

FastTrack Recruitment and Training Programme – An interview with Central Bedfordshire Council

Central Bedfordshire Council is a unitary local authority located about 35 miles north of London. It provides services to approximately a quarter of a million people.

escalla has been delivering skills, resources and expertise for over twenty years to the public sector and local authorities across the UK. We have helped countless authorities to reduce their costs, improve effectiveness and comply with essential legislation.

“ The quality of the FastTrack candidates is exceptional. They are beginning to assess new benefit claims in record time and will soon be making a major contribution to the success of the team.

– Team Leader, CBC

“ We were finding it difficult to recruit experienced staff, using traditional methods of recruitment. FastTrack has proven that another way is possible by delivering high-quality staff both quickly and cost effectively.

– Gary Muskett, Head of Revenue and Benefits, CBC

In this interview, we talk to Gary Muskett, the Head of Revenues and Benefits at Central Bedfordshire Council. He tells us why he commissioned escalla to recruit and train seven new benefit assessment officers, and shares his thoughts and experiences with us.

Hi Gary, please could you explain the difficulties you were experiencing with resourcing your service?

Yes, of course. We had been finding it difficult to recruit and retain experienced staff for some time because of all of the uncertainty around at the moment.

In fact, the last couple of times we tried to recruit, we were only able to fill one or two vacancies each time; and these were mainly through internal transfers and redeployments, rather than external appointments.

Last year we got to the point where we had five vacancies to fill and needed to take urgent action, to prevent any impact on service delivery. Of course,

we could have tried to recruit again ourselves, but we were reluctant to do so, given previous experiences. After all, recruitment exercises are expensive and take managers away from their day jobs.

Instead we searched for a plan B; and that plan B was FastTrack.

Did you consider any other options, such as bringing in agency staff or off-site processing?

Yes, but we wanted a long-term solution rather than a short-term fix.

We already rely on agency staff and cannot continue to pay inflated prices to help maintain performance. Instead, we want committed staff with drive, commitment and a fresh approach.

What were your initial thoughts about FastTrack?

They were very positive! I could see that FastTrack had worked, it was proven and the business case made complete financial sense.

Of course, some people were a little sceptical at first, but this was only because it seemed too good to be true, which of course it wasn't!

What did you find different about the FastTrack selection process?

The process was very different to how we normally recruit and train staff. For a start, the focus was on attracting people with the right transferable skills and attitude, rather

than merely searching for experience – helping to open up the door to a wider number of candidates.

The selection process itself was very different and much more rigorous than the usual application form and interview stages that many local authorities tend to favour. FastTrack consisted of an initial CV screening stage, telephone interviews, and an assessment day – involving numeracy and literacy tests, a group exercise and a face-to-face interview. The successful candidates then went on to complete specific on the job training for seven days, where their ability to learn complex benefits legislation was assessed through ongoing evaluation and a final exam.

A Step-by-step Guide

Here's how FastTrack works to revolutionise your recruitment and training process in 11 steps ...



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Crucially, at this stage, escalla provided written reports on each candidate's performance, including their ability to learn and to work as part of a team, as well as their references and DBS checks etc. – so we could then make the final and very well informed decision.

What more could any manager or employer want than a complete and detailed picture of each candidate prior to selection?

I could not fault any of the process at all.

What was it like working with escalla?

The escalla team were very easy to work with and we quickly built up a fantastic relationship with them. They were all very personable, knowledgeable and professional.

escalla carefully managed the whole recruitment and training process from start to finish and kept us informed every step of the way. The team were incredibly well organised and ran everything like clockwork. The assessment day itself was a joy to observe!

I also liked the fact that most of the escalla team had a local authority background and understood the needs of our business. This really helped us to build trust quickly and give us the reassurance we needed.

What have you gained through FastTrack?

Well, for the first time in a long time, we have managed to fill all of our vacancies in one go – and in only six weeks. The quality of candidates has been amazing, so much so that we ended up taking on seven staff, instead of the five positions we had advertised. This was testament to escalla and the success of the programme.

The staff have been in-post for about eight weeks now and are performing well above all expectations. They are already assessing live benefit applications with very little support and few errors. To be honest, we didn't expect them to be anywhere near this standard by now!

I firmly believe that this is down to selecting the right staff with the right attitude and providing the right level of training and support. I must say how refreshing it has been to have such a bunch of fresh, motivated and committed staff on board. Their attitude has been spot on and I think that we have some real stars for the future.

What was the best thing about FastTrack?

It did what it said on the tin!

How will you recruit and train in future?

We will certainly be using the FastTrack programme again and we will be looking at expanding this

approach into other parts of the business. There have been so many benefits to the programme.

FastTrack has proven that if you are prepared to try something different and think outside the box, a more effective and efficient way is possible.

Thanks for your time, Gary. And we're really pleased to have worked with you on such a successful programme.



If you would like to find out more about FastTrack, please contact us on 0800 072 9844 or email LA@escalla.co.uk.



Coming into a new workplace can be a daunting prospect. Everybody around

you is bound to be more experienced than you and will be familiar with each other, so being the new arrival can be challenging. This was not the case as my six colleagues and I entered the world of Housing Benefits and Council Tax Support within Central Bedfordshire Council; the atmosphere was noticeably less stressful and the whole team is incredibly welcoming and supportive.

– FastTrack Candidate, CBC



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FastTrack Recruitment Programme

A CASE STUDY