

8. Staff matter: attracting and retaining staff to manage coastal risk effectively

1. Why obtaining and retaining good quality, appropriately qualified, staff is important

The duty of care that local authorities have towards their communities requires that a coordinated approach be adopted for the planning and management of coastal activities. This requires mutual understanding between all the parties involved. Continuity of staff is advantageous to the development of links and wider networks. In particular, as coastal risk management has been an area of rapid development in scientific understanding and policy response, it is very important that authorities/organisations remain up to date.

Other reasons why it is essential for local authorities to obtain and retain good quality staff include the following:

- The resources available to major developers appear to put them at an advantage against Local Planning Authority (LPA) staff at local inquiries. LPA staff must be of such a calibre and have such understanding as will ensure that decisions are based on well-informed exchange and debate rather than resource availability;
- Building up strong in-house teams not only develops local capacity but will contribute to staff retention and reduce expenditure on external consultancies. Where inadequate resources are available, authorities/organisations could explore opportunities to share;
- Training of new staff cannot easily replace understanding and knowledge built up over years. If resources are to be directed to attracting high quality staff and further improving their skills and understanding, efforts must be made to retain those individuals on a long-term basis; and
- Surveys suggest that opportunities for personal learning and development are highly important to those seeking work and in retaining staff. It represents an objective shared by employee and employer alike. Pay disparity between different sectors can undermine mutual respect.

2. Attracting staff

General aspects

When attracting staff, it is vital to keep the four key features of jobs in mind. These are:

- Pay
- Level of job
- Location
- Employee-employer skills match

With respect to pay, it is important that pay levels are competitive between different sectors operating within a region for any level of work. Suggestions related to pay-related benefits and other means of attracting staff are summarised in Box 1 below.

Box 1

Attracting staff: some suggestions

- **Opportunities for career development**
These include training schemes, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes, career grade schemes, and opportunities to gain professional or other qualifications. The needs of employees complement employer objectives for continuing staff improvement
- **Pay-related benefits**
These include the availability of final salary pensions schemes and performance related bonuses
- **Quality of life incentives**
These include flexible working hours, opportunities for home working and the level of annual leave
- **Car/cost of transport-related benefits**
These have some significance as do housing related benefits in certain geographical areas

Note that these are listed in order of importance

Plate 1

In-service training



Job advertisements

Job advertisements are central to attracting the right staff. Box 2 provides a checklist of essential features of job advertisements. It must always be remembered that information provided in job advertisements provides key messages to potential applicants. Assuming a good fit of location, pay, post and skills, applicants want to know about:

- Opportunities for career progression and continuing professional development
- Financial incentives
- Information about the working environment and the working context

Advertisements not providing this information are at a disadvantage whereas advertisements demonstrating a 'people are valued' message are at an advantage.

Web-based advertising and the use to agencies to fill higher level posts should be considered. The former allows the provision of more information about the job and can be linked to wider information about the authority/organisation and its work. This has the benefit that it can extend the area of coverage beyond the UK and is often cheaper. A small colour advertisement in journal/newspaper pages can provide a useful supporting link. Distribution through an existing association's or network's distribution list, such as CoastNET, could also be useful.

Box 2

Job advertisements: the essentials

Job adverts should be:

Interesting - This may come from the layout but individual phraseology and information is important. Uninspiring advertisements may be thought to reflect the nature of an employer

Concise and entirely relevant

Person-orientated - i.e. they should set out both what the job offers the applicant and that the authority operates from a person-orientated perspective

Eye-catching - achieved by the use of colour, graphics or layout. Colour banners to the side, top or bottom which separate job related benefits from the job specification can be informative, look professional and provide visual interest. This may be important where there is competition with the private sector

Positive about the authority - Information about the quality of the authority does not appear important but information on authority thinking is. Logos and icons provide organisational indicators

