

Specialists in universities

SUMS
Consulting



Briefing Paper

Moving Away from Internal Recruitment Scrutiny Panels

Emma Ogden, Consultant, SUMS Consulting
November 2022

Contents

Contents.....	2
The Challenge.....	3
Opportunities for Enhancement.....	3
Alignment to Workforce Planning.....	4
Framework for Governance, Ownership, And Approval	4
The Importance of Culture	5
RACI Matrix	6
Implementation Considerations	7

To address the financial uncertainties created through the pandemic, many Universities sought to safeguard themselves through additional layers of governance. Considering the high cost and pay bill of staff, one of the most common changes was the introduction of senior panels to scrutinise recruitment requests and staffing changes.

At the time, many saw this as an interim measure, but as we now move into the ‘new’ world post-Covid, many continue and have seemingly become business-as-usual.

SUMS has supported several reviews on how universities can begin to ease control while ensuring effective governance can be maintained. This thought piece provides some insight from these reviews and the key recommendations made.

SUMS is a membership-based higher education consultancy, a registered charity and not-for-profit organisation that provides expert consulting to universities across all professional services areas. Here, Emma Ogden, SUMS Consultant, shares insight on how to move away from recruitment scrutiny panels. With expertise covering almost all areas involved in Human Resources, we would welcome an opportunity to support you with your people needs. If you wish to discuss further or need any information, please contact SUMS Consultant Emma Ogden at e.l.ogden@reading.ac.uk.

The Challenge

Given the need to implement responsive change to the Covid pandemic, many universities implemented an additional level of scrutiny to recruitment processes with include layers of approval and significant amounts of evidence being requested. In many instances they created a Recruitment Scrutiny Panel (RSP). Issues with RSPs include:

- Lack of clarity on approval principles
- Lack of clarity about what can and cannot be authorised and by whom
- Manual supporting processes and / or out of system forms
- Exposure to potential GDPR risk
- Panel composition not including appropriate stakeholder representation
- Additional workloads for (predominantly) HR colleagues.
- Time consuming processes

A key challenge with creating RSPs is the impact on the university culture. Middle managers who have engaged in SUMS reviews have shared that they feel less trusted; both in whether they are making sound resourcing decisions and whether they are considering the broader financial landscape. Senior leaders shared that they feel line managers are unable to make 'hard decisions' when it comes to efficiencies, savings, or resource management. The resulting impact is that RSPs are often reactive and not aligned to any broader university strategic resource and budget process, such as business planning or workforce planning.

Opportunities for Enhancement

For universities who are seeking to move away from RSPs, there are opportunities for enhancement that SUMS would recommend. These ensure improved clarity and consistency for all stages of recruitment and onboarding, enhanced collaboration opportunities and optimised processes and decision-making. Our recommendations are:

1. **Create a clear framework for governance, ownership, and approval, to give greater clarity and autonomy for recruitment authorisers** – this may include a RACI analysis and Authority Approval Matrix.
2. **Align RSP processes to workforce planning.**
3. **Lower the authority levels** – with the agreement of all key stakeholders; this should result in less requests being submitted to a panel.
4. **Map the process** – explicitly outlining the different roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders.
5. **Make better use of the current system infrastructure** – integrated and optimised systems, defined users and access, digitised forms and workflow functionality to improve user experiences, reduce authorisation delays and enable tracking.
6. **Review and make visible performance: against SLAs and KPIs** – to inform better decision making and identify potential blockers.

Alignment to Workforce Planning

There should be alignment between the process to request changes to the establishment and workforce planning. Setting workforce requirement criteria helps shift thinking away from the 'like for like' replacements to how roles could be repurposed or realigned to meet an overall strategic objective. Workforce planning criteria could include, for example, staff student ratios (SSRs), spans of control, size and shape of workforce and market insight / student profile.

Having a workforce establishment helps demonstrate transparency of need: awareness of the current or future workforce gaps that could limit the execution of business strategy.

The annual Business Planning process provides an opportunity to align discussions on future workforce needs with the total establishment. Subsequent requests that are within the agreed parameters and budget should not be subject to additional scrutiny.

HR should provide support with workforce planning, specifically:

- The alignment of headcount planning with talent (demand and supply)
- Advising on priority workforce investments, informed by relevant data insight and metrics
- Undertaking planned rather than reactive talent and recruitment management

In the first instance, it may be that the process focuses more on operational workforce planning (i.e., management where there are aspects such as high turnover, high levels of fractional roles, or fixed term contracts). As the process matures, it should shift to a more strategic approach that is informed by data and market insight and includes proactive talent management, to achieve a future-fit workforce.

