

# Recruitment and retention of staff in UK higher education

A survey and case studies

2001

Commissioned by the HEFCE, SCOP, UCEA and UUK

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## Preface

This publication presents the findings of two projects investigating recruitment and retention difficulties in UK higher education institutions. The aim of both projects was to assess the extent and nature of any difficulties, as well as the factors that are contributing to them.

The first report analyses the data from the fourth annual survey of institutions conducted during September and October 2001 by IRS Research, an independent research organisation. The second report is based on qualitative case study research conducted in 14 higher education institutions during the same period.

Both point to serious problems in recruiting and retaining both academic and support staff in higher education. The annual survey highlights trends and provides evidence of a worsening situation year on year since 1998. While recruitment difficulties are continuing to worsen for most institutions in certain subject and support staff areas, a minority of institutions are now experiencing recruitment and retention problems across all staff areas.

Among academic staff, the survey points to particular difficulties in recruiting staff in the areas of computing/IT, and business subjects, as well as engineering, biological sciences, the professions allied to medicine, and education. Among support staff the most acute difficulties were found in recruiting and retaining non-managerial, manual, technical and clerical staff. Retention difficulties are generally more acute for support staff than for academic staff, and are particularly severe in the case of manual staff.

Both the survey and the case study research point to pay as a major factor in the current difficulties. Higher pay offered by the private sector is affecting institutions' ability to recruit and retain support staff and some groups of academic staff in certain key areas, including engineering, IT and business-related subjects. The low starting level of academic salaries is widely viewed as discouraging the recruitment of new entrants to the profession. In some areas, such as education and the professions allied to medicine, recruitment and retention are adversely affected by the higher pay levels now offered by the NHS and state schools.

The case study research highlights the impact of these recruitment and retention difficulties on the ability of institutions to deliver their organisational objectives. Human resource managers and heads of academic departments and support functions expressed their deep concerns about the difficulties in recruiting new entrants as well as more senior staff, and they acknowledged that compromises were being made on staff quality to fill vacancies. They also cited other problems such as difficulties in delivering courses, developing research activities and maintaining adequate support services provision.

The findings are supported by several other studies which indicate the importance of addressing the current situation. For instance, the recently published report of Sir Gareth Roberts' review of the supply of scientists and engineers made clear that: 'ensuring that universities are able to recruit and retain quality staff is vital to the UK's future supply of highly-skilled scientists and engineers'. It also expressed concern at the 'low levels of pay and consequent recruitment and retention problems for permanent academic staff'.

The difficulties already apparent in attracting new academic entrants are likely to be intensified by problems resulting from the current age profile of the workforce, and the Government's plans to

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expand higher education. Projections of higher education staffing point to a shrinking proportion of the academic workforce aged under 30, and a growing proportion over 50, particularly in certain subject areas. The anticipated problems of replacing those who retire in the next 10 years will exacerbate present recruitment difficulties. The Government's objective of increasing the proportion of young people entering higher education, and the concomitant need for universities and colleges to employ more academic and support staff, may create significant further problems.

The key role that the higher education sector plays in the UK economy as a whole is clear. The challenge is to ensure that the recruitment and retention problems identified in these two reports are tackled as a matter of urgency.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Philip Love', written in a cursive style.

Philip Love  
Vice-Chancellor, University of Liverpool  
Chairman, UCEA

# Survey

## Recruitment and retention of staff in UK higher education 2001

irsresearch

Michael Thewlis



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## Executive summary

This report covers the fourth annual survey of staff recruitment and retention in UK higher education institutions. The survey was conducted during September and October 2001 by IRS Research, and the report is based on responses from over 75 per cent of the 163 higher education institutions contacted.

The data produced from the 2001 survey have been analysed to assess the prevalence and nature of staff recruitment and retention problems facing higher education. The extent to which these difficulties have changed since 1998 is also discussed.

