



# Universities Human Resources NEWSLETTER



UHR Chair, Matthew Knight,  
announcing the 2011  
UHR Award winners

UHR is delighted to announce results of the 2011 Awards for Excellence in Human Resources in Higher Education. This special edition newsletter celebrates some of the innovative and effective people management initiatives that universities have undertaken during these challenging times.

The results were announced at the UHR annual conference in May earlier this year, and with the volume and diversity of successful projects, the judges decided to award three commendations alongside the four category winners.

# 2011 UHR Awards

## Winning people management initiatives for challenging times

The annual UHR awards were established to showcase the measurable, positive impact that good HR practice has on organisations in the current challenging operating environment. The awards provide a welcome opportunity to recognise and celebrate the importance of HR achievement, whether through an individual's or team's work, and to share good practice within the sector – a key objective for UHR.

For 2011, the four award categories were designed to reflect the theme of the annual conference, 'The Talent Challenge – working together in a changing world'. Entry to these categories called for evidence of measurable achievement and impact, as the judges searched for a project or initiative that had already been implemented and produced real results.

With over 30 entries – a record number – the judging panel had a difficult task to identify the winners. The judges were Professor Andrew Wathey, Vice Chancellor at Northumbria University, (last year's overall winners); Ian Tomlinson-Roe, UK HR function effectiveness practice leader with PricewaterhouseCoopers (who led for PwC on the development of the People Management Framework with UHR); Professor Ivan Robertson of Robertson Cooper, advisor to the national HE 'Wellbeing' project, in which UHR is involved; and UHR Chair, Matthew Knight, HR Director at the University of Leeds.

The awards were announced by UHR Chair Matthew Knight and presented by UHR Vice Chair Jane Embley at the annual conference gala dinner on 19 May. The judges singled out those HR teams that had made a real difference to their institution, within the various categories, and whose projects provide inspiration across the sector.

The winning teams were:

### **Talent challenge**

**Winner:** University of Sheffield – Female Academic Progression Project

### **HR contribution to business efficiency in challenging times**

**Winner:** University of the West of England – People + Performance Project

**Commended:** University of Lincoln – Absence Management & Wellbeing Project

**Commended:** University of Cumbria – Recovery Project

### **Organisational resilience and staff engagement**

**Winner:** De Montfort University – Vision Café Project

### **Exceptional HR achievement**

**Winner:** City University London – An HR Metamorphosis Project

**Commended:** University of Brighton – Equality Starts Here Project

Part of the mission of UHR is to facilitate sharing good practice within HR. UHR members will have the opportunity to hear from some of the entrants about their projects over the next year, through workshops and regional events. Details of the winning and commended projects are also available to anyone from the UHR website [www.uhr.ac.uk](http://www.uhr.ac.uk)



Janis Webster, Head of HR Operations, and Andrew Dodman, Director of HR, receiving the award for the University of Sheffield

### Category: Talent challenge

**Winner:** University of Sheffield – Female Academic Progression Project

The University of Sheffield's Female Academic Progression Project, was the winner of the Talent challenge category, which was for initiatives in the areas of succession planning, leadership development and organisational change.

The project was established to challenge the "accumulated disadvantage" experienced by female academics in their career progression, an issue identified as a priority area through dialogue with groups of female academic staff. With concerted senior level buy-in and input from all the university's academic faculties in a steering group, the multi-faceted Female Academics' Progression plan was devised to address this issue. The steering group identified eight key themes that required attention, and targeted measures were taken to address these areas.

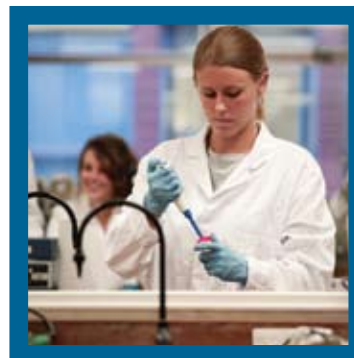
These included mentoring schemes, aimed at developing female academics' leadership behaviours and offering career support; an annual lunch for all female professors with the Vice-Chancellor and Executive Board; and the Women Academic Returners' Program (WARP), which supports academics returning from maternity leave with monies that allow them to concentrate on their research after their return to work.

The impact of the activities can be measured in many ways.

