

# Meeting tomorrow's challenges today

## ECC Annual Conference 23 November 2017

### Conference Report

Key themes and learning points: the two-minute summary	2
Introduction	3
Keynote 1: What's changing now and in the future: key challenges for HE	4
Keynote 2: Market pay in a changing context: Current workplace climate and environment; job evaluation, market pay and reward	5
Keynote 3: Agility in Academe: How can HE tap knowledge expertise and commitment to promote smart effective responses to a fast-changing environment through learning and agility?	6
Workshop 1: Talent and recruitment in a post-Brexit world	7
Workshop 2: Mind the Gender Pay Gap - key issues around role analysis that can lead to widening the gap	7
Workshop 3: Reward Strategy – One University's experience and outputs	8



Video interviews with the conference speakers are available on our [website](#) or our [YouTube channel](#).



## Key themes and learning points: the two-minute summary

**Student demands and the HR agenda:** Although many policies affecting the sector present challenges and opportunities for HR, it's vital to understand the effect of changing student expectations, demands and perceptions on all staff roles, not just on academics.

**Job Evaluation is alive and well!** Despite the challenges sometimes levelled at job evaluation and role analysis, the best reward strategies are likely to blend a systematic, transparent job evaluation approach with market-based considerations.

**You are in the “knowledge business”:** HR can support universities' and colleges' central role as providers of knowledge and expertise, by being innovative in linking reward, talent management, learning and wellbeing.

**You are not alone...** As a member of ECC you are part of a network of 125 universities and colleges across the UK. Speak to our Consultant team to find out more about ECC networking groups, and to tap into the experience and knowledge of other members and the wider ECC team.



**Make the unconscious, conscious:** Unconscious bias is unintended and can affect key recruitment and management decisions; but it can be recognised and addressed.

## Introduction



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The ECC Annual Conference 2017: **Meeting tomorrow's challenges today** was held on 23 November.

Attended by over 50 delegates from 35 member organisations across the UK plus representatives of partner organisations, the conference focused on major areas of change, understanding how they will impact our sector. Our keynote speakers shared insights to help HR professionals tackle those challenges, and we ran three practical workshops exploring key issues:

- Talent and recruitment in a post-Brexit world
- Role analysis and the gender pay gap
- Reward strategy issues and options

All the speakers' presentations are available on the ECC website [here](#).

We have uploaded short video interviews with conference speakers to the website and to our [YouTube channel](#), so you can hear the key points first hand. The minutes of the 2016/17 AGM which took place during the conference are available in the Members Area of our website.

As ever we are very grateful to speakers, members and conference attendees for their positive and helpful input. The discussions on the day will be invaluable as we further improve and develop the work of the consortium in the coming months.

January 2018

## Keynote 1: What's changing now and in the future: key challenges for HE



**Nick Hillman**  
**Director**  
**Higher Education Policy Institute**

<http://www.hepi.ac.uk/>

[@nickhillman](https://twitter.com/nickhillman)

In a wide-ranging presentation, Nick covered major political and economic events since he addressed the ECC conference two years ago...and there have been quite a number!

As insightful as ever, Nick brought delegates right up to date with his thoughts on the fluidity of education policy; likely shape of the Government's mooted review of tuition fees; the relationship between student expectations, employment and value for money; and the expansion of the HE sector through it being opened up to new providers.

He also highlighted the importance of student wellbeing and mental health, and questioned how transparent universities have been in spending student fees, particularly in an environment where senior remuneration is under greater public scrutiny than ever before. Nick touched on a number of wider issues affecting HR including Brexit, the narrowness of the Government's majority, REF/TEF and pensions.

Nick's presentation slides and video interview are available on our website.

## Keynote 2: Market pay in a changing context: Current workplace climate and environment; job evaluation, market pay and reward



**Peter Reilly**  
**Principal Associate**  
**Institute for Employment Studies**

<http://www.employment-studies.co.uk/>

[@reillyies](https://twitter.com/reillyies)

Peter Reilly provided a very comprehensive review of the environment challenges before us and discussed how these impact, and are impacted by, pay and reward decisions.

Having outline a range of pay strategies, Peter neatly summarised some of the myths and challenges that have been made to the concept of job evaluation, and set these against the potential pros and cons of a market pay based approach.

