

Open University

The Open University (OU) has approximately 4,500 personnel and 7,000 associate lecturers based in 13 regions across the UK. The University recently made a decision to change from a centralised system of human resource data collection and retention, including the collection of equality and diversity monitoring data pertaining to applicant and appointee, organised by Personnel, to a decentralised system using the new Personnel computer system – Personnel Information Management System (PIMS) - introduced in summer 2003. Until that time Personnel was responsible for a number of administrative functions in the recruitment process. PIMS has been rolled out to all units for the purpose of them undertaking their own recruitment, interviews, and administrative processes using standardised Personnel templates. Units send applicants a pack of information following on from their enquiry, which includes a job description, application form and further particulars (staff benefits at the OU), and the equality monitoring form. The units input the equality data into the PIMS system when the form is returned. Even at this enquiry stage, applicants are logged on to PIMS and are given a unique staff number. This will remain on the system even if they are not successful; if they are appointed it will stay with them throughout their employment. At the conclusion of the recruitment Personnel issues the contract. The primary function of Personnel in the devolved recruitment process is to check the system is working effectively, that data on each applicant has been recorded on the system correctly and that the information sent to the candidate is accurate. Personnel provides a helpdesk for any queries on how to use PIMS, along with technical IT support.

Personnel has responsibility for monitoring equality and diversity amongst existing staff. Data on existing staff is considered accurate by the OU because all applicants receive an equality and diversity monitoring form when they apply for a job, and this information is carried forward when they are offered a position. There is some blank data where appointees have decided not to complete the monitoring form. In order to obtain more complete information Personnel has undertaken a paper validation exercise to update the computerised data held. Currently a module is being developed which will be linked to PIMS called the Staff Self Service Module. This is an intranet-based system that allows staff to personally be able to access certain details, held on their PIMS record and make changes to a limited number of the fields. This will include data on equality and diversity.

Gathering data of nominations for promotions is an area which is under development. It is straightforward to monitor in terms of promotions or regrading of support staff because this is all processed through Personnel. Nominations for promotion of Academic and Research staff and regradings of Academic-Related staff are handled outside the Personnel Division. It is in discussion to allow the relevant department access to the Personnel database to input data on all candidates who have applied for promotion. The system has a stringent set of permissions so their view will be limited to the level required to gain access to the fields that need updating. Permissions are controlled through job roles which the Head of Unit determines as appropriate to allow access to certain parts of the database.

The Learning and Management System (LMS), which is a training data base, is currently under development and due to be devolved in the next few months. Essentially it is linked into PIMS and has integrated all data from the five different OU departments that run training courses. The LMS system will store data on staff who attend courses and staff who have applied for courses, and are on a waiting list.

It is envisaged that the new Personnel computerised data system and evolved methodology of data collection will assist the University in terms of administrative efficiencies and improved equality and diversity data collection.