

Job Evaluation in Higher Education - a Lesson Learnt?

A recent report published by the Higher Education employers association, UCEA, presented a review of the framework agreement for the modernisation of pay structures in Higher Education.

The 'framework agreement' was an enabling national agreement that introduced a 51 point pay spine covering the vast majority of HE staff. This report provided the skeletal framework around which individual institutions could create their own pay and grading structures and importantly choose which mechanism of job evaluation would underpin these. The report is highly recommended for those still battling with the concept of job evaluation and how the process can be implemented to achieve a positive outcome.

In the vast majority of cases the choice of a job evaluation scheme was between the Higher Education Role Analysis Scheme, designed and developed specifically for the Higher Education sector and a tailored version of the Hay scheme of job evaluation.

The report was published in September 2008 at a time when a significant group of institutions had recently fully implemented their revised pay structures and as such the experiences were fresh in the minds of those who were canvassed for case study or opinion. This was also significantly just ahead of the worst fall-out from the banking crisis.

Those in other sections of the public sector could perhaps be excused for casting envious eyes over the related pay settlement that was agreed during the period of the agreement, spanning the years 2006-2009. Total increases of at least 15.9% over the period have had a significant impact in the ease of implementing a new pay and grade framework.

With many related public sector organisations having a less positive experience in implementing job evaluation, some key pointers can be provided in looking at pay and grade reviews underpinned by job evaluation:

Adequate resourcing

Both the pay settlements reached and the internal resources available to institutions in Higher Education were generous in relative terms. Having clear financial parameters in terms of projected, budgeted costs and internal project resources are key.

Recommended solutions

It is interesting to note that as part of the framework agreement a recommended pay structure model was presented for consideration as a template model for local adaptation if deemed appropriate.

This 'starter' model gave each institution a clear head start during the pay modelling component, whereas the normal experience is one of a 'blank sheet' to design pay models from scratch. In addition to this, the evaluation of academic roles was supported by the creation of national role profiles which could be adapted or tailored locally. This national supporting framework under the auspices of UCEA was of considerable help to individual institutions.

Job Evaluation methodology

A clear distinction can be drawn between two main methodologies in applying job evaluation:

- The application of generic role profiles supporting defined job families
- Individual role evaluation reflecting demands of existing roles

The process of job evaluation varied between the utilisation of evaluation panels and application of job matching against generic profiles and employee participative role evaluation.

The choice of methodology very much reflected the HR culture of each institution and was related to the choice of scheme and the scale of employee involvement. The report noted that the job family approach with associated panels and job matching was generally positively received.

Resolve equal pay in positive financial climate

The implementation of the framework agreement will resolve many (but by no means all) equal pay issues. As this was done in an exceptionally positive financial framework, the numbers of gainers and losers were balanced heavily in favour of gainers with fundamental pay protection underpinning some staff groups.

For those who have yet to implement job evaluation and resolve potential equal pay cases throughout the public sector, they do so in a radically different financial framework. The latest round of pay negotiations in Higher Education present a startlingly tighter offer than previously noted. This sets the scene for the public sector generally. Implementing new pay and grade models at a time when financial savings are required will considerably reduce the likelihood that it will be seen as a positive experience by HR Directors.

Even those Higher Education institutions who have declared their satisfaction on how job evaluation has been successfully implemented now have to consider both the impact of these generous settlements have been and whether in fact their full equal pay liability has been indeed been addressed. The time for audit and review will soon come to those who have jumped the implementation hurdle.