15:40: Closing Discussions and Feedback

30 minutes were given for each workshop, comprising of 15-20 mins presentation, followed by 10 mins Q&A.

Stall browsing sessions took place for 20 minutes at regular intervals.

The programme was designed to make the best use of the resources available on the day and to enable employers, employment consultants, and deaf job seekers to network and learn from each other. The speakers were carefully chosen to ensure that there was a mixture of deaf and hearing professionals to highlight the importance of everyone working together to achieve common goals and to learn from each other's examples of good working practices.

Following the conference, Tracey Abbot from the Business Disability Forum expressed surprise at the low figures of employment amongst the deaf community and identified many issues that she was not previously aware of. She is now in contact with Ernst and Young, a leading law and accountancy firm to develop a recruitment programme specifically aimed at deaf undergraduates to improve their employment prospects. Many deaf participants had also informed us that the conference component of the fair had made them more aware of employment issues that they were not previously aware of and the services that they could access to improve their employment prospects. Paul Burstow MP and the Deputy Mayor also had increased awareness of deaf employment issues through interacting with the deaf participants at the fair, and therefore were better informed in campaigning for deaf employment issues through their various contacts and during parliamentary sessions on those topics.

Speakers:

Rt Hon Paul Burstow MP for Sutton and Cheam:

Paul introduced himself and his meeting with Alasdair Grant, Deaf Unity Deaf Alumni Project Co-ordinator about Deaf Unity's vision to have an event like the Deaf Careers Fair, the challenges of conveying an idea into a practical reality, and especially for a small organisation that is still growing, such as Deaf Unity, congratulating the leadership demonstrated by Deaf Unity. He noticed the number of organisations that were present at the Careers Fair and said that the event was a milestone for the Deaf Community. Paul expressed that the event was a staging post on a journey to ensure that deaf people have as many opportunities as possible to use their skills, their assets and their talents to the full in the work place. He noted the need to see more careers fairs specifically targeting deaf people and for employers to 'open their eyes' to the opportunities of employing deaf people.

Paul highlighted the statistic that D/deaf people are four-times more likely to be unemployed than the general population. Misconceptions need to be challenged regarding employing D/deaf people and employers need to be informed about reasonable adjustments, so that they are informed and willing to adjust when and where necessary.

Deaf Unity was praised for its Deaf Learners project that promotes access to further and higher education for deaf people through consultancy with institutions, information days for prospective students, and its online portal of resources. Deaf Unity is also working to identify inspirational role models as part of its mission to empower deaf people to fulfil their potential and Paul expressed commendation at this.

Paul concluded with thanking the sponsors for their support and making the event possible. London Leaders were thanked for hosting the event as well as the Greater London Authority for opening the building for use, giving a real spotlight to the event. He finished by saying that he wished for this event to be the spark that ignites something really big going forward, with its being the first of its type in the UK, so that it encourages other employers to take part when the next one of these is organised.

Terry Day, Head of Diversity and Social Policy Team, Greater London Assembly:

Terry kindly stood in for Munira Mirza, the Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture, who was unfortunately unwell the day of the event. On behalf of Munira and the Mayor, Boris Johnson, she offered a very big welcome to all of those who were present at City Hall.

Terry was particularly delighted to welcome Abdi Gas and Deaf Unity to the GLA, because Abdi was a participant in their 2011 London Leaders' Programme. Over the last five years the programme has supported 70 new leaders who are true innovators. The programme is a very competitive process to become a London Leader, with applicants needing to have a really innovative idea to solve some of the most pressing and challenging problems in London, particularly the whole issue of making London the best and most sustainable city in the world. Abdi was successful in competing to get on to that programme, and Deaf Unity, the organisation which he helped found, is one of the results of the support that he has been given. Terry was eager to stress the Greater London Assembly's continued support, as evidenced by their hosting the Careers Fair.

Terry is the Chair, on behalf of the Mayor, of the Mayor's Deaf and Disabled Stakeholder Group which is a group of deaf and disabled people's organisations in London. It meets twice a year to advise the Mayor on how to ensure disabled peoples' issues and disability equality are taken into account in the Mayoral strategies and programmes. The next meeting of that group will focus on employment and skills. There is a big opportunity at the moment, especially in London, as a great deal of funding is available from Europe, particularly in the field of employment support. The European Social Fund brings in an enormous amount of money into London and also the European Regional Development Fund.

