



INTERNAL QUALITY REVIEW HUMAN RESOURCES 2014

RCSI DEVELOPING HEALTHCARE LEADERS WHO MAKE A DIFFERENCE WORLDWIDE

Human Resources Department Peer Review Group Report

DOCUMENT CONTROL SHEET

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1 Context for the Review of RCSI Human Resources

- 1.1 This Report presents the findings of a quality review of RCSI Human Resources Department. The review took place between 23-26 September 2014. The purpose of quality review is to assist RCSI to assure itself of the quality of each of its constituent units, and to utilise learning from this developmental process, to effect enhancements.
- 1.2 The Review Group met staff from within the HR Department and the wider College and also with key external stakeholders. All participants who met the Review Group were provided with opportunities to contribute to the discussions. The meetings were conducted in a purposeful and focused way, their general tone was informal, and views were expressed which spoke of good practices, but also some areas that presented challenges for the HR Department.
- 1.3 The review process was clear to the Review Group, including the place of the review within the overall development of the HR Department and the Review Group was greatly supported in the site visit by the RCSI Quality Office.
- 1.4 The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) is the second oldest third-level academic institution in Ireland. RCSI is both [a] a health sciences Higher Education Institution with Schools of Leadership, Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Physiotherapy and Postgraduate Studies, and [b] a Postgraduate Training Body in Surgery and related specialties. RCSI is one of four Royal Colleges of Surgeons in Great Britain and Ireland (Edinburgh, England, Glasgow and Ireland). The RCSI School of Medicine was established in 1886 and RCSI became a Recognised College of the National University of Ireland (NUI) in 1978. In the decade from 1996 to 2006, RCSI underwent significant expansion through the establishment of additional Schools/Institutes on the Dublin campus, and of three new international campuses (Penang Medical College, RCSI-Bahrain & RCSI-Dubai). Following an institutional review commissioned jointly by the Higher Education Authority and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), RCSI was granted independent degree awarding powers in 2010. In 2011, RCSI entered into a licensing agreement with Perdana University (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia) to establish the PU-RCSI School of Medicine. In 2012, RCSI launched the '3U Partnership' in conjunction with Dublin City University and the National University of Ireland Maynooth. In May 2013, RCSI was ranked in the top 200 medical schools in the world in the QS University Rankings.
- 1.5 RCSI is an independent, not-for-profit health sciences institution with charitable status in the Republic of Ireland. The institution operates a primarily self-funding model, with State funding accounting for less than 20% of total income. The model is based on the education of a substantial cohort of international students alongside Irish/EU students.
- 1.6 A number of hospitals in Ireland are also affiliated to RCSI and these provide opportunities for clinical training, through a network of approximately 140 honorary clinicians.

RCSI Staff by Location

1.7 RCSI has nearly 1000 staff in Ireland and over 130 on the Bahrain campus. In addition, there are currently small numbers of staff based in Malaysia and the UAE. The breakdown of staff by country, as at 31st December 2013, is shown in Fig 1.0 to the right. The Malaysia figures exclude 5 RCSI employees currently there on secondment.

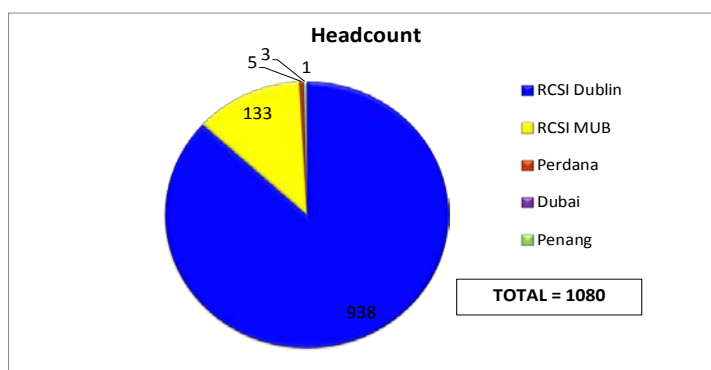


Fig 1.0: Headcount by Location as at December 31st 2013

1.8 The HR Department in RCSI is responsible for providing HR support services to over 1000 RCSI employees, most of whom are based in Dublin (see Figure 1 above). In addition to salaried staff, RCSI also has over 900 staff on its casual payroll – these include invigilators, examiners, sessional lecturers, actors and library staff, to whom RCSI pay variable amounts based on the hours worked.

