

Workforce planning:

A practical guide

Publisher's note

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this publication is accurate at the time of printing. The author, editor and publisher cannot accept any responsibility for any errors or omissions, however caused. No responsibility for loss or damage experienced by any person acting, or refraining from action as a result of the contents of this document can be accepted by the author, editor or publisher.

First published in the United Kingdom by Educational Competencies Consortium in 2010.

This publication may only be reproduced, stored or transmitted, in any form or by any means beyond that permitted by the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 or in the case of reprographic reproduction in accordance with the terms and licences issued by the CLA with prior permission of the publishers.

Enquired concerning reproduction outside these terms should be sent to the publishers at:

ECC Ltd,
3 Gray's Inn Square,
London WC1R 5AH.

© Educational Competencies Consortium Ltd

ISBN 978-0-956-1241-1-1

Educational Competencies Consortium Ltd is a not-for-profit, member-driven organisation in the higher and further education and related sectors. It supplies its members with a unique mix of high quality role design and analysis products and bespoke services to enable them to deliver best practice in people management.

We add value by helping our members develop people and performance in a transparent and objective way.

Developing people, delivering results

Our role design and analysis products (HERA and FEDRA) have been developed by and for the Higher and Further Education sectors and are used successfully in nearly 130 organisations. An independent review found HERA had fulfilled its design objectives and achieved high levels of satisfaction amongst managers, staff and trade unions.

Our unique approach builds links between recruitment, reward management, workforce planning and career mapping thus providing an integrated and flexible approach to best practice in people management.

The ECC team provides expert support, with a deeply held belief that our work has a positive impact on the results our members are able to achieve. These are not just HR results, but contribute to the overall success of each member organisation.

Please contact us to talk about how we can help you achieve your objectives:

ECC Ltd
3 Gray's Inn Square
London WC1R 5AH
Tel: 020 7430 8368
Email: contactus@ecc.ac.uk

© ECC 2010

CONTENTS

Introduction.....5

What is workforce planning7

 Why create a workforce plan7

 Why now?7

 Criteria for effective workforce planning.....7

 Words of caution8

Planning Techniques.....9

 Scenario planning9

 Links to other plans and planners9

 Who can help and who to involve.....11

Approaches to workforce planning13

Stages of workforce planning15

 Gather and use data16

 Putting the plan together.....20

 Plan contents.....21

Implementation.....24

 Ownership.....24

 Managing implementation.....24

 Monitoring implementation25

 Evaluation26

Relationship with HR Policies, procedures and enablers27

 HR policies and processes.....27

References31

INTRODUCTION

This document has been written to support the development of a workforce plan. As this task may be new to many working in higher and further education organisations, both theory and the experiences of other organisations that have created such plans to provide assistance have provided source material.

The guide aims to be practical so it contains checklists and tips as well as discussing the topic. References to other sources of information are also given, in case further explanations of the ideas proposed below are needed.

The starting point is a definition of a workforce plan and its purpose. The following definition has been used here:

The purpose of workforce planning is to ensure that the organisation has an adequate supply of people with the skills, knowledge and experience required to achieve its strategic objectives efficiently and effectively, both in the short and long term.

This means that a workforce plan cannot exist in isolation, nor should it. The purpose of planning is to identify the workforce requirements in relation to strategic objectives. This should mean that the workforce plan's content will facilitate their achievement and it is grounded in the overall organisational context.

Reliable and accurate information drawn from an accurate and contemporary assessment of the organisation and its environment will ensure the plan's contents are comprehensive and realistic.

The implementation of the plan should also be managed so the use of project management techniques may be helpful, as they will ensure that actions are taken in the right sequence and milestones are met. Progress should also be monitored at regular intervals, to ensure that day-to-day decisions are in line with the plan's overall intent. Making sure the plan is used in this way will help to achieve its overall objectives.

The plan will only be used if it is seen as being useful and relevant by key individuals. How and when they are to be involved should be considered when deciding how the workforce plan will be developed. Who to involve, and at which stage, will depend on the nature of each organisation. Senior and middle managers will each have a distinct contribution to make at various stages. The involvement of trade union representatives will demonstrate the organisation's commitment to on-going partnership working. Staff's views can be gathered through the use of staff surveys, focus groups and other media. Other professionals can make a legitimate and invaluable contribution. These people include financial experts, strategic planners, equality and diversity officers as well as human resource management and development practitioners.

Communicating the plan's contents is essential if it is to be used in routine decision making. The evaluation of the effectiveness of the plan should be reviewed as part of the organisation's strategic planning cycle, and to consolidate learning.

The final section describes how the other core HR processes compliment the workforce plan. The two should co-join as the HR policies and procedures are the levers and enablers that will support the plan's implementation and make sure actions are in line with the organisation's intent.

Workforce planning

Those involved in the production of the workforce plan may benefit from some training to help them understand the process and make full and effective contribution. This guide may also help to give a broader understand the process and its overall context.

ECC's consultants can provide practical support and guidance with all stages of a plan's development. In particular, they can help with the use of role analysis to contribute to the understanding of the current workforce's make-up, the design of new roles and specification of competencies required for effective performance. ECC's partner, Capita Survey and Research Unit, provides pay and labour market data to help with the analysis of the relevant labour markets. Details of these and information about the other services provided to ECC's members can be found on its web site – www.ecc.ac.uk – or via email to contactus@ecc.ac.uk.

WHAT IS WORKFORCE PLANNING

Workforce planning is the process used to ensure that the people with the skills, knowledge and experiences needed to deliver an organisation's long and short-term objectives are available, when and where they are needed.

The workforce plan should describe the roles that those people will play, the ways in which those roles will interact and the competencies required for effective performance. It should also set out the forms of employment required, for example by stating whether full and part-time, permanent and temporary contracts will be required, as well as indicate the numbers of employees likely to be required for each role.

Why create a workforce plan

A workforce plan provides the glue needed for other plans to be put into action. Typically, in higher and further education organisations, strategic plans focus on academic matters, finance, buildings and other physical resources. The most important resource – the people needed to deliver these plans – is often taken as read.

Making the link between these plans and describing the workforce requirements will strengthen organisational practice and increase an organisation's chances of achieving its long and short-term objectives.

Why now?

In the current climate, a number of drivers are combining and the need to address these through more robust planning and workforce planning in particular will be inescapable. These drivers include:

- The financial imperative to make best use of the existing workforce
- The need to reduce cost and achieve productivity gains
- Pressure to deliver better services to students who, increasingly, are becoming demanding paying customers
- The need to secure multiple sources of income and deliver quality services in return
- The importance of continuing the significant progress made in the last decade to improve the people management practices

The use of workforce planning to underpin strategic and operational planning will make a vital contribution to ensuring the organisation's sustainability.