The programme that will run from 2014 to 2020 is currently being formulated and developed. Terry explained that one of the big questions that's really up for debate, and will eventually be answered, is the extent to which there should be targeted employment support as part of that programme. That support would take the form of specifically aimed projects towards one or more disadvantaged groups, with deaf people clearly making up one of those groups. Terry reiterated that the employment rate for deaf people is much, much worse than the general employment rates. She recognised that this is not due to the nature of deafness or the Community, rather, it is due to the many barriers to recruitment that exist. It was explained that the next meeting of the deaf and disabled people stakeholder group will to particularly focus on the London enterprise panels, jobs and growth plan, including what the Mayor is going to do in terms of interventions over the next six years. The group will also be looking at pre-employment support such as volunteering and training, support

for jobless households, careers provision in schools and all of those things are issues which deaf people's organisations need to have a voice and be heard on. Terry expressed her commitment to making sure that deaf peoples' voices are heard as these programmes are developed.

Terry revealed that the figures for disabled people in general, including deaf people, are really quite stark. The employment rate for disabled people in the year ending March 2013 was just 48.3%, which compares with an employment rate of 74% for non-disabled people. This means there is a gap of 25.7%, which Terry said was 'simply not good enough'. That gap has reduced and has been reducing since 2008, when it was an even more horrifying 30.7%. Terry was clear that there is still a very long way to go, yet she was absolutely sure that events such as the Careers Fair, along with those of other organisations and the GLA, can reduce that gap by working together towards this unified goal.

Terry closed by commending all for their support of this event and its goals. She said that she hoped each of those present would be able to take away something that matters to them. For the organisations present, Terry expressed her delight at their being there and reached out to them to continue to assist in reducing the employment gap.

Tracey Abbots (Business Disability Forum):

Tracey is an employee of the Business Disability Forum. Launched in 1991 by the Prince of Wales, The BDF celebrated their 20th anniversary a couple of years ago, which was extremely well attended. As a not-for-profit charity, funded entirely by their membership - which consists of over 350 members and partners - they enable business improvement, service provision, new product development, talent acquisition, enhanced productivity, brand reputation, risk management, community investment, all of which acts to drive social benefit and economic growth. Their partner group pays £20,000 a year to work with them, demonstrating their real commitment through making a large financial commitment to getting to know how to employ people with talent that have disabilities, which includes deaf people.

It is quite a prestigious group, BBC, Cisco, IHG, the HMRC, the Home Office; including KPMG, Santander; some of the biggest names. Membership covers 20% of the UK workforce. Which is quite a lot.

Tracey explained that members of the group are always calling to ask for information, help and support on how to interview people with different impairments. She noted that very often, queries are received from banks where deaf people have gone in asking for help, asking for BSL and interpreters, and their first port of call is the BDF.

Tracey illustrated the need for their services by explaining that the GDF conducted a banking profile for its banking customers to give them an idea of how many of their customers have various impairments. 19% of the UK population, for example, has a disability, so that is nearly 12 million people in the UK. So the whole business of getting it right for people with disability is essential if you want to make money and you want to grow as a business. It can't be ignored. More than 1.5% of the population have a speech impairment; one-in-eight are carers; almost 1% of the worldwide population have dementia; and one-in-six of the population have a hearing loss. So, around 10 million people is what the Office of National Statistics suggests having a hearing impairment. It was explained that 10 million people out of the total population is a large number requiring some level of adjustment, and that is where the BDF comes in.

Tracey was passionate in encouraging those present to take advantage of Access to Work's services. She noted that they can provide effective support for participating fully in meetings, in assessment centres and training, whatever it might be. She informed the audience that it has only actually spent its whole budget once in the last 25 years. Tracey shared that she herself takes advantage of its support, using it for travel and all sorts of work-related activities. It can help people to start work, help with interviews, helps interns,

help people on work experience - a very wide range of support. In addition, she explained that it can help ones in starting their own business. Tracey reassured people that it is a grant, so the money does not have to be paid back, a fact for which she thanked all tax payers.

