Progress Report on 2013/14 Conference issues

The ECC Annual Conference 2014: New Challenges, New Solutions: Innovation and HR was held on 3 and 4 March 2014.

All the conference documentation is available at http://www.ecc.ac.uk/events/annual-conference-archive/2013-14-new-challenges-new-solutions/ where you will find:

- copies of presentations
- video interviews with speakers
- a conference report
- articles about Scotland and Wales HE developments and funding

This Progress Report describes how we are tackling issues identified at the conference as well as through member feedback during the year:
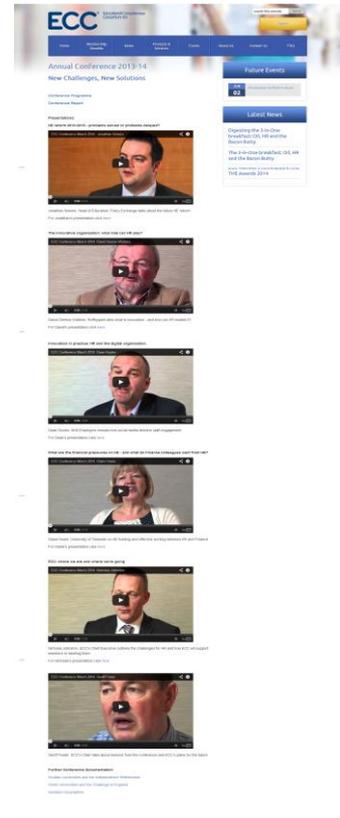
1. **Sharing good practice**
2. **ECC service development**
3. **ECC communications**
4. **Procurement**

Performance against all business and financial objectives is reported in our Annual Reports, and we will continue to communicate with members throughout the year.

Do please contact me with any questions, comments or ideas.

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1. SHARING GOOD PRACTICE

1.1 MEMBER NETWORKING

You said

Could ECC facilitate collaborative working in the south of England along the lines that works for universities in the north and Scotland? Could there be working groups to map career progression and performance? These would consider promotion and its effects on job grade. Issues discussed included creative performance pay and rewards; contribution and excellence; and the alignment of HERA competencies with academic promotion criteria.

Members would value opportunities to share experience and concerns – things have moved on over the last 12 years and the issues faced in various user groups originally are now very different.

We are doing

We have very active network groups in Scotland and the North of England. During the focus groups that we ran for the HERA/FEDRA scheme documentation project we found interest in re-introducing some regional networking groups to have discussions about continued practice and use of HERA/FEDRA on an annual basis. These networking groups would enable members to get together and share learning and ideas on how they are using HERA.
We would be delighted to facilitate such groups as regional networking groups and we will invite any members who are interested in taking part to contact us.
We also recognise that with the introduction of the new software we may need to run additional network groups to pick up and deal with user issues, and to encourage members to share thinking and practical solutions.

1.2 ENCOURAGING INNOVATION

You said

What practical ways can we find to create the space and time for people to develop ideas and to work in teams rather than in isolation? Building on one of the Dragons Den ideas, could there be an ECC award for innovation and enterprise? Suggestions could be collected and presented at the ECC Annual Conference for consideration.

How we better understand the impact of new technology and changes to working patterns? How do we best enable staff to use social media appropriately?

We are doing

We are keen to work on this, and to take innovative approaches to doing so.
Let us know what you think – should we host an event on innovation? Should we do some desk research to collate articles and learning from other sectors? Would members be interested in joining a virtual network to share thinking on hot topics?

We will shortly post a JISC request on these questions, so please look out for that and / or contact us direct with your views.

1.3 TOTAL REWARD

You said

Given that there is more to working at university than grades and salaries, how can we improve the content and presentation of total reward packages?

We are doing

This is an issue that members are increasingly interested in; we will use existing network groups to gather views and solutions so that we can share these with the wider membership.

We will also post a JISC request on this issue, so please look out for that and / or contact us direct with your views.

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2. ECC SERVICE DEVELOPMENT

2.1 THE NEW HERA AND FEDRA SOFTWARE

You said

The new software sounds very exciting! What will happen in terms of ongoing software support? What will members need to do or think about before the introduction of the new system? Are you planning to audit the databases of the 125 members and will local structures inform future development? Will there be functionality in the new software to carry out audits?

We are doing

The first line of support will come from ECC, with more support available from the software developer when necessary. Day to day issues like password resets and general updates will be dealt with by the in-house ECC support team. The main difference is that ECC will own the system outright. It will be wholly ECC's and it will be much easier to improve and evolve the product over time.