Criteria for effective workforce planning

There is little point in spending time and money on the creation of a plan that is not fit for purpose. Similarly, the ways in which the planning process are carried out can be wasteful, even if the final plan of is good quality.

The criteria for an effective workforce planning process include:

- Developing a sense of collective ownership of the strategic importance of people issues
- Agreeing workforce strategies that directly link to the strategic objectives

Workforce planning

- Focusing on the major issues and identifying how to convert the workforce challenges into action,
- Using practical and cost-effective methods for the plan's development
- Linking long term planning to day to day activities
- Ensuring the right people are involved, but only at the required time and in the most effective way

These criteria can be used for monitoring, evaluating and refining the planning process.

Words of caution

Planning can become an end in itself. One of universities and colleges' major strengths is their use of collaborative approaches. These help to ensure buy-in and input from others helps to make sure the plan is comprehensive. However, these approaches can take a long time and do not necessarily achieve significant improvements to the quality of the final document.

The planning process can also contain other pitfalls, which will need to be avoided. These include:

- Seeing planning as a panacea: other action may be required to deliver the strategic objectives
- Over-analysis can lead to paralysis: the wish to find out what other organisations are doing and the desire to achieve perfection can mean that the sight of the main task is lost
- Aiming to cover the whole organisation comprehensively rather than focusing on the matters that relate directly to the achievement of the strategic plan
- Trying to do everything at once rather than prioritising actions and initiatives

Implementation can be made easier if the workload is shared, communication is effective and the HR department is seen as the plan's facilitator, not its owner.

PLANNING TECHNIQUES

Planning is easiest in times of stability or, at least, when it is possible to forecast the future with some degree of accuracy. However, effective planning can be more important at times of change as it can provide some certainty and identify areas where research will answer questions and fill gaps in knowledge. The higher and further education sectors face a period of turbulence because of the cuts to financial resources and a lack of certainty regarding the impact changes to government policy will have. Similarly, other factors in the environment will have various and different effects and their combination will affect each organisation uniquely.

Scenario planning

Scenario planning is often used to support of the development of overall strategic plans as it provides a rigorous approach to assessing future conditions when that future is difficult to predict. The approach can also be used for workforce planning. It is particularly valuable in turbulent conditions when preserving the status quo or incremental change will not suffice. It offers a systematic and sophisticated process, which engages key players by requiring them to “live” in the future world and explore their organisation’s alternative futures thus helping them to identify the quantum leaps needed to get there.

Its strength is that it facilitates the prediction of more than one version of the future, thus taking account of the changes that will most probably occur between then and now. It results in the development of a number of hypotheses specifically designed to highlight the risks and opportunities involved in specific strategic issues. The robustness of this analysis can be used to inform the creation of the organisation’s plans and provide contingencies, which will take account of subsequent changes in its environment and unforeseen developments.

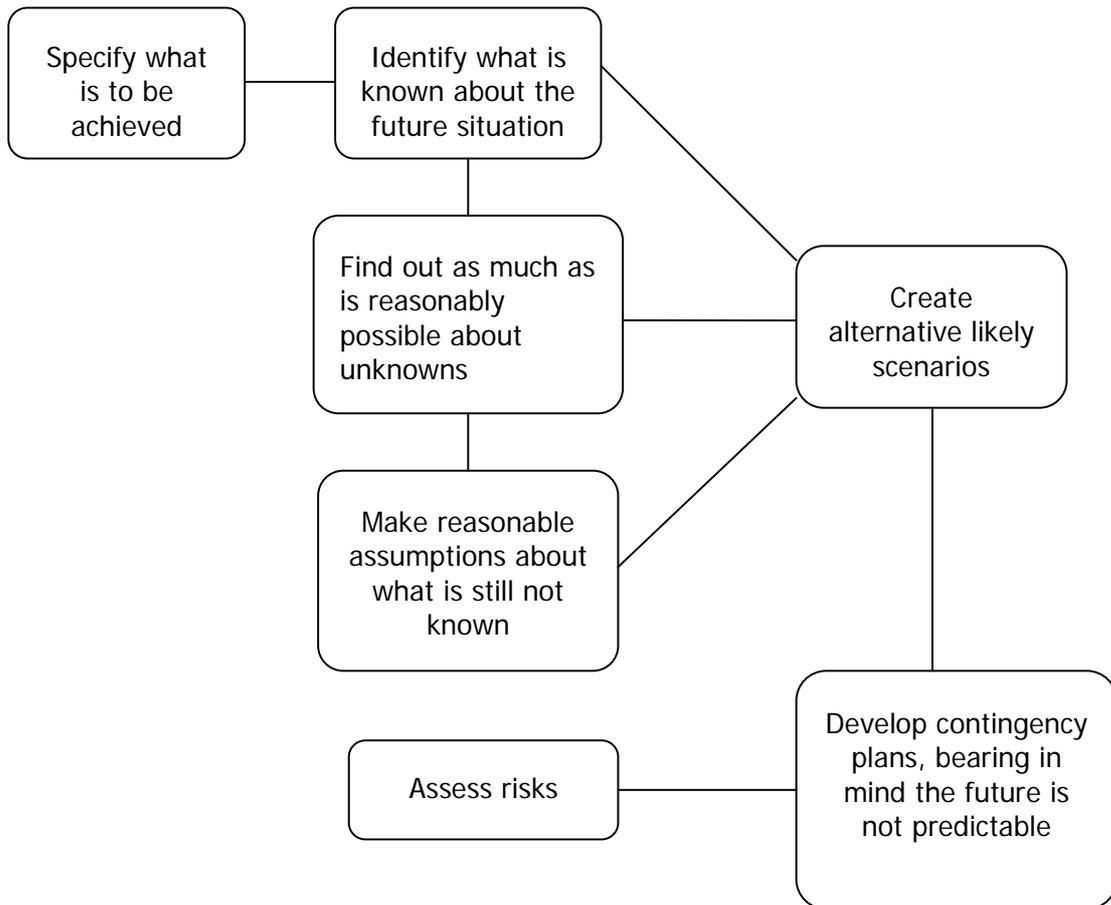
Sayers (2010) has written a guide to scenario planning in Higher Education for the Leadership Foundation. She says, “Scenario planning arose in part due to a perceived lack regarding predictive reasoning – that predictions are often wrong. In particular they often fail when they are most needed, namely as major changes occur.” This statement can also be applied to workforce planning.

