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| **Agenda item:** | **15** |
| **Attachment:** | **J** |

**HRA BOARD COVER SHEET**

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| **Date of Meeting:** | 20 March |

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| **Title of Paper:** | Approvals Workforce Programme – review and status update |
| **Purpose of Paper:** | To describe and reflect on the Approvals Workforce Programme. It will describe the magnitude of the changes that have been brought about, the background and rationale, and the impact on the HRA |
| **Reason for Submission:** | To provide Board with a review of the purpose of the Workforce programme, and assurance on its progress and next steps. |
| **Details:** | Leadership Team requested an update for Board at this point in the formal change management process |
| **Time required for item:** | 5 Minutes |

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Recommendation / Proposed Actions:** | **To Approve** | | **N** |
| **To Note** | | **Y** |
| **For Discussion** | | **N** |
| **Comments** |  | |

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| **Name:** | Jonathan Fennelly-Barnwell |
| **Job Title:** | Deputy Director, Approvals Service |
| **Date:** | 14 March 2019 |

Approvals Workforce Programme – Review and Status update

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Background

An integrated Approvals Service is a keystone of HRA Approval. Service Improvement work to further develop and test and integrate assessment and research ethics components and their integration has been in progress since 2015 under the HRA Approval Programme team, the Assessment team and the Research Ethics Service. The Approvals Workforce Development programme has created a major structural change to deliver a fully integrated Approvals process ensuring that organisational form follows function. This transformative change to the structural delivery of HRA Approval follows the earlier Service Improvement Programme work and strategic restructuring at Board level, with the appointment of the Director of Approvals Service in 2017. From autumn of that year, a senior Workforce Change lead was identified, and principles and approaches to workforce redesign were investigated, assessed and discussed with the Workforce Board established at that time, to oversee all strategic changes to workforce in HRA.

As set out fully in the high level programme plan, approved by Workforce Board in March 2018, a number of key principles, including those directly relating to HRA Values, have underpinned this workforce development activity. The principles apply across the workforce change process itself, and its outcomes:

* *Collaborative:*  The underpinning work in the Approval SIP has involved a wide range of staff, capitalising on individual viewpoints, experiences and expertise.
* *Empowering:* New, rigorously tested and evaluated processes use expert staff and empower them to make judgments within tested bandwidths. This pushes current boundaries in respect of autonomous and authoritative decision making.
* *Transparency:*  Staff are informed through formal communications and regular visits to each regional office by senior management to talk about plans and processes, and to hear staff views.
* *Inspiring Leadership*: Communications and engagement have empowered line managers to talk with staff about direction of travel, decisions, and the impact on teams and individuals.
* *People are our greatest resource*: We want to retain the talent, skills and expertise of our staff and support them into new opportunities, or take advantage of normal turnover.
* *Proportionality*: This work has been contingent on hard outcomes relating to process, resource and finance, and supporting staff affected by change. All of these have are intrinsic to HRA work, and we have mechanisms and governance structures to oversee them. It would be disproportionate and resource-intensive to establish new boards where change management programmes can be scrutinised in existing structures. Accordingly the Approvals Workforce work is an overarching programme, which coordinates and oversees activities through existing project boards and risk management structures.
* *Planned, stepwise progression:*  This has been key to managing the complexities of change directly affecting nearly 130 staff. Stepwise progression is also central to planning the transition of work activities towards the integrated process simultaneously to the change in formal contractual arrangements.

Organisational Change - proposals, process and outcomes

The process and steps for formal change management are set out in HRA Organisational Change Policy which has provided consistency and clarity for both staff and management. Above and beyond the requirements of formal policy, we acknowledged the scale, complexity and likely impacts of the organisational change. Informal, but planned staff communications commenced in April 2018, six months before the formal consultation was launched. This gave senior management time to explore with staff the context of the changes, and staff the time to familiarise themselves with the rationale. It maximised the understanding across teams of the significant benefits of the integrated process, and a significant proportion of staff drew these conclusions for themselves. Moreover, many staff became advocates for changes and the change process itself, and notwithstanding uncertainties about skills mix and the impact on some individuals, staff became keen for the process to move on. We worked with the Comms team to publish issue regular Q&A documents to staff. Management also engaged with Staff Partnership Forum and union representatives through the Joint Negotiating Committee and gratefully received feedback from these.