One of the key issues in this project is data migration. The new supplier will carry out a dummy migration exercise early in the build so that we know from the outset what the landscape looks like and where the greatest effort needs to be made. We will consult individual members well in advance of any actual migration of their live data. We do not yet know the full extent to which local variations affect how data is managed within each member organisation. Some of this audit can be done remotely but we will have dialogue with members to determine this in detail. The reporting function within the software will enable members to check the consistency of their data and scoring.

The introduction of new software is a substantial development project for ECC.

There have been a number of communications specifically in relation to this project, and these will increase over the next few months, with the addition of a Twitter feed shortly. These communications will address all these issues and others fully.

2.2 SENIOR REWARD

You said

Although some members have successfully addressed senior pay and reward by building on their use of HERA, how does a HERA-based approach take account of market supplements or weighting for senior roles?

We are doing

In 2013 we published a report covering members' current practice relating to determining pay for senior staff. We have set up a project group to explore how we can best support members in addressing senior pay issues in future.

So far we have run one workshop with members to gather data and ideas on the spread and levels of senior role in HE. We have two more workshops planned and would welcome other interested members to get in touch and discuss their ideas.

We hope to provide a framework for our HE members to help them link requirements of senior roles to performance expectations and personal attributes.

2.3 BEYOND ROLE ANALYSIS – MAKING USE OF THE OUTPUTS TO ADD VALUE TO PEOPLE MANAGEMENT PRACTICE

You said

How do we match roles to generic profiles – either manually or through other systems – to see how they fit? How best can we deal with the implications of contribution points towards final reward packages and performance related pay? Will the ECC competency framework be revised and refreshed?

We are doing

Generic Profiles

Generic profiles can be an effective tool, but they do need to be based on robust analytical work to define these profiles with specific guidance provided for their use. The danger of matching from generic profiles is that it can lead to serious problems with Pay Equality.

We have therefore tended to be careful not to encourage the widespread use of generic profiles without these important underpinnings. Practice varies across the sector, and our consultants have been working with some members to provide help with the design of robust and analytically constructed profiles that do not compromise the integrity of the role analysis process

ECC has a wealth of advice to provide members with the use of generic profiles and is more than happy to respond to request for help to provide a best practice solution.

Contribution points and reward

We are keeping a watching brief on decisions made in the sector regarding the use of contribution points with a stronger focus on performance and related pay outcomes.

So far, few members in the sector have opted to get rid of automatic increments. Our consultants are currently looking at performance with the Senior Pay project and exploring the implementation of a more business plan-performance focussed approach with individual members.

Once we have a member willing to provide a case study we will share findings with members and also it is our aim to initiate a wider discussion in the sector about transitioning to a world where automatic increments become a thing of the past.

ECC Competency framework

We are exploring how our existing competency framework might be revised. This was originally developed to support members in translating the role requirements into competencies for the employees. We are seeking interested from members who would like to be involved with this; however it is likely that this work will be undertaken once the new software has been embedded with all members.

3. ECC COMMUNICATIONS

You said

Could ECC develop targeted newsletters with a focus on rewards and management of change? There could also be social media communications about reward and job evaluation aimed at all university contacts.

We are doing

We use a range of communications, including an informal 'CEO's briefing' which is circulated several times a year. We have created a company profile and group for ECC members on LinkedIn (search for 'ECC Ltd'). Although at a very early stage this will be further developed and promoted.

Our Chief Executive already has a Twitter presence (@ecc_nicholas), and we intend to add a second Twitter feed focusing on the introduction of our new HERA and FEDRA software.

We will consider targeted newsletters in planning our activities for 2014/15. We will also consider adding interactivity to our website during the year.

4. PROCUREMENT

You said

Can the consortium's collective purchasing power secure discounts on other services? Ideas discussed included recruitment advertising or discounts for 'change consultants'. Can we use the buying power of ECC members to negotiate national discounts for staff to enhance benefits of working for university? These could be added to local reward packages eg. discounts on holidays.

We are doing

Discounts on services provided by all our third party suppliers were reviewed and renegotiated for 2013/14, and we have used the combined purchasing power of our member organisations to secure discounts of 10-20% from respected providers of employee engagement surveys, equal pay reviews, e-recruitment, and online recruitment advertising. We are about to confirm a further exclusive discount for ECC members on a specialist provider of disciplinary or grievance investigation services. We will continue to seek member discounts from other suppliers, and will explore the potential for national discounts to enhance the benefits of working for ECC members.