Thus, the accuracy of forecasts can be improved by engaging in a more rigorous process that is designed to involve key people and those with critical information. It can also improve commitment to making the changes needed to increase the chances of the preferred future happening.

Bechet (2008) also describes how this and other approaches can be used to help identify staffing requirements where there is considerable uncertainty.

The following diagram highlights the areas that need to be considered to reduce uncertainty and inform the planning process. The starting point is to specify what the plan is to achieve, within the context of the organisation’s overall strategic plan.

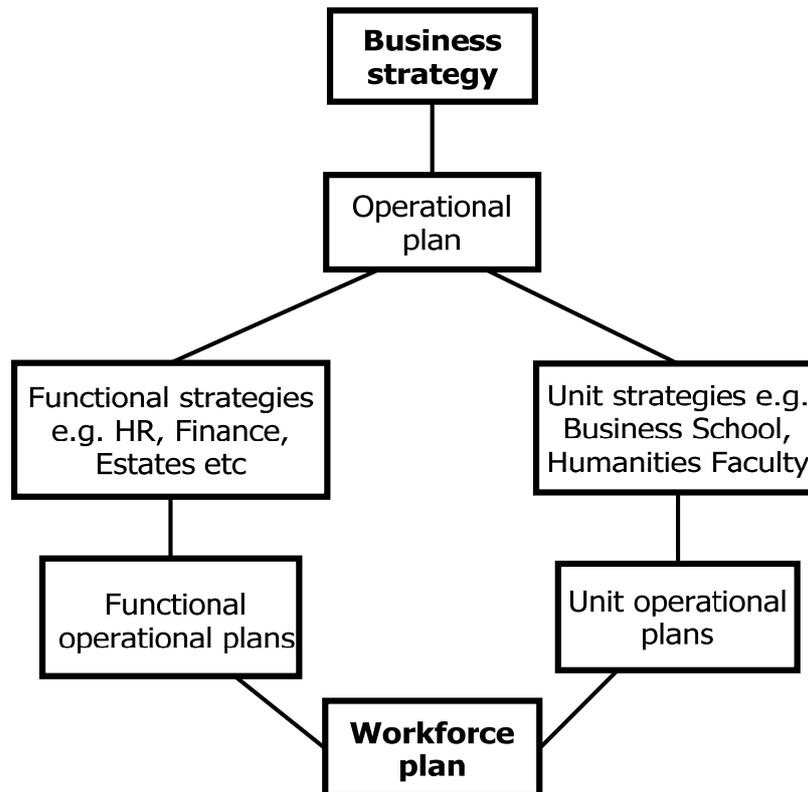
Workforce planning



Links to other plans and planners

An organisation's business strategy usually has a range of organisational or functional plans to facilitate its realisation. These tend to include academic and financial plans, HR and communication strategies, and capital programmes. The following diagram shows the relationship between plans and strategies, and how the workforce plan can underpin them all:

Workforce planning



Often, in practice, these plans are isolated from each other. Planning can be short term and in response to events, rather than forward looking and proactive. The strengths of workforce planning can be found in its ability to focus holistically on the long term, on the detail of the here and now, and to draw together the people implications of the various strategic and operational plans.

The process encourages managers at different levels to consider the implications of decisions in advance by highlighting and drawing together related people management and demographic issues from across the whole organisation.

HR professionals' key role in the process is to work with managers to help them understand the implications of these issues and to pull together a series of related and proactive plans designed to meet the operational targets and strategic objectives.

Who can help and who to involve

Involving the right people in the development and enactment of the plan is essential if they are to have ownership of it. Making sure they are able to contribute will increase the chances of them using the plan to guide their everyday actions and inform their decisions. They are also more likely to communicate the contents of the plan and its intent to others and consider workforce needs when planning other developments and areas of work.

Workforce planning

Who are the key people? This will depend on the stage of the plan's development and its focus. For example, middle managers and professional advisors will be involved at a functional level while senior managers, specialists and heads of functional units will be involved in drawing together the functional plans into the organisation's strategic context.

The following pointers will aid their identification:

- People who understand the situation and issues, and the organisation's strategic context and its functional realities
- People who have a vested interest in success of the plan
- People who can make things happen or block progress
- Professional planners in central and operational departments and units

Finding appropriate ways to engage these people in the right way and at the right time will be important. Frequently, people are involved through their membership of committees but this is not the only, nor necessarily the most effective, way of achieving their participation. Meetings are good for debate and the exchange of information and views but they need to be managed and organised. There are other very effective ways of obtaining opinions such as the use of discussion documents, email debates, questionnaires and one to one discussions.

However, if there is a real need to bring people together in the same place at the same time, the group set up to develop a workforce plan should have a clear remit and time limited tasks. It may be a work group or steering group but without this clarity of purpose, the planning process could lose its focus and the group take on a life of its own.

Assigning responsibility to one person may be a productive way of progressing the development of the workforce plan. This person would be responsible for consulting with key individuals and acting as the project manager for the plan's implementation.

The steering group could provide support to this person by checking that the plan is comprehensive and creating the links with other plans. The steering group could also be given the responsibility for making key decisions regarding the plan's content as well as monitoring its progress.

APPROACHES TO WORKFORCE PLANNING

There is no one way to create a workforce plan. The examples given below may act as guides and help with the development of an approach suitable for an individual organisation. Ideally, the approach, whatever its final form, should be based on the principles of:

- Relevance
- Practical
- Evidence-based
- Integrated

Most importantly, the plan should be owned by the organisation and its key stakeholders and widely communicated.

PUBLIC SECTOR

The NHS and local government have devised an approach to support the creation of workforce plans, particularly for use in services shared locally across the two bodies. It contains the following six steps:

1. Define what is to be achieved
2. Identify future needs outlined in the strategic plan
3. Define the workforce required to deliver the plan
4. Understand the workforce availability
5. Develop and implement an action plan
6. Monitor progress, review success and evaluate the plan

Further details of this can be found on the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) web site.

