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Learning to Be Job Ready: Strategies for Greater Social Inclusion in Public Sector Employment

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Abstract 'Learning to be job ready' (L2BJR) was a pilot scheme involving 16 long-term unemployed people from a range of backgrounds being offered a 6-month paid placement within the care department of a city council in Northern England. The project was based on a partnership with the largest college in the city specialising in post-16 education and training for residents and employees. The college targeted people as potential candidates for the programme through their prior attendance on or interest in care courses at the college, rather than the council employing more traditional methods of recruitment. Surveys, focus groups and interviews were utilised to capture the views and experiences of the participants, project workers and line managers, and also evidence of the project's impact on service delivery in the care department. The article adds to our conceptual and practical knowledge of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the public sector in three distinct ways. From a social and business perspective, the findings of the research highlight a potentially more robust strategy for matching long-term unemployed citizens to training and job opportunities in the public sector than is otherwise possible through the more conventional route of the job centre. Secondly, through this approach and with appropriate pre-training, a greater understanding of and empathy for the service users can be developed in the new organisational members, strengthening the subsequent ethical delivery and quality of the service. Finally, a re-conceptualisation of Carroll's influential model of CSR, which also specifically incorporates the ethical and social inclusion duties of public sector organisations not only as service providers but also as potential employers, offers a more tailored paradigm for understanding this unique yet under-researched element of CSR theory and practice.

Keywords Corporate social responsibility · Public sector · Equality · Social inclusion · Recruitment strategies · Disadvantaged communities · Training and development · Social care

Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is both a concept and a practice of increasing importance in terms of how organisations seek to engage more effectively with their customers and the local and wider communities (McWilliams et al. 2006) and, it has been argued more latterly, with respect to promoting greater equality in society and in the workplace (Grosser and Moon 2005). For public sector organisations, like the city council in the North of England that forms the basis of this study, there is an additional commitment in terms of its CSR strategy to better represent its constituents through reflecting their broader social and ethnic diversity in terms of the make up of its workforce (Chandler 2008). To this end, when the largest college in the city, the main provider of post-16 education and training, proposed a pilot programme to train long-term unemployed members in the community to be 'work ready' to take up fixed-term positions in the council's care services department, it struck a chord with the council's strategy.

'Learning to be job ready' (L2BJR) was a pilot scheme based on unemployed people, from a range of backgrounds and with an interest in working in the care sector, being offered a 6-month paid placement within the council's

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social care department. It took place over a 6-month period ending in March 2010. It is significant that candidates were first short-listed and then subsequently selected via their links with the college alone, and not through the normal process of being matched to a vacancy by their local job centre. This made the recruitment process quite unique and innovative, and is a key element of the project as a whole. A crucial part of the process was for participants to subsequently undertake 4 weeks training for them to feel better prepared for the role to which they were later assigned. The training covered a number of areas including principles of care, working with vulnerable people and numeracy and literacy skills.

The article critically analyses the experiences of the 16 participants, from their initial recruitment, through pre-training to the subsequent placement with the council. In this way, their reflections on the key outcomes of that experience are compared and contrasted against the overall objectives of the project of making them more employable and confident in themselves. Furthermore, through dialogue with the project team and council managers, the discussion also critically assesses the impact of the project on service delivery.

The article argues that the findings of the research enhance our understanding of CSR, both conceptually and in practice, through three distinct but inter-related features. From a business and social perspective, the findings of the research highlight a more robust strategy for matching long-term unemployed citizens to training and job opportunities in the public sector than is otherwise possible through the more conventional route of the job centre. That is, greater social inclusion in terms of employment is more likely to be achieved when an organisation adopts both a 'supply and demand' (Crisp et al. 2009) approach to training and employment opportunities. Secondly, through this approach and with appropriate pre-training, a greater understanding of and empathy for the service users can be developed in future organisational members, strengthening the subsequent ethical delivery and quality of the service.

Finally, a re-conceptualisation of Carroll's influential model of CSR that also specifically incorporates the unique ethical and social inclusion duties of public sector organisations not only as service providers but also potential employers, offers a more tailored paradigm for understanding this unique yet under-researched element of CSR theory and practice.

The current literature on the concept and practice of CSR offers a rich source of understanding of its development, diversity and influence, particularly within the commercial sector (Carroll 1998). However, with the exception of a relatively small number of writers (Grosser and Moon 2005; Lauring and Thomsen 2009; Hart 2010), there has been little discussion on where the issues of equality and diversity fall within this conceptual framework. Furthermore, the idea of addressing greater social inclusion through a strategy of CSR is largely absent in the literature. In seeking to address this deficit in our knowledge, this article explores two key research questions. Firstly, how do public sector organisations address their social obligations in the context of their CSR? Secondly, how is that strategy conceived, carried out and experienced with respect to a project designed to bring about greater social inclusion for disadvantaged constituents served by that public organisation?

Crucially, it would be legitimate to question the degree to which we can generalise findings based on a pilot of 16 participants. However, it is argued that, through the adoption of a case study methodology, which derives extensive data from other key respondents and sources using a triangulation of methods (Yin 1993), the broader implications of this CSR initiative can also be captured. Furthermore, it offers an alternative epistemological approach to empirical research in the field of CSR, based more on qualitative data collection and analysis, which is in contrast to the currently dominant quantitative approaches in the field (Lockett et al. 2006, p. 132). In so doing, the research, potentially, offers us other insights into the practice and theory of CSR.

