



EMCC company network

Case example of Dublin Bus

Company background
Diversity management practice
Contact details



This case example is available in electronic format only.

Company background

Dublin Bus (Bus Átha Cliath) is a major semi-state public transport provider in the city of Dublin and the surrounding area. The service operates 1,182 buses on 214 routes and carries approximately 500,000 passengers a day. Passenger numbers for 2006 were 146 million. Dublin Bus is part of the CIE group, an umbrella organisation covering four subsidiaries, Irish Rail (Iarnród Eireann), Bus Eireann, Dublin Bus and CIE Tours. CIE is a statutory corporation and therefore has no issued share capital or equity invested in the company.

Operations

The organisation has 3,700 staff. The majority of staff are in operations grades (80%) with smaller numbers in maintenance grades (14%), and clerical, administrative and executive grades. Women represent just 6% of staff. Women have a younger age profile in the company than men, and after the age of 53 their numbers fall off significantly. This can be explained in part by the existence of a ban on the employment of married women in the public sector until the mid 1970s.

Dublin Bus is unionised. In general, the company employs a partnership approach between senior management, employees and unions. Collective bargaining is governed by the national social partnership process. Pat Normanly, Manager, Training, Recruitment and Equality at Dublin Bus, referred to the key presence of trade unions in Dublin Bus and how the company has responded to this over time.

‘We’re a highly trade unionised organisation. One hundred per cent of our employees are members of a trade union. So we have ... very much a partnership approach that is moving from a traditional trade union approach to a more partnership approach.’ ([listen to Pat](#))

There have been many changes in Dublin Bus, especially since 1997. Many of these were due to the changing environment that the company operates in. The bus fleet has increased by approximately 30% and staffing has increased by 16%. An increasing population and rate of car ownership in Dublin has increased traffic congestion, and although there are now dedicated bus lanes on some routes, bus drivers are working in a more difficult environment. Like many other Irish businesses, Dublin Bus is operating in a very different and changing environment of economic and population growth.

Diversity management practice

The Dublin Bus diversity management programme is set within a context of dramatic changes in Ireland over recent years. The population reached 4.3 million in 2005, the highest level since the census of 1861. Ireland has become a country of choice for emigrants from over 160 countries and recent years have seen a dramatic change from being a country of emigration to one of immigration. There is an increasing number of women in the workplace and unemployment is at 4.2%, the lowest unemployment rate in the EU.

The increasing number of immigrants who came to Ireland in the late 1990s coincided with the expansion of the Dublin Bus fleet. The company welcomed applications from new immigrants who were in a position to seek work in Ireland. The company continues to attract a significant number of new immigrants, mainly as bus drivers. Fifteen per cent of the bus drivers currently employed by Dublin Bus are from a country outside Ireland, and 10% are from outside the EU. (These figures are in line with the national profile of the labour force.) They currently represent 63 different countries of origin and Dublin Bus is now recognised as a high profile intercultural workplace.

Setting up the equality and diversity Programme

The equality and diversity Programme was established in Dublin Bus in January 2001. It was an initiative of the HR manager in response to a number of emerging concerns. These included the low percentage of women in certain grades in the organisation, a lack of career progression for female employees, an increasing proportion of black and ethnic minority employees in the workforce, the needs of people with disabilities, the increasing age profile of the workforce and the introduction of equality legislation. One of the fundamental drivers of this initiative was rapid change taking place within the organisation, as Pat explains:

‘We’re a changing organisation, with change in the demographics of our workforce, older employees, people from different countries of origin, cultural diversity, women in the workplace, people with disabilities so it’s about the changing needs of our employees, and changing needs of the business and changing customers.’ ([listen to Pat](#))

However, another reason for establishing the strategy was to develop a culture where equality and diversity would become established as core values in the organisation. Dublin Bus recognised that the workforce and customer base are made up of people with many differences. By acknowledging and valuing these differences, the organisation can ensure a working environment where people feel valued and where their potential is fully realised. This, in turn, will help to provide a better and safer service for customers, improve staff morale, reduce absenteeism and facilitate good teamwork. It aims to create an environment of dignity and respect and to put in place procedures throughout the organisation to ensure best practice in all business functions.

The first step was the appointment of an Equality and Diversity Officer (EDO) in 2001 who had the task of setting up and developing an equality and diversity programme. The EDO received strong support from senior management. Dublin Bus has developed an Equality and Diversity Action Plan that covers a number of areas including: applying the principles of equality and inclusion to people management; involving staff who reflect the diversity of the workforce; and evaluating the benefits of any changes made in relation to equality and diversity.

At the beginning much of the work was concerned with establishing HR policies relating to recruitment and career development. The work continued with awareness-raising activities for management and staff and was supplemented with a number of specific activities and events to promote diversity. Pat summarised the implementation process:

‘First of all appointing somebody as a point of contact and as somebody to direct it, then having the initial commitment of senior management towards it, and then the first action would have been carrying out an equality review, having a thorough review of the company through the lens of equality and diversity, and then ... looking at the recommendations of that review and developing action plans.’ ([listen to Pat](#))

A potential weakness in the approach taken was that there is a risk of the initiative becoming over-reliant on the person of the officer. Though no formal succession plans are in place, the EDO is aware of the issue. However, given the level of integration of the programme in the company, it is likely the programme would be maintained into the future.

