

# INVESTORS IN PEOPLE ASSESSMENT REPORT UNIVERSITY OF WORCESTER



## Key Information

Assessment Type	Assessment
Investors in People Specialist Name	Richard Tomes
Visit Date	08/12/2014 to 12/12/2014
Assessment Enquiry Number	ENQ – 93432 – YN2PDX

## Conclusion

After having completed the assessment I am pleased to conclude that the University of Worcester continues to meet the requirements of the Standard and should be accredited for a further period of 3 years. This is an achievement of which to be proud and stems from the importance that is attached to the management and development of people throughout the organisation.

It is also noted the significant changes and developments that have been made at the University and how it has become a more integral part of the city. This could not have been achieved without the involvement of a highly competent and effective staff team

## Milestone Dates

Review of Continuous Improvement Plan	June 2016
Date of Next Full Assessment	November 2017



Richard Tomes  
Investors in People Specialist

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## Introduction

The University of Worcester has been accredited as an Investor in People since March 1998 and since that time has grown and prospered. There have been significant increases in the numbers of both students and staff and additional premises in which to deliver learning and also some exciting new facilities for the city.

The University continues to be one of the UKs fastest growing universities, enjoys an increasing reputation for the excellence of its teaching and is becoming more widely recognised for its research capability. For the purpose of this assessment some of those parts of the University that were not included in the previous assessment were selected with the presumption that practices would be reflective of those for the University as a whole. It was also decided that the assessment should be against the core Standard but that at the time of the next assessment the higher levels of accreditation would be more seriously considered.

In addition to people being selected for face to face interviews a questionnaire was also sent to a significant number of hourly paid lecturers as they make a significant contribution to teaching at the University. In contrast to the previous assessment where 50% of the questionnaires were returned the number of respondents on this occasion was very small making the evidence offered of limited value. Thought will need to be given to how to gather a more significant response for this group of staff at the next assessment.

## Summary of Findings

The University chose to be assessed against the core version of the Standard which is in itself a very praiseworthy achievement and one that many organisations find challenging. It became clear on conducting the assessment that Worcester University could if it wished make significant inroads into the broader framework. In the Assessments Results Summary (Appendix 2) an indication has been given of some of those additional evidence requirements that could have been attained if they had been included in the assessment.

The effectiveness with which people are managed and developed means that opportunities to develop further in line with the Standard are limited and that further improvement lies in the arena of the broader framework whether or not these are included in a future assessment.

## Feedback against the requirements of the Standard

### Planning and Communication (Indicator 1)

Plans are in place at a variety of levels in the University and these include a strategy for the organisation as a whole as well as detailed plans and learning outcomes for each course that is taught. As a result of the effort that goes into communicating the aim and vision to people staff are able to relate how what they and their team does contributes to the broader strategy. The VC makes significant effort to brief out the plan by attending every team meeting when it is launched. Staff are also invited to a 'state of the nation' meeting each semester where they can hear about progress with plans and emerging developments as well as having the opportunity to question the VC. It is disappointing that some staff, particularly those in administrative roles feel these meetings are only for the 'higher ups' and as a consequence do not attend.

Many people commented that the all staff e-mails, newsletters and website are very helpful in giving them an understanding of what is happening on the broader front and new plans and ideas that are emerging. They also confirm that team meetings are useful to communicate both up and down the organisation. At an Institute level Away Days are held from time to time and these provide an opportunity to share with each other information on what people and teams are doing and engage in discussion on future plans and activity. These are considered to be useful events that also allow people engaged in research to showcase what they are doing. They are of greater interest to academic staff with some others saying that they have less relevance to what they do. You could look at non academic staff meeting between themselves for part of the day on these occasions.

The NSS is one of the primary measures by which the success of the University is judged and customer satisfaction measured. It is clear from conversations with people that they recognise this as a critical success factor and are able to articulate how actions by them and their team will have an impact. This is no doubt in part due to the practice of issuing a survey to year 1 and 2 students that mirrors the NSS. As one person remarked in light hearted comment; *"we are told, If you look after the students, we'll look after you."*

There is a clear linkage from the strategic plan that leads to the objectives for Institutes, teams and ultimately individuals. In conversations with people they are able to illustrate how what they do can have an impact on the goals of the organisation. Everyone was able to confirm that as part of the annual appraisal process individual objectives are agreed and people know how these ultimately relate to corporate targets. Respondents were also able to describe the values enshrined in the plan, confirmed that these are frequently discussed and that they are lived by most people in the organisation. There is also evidence that thought is increasingly being given to how these values should determine the appropriate behaviours for them to be achieved.