### Regularity of recruitment and retention difficulties (Chapter 2)

- Recruitment and retention difficulties for both academic and support staff in UK higher education institutions have continued to worsen year on year since 1998.
- This year's survey findings indicate that recruitment difficulties are continuing to worsen for most institutions in certain subject and support staff areas, and a minority of institutions are experiencing recruitment and retention problems across all staff categories.
- Around one in five institutions reported experiencing difficulties filling academic, administrative and professional, technical or clerical positions 'always', 'usually' or 'more often than not' in 2001. In many cases, institutions reported such problems across more than one of these staff groups. In addition, almost one-half of all institutions experienced difficulty 'always', 'usually' or 'more often than not' when recruiting manual staff in 2001.
- The regularity of retention difficulties reported by institutions was generally more acute for support staff than for academic staff. In particular, institutions reported the most frequent and severe retention difficulties were with manual staff.
- Pre-1992 universities experienced slightly greater recruitment and retention problems than post-1992 universities, with both facing significantly greater difficulties than higher education colleges.

#### Academic staff

- One in five institutions reported that they experienced difficulties 'most of the time' when recruiting academic staff in 2001, a three-fold increase since the survey began in 1998.
- Almost 8 per cent of institutions reported experiencing academic staff retention problems 'most of the time' in 2001, against 2.2 per cent reporting this in 1998.

#### Support staff

- Almost one in four institutions reported difficulties filling administrative and professional posts 'most of the time' in 2001. When the survey began in 1998, around one in 11 institutions reported experiencing recruitment difficulties 'most of the time'. Around one in six institutions experienced difficulties retaining such staff 'most of the time' in 2001, twice as many as in 1998.
- Around 20 per cent of institutions experienced difficulty recruiting technicians 'most of the time' in 2001, compared with just over 16 per cent in 1998. One in ten institutions experienced difficulties retaining technicians 'most of the time'.
- In 1998, just over 7 per cent of institutions reported that recruiting clerical staff was a problem 'most of the time'. By 2001, this had become 18 per cent. Similarly, almost one-quarter of

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respondents experienced difficulties retaining clerical staff 'most of the time' in 2001, an increase of more than two-fold since the survey began.

- In 2001, 44 per cent of institutions reported experiencing recruitment difficulties with manual staff 'most of the time', compared with 23 per cent in 1998. In 1998 only 15 per cent of institutions reported difficulties in retaining manual staff. By 2001 that figure had more than doubled to nearly 40 per cent of institutions.

### **Specific recruitment and retention difficulties (Chapter 3)**

#### **Academic staff**

- Subject areas causing the most problems were computing/IT and business subjects (such as accountancy/finance, management, law and economics), as well as engineering, biological sciences, professions allied to medicine (PAMs) and education.
- Where institutions reported difficulties in recruiting academic staff, these difficulties were typically reported in around five subject areas. In comparison, where institutions reported retention difficulties, these were reported in around four subject areas.
- Almost 60 per cent of all institutions reported difficulties in recruiting lecturers, more than one-third of institutions reported that recruiting professors was a problem and over one-quarter of all institutions reported difficulties recruiting research assistants.

#### **Administrative and professional staff**

- For professional staff posts, such as those in finance and personnel, institutions were generally experiencing greater problems recruiting non-managerial staff than managerial staff; though pre-1992 universities were experiencing greater difficulties recruiting managerial staff.
- Retaining non-managerial professional staff was a greater problem for institutions than was retaining managerial staff. While almost 20 per cent of institutions reported difficulties in retaining managerial level professional staff, over 25 per cent had difficulties with non-managerial staff. Again, universities were experiencing more problems than colleges, with post-1992 universities experiencing the greatest problems.

#### **Technical staff**

- Over one-quarter of institutions reported problems recruiting managers for specific technical posts, while almost two-thirds of all institutions reported difficulty recruiting to particular non-managerial positions.
- Recruiting computing and IT staff continued to be the most problematic area for institutions. Around 40 per cent of institutions found technical IT managers were difficult to recruit, and almost 60 per cent had difficulty filling lower grade staff positions. One in five institutions reported difficulties in recruiting laboratory staff, predominantly for technical, rather than managerial, positions.
- For technical staff, institutions reported greater difficulty retaining non-managerial staff than retaining managerial staff. Where this was the case, the difficulties related almost entirely to computing and IT staff. Over one-third of institutions reported problems retaining technical staff, compared with just under one-fifth reporting problems retaining managerial staff.

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## **Clerical staff**

- Over one-quarter of institutions reported problems recruiting staff to specific clerical positions. Universities experienced greater problems than colleges, with pre-1992 universities experiencing the greatest difficulties. Over one-fifth of institutions reported difficulties retaining staff in specific clerical posts, with colleges experiencing greater difficulties than universities.