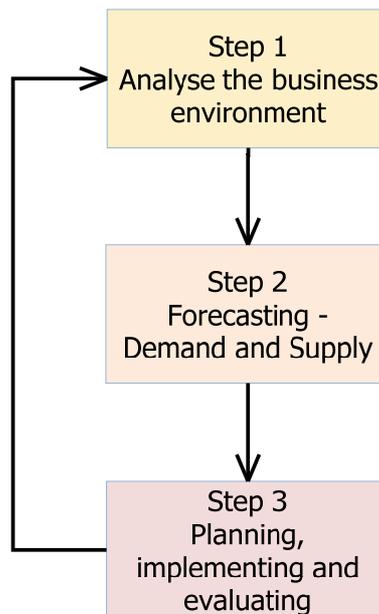
CIPD

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development identifies four stages:

Workforce planning

HIGHER EDUCATION

The University of Adelaide has published its approach to staff planning on its website. Its toolkit has the following three steps:



STAGES OF WORKFORCE PLANNING

The following section draws on the examples referred to above and those described in the texts referenced below. These have helped to identify the main stages of workforce planning described below. This shows the flow from the initial analysis of the organisation's strategic context to the evaluation of the workforce plan's success.

One major task is the collection of the information needed to form the basis of the development of the workforce plan. This will outline the organisation's context and its strategic plan as well as describe the current make-up of the workforce and give information about its relevant labour markets.

The plan's content and its format should be considered early along with the preparatory action needed to ensure effective implementation; including making sure key individuals are fully committed to the process. The progress of its implementation will need to be monitored and action taken to adjust it in the light of changing circumstances.

ANALYSE THE ORGANISATION'S STRATEGY

The workforce plan should set out:

- What the plan is intended to achieve
- Why the plan is needed and how it will link with the organisation's strategic and operational plans and the HR strategy
- The scope of the plan: whether it will cover the whole organisation, focus on individual units or address particular issues
- The issues to be addressed
- Who will own the plan: the planning process must be regarded as important if the outcome is to have any credibility

The University of Adelaide's toolkit suggests that the starting point is to analyse and understand the implications of the strategic plan for the HR function and workforce, and provide the answer to the following questions:

- What is the strategic direction of the organisation?
- What are the implications for each faculty and division?
- What key projects, research activities and programmes are being undertaken?
- Which areas of its operation have most priority and are in need of most attention?
- What are the budget implications?
- What are the implications for staffing capabilities and numbers?
- What competencies does the university need to succeed now and in the future?

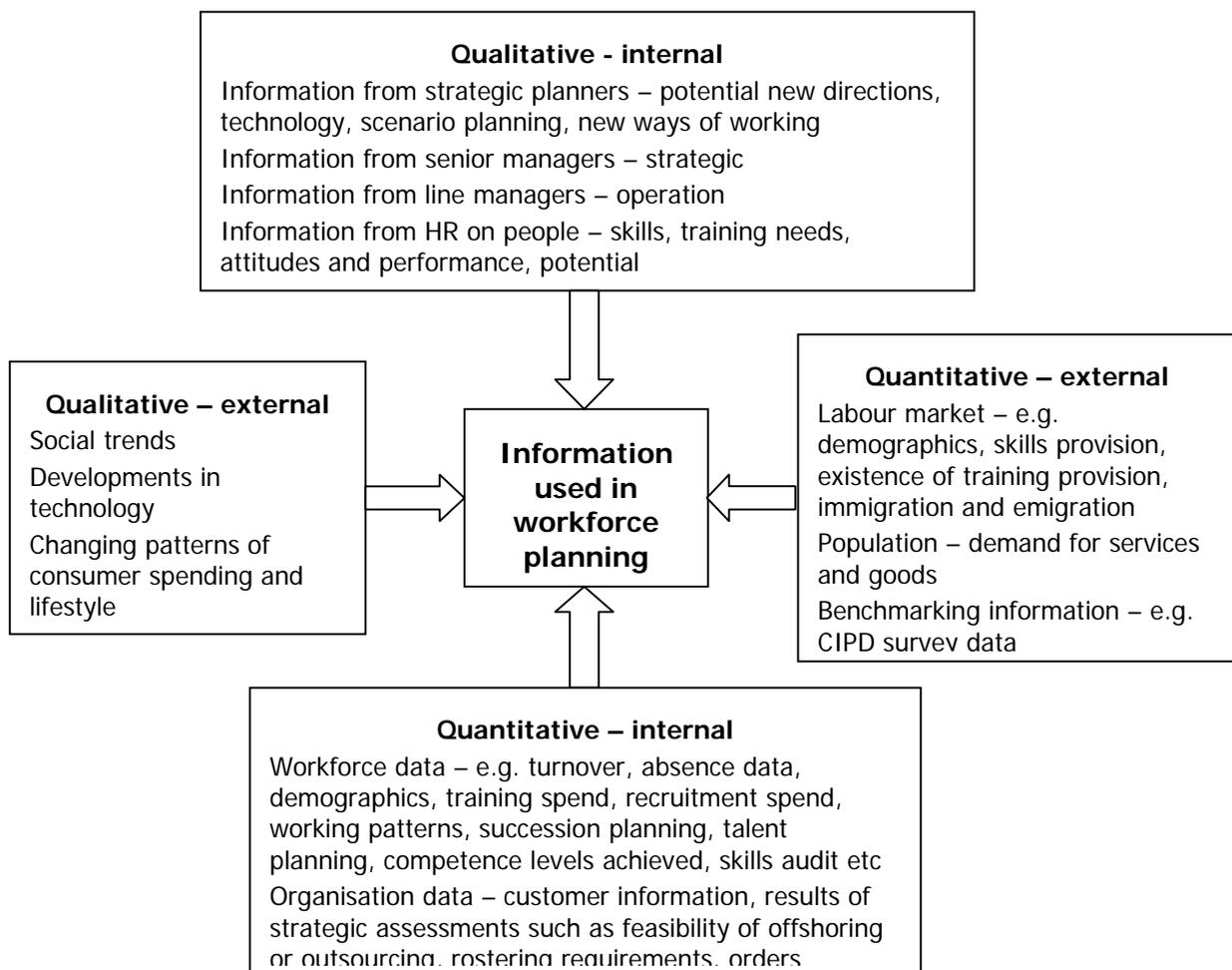
The steering group could be asked to help with the assessment of risk and highlight key issues. The University of Adelaide suggests the use of an instrument, such as the grid shown below, to identify the most important. This approach is often used in support of strategic planning but it can be used at this level as well.

Workforce planning

Key issues	Potential impact	Risk Negligible Low Medium High	Likelihood of occurring Low Medium High
e.g. increase student satisfaction			
e.g. increase productivity levels			
e.g. increase the services to and income from employers			
e.g. reduce operational costs			

Gather and use data

The CIPD's guide contains a diagram, which describes and categories information, which may be useful in developing a workforce plan:



KNOWING THE ORGANISATION

Various documents will already exist within the organisation and their examination will provide essential information. These might include:

- The strategic and enabling plans
- Operating plans for the faculties and divisions
- Business plans
- Budgets
- Staff survey results
- Student survey information
- Project plans

Various external forces will influence the organisation's ability to deliver its strategic plans and its workforce needs. These should be explored and the risks they pose identified. They could include government initiatives and policies (e.g. changes to the retirement age), major changes facing the organisation (e.g. the cancellation of a major research contract) and other key constraints and enablers.