There is a well established process by which the progress and success of courses are reviewed. Course leaders are very effective at bringing teams together so that performance information can be gathered and discussed. Some courses are more dynamic than others and these interactions allow some planning of how modules might evolve and reflect how the workplace may be changing.

For those parts of the University that provide support to other departments there are service level agreements or service standards in place that help ensure that people are clear about what is expected of them and enable performance to be measured.

## Leadership and Management (Indicators 4 & 5)

People comment that they have confidence in the senior leadership team and that the continuing success and growth of the organisation is as a result of the strategic direction set and the competence, drive and enthusiasm of top managers. Those new to management see more senior managers as good and effective role models. The overall view of managers in the organisation is that they are universally good at what they do. One relatively new starter said; *“I’ve got the best line managers I’ve ever worked for”* and someone else commented; *“I am full of admiration for my manager, I am always being encouraged to try new ideas.”*

The support offered to managers to enable them to acquire further develop leadership skills are considered to be good and effective. It is encouraging that those who may become managers in the future are also provided for through the Aspiring Leaders Programme and there are also opportunities as a result of maternity leave and other factors for people to temporarily work in a leadership capacity. In addition, the role of Course/Programme Leader whilst not giving people line management responsibility does nevertheless allow people to gain skills and behaviours that are considered beneficial for the future. Several people commented of the leadership programme, which is now in its third cohort and is seen to be a helpful and worthwhile course of study. Participants find it useful to meet with managers from elsewhere in the University and speak of the project and mentoring elements of the programme as being particularly useful.

It would be helpful to define more precisely the leadership competences (knowledge, skills and behaviours) that should be adopted by all managers. As well as providing a framework against which management effectiveness can be measured they can also inform how managers can develop further.

Managers speak of being more performance focussed in their oversight of people and say that they have been guided on how to hold ‘difficult conversations’ whilst continuing to offer support to those who may need to improve. It was however reported that staff do not feel over managed and consider the balance is just right between being trusted to do the job and a guiding hand being there when needed. At managers meetings there will at times be discussion about leadership and the sharing of practice. Personnel will on occasions be invited to these meetings to inform people of evolving practice and give a University wide perspective.

Processes by which people receive performance feedback and can have developmental discussions are seen as helpful and managers diligent in ensuring they take place. Many staff benefit from a one to one with their managers on a regular basis and there are appraisals that take place twice a year. These provide staff with constructive feedback as well as the opportunity to consider how they can be even more effective in their role. For those that teach observation is considered a helpful and constructive process as a result of which developmental discussions will take place. This is particularly true for new people who will often be pursuing their PGCHE with observation being a key component.

Many people (particularly academics) are able to describe how they have had opportunities to progress a career whilst at the University and have been helped by managers to determine the best direction in which their talents and aspirations can be realised. People are helped to understand what they need to do to be noticed and be able to advance. There are clearly more opportunities for academics to progress than others, though it is evident that similar levels of encouragement are given to those in non academic areas.

A couple of people spoke of having been interviewed for a promotion opportunity but had been unsuccessful. However, they were given very constructive feedback on why they didn't get the job and were able to address these factors with the help of their manager. In the case of one individual they had been successful at a subsequent promotion interview.

### Learning and Development (Indicators 2, 8, 9 & 10)

As should be expected in a university the majority of people are afforded significant development opportunities and a wide variety of types of learning are available to people.

Those that are new to the University speak of well structured and comprehensive induction procedures that help people become familiar with the organisation in which they are working and the role in which they have been engaged. Some people also spoke of induction commencing before taking up post. Although there is a process it would not appear that this is slavishly followed and there can be changes and adaptations to reflect an individual's background and the job for which they have been recruited. Most people are allocated a mentor which they say is helpful in understanding new systems and processes, as well as where things are and who to approach for information and advice. Probation (which is 2 years for academics) provides the opportunity to formally review progress and offer coaching should that be needed. It was also confirmed that any necessary learning is made available in a timely fashion.

Many people are pursuing further academic qualifications and with the increasing focus on research doctorates are encouraged. New lecturers are required to undertake the PGCHE which can become part of a Masters and others are taking more subject specific routes. For admin people there is the opportunity to undertake a first degree if they do not already have one, though some people did not feel there was strong encouragement of this. A number of people within support roles also have the opportunity to attain NVQs which are effective in accrediting work based learning and demonstrating vocational competence.

