

# The History of HERA

## Background

In the early 1990's a number of factors were affecting Higher Education. These, coming from both within and outside the Sector, included the new approaches to human resource management that were being adopted by employers in the public and private sectors, including fresh thinking on equal opportunities and the use of competencies. When the division between the then polytechnics and the universities ceased, it became apparent that both types of higher education institutions had similar problems. There was a proliferation of pay rates and bargaining units and the existing grading and job evaluation systems were seen by managers as unsatisfactory. Employment and management practices were creating more problems than solutions and changes to the legislation regarding equal pay for work of equal value were causing personnel professionals and senior managers to question existing practices.

In 1993, the Fender Report "Promoting People" produced by a working group chaired by Professor Brian Fender identified two major problems:

- As jobs evolve and new kinds of work and jobs emerge the boundaries between staff groups as defined by the pay negotiating arrangements were getting blurred.
- Statute and case law in the field of equal pay for work of equal value was stripping out the defences available to employers.

Many Directors of Personnel shared these concerns and a workshop was organised to consider options. The "do nothing" choice was not amongst them. Rather, it was decided that some form of action was needed to find an appropriate way forward. Universities and, later, Colleges of Higher Education were invited to work collaboratively on the quest. This resulted, in July 1994, in the creation of Universities Competences Consortium (**Comcon**) and the establishment of a private limited company (Educational Competences Consortium Ltd). Over 100 institutions joined in membership.

## Feasibility study

The consortium defined its purpose as:

*'To use the combined resources of member Universities to explore approaches, including competences, for developing an appropriate, practicable, equitable and cost effective methodology for analysing job content in Higher Education institutions in a way which is responsive to the differing needs of institutions to support a range of local HRM objectives'.*

The first step was to find out if this quest was possible. A feasibility study was constructed and, following a competitive tendering process, Towers Perrin was contracted in January 1995 to find out how to achieve Comcon's objectives. The consultants examined existing approaches to job analysis - the most obvious being job evaluation methods - and competencies and competences; they

discussed roles in Higher Education with a cross section of staff and explored world-wide latest good practice.

The Consortium wanted to move away from the traditional concepts of job evaluation based on sizing tasks and defensive responses; they wanted to take a fresh approach. They believed that, in the future, it would be important to be able to recognise the value of the contribution made by individuals in a way that would reflect role requirements in the context of their employing institution.

In the light of the feasibility study report, made in Summer 1995, the Management Committee decided it wanted a scheme that would combine:

- a factor-based approach incorporating *"input"* (what an individual brings to a job or role, e.g. knowledge and experience) and contextual factors
- and
- a *"throughput"* approach focusing on the process by which results are achieved (how an individual performs effectively, i.e. their behavioural competencies).

### **Scheme development**

The Management Committee of the Consortium decided to go ahead with the development of such a scheme. This, it was believed, would be sufficiently dynamic to respond to the differing needs of institutions and support a range of human resource management objectives which would:

- o assist in job design
- o aid the assessment of equitable basic grades (and pay levels)
- o facilitate pay flexibility and performance rewards
- o assist with mentoring, probation, performance appraisal and staff development, and vocational qualifications
- o assist in setting and assessing *"quality"* criteria
- o help clarify promotion criteria
- o provide a mechanism for moving towards equal pay for work of equal value
- o enhance equal opportunities practice and meet UK and EU legal requirements
- o be responsive to the differing needs of institutions
- o be cost-effective through the sharing of development and application costs
- o be user friendly.

Following another competitive tendering exercise, Towers Perrin was re-appointed to conduct the development phase. A project plan was formulated and a manager appointed. A small group of members of the Management Committee were asked to steer the project and the team of Academic Advisors who had made a valuable contribution during the feasibility study, extended. Member institutions were asked to volunteer as key sites. These would be constants throughout the project and act as test sites. Volunteers from

Personnel Staff were also sought to work alongside the Project Team and Consultants and, as members of the Working Group, become Expert Users.

