

Working lives

Elizabeth Flegg, Human Resources manager at Sussex DAAT

How did you become an HR manager?

I had worked in retail, engineering and social care when I decided my future ambitions lay in human resources. So I bit the bullet and returned to full time education. I took a Post Graduate Diploma in Personnel and Development in July 1996, followed by an MSc in Human Resources Management in 2001. The courses widened my knowledge and understanding of strategic HR.

I gained work experience in personnel in both the public and private sectors, but the main part of my HR employment was with West Sussex County Council advising managers in their Social and Caring Services Department.

It was during this job that I first came into contact with West Sussex DAAT (at that time a DAT), which is hosted by the local authority. A new DAT Co-ordinator had been appointed and was keen to recruit a small team to assist with young people and adult joint commissioning and the far-reaching communities agenda.

We found ourselves ploughing through endless bureaucracy and paperwork during our meetings and realised the need for a more proactive approach to workforce planning and development. Everything to do with job evaluation and recruitment took too long.

The following year funding was sought and the DAAT HR Manager role was born; I applied and was appointed. This was initially a part time post (2.5 days per week), but Brighton and Hove and then East Sussex DAATs quickly got on board extending funding to make the role full time.

What does your job involve?

My job was busy from day one. The Sussex DAATs had been proactive leading up to my appointment, and had set up our 'Workforce Planning Task



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and Reference Group', which was keenly awaiting my arrival. The group involves key people and agencies from across the sector within Sussex and provides a good example of partnership working. We hold quarterly meetings, including our annual Workforce Planning Stakeholder event. Around 70 people attend this free event to receive updates and news on developments.

I often receive phone calls or letters from people wishing to work in the sector seeking information about how to 'get in'. When I started in my role in 2003, I was unsure what to advise, and after some investigation found it incredible that there was actually little guidance to give these people, beyond 'you could become a volunteer and grow from there'.

There was no career pathway, information on working in the sector was thin and often out of date, and there were few educational routes to follow. My background in social care

had demonstrated how difficult it was to recruit and retain good workers even with good information and campaigns in place. It was concerning that the sector lacked such strategies and had few plans to take this challenging agenda forward.

But there was an 'up' side: having little in place in Sussex provided me with a blank canvas to develop and build workforce planning and development requirements for the local sector.

What have been your biggest challenges?

DANOS was born in 2003 so there was an immediate challenge in bringing this to fruition and making implementation easier for our local organisations. We held workshops to help our local sector to understand and implement DANOS and quickly signed up to the Home Office Workforce Planning project along

with Bradford and Middlesbrough DAATs. This study was undertaken by Cranfield School of Management and provided us with extremely helpful information regarding the size and image of our sector and its recruitment and development requirements. This then started to inform a Workforce Planning and Development Strategy which was born in April this year complementing the individual Sussex DAAT strategies.

The Workforce Planning and Development Group is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the strategy, so my personal challenge is to make sure systems are put in place and co-ordinate activity to help our sector to recruit, train and retain the workforce more successfully.

One large project I am currently overseeing is the implementation of the City and Guilds Progression Award in Community Justice – Drug and Alcohol Services, at two of our local colleges. This course forms part of the training completed by NTA apprentices and has been successfully running as a standalone course in the West Midlands, and they have helped me to make it a success in Sussex. At last we have a part LSC funded educational programme for people looking to work and volunteer in the sector and information to provide to those wishing to work in the field.

Another major demand of my job is to take part in service contract reviews and contract tenders to assess whether their HR and training systems are in line with our expectations. I am responsible for collecting the quarterly workforce data required by the NTA, much to the relief of our commissioning managers. I analyse and compare this data across Sussex, which provides the DAATs with interesting and useful feedback on how our services are managed.

The Workforce Strategy can be viewed at www.eastsussexdaat.org.uk and www.westsussexdaat.co.uk