## **Manual staff**

- For manual staff, again it was non-managerial staff who were causing institutions the greatest recruitment and retention problems. While almost 10 per cent of institutions were experiencing recruitment problems with managers of manual support functions, more than one-half of institutions reported difficulties recruiting non-managerial levels of manual staff.
- The manual staff causing institutions the most recruitment difficulties were those in catering and cleaning, with one in three institutions experiencing difficulties in each of these areas. However, almost 20 per cent of institutions reported difficulties in recruiting maintenance staff – typically craft trades – and a further 15 per cent experienced problems attracting security staff.
- Over one-third of institutions had difficulties retaining catering staff, and one in four experienced difficulties in retaining cleaning staff. Institutions also had problems retaining their maintenance and security staff – with one in ten institutions experiencing difficulties in each of these areas.

## **Vacancies and staff turnover (Chapter 4)**

- Sixty-one institutions provided detailed numerical information regarding staffing levels and job vacancies. These institutions employed over 130,000 staff and during the last 12 months had advertised over 20,000 staff vacancies. Of these 1,250 vacancies (6 per cent), remained unfilled after three months.
- Average turnover rates for ‘permanent’ staff in these institutions was just over 12 per cent per year. Across the staffing groups, academic and administrative/professional staff turnover rates were the lowest at around 8 per cent, manual turnover rates were highest at 18 per cent, while technical and clerical staff turnover rates were 9 and 15 per cent respectively.

## **Reasons for the difficulties (Chapter 5)**

- Pay levels were cited by many as the main reason for staff recruitment and retention problems. Higher pay offered by the private sector was viewed as a key factor impacting upon institutions’ ability to attract and retain support staff and some groups of academic staff – notably those in law, IT and engineering.
- For education and the professions allied to medicine, pay levels in other parts of the public sector (such as the NHS and state schools) were often higher than those offered within higher education. Institutions in London and other major UK cities reported that high housing and travel costs were exacerbating the problem of low salaries.
- Institutions also mentioned that recruitment exercises often attracted a limited pool of candidates and/or poor quality candidates. Institutions also reported that it was difficult to recruit good young academic staff as a result of low starting salaries.

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- Poor promotion opportunities for academics were also mentioned as a reason for staff leaving institutions. Staff often left to join institutions that were larger, or had higher reputations or better research opportunities.

### **The future (Chapter 6)**

- Looking to the future, around 95 per cent of institutions expect recruitment and retention difficulties either to remain the same or worsen across all staff groups in the next 12 months.

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## 1: Introduction

IRS Research, an independent research organisation, was commissioned by the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) to carry out the fourth annual survey of staff recruitment and retention across UK higher education in the autumn of 2001.

The first survey to assess the extent and nature of staff recruitment and retention problems facing higher education was undertaken on behalf of the Independent Review of Higher Education Pay and Conditions (the Bett Committee) in 1998. The survey was next conducted by the Office of Manpower Economics in 1999, and thereafter by IRS Research in 2000 and 2001.

### Redesign of survey questionnaire

For the 2001 survey, the questionnaire format was redesigned to take account of feedback from previous years, and split into two separate questionnaires. Questionnaire one asked institutions about the nature and regularity of recruitment and retention problems, while questionnaire two asked institutions about numbers of staff, leavers, starters and vacancies. The redesign of these questionnaires is discussed further in Appendix A of this report.

It should be emphasised, however, that in redesigning the questionnaire to aid completion, care was taken to ensure that the resulting data would be compatible with that from previous years, so that trends over the four year period could be validly assessed.

### Procedure and response rate

The questionnaires were sent to all heads of personnel on 30 August 2001 by IRS Research using contact lists supplied by UCEA. Two pre-paid return envelopes accompanied each set of questionnaires to allow institutions to split the task of collecting the data. The date by which the return of completed questionnaires was requested was 14 September 2001. However, by this date only 37 institutions had responded to the survey. In order to increase the response rate, emails and a reminder letter were sent out to institutions and the return date extended to 28 October 2001. By this date, 123 institutions (75 per cent) had returned questionnaire one and 86 (53 per cent) had returned questionnaire two.

Respondents were distributed across categories of institution in the proportions detailed in Table 1.

