

Welcome to this newsletter, whose aim is to keep supporters, alumni and friends of Careers Springboard West Berkshire updated with our activities and ongoing developments. Our mission is to support out-of-work professionals and managers, and the state of the economy means that we have had a busy time!

## Chairman's Update: George Athorn

2010 was another busy year for us, though not quite as hectic as 2009. During the year a further 73 job seekers joined us looking for help, down from 103 the year before. There is a steady flow of people getting jobs, although a noticeable trend is that more of these are initially short-term contracts, rather than full-time employment. Nevertheless, our success rate has improved, with an average of over one person a week leaving us for a new job.



This, and other anecdotal evidence, suggests that the worst seems to be over for job seekers. Since August, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of job seekers seeing an improvement in the jobs market. However, we are seeing the first casualties of the public sector cuts and have in place some plans to tailor some of our services for this sector, should demand warrant it.

With the continuing high demand for our support, we again did not take a summer break but offered a drop-in service rather than a formal programme. This proved quite popular.

We are fortunate in that we recruited several new volunteers during the year (see the volunteers section). This means that we have been able to widen the range of help we can offer through 1-on-1 sessions with jobseekers. These are usually held on Thursdays in addition to our main meetings every Tuesday.

Another innovation this year has been the addition of 'sushi' sessions, which as the name implies, is a small savouring of something different. These are occasional 45 minute sessions added at the end of our main meeting in which a particular topic is explored in more depth, such as 'starting your own business'.

## The Foundation For Jobseekers Ltd

A major milestone during the year has been the creation of The Foundation For Jobseekers. As our major funding source to date, the Branshaw Foundation, wraps up its work, the chairmen of the five Thames Valley Executive Job Clubs, decided that rather than each of us going-it-alone, that we would create a Foundation to act as a co-ordinating body.



The Foundation is constituted as a Charity Limited by Guarantee (Charity No. 1136534). Its members are the volunteer chairmen of the five job clubs. Each job club takes responsibility for one or more activities of the Foundation on behalf of all job clubs. For example, Careers Springboard West Berkshire is responsible for marketing and the website [www.f4jobseekers.org.uk](http://www.f4jobseekers.org.uk).

A looming challenge for the Foundation is that of attracting funding for the work of the job clubs. Unlike other worthy causes, out-of-work managers are not a group that many donors immediately consider as needy. Yet the support provision for this group from government is abysmally low, and such people when back in employment are the very people who can help create economic wealth for society at large.

One consequence of the above transition and funding arrangements is that our former project manager, Isabella Kerr, is herself one of our jobseekers. We are very sad to see her go and thank her for all the tremendous work she has done for us over the 5 years since we started Careers Springboard West Berkshire. We give Isabella all our best wishes for the future.

The professional networking site LinkedIn has grown in popularity. In early 2009 less than a third of our jobseekers actively used it. Today over 90% are members and regard it as an important job search tool.

## Spring 2011 Programme

Our Spring programme is now underway. It features the usual mix of job seeking topics, but with some new speakers giving fresh insights into traditional topics.

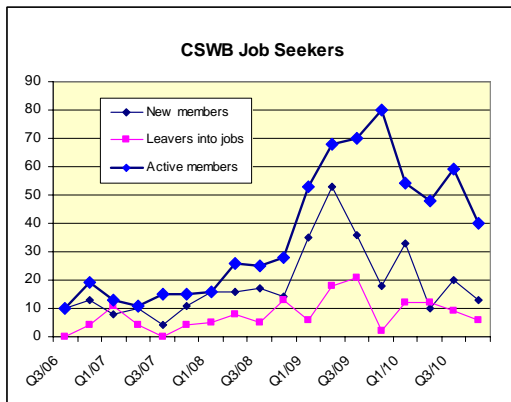


## Sushi Sessions

First introduced in 2010 are these extra sessions at the end of the normal Tuesday workshops. Based on job seeker's requests we explore a particular topic in more depth. In 2010 we ran sessions on LinkedIn, competency-based CVs, starting your own business and marketing yourself using the internet.

## Steady as She Goes

Although not quite as busy as 2009, 2010 was a year with a steady number of new members seeking help in their job seeking. While the first part of the year was encouraging in terms of the number gaining jobs, this had slowed down by year end (see graph).