The article commences with a review of the key literature on CSR and equality and diversity. This includes a re-conceptualisation of CSR that draws on that literature to offer a model more appropriate for considering the strategy of social inclusion in the context of a public sector organisation. A section then follows on the research methods employed in the project, followed by an analysis section on the research data. The article closes with a discussion and summary of the overall findings and their implications, including a reflection on the efficacy of the new CSR model.

Literature Review

There is currently little empirical research on the concept and practice of CSR in the public sector, certainly with respect to social inclusion. Although Hebson et al. do offer a useful model of the 'public sector ethos' as articulated, for instance, in the notions of 'to serve the public good' and 'to be loyal to the community' (2003, p. 486), it can be argued, nonetheless, that it is necessary to extend and develop this type of conceptualisation to capture more fully how a public body in its broader and more strategic sense achieves that public ethos operationally. This section, therefore, reviews the literature on CSR and equality and diversity to establish how a modified conceptualisation of CSR could provide a suitable model for analysing the research data in the context of offering long-term unemployed people job opportunities

in the public sector. Conceptually, with the exception of Randle and Haunch (2008), this is also a little researched area of CSR methodology or practice.

Carroll usefully traces the evolution of CSR as an analytical concept and business practice from the 1950s until the end of the twentieth century. He notes its 'long and diverse [literary] history' (1999, p. 291) and its transition by the late 1990s into a number of contrasting but related themes including stakeholder theory, business ethics and corporate social performance.

Traditionally, it is the business case for CSR initiatives that has benchmarked its appropriateness and effectiveness. 'Bottom line' arguments that articulate shareholders as the key legitimate stakeholders have dominated CSR discourse (Crane and Matten 2004), although Carroll and Shabana (2010) have usefully extended this debate to demonstrate broader potential business outcomes through CSR. For instance, they argue that better managing environmental impact and building relationships with local communities can realise cost and risk reduction. Equally, improved competitive advantage is possible by developing relationships with customers, government and NGOs and by adopting enlightened corporate citizenship to appeal to a broader section of potential employees.

In recent years, writers have further conceptualised CSR to investigate: political influence (Windsor 2006; Tullberg 2004), the third sector (Hayes 2002), the business case for better health and safety (Hart 2010) and 'corporate governance and public management' (Heath and Norman 2004). The concept of the stakeholder is particularly useful in the discussion that follows, reflecting the interest in CSR initiatives from parties such as: customers, owners, shareholders, managers, employees, the community and 'social action' groups (Carroll 1991). Carroll's conceptualisations have been particularly influential.

His early and seminal model (1979, 1991), reproduced in Fig. 1, shows the four key dimensions of CSR: economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic, where the 'economic' dimension encapsulates the business case for CSR and the 'legal' dimension symbolises the social 'codified ethics' (Carroll 1998, p. 2) of corporate behaviour. The 'ethical' considerations are those expected by the firm's stakeholders, for instance, environmental diligence, and finally, the fourth dimension represents contributions to communities and society above and beyond the other three. However, it can be argued that the one area of CSR remaining under-researched is that of equality and diversity.

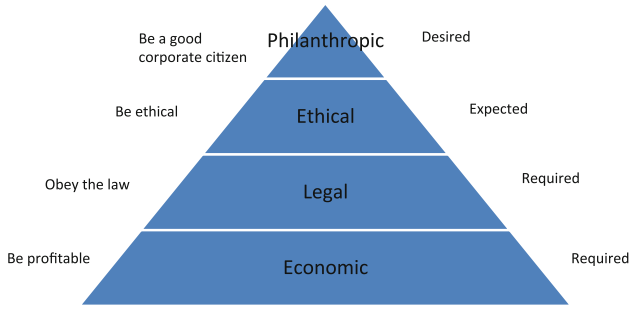

Fig. 1 Carroll's original pyramid conceptualisation of CSR (1979, 1991)

Concepts of Equality and Diversity

Many contemporary writers on equality have been critical of the effectiveness of government initiatives, primarily through legislation, which aim to give greater rights to the disadvantaged groups in society, and also the extent to which employers have addressed issues of inequality in the workplace (Cockburn 1991; Ledwith and Colgan 1996; Kirton and Greene 2005). In particular, Dickens (1999) usefully reviews and conceptualises the development of equality theory and practice through her 'three prongs' metaphor to portray the social justice, legal and business case arguments for action in the workplace and society.

Dickens is critical of the growing prominence given to the business case in equality and diversity discourse, where recent debates on the theory and practice of equality have seen the inclusion of a more individualised view; it is argued, however, that a more business-oriented view of how 'managing diversity' can better represent the rights and aspirations of individuals in society (Prasad et al. 1997; Kandola and Fullerton 1998; Kirton and Greene 2005).

In contrast, Dickens argues that moral and social arguments (social justice), for instance, for fairer pay, fairer division of labour and fairer distribution of power between the genders (1999, p. 10) are being subsumed within the rhetoric of organisational goals. It is a rhetoric, which in contrast to the moral case, articulates a business case that remains contingent, short term and selective and occurs only in areas were equal opportunities and business needs coincide (ibid.). Hart (2010) echoes this critique of the business case in her recent critical review of contemporary CSR literature and practice. She strongly questions whether equality and diversity strategy and policies can be effectively managed and monitored by self-regulation of industry alone.