Example of a key issue:

A university has decided, amongst other things, to improve the National Student Survey results for assessment and feedback, across the university and for each school, year on year.

Each school was asked to hold a workshop to which a representative sample of staff involved in all aspects of student assessment and feedback were invited. The facilitated workshops had two tasks.

The first was to map the assessment and feedback process in its entirety, from inception to the final stage of the appeals procedure.

The participants were then asked to vision what would be happening if the assessment feedback process achieved an 80% satisfaction rating from students in five years time. Senior managers, whose remits included assessment and feedback, were also invited to attend a similar workshop.

The results of the workshops were collated by the facilitators and analysed. This resulted in a comprehensive (and complex) map of the process and the starting point from which to develop a more satisfactory approach to student assessment and feedback.

A plan was developed to bring about the required changes to deliver the new approach. The processes and associated activities were used to design the roles needed and to specify the knowledge, skills and experience required. The plan also outlined the action that would be taken to build new structures, move staff from their current roles into the new ones and help them assume their new responsibilities. This would include developing new skills and learning different ways of working.

ASSESSING THE CURRENT WORKFORCE

The CIPD model referred to above, along with the other approaches described, suggest that quantitative data about the workforce is a key component. Information gathered for other purposes, particularly HESA and SFC returns and that used for equality reviews, can be used to assess the profile of the current workforce.

The following suggests possible variables that could be used:

- Numbers of staff employed by:
 - The various types of contractual arrangement
 - Grade
 - Occupational groups
 - Organisational unit
- The cost of each of the groups identified above including base pay, allowances and overtime and employers' costs
- HR metrics, for example:
 - Turnover
 - Absenteeism and sickness
 - Training records and skills audit
 - Other indicators affecting performance and productivity

(The DLA-Piper benchmarking information, if used, may also be helpful.)
- Demographic profile:
 - Age
 - Gender
 - Length of service and time in post
 - Ethnicity
 - Disability
 - Other equality strands if robust data is available

The detailed understanding of the workforce's make-up will show patterns and trends (such as bulges in age bands or concentration of issues in certain groups or parts of the organisation). It will also suggest actions that could be included in the workforce plan to address the areas of surplus or weakness identified in relation to the organisation's strategic plans. Examples of these could include the introduction of a phased retirement scheme to create space for the recruitment of younger people, more focused approaches to attendance management and ill-health retirement to reduce cost, or increased training investment in weaker areas of performance.

Information about the following will also be helpful:

- Where employees are recruited from
 - Local employers (public, private and third sector organisations)
 - National employers (public, private and third sector organisations)
 - Other HE or FE employers – local – national – international
 - Study or training
- What attracts employees to the organisation and why they stay

Workforce planning

- Where they go when they leave
 - Information gathered from exit surveys and interviews may indicate why staff leave and where they go
- Staff surveys
 - Answers may differ by variables such as, for example, staff group, level, discipline and age
 - Answers will indicate if any pay and labour market data is needed to provide comparative information and suggest other forms of reward sought by employees

The analysis will increase the understanding of supply and reasons for turnover and can be used to reveal what factors matter most to the existing employees. This could help to avoid unnecessary expenditure, for example on schemes, which have no effect on morale or productivity, or expensive national recruitment campaigns when more local approaches would suffice.

The statistical assessment should sit alongside an audit of the skills. Ways of collecting information about the skills and talent available amongst the workforce can include maintaining up to date CV's. This is a method is widely used for academic staff but can equally be applied to other groups.

The construction of a talent bank using a database containing information about the skills, qualifications, experience, interests and potential of current employees will draw on records of the performance review or appraisal processes and training and CPD records.

Accurate information will be essential at later stages in readiness for the implementation of the plan but this need should be balanced with pragmatism. It may be better to be nearly right than precisely wrong, at this stage. While it is important to be correct, ensuring the data is fully accurate and comprehensive could lead the unwary planner into one of the traps: over-analysis can lead to paralysis.

MAKEUP OF CURRENT ROLES

Gaining a good understanding of the make up the current roles found in the organisation is as important as analysing the makeup of the workforce.

This will allow an assessment of the ways roles have been designed and their comparative contribution to the strategic plan and the various scenarios. This will reveal gaps or overlaps and highlight which roles (and their distinctive skill sets) will be critical for future success and which will need to be modified as well as identifying those no longer required.

LABOUR MARKET DATA

The CIPD model shown above suggests an analysis of the external labour market will be needed. This will provide information about the availability of labour as well as the trends in supply and demand. This insight will help to assess the rates of pay and other benefits provided by comparative employers.

Universities and colleges are active in a range of markets, each of which will present different factors and require actions appropriate to each for the organisation to secure its place as an employer of choice. Therefore, a good understanding of the different markets, as well as the views of recently appointed staff, is needed to enable the organisation to position itself

Workforce planning

appropriately in each. There is a wealth of information but without a structured approach to its collection and analysis and good understanding of what the information is actually saying, there is a danger of gathering excessive amounts of data and losing sight of the real meaning.

Other information about the organisation's context, as suggested by the CIPD diagram above, may also be useful. This might include, for example, forecast information about the likely make up of the student population in the future or an analysis of major competitors.

Putting the plan together

The person responsible for the creation of the plan will have collected and analysed the information. The results of the analysis should be combined with the analysis of the strategic issues to identify priorities and issues that will need to be addressed in the plan.

If a steering group has been set up, it is probable that this group will be responsible for identifying the key issues, weighing up the alternative ways they could be addressed and making decisions regarding the preferred options.

The steering group will also be responsible for making sure the development of the plan is on schedule. The use of project management techniques may be help and they certainly will help to support the implementation of the plan.

WHO TO INVOLVE

Clearly, line and senior managers will play a central role in the formation of the workforce plan. Representatives from this cohort are likely to be members of the steering group. They will also have been asked to provide information and may be consulted on options.

Working in partnership with the trade unions will bring many benefits. Union representatives can provide different perspectives and highlight factors that might not otherwise be obvious. They can also keep their members informed, address their questions and allay anxieties.

Getting them signed up to the implications of the plan may help to avoid misunderstandings and smooth implementation later on. This may be through their involvement in the steering group or through other consultative processes.