**Table 1 – Response rates for questionnaire one by type of institution**

Institution	Total number of institutions	Returns	Response rate (per cent)
Pre-1992 universities	68	54	79
Post-1992 universities	37	26	70
Colleges	58	41	71
Total	163	*123	75

*Notes:* Column adds up to 121. The figure of 123 contains two responses from unidentified sources.

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## 2: Analysis of the regularity of recruitment and retention difficulties

The first section of questionnaire one asked institutions to indicate the regularity with which they experienced difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff in each of five staff groups:

- Academic
- Administrative and professional
- Technical
- Clerical
- Manual.

In order to produce quantitative data on their experience of recruitment and retention, institutions were asked to respond using the following predetermined categories:

- Always
- Usually
- More often than not
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never.

As recruitment and retention difficulties may be experienced throughout the year, often in a haphazard manner, no time period was given upon which institutions should base their responses to these questions. As a result, institutions were likely to give an approximation of the position regarding recruitment and retention throughout the year and, more likely, to be referring to their recent experiences.

The following section looks at the recruitment and retention issues surrounding academic and support staff in 2001, as well as comparing the data with that collected since 1998. The entire data regarding the regularity of recruitment and retention difficulties collected from 1998 to 2001 are presented in Appendix B of this report.

### 2001 Findings

#### Recruiting staff

Table 2 illustrates the responses given by institutions to the question: 'How often do you have difficulty in recruiting staff in the following groups?', with the response options provided being academic, administrative and professional, technical, clerical and manual.

As shown in Table 2, a significant proportion of institutions experienced recruitment difficulties in 2001 'more often than not', 'usually' or 'always' across all staff groups. Around one in five institutions reported experiencing difficulties filling academic, administrative and professional, technical or clerical positions 'always', 'usually' or 'more often than not' in 2001. In many cases, institutions experienced difficulties of such regularity across more than one of these staff groups, and a significant minority (19 per cent) reported such difficulties across all those five groups. Additionally, almost half (44 per cent) of all institutions regularly experienced difficulty 'always', 'usually' or 'more often than not' when recruiting manual staff in 2001.

**Table 2 – Regularity of recruitment difficulties, by staff group, 2001**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Academic</b> (%)	<b>Administrative /Professional</b> (%)	<b>Technical</b> (%)	<b>Clerical</b> (%)	<b>Manual</b> (%)
Always	1.1	0.0	1.1	0.0	6.7
Usually	3.2	2.1	5.4	5.3	14.4
More often than not	13.8	21.3	15.2	12.8	23.3
Sometimes	53.2	38.3	32.6	25.5	25.6
Rarely	25.5	35.1	39.1	44.7	21.1
Never	3.2	3.2	6.5	11.7	8.9

**Retaining staff**

Table 3 illustrates the responses given by institutions to the question: ‘How often do you have difficulty in retaining staff in the following groups?’ – academic, administrative and professional, technical, clerical and manual. Responses to this question showed that, on average, institutions experienced less difficulty in retaining staff than they did in recruiting staff in 2001.

In general, institutions reported that the regularity with which they experienced difficulties in retaining support staff was more acute than for academic staff, with manual staff in particular causing the most frequent and severe retention difficulties.

**Table 3 – Regularity of retention difficulties, by staff group, 2001**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Academic</b> (%)	<b>Administrative /Professional</b> (%)	<b>Technical</b> (%)	<b>Clerical</b> (%)	<b>Manual</b> (%)
Always	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.3
Usually	2.2	4.2	4.3	9.6	14.4
More often than not	5.4	12.5	6.5	14.9	20.0
Sometimes	51.6	43.8	27.2	18.1	31.1
Rarely	37.6	35.4	52.2	51.1	22.2
Never	3.2	4.2	9.8	6.4	8.9

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## Institutions' recruitment and retention experiences since 1998

The following section looks at institutions' experiences of recruitment and retention problems since the survey began in 1998.

Throughout this section the analysis will refer to institutions' experiences 'most of the time'. Where this is stated, the 'more often than not', 'usually' and 'always' responses given by institutions to the questions, 'How often do you have difficulty in recruiting (and retaining) staff...' have been aggregated to give the overall proportion of institutions experiencing regular recruitment and retention problems more often than they were not.

The analysis shows that recruitment and retention problems have become increasingly frequent across institutions over the four years this survey has run. Overall, by far the most common problems continue to be in the recruitment and retention of manual staff, but proportionately the greatest growth in such problems has been in respect of academic staff.

