People management self-assessment tool

Universities Personnel Association (UPA) and Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP) Personnel Network

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Preface from UPA and SCOP Personnel Network

The Universities Personnel Association (UPA) and SCOP Personnel Network have been pleased to develop a bespoke people management self-assessment tool for HE institutions. The initiative arose out of the HEFCE consultation exercise carried out over Rewarding and Developing Staff (Phase 2), which explored with institutions whether a self-assessment tool should be developed and, if so, who should develop it. A majority of respondents agreed that a self-assessment tool should be developed and considered it important that the tool be developed 'by the sector for the sector', perhaps with consultant support. It is in this spirit that UPA and SCOP Personnel Network have taken this project forward.

We are immensely grateful to the institutions that have acted as pilot sites and test sites during the development stages of the tool. We are also very grateful to our HR colleagues who gave their input and feedback in two well-attended workshops held in London in April and May 2004. The development of the tool has been supported by HEFCE, both financially and through HEFCE officers working within the Steering Group, and by the OPM consultancy who were commissioned by the Steering Group to contribute specialist research and design input.

The *output* from all this work is now presented in the following pages. The design and structure of the self-assessment tool is explained along with guidance for its use. We are hopeful that the *outcome* from this work is that institutions will be equipped with a tool that will support continuous improvement in people management in their institution and that can be adapted to their differing needs. In addition, its use should reinforce for internal stakeholders the link between effective people management planning and wider institutional performance, and demonstrate to sector stakeholders a high level of commitment to and competence in people management.

The effectiveness of the tool will be reviewed after an appropriate period of operation by seeking the views of both users and sector stakeholders.

Peter Deer, Chair of UPA
Gill Slater, Chair of SCOP Personnel Network

How to use the self-assessment tool materials

These people management self-assessment tool materials are presented in two parts: part one contains an introduction and guidance on how to use the tool and part two contains the tool itself: seven packs of materials covering the main dimensions of people management.

Part one

A section on the design and structure of the tool follows on pages 3 and 5. Instructions for using the tool start on page 9 and explain the three main stages, which are:

- Stage 1: Planning and initial data gathering

- Stage 2: Carrying out the assessment

- Stage 3: Using the assessment results

These provide an overview of how to prepare for self-assessment and where to start, how to approach the assessment itself and what to do with the findings that emerge from the exercise.

The tool was **tested** by a number of higher education institutions and their experiences are summarised at the end of the guidance.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 describes how the tool was developed and who was involved in the work.

- Appendix 2 suggests an alternative way of structuring people management activities, other than in the seven categories listed below.

Part two

This part consists of seven packs of documentation, one for each dimension of people management activity. The dimensions are:

- Remuneration and fair employment

- Staff recruitment and retention

- Size and composition of the workforce

- Staff development and skills needs fit

- Leadership, involvement and change management

- Occupational health, staff welfare and health and safety

- Performance management: linking people management to wider organisational performance.

PART ONE

Introduction

This self-assessment tool is designed to help UK higher education institutions (HEIs) to assess their practice and performance in people management. It offers a systematic, easy to use and evidenced-based way of doing this. It will help to refine and update human resources (HR) strategies and develop targeted action plans – all of which should lead to measurable improvements in people management. In addition, it links to parallel development work on benchmarking performance in managing people, which encourages HEIs to compare their own performance against that of others. It also links with similar work in other sectors.

The term 'people management' is used rather than 'human resources management' to indicate the relevance and importance of this area of work for managers generally and not just those working in the HR function. As a contributor to the wider performance of the institution, effective people management is everyone's responsibility.

The purpose of the self-assessment tool

This tool has been developed to meet a variety of different needs: not only those from inside institutions, although that is its primary purpose, but also those of other stakeholders. The tool has been designed to help all those responsible for people management in HEIs to evaluate practice and performance, reassess strategic priorities and link them closely with wider organisational goals. It should encourage those undertaking the assessment to engage and involve others in the process and it should not be carried out in isolation. The process of analysis and review involved in using the tool should ensure that current HR strategies are refined and enhanced, drawing on past learning and experience. Doing so will create wider confidence about the contribution people management is making to institutional performance.

Ideally, this tool will link into other review, planning and reporting processes already in place. It will encourage HR managers to have a dialogue with others in the institution and assess overall performance across a wide range of issues affecting people management practice. Using the tool should help to clarify priorities for action as well as secure a commitment from others to bring about change and improvement. It should help to strengthen wider strategy development and planning by contributing to improved overall management in the institution. The process of assessment may also encourage governing bodies to feel involved in the oversight of people management performance.

External stakeholders will want to be confident that the process of assessment is thorough. The results should provide a clear plan of action for further improvement in people management practice – both for individual institutions and for the sector as a whole. This robustness will be an important part of validating the process and its outcomes, both internally and externally. For English HEIs, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has indicated that it will adopt 'lighter touch' arrangements using this tool (or a comparable tool) compared to the procedures adopted for Rewarding and Developing Staff (R&DS) round 1.

The design of the tool

Care has been taken in the design and development to produce a tool which is:

- comprehensive and systematic

- easy to understand and use, both by specialists and general managers

- visible and transparent

- rigorous and challenging enough to encourage continuous improvement

- flexible enough to be adapted to individual institutions and circumstances

- not overly time consuming to use.

These were the core requirements identified by participants in the workshops held in the first stage of the tool's development. Workshop participants also provided design suggestions that shaped the final format of the tool. At the end of development, four institutions tested a prototype tool and their suggestions were also incorporated (see Appendix 1 – How the tool was developed). Their comments can be found in feedback summaries at the end of part one.