Given our common focus, delegates were relieved to see a powerful exposition of what Peter termed the 'job evaluation fightback', which felt especially relevant given the heightened attention being paid to pay equality and gender gap reporting.

Ultimately each organisation needs to determine the right reward strategies to deliver its business strategy, ensuring this fits with internal cultural issues.

Peter concluded with a practical 10-part assessment tool to review pay and reward system effectiveness.

Peter's presentation slides and video interview are available on our website.

## **Keynote 3: Agility in Academe: How can HE tap knowledge expertise and commitment to promote smart effective responses to a fast-changing environment through learning and agility?**



**John McGurk**  
**Head of Scotland and Northern Ireland**  
**CIPD**

<https://www.cipd.co.uk/>  
@JMcGurkLTD

By turns challenging and encouraging, John delivered a highly thought-provoking and entertaining presentation.

Drawing on examples from a number of sectors, as well as his own experience in roles within and outside HR, John was able to recognise where practice in HE is agile – and not so agile.

His presentation summarised many of the changes and opportunities facing universities and colleges as 'knowledge businesses', and recognised the role of HR professionals in delivering innovation in transactional activities but also in playing an active role in linking potentially disparate initiatives such as talent, reward, learning, and staff wellbeing.

John was quick to draw a parallel between the CIPD and universities as being 'content providers' in relation to professional development and learning.

John's presentation slides and video interview are available on our website.

## Workshop 1: Talent and recruitment in a post-Brexit world



Tackling an uncertain future landscape, this workshop was packed with references and insights from a range of sources.

Particular points of focus included the future of research funding and staffing, international recruitment, freedom of movement and increased competition.

Although there is clearly some evidence already of a 'brain drain' from UK research, there are also opportunities in potential collaboration with industry in the UK and with research collaborators outside the EU.

## Workshop 2: Mind the Gender Pay Gap - key issues around role analysis that can lead to widening the gap

In this workshop participants learned that we are all vulnerable to the influence of deeply held views and ideas which create unconscious bias. We use stereotypes as shorthand to make generalisations about people rather than having to interpret each interaction from scratch. Some are conscious, and some are not. And it's not gender specific – both men and women can be guilty.

The challenge is recognising bias when it happens, particularly in the workplace.

In a lively workshop debate, participants used a Gender Pay Gap questionnaire to identify areas where unconscious bias may influence decision making, including role titles, development opportunities and reward and remuneration.

Learning points included the fact that no participants had assessed the equality impact of policies and procedures around the setting of starting pay on appointment.

There were also issues raised around the development of skill of managers to undertake recruitment processes, and some indicated that their staff had not had unconscious bias training, nor briefings on the purpose and use of HERA role analysis to limit risks of unequal pay.

Finally, a number of organisations do not anonymise application forms before asking recruiting managers to short list, again leaving this open to risks of unconscious bias.

## Workshop 3: Reward Strategy – One University’s experience and outputs

During a highly practical workshop with insights from the University of Lincoln, the group discussed the importance of communications in Reward Strategy.

Examples included the potential to use workplace Facebook; liaising with communications specialists to help convey messages; and methods such as a web portal to enable staff outside work to view how reward strategy affects them.

It is clearly important - and difficult - to get the reward package right and workshop participants agreed that an honest conversation with staff was the best approach.

Some HEIs had consulted staff about rewards and reward strategy. There was a suggestion that talking to those already engaged about what they want and then managing expectations was a sensible starting point.



In-house career pathways and individual development are not always possible in smaller organisations. And talent management processes can sometimes put up barriers that don't encourage moving out of discipline or area of work even though staff may have transferable skills.

There was also a recognition that with flatter structures staff need to recognise (and if necessary be advised) that they may have to move out of the organisation in order to subsequently come back and move up the career ladder.

Various types of reward were discussed, such as 'recognition rewards'. One university talked about introducing a different pension for newer staff eg. defined contribution scheme and moving away from final salary scheme. Some contract types eg. sales type bonuses had caused a ripple effect at one university. Allowances for people working with international partners was raised as an issue and was under review.

An ongoing challenge in identifying and evaluating reward options was simply finding the time to allow HR people to attend events eg. on DPR or pension changes to inform reward strategy.