With respect to the legal case for equality, whilst recognising its importance in 'setting a broad employer equality agenda' (1999, p. 12), Dickens makes a case for avoiding the danger of 'overestimating' its effect on the actions of employers. Nonetheless, Dickens also argues that, though 'limited', 'the legislative framework for equality is important both symbolically and practically' (2006, p. 307) in that 'legislative compliance … can act as a catalyst to considering business efficiency rationales' (2007, p. 487).

Significantly, the enactment of the Equality Act in 2010 in the UK presents a clear and extended legal driver for all public sector organisations. The Act brings together previous regulations covering all equality strands within the UK under one piece of legislation. In addition, under the new Act, extended equality duties make it incumbent on public organisations to also positively promote the rights of all disadvantaged groups within the workplace (Government Equalities Office 2010). Crucially, for this article, Dickens' model offers a more critical perspective on the research and analysis of equality and diversity that, it is argued, will strengthen the conceptualisation of CSR to be developed from Carroll's model.

A Re-Conceptualisation of Equality and CSR in the Public Sector

There is, therefore, a strong body of literature that recognises the drivers of the moral, legal and business cases for equality and diversity measures to be undertaken in organisations and more generally in society. Furthermore, a number of writers have noted the key link between CSR and equality and diversity (Crane and Matten 2004; Lauring and Thomsen 2009; Markel and Barclay 2009). Grosser and Moon (2005) and Hart (2010), in particular, utilise Dickens' (1999) model for their discussion and analysis. It is also of note that the CSR literature makes limited reference to the aims and obligations of the public sector.

It can thus be argued that, conceptually, a more complete model of CSR for a public sector organisation could be devised by modifying Carroll's original model (1979, 1991) with elements contained within the Dickens' model. In addition, emphasis can be put on the unique elements of corporate activity that society entrusts to local government in the UK and, it can be argued, across many other countries. In the UK, for instance, the Local Government Act 2000 rests a duty on all local authorities to advance the economic and social well being of the local people that they represent politically and support also as a service provider (Chandler 2008, p. 289; Ridley-Duff and Bull 2011, p. 41). The new model is shown in Fig. 2.

The logic for the new conceptualisation is as follows. It can be argued that a public organisation is guided by similar economic, legal and, to a different degree, ethical imperatives as a commercial corporation, the difference in terms of the economic driver being cost effectiveness rather than profit motivation. However, what Carroll's (1991) original model conceptualised as philanthropic or discretionary motivation is replaced by a dimension that, it is felt, is unique and the most appropriate to a public organisation, which is social justice; where social justice can be defined as promoting the basic rights of citizens as

Fig. 2 A public sector conceptualisation of CSR

service users and employees, for instance, to greater equality in the labour market (Crisp et al. 2009).

Crucially, this re-conceptualisation allows a 'desired' (Carroll 1979) element of the original model to be replaced with an 'expected' element of CSR when viewed by the key stakeholders of a public organisation; and thus further defines the unique nature of public sector CSR. Furthermore, contextually, the notion has resonance with a key initiative in recent government regeneration policy. New Labour's 'New Deal for Communities' strategy proved quite successful in bringing greater 'social justice' to some of the most deprived communities in the UK (Batty et al. 2010).

It is now possible to incorporate the Dickens' model into the new model. Social justice captures equality initiatives such as greater social inclusion and other social obligations of a public service provider to its constituents that marks it apart from a commercial organisation, whilst the legal driver maps easily across and the business case equates to the economic dimension of the new CSR conceptualisation. Finally, the ethical element captures how service users or citizens are or expect to be treated. In addition and taking into account the counsel of Schwartz and Carroll (2003), it must be stressed that the four dimensions of the proposed model are not conceptualised as hierarchical but rather to be understood as complementary and, to a degree, symbiotic.

In conclusion, Fig. 2, it is argued, offers a more robust conceptual model that will allow the mapping of the economic, legal, ethical and social justice drivers within the corporate strategy of a public sector organisation. Furthermore, it still allows the discussion and analysis of aspects of that strategy that are driven by more than one dimension. For instance, as per managing diversity theory (Kandola and Fullerton 1998), there is a sound argument for a business (economic), legal (non-discriminatory) and social justice case for recruiting members into the organisation from underrepresented groups within society. It is also noted that the model can incorporate, where applicable, key stakeholders (Carroll 1991; Crane and Matten 2004) with an interest in the various elements of CSR. Framed within the re-conceptualised model of CSR for the

public sector, and utilising the models and concepts identified in the literature review, the following research questions are critically addressed:

- Through which means, and to what degree, does a public sector organisation address its social obligations in the context of its CSR?
- How is that strategy conceived, carried out and experienced with respect to a project designed to bring about greater social inclusion for disadvantaged constituents served by that public organisation?

Research Methods

The research was part of a project undertaken by the writer to evaluate the effectiveness of a pilot conducted by a council and a college in a city in Northern England to help long-term unemployed residents back into full-time employment through pre-employment training and a 6-month placement with the council. There were 16 participants in the pilot. In terms of biographical data, 37% were male and 63% female, with just under 50% from non-white ethnic groups. There was a cross-section of ages from people in their early twenties to participants in their fifties, and the group also came from a variety of social and occupational groups.