### Academic staff

Around one in five (18.1 per cent) institutions experienced difficulties 'most of the time' when recruiting academic staff in 2001. This figure has increased three-fold since the survey began in 1998, when around one in 20 (5.8 per cent of institutions) reported problems 'most of the time' when recruiting academic staff.

Retention of academics follows a similar trend to that described for recruitment. When the survey began in 1998, just over 2 per cent of institutions reported difficulties retaining academics 'most of the time'. However, by 2001 almost 8 per cent of institutions were experiencing academic staff retention problems more often than they were not.

These findings are illustrated in Table 4.

**Table 4 – Frequency of academic staff recruitment and retention difficulties, 1998-2001**

Recruitment					Retention				
Response	1998 (%)	1999 (%)	2000 (%)	2001 (%)	Response	1998 (%)	1999 (%)	2000 (%)	2001 (%)
Most of the time	5.8	16.8	11.7	18.1	Most of the time	2.2	4.1	4.7	7.6
Sometimes	72.5	69.1	77.5	53.2	Sometimes	52.6	62.4	67.7	51.6
Rarely or Never	21.8	14.1	10.9	28.7	Rarely or Never	45.1	32.5	27.6	40.8

### Support staff

#### Administrative and professional staff

Table 5 shows that almost one in four (23.4 per cent) institutions responding to this survey reported difficulties in filling administrative and professional posts 'most of the time' in 2001. This figure has increased year on year since the survey began in 1998, when around one in 11 (8.7 per cent) institutions reported experiencing recruitment difficulties 'most of the time'.

The proportion of institutions regularly experiencing difficulties retaining administrative and professional staff has also increased since the survey began in 1998. Around one in six institutions

(16.7 per cent) experienced difficulties retaining staff 'most of the time' in 2001, compared with 1998 when around one in 12 (8.1 per cent) institutions reported regular problems.

**Table 5 – Frequency of administrative and professional staff recruitment and retention difficulties, 1998-2001**

Recruitment					Retention				
Response	1998 (%)	1999 (%)	2000 (%)	2001 (%)	Response	1998 (%)	1999 (%)	2000 (%)	2001 (%)
Most of the time	8.7	12.2	15.6	23.4	Most of the time	8.1	7.4	11.0	16.7
Sometimes	52.2	62.8	54.7	38.3	Sometimes	54.1	58.4	57.5	43.8
Rarely or Never	39.1	25.0	29.7	38.3	Rarely or Never	37.8	34.2	31.5	39.6

### Technicians

Around one in five (21.7 per cent) of institutions experienced difficulty recruiting technicians 'most of the time' in 2001, compared with just over 16 per cent in 1998. The proportion of institutions regularly experiencing these difficulties has remained broadly similar throughout the lifetime of this survey. However, the proportion of institutions regularly experiencing recruitment difficulties either rarely or never for this category of staff has increased, with 46.6 per cent reporting few or no difficulties in 2001 compared with 33.1 per cent of respondents in 1998.

In the case of retention, despite slight increases in 1999 and 2000, the proportion of institutions experiencing difficulties retaining technicians most of the time has remained broadly similar throughout the lifetime of this survey, at around the 10 per cent mark.

**Table 6 – Frequency of technical staff recruitment and retention difficulties, 1998-2001**

Recruitment					Retention				
Response	1998 (%)	1999 (%)	2000 (%)	2001 (%)	Response	1998 (%)	1999 (%)	2000 (%)	2001 (%)
Most of the time	16.6	18.9	20.5	21.7	Most of the time	10.7	12.8	14.5	10.8
Sometimes	50.4	46.6	46.5	32.6	Sometimes	38.9	39.6	39.5	27.2
Rarely or Never	33.1	34.5	33.0	45.6	Rarely or Never	50.4	47.7	45.9	62.0

### Clerical staff

Clerical staff recruitment difficulties have also increased during the lifetime of this survey. In 1998, just over 7 per cent of institutions reported that recruiting clerical staff was a problem most of the time, compared with 18 per cent in 2001, an increase of two-and-a-half times.

Unlike for other staff groups, retention of clerical staff is more problematic than their recruitment. Almost one-quarter of respondents experienced difficulties retaining clerical staff 'most of the time' in 2001. This represents an increase of more than two-fold since the survey began, when 12 per cent of institutions reported experiencing these problems.