Engaging members of staff in the early stages of the development of the workforce plan as well as their representatives will also enrich the picture and help the analysis of the current situation. As well as highlighting weaknesses in current practice, asking staff for their views can identify those aspects of current practice that add value but whose importance may not be fully appreciated. Preserving these is as important as taking action to address weaknesses.

Staff also have good ideas about ways in which improvements can be made. Their views can be gathered in a number of ways including:

- Staff surveys
- Snap shot surveys on particular issues
- Conferences
- Working lunches
- Workplace and team meetings
- Suggestion schemes
- Talking to people and listening to their descriptions of their everyday work

Plan contents

The norms of the organisation will influence the style of the plan which should be in an acceptable and easily accessible form. Its contents should be as precise as possible and should:

Specify:

- The workforce objectives to be achieved
- Define the parameters of the plan, its focus (organisational wide or specific) and issues to be addressed
- Any targets to be attained
- What success will look like
- Ways in which progress will be assessed and measured

Describe:

- The makeup of the current workforce
- Strengths, weaknesses, excesses and deficits in the current workforce which relate to the objectives to be achieved
- Labour market conditions that will have an impact

Indicate strategic priorities:

- Which aspects of the strategic plan take priority
- Who will make these decisions and how

The aspects of the strategic plan should be agreed in accordance with their comparative importance and the need to make changes quickly.

Identify the future requirements in terms:

- Functions and activities needed to deliver the strategic plan
- Roles required to carry out the functions and actions
- Competencies required to carry out those functions and activities effectively and to the required standard
- Gaps revealed by the analysis of the current workforce profile
- Ways of organising roles and functions to achieve strategic priorities

Indicate coverage:

- The plan should be focused onto the most important strategic issues. This may mean that priority is given to a unit or function for a period. The plan should make it clear how the priorities will be determined
- There should be a clear relationship between the workforce plan and the HR strategy as the latter will describe the ways in which the plan is to be delivered and provide the parameters to guide the actions taken

Workforce planning

Outline what changes are required and how they are to be achieved:

- Specify the changes to organisational structure and roles
- Describe how the workforce demographic profile will be altered (e.g. by positive recruitment campaigns, provision of support to encourage applications from under-represented groups)
- Identify options for employees occupying roles that will be changed significantly, require fewer numbers of occupants or will no longer be needed
- Explain how the competencies, skills, expertise and numbers of employees required to occupy the roles needed for the achievement of the strategic plan will be sourced

Identify likely blocks, obstacles and ways in which they may be addressed

- Identify the enablers which can be deployed to deal with barriers to progress and over-come opposition to change

Sets out how progress is to be monitored and adapted and progress assessed

- The plan will be iterative and will inevitably alter during the course of its life time
- Milestones and indicators of achievement should be agreed at the outset and used as part on on-going monitoring

Example

After the scenario planning workshop, the HR department was asked to work with line managers to identify all the roles currently involved in the assessment and feedback processes mapped during the scenario planning workshops.

A working group was set up to compare the relationship between the current situation and the student assessment and feedback process map and to identify where changes would be needed if the approach developed during the scenario planning workshops was to be delivered.

The working group was asked to highlight strengths and weaknesses in the current process and to identify where changes to role would lead to improvements. The following were some of the areas identified as being in need of action:

- Creation of the role of Course Manager for each major course, to take responsibility for the whole process
- Appointment of an expert in assessment and feedback processes
- Examination and alteration of the administrative and record keeping processes to streamline them, remove duplication and reduce the chance of mistakes
- Identification of examples of existing good practice
- Training for all staff involved in the assessment and feedback process so they would know what the changes to the system would mean to them in practice
- Training academic staff in ways of giving feedback and approaches to assessment, using examples of good practice and input from the expert
- Inclusion of criteria relating to approaches and attitude to student assessment and feedback in the recruitment, selection and promotion criteria and in performance management processes
- Asking staff who use good practice to mentor others (and reward them for this additional responsibility)
- Using National Student Satisfaction (NSS) results for each school to assess achievement and take follow up action to preserve achievement, strengthen success, and identify areas where further action is required.
- Rewarding improvements to the NSS results achieved by course teams

The options were considered and decisions made regarding the new structure. A workforce plan was drawn up. This described the roles required to deliver the new processes, the structures into which they would be placed and the processes that would be used to fill them. It also specified which roles would need to be altered and which would be surplus to requirements.

IMPLEMENTATION

Ownership

Involving people in the development of the plan will have gone a long way towards winning their commitment to and ensuring their participation in its enactment. The plan should also be widely communicated throughout the organisation.

From the outset, it should be clear:

- Who will “own” the workforce plan as a whole and who will own it in parts
- What contribution will the HR, Equalities and Diversity and Staff Development and other related professionals make
- What responsibilities will managers have, at which level

Managing implementation

Once the plan's contents have been finalised, it will be ready to put into action. How this is to happen should be outlined by specifying:

- How the plan is to be delivered in terms of actions to be taken, including outlining the change management practices to be used
- The training and development needed by those responsible for managing the changes and delivering the plan
- Who will be responsible for taking those actions
- Milestones and deadlines
- How progress will be monitoring and reviewed
- What success will look like
- How the actions will be mainstreamed into the organisation's normal way of working, including how keeping the workforce plan up to date will relate to the business planning process
- How current staff will be involved in the delivery of the plan and their levels of engagement maintained during the changes

The organisation's ability to deliver the plan should be considered before deadlines are set.

The use of project management techniques can ensure that the implementation of the workforce plan is linked to other processes and that deadlines are met. They will also help to identify when certain tasks need finishing so the time demands and the availability of needed resources can be balanced with other priorities.

Turnover is traditionally low for most staff groups and is likely to decline further as the economic climate worsens. Therefore, the opportunities to increase the flexibility of working practices and contracts should be taken whenever they occur.

The person responsible for the development of the plan may be given the role of project manager or it could be assigned to another person. The key aspect of their role will be to ensure that the decisions outlined in the workforce plan are translated into everyday decisions. Another key responsibility will be to maintain progress.

Workforce planning

Lifelong Learning UK, in its report "Occupational map for the higher education sectors", noted that project management skills are being in short supply. Developing these amongst those responsible for the development and implementation of the workforce plan, before the work begins could, therefore, be worthwhile.

Monitoring implementation

Some of the anticipated scenarios used as the basis for the workforce plan may alter with the passage of time. Some will become more likely, some will become less so and new factors will emerge. These changes may result in a refocus of the plan. For example if the actions taken to address attendance management issues are being effective, focus can turn to other issues and plan adjusted to take account of these developments.

