

Report from Manresa Study Visit – June 2008

Background

The City of Manresa has around 75,000 inhabitants and is situated in the centre of Catalonia in northern Spain. The main industry in Manresa is the car manufacturing industry, which is currently under threat of relocation.

Spain has experienced an increase in immigration in the last 10 years. Spanish immigration has gone up by around 15%, a figure reflective in the Manresa area. Immigration is mainly from Latin American countries, Morocco, Romania, Senegal & Poland.

To work in Manresa it is necessary for you to speak 2 languages – Catalan and Spanish.

Most immigrants become Spanish citizens after 2 years and all children born in Spain are considered Spanish.

There are more immigrant women who are graduates than men, however more immigrant men have vocational/trades experience than women.

Similarities

We immediately recognised similarities between Manresa Council and that of Westminster City Council, which Westminster Adult Education is part of, in the many projects they are involved in and the types of services it provides for its' local community.

Manresa council works with various organizations including religious organisations in an attempt to sensitise the local community. This is carried out through the planning of various cultural activities. This is very similar to initiatives carried out by local authorities (councils) throughout the UK to celebrate the diversity of their local communities. A couple of the initiatives carried out in Westminster are “Black History Month” & Chinese New Year celebrations.

The Atenea Project in Manresa identifies the fact that more immigrant women are working below their level of education than men. This is an aspect that we recognise in Westminster but find that as well as the usual language barriers there are also cultural barriers surrounding women and their status within the home, especially prevalent amongst the Arabic community and it is often this that prevents these women from moving into work following education.

We also recognise from the Acollim Project schemes providing immigrants with a trade or education to help them access the workplace. Although we do not have many initiatives that focus particularly on immigrants we do have initiatives that help people access the labour market. These initiatives are open to immigrants, provided they meet the necessary qualifying criteria of the project that they are applying to.

Surprises

The project has such a high profile locally resulting in an audience with the Mayor of Manresa and local press coverage of our visit.

Immigrants wanting to work in Catalonia are expected to speak both Catalan and Spanish.

There is a high number of projects focusing on the up-skilling of immigrants to facilitate their entry into the workplace.

The DIESA scheme impressed us greatly with their language training scheme for their immigrant employees and the fact that they not only focus on the professional development of their employees but ensured that the social needs of immigrant employees were also being met through the strong links they have with Manresa council. This scheme understands that “the whole is only a sum of its parts” and to develop a loyal and committed workforce it is important that their social wellbeing is addressed. The experience here was positive on both the side of the employer and the immigrant employee. To undertake this project doesn't necessarily mean a large investment but it does require a firm understanding of what the council and local community can provide to support immigrant workers and their families and through the forging of strong partnerships immigrant employees can receive the assistance they require to allow them to integrate and undertake work.

In summary, this was a very enlightening visit with some fantastic work being carried out, some of which I can identify with, being part of a local authority council.