Although the peak of redundancies seems to have passed, 2011 has started with a steady flow of new joiners, and we are seeing the first casualties of the public sector cuts in West Berkshire.

"From February to August this year [2010] I found the job market very slow. By late August the market suddenly became very busy and a lot of suitable roles appeared". (One job seeker's perspective)

The profile of job seekers is broadly the same with the average age constant at 49. The only significant difference we have noted over the last year is the percentage of referrals from Jobcentre Plus, which has declined from 45% to 36%. Friends and family are the second most significant way in which job seekers find out about us.

Getting short-term contracts continues as a significant route back into full-time employment. Job seekers have also taken advantage of support available for training while they look for a new job (see below)

"Ironically I worked for 20+ years as an IT project manager prior to my last post, but have found that for some posts experience doesn't count for much, whereas a qualification does. Incidentally I've also found that for even non-project management positions PRINCE2 has become a prerequisite."  
(Job seeker who took a PRINCE2 course)

## New Volunteers

During the last year we have welcomed on board four new volunteers. They were:

- Mike Aitken – Mike runs his own company offering training courses for sales people, and especially the use of Linked In, a topic on which he will speak at our meetings
- John Refaussé – a former HR director John is one of our speakers as well as helping our jobseekers develop their confidence in self-marketing (see Volunteer Profile on page 3)
- Angela Rowe – as an experienced adult guidance advisor, Angela will be offering our jobseekers 1-on-1 support to help with career planning, CV preparation, motivation and interview practice
- Linda Sutcliffe – Linda runs Best Practice HR Ltd, a local recruitment company; for our jobseekers, she brings her experience of competency-based interviewing, selection and assessment to the other side of employer's table.

## Job Seeker Profile: Clifton Malcolm



After 19 years working in the telecoms industry, Clifton was made redundant at the height of the recession in March 2009. He has extensive experience in managing complex IT projects and is an accredited PRINCE2 practitioner. PRINCE2

is a project management methodology initially developed for the public sector but now widely used in all sectors.

After spending six months without success Clifton found out about Careers Springboard through an advert in the Newbury Weekly News and joined us in late 2009. Although the going was still tough he found the camaraderie at our meetings helpful and he always went away with some new ideas to try. He made full use of all the methods we teach – advertising, agencies, networking and direct approaches. In the end he found his job through an online job board.

After he had succeeded, he, like many other successful job seekers, came back to one of our meetings to share his experiences with those still job hunting. His advice to job seekers included:

- Be proactive, don't just register with job boards or send in applications - phone to find more and follow-up.
- Tailor your CV for every application so that it meshes with the employer's requirements (you are not lying, just putting your matching strengths first).
- Rehearse and practice your "tell me about yourself" – you will get asked this a lot at interviews and informally.
- Before an interview find out the competences needed and develop 10 achievement stories to match (he used the STAR approach - situation, task, action, results).
- Put the interviewer at ease; he/she may not have had as much practice as you!

During his time with us, Clifton took advantage of 1-on-1 help with two of our volunteers. As well as general coaching what he found useful was role playing the interview that got his eventual job, as a project manager at Nationwide Building Society in Swindon. Today, he is involved in a major IT programme within the company.

Altogether Clifton was out of work for nearly 18 months. During this time he had a number of interviews without landing the job. Although this can be a very disheartening process he persevered: "I used this time to continue my personal development. I took several courses to keep my skills up to date. Above all, my advice to job seekers is to remain positive - every 'no' is one step closer to your 'yes'".

About his time with Careers Springboard what Clifton most valued was the support and expert guidance from the volunteer staff and being able to share experiences with other professionals in the same boat.

"I liked the 'menu' of services allowing the individual to tailor to own needs, without pressure to attend every week. The group discussions and networking opportunities are especially useful. A fine service and many thanks to the volunteers."

(Feedback from a former job seeker)

## Feature: Direct Approaches

When a jobseeker replies to an advert he or she these days is often competing with more than 100 other applicants. So one way in which they can increase the odds in their favour is to make direct approaches to employers. In the last year or so this has been addressed in a session on 'the hidden market' alongside networking, but we believe these methods are so important that we have now split them (as they were from 2006-8) into two separate sessions.