Membership of the Peer Review Group

1.9 The Peer Review Group (PRG) members were:

Ms Jaspal Kaur, Director of Human Resources, Nottingham University (external)

Mr Charles Dolan, Director of CDC consulting (external)

Mr Philip Curtis, Director of Admissions, RCSI (internal)

Dr Roy Ferguson, Director of Quality, University College Dublin (external and Chair)

Terms of reference of the Review Group

1.10 The terms of reference of the PRG were to:

- Critically evaluate the SAR and the supporting documentation
- Verify how well the aims and objectives of the unit are being fulfilled, having regard to the available resources, and comment on the appropriateness of the unit's mission, objectives and strategic plan
- Comment on how well the unit fits with the strategic plans for the College as a whole

- Evaluate the unit's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges as outlined in the SAR
- Discuss any perceived strengths and weaknesses not identified in the SAR
- Assess the suitability of the working environment(s)
- Comment on any recommendations proposed by the unit in its SAR
- Make appropriate recommendations for improvement, with due consideration of resource implications

The Quality Review Process

1.11 Prior to the site visit, the Review Group was provided with a Self-Assessment Report (SAR), together with supporting documentation. The Review Group requested additional information relating to, for example, budgets, policies and procedures etc. all of which were provided. The content of the SAR was validated through an examination of the documentation provided and critically, through meetings with HR staff and with a broad range of staff across RCSI, as well as stakeholders external to RCSI, for example, hospital clinicians holding honorary appointments with RCSI and Trade Union representatives. The Review Group would like to thank all the RCSI staff and external colleagues that they met during the site visit, not least for the open, frank and constructive dialogue that took place.

The schedule of meetings is attached in Appendix 1.

1.12 At the conclusion of the site visit, the Review Group outlined the key findings, commendations and recommendations for enhancement arising from the review. Following receipt of this report the RCSI Human Resources Department will consider the recommendations and, in conjunction with the RCSI Quality Enhancement Office, will develop a Quality Improvement Plan to address the stated recommendations.

2 Introduction and overview of the Human Resources Department

Introduction and Unit Details

- 2.1 The Human Resources (HR) Team in RCSI is relatively new, with an average tenure of just over 2 years. The HR Director joined RCSI in August 2011. RCSI is managed by the Chief Executive Officer, supported by a seven-person Senior Management Team, including the Director of Human Resources.
- 2.2 Upon appointment, the HR Director conducted a strategic review of HR to identify capability gaps and define a new operating model for HR. This review was informed by the Ulrich model of HR Management. One early change that resulted from this review was the introduction of a Business Partnership model within HR, creating two new dedicated roles configured to directly serve specific areas of the organisation, namely HR Faculty Liaison (covering Medical & Health Sciences; other faculties; Finance; and Honorary Appointments) and HR Business Partner (covering Research; Communications & Events; IT; Surgical Affairs; & Estates). Over the following 24 months, this structure has further matured and developed, with the appointment of a new Organisation Development & Change Manager, a Learning & Development Manager, and a HR Systems Project Manager, and the expansion of the HR Operations area. During this restructuring some members of the previous HR team chose to move on to new opportunities – due to a mixture of personal reasons, redundancy, and other opportunities. This facilitated the recruitment of a new cohort of staff into the HR function.
- 2.3 The new HR team in RCSI has a mix of specialist HR/ Employee Relations skills and project management expertise. All team members have previously worked in the private sector – on one hand this has been beneficial in bringing knowledge of private sector/industry best practice to bear; on the other hand it has presented a challenge to HR, in that none of the team had higher education experience prior to joining RCSI, a point acknowledged by HR in their self-assessment report. Over the past 24 months, there has been a learning curve for the team in this respect, however, the evidence presented to the Review Group, not least that provided by a wide spectrum of RCSI staff, would suggest that the HR Team have adjusted well to the higher education environment.
- 2.4 The services provided by HR are broad and wide-ranging and would appear appropriate to the operational and strategic needs of RCSI at the current time, namely:
- 1) Recruitment
 - 2) HR Operations and Administration
 - 3) Business Partnership
 - 4) Performance Management and Progression
 - 5) Learning & Development
 - 6) Employee Reward & Recognition
 - 7) Change Management
 - 8) RCSI International
 - 9) HR Strategy & Engagement

3 Mission, Strategic Planning, Organisation and Management of RCSI HR

- 3.1 A comprehensive overview of the Mission, Strategic Planning, Organisation and Management of the unit was provided in the self- assessment report (SAR). The alignment of the HR Strategy to the Institutional Strategic Plan 2013 – 2017 was clear, as evidenced in the number of objectives that were progressing which were aligned with the institutional strategy objectives. The HR Team appears to be well structured with clearly defined functional roles yet still retaining the internal flexibility to respond, as appropriate, to short term goals and challenges.
- 3.2 The integration of the HR Director as a part of the Senior Management Team and the requirement to report on a quarterly basis, to the RCSI CEO and Strategy Programme Manager should further enhance the value of contributions by HR to the overall organisation along its planned strategic path.
- 3.3 As with all organisations, the use of feedback to monitor its level of effectiveness is important and this has been shown in the use of the staff survey prior to the SAR process. This type of feedback can be a useful re-affirmation to the continued strategic direction of the organisation. Some consideration by HR might be given, however, as to how effectively they feedback the outcomes of the survey data to staff. HR may wish to seek ways to increase the response rate to some staff surveys – does HR have any mechanism to follow up why this occurs and to explore what this section of the RCSI community is not saying?
- 3.4 The relatively high number of casual staff – some 900 – on the RCSI payroll was noted. The SAR acknowledges that processing payments for this category of staff (approx. 100 per month) generates an additional administrative overhead for the HR and Payroll Teams.
- 3.5 As the organisation continues to grow, in both scale and scope, the HR team recognise the need for the organisational structure within HR to be agile and responsive, in order to adapt to the changing needs of RCSI as a whole. It is clear that the introduction of the Business Partner model has been successful and has made a significant contribution throughout the college and it has proved to be a very effective model for the organisation moving forward. However, it is also clear that this development risks becoming a victim of its own success due to the value of the contribution being made, and the increased work load that is being placed upon the Business Partners.

