

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE REVIEW REPORT THE UNIVERSITY OF WORCESTER

Key Information

Assessment Type	Review
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Visit Date	17 October 2011 to 20 October 2011
Assessment Reference Number	ENQ-82347-WD28XQ

Introduction

The University of Worcester has been recognised as an Investor in People since 1996 and this is their 5th review against the Standard. There have been many changes and changes and developments since then and the University is growing both in size and reputation. Despite this growth the University retains its identity as a friendly organisation for both students and staff alike. These are challenging times for universities and the strategic priorities are currently under review as the University considers how best to respond to these challenges. There is a recognition that they have to be seen as an attractive choice for students and further establish themselves as a key player with the business and cultural heart of the city.

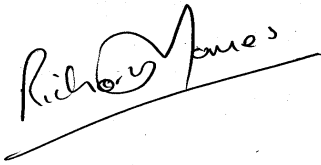
In planning for the review personnel from 3 academic Institutes as well as 3 support departments were selected for interview. These were explored in some depth to ascertain how planning, management and associated approaches were supporting the achievement of key strategic aims and that the principles of Investors in People underpin the continuing development of the organisation. Face to face interviews were carried out with 49 people and in addition a 75 sessional staff were invited to complete a questionnaire. Of these there were 38 respondents (50.7%)

Although the review was against the core Standard 6 additional evidence requirements were included in the review and comment on these included in the detailed feedback that follows.

Conclusion

As is to be expected in an organisation as diverse as a university where the needs of academic staff are in some respects different to those of support personal there is some variance in the approaches taken to involve, support and develop people. Overall the University demonstrates that the Investors in People Standard is a valuable tool to support change and development and there is much good practice on which it is to be congratulated. Unsurprisingly in an organisation with so many component parts there are some pockets where approaches may have slipped. These are however outweighed by the high standards that are evident across the majority of the University and it is concluded that the University continues to meet the requirements of the Standard and is recognised for a further period of 3 years.

This review was undertaken a little later than it should and therefore the next review should take place by 18 July 2014.



Richard Tomes
Investors in People Assessor

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Feedback against the requirements of the Standard

The following feedback is set against the key organisational priorities set out in the University's Strategic Plan 2007 – 2012

University of Choice

The University sets out its vision in the strategic plan that is developed by the senior management team in conjunction with the governing body. This sets clear milestones for progression and ambitious plans to grow the organisation. In support of this plan Institutes and Departments formulate their own plans which ultimately lead to the determination of team and individual objectives. Particular effort has been placed into helping people understand the bigger picture and seek their contribution and ideas for how all aspects of the University's work can develop further. There has been significant effort from the VC in this regard with him attending approaching 70 meetings of staff over the between March and June to set out his vision and gather their thoughts. A majority of people found these meetings useful and saw this as a genuine attempt to give them a stronger voice. People say that *'it is clear that the VC wants us all to be involved in saying how things can improve'*

Across the University there are a variety of approaches to develop further the quality of provision and services. These are more formal and established for academic institutes but all staff feel that they are engaged in activity whereby the University can improve its standing in the community and more importantly be more widely sought after as a place to study. People also believe that they are able to take responsibility for making improvements to their own areas of responsibility and in addition focus groups are widely used as a mechanism to establish new approaches.

Many respondents referenced the no redundancy stance being taken by the University which in face of some of the possible challenges in the future they see as a positive move that helps engender a commitment from staff and shows how as an employer the University has a concern for its people.

Although there are some differences between the approaches for academics and those for support staff the learning requirements for teams and individuals are determined through discussion with the focus being on learning that will support the achievement of objectives, aid research and improve teaching and learning.

There are several notable successes that point to the growing strengths of the organisation, not the least is the 7 fold increase in applications from potential students. Also, they are justifiably proud to have achieved the best on report on primary teacher training of any university in the country.

An Outstanding Student Experience

People are well aware of their responsibilities and have a clear understanding of how they can contribute to the quality of learning and the variety of ways in which students benefit from their time at the University. People appreciate that ensuring that students have a rewarding and stimulating experience during their time at the University has benefits that will impact on the growing reputation of the University. It was evident here is a changing view of the student/university relationship with many respondents referring to more of a customer/supplier approach and how this will reflect in how teaching and learning evolves.

improving performance

Within academic institutes there are well established processes to review progress and develop further the quality of learning. This approach has its own momentum and engages everyone in a process of continual improvement which as well as being inward looking seeks to bring learning in from networking opportunities, conferences and research activity that is a key part of the role of an academic.