Qualitatively, the plan has received a wealth of positive feedback from staff and other organisations, and quantitatively, our promotion statistics show an increased success rate for female academics

progressing to senior academic positions across the university. WARP has also helped female academics coming back from maternity to bring in significant revenue through research income. The key to the plan's success has been the active involvement of female academic staff in determining strategy, policy and action. Thanks to this, Human Resources has gained academic buy-in for a key strand of its Equality and Diversity strategy, "Excellence through Inclusion".

Professor Tony Ryan, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, commented *"In creating a climate in which our female academics are able to share the issues that are relevant to them and consider the root causes of barriers to their progression, they themselves create the impetus for change. The impact of the actions and initiatives taken to date confirm to me that this involvement and engagement is an important part of our work to ensure we maximise everyone's talent. I am absolutely delighted that UHR have recognised our efforts in this important area."*



Biomedical Science Student, University of Sheffield



Far left: Catherine Parker and Joy Charlton, HR Managers, receiving the award for the University of the West of England

Left: University of the West of England's HR Team



University of Lincoln's HR Team

**Category: HR contribution to business efficiency in challenging times**

**Winner:** University of the West of England – People + Performance Project

The University of the West of England's entry was for their people + performance project and won the HR contribution to business efficiency in challenging times category. Designed and developed wholly in-house by the HR team, this new performance management system is unique in its ambition and range.

The project had two aims: to improve the employment experience for staff, and to enable financial savings. These two aims are often seen as contradictory. The team tackled this problem by combining ten separate people-centered initiatives in to one branded programme – all with a core purpose of improving business efficiency.

The project covered initiatives ranging from team briefing to a new academic workload model, and from new performance standards to corporate well being.

The project has succeeded by linking individual outputs to business need, by improving management capacity, and by reducing management overheads.

The project has enabled a reduction in academic management costs by £2.8m per annum, and will enable a similar saving in 2011/12 on professional service budgets. At the same time, engagement levels at one to one and annual review meetings are up, and sickness absence has reduced by 10%.

Ian Apperley, Human Resources Director, commented *"Implementation has been tough, and it would have been impossible without a fantastic HR department working together to support achievement."*

The project proves how HR actions can improve the "bottom line", and it has confirmed HR's role as a provider of people based solutions to prevailing financial challenges.

John Rushforth, Deputy Vice Chancellor (Resources), said *"This is an absolutely fantastic award to win, and well deserved recognition of everyone working so hard across the whole department to support the university's change programmes, and to support all of the members of staff affected by them. We are a Partnership University and the partnership style of working is one that has been embraced by the HR team. We are grateful to have such a wonderful group of people, and delighted that they have received such prestigious external recognition of their work."*

**Commended:** University of Lincoln – Absence Management & Wellbeing Project

The University of Lincoln's Absence Management & Wellbeing Project was commended in the HR contribution to business efficiency in challenging times category. The university sees staff entitlement to a generous sick pay scheme as a key factor in recruiting and retaining staff members and did not wish to remove it even when this may have resulted in immediate financial savings. Instead the university, through the HR Department, chose to invest in a project built around the introduction of a new absence management system which represented devolved employee data entry and management information for the first time in the university – the purpose being to support managers with identifying absence trends and taking positive steps in a timely manner. This system implementation was then supported by a number of key wellbeing and benefit initiatives with the aim of proactively ensuring that

individuals were taking interest and ownership in their health through various university schemes and activities.

The project was aimed at the whole workforce and encompassed balancing the financial investment of a system and wellbeing initiatives against the potential savings in the cost of sickness pay to the business through having timely and accurate management information. The project was supported by a communications strategy using technology, desk drops and eye catching posters to encourage a cultural change in the university where employee wellbeing would be seen as a shared responsibility.

The project reduced the average number of days per FTE, from 8.29 days in 2009 to 6.54 in 2010, and resulted in a cost reduction of sickness absence from £1.125 million in 2009 to £821,000 in 2010. The removal of all paper absence reporting also saved £3,000 per year. The real time absence data gathered is used to support better workforce planning, and the work has demonstrated the HR Department supporting a number of key university agendas including Wellbeing, reducing bureaucracy, the Value For Money agenda and the Environment agenda.

