

# **HUMANE**

**Heads of University Management & Administration Network in Europe**

## **SEMINAR**

**Università degli Studi di Ferrara**

**Friday 30 to Saturday 31 March 2001**

### **“Human Resources Management”**

Summary

**Human Resources Policies at the University of Ferrara**

## **Alessandro Fabbri, Università degli Studi di Ferrara**

The opening presentation described the organisation of human resources in the traditional, medium-sized university that is Ferrara.

The University is divided into 18 Departments, plus some scientific Centres and general services, as well as the Central Administration. The teaching staff is composed of 665 academic staff and researchers, while clerical staff include 518 people, comprising personal assistants, technicians, librarians, and other kind of employees. The number of registered students is just over 14,000, and the annual budget of the order of 120 million euros.

Alessandro observed that one problem with the Italian system of operating budgets is that those who are responsible for financial decisions are often associated with academic activity, so that it

often appears easier to find funds for an academic appointment than for an administrative one. Another distinction among staff is that, whereas until 1993 all staff were civil servants, this is now true only for academic staff, with other employees coming under civil law. However, since the University is a public institution, the recruitment of employees is possible only by open competition. It is also very difficult to recruit staff for short periods.

He identified the two major issues in HR terms as those of *professional staff training* and the *revision of career grades* for staff. For training there exists a National Collective Agreement. Compulsory and optional courses with final examinations provide credits which are valid in all universities. The 2001 budget in Ferrara has a provision of some 90,000 euros for compulsory training activities, which are divided into three categories: training, updating and specialised training.

The revision of staffing structures was based on the principle of having all staff assigned to one of four new categories which replace 10 previous grades – although since each category is sub-divided there are in fact 19 different levels in the new structure. The four categories are attained by virtue of education and training – for example, school education only for the first grade, high school for the second, a degree for the third and a degree plus training for the fourth. At Ferrara, of the 518 support staff, by far the largest number (33%) were at the second level; while out of the same 518, a total of 140 work in central administration.

The session produced many questions, notably concerning the practice of reserving a number of places for promotion for internal staff, together with questions about the nature of training courses undertaken.

## **Recruitment and Selection in the UK and Ireland**

*Trevor Field, University of Aberdeen*

*Michael Gleeson, Trinity College, Dublin*

These linked presentations gave an overview of recruitment practice in the UK and Ireland, and sought to bring out in discussion the ways in which such practice differs from, or is the same as, other national models for recruiting new staff.

### *Recruitment as a two-way Process (Trevor Field)*

Trevor pointed out that until the mid-1990s very little or no research had been done into the process of recruiting and selecting academic staff in UK universities. Traditionally, most universities operated in

very similar ways, with a general advertisement placed in the press and then a rather unstructured selection process followed by an interview for shortlisted candidates. For various reasons, universities saw themselves (and their academic staff) as different from other forms of employment. Not surprisingly, the process came to be seen as a “closed shop”.

A survey which he had carried out in 1995 showed various trends at national level – for example, a distinction between the advertising styles of “old” and “new” universities, a tension between the academic “line manager” and the central Personnel function, a greater tendency to add practical tests to the formal interview, and – above all – a surprising reluctance to tell candidates what was actually involved in the job. At a local level, in Aberdeen, there had been significant advances in terms of rigorous shortlisting processes, statements of equal opportunities, and the creation of job- or person-specifications. However, these had not perhaps been matched by truly cost-effective advertising or by the conduct of presentations, or even by the rigour of formal interview situations.

In reviewing the changes which had affected the sector since the 1995 report, on the basis of recent advertisements in the press, it became clear that advertising styles had now become much more similar across the sector. But it was still possible to ask what messages universities are sending out in their advertisements – for example, does everyone understand the same thing by an “equal opportunities” policy? What purpose is served by the confidential references given on behalf of candidates, or even by the application form itself?

More generally, the presentation addressed the question of the role of the Human Resources department in such matters, and asked whether the HR department is sometimes merely a re-badged Personnel office – a “clerk of works” rather than an architect.

### *Professorial Recruitment at TCD (Michael Gleeson)*

Michael reminded his audience at the very start that the recruitment of Professors is one of the major activities in Universities. This is particularly so in the case of relatively small academic departments, where the strategic direction of an academic field can be addressed.

This presentation illustrated the fairly traditional way in which Trinity College, Dublin (TCD) approaches the recruitment process. All Chair appointments are dealt with via the Secretary’s office, with a process of long-listing and short-listing preceding an interview process. The interviews take place over two days, with a first interview being structured and conducted using external experts; the second interview is similar but with a greater internal element. Michael and others described experiences with “head-hunting”.

