

Case Study of HR Task Force Consultancy work carried out on behalf of Hertford Regional College.

Our HR Task Force Consultant was engaged by Andy Forbes, the Principal and Chief Executive at Hertford Regional College (HRC), to manage a major restructure of the College's business support functions. As a result of funding pressures, it was necessary to find an annual saving of £1.4m. The project commenced in late March, with the aim of achieving the required saving by the end of July. Work had already been undertaken to identify the roles at risk of potential redundancy, and a broad communication issued on the basis of that work. Given the time imperative, it was not possible to produce a proper project initiation document, but our Consultant put in place those project disciplines key to success - a project plan, a practical issues and risks log, and a costed business case.

Our HR Task Force Consultant worked with the College to identify the pools of staff potentially affected by the proposed redundancies, and analysed the service records of those staff to enable a decision as to whether voluntary redundancy (VR) terms could be afforded. That decision having been made, a manager guide to dealing with redundancies was produced and SMT members, who would deal with the individual consultation requirements, were briefed. Specific advice was provided on how to set up, run and determine the outcome from individual consultation meetings. A preference pack was prepared for every potentially affected member of staff. This included an individualised statement of terms, were voluntary redundancy to be requested and granted.

A communications channel to all staff was put in place. *Restructure Newsbrief*, published to the College's intranet and publicised via email to all staff, was utilised to communicate the project's process and timescale, and progress against these. *Newsbriefs* were issued as each stage of the process was completed, on average once per week. Questions from staff were gathered via various channels, and, along with answers, communicated to all staff via the *Newsbrief*.

The project was run to suitably pared-down PRINCE2 disciplines. As each stage was reached, and then concluded, SMT was kept updated via an email summary of progress to date and next steps. Along with regular update of the process maps, risk register and issues log, this thus constituted a regular project manager report. A brief session at each SMT meeting served to iron out issues and ensure clarity over next steps.

A Master Control Spreadsheet was designed to enable capture of all relevant information relating to those individuals potentially affected. This included all that information needed to generate individual communications; and to calculate VR, compulsory redundancy (CR), pay in lieu of notice (PILON), and pension strain payments. It also enabled capture of preferences, and tracking of decisions relating to VR/CR and redeployment. This thus acted as the key control document, ensuring that no-one slipped through the net, and enabling ongoing tracking of savings achieved, and refinement of project costs.

On their return, the completed preference forms were analysed to determine the scale of the saving that could be realised through granting VRs, and to plan who needed to be assessed for which redeployment opportunities. Our Consultant oversaw a panel of SMT members that made decisions on VR requests. Customised compromise agreements were prepared and issued where required. The assessments for the redeployment opportunities were carefully sequenced to reflect individual, and to accommodate multiple, preferences. All appointment decisions were made by early June. On completion of the assessment process, notices of compulsory redundancy were issued to those unsuccessful, and managed through to conclusion.

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50 people ultimately left on VR terms, and a further three were made compulsorily redundant. The project realised an annual saving of £1.16m, the difference between this and the initial target accounted for by proposed redundancies withdrawn during the consultation period. It was completed four weeks ahead of schedule, and without industrial action.

As the project proceeded, it threw into focus a number of underlying HR and organisational development issues. Upon completion of the restructure, our Consultant was thus engaged to work two days per week at the College. He developed a practical strategy that addressed all areas of HR and OD, and designed to be executed over a three year period, taking account of College resources. This strategy was converted into a project plan, each milestone clearly owned and time-delimited. Hand-in-hand with developing this strategy and plan, our Consultant worked with the College's HR team to make this what it now is - a driving force behind positive change for the College, with great clarity over its own role, in support of College objectives and line managers.

Our HR Task Force Consultant has worked with the College on a number of the components of the HR plan, developing policies, and training line managers on the application of these. Although his work with the HR team has enabled them to now take the lead on steady progression of that plan, HRC continues to make use of our Consultant when a key milestone is on the horizon. Feedback from HRC:

- “Richard was excellent. He is the best HR person I have worked with. He gave us confidence to deal with the project”
- “Highly efficient, well-organised and an excellent project manager. Very effective communication processes established. Richard brings an unusual blend of precision and creativity to HR project management.”