

## **Study Visit – Le Puy, France**

### **Similarities.....**

In the UK there has been a recent project entitled CESME (Contribution of Ethnic Minority Employees to UK Small and Medium Sized Enterprises). The overall project aim is to demonstrate the business advantages of diversity in employment by assisting employers to understand the arguments for racial equality in the workplace and to promote employment of ethnic minority employees in enterprises at all levels. It does not aim to identify racism within an organisation, but to clarify the implications of diversity management on the firm's general business performance and, more specifically, on the SME's (Small Medium Enterprise) internationalisation.

#### Objectives of the CESME Project

- Promote employment of the ethnic minority workforce in the UK and Europe
- Work towards the elimination of racial discrimination and promote equality of opportunity
- Encourage good relations between people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds
- Clarify the positive implications of workforce diversity management on the firm's business performance
- Disseminate good practice on inclusion of ethnic minority employees
- Make the corporate culture of British firms more sensitive to diversity.

#### CESME Project Activities

- Research Services: orientated towards small and medium sized firms and ethnic minority issues in the UK and internationally.
- International Business and Employment Training: diversity awareness and international business training courses aimed at SME managerial staff who would like to make their firm's corporate culture more sensitive to diversity issues while improving their internationalisation and performance.
- Distance Learning Materials: on international business and diversity related issues. Materials include computer-aided learning packages and the latest multimedia and internet technologies. Specialised CD-ROM packages have been produced and distributed regularly to SMEs.
- Personalised Mentoring: with the support of academic staff from various universities in the UK, the skills of experienced UK ethnic minority and overseas postgraduate students are used to research specific international business projects for interested SMEs.

This project only targets SMEs and we are not aware in the UK of any project such as the one with COPEC, Mission Local and Casino Group.

## The 2<sup>nd</sup> Chance School

This is very similar to the provision that Westminster Adult Education provides within its' local community, working with identified disadvantaged groups providing skills for work and further education in order to facilitate access to the UK labour market. Often the groups we work with are minority groups who have found it difficult to access traditional education and therefore we strive to bridge this gap by taking education into the local community, operating from such venues as, community and church halls, local schools & children's centres, etc.

### **Elements that surprised us.....**

In the UK we are not aware of any organisation using a "blind application" system when recruiting employees or selecting employees for promotion. This is extremely good practice and one that should be adopted in the UK by companies who truly want to promote equality and diversity within their organisations as complex legislation within the UK often allows for exploitation.

Also, the way in which simulation activities are organised in the partnership with the Casino Group is again a system that we have not come across when recruiting in the UK. The common system adopted in the UK is that of an application form and within that application the candidate is usually asked to reveal details regarding their ethnicity. The content of the applications submitted to employers by individuals usually forms the basis of the initial selection of candidates for testing or interviewing.

The meeting involving Vedioorbis was again enlightening as employment agencies within the UK are obviously bound by legislation around equity of opportunity but how does a money making organisation that relies on fee paying clients really cope with a request to discriminate, when a refusal of such a request could result in a loss of business? The details of the training that Vedioorbis provides to their staff in tackling this situation would be of particular interest in the UK whose economy is largely built on service industry.

### **In Summary**

This was a very well organised and informative study visit with valuable opportunities provided to share the good practice that exists within the partnership. It is amazing how creative organisations are in tackling issues in the absence of firm legislation.