Managers understand that giving people feedback has a value both in terms of the ongoing process of development and ensuring that staff feel they are integral to the success of the University. This feedback is formalised as part of the appraisal process, but in addition for a number of people will be part of regular discussions they have with managers. Within academic teams the ongoing process of reviewing course delivery means that seeking and receiving feedback from both internal and external sources is part of a continuum and seen as vital to developing the quality of provision.

As might be expected in a university many staff, particularly in teaching areas are highly motivated to personal development and this has a direct impact on the quality of teaching and learning. People confirm that they are empowered to take responsibility (often as part of team activity) for determining how the quality of what they do can be improved. Many people spoke of the value of team teaching as a way in which people share and learn from each other and it is clear that a strong support culture is in evidence. The practice of peer observation is well established and can be seen to be of benefit both to the observer as well as the person being observed. The benefits of this approach can be seen in that survey results show that the quality of teaching has moved from satisfactory to good

One of the institutes described their approach to quality assurance, *'we ask people for their views on why we are not doing well and set up focus groups to address issues. We hold learning and teaching away days 2 to 3 times a year and people are more forthcoming and confident about how to tackle deficiencies. Should staff be ineffective we train them to bring their skills up to date. There has been a very positive reaction from staff and there is agreement on the outcomes and objectives to be achieved.'*

Generating Knowledge and Promoting Enterprise

People are more aware of the corporate aims of the University and have been helped to understand the impact that increases in student fees etc may have on the future. In addition to bringing quality into sharper focus, extending the range and scope of provision is key to longer term success. People are encouraged to develop external links and seek opportunities to win new business and generate additional revenue. There are some particular successes, for example the National Pollen and Aerobiology research facility has achieved the target to generate a surplus in one year rather than the three year timescale that was set.

Within support areas clear plans for learning are in evidence that focus on supporting the achievement of departmental targets. The corporate provision delivered via HR that seeks to address more generic needs, but departments are able to influence the content and range of courses to ensure particular needs are met. It is also evident that the appraisal process helps ensure that as well as learning provision being determined by managers staff are able to discuss their personal learning needs. As is to be expected with academic staff they take a greater responsibility for their own learning and much of this takes the form of research, networking, conferences etc rather than traditional forms of learning. People are able to confirm that for the majority, time is available for them to pursue their own learning goals and support for this (including costs) will generally be available.

The pervading culture within the University is one of continual improvement and the development of people is a key part of this. There is an understanding amongst staff that learning is of mutual benefit to themselves and the University and confirm that their development is part of an ongoing process.

People who are new to the University receive an induction and the probation process is geared to helping them settle quickly and ensuring that formative learning needs are addressed. A mentoring scheme is in operation which when it works well gives people a point of contact and a critical friend with whom issues can be discussed. One person described the mentoring experience as *'brilliant'*

A First Class University for the Region

People are committed to delivering first class services for students and staff alike which is underpinned by staff believing that they have a valued contribution to make and this could be evidenced with academic staff as well as those in more junior support roles. It is without doubt that managers and the majority of staff are committed to seeing the University improve and progress, recognising that in an increasingly competitive environment excellence of provision is an imperative.

There is a clear connection between the drive to become an effective and respected institution and the attention that is given to the development of people. There are a wide variety of approaches to learning, including for example formal courses, research, networking and focus groups etc. All learning is valued and it is recognised that low cost options can be highly effective in the development of both teams and individuals. People are able to confirm that to a large extent they are encouraged to develop both within the context of their role and where possible in support of wider career aspirations. Some of the security team have recently achieved the status of Community Accreditation and the awards were presented by the VC which helps to reinforce that all learning has a value and not just that which is academically based.

A mark of the success being achieved is that the University can demand higher UCAS points from applicants and the percentage of 'good degrees' being attained is increasing.

High Achieving Staff in a Well Led University

People have confidence in the management team and believe that the senior team are capable of steering the University through the times that lie ahead. A majority of staff report that managers provide them with support and encouragement to perform their roles effectively and that there is always an open door when in need of help or guidance. At team meetings, away days etc managers involve staff in discussions about performance and what improvements could be made. As people say, *'if you want to get involved in helping things get better, you can'*

The leadership programme has been attended by many managers across the University and is reported to have given managers a broader understanding of strategic thinking' helped ensure greater uniformity of approach and provide the opportunity for people to consider their management style. Several people said that it was *'very useful'*

There is a varied approach to acknowledging the contribution of staff, many comment on thanks and well done being part of the culture of where they work and one team spoke of a champagne celebration as a result of winning a particular piece of work. The majority of managers are reported to make particular effort to recognise the contribution of people and where appropriate this will be done publically so that others are aware of what has been achieved. On a more tangible front people are

encouraged to seek increment opportunities when through their own efforts they have made particular achievements and/or their role has become more challenging.