Tracey touched briefly on internship, in recognition that many present have a great deal of work experience, whilst others might be entering into work for the first time. She explained that internships are a great way of getting into the world of work. Tracey told the audience that the BDF has four member companies which were present at the Fair, whom have really successful internship programmes and are desperate to find people with disabilities that will go and work for them. It was made clear that the majority of the BDF's partners are desperately, desperately looking for individuals that experience a disability or impairment that would like a job.

A few different opportunities were then summarised: Motability, in Southwark, will pay towards a person's university degree and give you paid work experience in the summer; BSkyB, for those interested in the media industry, are running internships and colour scholarships this year, specifically looking for people with disability; ITV and the BBC are doing the same. Fujitsu is desperately looking to get people with disabilities for their IT department, and they will train people after recruitment. Tracey made this statement: 'if you are feeling brave and strong and confident in your skills, if you want to work, and you want to work for a company, it is a good place to start with our membership.'

Tracey fielded questions from the audience which discussed the impact of the different models of disability - the medical and social models - as it applies to deafness. She explained that medical model is based on 'deafness', whereas the social model is based on 'sign language'. She explained that in order for deaf people to achieve equality of access, there is the additional barrier of access to language. Tracey addressed the issue of proactive recruitment, as often companies want to see individuals that come from ethnic backgrounds, that have disability, and that are preferably female - a tall order! In a very honest statement Tracey said that people cannot expect equality, sadly, and perhaps that means people will have to keep hitting their heads against a brick wall until it opens and the next generation can come through.

A second question mentioned about Inclusion London 2010, and the repercussions of the Equality Act. Tracey responded by recognising that much of what is done is tokenism. She highlighted that the majority of the BDF's members will allow a person to request adjustments for face to face interviews or other aspects of the recruitment process.

Jeff Brattan-Wilson (Royal Association for Deaf People):

Jeff was kind enough to attend and turn attention to employment law, and the Equalities Act 2010. He outlined the Act and how it effects deaf individuals with regards to employment. He explained that there more than 800,000 people in the UK are severely or profoundly deaf and they use British Sign Language. Now looking at this, that means there are over three-million of working age, which is a great number of people, and they are looking for work. The Government wants them to obtain work, but Jeff asked: "where is the support?"

Jeff explained that it is a fact that a hearing person working versus a deaf person is 2-:1; there are more problems for deaf people getting into employment. Most deaf people are working in factories or similar manual labour roles which are unskilled or low skilled.

Jeff encouraged the audience to think on the statistics and reflect whether it really is difficult for deaf people to obtain work. He quoted a previous President of Kingston University in America, who said that "deaf people can do everything apart from hear."

Jeff expressed that deaf people are resourceful, especially when it comes to communication, and employers need to be made aware of that. Most companies really they don't really know how to approach or how to accommodate a deaf person as most of them are not deaf-aware. He highlighted that Jeff McWinney the director of Sign Video, gave a lovely speech a while ago, where he drew attention to differences of perspective. Deaf people are obviously seen differently by the mainstream, according to Jeff, and possibly in how deaf people view themselves. Companies should seen the value in having a diverse make-up of staff who have different skills and backgrounds.

Jeff outlined the reliance on interpreters during the interview process and the need for companies to fully prepare the interpreter so that they are able to provide the most effective service possible, so that the deaf person is enabled to compete on the most equal footing possible. Reticence or poor performance on behalf of the interpreter could be perceived as originating with the deaf person, to their detriment. If the interpreter's voice-over is poor or not accurately reflecting the eloquence of the deaf person's signing, it all effects the perception of the interviewing panel.

A variety of scenarios was discussed by Jeff within an interview context and really pushed home the notion of requiring effective interpreting provision at the interview stage.

Jeff also informed the audience that according to the Equality Act, application forms must now disregard disability or health from the interview stages, with this information being provided on a separate form.

