The HERA experience at LSE

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The timetable

• HERA role assessment system adopted in 2000
• Senior admin managers and trade unions were fully consulted by HR and deputy School director
• For a year every new post and promotion case was HERA assessed
• From 2001 HERA was rolled out across LSE non-teaching departments
• IT Services was in the first wave (2001); Library waited till second phase (2002)
• Each exercise took many months (6-12)
Why choose a role assessment system?

• A defensible job evaluation system was needed for equal pay purposes
• The old in-house “grade definitions” guidelines were vague and inconsistently applied
• The promotions committee struggled to be fair across different departments
• It wished to separate role from performance, which line managers often confused in their cases
• The HR director was concerned about “anecdotalism” in the committee
The HERA system

- Devised by a former HR director from a university
- Created with HE specifically in mind
- LSE used the scheme’s creator and trained a senior HR staff member
- The School was prepared to abide by the results, however inflationary they might be
The HERA form

• The key tool in HERA is a self-assessment form called the *Written Record* (19 pages long)
• There are 14 sections devoted to *Elements* to be assessed, with 49 questions in all
• There is a 9-page *Guide to role holders*
• The assessor scores every element and reaches a final score
• Each range of scores relates to a salary grade
14 elements in the scheme

- Communication
- Teamwork & motivation
- Liaison & networking
- Service delivery
- Decision making
- Planning & organisation
- Initiative & problem solving
- Analysis & research*
- Sensory & physical*
- Work environment*
- Pastoral care & welfare*
- Team development
- Teaching & learning support*
- Knowledge & experience
Questions in each element: eg Liaison & networking

- Are you required to:
- carry out standard day to day liaison using existing procedures?
- participate in networks within the institution or externally?
- Initiate, build or lead internal networks; maintain relationships over time; establish communication channels for self and others to use?
Liaison & networking continued

• Initiate, develop or lead networks which are external to the institution?
• The postholder needs to give Evidence under each Element for every level of question they think applies to their role
• The postholder signs at the end that the form is accurate
The process at LSE for IT Services and Library

- The assessor met the senior managers to discuss remit and timescale of the exercise
- They agreed how many *distinct roles* needed to be analysed
- In ITS this was c20; in the Library it was 61
- A variety of techniques was used for collecting the data
- Assessor briefed all staff at meeting with Q & A
The LSE process

• Assessor interviewed individual postholders, using the form as a guide
• Assessor interviewed groups of postholders
• Individuals completed the form
• Groups completed the form
• Desktop analysis using similar post as benchmark
• Interview with line manager where individual was unavailable
The LSE process

• Separate briefings held for those being interviewed, those just doing the written record, and those working in groups, with handouts.

• Line managers played a key role, encouraging staff to meet deadlines for form filling and helping them to prepare for interviews.
The LSE process

- ITS had 8 groups of staff with identical job descriptions
- User support specialists
- User support officers
- Helpdesk assistants
- Training officers
- Halls assistants
The LSE process

• System specialists
• Network specialists
• PC support officers
The LSE process

- All other posts were deemed to be one-offs
- All forms were checked by line managers who also verified and signed each page of the forms
- They ensured the forms were accurate and helped to correct any errors or add evidence where staff had undersold their roles
- The agreed forms were sent to the assessor with supporting statements from the managers
The LSE process

• The assessor carried out interviews and scored the forms
• Senior managers discussed all detailed scores with the assessor, addressed any oddities, and agreed final scores; only a handful of scores were changed as a result (mainly upwards)
• Staff were told their scores
• Any scores above existing grade went to promotions committee for validation
The LSE process

- Upgrade cases by managers accompanied the above-grade scores
- The committee approved all ITS and Library cases
- Salary increases were backdated to the date of confirmation of the score
The results for ITS and Library

- c50 % of posts in both services were upgraded
- Some other posts in ITS were moved from old technical grades to new clerical grades, with a slight increase in salary and an extended top of grade
- No posts were graded below the existing grade
Advantages

• HERA grades the post not the person and is completely distinct from the reward system
• But if an individual through excellent performance has also actually expanded the role then the grade can benefit
• The multi-faceted approach (self-assessment, line manager input, interviews with assessor) does make for objectivity
Advantages

• The process, like appraisal, makes staff think about their roles as they have to give evidence through real examples
• All posts in a service get assessed at the same time which helps to foster fairness and consistency
• The focus is on required skills and behaviour rather than on tasks to be performed (input rather than output)
Pitfalls

- Staff found the process daunting
- They complained about the length of the form and the time taken to fill it in
- Many found it difficult to be analytical
- Many undersold themselves and the line manager input was crucial here
- A few oversold themselves and line managers had to point out the errors
Concerns

• We worried that HERA was likely to underestimate the importance of technical roles, especially the backroom boys and girls, because of the rather conceptual and “touchy feely” appearance of some of the questions

• Number of staff and size of budget managed is not overtly appreciated in the scoring
However…

• The technical issue turned out to be surmountable, as it was relatively easy to demonstrate the impact of such roles on others.

• Various *Elements* between them covered the complexity/difficulty of managing budgets and staff, scoring posts where there was considerable judgement needed.
Ongoing role assessment at LSE

• All job descriptions and person specifications are now based on HERA
• In particular, the p.specs cover all relevant *Elements* from the HERA 14
• Every new post needs to be HERA assessed by HR against the j.d. and p.s and scored and graded before advert
• All cases for upgrading need old and new j.d. and p.s. for comparison and are HERA assessed by HR
The verdict?

- The exercise was a pretty positive one for us
- Staff engaged in it with lots of encouragement from management and seemed to accept the results as fair
- Managers, especially the very senior, had to put in a lot of effort, but it was worth it
The verdict

• The vast majority of HERA scores from the assessor felt just about right and where they didn’t she accepted our input
• The School accepted the cost of upgrading c50% of our staff
• Once you get used to it, the system feels consistent and it gets easier to write job descriptions and person specs so that the recruitment process as a whole is simplified