The project was unique in that rather than going through the job centre, organisers contacted a range of previous or current college students who had undertaken a pre-employment course for, or indicated an interest in, working in the caring sector. An initial list of over 70 applicants was reduced to one of 40 after the first telephone interviews, which were based on attitude and commitment to providing care to adults. The successful people were then invited to interview, 16 of who were subsequently offered a place on the project.

A case study approach (Yin 1993) was adopted to capture relevant data from a broader number of sources within the organisation through mixed methods, and to give the final findings greater robustness and legitimacy. Furthermore, as Otley and Berry (1994, p. 46) argue, case studies provide a vehicle by which theories can be modified and tested through the generation of further data, and when existing theory cannot fully explain the subject of interest. Similarly, for Arvidsson (2010) in her study of the communication of CSR, a qualitative approach that precedes semi-structured interviews (and in this study, also focus groups) with a survey, allows key issues to be first identified, then further investigated. In this way, the methodology provides 'data which are in many ways richer' (ibid., p. 345) than, say, a more quantitative survey method alone.

The research was conducted over a 6-month period ending in March 2010 and involved three elements of data collection. All participants completed three short questionnaires over the placement period. The first survey took place at the beginning of the initial training; the second at the end of the 4-week pre-employment training block; and the third questionnaire was completed 2 months into the overall programme.

The strategic rationale for the pilot and how it was planned, set up and then carried out in partnership between the council and the college was established through ten 1 hour semi-structured interviews with key personnel involved in the process. This included senior managers and project workers from both partner organisations. The operational impact of the participants' contribution to their respective placement sections (within the social care department) was ascertained through a series of semi-structured telephone interviews, lasting on average 45 min in duration, with a cross-section of eight line managers.

Participants also attended two focus group sessions—the first held midway in the placement, and the second a week before it ended. Four focus groups were staged across each of the two research days, each one an hour in duration to ensure that, in small groups, participants' views were fully captured. In addition, the participants could engage in a level of group discussion about key issues arising from their time on the programme.

The interview and focus group data were analysed through template analysis of the transcripts (King 2004). This process entailed construction of initial templates and codes from the respective interview and focus group schedules. This allowed early categorisation to be made based on the initial questions put to the respondents and then the refinement of coding in the subsequent analysis.

CSR in Context

The analysis in this section focuses on the context of CSR within the partner organisations and what were the reported key overall drivers for and expectations of the project. Both partner organisations were fundamentally committed to addressing the social and economic issues that blight many citizens within their community. This was clearly articulated in the Council's Community Strategy (2009) that sets out its goals of helping all residents:

> To reach their full potential, creating neighbourhoods of choice and raising individual and collective esteem/mutual respect, regardless of race, sexual orientation, gender, age, disability or religious and beliefs systems.

Similarly, for the College, its core mission is

> To raise aspirations, expectations and achievements to enable economic success and social inclusion within the city and beyond, by delivering world class education and vocational training for individuals, communities and employers. … [Through]….putting the learner at the heart of all we do..[and]…establishing effective and productive partnerships – to maximise the benefit for learners and our local communities and to develop the skills needed in the local, regional and national economy.

A key element of the partnership was a shared ethos to support the unemployed local people through upskilling and then giving them an experience of work to make them more employable in the longer term. As a senior manager from the college explained, 'it is part of our mission statement and a key element of the *corporate social responsibility* of the college to deliver innovative and creative educational solutions, like learning to be job ready, to help people into work. In short, that's what we're here for' (author's emphasis). She saw the project as a model for further collaboration with the council and other partner organisations in the region.

A Unique Approach to Recruitment and Pre-Work Training

A unique feature of the project was how people were recruited onto the programme. As one of the project workers commented:

> If the city council had advertised these jobs in the normal way, the majority of these people who are successfully doing the job now would not have applied….because they would have thought that it is for smart people, not people like me.

This he argued was because the long-term unemployed person is less likely to have the confidence to apply 'for the council'. He felt that L2BJR broke down this barrier by using a different 'more proactive' process. As he further explained, 'If you are going to tackle hard to reach groups you need a different approach. That is…[if you are going to successfully engage with and provide opportunities for]… people who lack self esteem, confidence and who have had previous bad experiences. The ones ultimately who are most at risk of poor health, crime and never escaping poverty'. As noted above in the methods section, the candidates were recruited through a fairly unique route via the college and not the job centre. In terms of the conceptual model, this raises a number of interesting issues considered later in this article.

The participants first undertook a 4-week training course with the college and were then placed in different sections of the care department. The training covered a wide area of study and practice to prepare for the placement. This included: principles of care, food hygiene, infection control, keeping accurate care records, literacy and communication, understanding the social model of disability, moving and handling, and equality and diversity. Other key aspects of the preparatory training were, as the tutor from the college explained, 'to help them know what they are going into, to know what to expect and go in with their eyes open'. The training for her was about talking about the practical and making it as real as possible. A key aspect of the initial training was also a firm understanding of the ethos of caring. As she further stressed:

> In our job, there's always a patient in the bed or client there. You've got to remember that. There's a human being there. You always care for anybody like you would like to be cared for. Treat people with dignity and respect.