**Table 7 – Frequency of clerical staff recruitment and retention difficulties, 1998-2001**

Recruitment					Retention				
Response	1998 (%)	1999 (%)	2000 (%)	2001 (%)	Response	1998 (%)	1999 (%)	2000 (%)	2001 (%)
Most of the time	7.4	10.1	13.3	18.1	Most of the time	12.0	9.4	12.6	24.5
Sometimes	31.6	35.6	37.5	25.5	Sometimes	29.1	36.7	36.2	18.1
Rarely or Never	61.1	54.4	49.3	56.4	Rarely or Never	58.2	54.0	51.2	57.5

**Manual staff**

It is in this staff group that institutions have experienced, and continue to experience, the highest levels of regular recruitment and retention difficulties. In 1998, almost one in four institutions (23.1 per cent) reported experiencing recruitment difficulties 'most of the time'. By 2001, this figure had increased to 44 per cent, an increase of almost two-fold since the survey began. In addition, the proportion of institutions who reported 'never' experiencing difficulties recruiting manual staff had fallen from just over 17 per cent in 1998 to less than 9 per cent in 2001.

Retention of manual staff groups has also become more difficult over the lifetime of this survey. In 1998, almost 15 per cent of institutions reported difficulties in retaining manual staff. By 2001, that figure has more than doubled, with nearly 40 per cent of institutions reporting retention problems 'most of the time'.

**Table 8 – Frequency of manual staff recruitment and retention difficulties, 1998-2001**

Recruitment					Retention				
Response	1998 (%)	1999 (%)	2000 (%)	2001 (%)	Response	1998 (%)	1999 (%)	2000 (%)	2001 (%)
Most of the time	23.1	31.2	33.4	44.4	Most of the time	14.4	24.4	24.6	37.7
Sometimes	29.1	32.0	31.7	25.6	Sometimes	37.1	35.8	34.1	31.1
Rarely or Never	47.8	36.7	34.9	30.0	Rarely or Never	48.5	39.9	41.3	31.1

**Variations between institutions**

Overall, higher education colleges were experiencing greater problems recruiting administrative and professional, technical and clerical staff, while pre-1992 universities had the most problems recruiting manual staff.

Colleges were also experiencing the greatest difficulties retaining technical and manual staff, while post-1992 universities found administrative and professional staff most difficult to retain, and pre-1992 institutions found clerical staff most difficult to retain.

## Geographical variations

Institutions' responses were also analysed using UK countries and English regions to investigate any regional differences in the data. The regions used in this aspect of the analysis are based on National Statistics Government Office Regions (GORs) as follows:

- London
- South-East (an amalgamation of two GORs – Eastern and South-East)
- South-West
- Midlands (an amalgamation of two GORs – East Midlands and West Midlands)
- North-West
- North-East and Yorkshire & the Humber (an amalgamation of two GORs)
- Scotland
- Wales
- Northern Ireland.

The response rates of institutions by UK country and English region are presented in Table 9.

**Table 9 – Response rates for questionnaire one by UK country and English region, 2001**

Region	Number of questionnaires sent	Number of questionnaires sent	Response rate (%)
London	38	22	58
South East & East	29	23	79
South West	11	10	91
Midlands	16	11	69
North West	16	13	81
North East and Yorkshire & the Humber	19	16	84
England	129	95	74
Wales	14	12	86
Scotland	17	11	65
Northern Ireland	3	3	100
Institution not stated/region unknown	-	2	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>75</b>

In order to compare the regularity of recruitment and retention difficulties between the five broad staff groups across the countries and English regions of the UK, a methodology using arithmetic progression has been used<sup>1</sup>. The method assigns values to institutions' response and an average score is computed for each broad staff group across the regions of the UK.

<sup>1</sup> The methodology for these calculations was originally used within the Bett report and subsequently in the studies by the Office for Manpower Economics and IRS Research.