Indicators of progress can be combined with the other performance management indicators used to assess changes to the make-up of the workforce. These could include, for example, statistics used to monitor the effectiveness of attendance management actions and turnover data. These will provide the information needed to make periodic reports on progress to senior managers and others with a key interest in the plan's implementation.

Inevitably, a review of the plan will be needed during its implementation and any changes deemed necessary should be decided with the same rigour as that used to make the original decisions.

The project manager will be responsible for reporting progress. There is a danger of the workforce plan becoming an end in itself rather than being a tool to support the achievement of operational and strategic objectives. Therefore, reports on progress may need to be interlinked and closely related.

The Universities HR group has produced a web-based tool called the "People Management Framework". Further information and how the framework can be accessed are given on the UHR web site.

The first step in the use of the framework is to specify a number of organisational imperatives. HR activities are mapped against them to identify the impact those activities are having on organisational success. The components of the workforce plan will therefore inform the population of the framework and its use will help to monitor the plan's implementation.

The use of the framework will also provide a mechanism for periodical reviews of the workforce plan. This review should also link with the business planning and budget setting processes, both of which will have implications on workforce needs and resource availability, and performance and development review and workload allocation. Critically, the workforce plan should include indicators, which can be used to support the assessment of progress and to make sure that difficult issues are addressed. Regular reference to these will help to maintain momentum and reinforce the importance of the plan.

MAINTAINING AND REFRESHING THE DATA USED FOR WORKFORCE PLANNING

The analysis of the organisation's workforce and its operating context will have informed the drafting of the workforce plan. This analysis will have made use of data drawn from a number of different sources. The origins of the data should be recorded so that it will be easy to get back to the source in case any checks are needed.

Workforce planning

If the data sources are allowed to become out of date, updating the plan will be more difficult and time consuming. Therefore, it is important that the sources should be kept up to date. The easiest way of doing this is to build updating processes, including quality assurance checks, into every day routines. If the same data sources underpin normal and routine decisions, keeping them up to date will happen as a matter of course.

Evaluation

The evaluation of the plan's utility and success can be both formative and summative. The formative evaluation will take place as the plan's implementation is monitored on an on-going basis.

The summative evaluation will take place formally at fixed points in time. This will be essential if subsequent plans are to take advantage of any learning accrued from the assessment of what went well and not so well, and why.

The critical test of success will be against the purpose of workforce planning. Has the plan ensured that the organisation has the people with the skills, knowledge and experience required to achieve its strategic objectives? If the answer is yes, then the plan will have worked.

The next set of questions will concern how well and how efficiently the plan achieved this end.

The evaluation can therefore be used to identify what led to success and what prevented achievement. Both will provide useful information on which to base future action.

The exercise may also benefit from benchmarking against other organisations. Universities and colleges are familiar with the use of comparative assessments and a number of tools to support these are already in existence. These include HEIDE, which draws on the data supplied to HESA and allows a particular university to select others, regionally, by mission group or other variables, with whom it wishes to compare itself. The DLA-Piper benchmarking service and the UHR people management framework provide for similar comparisons using a number of HR measures and ratios.

RELATIONSHIP WITH HR POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND ENABLERS

Policies, and procedures together with systems and processes, provide the levers and mechanisms that bring alive an organisation's strategic intent. These should act as enablers of the workforce plan and compliment it to ensure that the right things are done in the right ways.

HR policies and processes

The HR policies should reflect the organisation's values and define the parameters that limit decision-making and action. These limits will also close down options. For example, a commitment to equality of opportunity will preclude giving preferential treatment to certain individuals.

Typically, there will be a number of processes, systems and procedures designed to put the policies into action and provide the means of monitoring progress.

The connection between the workforce plan and approaches taken to the other aspects of people management and development, and recruitment and promotion should be direct. The Institute of Employment Studies recognises this in its report "The HR agenda for 2010" which outlines how HR needs to transform for the future. The report stresses the importance of integrating policies so they work together to achieve the organisation's strategic plan, but in ways that appreciate where necessary differences between organisational units should exist.

The following section describes the systems and processes commonly in use and outlines how they can be aligned to the workforce plan.

Performance management and appraisal

Comprehensive performance management processes will support the delivery of the workforce plan requirements in terms of competencies so are thus invaluable. These can ensure that staff understand their role in the organisation and what is expected of them and, together with internal communication systems, will help people to understand how the organisation's strategy will influence them and change the roles they occupy.

The performance management processes should focus people on doing the right things in the right way. They will also provide mechanisms for monitoring progress, providing feedback and rewarding achievement. They will also supply information to support the assessment of the workforce capabilities, as noted above.

Effective appraisal systems, not always in place within higher education organisations, are essential as they give people the opportunity to consider how their aspirations fit alongside the organisation's strategic plan and the requirements of their role.

ECC's guide "Developing people, delivering results" describes how performance management and appraisal systems can link with other processes, for example quality assurance, in ways that will simplify their implementation and gain greater acceptance.

Succession planning and talent management

The process used to develop the workforce plan should have included an appraisal of the existing workforce's capability. This may have been identified through a skills audit or competency assessment, which would also have revealed strengths, weaknesses, gaps and potential. Information about individual's career aspirations, gathered from review and

Workforce planning

development processes, can enrich the picture and allow the organisation to plan the deployment of its human assets to meet their full potential.

The creation of a talent bank can contribute to the assessment of the organisation's human resource. It can also be used to inform a succession plan that will identify areas of potential shortages and areas of excesses. This should also highlight ways in which future staffing requirements can be met by developing the capabilities of current employees or identify where the recruitment of people with the necessary knowledge, skills and experience will be necessary.

Evidence from other sectors suggests that the organisations most likely to recover quickly from recession are those that invested in the development of their existing workforce. This approach can be effective as it can go some way to maintaining levels of morale, motivation and productivity during periods of considerable organisational change.

The approach can also be more economical and reliable. Recruitment is always costly and can be uncertain as the appointment of new staff contains elements of risk and the vagaries of the labour market can affect the chances of appointing staff of the required calibre.

Training and development

The identification of training and development needs should flow from a comparison of the organisation's strategic requirements and the appraisal of the workforce capabilities made through processes such as those used to inform the succession plan and create the talent bank.

A systematic approach to needs identification rather than responding to individual requests can help to prioritise them in relation to the organisation's and will align alongside other action required to satisfy its strategic imperatives.

Looking forward will also provide more lead-time, thus creating opportunities for the use of a greater range of development methods and provide a direct link between development and organisational change.