In the first stage of the phase, the Towers Perrin consultants, project team and Working Group members visited fourteen different universities and colleges to talk to staff. The interviewees were selected from across a wide range of jobs so that staff from all groups represented in Higher Education were included. Considerable efforts were made throughout the project to ensure that all staff groups, including manual workers, technicians, administrative staff, researchers and academic staff from all disciplines and types of institutions were included. It was quickly obvious that most occupations were represented in Higher Education and the skill levels ranged from the novice to world expert.

The interviewees were seen both individually and in groups and asked about their roles. A card exercise was designed from the information obtained during the feasibility study. This and other methods were used to help stimulate discussion about "what is of value to Higher Education" and to obtain information about tasks and skills. The data gathered was analysed and used to form initial ideas of possible factors and competencies.

The first draft was tested and edited with staff, again from representative groups, in a further 20 universities and colleges. The Management Committee, trade unions and academic advisers were asked to comment and further drafts produced and retested. Advice was also obtained from the Equal Opportunities commission.

Eventually the definitions were refined into fourteen *elements*. These, it was intended, would be used to construct a *profile* for each and every role found in a Higher Education Institution. The way in which the profile would be compiled would normally be by means of a structured interview. The interview would be conducted by a trained role analyst, who would gather *evidence* from the role holder or from a group of role holders who occupy similar roles or work together in a functional group. A *questionnaire* would be completed on the basis of the evidence and the resultant *scores* entered into the *database*.

The questionnaire was drafted and tested in another 20 institutions. The Towers Perrin consultants interviewed individuals holding the 100 representative roles and a sample role profile was produced for each. Further representatives of these same roles were interviewed in other institutions by members of the Project Team and the Working Group.

In all, some 259 interviews took place in a total of 40 institutions. The results of this exercise were used both to test the adequacy of the questionnaire, and as a part of the later complex process of drawing up the scoring and weighting of the scheme. The questionnaire finally comprised of 50 statements, carefully worded to reflect how the role holders described their work.

The experience gained during the testing of the questionnaire also demonstrated that the questions generated different types of answer. As a consequence 4 kinds of response table were developed:

- a *single* response - giving a choice of statement which best describes the role requirements
- a *linear* response- allowing the distinction to be made between the statements by level of importance and relevancy
- a *target* response - asking the role holder to distinguish between the statements which best describe the primary focus, which are of minor importance or do not apply
- a *matrix* table - allowing the role holder to combine two sets of statement.

The system is so sensitive that over 35 million, billion, billion different responses can be produced.

As the reason for the scheme was to define and differentiate between roles, some mechanism was required to distinguish one profile from another. After considering options and drawing on the advice of the academic advisors and other researchers, it was decided that an appropriate scoring and weighting system was needed.

### **Development of the scoring and weighting system**

This was developed in two stages. Firstly the scoring system was devised. Several underpinning principles were used:

- no question would score zero,
- the questions and elements would both be weighed,
- where steps between the responses were required, these would be of an equal size,
- a maximum of 20 unweighted points would be allocated to each response.

The response given to each question would produce a raw score which would then be converted into an element score and eventually into a total role score. Transparency was important. The Management Committee believed that the scheme should not be "Black Box". It wanted to make sure that even the detailed calculations could be carried out manually, if required, so everyone could see how the resulting score had been produced.

The construction of the weighting system was the second task. Various ways of doing this were possible. A common technique in devising job analysis and evaluation schemes is to have some sort of reference rank order against which to measure results. Regression analysis is used to show how well the chosen weights predict the reference rank order and the "best fit" used. Often the existing hierarchy of jobs produced by current pay schemes is used as the rank order and the weights determined by a "panel of experts". This approach was rejected on the grounds that existing hierarchies were known to be flawed and identifying acceptable "experts" would be nigh on impossible. So, again, research was carried out and expert opinion sought. It transpired that there were several ways other than the statistical and expert panel approaches to

determine the weightings. It was decided, in the best traditions of academia, to consult widely.