Commendations

- 3.6 HR has a presence at senior management level and on key bodies across the college
- 3.7 HR values are well articulated
- 3.8 The planned move of the HR function away from a transactional personnel approach some years ago has been successful to date and further improvement continues as outlined in the HR Strategic Plan
- 3.9. The enthusiasm, expertise and dedication of the HR team

- 3.10 The development of an HR Strategy is appropriately aligned with the RCSI Strategic Plan
- 3.11 The unit is well structured to deliver a range of HR services which are transactional and operational combined with a strategic and organizational development capacity

Recommendations

- 3.12 The Review Group would recommend that it is an appropriate time to reflect on the number of initiative's currently underway, their status and resource requirements, while ensuring the present high quality of service is maintained. The Review Group would be concerned about the future ability of HR to deliver projects at the current level of activity and recommend that HR consolidate and reflect on the current achievements to date, to ensure that sufficient capacity is accessible for new projects as and when they become necessary
- 3.13 The Review Group recognise the increased visibility and contribution of the HR Department, both as a service provider within RCSI and in assisting the implementation of the Institutional Strategic Plan. It was clear from some of the meetings, however, that there still appears to be a limited understanding of the role that HR plays within RCSI. There is a need for HR to continue to communicate the full range of services it provides to the wider staff body
- 3.14 There appears to be no systematic method by which HR evaluates whether the intended benefit(s) of a particular initiative or project has been realised. The Review Group recommends that project close out processes and post implementation reviews need to be put in place to critically assess the impact (and efficiency gains) on workloads, potential for savings in time and therefore, capacity to resource other activities
- 3.15 RCSI HR may wish to consider the utility of developing Service Level Agreements (SLA) with end-users for a limited range of services (e.g. recruitment), to support the cost effective provision of HR services. Having identified and agreed the key metrics, RCSI HR could monitor performance against the service levels set out in the SLA and publish the results as KPIs
- 3.16 The Review Group recommends a review of the process by which Casual Staff are engaged and the contractual arrangements that are in place in relation to same – not least, to ensure that RCSI, from a legal perspective, is not unduly exposed. An expected outcome of such a review would be that HR develop clear guidance on the relevant processes for line managers e.g. Garda vetting and reference checking. HR should ensure that all Casual Staff are appropriately trained and equipped to undertaken their duties

4 Staff and Facilities

- 4.1 An overview of the HR team was provided in the self-assessment report. There are 11 staff assigned to the HR team which includes the HR Director. The HR director is 3 years in post. All but one of the HR team has joined RCSI since the HR Director assumed his position. All new recruits come from the HR industry and had not worked in an academic environment prior to joining RCSI. The gender balance is heavily biased female to male 9:2 and while not untypical of many HR Departments in higher education, this ratio should be monitored and reflected upon at appropriate junctures.
- 4.2 The HR team have qualifications and experience that are relevant to Human Resources and provide a range of services that include recruitment and resourcing, organisational development and change management, project support and leadership and development training.
- 4.3 The HR Director is a member of the College Senior Management Team (SMT). In addition to being the Head of Human Resources, the HR Director is also Head of Estates and Information Technology. These additional areas of responsibility do not appear to have negatively impacted on the HR function and the HR team indicated that they are satisfied with the level of access they have to the HR Director. The HR Director is located within the HR open plan office.
- 4.4 Given that the HR team is relatively flat and small in size, the HR Director generally assigns any tasks or responsibilities outside of standard role descriptions directly. Decisions are escalated to the HR Director as appropriate, by any team member; however, within HR Ops and Recruitment these decisions would normally be brought to the Org Development & Change manager in the first instance, and then escalated further as required.
- 4.5 The introduction of a Leadership and Development function within the HR suite of offerings is also welcomed. In developing this area within HR, the team need to be aware of the possible duplication of training programmes, (e.g. statistics) with other service providers within RCSI. This may present further opportunities to increase inter-departmental collaboration.

