

CSR case studies



Costain Group

Employees' strategic approach to upskilling brings community benefits and encourages development of a company-wide volunteering programme.

● The company

Costain is an international engineering and construction group. The company's headquarters is in Maidenhead and it employs approximately 2,500 people, as well as subcontractors and agency staff.

Three years ago, the company introduced a new overall corporate strategy – "Being Number One". By focusing on what the UK construction market is doing and what its key customers want, Costain Group aims to build strong positions in its key markets which are water, rail, highways, health, education, retail, nuclear, oil & gas, marine, property, airports and waste. Costain has committed to doing this by being customer focused; open and honest; safe and environmentally aware; team players; accountable; and improving continuously and therefore the natural choice.

In 2005, the board nominated a PLC board sponsor for a new Corporate Responsibility Committee headed up by one of the executive board directors. The purpose of this committee is to advise the business to ensure the range and depth of Costain corporate responsibility work is recognised and captured and to drive CR throughout the organisation.

As part of its CR strategy, Costain joined Business in the Community (BITC). In 2007, the Group underwent its first BITC assessment and scored 62%. The company used this result to inform its CR efforts and showed significant improvements in 2008 by achieving Silver Status at 83%. This result is seen as a huge step forward for the business and puts

Costain ahead of other companies in the UK's construction and engineering sector.

This case study profiles the Katesgrove School community project, which was initiated by a group of Costain staff.

● The drivers

Costain Group's High Potential Programme (HPP) is a management development programme which takes people from across the business and puts them through a mini-MBA type programme covering the various aspects of business management, leadership, strategy, etc. At the end of one of the courses in 2008, the graduating group decided they wanted to run a short management exercise project which would enable them to put their new skills into practice.

The group wanted something different, tying their initiative into the overall business strategy and approach to CSR, as well as the key sectors and regions the business operates in. They also wanted their initiative to have an immediate tangible benefit to the community.

● Taking action

The HPP group decided to undertake a two-day project in the education sector and was put in contact with Katesgrove Primary School in Central Reading by BITC's Cares programme. Katesgrove is a large, multicultural school which has shown strong improvement in its last few Ofsted inspections, but has no time or resources to improve its outdated infrastructure. The Costain team saw

this as an opportunity for them to make a difference to the school.

They met with the school's Headteacher and Bursar for a tour of the school and to map out everything that needed doing in the playground and garden areas. They then identified the tasks that they could most usefully do to achieve maximum efficiency and benefit given the time and resources available.

The Costain team sourced most of the tools and materials required from company suppliers, thus keeping costs to the business to a minimum. Over the two days of the project, they divided the work amongst the twelve of them to ensure they completed everything they had set out to do. They stripped and repainted walls in the main playground, dug up and replanted an existing raised garden and erected a pergola to provide shade.

Feedback from the school was very positive and the Costain employees involved thoroughly enjoyed themselves and relished the opportunity to bring their team working and project planning skills to life. One participant commented that, "Actually getting my hands dirty was a bit of a novelty!" Support of the initiative was publically expressed by Costain's CR Committee, as well as the education sector director and several other project directors.

Superior organisation skills were crucial for the individuals in the HPP team, so that they did not adversely affect their day jobs or over commit themselves in terms of time and finance. Working in a school environment, the team also had to keep health and safety issues top of mind.

● **Business benefits**

The Katesgrove project brought significant benefits to the Costain employees by pulling together development points learnt on the HPP programme. It helped them focus on issues of team management, teamwork, programme management, resourcing and procurement.

For the broader business, it provided a useful opportunity to strengthen and promote the Costain brand within the education sector, one of its key focus areas.

● **Why is it CSR?**

The project was initiated by employees, provided a practical opportunity for skills development and was aligned to the business and corporate responsibility strategies. The benefits to the community are measurable and lasting.

● **What next?**

The HPP team has communicated the success of their endeavour widely within Costain and, as a result, the CR Committee is now working towards implementing a policy that makes community involvement and volunteering much more of a core activity of the business. The plan is to build a closer relationship with BITC and its Cares employee volunteering programme.

Contact us:

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