The scope of people management – the seven dimensions

This tool is designed to address a range of people management processes and activities, at both the strategic and operational level.

The scope of the tool takes account of:

- the six priority areas identified in round 1 of Rewarding and Developing Staff (R&DS): recruitment and retention; staff development; equal opportunities; reviews of staffing needs; annual performance reviews for all staff; and action to tackle poor performance.[1]

- the revised priorities reflected in R&DS round 2 on: institution-wide job evaluation; annual performance review; flexible reward systems; rewarding teaching excellence; and the development of early-stage researchers, support and part-time staff, and staff on fixed term contracts.[2]

- the views of those involved in the workshops as to the key dimensions of people management.

To meet these different requirements the tool has been developed around seven dimensions of people management work and this is reflected in the structure and layout of the following parts of the guide. These are based on a slightly revised version of the aspects used in the Accounting for People taskforce, chaired by Denise Kingsmill. [3] They are:

- remuneration and fair employment

- staff recruitment and retention

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[1] *Rewarding and developing staff in HE,* HEFCE 01/16.

[2] *Rewarding and developing staff in HE – round 2,* HEFCE 2004/03

[3] *Accounting for People* taskforce, chaired by Denise Kingsmill, October 2003
http://www.accountingforpeople.gov.uk/background.htm

- size and composition of the workforce

- staff development and skills needs fit

- leadership, involvement and change management

- occupational health, staff welfare and health and safety

- performance management: linking people management to wider organisational performance.

The first six of these cover the substantive aspects of people management practice. The seventh covers performance managing the other six, and is also an objective for the effectiveness of people management in its own right.

Looking at these seven dimensions is one way for institutions to organise their assessment of people management performance – as seven discrete, but related, review exercises. If, however, an institution's people management work does not fit with these dimensions neatly, or if the HR strategic priorities suggest other ways of defining the scope and boundaries of people management work, it is possible to use the tool in a slightly different way. Guidance about how to regroup the lists of items under the seven dimensions is outlined in Appendix 2.
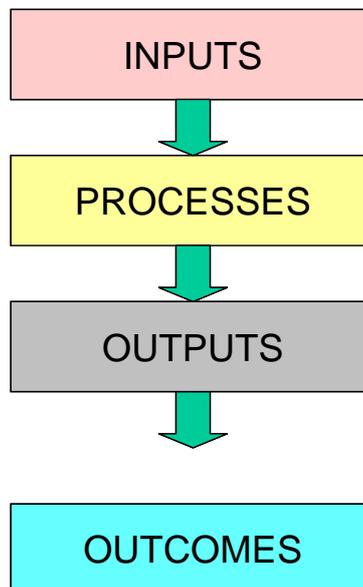
A systems view of people management

The tool is based on a model of people management practice that examines the inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes of the work, and the links between these. This approach is widely used in planning and performance management across the public and private sectors. It was a feature of HEFCE's good practice guidance issued for R&DS round 1, and a number of institutions are already using it in their HR strategy work.[4] The tool uses the following assessment framework:

- different **inputs** into people management activities in terms of staff time and finance, staff skills and expertise

- recognised procedures and **processes,** such as recruitment exercises, appraisals or exit interviews

- tangible **outputs,** like numbers of people recruited, trained or appraised

- **outcomes** that may be immediate such as improved staff satisfaction and understanding about issues such as equal opportunities, or intermediate, in that they support the achievement of wider organisational goals, such as better RAE ratings or improved standards of teaching and learning for students, leading to enhanced student satisfaction and retention.

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[4] *Rewarding and Developing Staff In Higher Education – Good practice in setting HR strategies.* HEFCE March 02/14 http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2002 .

SYSTEMS MODEL

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│     INPUTS      │
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┌─────────────────┐
│   PROCESSES     │
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│    OUTPUTS      │
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│    OUTCOMES     │
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Activities on each of the seven dimensions are grouped as inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes. The links to the HR strategy and the progress achieved in each area can be explored using this model. It will also help to identify the priorities for further improvement and development.

Structure and layout of the tool

There is a set of materials for each dimension of people management work. In each set there are checklists for assessing the importance to the HR strategy and progress so far achieved. Examples of sources of evidence are given as a guide and space is provided for listing additional or alternative sources. Pre- and post-evaluation sheets are included to encourage exploration of priorities and outcomes in each of the seven dimensions. Comment boxes are included for recording conclusions and emerging implications. The information recorded on the checklists and lists of sources of information will provide a data source to be used by those involved in the process. The comment boxes and evaluation sheets can be used to underpin reports, develop action plans and future priorities for people management.
The assessment packs form the second part of these materials, after the guidance.

It will be important to identify the sources of evidence to verify and validate judgements. This gives the tool its credibility for internal and external reporting purposes and will give external stakeholders confidence in the findings. Gathering and examining evidence to support judgements is discussed under Stage 2: carrying out the assessment.

How to use the tool

It is expected that the tool will be used in stages and in different ways. The experiences of the institutions that tested the prototype tool give some insights into the different approaches; these can be found in the Feedback summaries.

There are three main stages:

1. planning the assessment and gathering initial data

2. carrying out the assessment – and linking it to wider strategic priorities

3. using the results of the assessment.

Stage 1. Planning the assessment and gathering initial data

Deciding on the approach to assessment

Planning should start with consideration of who is to be involved in the assessment work, with particular attention being paid to how the institution will assure it undertakes a credible and objective process.

