

Consultant capacity

1. Introduction

The implementation of the workforce plan and staff changes in early 2018 created a Consultant team with (for the first time) identical role descriptions and job titles, but with the flexibility for each to lead aspects of service delivery and development which can vary over time.

My favoured model has always been a smaller number of individual Consultants with higher contracted FTE time, rather than a larger number of post holders where in the past we have had as little as 0.4FTE of their time.

The model is working well, but the current workload means we are at or near capacity. The prospect of further growth means we need to consider how and when we might add further capacity.

2. Current Consultant capacity

We have a team of four Consultants, with contracted hours and member allocation as follows:

- 1.0 FTE (34 members, 2 non-members)
- 0.8 FTE (35 members)
- 0.8 FTE (31 members, 2 non-members)
- 0.5 FTE (25 members, 3 non-members)

We therefore have a total of 3.1 FTE Consultants for 125 members. The working week is 35 hours and after annual leave and our usual Christmas closure we have around 685 Consultant days available.

We also have added a budget for 50 days overtime this year; there has been no uptake to date.

Members are allocated on the basis of geography, previous contact, and how much time they tend to take up.

3. Annual resource requirement

Our recurring annual requirement includes:

- 65-70 Inclusive consultancy or training days. Every member is entitled to one per year. New members are entitled to three in their first year.
- c. 100 paid consultancy days delivered in non-contracted hours. The higher the FTE, the fewer non-contracted days a Consultant has available.
- 6-7 national training events and development days with associated planning, preparation and delivery, totalling around 20 days.
- Around 8-10 days per Consultant for internal meetings, say 32-40 days in total.
- Leadership of and contribution to ECC service development, strategic work, liaison with suppliers and partners etc. Difficult to quantify but can be a considerable amount of time often within short period (eg. re-contracting for the labour market data work).
- Ad hoc member and non-member support, advice and account management (some of this support is also provided by the two office staff in London)

Although not easily quantified the last of these is definitely the largest single use of time. There is no doubt that we are at or near Consultant capacity overall.

4. Known and potential changes to demand

The Colleges Scotland training and rollout is now likely to begin March 2019. Together with additional consultancy and project support this is likely to require 25+ Consultant days over a 12-month period, with a smaller recurring annual demand thereafter.

Our partnership with Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) will almost definitely deliver a four-day training programme in London in 2019, with related preparation time required. Involving more than one Consultant, this project might total 10-12 person days.

We have gained several new FE members in the last year. Some of this has been organic growth where an existing member has recommended us to another college, and some has been supported by ECC being active in contacting colleges in the north west of England. Although we might see no new members in the next year, it is quite possible that we could acquire another three or four FE members. This would represent around 20-25 days during the year including promotion, onboarding, and inclusive and paid consultancy. Subscription income would be around £16-18,000 recurring.

We have had two serious enquiries from private secondary schools in the last two months. Although these have not progressed to membership or consultancy, they indicate that there may well be a growing opportunity in this sector which was not there when we undertook market scanning in 2015/16. We will do further work to explore the opportunity. It is not hard however to imagine gaining perhaps one

member and one non-member client in the next couple of years, which might represent 8 days. With a toehold in this market we could easily see this growing further.

Together these opportunities represent a minimum of 35 days in the next 12 months, and possibly as much as 70+ on top of our recurring inclusive and paid work.

5. Options

Assuming we welcome further growth, we have a number of options to increase capacity.

a) Associate Consultants

Engage a small number of skilled, experienced freelance Consultants contracted by the day.

Pros

- No fixed cost
- Very fluid, allows us to add capacity only when we need it
- Easy to set up; we know several suitable Consultants, including ex-ECC staff

Cons

- We did have a bank of two or three Associates over the last three years but never used them, mainly as we were able to absorb demand within the existing team.
- Possibly some reluctance within the employed Consultant team to let an Associate deliver service to their member or client.
- Requires ongoing communication and training to ensure Associates are up to speed.
- Erodes one of our key member benefits, the designated Consultant.
- We removed the Associates from the resource model as part of the 2017/18 workforce plan.

This option is not recommended.

b) Increase existing FTEs

Pros

- Immediate access to skilled resource.
- Adheres to preferred model of fewer Consultants but higher FTE.
- No investment required in recruitment, equipment or training.
- Ensures members and clients continue to have contact with the Consultants they already know.

- There are some economies of scale in time and travel; only having four Consultants means we only spend four days of time for a team meeting regardless of their individual FTE.

Cons

- There is no real scope to increase existing FTEs. Our 0.5FTE does not want more contracted hours, and the two 0.8FTEs have other work commitments.
- Would constrain the amount of non-contracted time available for paid consultancy work.
- Still leaves us reliant on four individuals; if one became unavailable we would lose 25% of our Consultant resource overnight.

This option is not recommended.

c) Create additional Consultant post

This option assumes an identical job description to the existing Consultants.

A variation could be to create a role specifically focused on a sector, or on winning new business, or one remunerated in a different way such as a retainer or payment by results. However these variations could reduce flexibility within the overall team and would be divisive. Furthermore it is not easy to cleanly separate 'sales' activity from delivery so the transition from one stage to another would be difficult. Members do tend to want the Consultant that has helped them scope a project to deliver the project.

The assessment here therefore focuses on creating an additional Consultant post.

Pros

- Protects us from reliance on just four individuals.
- Depending on location, could be very helpful in reducing travel time to member sites for the team as a whole. Geographical coverage is becoming a challenge (eg. our Glasgow-based Consultant is currently onboarding members in Nottingham and Plymouth).
- Adds the right kind of capacity that we need.
- We could target particular geographic locations and / or experience that we require, such as experience with FE or located in the midlands or South coast.
- Although finding the right candidate is not easy, the role is proven and is attractive, and we have a recruitment model that has worked before.

Cons

- Requires considerable financial investment. A 1.0 FTE costs ECC £64,166 annually including £48,685 salary plus NI and pension costs. A 0.6FTE would cost around £38,500 in total.

- Possibly less flexible from a contractual point of view than other options; once we commit, it becomes difficult although not impossible to delete such a post.
- A leap of faith is needed. We would be wise to put that investment in place before it is absolutely required, given lead times for recruitment.

6. Conclusions and recommendation

We are close to capacity. I am confident that we can absorb the Colleges Scotland and USM work within our current resource, and we could probably also absorb another 3-4 new members, as the ongoing demands of the members who joined this year will probably reduce over time.

If we were to grow by another 10-12 members - which is not inconceivable - we would definitely need significantly more Consultant capacity in place.

The key thing therefore is to identify the trigger point for creating a post, and decide on the preferred FTE.

My recommendations are:

- that the Board considers an agreement in principle for an additional Consultant post, probably at 0.6FTE, to be created should ECC gain three new members or should we secure new business that is likely to require more than 25 days per annum recurring.
- that the Board delegates authority to the Remuneration and Employment Committee to provide approval to recruit should either of those trigger points be met, and in those circumstances to confirm timing and details of the post with me (including desired location, FTE, temporary / permanent etc).

The Executive Committee would be kept fully informed should we appear to be approaching a trigger point.

13 November 2018

Nicholas Johnston
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ECC