Commendations

- 4.6 The ongoing development of HR staff and staff in general is to be commended
- 4.7 The use of the Staff Portal as a means of communicating learning opportunities to the wider staff body
- 4.8 The Review Group welcomed the progress on academic promotions to date
- 4.9 The success of a number of change management initiatives, in particular the Pension project, was noted by many staff
- 4.10 The success of the Business Partner model was noted

Recommendations

- 4.11 The Review Group recommend a review of the current learning and development offerings by HR and other providers within RCSI, to identify areas of duplication and thereby ensure the efficient use of limited resources
- 4.12 The Review Group would encourage HR to continue to reflect on appropriate mechanisms to support the career development of those staff in grades not covered under the academic promotions
- 4.13 Consideration should be given to the introduction of non-monetary forms of recognition for contributions above and beyond the 'call of duty' (e.g. Employee of the month), particularly for those staff grades that do not have access to structured career development opportunities
- 4.14 With a view to the sustainability of the Business Partner model, HR should explore ways to release additional resources to support this service and possibly extend it as appropriate

5 Services, Procedures and Performance

- 5.1 The HR Department deals with high-volume recruitment on an annual basis. There are approximately 212 positions filled per annum. During Q4 2013 an online e-recruitment system was launched. The focus on streamlining processes and using technology more effectively are positive initiatives, which the Review Group welcomes. Whilst this new system has delivered considerable efficiency benefits for HR, as well as being more user friendly for applicants, the functionality does not appear to have been extended to support recruiting managers.
- 5.2 The majority of line managers were extremely positive about their experience of the recruitment processes operated by the HR Department. The Review Group recognises the use of *Linked In* as an advance which enables the promotion of adverts to appropriate candidates.
- 5.3 The feedback from the new hires, those recruited within the last twelve months, was more mixed. On the one hand a number of new recruits reported very high levels of satisfaction with the recruitment processes whilst others reported issues, for example, in one case a member of staff arrived at RCSI but they were not expected by the line manager or HR. This type of incident whilst infrequent, can impact negatively on individuals and their perception of the College.
- 5.4 The processes in relation to the appointment of research staff in particular, needs some further focus. The Review Group heard of the variable experience of research staff, for example, it was not uncommon for a research member of staff to commence employment at RCSI and experience delays in receiving a contract and pay. There appears to be scope to improve communication and co-ordinate services between the relevant departments.
- 5.5 The SAR highlights the requirement for all new replacement posts to be considered for approval by the Senior Management Team. The Review Group received feedback from line managers that this process was seen as unnecessary in respect to certain cases e.g. maternity leave cover. The Review Group noted the important financial control reasons for the current process being in place, but felt there maybe opportunities/benefits in revisiting the current arrangement with a view to devolving responsibility to line managers for certain replacement posts (but still operate within a robust framework, which would provide the reassurance the Senior Management Team is seeking).
- 5.6 The Review Group were informed that the current RCSI policy requires that administrative positions must be advertised internally prior to external recruitment (should that option be required). The Review Group understand that this process facilitates internal staff development and mobility, however, it also creates a negative 'ripple effect' across the institution with an associated administrative burden, as this process must be repeated each time an internal post is filled.
- 5.7 The Review Group understand the historical basis for members of HR participation in the majority of (if not all) interviews for new staff. However this has significant resource implications. While acknowledging the need to retain the flexibility to decide on its value/need, given the perceived pressure on HR resources, urgent consideration should be given to the need for this to continue to the extent that it does currently.

- 5.8 Staff data and management information is a key requirement in any HR Department. Phase 1 of Core has been successfully implemented. The time and attendance module which is part of Phase 2 has also been delivered. There is further functionality that will be released over 2014/2015.
- 5.9 The Review Group also heard very positive feedback on the staff portal. As part of the technology developments there was evidence of continuous improvement and the use of *lean* processing being utilised to achieve efficiencies.
- 5.10 The SAR identified one of the challenges for the HR function as being “*the diverse nature of the staff population*”. While the introduction of promotions for academic staff has been generally welcomed and seen as a positive development, it has highlighted the absence of a similar career structure for Professional, Support and Technical staff in particular. In 2013 a position paper was developed by HR to seek ways to address these concerns. RCSI has identified a number of steps to support career progression for these staff e.g. engage in the PDP process, take advantage of learning and development opportunities. This is to be welcomed. It should be noted, however, that while these challenges are real and frustrating to those staff groups that it impacts upon, the issues are not unique to RCSI. It is a common challenge for all higher education institutions. Given this point, there may be value in RCSI HR opening discussions with other HEI’s to discuss common challenges and potential innovative strategies to resolve them.
- 5.11 A performance management process, *Professional Development Planning* (PDP) was launched in 2013. The process follows three steps, first set objectives, second midyear review and end of year review. It was clear from feedback that the PDP is used in some parts of the College as a development tool and in others as a performance management tool. It was notable that staff who had brought some latent knowledge of performance management systems from other institutions have a higher level of understanding of how the PDP could benefit them and the Institution. There were some staff who struggled to understand the benefit of PDP and in particular, it was unclear to some colleagues how it linked to development. The Review Group heard concerns that “*a one size fits all*” model was inappropriate for PDP, within an organisation that had such a diverse range of staff. Some differentiation may need to be considered for different categories of staff. In some areas, the midyear review was seen as being too frequent, although in one area the line manager would like to see the frequency of reviews increase. PDP is a relatively new mechanism and there was recognition of it as being the ‘*beginning of a journey*’. However, due to its cross applicability, RCSI needs to be aware of its impact on various terms and conditions of staff coming under its remit and its potential effect on staff engagement. Where there is a desire to create a performance management culture, it is critical that the purpose of PDP is clear, the goals should be aligned to the institution’s strategic aims and performance be linked to reward.
- 5.12 The SAR identifies some challenges with regard to recruitment for the international campuses of RCSI. The challenges are common in any HEI operating overseas. The barriers to increased mobility amongst the existing staff are well understood by RCSI, in particular concerns regarding the research environment of the international campuses is a key issue and is currently being addressed within a recently constituted Working Group. The Review Group understand that the Working Group, *inter alia*, maybe considering if international service can be factored into the promotion criteria as appropriate.

