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**HEALTH AND SAFETY EXECUTIVE****The HSE Board****RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION IN HSE****A Paper by Kate Timms****Issue**

1 On 9 January the Board invited me to examine with recent band 4 and 5 recruits to HSE their experience of our recruitment processes and ways in which these can be improved. Richard Clifton, Peter Graham, John Thompson and I accordingly hosted a lunch discussion with eight recruits on 11 March. The key messages emerging from this discussion are set out below.

**Timing**

2 Routine.

**Recommendation**

3 That the Board consider the issues bearing on recruitment and retention identified in paragraph 7 below.

## **Background**

### Recruitment process

4 Some of those present had been recruited through the FOD inspectorate trawl and were in policy directorates with tickets to enter the inspectorate after two years; all were finding this “pre-inspectorate” exposure to policy making valuable. Others had been recruited via Capita Ras and had either chosen to join HSE from a range of two or more other Departments or Agencies, or been offered HSE as their only option in view of their particular qualifications and experience. Main impressions of the recruitment process were:

- All, irrespective of their recruitment route, had experienced long (3 to 4 months, for “pre-inspectors”, sometimes longer) delays in the recruitment procedure. Most of this seemed to arise in the process of taking up references, where it was often the case that the candidate him/herself in the end had to sort out the bureaucratic tangle (incorrect addresses, approaches wrongly made to existing employers, etc). Clearly this gave rise to difficulties for those joining HSE from other jobs who had to handle the process of giving notice to employers; but it seemed likely too that recruitment delays risked losing good people who in a tight job market would be recruited elsewhere during the waiting period.
- Pay was obviously a significant factor: the Capita Ras recruitment process meant that job offers by different parts of Government to candidates in the same grade showed very transparently the differences in starting salaries (eg some £2000 for band 5 as between OFSTED and HSE). HSE was amongst the low payers on this important measure.

### Pay Criterion

- The quality of the information about HSE at the recruitment stage was frankly variable. That supplied via Capita Ras did not adequately differentiate the product which HSE had to sell from the rest (“could have been any part of Government with a different logo”). Equally the website was not user friendly for those attempting to navigate it for purposes of searching for jobs.
- Although those entering HSE through the Inspectorate route were provided with generally very full documentation about the role of an Inspector within HSE, the same was not true of those entering HSE as policy makers. Should there not be an equivalent set of information to the Inspectors’ packs available to those looking for a career in policy making? Should not job recruitment exercises such as open days as the normal rule be carried out on the basis of recruiting to jobs across the organisation, and not simply to, say, FOD alone?

## Development and training

5 Once within HSE, new recruits were generally positive about the extent of the line manager commitment to their development both on the job and in terms of access to training courses. Several spoke highly of the NEBOSH course and the advantages to the individual of early participation in it. HSE induction courses were valuable, as was the training in policy development, although there were concerns over the length of time spent waiting for a place on the course.

## Promotion prospects

6 A major concern for new band fives was early access to promotion opportunities. HSE's arrangements under which candidates for promotion had to demonstrate work-related evidence of core competencies was not flexible enough to allow for the diversity of new entrants' experience. Without more accessible means of demonstrating ability and thus moving to higher levels of responsibility, new recruits would be discouraged early in their careers with the risk that they would look elsewhere for opportunities for advancement.

## **Action**

7 HSE has a positive strength in recruitment terms in that, from the outside, HSE is clearly seen to be an attractive employer (offers a career, interesting work, socially useful objectives etc). Some people had taken pay cuts, endured long delays in recruitment and themselves taken the initiative to find out about and resolve problems delaying a final decision on entry. We must do everything possible to capitalise on this perceived strength, not squander it. However we also gained the general impression of some disappointment concerning the quality of the work (and also pay and promotion prospects) when recruits were in post. Aside from the wider question of pay, issues which the Board should address are therefore:

- how to reduce the time spent between recruitment and placing people "in post";
- ways of improving the HSE message (in terms of both brand image and substance) so as to attract high quality recruits;
- whether a competence/experience based promotion system militates against ambitious young recruits, with long term detriment to the cadre of high quality staff.