Northumbria University NEWCASTLE

Ammar Mirza CBE

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Business Clinic helps with diversity and inclusion

Students from Northumbria University, Newcastle, have been praised for their work to support diversity and inclusion within the North East workplace after completing a business consultancy project with a leading social enterprise.

Working with Asian Business Connexions(ABC), the four final-year students undertook the work as part of their degree studies with The Business Clinic, an innovative educational programme at Northumbria offering a free consultancy services to real clients.

Founded by Ammar Mirza CBE and Jalf Ali in 2009, ABC was established as a non-profit social enterprise to help address inequality, promote community cohesion and improve access for the Asian and wider community to existing business support programmes. Recognised as the foremost Asian business organisation across the North of England it now represents the whole of the Northern Powerhouse region.

ABC's brief to the student team, known as Target Solutions, was to develop and deliver an engagement strategy to promote and encourage inclusion in the region. To support ABC, Target Solutions carried out extensive research, including an online survey of employers of all sizes and sectors in the North East to understand their views and approach to inclusion, consolidate best practices and identify the values of diversity and inclusion. From their findings they were able to produce a report with three key recommendations for ABC. In brief, these included integrating a core recruitment and training arm into ABC's operation, better use of social media such as Instagram, and expanding the LinkedIn account to promote recruitment and training.

Commenting on the work carried out by the students, Ammar Mirza said: "The team worked collaboratively and cohesively in trying circumstances. The quality of the work, approach and output was first class, which would easily compete against any paid for commission by an established consultancy firm. We will use all of the findings and embed them into our delivery plan. We are very grateful to the business clinic and the students, and wish them all the best in their endeavours."

Nigel Coates, Director of The Business Clinic at Northumbria, said: Despite the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, this has been another highly successful year for our students and clients. The relationship between Target Solutions and ABC is an excellent example of university and industry collaboration. Since we established the Business Clinic in 2013, the total value of the students' free consultancy advice and reports – given to more than 500 clients – has been estimated to exceed £2.75m. This is a superb achievement that both enhances the learning experience and the employability skills of our students; and delivers considerable benefits for our clients."

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