Although there is discussion with people at appraisal and one to ones about learning that could be useful a majority (of academics) take responsibility for managing their own development. Managers will also suggest to people activities that they feel will be of benefit and pass on information they feel will be of use. A comment from one respondent was; *"I've been offered so many brilliant courses."* There is also significant peer learning taking place both through observation in the classroom and in discussion at meetings as well as more informal interactions.

People are very positive about the support that is provided for development and the range of opportunities available. Whilst there is a suggestion that resources to fund development are more controlled than previously staff confirm that needs continue to be met. The nature of learning that takes place is varied and as has already been mentioned can range between a course of academic study to an informal conversation with colleagues. Other activities include the programme of University courses, conferences, networking and research. For some coaching by managers also plays a part and there is a coaching scheme in place for new course leaders whereby they meet 6-8 times over a year. Use is made of Action Learning Sets and bespoke training will be commissioned to meet specific needs. Staff feel they get the opportunity to shine through being involved in external events and many spoke of exciting opportunities both home and abroad that have been both a valuable learning exercise as well as showcasing the University.

Those that have vocational skills are diligent about ensuring that these are kept current through placement visits, networking, peer discussion and through a variety of external learning forums. Some

staff find that part time working allows them to continue to work in their profession and that this provides added value for students and other staff who are able to learn from their knowledge and expertise.

Since the previous assessment the University has continued to enjoy continued success and the effective management and development of people has been a significant part of this. They have been the fastest growing University from 2005 – 2012, there are now over 1000 staff and a turnover of £80m and a plan to increase this to 1500 people and a £200m turnover. Several courses can boast very positive NSS results and the volumes of people applying for places rises year on year as a result of which more able students can be selected. External inspections and audits such as Ofsted are very positive about the University and there is increasing success in winning bids and tenders.

Some teams and people in academic roles find great benefit in being members of the AUA and describe the conferences and learning they offer as being stimulating and interesting, they also find a value in how membership allows them to network effectively with people at other universities. This is not universal as some others have little knowledge or understanding of what the AUA offers and do not display any great enthusiasm to find out. You may wish to consider taking a corporate stance on membership

#### Positive Culture (Indicators 3, 6 & 9)

People say one of the strengths of the University and a reason why a number stay is its approach to equality and diversity and in particular how this is manifested in family friendly policies. Awards have also been won that attest to a positive stance across a range of diversity issue. The organisation is considered a caring employer and flexibilities can usually be agreed to meet individual needs and preferences. Those with families are attracted by the opportunity to manage their hours to accommodate the challenges of work and being a parent. Working from home is a possibility for many people and the performance focus is on achieving objectives and not hours worked means that some are able to maintain a good work life balance.

One manager spoke of one of their tasks being to help people manage their diaries so that they can manage what may appear conflicting priorities. Whilst some appear to be achieving this others comment that that trying to fit everything in is a challenge they fail to meet. For those that are involved in extracurricular sporting activities it would appear to be more of an issue. It may be that managers need to be encouraged to understand any issues staff may have in this regard and support that may be required.

It has already been mentioned that staff are not micro managed and feel trusted to take responsibility for their role. This may include budgets and course performance with people being able to make decisions without having to seek permission. It is understood that mistakes will on occasions happen and when they do lessons are learned and shared with others.

There is generally a culture of making people feel valued and appreciated for what they do and this will take a variety of forms. Most managers offer a simple thank you to people and there can be mention at meetings of what people have done. One senior manager asks that people's achievements are passed up the line so that where appropriate they can send a note of acknowledgement. In Sports the blog is used to make others aware of what has been achieved by people and staff have now got used to sending in details of their achievements. The blog is perceived as an effective communication tool and you may wish to consider if it should be replicated across other parts of the University.



The practice of people being expected to make application should they feel deserving of a bonus or pay increment has become established and some managers encourage staff to start recording their evidence early in the year. Several of those spoken to have applied previously had been successful and are comfortable with the process. A small number said they considered it demeaning and felt like 'begging for money.' You may wish to try and counteract any negative perceptions as it does appear to be a much better process than one where managers alone make the decision. The 'Worcester Rewards' whereby people can get discounts in local shops was in contrast appreciated by all spoken to.

Staff are made to feel that they can make a contribution to how the University evolves and everyone believes that they can voice ideas and opinions and that these will be taken seriously. This includes those that are new to the organisation who are encouraged to share thoughts and impressions that come from looking with a fresh pair of eyes. People have the confidence to try new things and learn lessons when things do not go as planned, there not being a blame culture within the organisation.

