

# CASE STUDY: GRADUATE MANAGEMENT FLEXI-PLACEMENT: CAREER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY WITHIN THE INSTITUTION OF CIVIL ENGINEERS

The NHS North West HR Graduate Training Scheme gives its trainees the opportunity to spend two months working on flexi-placements in organisations that are external to the NHS. Such placements are a great opportunity for trainees to gain experience and share good practice. This develops their skills and confidence, whilst also benefitting the NHS through the knowledge they gain. This case study forms part of a series of three, all of which are based upon placements undertaken by graduate trainees in August and September 2013.

This case study is specifically based upon the flexi-placement that was undertaken at the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE Group) to research and develop a career development strategy for ICE and its employees. Whilst this organisation operates in a different environment to the NHS, the organisation has a strong set of values and commitment to delivering good outcomes for its members, similar to the commitments the NHS makes to its patients. Therefore work carried out on this placement would be transferable to NHS organisations.

## Key Outcomes

As the project has just been launched, and the placement was only of short duration, it is difficult to demonstrate reduced staff turnover or improved staff engagement. However even within a limited timeframe of two months the following outcomes can be evidenced:

- **Stakeholder engagement** - the project sponsor agreed that the work done on career development during the placement was valuable and that it was important that momentum was not lost. As a result there is strong commitment by the ICE group to carry out further work on career development to support employees. Demonstrating the value of this work. See the Next Steps section for further details
- **Greater awareness of internal career paths** - when the 'employee voice' group consulted on change staff were at first sceptical about the mapping tool as it didn't show the career paths they expected. However once it

was explained that the mapping paths were based on competencies and provided alternative career paths, that may not be just a vertical line of progression, they were enthusiastic about it and developed a better understanding of the paths open to them. This is expected to improve staff satisfaction and therefore retention.

## Background

### Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE)

The Institution of Civil Engineers is a qualifying body and chartered charity which was formed in 1818 and is based in Westminster although it has offices throughout Europe and Asia. ICE employees 450 people and has 80,000 members worldwide. The organisation seeks to "foster and promote the art and science of civil engineering." The internal motivation for ICE to undertake this project came from its high turnover



of 22% (compared to a UK average of 15%) and consistent feedback from engagement surveys and exit interviews that employees perceive there is no opportunity to develop: “there is a feeling that you need to leave ICE to further your career.”

## Key Aims

- Raise awareness amongst employees about internal career paths
- Contribute in a meaningful way to the organisation's retention strategy
- Create a strategy that will allow employees to feel confident in developing their career
- Give managers the tools and techniques necessary to support their employees with career development

## Key Stages of Setup

There were three main people involved in the project:

- HR Director and Project Sponsor
- HR Graduate and Project Manager
- Senior HR Business Partner

As the placement lasted two months there was a clear timescale and set of goals for the project which helped the planning process.



## How It Works

The project consisted of an interactive career mapping tool (see appendix 1 for sample of principal) and employee guidance on planning career development.

### Career Mapping Tool

The mapping tool was set up by creating a spread sheet of all roles within the membership division, including: competencies, person specifications and pay grade for all jobs. Jobs were then matched on the basis of the following criteria: they needed to be within two pay grades (anything beyond was seen as unachievable by the organisation), and to have similar specifications, which did not include skills that were non-transferable (e.g. a role without HTML skills would not transfer to job that required HTML skills).

By doing this it was possible to create new career paths that did not follow a traditional linear structure. This created many different options in an organisation with a fairly flat structure. Once the career paths were mapped PowerPoint was used as the delivery method for the career maps (see appendix 1). Employees could select their division and their job role before looking at where their roles sits within the organisation's hierarchy. The key component was the section below hierarchy that allowed employees to look at the jobs which would be a logical career move (based on the matching process) at either the same grade or one/two grades up, divided into 'same level' and 'promotion'.

### Employee Guidance

Employee guidance material was mainly designed using a CIPD tool (see appendix 2) which provides guidance for employees on career development in a 'partnership' style, whereby employees are provided with the tools and resources they need by their employer. However the fact that achievement and seeking of opportunities remains the responsibility of the employees really fits with ICE's philosophy.

## Resources

There was no additional funding or resources for the project other than those that the organisation already had. The career development mapping tool was made using PowerPoint with a mixture of academic literature, case studies, journals and CIPD tools and materials influencing content. The same sources also influenced the accompanying career management document for employees and the script for the management training video.