Review meetings should include representatives from main areas of the organisation - academic and support functions and those within the HR or personnel team – including the director or head of HR and perhaps an HR specialist practitioner from the dimension of people management being assessed. Those from outside HR might include: a senior person with institutional responsibility for this area of activity; a governor with an interest, or specialist expertise, in people management; a chair of a relevant committee

It is good practice with any self-review process to incorporate an element of external validation to confirm that the process is thorough. This could take different forms – perhaps input from other HR professionals within or outside the sector, perhaps a member of the governing body or an independent consultant. This may not always be feasible but a review group with a broad-based composition will ensure an objective and constructively critical view of people management practices and validate the assessment process.

Whilst all these interests could be represented, it is for institutions to decide what is most appropriate for them. However, the head of HR should not carry out this review alone. It should be a dialogue about people management performance and priorities across the institution.

A segmented approach to assessment

It is recommended that each dimension be approached as a separate exercise rather than considering all in a single process. The experience of the test institutions showed that it was possible to plan, gather data and complete the preparatory work for a single dimension in a matter of weeks. The actual assessment of one dimension can be completed in one or two days by the HR team with up to half a day's input from the other people involved.

Institutions will be at different stages of progress in the various dimensions of people management. In areas that have progressed well, the assessment should be a quick exercise to check the major priorities being addressed and actions planned for the near future. In areas where less has been achieved, the assessment will help in identifying issues and establishing a programme of work.

HEIs can decide which of the seven dimensions to look at first, using the dimensions in the order that best suits the institution.

Which dimension should be assessed first?

Questions to consider:

- Has significant progress already been made in this area?

- Does the HR strategy place emphasis on this area of people management practice?

- Is this an area where other audits or reviews have highlighted specific development needs?

- Did HEFCE or stakeholder feedback on earlier HR strategies identify development needs in this area?

- Has a new institutional strategy identified development needs in a particular area of people management?

Undertaking and scheduling the self-assessment

Some of the test institutions found it easier to divide the work up between members of the HR team. Others found it easier to set up a small working group to share the workload and complete the assessment with representation from other groups with an interest in people management.

The assessment should fit into the normal cycle of business planning and performance review in HEIs. It might link to the timescales for reviewing and developing a new corporate plan or HR strategy. This would allow the self-assessment to contribute to the development of new strategies and plans, or highlight the people management implications of existing strategies and plans.

Preparing for the assessment – data gathering

Once a dimension has been selected, data needs to be collected. The assessment should be based on sound evidence. This might include reviewing copies of:

- strategies and plans, policies and procedures

- other audit or review reports, including Investors in People (IIP) assessment or recent EFQM or Charter Mark assessments

- staff survey results

- reports to personnel/HR committee

- recruitment or retention data or staffing composition profile

- benchmarking data, if available.

Both quantitative data and qualitative data need to be collected. Examples of sources of information are described for each of the seven dimensions covered by the tool.

There are two aspects of data gathering:

- **identifying the sources of information** relevant to the assessment indicators – knowing what is available and, where it is held. When gathering information it will be helpful to examine not only the 'possible sources of data and other information' lists relating to the dimension being assessed, but also the 'inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes' indicators themselves. The information lists suggest examples of what to look at and there may be other sources of evidence that are specific to an institution.

- **interpreting the information**

  Information already collected and interpreted can be incorporated into the assessment process and thus shared with a wider audience. Validation or verification of information sources and interpretation is described, in 'Arriving at a judgement' in the next part of the guide.

Evaluating the HR strategy and the corporate plan

Pre-assessment forms
The questions in the pre-assessment forms will help to link the corporate plan priorities with HR strategy developments. They can be used first before undertaking the more detailed assessment ratings, and are at the beginning of each pack (see part two of the materials).

Post-assessment forms
The post-evaluation questions are designed to encourage exploration of the conclusions on each dimension and appear at the back of each pack of documentation.

Stage 2. Carrying out the assessment

Setting up meetings

The second stage of the process is to set up a review meeting for the selected dimension/s to undertake the assessment and complete the documentation. Data and supporting information will need to be available to those undertaking the assessment work.

It is recommended that only one of the seven dimensions be reviewed at a single meeting. The experience of test institutions suggests that these meetings will take between one to three hours.

Arriving at a judgement on the different indicators

For each of the seven dimensions of people management there is a list of indicators for each part of the systems model – inputs, process, outputs, and outcomes – to show where and how the work is being carried out. The review exercise is an opportunity to evaluate where and why this is happening.

The indicators are laid out in a questionnaire format. In order to arrive at a rating, there are two steps for each dimension of people management:

- The first step is to consider the 'importance to HR strategy' which is an assessment of the extent to which this activity is of 'high importance', 'medium importance' or 'low importance' for *current* HR strategic priorities.

- The second step is to look at the 'progress being made' and how far the work has progressed to a 'significant', 'moderate' or 'limited' extent.

At each meeting, participants will be expected to use the available evidence in order to justify and validate the conclusions they reach. This will be particularly important for areas that are assessed as needing more attention and that might become priorities for action in the future.

Assembling the evidence that underpins the assessments

Conclusions and recommendations will emerge as the tool is applied. The checklist for summarising ratings of 'importance' and 'progress' is supplemented by recording of evidence to justify the conclusions.

The checklist forms an agenda for the review meetings and other discussions, and also provides a reference document for later stages. It is recommended that a 'working document' version of the questionnaire is used to record comments and notes. This document and a record of the review meeting/s may be useful in explaining the conclusions and priorities that emerge and aid any external validation of the process.

The final versions of the forms can be filled in either electronically or by hand.