It was explained that discrimination is a broad spectrum. There are six types of employment discrimination, Perhaps a company may make redundancies and talk about going through a hearing and speaking test, which could easily discriminate against a deaf person. It could be because the interpreter is not of a good standard. If an interpreter is withheld, that's lack of reasonable adjustment, which becomes discrimination on these grounds. Another situation could be that a deaf person applies for the job of a physiotherapist, or sports physiotherapist. Due to the role being conducted in a small room, issue could be raised over space and the fact that the deaf person and the interpreter cannot fit along with the client - the deaf person does not get the job. That is discrimination as efforts should be made to relocate. Then there is the labelling of "deaf and dumb", or the teasing experienced by deaf people - all of that counts as discrimination.

Jeff informed the audience that an employer must follow the law if they know that person has a disability, such as deafness. If they don't know that an employee has a disability, they don't have a duty of care. So if someone is applying for a job, it is imperative that the applicant make their disability known at the very early stages, so that the employer is now bound by law. If it is not known, they could always plead ignorance of the fact.

Jeff acknowledged that many people do not know about Access to Work and the support available to them - both deaf ones and the employers. He stressed that deaf people need to take the responsibility, however onerous, of educating employers, both actual and potential.

Jeff then fielded questions about a range of topics. One was regarding literacy levels seen in deaf people and the need for interpreters to have a proficiency in sign language, but also english. If they are being provided to assist in language modification and support, the level of English of the interpreter needs to be equivalent to the level of signing in the deaf person. Jeff stressed that Access to Work can provide assistance with language support and it is up to the deaf person to ensure they engage a skilled interpreter.

Jeff clarified that whilst an employer cannot legally enquire as to a disability, it is often in the best interest of the applicant to divulge it at their earliest opportunity to enjoy the support enshrined in law. That information should not be put on the application form, however, it should be made available to those arranging the interview so that proper adjustments can be made.

Tracie Redshaw, Operations Manager from Clarion:

Clarion is an organisation that was originally set up as an interpreting service, and has grown to become a national interpreting service which also offers employment support to people who are on the Work Programme and on Work Choice. Tracie expressed her desire to talk on the subject of the Work Programme and Work Choice, because she feels it is important that all know what that is and what people's rights are when on the Work Programme.

The Work Programme is a government scheme that was rolled out in 2011. It is a five-year programme. When on the Work Programme, it generally lasts for two years. The aim of the programme is to support people who have been unemployed back into employment. The contract is administered by the Department for Work and Pensions through Jobcentre Plus, and then Jobcentre Plus will refer out to what's called 'prime contractors' and 'subcontractors' who will run the courses.

A person may have to go on to the Work Programme, which is called a "mandatory" referral. This might be if you are aged 16--18 and not in education and training or employment; if 18--24 and have been unemployed for nine months, or you are 25+ and you have been unemployed for 12 months. The Work Programme is a mandatory programme. There is also a programme called Work Choice, which was predominantly set up to offer specialist support to disabled people with disabilities who are looking to get back into employment for at least 16 hours a week. Again that is run by prime contractors and subcontractors. That's a referral that you would get from the Jobcentre. Work Choice is a voluntary programme. You don't have to go on to that programme, but if you do decide to, the type of support you would get would depend on what came out of an initial assessment. This would take the form of a chat about the type of experience and skills that you have, and what support you might need to get you back into employment.

A prime contractor is a large organisation: they could be a private organisation, a business or they could be public sector organisations. A prime contractor is an organisation which has been awarded funding to deliver the Work Programme or Work Choice programme. A subcontractor is an organisation that will support the prime contractor to deliver the programme. So it may be that they will work with a particular group of people or they will cover a particular geographical location.

On the Work Programme, the way it should run depends on the individual prime contractor. There will be minimum requirements that organisations are asked to adhere to, but it can be quite flexible as to how that is run with each prime contractor. This has positives and negatives, as it does mean that you might get seen more often with one contractor than you would with another.

Tracie stressed that her key message really was to make sure that people are getting the right support when referred to any of these prime contractors or subcontractors. A person should meet with their assigned adviser regularly, depending on what benefits they are on, what payment group they are in, and the type of support needed. She encouraged ones to ensure that when appointments are set, be aware of one's rights to access.

With the Work Programme, there are certain rules which must be adhered to. Appointments must be kept - if they are missed, benefits could be reduced or even stopped in some situations, which is referred to as being "sanctioned." Tracie stressed again the need for participants to ensure their communication needs are being met as these meetings are meant to be meaningful and productive. Again, if you are unable to communicate and prove the amount of job searches that you have done, or are unable to prove that you have met with employers or have sent an application form or whatever it is you have been asked to do, your benefits could be sanctioned. If lack of support has hindered these efforts, then it is important to prove.