Professor Mary Stuart, Vice Chancellor, commented *"I am delighted that we have been recognised for the positive impact the work of the HR department has had on improving our absence management processes and practices. Not only have we developed and implemented a clear policy we have also moved all our absence reporting on line which has simplified and streamlined our reporting. The team have worked in partnership with our unions, managers and administrative staff to deliver this change. In tandem and because we recognise that improving health is so much more than supporting people when they are sick HR have undertaken significant work on raising awareness about wellbeing tools and resources. It is particularly pleasing to be able to promote all the opportunities we are able to offer both staff and students to take part in activities which can improve their health."*

## Commended: University of Cumbria – Recovery Project

The University of Cumbria's HR team was awarded a Commendation for their contribution to business efficiency in challenging times. Their innovative Supporting Staff in Transition Programme was created in response to an urgent need for transformational change to meet financial and quality targets. During 2009/10 the university recognised that it had to implement serious financial recovery within an extremely challenging timescale.

This meant difficult issues such as reducing the number of faculties and professional services, transferring FE delivery to two new providers, reviewing all student administration functions, reshaping estate principles and re-profiling the university's senior management team had to be addressed. The new programme, commissioned and facilitated by the HR service, supported over 400 staff through voluntary severance, redundancy or redeployment and attracted European Funding to support its implementation.

HR Director Janet Whitworth said *"Most of this work was led by my predecessor John Parr, but I am extremely proud of the team. Not only was the reconfiguration completed so successfully, but we also managed to restructure our own service at the same time. We would be happy to share the approach we adopted with HR professionals in other HEIs."*

Vice Chancellor Professor Graham Upton commented *"I am thrilled the efforts of our HR team have been recognised with this commendation. The scale, scope and timescale of the work undertaken by them were both outstanding and innovative. Their contribution to transforming the University of Cumbria cannot be overestimated."*



**Paul Boustead, Deputy Director of HR, and Janet Whitworth, Director of HR, receiving the commendation for the University of Cumbria**



Ben Browne, Director of HR, receiving the award for De Montfort University

### Category: Organisational resilience and staff engagement

Winner: De Montfort University – Vision Café Project

De Montfort University's Vision Café project won the Organisational resilience and staff engagement category and set out to address a contemporary issue; In an increasingly competitive and challenging environment, there is a compelling need for universities to have a clearly articulated Mission and Vision, which is understood and 'owned' by the workforce. Based on the World Café concept, initial engagement centred on a series of Vision Cafés, the objectives of which were:

- To engage a diverse range of staff, students and stakeholders to elicit their views, with the aim of ensuring shared ownership of the final Mission and Vision;
- To create an environment which broke down occupational and/or hierarchical barriers, to enable colleagues from different backgrounds to work collaboratively;
- To provide a genuine opportunity for employees and stakeholders to shape the future direction of the university.

A training room was transformed to replicate an authentic café environment in order to establish an informal setting. A series of internal communications was carefully executed to engage staff and deliver a consistent message from the VC i.e. that this process of engagement was genuine and the outcomes of the cafés were expected to be pivotal in shaping the Mission and Vision of the university. During the Café events, comments were instantly captured on table cloths and the evaluation/feedback on the process was captured by participants writing their views on

boards under headings "What's Hot" and "What's Not". Following the Vision Cafés, an e-engagement process commenced to provide an opportunity for staff who had not participated in the Vision Cafés, Governors and key external stakeholders to engage.

As a direct result of the feedback from the engagement, the original draft Mission and Vision was substantially revised, demonstrating to those who contributed to the process that their views counted and that the final product was something the entire university could 'own'.

Commenting on the Café, Professor David Wilson, Deputy Vice-Chancellor/Dean of Business and Law, said *"The processes led by the HR Directorate to engage staff and other stakeholders in the development of the university's Mission and Vision were a model of good practice. In particular, the innovative use of the World Café methodology to engage with staff to create a sense of enthusiasm and the exemplary facilitation, which led to clear outputs that genuinely influenced the final version of Mission and Vision. The engagement processes demonstrated that if organisations value staff as their biggest asset, there is a compelling case for providing opportunities for positive participation and an equalling compelling case for enabling staff to contribute to shaping the future of their organisation."*



City University London's  
HR Team

### **Category: Exceptional HR achievement**

**Winner:** City University London – An HR Metamorphosis Project

The winner of the Exceptional HR achievement category was City University London's An HR Metamorphosis Project.