Plate 2

An overworked employee



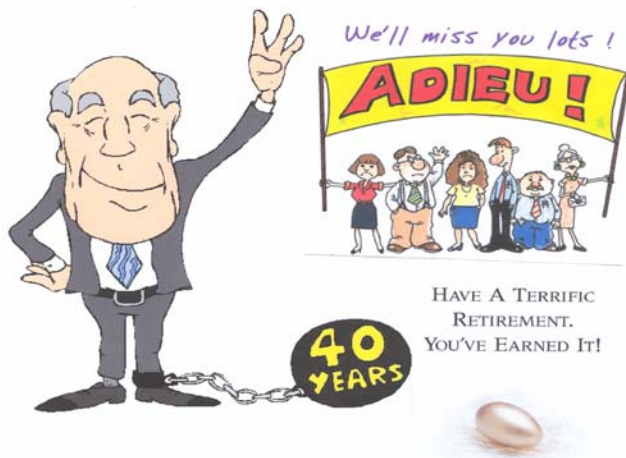
3. Retaining staff

Employers and employees share objectives related to career progression. Good career development schemes, with clear and obtainable opportunities for progression, are vital to retain good staff. Flexibility to reward high performance within/beyond career grades is advantageous.

Both employers and employees want to see improvement in staff quality. The factors affecting staff retention have been found to be the same as those that attract staff (see Box 1), and to be in the same order of importance. Opportunities for career development are as important to retain staff as to attract them. Often specific 'packages,' particularly of in-service training and CPD programmes, can be tailored to meet both employer and individual needs. In particular, management has a vital role in developing career grades, in matching employer-employee requirements and in providing training/CPD programmes/events especially for less well-qualified and less experienced staff.

Additional factors which may influence staff include: subsidised medical and/or personal accident insurance, opportunities for web site use outside core time and family-friendly working policies.

Plate 3 Moving on ...



Box 3 Filling short term gaps

- **Link up with regional colleges and universities to generate both short and longer-term benefit.** Students undertaking part time or summer vacation work experience can fill certain short term gaps and may turn into long term, locally knowledgeable staff. Graduate schemes can be beneficial to all parties
- **Consider using external sources to fill short term gaps.** Some agencies, like Local Government Services, have highly experienced planning staff on their books.

4. Training and CPD of staff

Joined up coastal risk management requires a shared awareness of the issue and a mutual awareness between the players of each others' roles, responsibilities and interests. Sharing responsibility may also mean that some people will change their mindsets. For example, engineering solutions will no longer be the automatic response to coastal risk.

Given the rapidly evolving science and policy related to coastal risk management, many aspects of earth science and risk management training may need to be delivered 'on the job.' This includes, for instance, the potential implications of climate change for coastal risk or the impact of decisions of insurance companies on the sustainability of local communities. In such circumstances, it is vital to ensure that new information from external sources is disseminated to those who should know (upwards, outwards and downwards in the authority/organisation).

Box 4 lists mechanisms which could be used for training and CPD in local authorities. Training should focus not only on technical and scientific aspects but, also, on the more general skills of negotiation, persuasion, cooperation, work prioritisation and staff management. Training programmes should be promoted and publicised. They should be accompanied by clear support for personal development through performance review.

The number of entrants with postgraduate planning qualifications may increase as a number of universities have reduced the duration of Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) recognised courses to one year. As the duration of part time courses will also be reduced, this should make it easier for employers to support their staff in acquiring planning qualifications. Additionally, the Government has recognised the severe problems facing the planning profession and is creating nearly 150 planning bursaries. The Environment Agency (EA), meanwhile, is involved in establishing two-year foundation degree courses in river and coastal engineering to be delivered through on-the-job training augmented by academic tuition - 'a light sandwich'.

Box 4

Mechanisms for training / CPD

- Internal training sessions
- Joint planning-engineer CPD
- Regular local/regional training events
- EA-led seminars and planning seminars for EA staff
- Work shadowing and job swaps
- Lunch time seminars (with light refreshments providing an incentive)

Finally, it is important to remember that elected members also need training on coastal risk issues and that both staff and members change, so training/CPD needs regular repetition.

Questions to ask yourself

- Does my organisation/authority have enough staff of appropriate quality to adequately meet the requirements of managing coastal risk? If not, why not? How should this be addressed?
- Does the engineer/planner communication on coastal risk involve a substantial number of staff or is it limited to one or two individuals?
- Are there clear and obvious incentives for those who gain knowledge or identify issues to share that knowledge/problem with a multi-disciplinary audience at a CPD seminar or workshop?

Further reading

Ballinger, R.C., Taussik, J. and Potts, J.S. (2003) *Managing Coastal Risk: making the shared responsibility work. Coastal Planning and Shoreline Management: a Review of Legislation and Guidance*. A Report to the Local Government Association (LGA)'s Special Interest Group (SIG) on Coastal Issues. London. 128 pp.

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