This sentiment was strongly supported by the manager of the training team within the council's workforce development department, and it is a good example of the ethical driver of the CSR public sector model. She stressed that the project's ethos fitted closely within the council's current 'dignity in care' campaign and strategy to ensure that all caring is done with this ethos central to its delivery.

In closing this section, it is of note that the fundamental aim of the project was to provide 6 month's quality training and work experience to equip the participants with the skills, knowledge and confidence to improve their chance of becoming employed at the end of that period. In this sense, the project's objectives also supported the argument that CSR can provide an important framework for addressing issues of equal opportunity in the workplace and society. In this case, it was achieved through the opportunity to join a training programme focussed on the learning needs of discriminated minorities (Crane and Matten 2004, p. 234). There was no guarantee of employment after the 6 months but, nevertheless, people would be supported in applying for vacancies within and beyond the council care sector. Having considered the context and strategy of L2BJR, the article now turns to an analysis of the results of the surveys of participants' early views and experiences of the programme.

An Analysis of the Surveys of the Workers' Views on Their Placement

The surveys proved helpful in establishing the general views of the participants on the programme, its impact on a number of key areas relating to their perceptions of work, and their previous experiences of applying for work. The

analysis also allowed for some of those issues identified to be explored in more depth with the focus groups. Table 1 illustrates the key findings from the three surveys. It is of note that to capture the respondents' views some answers were specific to a particular stage in the 6-month placement programme. Conversely, a number of questions were posed to capture their ongoing feelings and views—for instance, their overall satisfaction with the programme.

Early Impressions

Having completed the recruitment process, the first survey was designed to establish the participants' views and expectations of the programme at the start of the 6-month programme as they began their initial training. Over 90% of the respondents had found the programme as a good experience. 95% were satisfied with how they had been interviewed to join the programme. 71% of respondents' initial view of the training was very good, and 85% had more confidence in themselves. 66% had a lot of confidence in their future career, whilst 33% did not have as much. 95% felt that they would be well received by their new council colleagues. Conversely, 70% of respondents were 'a bit worried' that they might find the new employment difficult. 79% felt that joining the programme had had a positive effect on their family lives, although 36% also reported that it had some negative effects.

It can be seen, therefore, that there was generally a very positive feeling reported overall by the group with respect to their early experiences and perceptions of the programme. The high level of satisfaction in the recruitment process is striking and mirrors a subsequent finding that participants would be less confident going through a traditional recruitment route back into employment. This point is further illustrated at this stage with regard to the concern of the majority over what their new role would involve.

Reflection on the Training

The second survey at the end of the 4-week training block ascertained how prepared participants felt for their subsequent placement with the council. The results showed that 90% still rated the overall quality and experience of the programme as good and felt that the programme had met their expectations. However, only 50% felt that they had had a realistic view of what would be expected of them. 72% reported a high level of self-confidence, 82% felt more confident about their career, with 60% reporting a positive effect on their personal life. Crucially, over 90% felt better off financially than when they joined the programme. Again significantly, only 18% felt that they would have been successful if they had gone through the traditional recruitment procedures to get on the programme.

The results suggest a continuing satisfaction at this stage with the programme as a whole, and the 4-week preparatory training block in particular. A number of respondents commented that the quality of the training could take them 'to another level'. One individual's comment that it was 'a once in a lifetime opportunity' reflected to a fair degree the overall satisfaction reported by all respondents. Interestingly, there is a marked increase in career confidence from 66% at the start of the training to 82% following its completion—which suggests that respondents felt that the training had equipped them well for their new roles, and had also made them more employable generally. Paradoxically, self-confidence dipped from an initial 85 to 72% and reflected for some, perhaps, the reality of undertaking

Table 1 Results from the surveys

Periodicity of the surveys	At the start of the training (%)	At the end of the 4 week training block (%)	Six weeks into the placement (%)
I am satisfied with interview process	95		
I am not sure that I would have got on the programme through the traditional route		63	69
I have found the programme a good experience	90	90	85
I am pleased with the training programme	71	90	92
I have got more confidence in myself	85	72	85
I am more confidence in my future career	66	82	65
I will be well received by new colleagues	95		
I am not sure what to expect in the placement	70	50	38
Participation has had a positive effect on my life	79	60	85
Joining has had some negative effects	36		
I feel better off financially		90	

their first work assignment after being out of work for some time. It is of note that this figure rises to 85% again once the group had been working for 6 weeks.

The financial benefits are also an important factor captured in this second snapshot of their feelings and, unsurprisingly, is a key element that was reported on further in the focus groups. Crucially, in terms of supporting the unemployed residents successfully into work, the fact that 63% of participants were not sure whether they could have successfully navigated the traditional recruitment route to enter the programme suggests that the project's more targeted and simplified approach to recruitment is of major significance.

Early Reflection on the Placement

Finally, having allowed time for the participants to settle into their new roles with the council, the third questionnaire was intended to capture their overall experiences and views of the programme 6 weeks into their placement and to establish their feelings about their new jobs. Findings indicated that 92% of the group rated the overall quality and experience of the training as good, with 85% of respondents feeling that the programme and job had both met their expectations. Interestingly, 54% felt that they had a realistic view of what was expected off them. However, 38% were still not fully sure.