The vast majority are very positive about working at the University, are proud of what it has achieved and consider it to be a good place to work. Comments that illustrate this include; *"It's the best place I've ever worked. You get a buzz from the job. I feel lucky to be here. It's great I love it. I feel that the University is at the cutting edge and I am proud to say I work here."*

## Strengths of the Organisation

There are many aspects of Worcester University that impress as being effective and demonstrating good practice, particularly when measured against the core Standard. Some of the most striking aspects are set out below alongside the mission statements as detailed in the current strategic plan.

### To be an outstanding university at which to be a student

Staff throughout the organisation are helped to understand how they can make a contribution to ensuring that students have a good experience. People are proud of the University and committed to ensuring its continuing success.

### To motivate and empower our students, graduates and staff to make a first rate contribution to society

Staff are highly motivated to wanting to achieve and the quality with which they are managed and developed results in them being very effective and able to offer a vocationally relevant experience.

### To inspire our students to reach their full potential, through excellent, innovative teaching, scholarship and research

People take responsibility for their own development and seek out opportunities to learn both within the University and from external sources. Particular effort goes into developing the effectiveness of teaching and learning through the guidance and coaching offered by managers and effective peer support networks.

### To foster and disseminate independent and distinctive scholarship and research, to achieve major, beneficial, social impact

Research now has a much higher profile and staff are increasingly pushing the boundaries of what students learn and the external projects in which they are engaged.

### To be an outstanding university at which to be a member of staff

The University is now a more integral part of the city and staff are proud of what it has achieved. It also has an evolving national and in some cases international profile. This is due to the challenging mission the University has set itself and how staff and leaders have risen to that challenge.

### To make a transformational contribution to the positive development of the cultural, social and economic life of the City of Worcester and our wider region

People have been given the skills to ensure that recent innovations such as the Hive and the Arena provide effectively for students and are also a resource for people in the city and beyond.

### To stand out as a visionary and inclusive university that challenges and overcomes barriers to participation in higher education

Staff are committed to providing an experience for people who may not previously benefited from HE. Learning and development also ensures that staff have the knowledge and skills to provide for people who present with more complex needs.

## Potential Issues Arising from the New Version of the Standard

A new version of the Standard will be launched in Jun/July 2015 and is currently being piloted with selected organisations across the country. From what can be seen of the draft version the following areas may need to be addressed in advance of a next assessment. This is presuming that the assessment would again be against the core Standard.

- There will need to be clear standards for managerial competence that provide a framework against which effectiveness can be measured.
- It will need to be evident that activity takes place to review people's performance against objectives and this helps them to improve.
- Core values will have to be in place from which behaviours have been established.
- Reward and recognition is in line with organisational objectives and how this will take place has been clearly communicated to people.
- Recruitment and selection is fair, efficient and effective.
- There is a clear understanding by leaders of who the stakeholders are in the communities and markets being served.

## Appendix 1 – Continuous Improvement Plan

Business Issue - What	Suggested Actions - How	Potential Benefit - Why	Priority - When	Solutions/Support Available - Who
Leadership and Management	Leadership competences should be clearly defined	These will provide the measure by which effectiveness can be determined and inform future development for managers	Medium	
Communication	Encourage those staff (mainly admin) that do not attend the VCs briefings to see the benefit of being there.	Staff will be helped to have a good understanding of strategic direction and that their opinions are equally important	High	
	Consider if the concept of using a Blog used within Sports could be adopted elsewhere in the University	These are an effective communication mechanism increasingly used by organisations.		
Learning and Development	Ensure that all admin people understand how they can be supported to attain a first degree.	This will raise status and self esteem	Medium	
	Consider whether there should be a corporate approach to membership of the AUA.	The learning that is available to members could well be of benefit to others at the University	Medium	
Culture	Review if all managers provide support and guidance to staff on how to manage their time effectively	More people should achieve a better work life balance.	Medium	

## Appendix 2 – Assessment results summary

### The Investors in People Framework

#### The Evidence Requirements

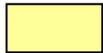
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
The Indicators	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	*		*		*		*		*		*		*		*		*						
	2	✓	✓	✓	✓		*	*	*			*			*	*													
	3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		*	*						*		*	*					*		*	*			
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	5	✓	✓	✓	✓						*	*	*		*		*	*	*		*	*		*					
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	10	✓	✓	✓																									

The number of evidence requirements met is 39

Key:



The Core Investors in People Standard



Your Choice from the Investors in People Framework



Not part of the Investors in People Framework

✓ = Evidence requirement met

\* = Some positive evidence was identified