- 5.13 The Review Group were informed that the application of Workload Models within RCSI was variable. The role of an academic in a modern research intensive institution, such as RCSI, is complex and diverse. It is both difficult and inappropriate to prescribe the schedule for academic staff in detail. Rather, internationally, Workload Models are integral to the operational structure and system that underpins the effective and equitable distribution and monitoring of workload within an academic unit. Workload Models attempt to balance load against capacity across the three main components of the academic role – Research and Scholarship, Teaching and Learning, and Administration and Contribution. Furthermore, the transparent use of such models can reassure staff as to the fairness of both the allocation process and outcomes.

Commendations

- 5.14 The e-recruitment tool was viewed favourably by line managers and staff
- 5.15 Staff reported an improvement in accessing HR policies on the staff portal
- 5.16 An increasingly valuable advisory role across all HR domains
- 5.17 There is a visible commitment to automate processes to improve the user experience eg E-recruitment
- 5.18 RCSI HR has a strong commitment to continuous improvement and the SAR provides evidence of examples of enhancement initiatives e.g. PDP
- 5.19 HR has an ambitious programme of work for 2015 relative to its available resources

Recommendations

- 5.20 **Recruitment** – The Review Group would recommend that:
- (a) The e-recruitment system be developed in order to optimise the use of the functionality for the entire process, achieving further efficiency benefits. There may also be value in benchmarking how other systems operate
 - (b) The selection process be developed further to include the use of assessment and psychometric tools
 - (c) The impact of the policy to initially advertise administrative posts internally be reconsidered in order to establish if the burden of the ‘ripple effect’ of such activity can be minimised.
 - (d) While acknowledging the basis and continued need for headcount/financial management imperatives, the Review Group would suggest that SMT reconsider the

current policy / requirement for all posts to require a business case submission and approval at SMT

5.21 **Interviews** - The Review Group would recommend that:

- (a) HR attendance at interviews be reviewed as a matter of urgency, so that consideration can be given to releasing resource to enable HR to add greater value in other areas of their service to the organisation
- (b) A formal interview training programme be provided to departments to facilitate a phased reduction of HR from the process. Everyone involved in interviewing within RCSI should receive mandatory formal interview training, to ensure a consistent approach and help RCSI meet its legal obligations regarding this activity. RCSI should retain a formal register of those trained

5.22 **Professional Development and Planning (PDP)** - The Review Group recommend that:

- (a) There is an important continuing need to clarify the purpose of the PDP initiative as there are mixed views about whether it is a performance management system, or developmental or both
- (b) Consideration be given to the benefit of differentiating between various grades of staff from early career to senior staff
- (c) Clarification is provided on its use with honorary appointments. RCSI needs to be explicit and clear if PDP applies to honorary appointments or if it is intended to be used for the purpose of promotions only e.g. to assist the honorary appointment for promotion from Lecturer to Senior Lecturer
- (d) The frequency of the PDP process and review meeting be revisited. The Review Group would recommend as a minimum, that PDP is an annual activity, but greater flexibility and discretion to determine the frequency of review meetings could be devolved to Schools/Departments
- (e) For all those using PDP, an exemplar form should be made available
- (f) In order to fully understand and clarify the issues with PDP, the use of representative focus groups may help
- (g) The inconsistency of the connection of bonuses to PDP being applicable for only some staff should be reviewed.

5.23 In the absence of a promotions framework for all staff, the Review Group would encourage HR to continue to reflect on appropriate mechanisms to support the career development of professional services/support staff and others affected

- 5.24 The Review Group recommend that HR should make explicit how it will support and interact with HR departments in RCSI's overseas sites
- 5.25 The Review Group would encourage RCSI HR to collate data on the nature of the questions being asked via telephone enquiries, with a view to enhancing the service to staff via the e-portal system (on the Frequently Asked Questions section)
- 5.26 In the interests of efficiency (e.g. how effective are resources being used?) and transparency/equity, the Review Group would recommend that RCSI HR consider a more consistent use of Workload Models across the institution

