

Adjust the Balance Social Footprints Symposium

'Improve CSR or miss out, businesses warned'

West Midlands businesses must adopt a more socially-responsible outlook or risk missing out as consumers become more discerning about the products they buy, they were warned at a major conference in Birmingham this week.

The warning came from speakers at the Social Footprints Symposium at the International Convention Centre on Monday, December 11, attended by over 500 people. The event was organised by the Adjust the Balance Development Partnership, part of the Equal Programme, which is funded by the Learning and Skills Council's regional European Social Fund.

The highlight of the day was a debate on corporate social responsibility (CSR) and work-life balance, chaired by John Humphries, host of Radio 4's Today programme and Mastermind.

Speaking in the debate, BBC Radio 4 presenter Quentin Cooper, said: "Although you can't make businesses take a socially-responsible attitude, it is reaching the stage where, just as individuals will be judged for their actions by their family, friends and peers, so will businesses be judged by their customers and suppliers as people are becoming more choosy.

"Businesses need not be altruistic about it – you can do things that have a positive effect on society because it makes good business sense to do so."

The all-day event was based around a series of workshops aimed at highlighting the need for businesses to improve their social responsibility, both towards their employees and to society generally.

The debating panellists, who answered questions from the audience, also included Carole Spiers from the UK Stress Association, June Williams, from Investors in People UK, David Darleston from Business in the Community and Dr Theodore Zeldin from Oxford University.

Stress expert Carole Spiers said CSR was about more than simply looking after the environment, and that taking care of people should remain a top priority too.

She added: "The challenges that this region is facing in areas such as skills and production suggest that businesses need to do more – the bottom line is that people need to be more valued and looked after and allowed to develop in a welcoming and flexible environment."

The LSC's Dave Kennedy, project co-ordinator, added that the event was a huge success: "There was an excellent turnout, the workshops and barge trips went down very well and we have given a lot of people a lot of food for thought.

"In keeping with his reputation, John Humphries did not give our speakers an easy ride but it made for a brilliant, entertaining and worthwhile debate."

This event will be run next year **11th December 2007** so put the date in your diary now!!!!