Stage 3. Using the results of the assessment

This self-assessment will provide useful evidence to support an institution's ability to:

- assess current practice and performance on people management

- use systematic, evidence-based self –assessment

- identify priority areas for action

- prepare, revise and update HR strategic priorities

- involve others in the institution in this process

- demonstrate where and how people management supports wider institutional performance

- provide assurance to governors and external stakeholders about the quality of people management and the continuous improvement practices at the institution.

The results of the assessment should have value for planning and decision making in other areas of the institution's activities. The questions in the final part of the document will support this activity.

Consideration should be given to where and how this process of people management self-assessment feeds into existing arrangements for reporting and governance.

Refining and updating HR strategies and action plans

The impact of self-assessment on HR strategies and action plans will depend on the progress and timescales of current strategies and the arrangements already in place for monitoring and evaluating this work. Ideally the tool will become part of the monitoring and evaluation of existing action plans and the further development of HR strategy. A number of the test institutions had just developed new corporate plans and the tool helped them to work through the HR implications of these.

It is for HEIs to decide where and how the self-assessment work fits into their business planning processes and performance management arrangements.

Internal reporting

The assessment and its outcomes will be of interest to a number of different audiences, which could include:

- other members of the HR team (where there are others)

- managers who helped in the assessment

- the senior management group

- governors and governing bodies

- committees with an interest in people management

- trade unions or staff associations

- other managers and staff in the institution.

Most of these groups, perhaps with the exception of the HR team, will only require a brief overview of the findings, and will not be concerned with the details of the assessment and evaluation sheets. A short report can be produced to summarise what was done (including the process used) and the main findings. Other groups may find a verbal briefing or short presentation helpful.

External reporting

HEFCE has a direct interest in people management self-assessment work in English HEIs. (In Scotland and Wales SHEFC and HEFCW may also take an interest, although there are no funding implications for their institutions). HEFCE will be consulting the sector about its wish to be assured that a self-assessment process is thorough, robust in its validation, inclusive, and that any action plan is based on the conclusions that emerge from the work. It will not expect to see any detailed assessment report. In their consultation, HEFCE is proposing that, for the purpose of continuing and mainstreaming R&DS round 2 funding, institutions will have until 30 May 2008 to complete and report on all the dimensions in the self-assessment tool (or use of an equivalent alternative tool).

Although there is no expectation to this effect, institutions may also want to consider whether they might choose to share part or all of the results of their self-assessment work with one another, either as part of any reciprocal arrangements they might have with individual institutions on HRM, or as part of wider networking within UPA or the SCOP Personnel Network.

Feedback summaries from the test institutions

After holding exploratory workshops with members of HEIs and developing the tool further, four institutions tested one or two dimensions from the tool. They were the universities of Birmingham, Bradford and Wales, Newport and Dartington College of Arts. Below are summaries of their experience.

University of Birmingham

Dimensions tested

- Size and composition of the workforce

- Leadership, involvement and change management

Process followed and insights gained

The choice of dimensions was deliberate: all of these were areas where the institution has invested a considerable amount of effort in recent years. Yet the assumption was that more progress in some of these areas could be achieved and using the self-assessment tool would allow further improvements to be made. It was believed this would add value to the performance review process as part of reassessing the HR strategy.

Each assessment followed a systematic process, which involved:

- Taking the checklist for possible sources of data and other information supplied in the tool and creating a new column for the institution. In this column all the relevant sources of data already to hand were entered and any significant gaps identified. This provided a core reference document, summarising the quantitative and qualitative information at the disposal of the team undertaking the assessment.

- The whole HR management team reviewed the questions on the evaluation forms. From this discussion the team took an initial view of the current situation. Members also discussed how to get additional perspectives from other relevant stakeholders in the institution. A plan was prepared for discussing this with specific individuals amongst these stakeholder groups.

- Structured discussions took place through July and August with representatives of various tiers of management, including senior management and corporate, academic and school managers.

Reports from these discussions were fed back to the HR management team for a final assessment and completion of the evaluation sheets. This process continued while other work was carried out as part of reviewing the HR strategy more fully.

Experience of using the tool: what worked best and what might you change?

The timing of the process over the summer holiday meant that focus group meetings could not be used as part of the process. Discussions were held on a one-to-one basis and while these were worthwhile, group discussions would have been more useful. The intention will be to use group discussions as part of the process in future.

Lessons and conclusions: benefits, value, insights

As skilled HR professionals, members of the group carrying out the assessment did not encounter any particular surprises in what was revealed: much of the analysis confirmed their understanding of the stage the organisation had reached and the effectiveness of its strategies to date.

It was useful to work within a clear framework. The systematic process combined with structured data gathering was helpful and contributed useful qualitative and quantitative information to support the review of HR strategy generally. Identifying some specific areas to focus on helped.

Next steps

The institution is proceeding with a wider review of its HR strategy and will continue to draw on the work carried out for this exercise.

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University of Bradford

Dimensions considered

- Size and composition of the workforce

- Performance management

Process followed and insights gained

The process was started by completing the tick list provided which set out the inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes. This provided a good feel for the scope of each area considered and was helpful. The list also gave some guidance on the importance of the dimensions to the HR strategy. Owing to the timing of the exercise, the data gathering proved to be a fairly straightforward process. The data was immediately accessible as the university's revised HR strategy and annual monitoring statement had recently been developed. By completing the tick list a completely different pattern emerged for each of the dimensions. At this stage HR consulted both the planning officer and finance department for specific information.

One of the dimensions (performance management) is comprehensively addressed in the university's HR strategy and has a high priority in the corporate strategy; the other (size and composition of the workforce) is less well addressed explicitly in either. While it is clear that the university has set itself appropriate priorities and its resources are fully occupied in ensuring that these are delivered, using the tool has made it aware that the size and composition of the workforce dimension in the strategy will need to be addressed at some point in the future.