A second consultancy firm, Research International, was commissioned to help. They used a process called *"conjoint analysis"*. This is a technique that establishes the relative importance of a given set of different attributes. A questionnaire was designed which allowed the 100 representative roles and 14 elements to be compared one against another and distributed to 1000 staff in 13 institutions.

The results of the questionnaires were tested statistically and a rank order of roles and elements produced. Interestingly, it was found that men and women agreed on which elements should be given the highest and lowest weights. But there were some differences with the others. Nevertheless, there was agreement on broad bands of elements. These findings were examined alongside those obtained during the interviews and the opinions expressed by the academic advisors and trade unions and the various possibilities were considered. It was concluded that the most sensible approach was to allocate the weights in a way that was statistically valid, easily understood and logical. Thus the number of points given to each element during the conjoint analysis rounded up was used as the basis.

The results are:

<b>Element:</b>	<b>Weighting %:</b>
Teaching and Learning Support	9.5
Initiative and Problem Solving	8
Knowledge and Experience	8
Communication	8
Decision Making Processes and Outcomes	7
Analysis and Research	7
Teamwork and Motivation	7
Planning and Organising Resources	7
Service Delivery	7
Team Development	7
Liaison and Networking	6.5
Pastoral Care and Welfare	6.5
Work Environment	6.5
Sensory and Physical Demands	5

## **Development of the software**

The Consortium decided to purchase and customise Towers Perrin's *Evaluation Framework* Software. The software allows the data in the database to be manipulated, produces useful information, calculates the scorings rapidly and accurately, and carries out a range of validation checks. As the software needed to be tailored and the scoring and weighting systems tested a further set of role profiles was obtained from other holders of the 100 representative role profiles in 15 more institutions, again by interviewing role holders. The results of these interviews were also used as examples in the database. In all, over two thousand staff had contributed to the process of developing the system by this time.

Before the project could be finally completed a name was needed for the approach and products. Opinions were sought and consideration given to a huge list of acronyms and names. After months of trawling through dictionaries **HERA** was chosen. Standing for **H**igher **E**ducation **R**ole **A**nalysis, the word also contained the symbolism of the Queen of the Greek Gods.

HERA was delivered to the members of the Consortium in May 1997. Expert users were trained to use the software and demonstrations given to a number of different interest groups across the sector. It was decided that HERA should be tested in practice to make sure that the approach could be applied consistently in one institution, to compare implementation methods and to obtain information which would inform the discussions on pay structures.

## **HERA pilot scheme**

Four Universities and two Colleges of Higher Education were selected to be pilot sites. They were chosen from the volunteers to reflect as far as possible the variety within the sector and were the University of Hull, Oxford Brooks University, Heriot-Watt University, The University of Wales College of Medicine, The London Institute, and Westhill College, Birmingham. Senior Management agreement was obtained in each and a number of individuals trained as role analysts. The trade unions, nationally and locally, were kept informed throughout and all save the AUT and NATHFE, who had declined the invitation, were actively involved.

Each of the six sites took a very different approach to the running of their pilot and trialling different ways of gathering and verifying data. However, the role analysts were trained consistently and the software and documentation used as recommended. The findings from each site were presented to a conference of members held in January 1998. These had shown that the scheme recognises the traditional academic values associated with Higher Education, those of teaching and research, and the contribution of all staff in these areas.

A wide range of staff had been involved in the pilots and the results revealed that HERA defines and differentiates between their roles. It also produced a sensible, transparent ranking which could be regarded as fair. Anomalies and

issues of equal pay for work of equal value were exposed but it was thought unlikely these would have huge implications for the size of the pay bill.

The pilots also showed that more work was needed to communicate the value and usefulness of HERA and some revisions to the software, documentation and training approaches were required. It was decided by the Board that the following six months be spent refining these.