**a) Proposals**

Two key principals underpin the changes set out proposed structure which allow us to best deliver the integrated process:

i) The creation of an Approvals Support Division distinct from the Approvals Operations Division (Fig 1 ). This centralises important functions relating to REC member recruitment; meeting logistics and planning; and REC member support and development. This will achieve significant operational efficiency as it groups task previously dispersed across a large number of staff, each with competing priorities. It also gives visibility to members and the community of these important functions. Crucially, the Support Division takes on responsibility for Quality Assurance within the Directorate, working with operational colleagues and RECs on quality control, audit and continuous improvement. Lastly, the Support Division will provide regional office presence and estates and facilities support in liaison with the Finance and Estates team, allowing Approvals Operations staff in each office to focus their full resource and expertise on the handling of applications.

*Fig 1 – Approvals Support Division Structure*

ii) Prompt access to expert staff review of applications is a cornerstone of HRA Approval. Therefore, within the Operations Division (fig 2) , new staffing increases capacity at Band 6 and 7 levels to ensure that applications receive expert governance scrutiny and any necessary liaison with applicants in a short timeframe. This reduces time spent awaiting clarifications, and allows more time and resource for study set-up, and less time spent on regulatory process. To achieve the greatest effect of increased capacity at senior levels, the proposal also increases capacity at Band 4 level to expedite the specialised administrative and other processes relating to application validation and amendments. It also provides for the important Workflow function which monitors application progress to assist with work allocation that carries applications through the process in timely manner. Significant expertise in minute taking and dealing with RECs existed with the Band 5 workforce. New structures allow these posts, whilst fewer in numbers, to focus on those tasks which are more commensurate with that banding. It achieves this by removing lower level administrative tasks, and those tasks which have been moved to the support division. Accordingly, the new structure can be described as an hourglass more than a pyramid.

*Fig 2 – Approvals Operations Division structure*

**b) Process**

After 6 months of informal consultation, proposals were presented to staff under a 45 day consultation. During this time, all staff were offered a 1-1 meeting with their manager and an HR representative to feedback on the proposals, and discuss impact on them.

The consultation document set out:

* Proposed structures and staffing and associated job descriptions
* Timeline for consultation, notification of outcomes and anticipated implementation
* Process for job allocation
* Management responsibilities and commitments
* Scope for limited Voluntary Redundancy
* Support available to staff.

On 19 November the consultation outcomes were shared in in writing and by video conference with staff, and the process for job allocation commenced.

All affected staff were invited to a job allocation interview and assessment. Though staff were asked to express interest in up to 3 posts, as our responsibility was to offer suitable alternative employment, we would not restrict staff to those choices. In light of this, and so staff would not have to undergo multiple interviews, these and the assessment were carefully designed to be universally applicable across affected staff. In turn, these outcomes provided the allocation panel with the information to match staff with suitable alternative employment.

Heads of Approvals Support and Operations were on all interview panels between November and January, to provide consistency. An HR manager or Workforce Programme Lead was panel chair. Assessments were anonymised before scoring by Band 8a managers from each new division. Following two days of allocation panel, considering interview records and assessment outcomes, the finalised staff allocation was shared with staff on 21 January.

During the change period (ie before and since the formal consultation period) 9 affected staff have resigned to take up posts elsewhere, 3 being in other HRA teams. We accept that the period of change can be unsettling, and that some staff will opt to pursue promotion or some certainty in other ways. In fact the feedback we have received is that staffs have secured opportunities that suit career plans and should be viewed positively.

**c) Outcomes**

Table 1 sets out the allocation of posts to staff, in line with the proposals agreed by Workforce Board. This allocation is set out in the full context of both Divisions, including:

* The Heads of Division who were slotted in line with policy in April 2018, when outline proposals made obsolete the Head of Assessment and Head of RES roles.
* Posts in the new structure that were out of scope of the consultation, having been previously filled either in internal competition for 8a post to assist with the management of change and planning the transition to new teams and processes.
* The remaining majority of staff in scope of the consultation, allocated posts in early 2019.