## Key Challenges

- **Staff engagement with the project** - this was overcome by involving employees at all stages of the project and taking their opinions and feedback into account, as well as feeding back to them how their involvement had influenced the outcomes
- **Lack of technology and budget** - perhaps the most satisfying element of this project was the adaptation of simple everyday software to create something that had the appearance of a more sophisticated programme. This was done by using PowerPoint and creating hyperlinks rather than clickable slides (see appendix 1)
- **Geographical spread** - the organisation has headquarters in London but has regional teams in five locations throughout the UK. To this end creating an inclusive career map that did not discriminate against regions was extremely difficult. The decision was made with the project sponsor to incorporate career paths regardless of where they were. To this end the organisation was demonstrating what was available in terms of internal career paths for those who were committed to the organisation. This decision was made on the basis that regional jobs did not have career paths within their base, therefore if employees did not feel they would move to London for progression they were unlikely to stay with the organisation or move beyond their current role

## Key Learning

### Joined up approach to working

Throughout the placement both the project sponsor and HR business partner made sure that they linked the work with other projects to prevent any overlap or duplication. This also ensured a consistent approach regardless of the division. Whilst the size of the organisation facilitated this there remained a concerted effort to make sure work was truly joined up.

Making a conscious effort to be more joined has never been more important in an NHS context; of the fourteen trusts Sir Bruce Keogh visited he reported “silo working” between divisions and professions as an issue in five of them. Making sure that projects, schemes of work, pathways are linked and that people work closer across department will only serve to benefit the NHS.

### Return on investment

ICE acknowledged that return on investment was about more than just retention of its employees. They accepted that some employees that received development might leave the organisation and the focus of the work was to give all employees as positive an experience of the organisation as possible. As an organisation that does not have the budget

to pay competitively in the field of engineering, building its reputation as an employer that helps its employees to develop is vital to ICE's long-term prosperity.

The NHS has similar challenges to keep excelling as an employer of choice. By engaging with positive projects to improve the skills and capabilities of all employees the reputation of trusts grow. Projects like this will contribute to keeping turnover down at a natural level, but more importantly the NHS can still get a return on investment if those that do leave have positive experiences to share about their time with the organisation.

### Generational shift

One of the key findings of this project was around generational shifts and what was really important to the generations who have joined the workforce in the past ten years. Employees currently aged 18 - 32, known as “millennials”, have completely different expectations of what they want from an employment relationship compared with the traditional pension and job security.

In a study conducted by Deloitte to understand the generational change it was found that whilst salary still came out as the highest valued element of the employment relationship. 53.7% of employees valued development opportunities; whilst only 7.9% valued job security.

As the NHS face an aging population, with skills shortages as older generations leave the workforce predicted and some Trusts already recruiting from abroad, strong attraction and retention strategies are vital to ensuring the NHS has the workforce to deliver high quality care. Acknowledging the different need and expectation of “millennials” can definitely contribute to the view of the NHS as an employer

## Sustainability

ICE's learning and development policy was in the process of being approved but has subsequently been amended to reflect the work done on career development. Likewise the materials used in the career-planning guide for employees reflected the organisation's values and also the suggested development activities in the draft of the learning and development policy to help the implementation and embedding process.





The HR department is also actively promoting the tools and resources available to employees when out visiting managers and colleagues across the organisation. With work planned in team briefings and ICE's newsletter.

ICE utilises their intranet very well and developments to practice such as this are heavily marketed by the organisation's communications manager to keep awareness up. The communications manager is also a keen advocate of linking in with the employee-led discussion group "Your Voice". As a non-unionised organisation "Your Voice" is the best way of directly communicating with staff outside of corporate channels.



### Next Steps

- Develop the mapping tool to all four of ICE's divisions
- Produce and publish the training video that will demonstrate to managers an 'effective' career discussion
- Introduce a formal mentoring scheme – the organisation is keen to introduce this as it is a good way of forging links between senior managers and their employees. It is also another way of retaining skills and knowledge as mentors pass this on to mentees
- With extensive user guides and information the internal communications manager (who works within the HR team) will carry on with the project, mapping the other three divisions of ICE and supporting employees who want to discuss career opportunities

### Supporting Material

The following resources are available as an appendix to this case study:

- Appendix 1 - Career mapping tool
- Appendix 2 - CIPD Career Discussions at work Tool
- [www.ice.org.uk](http://www.ice.org.uk)

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