One of the benefits of thinking through progress from inputs to outcomes was to highlight that more attention was paid in some areas of people management work to inputs and processes than to outputs and outcomes. When working on complex projects it is easy to become embroiled

in the process, not see the bigger picture and lose sight of the outcomes. The tool does require some analysis of the data and this revealed a need to concentrate effort on the less well-developed areas.

Lessons and conclusions: benefits, value, insights

Using the tool was less onerous than anticipated. The sources of evidence were easily identified to demonstrate both the importance to the HR strategy and progress made to date. The documentation has been improved as a result of feedback from the test institutions and now provides a good checklist and avoids duplication. The process does have to be led by HR and most of the work will be carried out within it.

Next steps

A more comprehensive briefing about the process will be undertaken prior to beginning any further assessment using the tool. Following completion of the work a meeting of key stakeholders in the institution will be held to consider and comment on the findings. It is envisaged that the final report will be approved through the committee structure. Engagement with the wider university community required by the tool will strengthen the commitment of the organisation to a progressive and continuing HR agenda.

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Dimensions tested

- Staff recruitment and retention

- Staff development and skills needs fit

Process followed and insights gained

The timing of the review immediately followed the preparation of the annual HR strategy review and report to the board of governors in July 2004. Therefore all the data gathering, analysis and review had already been undertaken as part of that exercise.

For each dimension the director of human resources and the relevant HR manager/staff development manager prepared a list of responses and made a first attempt at assessing the various statements in the area looked at. Following this, the director of HR wrote up the work on both dimensions – which took about one to one-and-a-half days in total.

A group of senior staff – dean, pro vice chancellor, a member of the board of governors and director of HR – met for an afternoon to review the documentation. All agreed that the tool's focus and content was appropriate for the university but had some criticisms of the process in terms of some overlap in questions across different parts of the tool. Some suggestions were also made

for further development of the tool to make a stronger link between people management and wider institutional strategy.

Experience of using the tool: what worked best and what might you change?

There was a perception of some duplication and overlap of items in the test version. The senior team would like to see the tool focus more closely on institutional strategy rather than simply being what seemed to them an inwardly focused 'HR toolkit'.

The process followed worked well and would probably be repeated in the same way again, if and when a similar exercise is undertaken. Consideration may be given to using the tool in the HR department as a 'forerunner' to next year's HR Strategy update report to the institution. This might involve using the tool as a checklist to see whether there is anything else 'out there' that should considered in HR terms.

Lessons and conclusions: benefits, value, insights

This test exercise using the tool resulted in a more critical review of HR and HR management being undertaken – as opposed to the normal HR report to governors where the focus is on achievements against objectives and positive outcomes.

There are some concerns in HR that it will be seen only as an HR toolkit and this might limit its wider use and credibility in the institution. All institutions are strongly encouraged to use this tool to look across all aspects of people management, not just at the key priorities in the HR strategy or recognised areas in need of development. It has the potential to become a valued self-assessment checklist for institutions to guide their future people management work.

Next steps

In the context of Wales, many will want to see how the finished tool looks and what the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) decides to do with it. However, regardless of that, it will be used as a guide when considering future actions and initiatives in HR management at the university – if only to check that it is on the right track.

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Dartington College of Arts

Dimensions tested

- Occupational health, staff welfare and health and safety

- Remuneration and fair employment

These are both priority areas and the college felt that it could benefit from using this exercise as an opportunity to review them.

Process followed and insights gained

The tool's checklist helped to assess the current situation in the areas examined. It was possible to work through the documentation using the notes provided. In both areas reviewed the four-stage process of looking at inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes was followed. As a small institution much of the data is held centrally and therefore the personnel officer for the college undertook some of the initial work alone. This included assessing what policies and procedures were in place and reviewing relevant statistical information. Following this the personnel officer met with the vice principal (administration) and together they looked at the two review areas in more detail. The timing of the project during the summer months was not ideal. The fact that there were organisational changes going on and conflicting work priorities during this period meant that it was difficult to engage with colleagues as fully as possible.

Experience of using the tool: what worked best and what might you change?

The tool proved very helpful. The checklists of items were comprehensive and it was encouraging to see where the college had made progress. Some of the terminology used was confusing, though this has been addressed in the revised documentation. It has also helped the college to look at the way it gathers and records data (e.g. recording of absence) in line with the developing use of the new HR information system, purchased in 2002.

Lessons and conclusions: benefits, value, insights

The whole process builds on the work started with the development of the HR strategy. It has helped the college to establish priorities and explore how these could link to the wider strategic goals in the two areas looked at. The importance of integrating HR activity into all aspects of other work in the college was highlighted. This was particularly evident when working through the evaluation questions in the tool. It also helped to reinforce the need to engage other areas in the review process, for example, senior academic staff. Working through the documentation provided the college with an excellent set of management standards to aspire to. It also helped it to establish what was not so relevant for a small institution, though it should prove valuable for all institutions, whatever their size.

Next steps

To take forward the priorities identified in the two areas reviewed by feeding them into the relevant planning and decision-making channels in the college.

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Appendix 1. How the tool was developed

In the consultation carried out on Rewarding and Developing Staff (R&DS) (Round 2), HEFCE asked institutions whether a self-assessment tool would assist them in their human resources work. It also raised the issue about who might develop the tool. The result of the consultation showed that a majority of institutions in the sector that responded were favourable to the idea (HEFCE 2004/03).