Since 2009, a challenging, rolling programme of parallel and integrated HR initiatives has transformed the efficiency and effectiveness of HR at City University London. This is enabling the university to achieve its aim of HR excellence in the HE sector and beyond.

*"HR has been restructured (whilst overseeing the restructuring of other areas), reduced costs significantly and transformed staff relations in the university, evidenced by the drop in grievances, disciplinary cases and employment tribunals. HR is now regarded as one of the best performing Professional Services in the university and a model for others."* (Henrietta Royle, Chief Operating Officer, 29 October 2010)

The HR metamorphosis involved three parallel and complementary workstreams designed to produce strategic alignment and a step change in operational standards:

- Reshaping HR structure, staffing and organisation
- Re-engineering HR processes
- Skills development and support for the HR team

HR is now far more closely engaged by and with the institution. This has resulted from the competence, credibility and confidence exhibited by the new team. Consequently, HR is a key player in delivering City's new Vision under the leadership of the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Paul Curran.

We will invest in people as the primary means of driving the transformation. (City Vision, March 2011)

Professor Susan Nash, Dean of The City Law School, said *"The new HR structure has provided the foundation for more effective working relationships between HR and its 'customers' across the university ensuring the delivery of a comprehensive, coordinated and cohesive HR service. It is the fostering and development of these relationships, and the understanding they afford, that has resulted in the success of the HR functions transformation. It is this understanding that will allow HR to play an integral role in delivering the university's vision, a vision that relies heavily on an investment in people."*

**Commended:** University of Brighton – Equality starts here Project

The University of Brighton's 'Equality starts here' project was commended in the Exceptional HR achievement category. Brighton, as a place, has a long history and reputation for tolerance and open-mindedness, and the university community reflects that of its location. The Personnel Department's equality and diversity awareness campaign was designed after many years of monitoring representation rates of black and ethnic minority staff and women in higher paid roles but seeing little or no change in profiles, despite a number of equal opportunities policies and initiatives, as well as sustained feedback that managers and staff lacked confidence in their knowledge of equality and diversity issues and were unsure of 'political correctness'.



Brenda Aherne, Staff Development Adviser and Caren Green, Personnel Adviser, receiving the commendation for the University of Brighton

The key aims of the awareness and communication project, which ran over a period of two years, were to tackle a culture of inertia and complacency and also to engage and empower staff to feel confident in addressing equality issues.

The mirror-board poster campaign "Equality starts here" was eye catching and innovative. The design concept means that people literally see themselves in the mirror and are encouraged to take personal responsibility for making equality and diversity happen.

In 2010, all staff were sent a copy of an associated mirror-board cover calendar entitled 'No easy answers'. Each month included a photographic image, a thought-provoking question and an informative statement, covering the range of protected characteristics. The calendar generated some interesting and challenging responses. The awareness campaign is demonstrating results although there is clearly a further journey to achieve equality for all.

The staff survey results showed exceptionally high scores from staff who said they believed that the university was fair and agreed with its actions on equality and diversity.

Professor Stuart Laing, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, said "Equality starts here' at Brighton is led by a skilled and reflective team of personnel professionals. The programme combines systematic use of data with both qualitative analysis and challenging communications materials – producing a custom-made and locally targeted approach to improving performance in equality and diversity practice.

Mirrorboard posters and equality calendars challenge complacency ("what is the problem?"), provoke debate ('are you saying this is about me?') and initiate action



Professor Julian Crampton, Vice-Chancellor, in the University of Brighton's 'Equality Starts Here' calendar

(‘so how can we make this better?’). Disability audits and consultation are transforming understanding and practice. Above all the whole organisation has been re-energised and sensitised to equality issues – a great success – and without a great fuss.”

## UHR News

### 2012 UHR Conference

The 2012 UHR Conference theme will be "Sustainability and Survival", running from 15 -18 May near London in Ashford, Kent.

### UHR Executive

Matthew Knight, Director of HR at the University of Leeds, will continue as UHR Chair until 30 September 2012. Matthew will be supported by two Vice Chairs: Jane Embley, Director of Human Resources at Northumbria University, and by Mary Luckiram, HR Director at City University, London.



Matthew Knight



Jane Embley



Mary Luckiram

UHR is involved in a range of projects and initiatives; for more details about these, or for membership and sponsorship opportunities, please contact:

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