Table 2 provides a comparison of previous staff numbers and number available for allocation under the consultation and change management processes.

As expected, a small number were allocated posts at a Band lower than present, and receive Pay Protection for fixed terms. In 2 cases this was at the request of staff. Significantly more staff were allocated posts representing a promotion (Table 3). One member of staff has appealed the allocation at a Band lower than their current role. The appeal hearing will be heard by Teresa Allen, Chief Executive I late March.

Throughout the consultation period, the Workforce Programme Lead liaised with staff, HR, and finance department to discuss potential Voluntary Redundancy (VR) agreements in line with provisional interest from staff, and in strict accordance with the terms for agreement of VR as set out in Organisational Change Policy.

20 confirmed applications for VR were received. 6 were accepted and progressed (Pay and Remuneration Committee having delegated authority to Senior Leadership Team for this) at the Bands below

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Band 7 | 1 |
| Band 6 | 2 |
| Band 4 | 1 |
| Band 3 | 2 |

*Table 1: New structure at 1.4.19 by post and band*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **New Post** | **Band** | **Number of posts** |
| **Approvals Operations:** |  |  |
| Head of Approvals Operations | 8c | 1 |
| Approvals Operations Manager | 8a | 2 |
| Approvals Managers | 7 | 12 |
| Approvals Specialist | 6 | 30 |
| Approvals Officer | 5 | 22 |
| Approvals Administrator | 4 | 25 |
| Workflow and Monitoring Manager | 7 | 1 |
| Data and Workflow Support Officer | 5 | 1 |
| Workflow Administrators | 4 | 10 |
|  |  |  |
| **Approvals Support** |  |  |
| Head of Approvals Support | 8c | 1 |
| Quality and Performance Manager | 8a | 1 |
| Membership Development Manager | 7 | 1 |
| Member Support Manager | 7 | 1 |
| Assurance and Reporting Specialist | 6 | 1 |
| Quality and Performance Officer | 5 | 1 |
| Member Support Officer | 5 | 1 |
| Member Support Administrator | 4 | 5 |
|  |  |  |
| **Total posts in structure** |  | **116** |

*Table 2: Comparison of current staff headcount and WTE to proposed staff headcount and WTE*:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Previous wte | Previous headcount | New wte | New Headcount at 1.4.19 Proposed overall headcount |
| 124.88 | 130 | 116.21 | 116 |

Table 3: Movement of staff between Bands directly resulting from Workforce Programme

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Moved up a Band | | Moved down a Band | |
| Previous Band | Number | Previous Band | Number |
|  |  |  |  |
| 7 | 2 |  |  |
| 6 | 4 | 6 | 3 |
| 5 | 10 | 5 | 5 |
| 4 | 4 |  |  |
| 3 | 1 |  |  |
|  | **21** |  | **8** |

All affected staff have been issued with the correct HR notices and most new contracts will take effect on 1 April 2019 after the statutory notice periods have ended. A small number of staff will commence on new contracts after 1 April due to the longer notice periods based on their current Band.

Additional outcomes include a more closely aligned service with Health and Care Research Wales, who have undertaken a similar workforce programme in parallel to ours, with ongoing discussion to align processes and systems. This alignment includes staff in Wales who will report directly in to Approvals whilst maintaining autonomy in respect of their RECs, leading to a more seamless service for researchers and more efficient use of regulatory resource.

Also in relation to regulatory resource, in setting budgets for 2019/20 it is apparent that the Approvals Workforce Programme has delivered the pay savings target set by SLT of around 300k.