The sector's own HR professional organisations – the Universities Personnel Association (UPA) and the SCOP Personnel Network - decided to develop a people management self-assessment initiative and secured resources from HEFCE to help progress the work. A steering group of UPA and SCOP Personnel Network members, along with HEFCE representatives, was created to oversee the project and, after a process of competitive tendering, consultants from OPM (Office for Public Management) were commissioned to provide specialist research and design support. The work began in spring 2004.

The objectives of the initiative were to:

- develop an analytical tool to support the continuous improvement of people management practice in institutions

- help institutions to contribute fully to all stages of the development of the tool and encourage their widespread ownership and use of it

- maximise the ability of institutions to draw upon a broad range of existing data and other information and minimise the potential additional workload associated with using such a tool

- find ways to link this work to the HR benchmarking exercise and to other quality improvement programmes that institutions may already be working on

- create a tool flexible enough to allow different kinds of institutions to use it easily and effectively

- demonstrate to other stakeholders inside and outside the sector the value of the tool and its fitness for purpose.

OPM consultants visited five institutions when developing the design of the tool. At these visits discussions were held with the director or head of HR as well as with other senior managers with specific responsibility for, or interest in, people management. The discussions focused on how people management performance was reviewed and the process of gathering information in support of these reviews. The potential value and use of a self-assessment tool was also examined. These visits were followed by two exploratory workshops to which all UPA and SCOP Personnel Network members were invited. The first of these helped to develop the design brief for the tool and the second one, a month later, reviewed the main design concepts of the tool and how it might be used in an institution and by whom.

At these exploratory workshops, institutions considered the scope of the tool. A map of the different aspects of people management in institutions was developed and then used to design the structure for the component elements within the tool itself.

Finally a prototype tool was tested out in four institutions (not the ones visited earlier): each was asked to test different elements of the tool and provide feedback on the experience. Following this, final design revisions and refinements were made in the autumn of 2004.

Care was taken to select a diverse range of institutions both for the site visits and for testing the prototype tool.

HEFCE will formally consult the sector on the use of the tool in relation to mainstreaming R&DS2 funds before its launch for use in institutions in spring 2005. Several workshops are planned for the consultation period to which managers with an interest in the tool will be invited. The purpose of the workshops is to enable participants to engage with the finished tool and inform responses to the consultation.

Appendix 2. Regrouping the dimensions of people management

Some institutions may feel that the seven dimensions used in this tool to describe the range of people management activities do not fit neatly with the way the work is organised in the institution or with the main priority areas of the HR strategy. For example, it may be that an institution has a specific focus on reward at a particular point in time, or a separate reward strategy. This may span issues currently contained within the remuneration and fair employment dimension in the tool as well as some of those from recruitment and retention dimension.

In order to offer maximum flexibility to link the tool closely to an institution's needs, the option is provided to regroup or re-bundle the items contained in the seven dimensions. This is achieved by listing all the items from the seven dimensions within the tool under the indicators 'inputs', 'processes', 'outputs' and 'outcomes'. It is suggested that these groupings are retained as a core part of the self-assessment analysis but with all the input items are grouped together, all the process items are together and so on, this should make the regrouping easier to do.

Using these aggregated lists, it should be possible to regroup items in a way that best fits the sub-divisions of an organisation's people management work or the HR strategy headings or priority areas. However, there are some important provisos about doing this:

- It is possible to re-categorise **all** the items in the seven dimensions in the tool successfully under their new headings.

- No items should be omitted in this regrouping because this undermines the integrity of the tool – however the scope is there to add additional items.

- The regroupings are coherent clusters of people management work and make sense for how an institution works and how the current strategy is organised.

- This supports an institution's capacity to assess people management practice and performance in a meaningful way.

It may not be necessary to redraw the boundaries of all the areas. If there are just one or two areas that require some regrouping of items, then it is recommended that the other workable dimensions as retained as they are. The aim here is to provide a tool that allows institutions to adapt it to match their specific needs and circumstances in the best way possible.

If an institution chooses to regroup one or more areas, it will need to explain this in any reporting on self-assessment work, both to the relevant bodies internally as well as to HEFCE (for HEIs in England).

Items listed under the indicators: inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes

Inputs

The institution has:

a.   managers and staff aware of staff development processes within the institution

b.   investment in learning and staff development

c.   expertise in staff development

d.   staff skilled in job design and work organisation or access to these skills externally

e.   the skills to analyse corporate workforce data

f.   managers in different parts of the institution able to use workforce data effectively

g.   policies and guidelines on occupational health, staff welfare and health and safety

h.   counselling and support services for staff

i.   managers with the knowledge and skills to handle occupational health, staff welfare and health and safety issues competently and confidently

j.   staff skilled in dealing with health and safety issues in the institution or these services bought in/outsourced

k.   resources to allow health and safety issues to be addressed

l.   HR staff skilled in providing advice and support on pay, rewards and employment

m.   HR staff are skilled in or receiving skilled support in job evaluation

n.   expertise on equal opportunities and diversity

o.   appropriate skills amongst the HR team to develop strategies and provide advice on recruitment and retention

p.   managers appropriately skilled to undertake recruitment and selection in line with policies and procedures

q.   encourages awareness of the importance of effective management (including people management) and its contribution to leadership and institutional performance

r.   invests in people management systems and skills and developing leadership capability

s.   has in-house professional capacity to provide support and advice on people management and leadership

t.   has a senior professional to head HR on the senior management team

Processes

The institution undertakes/has undertaken:

a.   reviews of staff development needs (for individuals and for the whole institution) using recognised processes

