



CIVILSERVICE

EMBEDDING PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

**Principles of good practice for professions, departments
and devolved administrations**



INTRODUCTION

The Skills Strategy for Government 2008-2011 places renewed emphasis on the role of professions within government. Agreed by Permanent Secretaries in 2008, the Skills Strategy tasks Heads of Profession with setting standards on professional skills for their staff, helping to shape career and workforce planning and to support professional development. The strategy reinforced the role of departments in embedding these professional skills standards into organisational processes and decisions.

A collectively agreed approach to embedding professional skills standards into departmental processes will support departmental skills priorities and facilitate cross-government implementation of the Skills Strategy. A key benefit will be in developing stronger relationships between professions, departments, HR practitioners and local professional leads which support joint workforce/business planning and strategy in order to:

- encourage a consistent approach to embedding professionalism, aligned with business strategy, across the Civil Service
- build a common understanding of the roles of professions and departments in the end-to-end business development process
- enable better and more efficient use of the business and professional skills of employees
- provide clearer career paths for individuals and better signposted opportunities for development across the Civil Service, leading to a more flexible workforce able to meet the challenges of the future



'Embedding Professional Skills' provides good practice principles to support professions, departments and devolved administrations (DAs), in the context of the Skills Strategy, in forming effective partnerships. The principles aim to provide best practice guidelines and a framework for all DAs, professions, departments, HR colleagues and local professional leads to work collaboratively to develop agreed ways of working which embed professional skills standards in a range of key areas. These areas are:

- business strategy and business planning
- recruitment, progression and promotion
- career and talent management and succession planning
- performance management
- learning and development

This guide has been developed by a working group which includes HR Practitioners¹ and representatives from a number of professions across government² brought together by Government Skills.

It is intended that it will be supplemented with a methodology covering the development by Civil Service wide professions of recommended qualification offers and their embedding within departmental processes. The methodology will form part of a Strategic Qualifications Framework, which is being trialled with a small number of professions and departments between February and June 2010.

¹ Including HMRC, DCSF, DWP, MoJ, BIS and Cabinet Office

² Including KIM, Science and Engineering, Communications, IT, HR, Policy and Operational Delivery

1 BUSINESS PLANNING AND WORKFORCE STRATEGY

Principles for departments / DAs

- 1.1** Ensure that professions are involved in business planning and strategy at all stages of the process
- 1.2** Work with the professions to understand and plan for the impacts of business strategy on workforce capability requirements
- 1.3** Work with professions to align workforce strategies and professional standards into agreed workforce and development plans
- 1.4** Be proactive in raising the profile and relevance of professions
- 1.5** Embed importance of professions to the policy making process
- 1.6** Maintain records of posts, post-holders, skills and professions

Principles for professions

- 1.8** Professional leads work with HR colleagues to ensure that professions contribute to the development of workforce planning and business strategy
- 1.9** Departmental Heads of Profession are proactive in raising the profile and relevance of professions in departments and DAs

CASE STUDY: MINISTRY OF JUSTICE

The Skills Strategy for Government 2008-2011 places emphasis on the roles of the professions in government. It tasks the Heads of Profession with setting standards for the professional skills of their professions and helping to shape workforce planning. At the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) the professions are now included in the development of the department's workforce strategy, and it's been a rewarding process for all.

The purpose of a workforce strategy is to enable senior managers across the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) to be collectively involved in future planning.

Most of the detailed workforce planning tends to take place at a local level – business group/regional/area which then feeds into the management information for MoJ's efficiency programmes. The HR team identified a need to look behind this data to understand the underlying trends and implications for the shape and make up of the workforce over future years.

The HR team's work with each of the departmental Heads of Profession in MoJ highlighted how diverse the professions are, in terms of their level of maturity, their culture, their approach to staff development and the challenges they face. As a result the HR team needed to engage with each of the professions separately.

As this was the first time that MoJ had attempted to develop a workforce strategy, it was clear that it would be an iterative process that should get easier to do with each stage. The focus of the first stage was primarily to encourage directors and Heads of Profession to start thinking about the key questions.

The HR team has a forum for MoJ's Heads of Profession that meets quarterly. This is supported by a working group at Grade 7 level. First, the team who was taking forward the workforce strategy gave a presentation to the working group. This outlined the purpose of the workforce strategy and gave members the opportunity to ask questions related to their own professional context.

The HR team developed a template containing with questions for each professional group. This was sent to Heads of Professions with a covering note to give the context of the request for information. The workforce strategy was tabled as an agenda item at the Heads of Profession forum.

In some cases, the HR Team also shared the views of earlier respondents with those who were still working on the template, in order to give them a better idea of what was required.