At this stage of the programme, there remained a trend of overall satisfaction with the programme, both in terms of its quality and the experience, and also in meeting the expectations of a large majority of the respondents. The majority of participants reported continuing confidence in themselves across all three surveys, satisfaction with their placement role and their future job prospects. Capturing those overall sentiments well, one participant declared:

> It was absolutely amazing to get on this placement. I've learnt so much from it. I am able to view the world in a different and better perspective.

Critically, the third in the series of surveys was able to capture the impact of the programme in terms of a number of measures of well-being associated with the potentially positive effects of training and employment (see Crisp et al. 2009). That 85% of the group felt happier than when they joined the programme and over three-quarters also saw an improvement in their personal lives is a clear indication that the early benefits of the pilot had exceeded gains solely measured in terms of increased income and employability, crucial though these obviously are. Linked with 70% of the group reporting a positive impact on their family lives, the results suggest that the experience of quality employment and training opportunity was also having a positive effect on the overall well-being of the participants.

One conclusion that could be drawn, supported by the finding from the second survey above on recruitment methods, is that the alternative approach to matching people to jobs and getting them 'job ready' is proving an effective strategy for aiding more disadvantaged, arguably less confident, members of the community back into the labour market. This also supports Markel and Barclay's assertion that reducing such barriers can be, 'easily adopted into an organisation's CSR programme that emphasizes…[the importance of]… the employment of a diverse workforce' (2009, p. 312). This is further evidenced in the finding of the third survey that this same group forming 69% was far from certain that they would have otherwise secured employment had it not been through the L2BJR route. It can be argued that these results clearly demonstrate the social justice dimension of the project, and its potential efficacy, as mapped to the CSR public sector model.

Conversely, nearly half way into the 6-month placement period, the third survey highlights a drop in confidence in longer-term career prospects. However, it could be argued that the fixed-term nature of this work opportunity was always likely to temper any over expectation on the part of the participants. Particularly with the growing realisation that there was no job guarantee when the programme came to an end. The issue of what people thought would happen at the end of the placement is developed further below.

The discussion on the survey findings has highlighted some of the key early ways in how the participants viewed and experienced the programme. In order to explore some of the issues in more depth and to investigate their views as the programme entered its latter stages, the next section reports on a series of two focus groups attended by the participants during the final 6 weeks of the placement period.

Findings from the Focus Groups

Levels of Enlightenment

A crucial theme that permeated discussion across both sets of focus groups was the ethos of caring. There was evidence in numerous contributions to the focus groups that the key ethos of *independence for clients through respect and dignity* had been fully embraced and internalised by all participants. This was the measure that they used when discussing the ways in which they worked with their client, immaterial of which department they worked in. Another key element of this strategy of caring was a recognition of the diversity and equality needs of their service users. This

was voiced by the majority in relation to how they saw their role in attending to the diverse nature of their clients and managing their care in relation to those different needs.

These outcomes suggest that the programme was also, therefore, delivering at the ethical and business case levels of the model, in terms of an enhanced service delivery but, crucially, in terms of a more empathetic approach by staff to the service user. As a number of the respondents also noted, for instance, 'learning disabilities can come in many forms and need different types of support'. Furthermore, with respect to Lauring and Thomsen's critique of CSR and equal opportunities, it supports their fundamental criteria that, 'for CSR to be more than just words, the portrayed values…[those it espouses]…must be integrated in the daily procedures of the organization' (2009, p. 26). In this sense, the ethos of care built into the initial training had been taken on board by all of the placement workers and was successfully informing their subsequent approach to their work.

Similarly, and an equally key finding was the genuine 'enlightenment' reported by the most of the respondents in terms of never having previously had much knowledge of the type of work that was done in the caring sector or, more fundamentally, the challenges faced by many other members of their community in terms of managing their disability. The programme had offered them both an insight into working in the care sector but also a greater awareness about the lives of another disadvantaged group often overlooked in the community. Therefore, it can be argued that the outcome was greater social inclusion for both service users and the participants delivering the service.

Outcomes and Expectations

The other significant findings from the focus groups were: the opportunity to do worthwhile work, and being paid and not being dependent on benefit. Crucially, when asked about their future plans at the end of the second set of focus groups, over 75% of the respondents stressed that the experience had made them want to go on and do further learning and seek better qualifications. This was also an important outcome in terms of how the college would be able to support the group in their further learning and development.

Unsurprisingly, not everyone reported total satisfaction with the programme. Dissonance was particularly evident in terms of a small group who felt that permanent employment after the placement had been 'part of the deal', although this had not been the understanding of the vast majority. Nonetheless, it highlights the need for such limitations to be explained clearly and consistently to all parties. The range of training opportunities that had been made available to them had disappointed a number of people. Comparison between the placement workers of the range of tasks that they undertook supported this conclusion and suggests some form of rotation might have been more equitable.

Nevertheless and significantly, in terms of well-being, respondents reported generally that both mentally and physically they felt 'better in themselves' and also that their employment had a positive effect on relations at home. Furthermore, the majority had a positive view of themselves and felt a 'sense of purpose'. Crucially, the programme for many had allowed them 'to look to the future', with a number reporting that the experience had had a profoundly positive effect on their outlook on life. The initial training was seen as a crucial element of this experience. The majority of the group felt that the training had given them valuable insight into working in a care role. Similarly, the majority found it of real value in terms of preparing for 'the transition into the job'.