b. staff development using a range of processes (including such things as induction, appraisals, mentoring, training, sabbaticals, 360 degree feedback etc)

c. appraisals and personal development covering all grades and types of staff

d. evaluation of the impact of staff development at different levels in the institution (for individuals, groups and the institution as a whole)

e. programmes of job redesign and work reorganisation in appropriate areas

f. reviews/updates of workforce data

g. planning using workforce data

h. regular reviews of workforce composition as part of governance arrangements

i. promotion of diverse workforce composition internally

j. recruitment, selection and promotion practice, taking account of the needs of a diverse workforce

k. training of managers and staff in using workforce data

l. regular reviews and audits of occupational health, staff welfare and health and safety

m. action which complies with requirements in health and safety legislation

n. procedures which link performance management with occupational health and staff welfare

o. training for managers and staff on occupational health, staff welfare and health and safety

p. monitoring arrangements for occupational health, staff welfare and health and safety practice

q. regular labour market reviews (on pay and rewards) and availability of skills in relevant market

r. reviews of pay and grading structures

s. equal pay audits

t. recruitment, selection and promotion on fair procedures

u. job evaluation across a range of jobs

v. regular reviews of equal opportunities and diversity practice

w. recruitment and selection guided by clear policies and procedures

x. exit interviews with those staff who leave

y. skills audits of future workforce needs

z. monitoring and evaluation of:

   − the service provided on staff recruitment (e.g. manager views on recruitment practice) on a regular basis

   − staff turnover

   − staff views on employment

aa. reviews identifying where people management and leadership need to be developed and improved

bb. training and development of its managers on people management and leadership

cc. communication across the institution to support people management work

dd. effective communication to support change and development associated with people management

ee. monitoring and evaluation of views about leadership and people management within the institution

ff. programmes for organisational development to support planned change and improved performance

gg. managers, staff at different levels and governors in relevant aspects of people management and its development

hh. trade unions and staff associations in relevant aspects of people management

ii. managers and staff at different levels as well as governors in people management issues

jj. a range of managers and staff in planned organisation development programmes

Outputs

The institution provides:

a. a clear profile of staff skills and competencies needed for the future

b. individual personal development plans

c. strategies for staff and management development (the institution as a whole and its main parts)

d. a clear profile of staff development needs

e. a programme of staff development activities that meets identified needs

f. an appropriate level of investment in staff development to meet identified needs

g. plans for the development of early-stage researchers

h. plans for increasing professionalism of support staff

i. job structures and work organisation that support improved performance and enriched job satisfaction

j. workforce data that is accurate and up to date

k. clear projections on future size and composition of the workforce

l. data that satisfactorily meets HESA reporting requirements

m. an approved race equality plan

n. targets and plans for improving diversity of the institution

o. equal opportunities policies and procedures supporting diversity

p. succession plans based on up to date workforce data

q. effective data base on workforce composition widely used

r. clear action plans for managing occupational health, staff welfare and health and safety practice more effectively

s. good information on occupational health, staff welfare and health and safety practice

t. information and analysis of any discrepancies on equal pay and a plan for addressing these

u. an approved race equality plan

v. flexible employment contracts

w. recognised principles to guide remuneration practice

x. transparent pay and grading structures

y. family friendly flexible employment policies

z. equal opportunity principles and clear procedures guiding recruitment, selection and promotion practice

aa. good information about:

  − what different groups of employees value most and expect to be rewarded

  − competitors reward packages

  − labour markets from which it recruits its staff

bb. pay and reward packages that allow the institution to attract and retain staff as required

cc. new pay structures and grading based on job evaluation

dd. schemes for recognition and reward of individual excellence in teaching and learning effectiveness

ee. skills audits to help develop future strategies for recruiting (and or developing staff)

ff. effective pay and reward packages and recruitment practice based on evidence from monitoring turnover, recruitment practice and surveys of staff attitudes on employment

gg. information on:

  − recruitment and retention priorities

  − recruitment and retention problem areas

  − which staff may need to be retrained, re-deployed or made redundant in the future

  − where to source its staff

  − the cost and efficiency of recruitment practice for different types of staff

  − which recruitment methods work best for different kinds of staff

  − vacant posts

  − the flexibility to reward highly valued staff

hh. clear plans for development of people management and leadership in the institution

ii. a specified level of investment in improving people management work beyond that as part of R&DS initiative (in England)

jj.   communication and change management plans supporting major initiatives

Outcomes

The institution achieves:

a.   staff who believe the institution is committed to their learning and development (including early-stage researchers and support staff)

b.   staff who recognise where and how their skills and competencies have been improved by staff development

c.   managers at different levels who recognise the importance of staff development and support and implement this

d.   staff who take their own and others personal development seriously and are committed to staff development activities

e.   staff who have and act on personal development plans

f.   staff who believe access to staff development activities is managed fairly and openly

g.   a culture that recognises the importance of learning and staff development

h.   using workforce composition data to support planning and decision making

i.   having managers and staff who support and are committed to having a diverse workforce

j.   demonstrable improvements in the diversity of its composition against objectives and targets set

k.   staff self-reporting on ethnicity

l.   managers and staff who understand procedures for occupational health, staff welfare and health and safety

m.   staff compliance with health and safety guidelines and regulations – unsafe and unhealthy practice is avoided

n.   managers and staff who feel supported in dealing with pressures of work

o.   staff who regard the institution as a healthy and safe workplace

p.   specified recruitment and retention goals

q.   staff who feel motivated and satisfied in their work

r.   staff who believe the institution is a fair employer – there is a healthy psychological contract