### **The Bett Report**

Changes in the external situation had occurred as a result of the Dearing Report. This had recommended in July 1997 that *"higher education employers appoint, after consultation with staff representatives, an independent review committee to report ... on the framework for determining pay and conditions of service"*. The Independent Review Committee was set up at the beginning of 1998 under Sir Michael Bett and began to obtain evidence. The ECC Board decided to make a submission to the IRC commending HERA as a tool *"to underpin any pay and grading structures that might come out of the IRC"*. It also recommended to its members that the local implementation of HERA for pay and grading be deferred until the IRC made its report. Members, however, were urged to learn how to use HERA and become familiar with its terminology, software and documentation. The use of the default weighting system, given the thorough and extensive research which underpinned its construction and the rigour of its development, was strongly recommended.

The IRC produced its Report in May 1999, and recommended that job evaluation be introduced to underpin reforms in pay structures. The Committee found that:

*"HERA seems to be an appropriate tool for the purpose: it has clearly been designed to take account satisfactorily of the range of roles peculiar to Higher Education as well as those roles which are common to other sectors, and particular care has been taken in the weighting of its 14 job elements to ensure that equal value considerations are fully addressed."*

### **National joint implementation trials**

Following on from this, ECC Ltd and the Trades Unions agreed to undertake national joint implementation trials. These began in the Autumn of 2001, and the specific areas to be addressed were as follows:

- how 'scholarship' is covered by HERA;
- how effectively part-time roles traditionally undertaken by women (eg cleaning, domestic and catering staff) are covered by HERA;
- whether HERA is able to handle satisfactorily the particular features associated with the roles undertaken by academic staff including part-time, sessional teaching staff and contract research staff;
- confirmation that HERA adequately captures the mix of institutions and the wide diversity of teaching and research (including clinical) roles within the sector;

- whether physical effort and working conditions are adequately covered, particularly in relation to roles involving a significant element of manual work;
- how HERA can be used to support institutional monitoring of equality, particularly equal pay for work of equal value requirements;
- how the Notes for Guidance and other documentation can be developed further to better facilitate effective implementation.

Nine institutions agreed to take part in these joint trials, and their conclusions were that HERA is a robust scheme which works. Most of the above points were already addressed adequately by the scheme, but certain modifications were needed to the scheme itself to simplify it and to take account of physical effort, which had not previously been included. Significant enhancement of the Notes for Guidance was also needed to help with the implementation and interpretation of the scheme, and the accompanying paperwork needed simplification. Some modifications to the HERA Evaluation Framework software were also required.

### **The new version of HERA and recent developments**

As a result of the outcome of these trials, and of consultations with users through a series of User Group meetings, a revised version of HERA was issued and distributed to members in September 2002.

At the same time, discussions within the new national negotiating body (JINCHES) produced Guidance on Role Analysis and Job Evaluation which stated that, subject to outcome of trials, and agreement on application of the scheme, employers and unions (except AUT) could recommend use of HERA as meeting HEIs' and unions' requirements for role analysis/ job evaluation.

Currently, discussions are taking place with AUT and NATFHE about possible joint work to bring together HERA and a scheme that is under development by the AUT.

At the beginning of 2002, a group of seven Research Intensive Universities got together to undertake a check on the original HERA weightings to determine whether there is any significant variation according to university mission. In order to do this they decided to repeat the original "Conjoint Analysis" exercise, and appointed Research International to assist them in this exercise. The Group has devised by a valid and robust process an alternative set of weightings, as follows:

*8.75% Initiative and Problem Solving  
Analysis and Research  
Teaching and Learning Support  
Knowledge and Experience*

*7.40% Communication*

*Teamworking and Motivation*  
*Decision Making Processes and Outcomes*  
*Planning and Organising Resources*  
*Team Development*

6.00% *Liaison and Networking*  
*Service Delivery*  
*Work Environment*  
*Pastoral Care and Welfare*

4.00% *Sensory and Physical Demands*

It is recognized that the changes resulting from applying these new weightings will be small. Some members of the Group intend to carry out local pilots to test out this new weighting structure against the current HERA recommended Weightings.

ECC Ltd is satisfied that this work has been carried out in a robust manner, and now offers this alternative weighting system to its other member institutions, should they feel that they share a research intensive mission, and should they feel that this would be more appropriate than the standard HERA weighting scheme.