One way of looking at direct approaches is to consider it as 'reverse headhunting'. Instead of scouring the market for a person who fits the needs of an organisation, a direct approach requires scouring the market for organisations that fit the needs of the individual. It is no

accident that one of the two speakers on this session is himself a head-hunter!

Here are the key steps in making a direct approach:

- Articulate your ideal job – type of employers, skills used, location etc.
- Identify potential targets – this involves quite a lot of research and can be time-consuming
- Prioritise them – you don't want to practice on your top targets first!
- So a SWOT analysis on yourself (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) – be realistic
- For each company, identify what value-added you can bring – what problems or opportunities can you help them with
- Identify named individuals to contact
- Develop your 'spiel' – this is the trickiest part; you have to have a marketing 'hook' that will engage and interest them
- Now start making contact – this is where you start on lower priority contacts first until you gain confidence and see what works for you.

We suggest that direct approaches and networking work well together. Rather than make a 'cold call' to a company, it's much better if you can find someone in your network who can give you an introduction. That's the way that Heena landed her new job!

#### Here's how one jobseeker did it

"I obtained the role - a 12 month contract working for a telecoms company - through an ex-colleague whose sister knew of a company looking for specialist HR skills. I approached them directly and was offered the job after 2 interviews which meant I beat the agency to their door."

#### Four Ways of Getting a Job

To put the direct approach in context, we list it as one of the four routes **A-D of getting a job**:

**Adverts:** responding to job adverts, either in the professional press or more typically these days on internet job boards

**Bureaus (agencies):** focussing on those that specialise in your specific market sector

**Contacts:** networking with colleagues and friends to get help and pointers

**Direct:** the direct approach just described.

The first two methods are **jobs looking for people**. Someone has spent considerable effort developing job specifications, so with 100+ responses they will want someone who "ticks all the boxes".

The second two methods are "people looking for jobs". Quite often, there are no formal job vacancies, but good identification of an organisation's challenges, followed by marketing your capabilities to address them can create openings that otherwise don't exist.

#### The power of networking

"I am delighted to let you know that I have got a job at last. I got the job through networking. Essentially I contacted a Venture Capitalist (VC) in Reading and asked for a meeting and used the name of someone I know to help get me the appointment (with their knowledge). I did quite a bit of networking in my search and I was largely targeting people who would be connected to the VC industry as I ideally wanted a job working for a VC-backed SME.

With the particular job I got I think I was the only candidate. This demonstrates the power of networking."

(A CSWB jobseeker following our suggested approach)

For many job seekers, options A and B are the most comfortable, whereas C and D require a more pro-active and assertive approach. When we did a straw poll of attendees at one of our sessions, we found that the time spent on methods C&D was only half that spent on methods A&B, even though over half of our members get jobs through C&D. It just shows how uncomfortable C&D is for many of us. However, it does pay dividends. Ask those of our former successful jobseekers and volunteers who have got jobs that way. And the key point is that instead of competing with 100s of other, often you are the only one!

## Test your knowledge

1. In a recent survey, two of the following local towns came 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> as the best two locations in the country to find a job. Which are the two?

*Basingstoke, Bracknell, Newbury, Oxford, Reading, Swindon, Wokingham.*

2. At the end of 2010 which of the following countries had the lowest unemployment rate in Europe?

*Austria, Denmark, Germany, Holland, UK*

3. On average how many times is a person likely to be redundant in their career?

Answers at the bottom of the next page

## Volunteer Profile: John Refaussé

Although it is some time ago now, my conventional career was in Human Resources management and developed through a variety of organisations with different cultures and traditions including shipbuilding and engineering, newspaper production, brewing and retailing, and drinks manufacturing and sales. I now recognise that the common theme running through each of these situations was change, and my most satisfying experiences as an HR Director have been in planning and leading major change programmes.



I was also fortunate to have the opportunity to broaden my work experiences in Europe and North America, particularly when I had responsibility for senior executive development in a large international FTSE company. During this time I was a member of the Corporate Advisory Council of Babson College in Boston, Massachusetts, widely regarded as N America's most innovative small business school.

My first major career watershed was when I left corporate life in the mid-1990s to set up my own consulting business in organisation development. I subsequently acquired a career management company in Wisconsin, in the American mid-west, which had developed

innovative technology-based approaches to personal development and the design of corporate universities. This seemed a good initial step to world domination, but issues around culture, business relationships and US banks eventually made the challenge too difficult, and I settled instead for a quieter life in career management in the UK.

