Staff Policy Committee
Report from Director of Human Resources
June 2013

Introduction

It is pleasing to report that HR is providing effective strategic level support to the university via a number of one-off projects and on-going work which all emanates from the HR Strategy agreed in 2008. The university now has a new Institutional Plan and we are working this year to both implement current projects but also beginning to focus on the new Plan. In addition we are formulating plans for 2013/14 which will involve us undertaking a review of the effectiveness of activity.

Staff Connect – new integrated HR/payroll system

Not long after the last Staff Policy Committee meeting it became clear that there were major issues with the direct management of the project which the governance process had not been effective enough to discover. We have quickly changed project managers and brought in more effective processes to ensure the governance is more effective. Since the contract award the Project Team have been testing the configured software build. This testing has revealed a significant number of issues to be resolved by the vendor and by changed practices at Kent.

The current plan is to ensure that the base payroll and HR functionality delivered is fit for purpose before delivering some of the more advanced features (manager and employee self-service). This necessitates splitting into a Phase 1A with a go-live date of April 2013 and Phase1B with a potential go-live date of November 2013. Phase 2 would follow thereafter. Detailed costings are in place for Phases 1A and 1B and are just achievable within the overall project budget. A re-costing for Phase 2 has not yet been performed, pending resolution of current issues. This will follow in due course.

Apprenticeships

A recurring theme in this report is the work we are doing to support the university’s commitment to being recognised for being the best employer in our region. We have therefore been making efforts to improve our profile both locally and nationally through awards and through our contribution to the local economy. We have put forwards a proposal to the Heads of Professional Services about the widening of the provision for apprenticeships beyond Estates and Commercial Services where they have been offered historically.

Some of the benefits we highlighted in the Scheme included:

Development opportunities for current staff;
- Each Apprentice is allocated a workplace mentor who will provide ‘on-the-job training’ and assess the progress of the apprentice.
Following completion of the apprenticeship, the University will have the opportunity to employ an individual who will be committed, engaged, and with highly relevant qualifications and experience.

Community Relations & Reputation;
• Apprenticeships are usually filled by local people and increased involvement may be seen as supportive to the local community, increasing the positive profile of the organisation as providing opportunities not only for students but those without the qualifications or aptitude to progress in the HE system.
• When negotiating new initiatives or developments on campus, it may be possible to write an Apprenticeship into the initiative as this may be viewed favorably by local focus groups or planning committees involved in decision making.
• By ensuring our Apprentices leave the University and go out into the UK workforce as skilled and well-rounded individuals, we can promote a positive and professional reputation of the University which will filter through an individual’s entire career and reach many other organisations.

In addition many departments have put forwards proposals in the planning round for Graduate Development Schemes which will help us with our employability goals.

Learning and Development

HR Excellence in Research Award

The University of Kent has been recognised with the European Commission’s HR Excellence in Research Award for its commitment to recruit, develop and retain high calibre research staff. The award focuses on the University’s implementation of specific actions which deliver commitments to research excellence, set out by the European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for their Recruitment [1]. The award will be increasingly expected by the Research Council UK (RCUK) and EU funders, as well as research collaborators and job applicants.

The award also recognises how Kent is engaging with research staff across all three faculties to identify key areas for improvement.

The University will show a continued commitment to researcher development via a cross Faculty Working Group, chaired by the University’s Director of Research Services and its Head of Organisational Development.

Kent is one of seven UK universities recognised with the award in 2013. The awards were announced by Vitae – the UK organisation which champions researcher
excellence in higher education - at the ‘HR strategies for researchers: future directions and good practice across Europe’ event in London this month.

Times Higher Education Leadership and Management Awards 2013

The Service Excellence initiative which was devised by the Learning & Development team in collaboration with staff in the Academic Division has been shortlisted in the Outstanding Departmental Administration Team category of the Times Higher Education Leadership and Management Awards 2013. A major challenge faced by the administrators in that team is ensuring consistency across the different units, while at the same time recognising and responding to local needs. Meeting this challenge became all the more crucial in 2011-12, when changes to the HE landscape made offering the best possible service to students an absolute imperative. To meet this priority, some parts of the team identified a particular need for “customer training”. From that initial grass-roots suggestion developed an ambitious and innovative initiative, designed by and for the team as a whole.

The initiative developed over a whole year in five different phases. Every available resource was tapped into, including internal expertise, HR assistance, external contacts and internal sponsors. Widespread staff commitment and determination created the impetus that would ensure the success of this large-scale collaborative programme. A half-day conference, with keynote speakers and workshops, open to every single member of the departmental administration team, launched the initiative. This had the advantage of uniting the team around their common objectives in a format which, although typically academic, had not previously been experienced by a lot of the participants. Colleagues returned to their sub-units and identified specific projects, some of them joint, which they identified as likely to make a positive difference to their particular student population. Phase 3 reunited the whole team, introducing a new “liquid café“ format in which projects were presented, questions raised and dialogues initiated among participants. An impressive twenty projects were then finalised and undertaken in phase 4. A final event, with poster displays, showcased the outcome of these projects. This event encouraged further sharing of good practice, while also celebrating the administration team's outstanding contribution to enhancing the student experience at Kent.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Athena Swan Bronze Award Application

In April the University made its application for the bronze Athena Swan Award. The submission was a collaborative effort between staff in the Faculty of Sciences and the HR team. Bronze awards demonstrate that an institution as a whole has a solid foundation of policies and practices to eliminate gender bias and an inclusive culture that values female staff. It shows: commitment to the journey towards advancing women in SET (Science, Engineering and Technology); identification of the starting point and the resources needed; identification of who is leading and supporting the process; and the monitoring of progress on the action plan.

The application included an action plan which was prepared by the Kent Athena SWAN Working Group to move their objectives forward. The action plan address
some explicit but also aims to achieve outcomes that are tied to our overall aim of changing the culture of the institution and faculty. The plan was been produced by the core SWAN team, but was circulated for input to the University Senior Management Team, all Heads of School in the Sciences. The plan was also heavily influenced by the report commissioned from Oxford Research and Policy who carried out an all-staff survey. It thus has buy-in and input from the institution at many levels with advice from external consultants.

We will be told in September whether we have achieved the award. A staff post is being created to support School in their individual applications over the next 12 months.

IDAHO Day

The University marked International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHO) on Friday 17 May with events that included the flying of a rainbow flag on its Templeman Library. The rainbow flag has been the international symbol for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) communities and social movements around the world since the 1970s. The LGBT Staff Network successfully organised its first LGBT History Month activities in February of this year and it is hoped they will continue to raise awareness of the role of LGBT staff and students at the University.’