The Equality and Diversity Action Plan

The EDO’s first task was to put in place essential policies on equality and diversity. A working party was established with staff representatives from various grades as well as trade union and management. This working party undertook an equality review between 2001 and 2002. An Equality and Diversity Action Plan was developed as a result to cover the period from 2003 to 2010. The three key objectives of this plan are:

- To support and protect staff and business needs – Two key actions have been implemented under this objective. The first action was to set up a point of contact, offering support, guidance and advice to staff and management. The second was the development of a comprehensive set of policies and procedures tackling different aspects of equality and diversity such as dignity and respect at work, employment, recruitment and selection, work–life balance, and accessible transport for all.
- To build competences and awareness – There are three elements to this objective. The first deals with mainstreaming, i.e. integrating diversity into all business functions. The second concerns providing training and guidelines to ensure positive approaches to managing diversity. The third focuses on changing attitudes and raising awareness of diversity.
- To facilitate and drive change – Again, this objective is divided into three elements. Inclusive participation and partnership consists of developing links between management, staff, the trade unions and minority groups, mainly through a series of working groups. Public relations and promotion deals with fostering good PR about Dublin Bus’s diversity work. Finally, monitoring and evaluation consists of solid data collection, analysis and reporting on progress.

The philosophy underpinning the action plan is a holistic one. While the company took care to focus on issues that needed to be addressed, it was anxious to avoid dividing people into disparate ‘target groups’.

Lessons learnt

Pat Normanly, Director of Equality and Diversity Policy, described some of the key lessons learned by Dublin Bus while implementing diversity management in the organisation.

Participation and consultation

Partnership and consultation is essential to the process. If the objective is to develop a more inclusive workplace, then new ways of including people in this process must be developed. Inclusion, consultation and participation can be difficult to organise, slow to work with and can bring its own problems, but Dublin Bus has learned that in the long term it is the only way to bring about effective change. It has enormous benefits in terms of awareness raising and buy-in throughout the organisation.

‘It is a slower way of working but it is the most effective way of working, that you include all the stakeholders whether that be management, trade unions and the employees themselves ... so that was one of the biggest.’ ([listen to Pat](#))

Integration in all aspects of the business

Issues of equality and diversity are primarily associated with equal opportunity for employees and equal treatment of customers, but it is also about acknowledging and really valuing difference, as well as capturing the benefits of diversity in all aspects of the business. Rather than being an added responsibility or just complying with legislation, it is about best practice in all aspects of the relationship between management and staff.

Planned and systematic approach

If equality and diversity is to be integrated into the overall business of the organisation, it must be implemented and planned in a systematic way. This will ensure that key objectives can be set, that timeframes can be established, and that measurement structures and communication

structures can be put in place, and that the programme can be evaluated effectively. However, Pat pointed out that it is important to balance a systematic approach with flexibility.

‘What I have learned is that planned and systematic approach has to be very flexible as well. That it can’t be too rigid. That you have to be able to adapt and change, as the programme is being developed. But somewhere you have to have clear objectives.’ ([listen to Pat](#))

The business case for diversity and challenges for the future

Pat Normanly believes that there is a strong business case for diversity, pointing to higher levels of satisfaction and consequently engagement in the workforce, with more opportunity for real inclusion and participation and better communication. Labour turnover in Dublin Bus has dropped to 3%, resulting in lower training costs and fewer accidents. Absenteeism has reduced steadily since the introduction of diversity management. In addition, the diversity management programme has become an alternative conflict resolution resource and very few grievance cases have been forwarded to the state-backed Equality Tribunal¹ since its introduction. Dublin Bus is the only Irish company listed as carrying out best practice in managing diversity in a compendium published by the European Commission. It has been recognised as a Good Practice Intercultural Workplace by the Equality Authority² and as a best practice HR employer in Ireland by the CIPD³ and the Irish Management Institute.

‘For me it is about good practice in all activities and I see that there is a business case for good practice, and if that good practice is called diversity or whatever but I think that diversity management is really about good practice at the end of the day: it’s about how you deal with and accommodate your employees and your customers.’ ([listen to Pat](#))

However a number of challenges remain for the maintenance and development of this successful programme in the future. It is essential to ensure that commitment is maintained throughout the organisation, particularly in the face of internal and external change. The implementation of related policies, procedures and practices must be reviewed regularly. It is also important to maintain a strong consultative approach by ensuring that changing needs can be expressed and addressed. In addition, employment opportunities and transport services need to be created and adapted for the entire community including those who experience inequality. Pat’s ultimate aim is the creation of a workplace where under-represented groups have equal access to opportunity and, importantly, can progress through the organisation.

¹ The Equality Tribunal is a state agency that adjudicates on equality disputes.

² The Equality Authority is a state agency that is responsible for all aspects of equality policy implementation

³ CIPD – Chartered Institute of Personnel Development

Contact details



Pat Normanly

Equality and Diversity Officer

Dublin Bus

Email: Pat.Normanly@dublinbus.ie

Website: <http://www.dublinbus.ie/home/>

For more information on Dublin Bus's equality and diversity strategy, see:

http://www.dublinbus.ie/opportunities/equality_and%20diversity_what_we_mean.asp

http://www.dublinbus.ie/opportunities/equality_and_diversity_strategy.asp