Tracie then outlined the services that Clarion offers. It does work on the Work Programme and the Work Choice with their communication employment consultant model, which is where support is provided for meetings with advisors. A person might get the action plan to update their CV or send off application forms or contact employers. The communication consultant will remain with the person throughout that process, so that support can be given to achieve the action point.

Tracie responded to some questions from the floor. She advised the use of Access to Work in having all access needs identified at the earliest stages, which can be communicated to the potential employer. She also stressed the need for individuals to be aware of the Equality Act and the responsibility it places on the employers to make reasonable adjustments.

Mark Nelson, Executive Director, Remark:

Remark was set up 15 years ago, less due to a business model and more due to responding to the personal experiences of Mark.

Having successfully gained a place at university, Mark experienced a real culture shock. Gone were his deaf peers from Mary Hare and suddenly he was the only hearing person in his vicinity. Despite having good grades and a lot of confidence, Mark suddenly felt out of his depth in this hearing environment.

Out of 20,000 students, he was the only one who was deaf. At Freshers' Week, everyone was blind drunk, which compounded the communication issues immensely! Whilst social groups were being formed and cemented, Mark was becoming increasingly isolated.

It is from these experiences that discussions with Raymond Wolf, another Deaf entrepreneur, led to the idea of forming their own business. This was at a time of only DLA - Access to Work was not yet in place and information was sparse at best. At 20-years-old, Mark was faced with so many decisions and so little information. He was employed at that time by the BBC as a cameraman on the See Hear programme. There, he was working for free, which was the case for about two years. His day would start at 8.00am and he would reach home by 7.00pm. His superiors noted his commitment and hardworking attitude, so he approached them to secure some payment for his work. This, over time, was increased to £500 a day.

Through his work over time, Remark was born and grew - 15 years on, the organisation now has £2.5 million of income, 50 staff, and 400 freelancers. Mark's day still lasts from 5.00am until 7.00pm and requires much input and dedication: weekends and evenings spent in meetings and sending emails. Mark told the audience that 'if you set up a business, really you give up your life'.

Mark revealed that at times, he has not been able to draw a wage, instead ensuring there was enough money to pay his staff. Concern over money is a paramount issue and resulted in many sleepless nights. He regaled the audience with his struggling to learn about forecasting and managing money and resources. Despite his great ideas, not all of them came to fruition, such as a Deaf cafe, which ate away at a large investment, showing that not all ideas will work out to a success.

Today, Remark is well-known for its media work and provision of interpreters. Mark explained that diversification was a key to Remark's overall success, as each section of the organisation will grow and shrink in response to the market, so he had to be very flexible in where to focus and make money.

Mark shared the wisdom with audience that the customer is always right! He mused on experiences he had gone through with clients whose design tastes were severely lacking, yet, they are the one paying for the

product. He encouraged all to think about developing a thick skin and a slow tongue to deal with clients and customers who you may not agree with all of the time. It is not just customer service, he added, it is the means by which you will ensure clientele, and therefore money.

Mark advised the audience, in response to questions, that not everyone makes an entrepreneur. People need to be honest with themselves and their skills and desires and identify a course of action that is suitable. He explained that being an entrepreneur is challenging, as is dealing with a business partner - Mark eventually bought out Raymond Wolf. Despite the challenges, Mark encouraged those who want to, to set up their own business if they have the energy and resilience to follow it through.

Mark outlined that whilst London is the base for Remark, they have grown and want to start reaching out to other parts of the country, hence establishing a regional office in Birmingham. He explained some of the challenges in moving out of London, not least the differences in work ethic and expectations of staff.

Mark expressed that he owes much to his upbringing and his competitive spirit with his brother. His parents never held him back, rather always giving him what he needed to press on. He encouraged all present to take risks, as without risks, you can't be successful. He explained that at various times he has had to lean heavily on his family to provide emotional and, at times, financial support.

He stressed that new businesses need to be flexible in their models to go where the money is. He explained that Remark has many competitors, so has had to reach out to serving the hearing community also, through subtitling services in various languages, for example.