The completed templates from each of the professions were collated into a spreadsheet, which helped to identify where some professions shared the same issues. The professions that have not focused on qualifications in the past (such as communications and HR) had a common challenge to re-skill existing staff

to build capability and meet the requirements of the professional skills agenda. Another common theme was the development of appropriate leadership skills for specialists, as was reducing the use of external consultants.

The HR team picked out the key issues from the responses from the professions and fed these into the overall workforce strategy document that included the responses from business groups.

In general, the approach worked well and provided the HR team with a foundation on which to build. Most of the responses were not detailed and a number of Heads of Profession highlighted the difficulties of planning ahead in the context of the forthcoming election (at the time) and the sometimes conflicting messages about the impact of financial pressures on delivery of public services.

What was helpful was the network of professional contacts at Grade 7 level who supported Heads of Professions to develop their responses.

2 RECRUITMENT, PROGRESSION AND PROMOTION

Principles for departments / DAs

- 2.1** HR in departments/DAs to engage with professional recruitment protocols and to refer to these throughout the recruitment process where appropriate
- 2.2** Make departmental Heads of Profession contact details readily available
- 2.3** Engage in periodic recruitment with further and higher education institutions to bring in talent from outside the Civil Service, where and when appropriate and in accordance with the workforce plan



- 2.4** Departmental Head of Profession is involved in recruitment to any pre-agreed business critical roles related to the profession, as and when agreed in workforce strategy
- 2.5** HR in departments/DAs and line managers use departmental and professional competency frameworks to describe different aspects of role as appropriate
- 2.6** Questions for promotion panels, recruitment interviews, assessment centres are competency based and appropriate to the competency group and to the skill level of the role
- 2.7** Careful consideration should be given to the balance between core and professional skills when recruiting to all roles
- 2.8** Ensure that HR in departments/DAs work closely with professions so that the role description, skill level and remuneration package are appropriate, particularly where there may be uncertainty

Principles for professions

- 2.9** Develop and promote the use of professional competency frameworks agreed by the professions as contributing to the development of individual and organisational capability
- 2.10** Match and group to organisations' competence PSG models, working with the organisation to ensure the appropriate balance between core and professional skills
- 2.11** Advise HR in departments/DAs on how to define role profiles, in particular for roles identified in workforce strategy, and give guidance/steer to HR as to application
- 2.12** Share departmental professions contacts and routes to advice with departments

3 CAREER AND TALENT MANAGEMENT AND SUCCESSION PLANNING

Principles for departments / DAs

- 3.1** Publish and advise on professional career pathways for staff
- 3.2** HR in departments/DAs operate a system to track movements of staff in order to maintain corporate memory and ensure knowledge and expertise is spread
- 3.3** Work with professions to design, complete and maintain a workforce succession plan and development strategy

Principles for professions

- 3.4** Work with HR in departments/DAs to create workforce plans which enable effective succession planning
- 3.5** Advise HR in departments/DAs as to how they should define roles and create job profiles
- 3.6** Provide input into long term development plans
- 3.7** Make information on profession/pathways available on departmental or profession websites

CASE STUDY: WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT

Heads of Profession have a vital contribution to make to building professional skills and qualifications for government. The Welsh Assembly Government has found a way to engage these busy professionals by building a network of Heads of Profession through regular seminars.

Bethan Jones has the sometimes artful role of embedding professional standards and qualifications into the way the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) does its everyday business.

Her role includes getting some of the most senior people in the organisation to consider the career development and qualifications for each of the professions in WAG, as well as supporting them to lead the professional skills agenda. This year, Heads of Profession in WAG have also been asked to contribute to its response to the Government Skills Peer Review.

“I was trying to think of a way of highlighting what the issues are and a way of getting the Heads of Profession together,” says Bethan, skills project delivery manager for the Welsh Assembly Government. “I began by having one-to-ones with them, updating them, and providing monthly reports. But they really wanted to learn from each other’s experiences and to share their good practice.”

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So she hit on the idea of twice-yearly seminars involving all the Heads of Profession. The format includes an introductory talk, working groups on different topics and feedback to the whole group.

Groups are deliberately mixed to include Heads of Profession from the newly established professions with those from professions which are more mature in terms of career mapping and setting professional standards.

“In the early seminars it was important for us to help facilitate the networking between the Heads of Profession and the understanding of their role so that there was a common acceptance and agreement of what a Head of Profession is within WAG.

“More recently the seminars have focused on the growing role of the Head of Profession across government. This has meant their increased involvement in planning the future agenda and the HR lifecycle, from workforce planning and recruitment to performance management and career development,” Bethan says.

Significant factors in making the seminars work are having a clear agenda and asking participants to talk about specific questions. “It’s not a talking shop,” says Bethan, adding that it was important to have trade unions involved from the start.

It was also important that the initial invitations came from the HR Director.