The general discussion also explored alternative ways in which colleagues address various other aspects of this important issue. The problems of initial start-up funds; support; housing; careers for spouses/partners were all seen to be presenting new challenges. For example, with professorial salaries in Ireland averaging around 85k euros it hardly seemed enough to tempt exceptional talent, especially in a city such as Dublin with very high housing costs. A more recent problem was that of dual-profession families, where the new professor had a spouse or partner who also wished to have a post as a price for moving. At least one British university had developed a policy of creating posts for partners, while others resisted this or saw it as incompatible with a policy of equal opportunities. It soon became apparent that the variety of ways of establishing a package varied enormously across Europe, since in some countries there was no tax to be paid on expenses. One thing which was clear, however, was that everywhere the overall package was more important than the fixed salary.

The presentation also raised questions about the process of departmental review which is engaged in before a successor is appointed, and the whole notion of how much input departments should have to the process. Scandinavian colleagues referred to a tradition of releasing the results of any interviews or examinations. Meanwhile, the idea of competition for salaries was noted in the Netherlands, where it had become more common to have part-time Professors, to such an extent that a situation had been reached where in some areas there were no full-time professors. A minimum percentage of time had therefore been established.

With regard to actual earnings, it was noted that at TCD there is a maximum level of 20% of external (research) earnings which a professor could keep, whereas in other systems (for example, the Netherlands) the 20% limit on time was not accompanied by any limit on the amount of earnings.

These presentations offered an opportunity to discuss the various types of recruitment process used in other European countries, and to compare the relative problems and benefits.

### **A Planning & Management Model for Academic Staff**

*Pasquale Mastrodomenico, Università degli Studi di Torino*

This demonstration continued and updated the presentation made in Reykjavik (June 2000), to show how it is possible to produce models to analyse and plan the costs of teaching staff for future periods – in this case, at the University of Turin, for five years. Pasquale illustrated how databases could be

used to forecast expenditure based on any permutation of staff numbers, with departmental or institutional totals

## **The Training of Amateurs**

### **Leif Lindfors, University of Stockholm**

Leif brought to the seminar some thoughts on “the training of amateurs”. He outlined the situation of the University of Stockholm, with about 80 departments, some of them having around 200 staff but others with only a few. There were four Faculties, of which Law was also a single department while the three others each had at least 22 departments. While there had been amalgamations over the years, the regular tendency to produce new disciplines or groupings had led to an equal number of splits, and the number of departments remained pretty constant. On a slightly different level the academic leadership operated on three levels – the Rector at the top, then Deans (proposed by the Faculty Board and accepted by the Rector), and finally Heads of Department.

As was the case for other countries, the funds for salaries and all other costs came from a variety of sources, with 60% coming directly from the Government although some other funds (for example, from Research Councils) might also show Government influence. Salary levels, together with other important aspects of autonomy, including staff recruitment, were determined within the university. In view of the large responsibilities involved it was necessary for heads of department to receive training.

Leif felt that the training offered had been successful, although the fixed-term nature of the head-of-department job meant that there was a high turn-over rate, with a consequent need to have new people on the course at regular intervals. The course was essentially aimed at reducing the amount of time which academics spent on basic administration. Informal “awayday” meetings for heads of department had also been shown to have very beneficial effects, in terms of commitment and understanding. This had been particularly valuable in overcoming the traditional problem whereby academic staff were more loyal to their discipline than to the university itself. For this institutional loyalty to become firmly rooted it was even more necessary for heads to be trained in leadership skills.

The difficulty of instilling a corporate sense had been experienced by various other colleagues, including those where professional managers had been appointed to handle the budgets for Faculties/Schools, and to provide support for heads of department. More than one UK university represented at the seminar had abolished traditional Faculties to bring in Schools. At Exeter, the Heads of School were appointed some 15 months before the start of their term of office, and then received a year of training, at the rate of three days per month. There was also a requirement to spend nine days per year in contact with Senior Management (Vice-Chancellor and University Secretary). This represented a major investment by the University, in addition to the annual bonus of around 9,000 euros for each Head of School.

In further discussion, Leif acknowledged that it was sometimes hard to persuade departments to cooperate, particularly if either of them feared that a take-over by another was likely. Indeed, he had found that it was often easier to get disparate disciplines to collaborate in organisational change!

With regard to attendance at the course, Leif noted that heads of department were formally obliged to take part, but that there was no penalty for anyone who refused – heads were “asked” to take part. Although in theory it would be possible to pay people more in recognition of particular skills, in practice this was not done. He saw a problem in that senior academics lost touch with their research specialisms while engaged in administrative matters, and wondered how other colleagues dealt with this. Various methods were suggested, including the provision of professional administrators to help, extra budgets with which to buy teaching support, and the possibility of a year’s sabbatical leave immediately after a term of office as head, to allow re-immersion in the academic discipline.