Knowledge and skill development

The scenarios developed during the creation of the workforce plan may indicate a general need for new ways of working across the organisation. This could require significant numbers of employees to develop new competencies and learn new practices and skills.

The longer lead times provided by workforce planning will also enable staff to acquire new knowledge, for example, by following qualification courses or using other structured learning methods.

Acquiring new competencies

Some competencies or areas of expertise required but not available within the existing workforce may be difficult to acquire through development and learning and so will have to be sourced externally.

Recruitment is the most common way of acquiring needed skills or expertise, though other options are available, including:

- Commissioning training providers to stimulate the supply of needed skills
- Introducing schemes such as Modern Apprenticeships or trainee programmes

Workforce planning

- Making use of interim or temporary appointments to help to determine whether the competencies and areas of expertise are needed permanently or for a specific purpose or limited period of time

The analysis of the labour market should inform the decisions on which options are most appropriate.

Recruitment and selection processes

The opportunities to recruit the skills and expertise required for new or changed roles externally may reduce as financial constraints become more stringent. Many organisations find they have to invest more in their recruitment practices when the conditions are tight as ensuring that the best possible candidate is sourced and selected becomes more critical.

The increase in the number of applicants caused by other employers shedding good quality employees will also drive changes to recruitment and selection practices.

The role requirements, as identified in the workforce plan, will provide the criteria for use in recruitment and selection decisions. As well as sizing the roles for grading purposes, HERA and FEDRA can be used to identify the most important competencies to provide role related criteria for recruitment, selection and promotion purposes.

Recruitment selection practices may also have to alter to reflect the changes in the labour market and expectations of candidates.

The most significant recent development in recruitment practice has been the use of the web as the main medium for advertisements. E-recruitment has also helped to improve the experience of applicants as well as provided the opportunity to streamline and speed up the recruitment process. There has also been an increase in the use of other recruitment methods, such search consultants and the creation of talent banks.

The design of selection methods should provide a robust and thorough assessment of the competencies required for the role in question. If these competencies are new to the organisation, its traditional selection methods may no longer be suitable. The use of assessment centres and other competency based selection processes are becoming more popular as they provide valid means of predicting which applicant will be most suitable for a particular role.

These assessment methods can also be used for internal recruitment and to support the redeployment of staff whose roles have become surplus to requirements.

Regrading and the design of new roles

Even when workforce planning is well developed and closely linked to business planning, there will be occasions when changes will occur to existing roles or new roles emerge in response to a particular need.

The effect of the changes on the size of existing roles will need to be assessed to determine whether any upward or downward movement in the level of responsibilities will affect the role's grade. Similarly new roles will need to be sized to ensure that they are fitting into the right place on the pay and grading structure. A structured approach used for the design of the role can also be used to support the identification of the competencies required for effective performance and to ensure the best person is appointed to it.

Turnover

The analysis of turnover patterns and trends will have revealed the location and characteristics of those who leave the organisation. It will also show where turnover is comparatively high and where it is low. While the retention of people with skills and knowledge is important in terms of continuity and keeping recruitment costs down, it can also lead to stagnation and block changes.

Consequently, the workforce plan may identify areas where turnover needs to be stimulated as well as areas where a reduction may be beneficial.

Attendance management

High levels of sickness absence are also a cost that can be reduced by the introduction of attendance management processes. The analysis of the workforce data will show where absence patterns are high and differentiate between short and long-term absence.

If these are deemed problematic, either because work is not being done or replacement costs are high, the workforce plan should identify what actions need to be taken to remedy the situation.

Redeployment and redundancy

The workforce plan should identify which roles and areas of work are likely to be surplus to requirements, just as much as highlighting which roles will need to be changed and identifying areas where new roles will be needed. The plan should also describe what the processes would be used to deal with the surpluses. These may include:

- Retraining individual employees so they are able to acquire the skills and knowledge required in the changed roles
- Redeploying employees into different or new roles. This may also include some retraining
- Developing affected employees' potential to fill skill gaps or take on other areas of work
- Considering how the future employment of role holders so affected may be curtailed through the use of a mix of voluntary and compulsory redundancies or early or ill health retirement or by a change in their contractual status
- Helping staff leave the organisation through the use of career counsellors, outplacement consultants and other forms of practical assistance

Consulting with employees likely to be effected by redundancy and their trade union representatives is a legal requirement as well as being good practice. The timely provision of good quality information and practical support are also advisable.

REFERENCES

Bechet, Thomas P. (2008) Strategic staffing: a comprehensive system for effective workforce planning. 2nd edition. American Management Association. New York.

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2010) Workforce planning: right people, right time, right skills. CIPD. London.

Educational Competencies Consortium (2008) Developing people, delivering results. ECC. London.

Improvement and Development Agency Workforce resources and good practice. From www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=9110444

Institute for Employment Studies (2010) The HR agenda for 2010; ten top trends as we come out of recession. IES. Brighton.

Lifelong Learning UK. (2010) Occupational map for the higher education sectors: Preliminary findings, March 2010. LL UK. London.

Sayers, Nicola (2010) A guide to scenario planning in higher education. Leadership Foundation for Higher Education. London.

University of Adelaide (2010) Workforce planning for schools and administrative units and Staff planning tool. From www.adelaide.edu.au/hr/managers/wkpl-strategy/

OTHER REFERENCES

Barrett, Lucinda and Barrett, Peter (2008) The management of academic workloads: full report on findings. Research and Development Series. Leadership Foundation for Higher Education. London.

Barrett, Peter and Barrett, Lucinda (2009) The management of academic workloads: improving practice in the sector. Research and Development Series. Leadership Foundation for Higher Education. London.

Casu, Barbara and Thanassoulis, Emmanuel. (2006) Evaluating cost efficiency in central administrative services in UK universities Omega, the international journal of management science 34 (5) pp 417-426

Goold, Michael and Campbell, Andrew (2002) Designing effective organisations. Josey Bass, San Francisco.

Handy, Charles (1995) The empty raincoat: making sense of the future. Random House.

Higher Education Funding Council (2010) The higher education workforce framework 2010: overview report. HEFCE. Bristol.

PA Consulting Group (2010) The future workforce for Higher Education: a report to HEFCE. PA Consulting Group. London.

Sellers-Rubio, R., Mas-Ruiz, F.J. and Casado-Diaz, A. (2010) University efficiency: complementariness versus trade-off between teaching, research and administrative activities. Higher Education Quarterly 64 (4) October 2010 pp 373 – 391.

Vitae (2009) Careers in research: online survey 2009 analysis of aggregated UK results. CRAC. Cambridge.