In an organisation whose business revolves around learning and attainment, providing opportunities for staff build on their existing qualifications is seen as one of the ways in people can be rewarded. Almost without exception people confirmed that they have been encouraged to further their academic studies (or attain a first degree) and where appropriate gain professional qualifications relevant to their role.

Sustainable Development, Excellent Facilities

Although a complex organisation there are established processes in place to measure the success of all parts of the University. There is clear demonstration of how the attention given to supporting the ongoing development of people contributes to their increasing effectiveness. There are a variety of approaches to reviewing performance and as well as this being conducted corporately by the senior team other managers and staff are also involved in review processes.

The University is able to point to a good track record of employment success for graduates, increases in the overall number of students on courses and being more successful in winning new contracts.

Inspire, Include, Innovate

It is considered essential to the role of managers that they involve and include their teams in all aspects of improving provision as well as the development of new approaches or initiatives. Many staff confirmed that there is now a more enabling approach by managers and encouragement to be involved whereby the University is able to capitalise on the talents of the entire workforce. Many say that the management approach is more structured and that people are given the trust and freedom to develop ideas in an environment that supports learning.

The University impresses as having a positive approach as a result of its achievements. Staff describe it as being more ambitious and outward facing which as a result has raised its profile. This has been supported by a widening of the research base and a refreshing of the course offer and as a result it has moved up the NSS league table. As one senior manager commented, *'it feels to be a university on the up'*

Strengths of the Organisation

A number of strengths were evidenced during the course of the review some of these relate to the University as a whole and others more to individual Departments or Institutes. The following list is by no means exhaustive, but does reflect the major areas of good practice that were identified.

- The clear links between planning at a corporate level and those for Departments/Institutes and how these are ultimately reflected in the objectives for teams and individuals.
- How the majority of people see that improving and developing provision is amongst their key priorities and how the University seeks to engage the energies and enthusiasm of people in this.
- The effort that has been made to help people understand the bigger picture and, the issues being faced and as part of this that people believe that their voice matters.
- Opportunities that are afforded to many people to grow personally as part of the development process and the encouragement to build on or attain relevant qualifications.
- The wide variety of ways in which people can learn and develop and the shared responsibility that is taken for development.
- The effort being made to 'professionalise' some of the support areas and make people feel that what they do is important and valued.
- The confidence with which people can approach making improvements and that they are empowered to take action without the need for direction.
- The wide variety and innovative approaches to meeting the learning and development needs of staff.
- The use of focus groups and the authority they are given to recommend improvement actions.
- The positive responses received from sessional staff to the questionnaire that was issued.
- The comments from many regarding the friendly nature of the organisation which contributes to the view that Worcester University is a good place to work.

The following questionnaire was issued to 75 sessional staff and 38 (50.7%) responses were received

1. I know how I am expected to contribute to developing and achieving the objectives of my team			
Strongly Agree:		44.7%	17
Agree:		44.7%	17
Disagree:		5.3%	2
Strongly Disagree:		5.3%	2

2. I know how I am expected to contribute to developing and achieving the objectives of the organisation			
Strongly Agree:		34.2%	13
Agree:		44.7%	17
Disagree:		15.8%	6
Strongly Disagree:		5.3%	2

3. I am fully involved in decisions about my training and development			
Strongly Agree:		21.1%	8
Agree:		42.1%	16
Disagree:		21.1%	8
Strongly Disagree:		15.8%	6

4. I can explain clearly what my own learning and development should achieve			
Strongly Agree:		23.7%	9
Agree:		55.3%	21
Disagree:		15.8%	6
Strongly Disagree:		5.3%	2

5. Managers are genuinely committed to giving me fair and equal access to the support and development I need			
Strongly Agree:		28.9%	11
Agree:		42.1%	16
Disagree:		21.1%	8
Strongly Disagree:		7.9	3

6. am encouraged to suggest ideas for improving my own and other people's performance			
Strongly Agree:		26.3%	10
Agree:		47.4%	18
Disagree:		18.4%	7
Strongly Disagree:		7.9%	3

7. I understand what my employer expects my manager to do to lead, manage and develop me			
Strongly Agree:		21.1%	8
Agree:		47.4%	18
Disagree:		18.4%	7
Strongly Disagree:		13.2%	5