The Operational Impact of L2BJR on the Service

Having discussed the expectations, feelings and experiences of the participants, this final section considers the impact that their contributions had on service delivery, as viewed by both senior and line management in the care department.

The Strategic View of Senior Managers

The senior managers charged with delivering care services were highly supportive of the initiative. As they both acknowledged, it is part of the council's 'mission' to help the disadvantaged members of the local community back into work. It is of note that the project also potentially coincided with the agenda of one of the participating sections within the care department. As the principal manager for learning disabilities (LDs) explained:

> It was a great opportunity to support the broad diversity agenda of the council but also of major benefit in terms of the learning disabilities partnership's big agenda to put learning disability people back to where they should be, in terms of being valued members of the community and people who are treated with dignity and respect, with the same rights and aspirations as everyone else. So if I can get other people to come into contact with learning disability people in a positive way, (a) there is a career there for them, (b) they get to learn what we do (c) they have a structured process of training and qualifications but (d) also put something back into the community and raise awareness about people with learning disabilities.

By bringing in previously long-term unemployed trainees into his service, it allowed them an opportunity to develop but also to learn more about an often equally excluded group within the community. With the hope that they would go back to their family, friends and community and raise people's awareness about LDs. With respect to Fig. 2, it can be argued that this is a good example of the potential symbiotic nature of public sector CSR, in highlighting the ethical, business and social justice cases for the LD department to achieve its corporate objective of better serving 'its customers'.

The View of the Manager

Overall, the line managers were pleased with the contribution made by the placement staff. They were impressed in general by their attitude and commitment to the service users. They described the participants as enthusiastic, very polite, willing to take guidance and willing to learn, and that the majority had good communication skills. All the participants were praised for their relationship building skills with the clients and their demonstration of a clear understanding of the ethos of the council's care sector. The vast majority were described as very good team workers who had integrated into their respective teams without issue and were well thought of by the rest of their colleagues. Collectively, the line managers rated 75% of the trainees as very good or better. The attributes of the 75% better workers were ascribed as:

- Having a very good attitude to their work
- Often innovative and creative in how they worked with their clients
- Very professional
- Very competent in working with the clients' care plans
- Very competent in producing reports
- Very motivated
- Able to contribute ideas to the team

There was a feeling amongst some managers that the reason that the less successful 25% of the candidates did not share the same commitment and passion for a job in caring was that the job was not suited to them or their employment needs. This corresponds with the views of a small number of the focus group participants who reported that the placement had not fully lived up to their expectations. This was in terms of the actual work they were expected to do and the lack of variation in tasks available to them in their particular placement location. Some managers also reported a 'slight dropping off' in some participants' contribution towards the end of the 6 month. However, they attributed this more to the uncertainty of 'what happens next' rather than a loss of interest in their area of work.

A key finding on the operational effectiveness of the project was that all eight line managers to varying degrees linked the attributes listed above to the quality, depth and applicability of the training delivered in the first month of the project. As noted above, the 'ethos of caring' imbued in the trainees was seen as a very positive part of their approach to client care. Furthermore, managers felt that the development of numeracy, literacy and IT skills had subsequently been used to good effect by group members in their daily support roles. Crucially, the majority of managers reported that the 4-week intensive training block had provided them with a cohort of more confident, focussed and enthusiastic workers than had been possible in previous recruitment exercises.

All the managers interviewed supported the aims and objectives of the project, were very content to be involved and, in many cases, wished that 'we had a definite job to offer' to their particular placement worker. That said, a number of respondents spoke specifically about how they felt that the process could be better managed to 'further reach its potential'. The managers felt that greater involvement of the line manager from the first day would be of value. Furthermore, a major issue for most of the managers was the need for a clearer briefing for participating managers and staff on the objectives of the programme and the expectations of the participants. They all felt that communication on this occasion could have been better and also had better co-ordination overall. It was only later in the programme that a council manager was assigned a co-ordinating role to be able to liaise with line managers involved in the project.

As Lauring and Thomsen (2009) stress, if CSR initiatives such as this are going to be embraced by operational managers, then it is crucial that these pleas for greater involvement by line managers are acknowledged and acted on by higher management. Similarly, and in the context of their research in the public sector, the findings have clear resonance with Maxwell et al.'s conclusion that, 'the role of the line manager is pivotal in implementing a managing diversity approach' (2001, p. 480), in this case with respect to a socially disadvantaged group in society.

Discussion and Conclusion

Utilising two research questions derived from a review of the current CSR and equality literature, the focus of the article has been on the means by which, and to what degree, a public sector organisation addresses its social obligations in the context of CSR. Furthermore, how that strategy is conceived, carried out and experienced with respect to a project designed to bring about greater social inclusion for disadvantaged members in the community.

With respect to the research questions, the discussion has highlighted a number of key outcomes from the L2BJR initiative that, it can be argued, map readily against dimensions of the CSR model for the public sector utilised in the analysis. As noted earlier, in accordance with Schwartz and Carroll's counsel (2003) the pyramid is not intended to be hierarchical. However, given that the fundamental aim of this article has been to emphasise the importance of social justice as a distinct dimension of CSR, it is logical to consider this element first as we review the analysis. It is also important to note that, as the discussion has demonstrated, in reality CSR actions can and do cut across dimensions (ibid.).