Holding the seminar off site, to allow participants to focus, has been successful. In between the seminars there are regular updates and support for the agreed work programme.

“Absolutely, it’s been a success,” says Bethan. “Some fantastic things have come out of it. One of the main things was a WAG professions intranet site.”

The intranet helps people to identify which profession or professions they fall into, says Bethan. It is also creating better communication with staff about the work that is going on so that everyone is well-informed.

According to Bethan, the seminars have also helped to build links between the Heads of Profession and means that things have progressed more consistently.

Professional standards are being developed in-house where they are not already provided by an external body. WAG began to capture data on individuals’ qualifications last year and has aligned every post in the organisation to one of the professions. The next step is to request all individuals to identify up to a maximum of three professional areas that they

themselves are aligned to and this data will be captured on the corporate HR information system.

The communications of the professions along with the information available on the professions intranet site have helped staff during their performance management reviews. They are able to clearly understand the skills, qualifications and standards in relation to their current role and future career development.

In terms of future priorities, the Head of Profession role is vital in workforce planning within WAG because they will identify potential professional skills and resource issues. The networking developed through the seminars has ensured that workforce issues are looked at across the business rather than within one division or profession.

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4 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Principles for departments / DAs

- 4.1** Ensure that line managers and counter-signing officers assess performance using professional guidance, particularly where professional skills are required. This may include seeking views from professions where the professional skills of the line manager and member of staff differ. See also 4.3

Principles for professions

- 4.2** Produce guidance on the performance management process where professional competencies form part of this process and distribute the guidance as appropriate
- 4.3** Participate in setting criteria for moderation of performance markings to ensure fairness of rating between different roles. See also 4.1
- 4.4** Advise on business-level objectives relevant to profession/key development tasks for profession



5 LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Principles for departments / DAs

- 5.1** Work with the Head of Profession to ensure appropriate skills transfer is undertaken when specific professional skills are procured externally
- 5.2** Provide infrastructure and support, appropriate to the priority of the profession within the department according to the workforce strategy and business plan, to ensure staff keep up their professional competence
- 5.3** Signpost learning and development (L&D) opportunities to enable staff to bridge skills gap, for example: making the transition to policy work
- 5.4** Support staff to enable attendance at workshops/seminars/external training courses
- 5.5** Provide guidance to line managers as to how to use skills frameworks to identify and analyse skills
- 5.6** Liaise with professions to ensure that learning and development (L&D) procurement addresses skills and efficiency needs, making use of common procurement strategies where appropriate
- 5.7** Consider internal and external secondments as part of professional development

Principles for professions

- 5.8** Provide timely bids for funding purposes in line with departmental priorities
- 5.9** Identify standards, qualification and continued professional development (CPD) requirements and communicate these to departments
- 5.10** Undertake audit of skills, identify gaps and work with L&D colleagues to satisfy development needs through the most cost effective methods
- 5.11** Set standards, qualification and CPD requirements and work in partnership with departments to deliver these

CHECKLIST OF THE KEY PRINCIPLES FOR DEPARTMENTS AND PROFESSIONS

Business Planning and Workforce Strategy

- Opportunities for professions to be involved in business planning, strategy development and the development of workforce plans have been included at all stages of the process
- Professions have been invited to take part in the process of evaluating and planning for the impacts of business strategy on workforce capability requirements
- Where practicable, records of posts, post-holders, skills and professional affiliations have been maintained

Recruitment, progression and promotion

- Departmental profession contacts and routes to advice have been shared with departments
- Professions have developed and made available professional competency frameworks
- Professional recruitment protocols referred to, where they exist, throughout all stages of the recruitment process
- Provision has been made to involve the Head of Profession in the recruitment process for business critical roles related to the profession
- The balance between core and professional skills has been taken into account as part of the recruitment process

Career and Talent Management and Succession Planning

- Advice on professional career pathways for staff has been published and made available (for example: on departmental intranet pages)
- A workforce succession plan and development strategy has been designed and completed in partnership with professions

Performance Management

- Relevant guidance from professions has been made available for line managers and counter-signing officers for the performance management of their staff
- Professions have been offered opportunities to participate in setting criteria for moderation of performance markings to ensure fairness of rating between different roles
- Professions have been given the opportunity to advise on business-level objectives relevant to the profession

Learning and Development

- Professions have identified standards, qualifications and continued professional development requirements and these have been communicated to departments
- Support for staff to keep up professional competence is provided and aligned with workforce strategy and business plans
- Learning and development procurement is undertaken with guidance from professions to address skills and efficiency needs, making use of common procurement strategies where appropriate
- Internal and external secondments are available, where appropriate, as part of professional development



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This report is on the Civil Service website at:

www.civilservice.gov.uk/professions

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