8. The way my manager behaves is in line with what the organisation expects of him/her			
Strongly Agree:		39.5%	15
Agree:		42.1%	16
Disagree:		10.5%	4
Strongly Disagree:		7.9%	3

9. My manager gives me useful feedback on how I'm doing in my job			
Strongly Agree:		34.2%	13
Agree:		34.2%	13
Disagree:		23.7%	9
Strongly Disagree:		7.9%	3

10. I can describe how I make a positive contribution to the performance of the organisation			
Strongly Agree:		42.1%	16
Agree:		44.7%	17
Disagree:		13.2%	5
Strongly Disagree:		0.0%	0

11. I can give specific examples of how my contribution has been recognised and valued			
Strongly Agree:		23.7%	9
Agree:		52.6%	20
Disagree:		18.4%	7
Strongly Disagree:		5.3%	2

12. I am involved in making decisions that affect my own performance			
Strongly Agree:		28.9%	11
Agree:		52.6%	20
Disagree:		15.8%	6
Strongly Disagree:		2.6%	1

13. I am involved in making decisions that affect my team's performance			
Strongly Agree:		10.5%	4
Agree:		65.8%	25
Disagree:		15.8%	6
Strongly Disagree:		7.9%	3

14. I am involved in making decisions that affect the performance of the organisation			
Strongly Agree:		7.9%	3
Agree:		52.6%	20
Disagree:		28.9%	11
Strongly Disagree:		10.5%	4

15. I have learned new skills and used them in my job			
Strongly Agree:		34.2%	13
Agree:		52.6%	20
Disagree:		10.5%	4
Strongly Disagree:		2.6%	1

16. I have learned new skills but I've not been able to use them in my job			
Strongly Agree:		2.6%	1
Agree:		15.8%	6
Disagree:		57.9%	22
Strongly Disagree:		23.7%	9

17. I have not learned any new skills			
Strongly Agree:		2.6%	1
Agree:		10.5%	4
Disagree:		55.3%	21
Strongly Disagree:		31.6%	12

18. If you started a new job or role, I was given a very useful introduction which helped me in my new job/role			
Strongly Agree:		18.4%	7
Agree:		44.7%	17
Disagree:		31.6%	12
Strongly Disagree:		5.3%	2

19. I can give examples of how learning and development has improved my own performance			
Strongly Agree:		26.3%	10
Agree:		52.6%	20
Disagree:		21.1%	8
Strongly Disagree:		0.0%	0

20. I can give examples of how learning and development has improved the performance of my team			
Strongly Agree:		13.2%	5
Agree:		47.4%	18
Disagree:		39.5%	15
Strongly Disagree:		0.0%	0

21. I can give examples of how learning and development has improved the organisation's performance			
Strongly Agree:		7.9%	3
Agree:		47.4%	18
Disagree:		39.5%	15
Strongly Disagree:		5.3%	2

22. I can give examples of how the management and development of people has improved			
Strongly Agree:		13.2%	5
Agree:		34.2%	13
Disagree:		47.4%	18
Strongly Disagree:		5.3%	2

Appendix 1 – Continuous Improvement Plan

Areas for Continuous Improvements and / or Areas for Action Plan	Activity	Support from (e.g. Assessor / Centre / Other)
Some people are less aware of plans for their part of the organisation and do not have the benefit of regular team meetings	Need to ensure that the good practice by which people are informed and involved is replicated in all parts of the organisation	
A small number of people receive limited feedback on their performance and have not had a recent appraisal	The benefit of providing regular and timely feedback on performance needs to be reinforced with all managers. The system to ensure that appraisals are being conducted may need to be a little tighter	
Some people do not feel that they are valued by the University.	It would be helpful to ensure that all managers understand that everyone needs to believe that they are making a contribution that is valued and appreciated by their employer. A simple thank you, or a well done goes a long way and often means more to people than something of monetary value.	
Cleaners and others can often be first point of contact when students needs help or have a problem	You may wish to ensure some of the support staff have the necessary knowledge and information to be able to signpost students who may be in need of advice or guidance.	
Mentoring for new starters is conducted very effectively for some people and less so for others	I would be worthwhile restating the purpose and process for mentoring and producing a contract for the mentor and mentee to agree.	

Appendix 2 – Assessment results summary

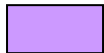
The Investors in People Framework

The Evidence Requirements

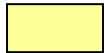
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2	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓				✓																	
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7	✓	✓	✓																										
8	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓							✓													
9	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓																								
10	✓	✓	✓																										

The number of evidence requirements met is 45

Key:



The Core Investors in People Standard



Your Choice from the IIP Framework



Not part of the Investors in People Framework