The social justice dimension was introduced to more effectively locate strategies for promoting greater equality within a revised CSR topology, including greater social inclusion. As Grosser and Moon (2005) suggest in relation to their research findings on gender management, there is scope to 'mainstream' equality and diversity initiatives within strategies of corporate social governance. Evidence from the analysis indicates that L2BJR is an example of such a possibility.

With specific reference to the efficacy of the new model, it can be argued that it has allowed a more nuanced discussion of the CSR aspects of public sector strategy and practice. In particular, the social justice dimension has enabled the potential contribution towards greater social inclusion of the L2BJR project to be more rigorously analysed and assessed. For instance, evidence from the survey and focus group data indicates clearly that on a number of measures of well being, such as greater self-confidence and confidence in the future, the aims of the project had been achieved. Similarly and critically, the overall conclusion of the participants was that they felt more employable in terms of the local labour market than when they first joined the programme.

Comparing the original and the new models in Figs. 1 and 2 respectively, the discussion above supports the retention of the right-hand labelling of intent of the four dimensions—with the proviso that the analysis suggests that social justice for the public sector organisation is more likely to be 'expected' than merely 'desired' by its stakeholders (Carroll 1979). With respect to those stakeholders, the left-hand side of the diagram categorises the key stakeholders for each dimension, based again on the discussion above. This initial classification of intent and stakeholders warrants further testing in subsequent research. Nevertheless, the findings of this research, certainly in relation to in this case the line manager, suggest that stakeholder 'buy in' is central to the success of any CSR initiative.

Drawing on the notion of 'a public sector ethos' (Hebson et al. 2003), the model allowed the identification of two key elements of the ethical dimension of public sector CSR strategy as enacted through the L2BJR project. Firstly, a significant theme that permeated the discourse of all the participants was the ethos of caring. There was clear evidence that the primary goal of greater independence for clients through respect and dignity had been fully embraced and internalised by all participants. This had also been a key element of the initial training. It is a good example of how the ethical driver of the CSR public sector model can be utilised to change rhetorical values of organisation ethics into real and meaningful practice in the workplace (Lauring and Thomsen 2009). In that, the project fitted closely within the council's 'dignity in care' campaign and strategy, as set out in current government guidelines (Ridley-Duff and Bull 2011), to ensure that all caring is carried out with this ethos central to its delivery.

Secondly, from an operational perspective, but also with reference to the social justice dimension of the CSR model, it is of note that the senior managers in the LD department recognised the synergy of the ethical treatment of their clients and the council's mission to help disadvantaged members of the local community back into work. In that one group of disadvantaged members of that community was given the opportunity to work with and raise awareness amongst others of another equally disadvantaged group in society who, both managers and the trainees reported, were not always accorded the respect and dignity they deserved.

Although there are few specific examples of actions with respect to legal responsibilities, it can be argued that the council's equality duties under current legislation must explicitly inform those actions. Furthermore, the contribution of L2BJR to social inclusion can be easily mapped to the future requirements of the Single Equality Act (Government Equality Office 2010).

Analysis of data from both the surveys and the focus groups revealed that the process for obtaining the placement opportunity had been a significant plus for the participants. The absence of a more 'traditional' job application and interview had been welcomed by most respondents and, arguably, in terms of supporting more vulnerable, less confident candidates back into work is a major strength of the programme. This accords with both the social justice and business drivers of CSR in that the process made it easier for vulnerable people to successfully apply for the project.

Conversely, this also allowed the council access to a potentially more committed and loyal group of people with a natural aptitude suitable for filling vacancies in its care department in a way that conventional methods of recruitment may not have achieved. In addition, line managers also commented on the success of the initial training programme in delivering workers who were 'job ready' and also echoes Fenwick and Bierema (2008)

argument that the involvement of the HR development team is crucial to any CSR initiative.

With respect to biographical differences, for instance on the basis of age or ethnicity, there was no evidence that any specific independent variable had had an impact on the overall findings of this particular research. With a few notable exceptions that have focussed specifically on gender (Grosser and Moon 2005; Grosser 2009), there has been limited research on CSR and issues of equality. This writer would argue that the importance of considering all equality strands in the context of CSR is a key area for further study.

Finally, it can be argued that through a unique recruitment process L2BJR offered an innovative approach to helping long-term unemployed local people to become more employable, whilst also addressing the key issue of matching suitable candidates to take up the role of caring for others in the community. Significantly, at the end of the project, half of the participants successfully applied for and secured jobs with the council within its care department, with all barring one of the others joining the registry for temporary workers to cover care roles across the council. It shows, therefore, the importance of both supply and demand drivers (Crisp et al. 2009) in addressing unemployment and social inclusion issues. With respect to the efficacy of the model developed in this article, the author notes Meehan et al.'s observation that

> The adoption of corporate responsibility (CR) in the commercial world has been limited to those areas offering economic gain, because scholars have not provided adequate conceptual resources to help managers integrate other aspects of CR into their corporate strategies and actions (2006, p. 386).

Drawing on the seminal contributions of Carroll (1979) and Dickens (1999), the re-conceptualised model in reflecting the key elements of the ethos and practice of an organisation like the council, it is hoped, offers both practitioners and academics an alternative tool in further addressing and analysing the key drivers for promoting CSR in the public sector.

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