6 Resource Management: Staff, Facilities, Budget and Financial Issues

- 6.1 The HR unit is based in 121 St. Stephen's Green, on the 3rd floor, in a bright recently refurbished open plan office. The open plan office is supplemented by a glazed private meeting room which can be subdivided into two smaller meeting rooms. The HR space would appear to facilitate a culture of open communication and collaboration within the office.
- 6.2 The HR team appears to be well structured with clear roles and areas of responsibility which are communicated in the 'meet the team' section of the HR portal, which is available to all RCSI staff. The HR Director provides real time updates in relation to decisions where and when appropriate, and also uses the forum of the HR Weekly team meeting to provide more detailed updates. For example, after the RCSI Senior Management Team meeting each week, the HR Director will cascade the key items of relevance to all the team within this forum.
- 6.3 Given the size of the team, it is important that the workload is effectively balanced during busy periods. The Review Group noted that this is managed by the HR Director and the OD Manager, who review workload and priorities on an ongoing basis, to ensure the focus of the team is where it needs to be. The weekly team meetings and recruitment meetings also provide a forum for any pressure on operational capacity to be raised, and for workload to be redistributed accordingly. These meetings are also used to update the team on any relevant issues arising from the SMT weekly meetings.
- 6.4 All members of the HR team are subject to the College PDP system and the HR Director meets with each team member annually on a 1:1 basis to set and agree PDP performance targets. In addition to these formal sessions and the weekly departmental meetings, the HR Director is available to meet with individual staff members on a continual basis. The HR team are satisfied with the communication channels that are available within the department and feel well informed on both the College and HR strategic plans.
- 6.5 The HR budget, which appears to be appropriate, is set on an annual basis and the HR team meet on a quarterly basis to monitor performance against budget. There appears to be a structured approach to financial management within the RCSI HR Department. No issues regarding the adequacy or otherwise of the budget distribution between pay and the non-pay costs centres were raised with the Review Group.

Commendations

- 6.6 The unit has undergone significant changes in the past 3 year and this seems to have been managed successfully with the new structures well embedded
- 6.7 The recruitment of HR staff from outside the education sector has enhanced the skills and profile of the unit. RCSI staff commented that this was the first time that RCSI has had a '*professional HR Department*' which was widely welcomed

- 6.8 The introduction of the HR Business Partner model is a real success story for HR. There was strong support for the role and value of the HR partners in assisting the CEO, Heads of Schools and Support Units to manage staff in their areas of responsibility
- 6.9 The introduction of a staff development and training function within HR is to be commended
- 6.10 Within HR there is a strong sense of team camaraderie, with a clear understanding of their mission and how it fits into the overall RCSI strategic objectives
- 6.11 There appears to be effective and open communications within the unit
- 6.12 Offices and meeting facilities are of a high standard and provide a welcome ambience for all visitors to the department
- 6.13 Access to the full suite of current policies, procedures and forms via the RCSI HR portal was noted as a very positive development

Recommendations

- 6.14 RCSI HR should continue to enhance arrangements to better understand and improve all relevant business processes, by working in partnership with other relevant service providers and stakeholders to improve the value added by the range of HR systems. The HR Department should continue to take a proactive leadership role in managing these 'boundary-spanning' activities
- 6.15 The Review Group commends the current practice of regular weekly team meetings. RCSI HR may wish to consider if there would be value in expanding the membership of the meetings periodically, to facilitate the involvement of staff external to HR, as a means of developing improved cross-functional communication

7 Service Users and Feedback

- 7.1 HR engage with a disparate range of staff; general, clinical, research, line managers and senior management, working from multiple sites including: St. Stephen's Green, hospital sites, and overseas locations.
- 7.2 The team provide a range of HR services that are generic to all staff, in addition to services that are bespoke to individual staff members and/or groups.
- 7.3 HR have rolled out a number of significant projects over the past number of years and engage with the staff community in the design and delivery of these projects to 'field test' for appropriateness and feedback. The involvement of staff in developing these projects is to be commended.
- 7.4 One significant project that received positive comment was the restructuring of the RCSI pension scheme which was widely praised for the level of staff engagement and communication that was provided during the restructuring process.
- 7.5 Enhanced HR services were welcomed by staff with particular praise for the introduction of *Core* and the availability of HR policy and procedure documentation which is available through the staff portal. The introduction of *Core* allows greater clarity in relation to tracking annual leave, updating of staff personal details and immediate access to payslips, P-60 information, etc. The enhancement of the HR web portal was also commended for improving access for all staff both local and remote, to HR policy documentation across a wide range of areas.
- 7.6 The HR team has also developed a staff induction process to provide new staff with an introduction to RCSI and an overview of working within the College. Staff found attending these sessions generally beneficial, however, evidence was presented to the Review Group which would suggest that the staff experience of induction is variable in regard to the information being provided, the timing of the induction (i.e. relative to the proximity to the actual start date of the employee) and the sense of preparedness for the arrival for the new staff member within their receiving department. The negative experience was not limited to, but was more evident within the research staff cohort.
- 7.7 As part of the feedback on the induction process, the induction pack itself was sometimes viewed as being confusing, for example, staff seemed unclear as to where many of the individual forms contained in the induction pack should be returned. Greater clarity should be provided as to where the forms should be returned to, e.g. information in relation to salary and bank details: should these be returned to HR or the salaries department?
- 7.8 HR is perceived as being visible, accessible and responsive. The '*telephone always being answered*' was commented upon as being an example of how accessible HR is. The open plan walk-in office was commented upon as having a friendly and inviting ambience. The private meeting rooms were also looked upon as being beneficial but some staff members did comment on the meeting room being 'too transparent' and that it might benefit from some additional privacy being added, possibly by masking the glass in some fashion. This was of particular concern if a private matter needed to be discussed which might be upsetting.