## **Rewards and Incentives in the context of performance-based pay**

**Dugald Mackie, University of Glasgow**

This case study was based on the experience of the University of Glasgow in seeking to develop the commercialisation of its research activity as part of a strategy of developing income streams which will be independent of core Government funding. While policies had been in place for some time to deal with researchers and inventors, no similar policies existed for the staff taking research to the market, although such staff were essentially operating in a competitive business environment.

The presentation explored some of the difficulties and tensions of attempting to marry an essentially public sector pay and reward structure with the type of private sector measures needed to retain highly skilled commercial staff. Areas to be explored will include performance-related bonuses, measurement of "added commercial value" and the holding of equity stakes in spin-out companies by employees.

The Research and Enterprise office at the University had been formed using central funds provided for this purpose. Its staff were a team of people with a commitment to commercial practices – the general background of these staff was in industry and commerce. They were not on the same incremental salary scales as other staff in the University administration, and this in itself might be a cause of friction. The financial rewards from commercialisation (Intellectual Property Rights, or IPR), were split between the University, the department and the individual.

Dugald noted that any performance-related schemes must be transparent and fair, must emphasise teamwork, must be based on appraisal and assessment, and finally must have firm management. Performance meanwhile was defined in terms of targets (with differential targets being set for individual teams), and of standards which were based on weighted core competencies – that is, key skills were needed, but some were given more importance (weight) in certain areas. He recognised that there had been signs of irritation or envy among some colleagues, but defended the commercial nature of the reward structure as being well suited to the nature of the enterprise.

In response to questions he noted that between 50% and 60% of the Research and Enterprise effort was devoted to bio-medical research. He also clarified that there was no absolute compulsion for staff to use this office (some people will always try to engineer their own deals with companies), but that the strong encouragement worked in most cases. The "deal-makers" within the office, who negotiated optimum rates on behalf of staff, were crucial to the organisation. Several participants asked about the fact that the University had deliberately chosen not to make the office into a separate company; Dugald explained that although this local decision had been taken at the outset it was still possible to change the rules if circumstances made it desirable.

## **Methods of Regulating Teaching Duties in Germany**

## Klaus Peters, University of Wuppertal

Klaus introduced his remarks by noting that in the Federal Republic of Germany the 16 individual states (the *Länder*) are independent in educational and cultural matters. This means that the universities of each state are subject to the legislation of the parliament in their particular state. The University of Wuppertal is in the state of North-Rhine/Westphalia, which with its population of 16 million is the largest of the states. His report concerned the situation in this state, where there are 15 universities and 12 technical colleges.

The reporting system was based on two main laws. The first, the so-called "**Lehrangebotserhebung**" (**collecting of information about courses offered**), is an instrument for checking the fulfilment of teaching duties at the University of Wuppertal and is based on a decree ("Erlass") issued by the Ministry of Science and Research of North-Rhine/Westphalia in October 1984.

The so-called "**Lehrverpflichtungsverordnung**" (**law on teaching obligations**) which was passed in August 1999 provided the necessary legal framework for fulfilling teaching loads and also established the obligation on the part of the university, the deans of the faculties and the teaching staff to supply information.

This law regulates

- teaching loads
- the method of calculation for particular kinds of courses
- the number of days on which professional teaching staff must be present in the university
- exceptions to the above
- possible reductions in teaching loads
- the obligation to supply information

Klaus illustrated the ways in which the introduction of this law had brought about in Wuppertal a re-organisation of the collecting of information about courses offered and strengthened the obligations

both on the part of teaching staff to supply information to the Dean of their Faculty and on the part of the university to supply information to the Ministry.

Collecting information on courses offered is done by the central administration (the section responsible for planning and development) as a service for the Faculties and for the "Rektorat" (the "university management", consisting of four professors and the head of the university administration), and the information is passed back to the Deans to be used as an instrument of internal Faculty control.

Further development of this scheme in the framework of a system of information about courses throughout the university were conceivable and technically possible, and had already been done at the University of Dortmund, for example. At the moment, however, for the University of Wuppertal the cost in terms of staff training and staff needed to run the system was perceived to be too high.

General discussion of this paper concentrated on the ways in which the different systems of independent *Länder* made it difficult to regulate higher education in Germany; and on the number of working hours in the context of "luggage professors" who were employed to give just a few classes or courses and who were rarely on campus. It transpired that various countries had different attitudes to the number of hours required of teaching staff, with some extremely detailed figures such as the 1,600 hours per year in Finland and 1,729 in Sweden.

At the conclusion of the seminar participants were treated to a private showing of the famous Palio di Ferrara, with magnificent displays of colourful heraldry and music. This was followed by a guided visit to the impressive Palazzo Schifanoia and in particular the frescoes of its "Room of the Months". This was only one of a number of museums and monuments in Ferrara, which was a revelation to all who saw the town for the first time.

#### **Summary prepared by Trevor Field**

The word is used here in its UK-Irish sense of the holder of a University Chair, and often implying headship, or potential headship, of a department.