To finish, Mark stressed that Remark is an equal opportunities employer and strives to have a diverse, skilled workforce. He said that being in London, diversity is important.

Stephen Isherwood, Chief Executive Officer, Association of Graduate Recruiters:

Stephen is Chief Executive of the Association of Graduate Recruiters, which is predominantly made up of employers, such as ReedSmith who were present at the Fair.

Stephen walked the audience through the current trends in the graduate market, what employers are saying, what they are looking for and teased that he might be able to dispel some of the myths out there. I

He began by attacking the purported statistic that 40% of all graduates are unemployed after they leave university. According to Stephen, that just is not true. He explained that around 13% of graduates, six months after leaving university, don't have a job. He stated that if you would like to be in a stronger position when applying for work, then you would do well to go to university and get a degree. 2009 was the worst year for jobs, that is when there were the smallest number of vacancies, yet, even in 2009 there were employers who couldn't fill all their vacancies. Stephen said that 'the market is not always as bad as people say it is.'

He reassured the audience that the job market is bouncing back: this year, 2014, the AGR members are reporting that they are increasing their vacancies by around about 10%. Last year, in the summer vacancies increased by around 4-5% in terms of the numbers. This speaks well of the strength in the market. He outlined that graduate recruitment very much follows the economy. As the economy comes out of recession, then employers start filling their vacancies again. Across the board, the highest growth sector in terms of people looking for graduate hires is IT and telecom: 40% growth. Public sector is increasing vacancies by 22%.

In terms of who recruits graduates, it was explained that the biggest sector by far are the professional services firms, the likes of PWC, and Ernst & Young, who take around 20% of all graduates in the graduate market for structured graduate vacancies. So the graduate market hasn't changed that much in a sense. Commenting on expectations of degrees, Stephen said that he often gets asked to comment on employers who set criteria. He shared that three-quarters of employers will ask for a 2:1 degree classification, or look for UCAS points, but actually, employers are very flexible. They are very accommodating if an applicant's grades are not as high as requested, if the reason is valid..

Comment was made on people's own perceptions holding them back from applying for high profile jobs. Stephen advised to not be put off by what you *think* an employer might say about you or what you think an employers' preconceptions might be. Always approach employers, always, always ask.

He addressed the subject of internships: that it is not wholly necessary to go through an internship programme to secure a job. Whilst there are a lot of internship programmes out there, and a lot of employers

recruit through their internship programme, they are only about half as many internship places as graduate places. That means half the graduate positions filled by our employers don't come through internships. It may help but it doesn't necessarily mean you have to have one to get a graduate level job.

He also shared that it is not necessary to hold a 'relevant' degree to a role you would like to apply for, which sets the UK market apart from other countries. Employers do not expect you to have a degree in the subject field, which opens up a wide range of prospective roles and applicants. He encouraged people to apply for all types of jobs and not to be put off by not holding a relevant degree, or the stated accreditation - go ahead and apply and let the company make decisions on those factors. Employers are always recruiting and willing to look anywhere for the right person.

Research was presented that showed what skills employers want. Most said they look to hire good people to grow within their organisation. They want people who will work within teams, who can communicate and who have drive and resilience. They want people who can challenge thinking, people who are commercial, people who understand the business environment. A whole range of soft skills including networking, openers to change, people who want to play an active role.

It was explained that this list often can be generic, so Stephen explained what it really means in practice. Employers want to hire people who can get things done, and get things done through other people. Most jobs today require team work, collaboration and delegation. Employers will look for those skills. He told the audience that 'yes, having a brain is useful, but employers want people who can actually solve the problems they deal with.' In expounding, he said: 'if you are a law firm, if you are an accountancy firm, your clients will come to you because they have issues that need solving. Actually employers are looking for people who can develop the skills to meet those needs.'

He advised a need for thorough research and a passion for industry. Stephen said that many people apply for roles with no idea of the company to whom they are applying, or knowledge about the role. Employers looking for somebody who wants to join because they have an interest, a desire to work in that sector. If somebody hasn't bothered to do the research, that's probably a pretty good indication that they are not that motivated to do the job.