Commendations

- 7.9 HR are to be commended on the number of projects that have been undertaken over the previous few years including, the restructuring of the RCSI pension scheme, introduction of *Core* and the development of an HR web portal to provide greater access to HR policies and procedures.
- 7.10 The welcoming atmosphere within the HR department
- 7.11 The introduction of a structured Staff Induction programme

Recommendations

- 7.12 The Review Group recommends that further efforts should be made to ensure a consistent approach to staff induction. The implementation of an induction checklist for Heads of Schools/ Departments might be beneficial for example, to enhance consistency, including the type of information provided to new staff. The Review Group also recommend that RCSI revisit the induction process to review the particular needs of different categories of staff - e.g. research; clinicians; technical staff - to provide more bespoke induction material. This might also include the introduction of cultural training for staff who may have engagements with international learners and/or who may be teaching in overseas locations.
- 7.13 Given the volume of information that new starts receive, the Review Group suggest that consideration should be given to phasing the distribution of information to new staff, e.g. the pension documentation cannot be processed for at least 6 months. Consideration should also be given to providing some of this information via the staff portal, which could then potentially route the completed documentation directly to the appropriate destination.
- 7.14 The appointment of research staff, funded through research grants, appears to present certain challenges. Based on the feedback received, it was evident to the Review Group that a significant piece of work is required to enhance the system and related processes supporting the research staff appointments. It appears that while there is an understanding of the needs of the individual candidate, which is captured through GAIS, it seems that once the research grant is approved the various RCSI systems do not consistently link-up – HR should take a pro-active lead to resolve this interface issue. [For example: the timing of the allocation of research grant funding can sometimes require that staff are ‘appointed’ before they can be processed fully through the College systems and that this can, at times, result in the student/employee being misaligned in terms of their correct functional category - some research staff are required to attend RCSI under temporary contractor/visitor cards until they are fully inducted and registered – but in the interim, staff/students may be on the wrong list for induction and/or staff/student communications and so on.
- 7.16 The Review Group suggest that some consideration be given to enhancing the privacy of the internal meeting room within the HR office.

8 Communication and Stakeholder Relations

- 8.1 **Internal:** There appears to be effective and open communications within the HR team. Staff noted that the communications within the office are assisted by the open plan design and physical layout.
- 8.2 The HR Director is part of the Senior Management Team and the HR team are well represented on College committees.
- 8.3 The Review Group were informed that each week, a team meeting is held with all members of the HR team. A tracker is used to manage the agenda for this meeting – this lists all the priorities for HR, actions, owners, due date and current status (using a Red/Amber/Green traffic light system). An update on each initiative or project is also captured during these meetings. Further, there are agenda items for ‘Business as Usual’ activities such as recruitment and HR Operations, given their key functionality in the overall operations of the Department. In addition, the HR Team has recently introduced a brief weekly recruitment meeting with the Recruitment Team and the HR Business Partners, given the high volume of work in this area.
- 8.4 HR staff participate in the College PDP system and this also provides a mechanism whereby staff engage in a structured way with the Head of Department.
- 8.5 The combination of the open team meetings and the HR input into SMT and College committees provide a background which ensures that HR is well informed on all aspects of College policy and strategy and that this information feeds down to all members of the HR team.
- 8.6 **External:** RCSI staff acknowledge the increased level of visibility of the HR team and their general accessibility. Some staff did comment, however, that they had missed some key HR communications because they were sent via a general staff email. Staff commented that the level of e-mail traffic can be very high in RCSI which can result in e-mails being missed or overlooked. Staff suggested that communications from HR might be improved by creating regular HR updates or better targeting communications to relevant staff groups. It was felt that the most appropriate media in which to place these updates might be within the RCSI *Pulse* publication within a specific HR section.

Commendations

- 8.7 There are a variety of internal communication channels to keep HR informed and connected with other College stakeholders.

Recommendations

- 8.8 The Review Group suggest that HR might consider including an HR section in the institutional *Pulse* publication to provide an additional source of communication to the wider RCSI

community and/or develop a more targeted method of communicating key HR information to specific staff groups.

9 Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Challenges

- 9.1 RCSI HR prepared a SAR which contained much useful information and facilitated constructive discussion during meetings with the Review Group in the course of the site visit. The SWOT analysis contained in the SAR was clear and the recommendations for improvement were grounded in the analysis. The Report covered all the required areas set out in the relevant guidelines and contained the critical information, including information on how RCSI HR benchmarks itself against referent HR Units. In this way, the SAR report provided the basis for a focused site visit by the Review Group.
- 9.2 The SAR captured many of the strengths of the Unit. Discussions with staff from across the College indicated that the overall service from RCSI HR had improved considerably in recent years. There was almost unanimous support for the HR Partner Model.
- 9.3 The SAR lists twelve areas of weakness/for development and many of these were confirmed by staff in meetings with the Review Group.