**Transition**

In parallel to the Organisational Change component of the Workforce Programme, significant work has continued on the detail of the integrated process itself, and of new functions in the Support Division. Whilst contractual changes take effect for staff on 1 April in nearly all cases, staff have been prepared that a significant degree of transitional working will be required as the new process cannot be ‘switched on’ on a day when the current process is ‘switched off’. Aside from the matter of applications in progress, many of the activities remain the same – they have been reorganised for more streamlined delivery by most appropriate staff at the most appropriate time. As such, Divisional managers are carefully planning the order in which activities will be handed over. Critically, not only has job allocation has been made, but also the allocation of staff to specified RECs. Intelligence on strengths and experience within the team supporting each REC will help decide on the order and rate of handover to implement the integrated process fully, whilst minimising impact on business as usual. Also, discussions with current managers have helped decisions about the lines of management in small teams, ensuring that staff are fully supported during transition, through teams having a mix of technical and management experience.

REC engagement is central to a smooth transition. We have kept RECs informed of proposals, and now considerable care is being given to acquainting REC members with new staff and processes

A feature of all the new posts is that they differ significantly from previous posts in that they all combine, to differing degrees, assessment of studies *and* working with RECs. The latter is particularly relevant in the Band 6 and 7 operational posts who enhance expert support to RECs. A programme of training events commenced with a two day event for the new Divisions. This provided an opportunity for new teams to meet in person and discuss the training topics which included an overview of new workflows, with an emphasis on working with RECs, and on how the Operations and Support Divisions will work together.

A further all-team day is planned for May to consolidate learning and experience to that date. Senior Managers from each Division will run workshops in Regional Offices throughout March to expand on details of Work Instructions and information flow. Divisional senior managers will also be instrumental in the roll-out and coaching to line managers in the use and benefits of a training matrix. This tool supports staff in identifying and addressing learning needs for their role, as well as clearly identifying learning opportunities to support career progression. The support available to line managers also includes learning opportunities in management. These are not limited to business matters and delivery to Work Instructions, but also in developing and implementing a coaching facilitative management approach, conducive to working across staff groups, teams and locations.

**Feedback and reflections**

From the earliest points of engagement on the Workforce Programme, staff have accepted the need for change and the benefits to a more integrated service for the research community. It is seen as a logical extension to the Approval SIP work which has involved many staff.

Periods of organisational change are unsettling for the majority even where the need for change is accepted. Staff have had many questions about the new structure and the process for filling it, as well as understandable anxieties about their future roles. Undoubtedly, there have been robust challenges from staff to proposals, understandably detailed lines of questioning, and anxieties expressed about the change from the earliest stages of consultation. That said, the absence of formal written complaints; no grievances having been raised; and appeals against decisions being limited to one is reassuring and is indicative of staff’s willingness to engage with the change management, as well as being a measure of how the work has been managed. However, this level of formal appeal and complaint should not be used to suggest that it has not been a challenging year for affected staff who have demonstrated professionalism, sensitivity and a commitment to business as usual despite their own anxieties.

Many of the questions raised related to detail of process, in some instances before this was even finalised. This is as we would expect of people whom we employ for their ability to pay attention to detail, whilst looking one step ahead at what that detail implies.

As stated at the beginning of this document, an integrated Approvals Service is a keystone of HRA Approval. However it is just one part of the continuous improvement we aim to achieve meaning that time and resource can be spent on study delivery and generating research evidence rather than on regulatory approvals. Work continues in engaging with applicants to maximise the quality of applications received, so there are fewer queries back to them before HRA Approval can be given. We have made inroads into engagement with Sponsors to help them undertake their responsibilities with appropriate levels of scrutiny, allowing the highest quality applications, including engagement with patients and the public to reach HRA. These issues can therefore be addressed early on, and not at the late stage of REC review leading to a waste of research resource. We continue to provide high quality advice and guidance to researchers, and a wide range of learning to support their development, and in pursuit of high quality research projects. And it should be noted that an integrated service is reliant on high quality research systems platforms to operate on, and this is just one of the key areas that interlink with the approvals service in workstreams that are at different stages of planning, development, and business as usual.

We are not yet at the point of generating a typical ‘Lessons Learnt’ document from the Workforce Change programme as we are not yet at the end of it. Moreover, the workforce aspect now overlaps with the management and implementation stage meaning that the target date of 1 April is on the whole, the start of something, more than it is a completion.