This gave me the opportunity to work again in change situations in both the public and private sectors, although this time with a focus on outplacement and career transition. Around this time I co-authored 'Managing Career Dilemmas' published by the Financial Times. It has not yet become a best seller!

## Radical Career Shift

Then came another radical career shift when about three years ago my wife and I decided to base ourselves in France, and concentrate on a project renovating our farmhouse in the Charente. This was a good experience, and I developed some interesting new skills, but life in rural France can sometimes be a little too relaxing..... and wine tasting can only take you so far! (And yes, French bureaucracy is stifling, and they do have the best healthcare system in the world!)

So we came back to the UK in late 2009 to take stock, and found a new base in West Berkshire. My wife has a senior role in the not-for-profit sector, but I was less enthusiastic about returning to work in the commercial world, even though I still enjoyed helping people to resolve career challenges. So I have developed a sort of portfolio career, similar to those I have helped others to build in the past. Most portfolio careers evolve over a period of time, and involve a combination of paid and unpaid activities usually combining old and new skills and experiences.

## From our session 'Your other choices'

There are many types of 'work' both paid and unpaid, you may combine these into a "portfolio" that make up a whole.

Part of the portfolio of another one of our volunteers, Bob, is being a good grandparent!!

## Volunteering for Careers Springboard

Careers Springboard is a good fit for my portfolio career because, through a volunteering role, it provides an opportunity to make a positive contribution to the local community by utilising my previous experience, and at the same time is part of rebuilding my network after 2 years out of the country.

I guess my particular strengths around career coaching are in personal analysis, self-marketing techniques, presentation skills, career transition planning including portfolio programmes, and executive coaching and mentoring.

I believe I can be particularly helpful in enabling job seekers to review their job search activities and get back 'on track' to ensure best fit between their skills, aspirations and capabilities and the needs of target employers.

I enjoy helping people to overcome challenges and move on, and in the process understand more about themselves and the opportunities available to them. In my experience, the most successful job seekers are very honest about their capabilities, set themselves realistic targets, and understand the essential difference between working hard and working effectively.

## A Fond Farewell....

During the five years of our existence, one person has been a constant source of help and inspiration. That is Isabella Kerr, the project manager for the five Thames Valley Job Clubs. However, as was noted in the Chairman's notes, Isabella's employer, the Branshaw Foundation, is winding down its operations as its funding diminishes. As a result, Isabella is herself now in the situation of our main stakeholders – our job seekers.



As well as providing much of the essential know-how for setting up and running a job club, Isabella provided us with much day-to-day practical help. Whether it was the type of

insurance that we needed, making funding applications or promoting our capabilities to Jobcentre Plus, Isabella, through her extensive network, knows just where to tap into for maximum benefit.

She was instrumental in getting the five job clubs the Thames Valley Executive Job Network to work more closely together. She set up training sessions for volunteers and networking meetings for job clubs to share experiences and to take on central roles on behalf of all five clubs in the network. The result of her efforts will live on in The Foundation For Jobseekers Ltd (see page 1).

Finally, Isabella, though living in Buckinghamshire, was often present at our meetings, either speaking or giving 1-on-1 advice to our jobseekers.

All round, her contribution to our success will be sorely missed. It is now up to our committee and volunteers to ensure that the legacy of her achievements lives on, giving professional jobseekers the help they need.

We wish Isabella every speed in finding her next job and our very best wishes for the future.

**One of our pieces of advice to jobseekers:  
Your CV is a sales document, not a  
technical specification.**

## Answers to 'Test Your Knowledge'

1. Reading and Bracknell tied for 1<sup>st</sup> place. Oxford was 5<sup>th</sup> and Swindon 9<sup>th</sup>. Other places in the top 10 included Cambridge, London & Milton Keynes but none of the other local towns listed.
2. Holland ousted Austria from the top spot with an unemployment rate of 4.4% (vs. 4.8%). The rates for Denmark, Germany and the UK were 8.0%, 6.7% and 7.9% respectively.
3. Based on employment statistics - 2.7 times.

We welcome feedback, comments, contributions. Please send them to:

[david@careerswestberks.org.uk](mailto:david@careerswestberks.org.uk)

Thank you for your support.