s.   managers who feel well supported on any pay and rewards work they need to deal with

t.   a number of staff employed on flexible employment contracts

u.   staff that take advantage of various leave provisions (e.g. maternity leave, carer's leave, compassionate leave)

v.   disability employment status (tick symbol)

w.   Investors in People status (in parts or for the whole institution)

x.   staff who feel there are opportunities for teaching career progression

y.   acceptable levels of staff turnover (overall and for specific groups)

z. an ability to recruit and retain those staff it needs to meet institutional performance requirements

aa. staff who express positive views of the institution as an employer

bb. suitable shortlists of candidates for vacant posts

cc. improved management skills and leadership in the institution

dd. recognition for having effective leadership and people management internally and externally (staff perceptions and key external stakeholders)

ee. managers and staff who feel informed and involved in changes in the institution

ff. recognised staff representatives feel informed and involved in changes within the institution

gg. governors who feel informed and involved in people management issues

hh. managers who feel they get appropriate and valued professional advice and support on people management and leadership

ii. commitment to the importance of people management and leadership

The institution avoids or effectively manages risk associated with:

a. staff leaving because of inadequate opportunities provided for staff development and learning

b. poorly focused staff development that leads to no appreciable gains for the individual and the institution

c. lack of take-up of staff development provisions available

d. under-resourcing of staff development

e. missed market or programme development opportunities because of lack of appropriate skills or expertise amongst staff

f. failure to comply with requirements on monitoring and target setting

g. insufficient workforce data limiting the ability to plan fully and effectively

h. being seen as having poor representation of women, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities in:

   − senior management

   − all management

   − senior academic posts

   − senior support staff posts

   − overall

i. legal cases brought against it on work related ill-health and breaches of health and safety practice

j. a poor accident or health risk record

k. stress-related illness and absence

l. staff who leave because of work pressure or an unacceptable working environment

m. industrial tribunal or legal cases brought by staff on unfair dismissal, unfair employment practice or discrimination (including equal pay claims)

n. negative publicity about unfair or discriminatory employment

o. being seen as having poor terms and conditions of employment compared with other employers (locally, nationally and or internationally

p. the poaching of high performing staff by other institutions

q. the rejection of job offers

r. the re-advertising of vacant posts because of a lack of suitable applicants

s. resources wasted on inefficient and ineffective recruitment

t. staff who leave earlier than expected

u. industrial relations disputes

v. lack of commitment to change and improved performance at different levels in the institution

w. staff perceiving a lack of effective leadership in the institution

x. staff feeling poorly informed and not consulted about changes made in the institution

Performance management

Objectives and targets

a. There are clear objectives set for each of the main areas of people management work.

b. There are measurable targets for specific areas of people management work.

c. Objectives and targets link to wider performance goals in the institution – demonstrable link.

d. Key stakeholders have been involved in helping to shape and develop objectives and targets for people management work.

e. Relevant people management performance information has been reviewed in developing objectives and targets.

f. Objectives and targets have recognised milestones of achievement against them – with identifiable timescales.

g. There are clear action plans linked to people management objectives and targets.

h. The resource input required to support the achievement of objectives and targets is identified and available.

i. People management objectives and targets are incorporated within a fully developed HR strategy for the institution.

Procedures and skills

a. There are clear procedures for performance managing staff in the institution – including appraisal, capability, discipline, grievance and improving performance.

b. Managers have the knowledge and skills to follow and utilise performance management procedures.

c. Managers are given appropriate advice and support on performance management.

d. There are good links made between performance management and staff development at different levels in the institution (e.g. by department, faculty and corporately).

e. Good performance is acknowledged and rewarded.

f. New staff are given proper induction.

Implementation

a. The HR strategy and the objectives and targets it contains guides programmes of people management work (for HR function, for other managers and staff).

b. The HR strategy and the main programmes of work associated with its implementation are communicated widely to managers and staff.

c. Objectives and targets in the HR strategy are reflected in business plans for various parts of the institution.

d. Objectives and targets in the HR strategy are reflected in personal development plans and other action plans.

e. Managers and staff review personal performance and set targets.

f. Staff receive training, development, encouragement and support from their managers to improve performance.

Performance monitoring and evaluation

a. There is a recognised process for reviewing performance against the objectives and targets contained in the HR strategy/other strategies and plans.

b. Relevant stakeholders in the institution are involved in the review process for strategies and plans.

c. The results of monitoring and evaluating performance against plans are reported to relevant bodies in the institution and are communicated more widely (internally/externally).

d. The data/information is available to monitor and evaluate performance effectively.

e. The results of monitoring help to refine and update objectives and targets in the HR strategy/other strategies and plans.

f. Performance evaluation takes places at all levels (from individuals to the whole institution).

Achievements and outcomes

The institution achieves:

a. The institution can identify where progress has been made against its objectives in strategies and plans with tangible results.

b. The achievements and outcomes on people management objectives and targets can be identified in wider performance achievements for the institution.

c. Managers, staff and governors in the institution recognise achievements in improving performance and understand their importance.

d. Managers and staff feel their skills and abilities are being properly utilised

e. Managers and staff are clear about what is expected from them.

f. Managers and staff are able to link their own performance to the performance of the wider organisation.

g. Managers handle good and poor performance appropriately and effectively.

The institution avoids or effectively manages the risks associated with:

a. poor performance and poorly performing staff not dealt with

b. managers lacking the skills and confidence to manage their own and their staff's performance effectively

c. staff feeling unclear about roles and responsibilities

d. staff feeling poorly informed and receiving insufficient guidance and support from their line managers

e. poorly managed grievance and discipline cases.