Framework for Governance, Ownership, And Approval

To satisfy governance needs and ensure the approval process is efficient, universities need to determine the relative composition and level of authority for different roles. SUMS reviews found two critical factors which determine the authorisation level:

1. Whether the request is within or outside of budget (i.e., as agreed within the annual Business Planning process).
2. The strategic impact of the request (i.e., the type of role being recruited for).

Table 1 denotes how this could work in practice with Table 2 aligning example levels of sign off.

Table 1: Authority Matrix

Financial Impact	Very High (4)	Out of budget				
	High (3)					
	Medium (2)	Within budget				
	Low (1)					
			Junior /entry-level	First line / middle manager	Senior manager	Executive
			Low (1)	Medium (2)	High (3)	Very High (4)
			Strategic Impact			

Table 2: Levels required for signoff

Level required for signoff	Scrutiny Panel Senior Leadership Team / Executive Leads Head of Department / Service HR and Finance	Very High (4)
	Senior Leadership Team / Executive Leads Head of Department / Service HR and Finance	High (3)
	Head of Department / Service HR and Finance	Low and Medium (1 and 2)

The Importance of Culture

A barrier to change can be culture. It is essential that the steps needed to improve culture are considered if change is to lead to effective improvement. Using a tool such as the [Johnson and Scholes' Cultural Web](#), can help address cultural elements, factoring them into the improvement process. As an example, concerns about accountability, empowerment and ownership can be supported through an explicit articulation of a RACI matrix.

RACI Matrix

A RACI analysis is a useful tool to help define who is ultimately responsible, locally responsible, and accountable for requests, alongside who should be consulted and informed. They should be developed against key process steps of the process and should be communicated and publicised to all stakeholders to ensure their roles and responsibilities are known.

RACIs can also inform a training needs analysis or development of further guidance material. An example analysis is outlined in Table 3.

Table 3 - Example RACI analysis

No	Key Process Activity	Applicant	Line Manager	HR	Finance	IT	Estates	Approving Body
1	Identify resourcing need		R	C	C			I
2	Confirm budget		R	C	A			I
3	Seeks approval		R	C	C			A
4	Develop recruitment plan		R	r		I	I	
5	Launches / closes advert		I	R				
6	Shortlisting and interviewing	I	R	r				
7	Appoints candidate	I	R	r	I			I
8	Pre-employment compliance checks	r	I	R				
9	Onboarding plan	I	R	I		I	I	
10	IT account set up	I	R	r		R		
11	Office / facilities set up	I	R	r			R	
12	Induction arranged	I	R	I				

Key	
R	Responsible overall
r	Responsible in area
A	Accountable
C	Consulted
I	Informed

Implementation Considerations

Depending on the scale of cultural and process change, it may be beneficial to phase the approach to enhancement. The stages to enable these activities would include any foundation activities, followed by process and activity reviews, guidance material and training development and piloting any change.

Benefits of change can include:

- Greater focus on strategic aims and innovation, rather than compliance
- Clearer governance framework without excessive layers of approval and bureaucracy
- A proactive process, aligned to workforce planning and the annual business planning round
- Better management of expectations
- Enhanced understanding of the end-to-end recruitment request, selection, and onboarding process
- Enhanced ownership by recruiting line managers: taking responsibility for ensuring a seamless experience
- Having the right people, involved in the right conversation, at the right time
- A more efficient system, enhanced by automation
- Single source of information, rather than a reliance on manual record keeping.

SUMS is working with universities across the UK to address these challenges and support long-term improvements to recruitment and change governance. For support with a review of analysis of your current processes, please contact Emma Ogden at e.l.ogden@reading.ac.uk.

© Southern Universities Management Services 2022

Copyright in this report is held by Southern Universities Management Services (SUMS). The commissioning institution is free to copy or reproduce material in whole or in part, provided that the source is acknowledged, and that material is not used for commercial gain.

Subject to consent having been given to the distribution of the report to other members of the SUMS consortium, member institutions may copy or reproduce material for internal use, provided that the source is acknowledged.



Reading Enterprise Centre, University of Reading, Earley Gate,
Whiteknights Rd, Reading RG6 6BU
T: 0118 378 4304 | E: sums@reading.co.uk | www.sums.org.uk