Appendix 1: Site-visit schedule 23 – 26 September 2014

Evening prior to site visit: Tuesday 23rd September 2014

Dur. mins	Time	Meeting Theme	Attendees	Venue
30	1700 – 1730	Welcome & Introduction for PRG Director of Quality and members of SMT	PRG. QEO; CEO; Dean	Robert Smith Room
90	1730 – 1900	Private planning meeting for members of the Peer Review Group	PRG	Robert Smith Room
	1915 – 2100	Dinner	PRG; QEO Representative	

Day 1: Wednesday 24th September 2014

Dur.	Time	Meeting Theme	Attendees	Venue
	0845	Review of preparatory work	PRG	Sir Thomas Myles Room
30	09.15 – 09.45	Meeting with Head of Unit	PRG; HR Director	Sir Thomas Myles Room
45	09.45 – 10.30	Time allocated for meeting with HR Staff : HR Ops, Information Systems & Recruitment	PRG; HR Staff	Sir Thomas Myles Room
25	10.30 – 10.55	Tea / coffee. Private meeting time for PRG	PRG	VC Room
45	11.00 – 11.45	Time allocated for meeting with HR Staff: Business Partnership, L&D and OD/ Change	PRG; HR Staff	Sir Thomas Myles Room
30	11.50 – 12.20	Tour of HR offices	PRG; tour guide	HR Dept. 121 SSG
60	12.30 – 13.30	Lunch & private meeting time for PRG	PRG	Sir Thomas Myles Room
50	13.35 – 14.25	Group1: Meetings with Heads of Schools & Senior Academics <i>Provide an overview of support provided to HR in managing staff who deliver key academic programmes. May cover</i>	PRG; Selected representatives	Sir Thomas Myles Room

		<i>specifics around recruitment and promotion of academic staff.</i>		
50	14.30 – 15.20	Group 2: Meeting with Senior Administrators <i>Provide an overview of support provided across the College by senior administrative staff members.</i>	PRG; Selected representatives	Sir Thomas Myles Room
40	15.30 – 16.10	Group 3: Meeting with recently recruited staff (past 12 months) Tea / coffee served to those present at meeting		
45	16.15 – 17.00	Group 4: Meeting with Clinicians / Academics in senior roles <i>Meeting with representatives from our Clinical staff groups and some senior academic staff (non-head of School).</i>	PRG; Selected representatives	Sir Thomas Myles Room
50	17.10 – 18.00	Review of afternoon's meetings.	PRG	
	19.00 – 21.00	PRG Dinner if required	PRG	Hotel

Day 2: Thursday 25th September 2014

Dur. mins	Time	Meeting Theme	Attendees	Venue
25	08.45	Private meeting time for PRG	PRG	
50	09.10 – 10.00	Group 5: Meeting with academic staff at lecturer level	PRG; selected staff	Sir Thomas Myles Room
50	10.10 – 11.00	Group 6: Meeting with Institute of Research / Office of Research & Innovation	PRG; selected staff	Sir Thomas Myles Room
25	11.00	Tea / coffee. Private meeting time for PRG.	PRG	Sir Thomas Myles Room
40	11.25 – 12.05	Group 7: Meeting with staff from support functions in the College <i>Meeting with those who are involved in helping HR to deliver the service it needs to deliver: IT, Finance, Communications and Estates.</i>	PRG; selected staff	Sir Thomas Myles Room
50	12.10 – 13.00	Group 8: Meeting with general staff <i>Cross section focus group with general staff across the college.</i>	PRG; selected staff	Sir Thomas Myles Room
30	13.00 – 13.30	Video Conference Meeting with CEO and Dean	PRG; CEO; Dean	Sir Thomas Myles Room
30	13.30 – 14.00	Lunch & private meeting time for PRG	PRG	Sir Thomas

				Myles Room
30	14.10 – 14.40	Group 9: Meeting with staff representatives from trade unions	PRG; selected staff	Sir Thomas Myles Room
50	14.40 – 15.30	Private meeting time for PRG members	PRG	Sir Thomas Myles Room
35	15.40 – 16.15	Group 10: Meeting with Research Staff <i>Provide an overview of HR support for researchers / the HR research experience (cross section of research staff across levels)</i>	PRG; selected staff	
120	16.30 – 18.30	Private meeting time for PRG members to finalise draft commendations and recommendations Tea / coffee	PRG	Sir Thomas Myles Room
	19.30	PRG Dinner and a chance to discuss key issues (if required)	PRG	Hotel

Day 3: Friday 26th September 2014

Time	Meeting Theme	Attendees	Venue
08.45 – 12.00	Private meeting time for PRG – discussion and finalisation of Commendations and Recommendations for all sections.	PRG	Sir Thomas Myles Room
10.30	Tea / coffee.	PRG	Sir Thomas Myles Room
12.00 – 12.15	Private meeting with QEO	PRG; QEO	Sir Thomas Myles Room
12.15 – 12.30	Meeting with Head of Unit & QEO	PRG; QEO; HR Director	Sir Thomas Myles Room
12.30 – 13.00	Exit presentation to all unit staff	PRG; QEO; All unit staff	Presidents Meeting Room
13.00 – 14.00	Light Lunch and Private meeting with QEO	PRG; QEO	Sir Thomas Myles Room
14.00	Review ends.		