Finally, on the subject of what employers look for, Stephen highlighted the need for resilience, which is fast becoming a buzz word for recruiters. This is needed as if you work in a client--driven business, clients want things, they want it all the time, but the pace of change is credible in terms of the commercial world. Employers want people who actually have the resilience to deal with those changing situations.

Moving on, Stephen gave attention to the Higher Education Achievement Report. Not all universities are using

this but it is something that came into place about two years ago and there are about 80 universities that now give their students a HEAR report. This document was brought into being really to address some of the problems that the 'exam qualification' - the bits of paper you have - does not give a full picture of achievement. The universities that are using the HEAR documentation, according to Stephen, are doing so because they want to give students and employers and other people a more holistic idea of what has been learned over the course of a degree. The report will contain what is being studied, and what the degree subject course may have contained. It will have on there the individual module remarks, which give a much more full understanding of an applicant's knowledge base and spectrum. The report would also apparently record extracurricular activities, which speaks to the individual sitting before an interview panel. This helps employers who are looking for people who can do more, people who show initiative, someone who is motivated.

This challenges students, in Stephen's mind, to do more than just 'study' at university. He appealed to students to think about the end picture they want to present to employers and get involved in activities that will demonstrate that. Students were encouraged to make best use of the HEAR and tell employers what it is when applying.

During the course of the presentation, work experience was championed. It demonstrates to an employer that an individual has an idea of 'work' and what it entails. It assists in building skills that can be transferrable to any profession. The ability to follow orders, achieve objectives, manage time etc, all of this shows a prospective employer that a person can actually deliver in a real-world scenario. It also allows the individual time and opportunity to reflect on their own performance, which is something encouraged strongly by employers in today's market.

Stephen encouraged people to apply for jobs and get practice at interviews. It is something that people get better at according to Stephen. At university, the careers service should be able to provide opportunities for this, as should job centres.

Stephen closed his address by quoting Vidal Sassoon, of the hairdressing fame: "the only place where 'success' comes before 'work' is in the dictionary."

Stephen spoke on the subject of paid-internships and highlighted the services provided by Employability, and Great with Diversity. Those organisations work with employers that want to recruit more people with

disabilities, yet they state that they do not receive many applications. Many organisations and companies are happy to make reasonable adjustments, according to his experience.

He encouraged those who keep getting turned down for jobs to approach the organisation and ask for feedback on the application or interview - by letter or even through a phone call. Whilst not all will reply, due to the volume of applications they handle, some might and give some insight as to areas to improve. Feedback can also be sought from university careers services, even after graduation.

Lastly, Stephen dealt with a question regarding multiple degrees. In his experience, unless it was a specialised field, those with multiple degrees, or Masters, would not gain a higher position due to their extra study. Often, second degrees only benefit the university, as they get the money!

Alasdair Grant, Deaf Alumni Project Manager, Deaf Unity:

Alasdair Grant took the floor at the close to outline future plans for Deaf Unity. These include a second carers fair and to work with the Learning and Development and HR Industry and Profession to develop the professional skills of the Deaf Community to make them more competitive. Those plans include having representatives from the Deaf Community involved in a forum, from different professions, in order to make sure that deaf people have access to the relevant learning and development materials. Alasdair said that obviously funding is a critical factor in progressing things, as currently all this work is being done on a voluntary basis.

Alasdair opened up and reached out to organisations to consider partnerships. He noted that at Deaf Day, hosted by City Lit, there were many organisations all delivering similar projects and all fighting for the same funding. He mentioned that more can be achieved together, thus, a proposal was made to form a Deaf Employment Forum – Consortium. Alasdair explained that Deaf Unity needs the advice of employers to ensure that deaf job seekers meet the needs of employers, as well as ensuring that development training programmes meet employers' needs meets the needs of deaf learners as well. It was explained that one of the roles of Deaf Unity is to develop a strategic framework as part of that consortium for delivering professional development training programmes for the Deaf Community. The benefits of a strategic framework are many, including enabling Deaf Unity to have a stronger voice to influence the HR and recruitment industries.

He ended by stating that one potential plan is to have a deaf recruitment agency, in partnership with employers. Deaf Unity has a job page on its website, whereby employers are able to advertise on it, to reach out to deaf job seekers.

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