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The scores allocated for this method were as follows:

**Table 10 – Values assigned in calculating arithmetic progression**

Response	Score
Never	0
Rarely	1
Sometimes	2
More often than not	3
Usually	4
Always	5

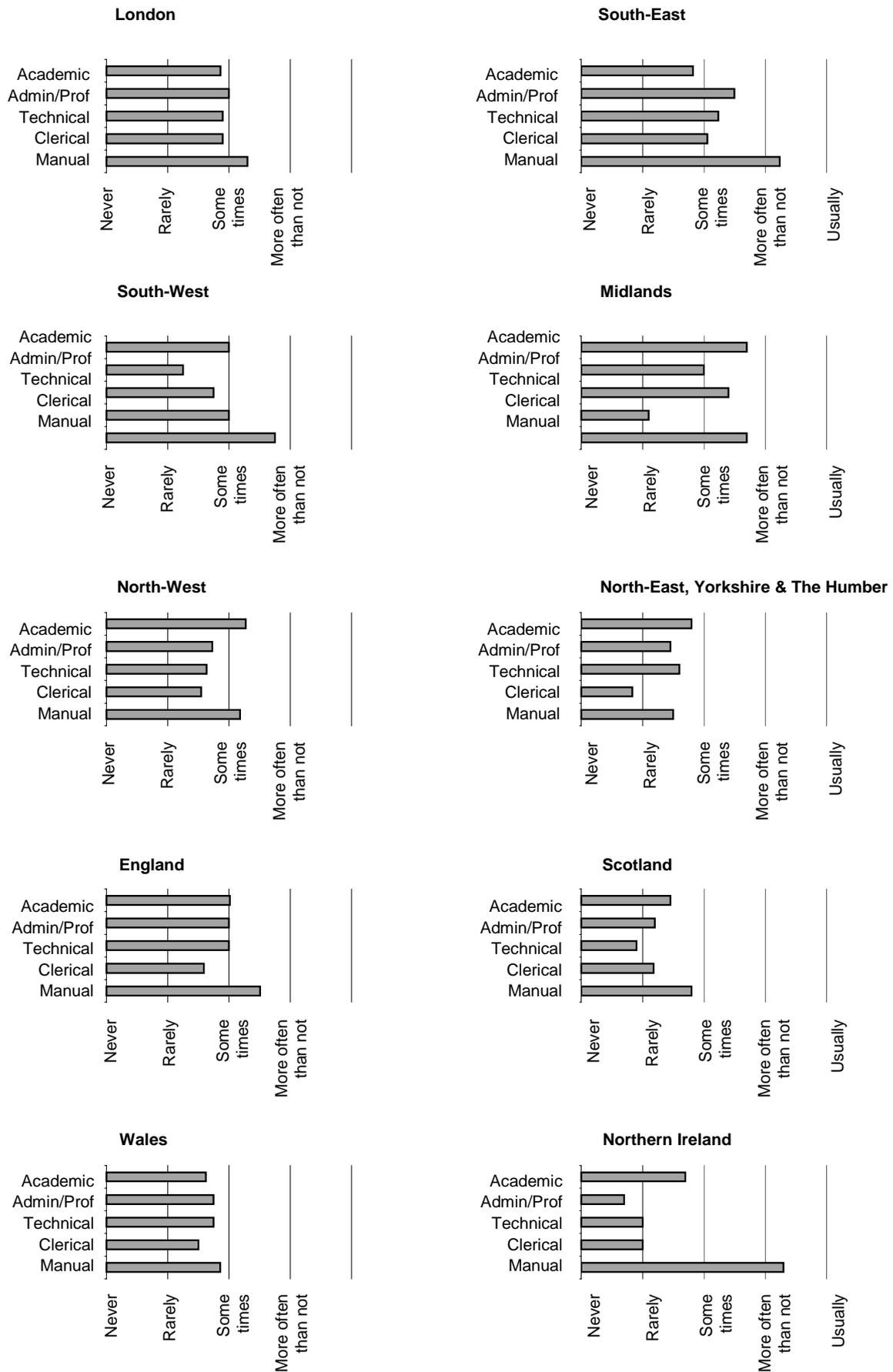
It should be noted that the scores obtained by this method are averages which, by nature, can disguise the worse, or better, experiences of some institutions in some regions and for some categories of staff. Also, the relatively low response rates in some regions, particularly London, should be noted when considering the following figures, as well as the small number of institutions in Northern Ireland.

For academic and technical staff recruitment, institutions in the Midlands experienced the greatest difficulties, while across all other staff groups, the South-East of England was experiencing the most difficulties. Although institutions in Northern Ireland were experiencing greatest difficulties recruiting manual staff, this was only marginally more severe than in the South-East, and is based on responses from only three institutions.

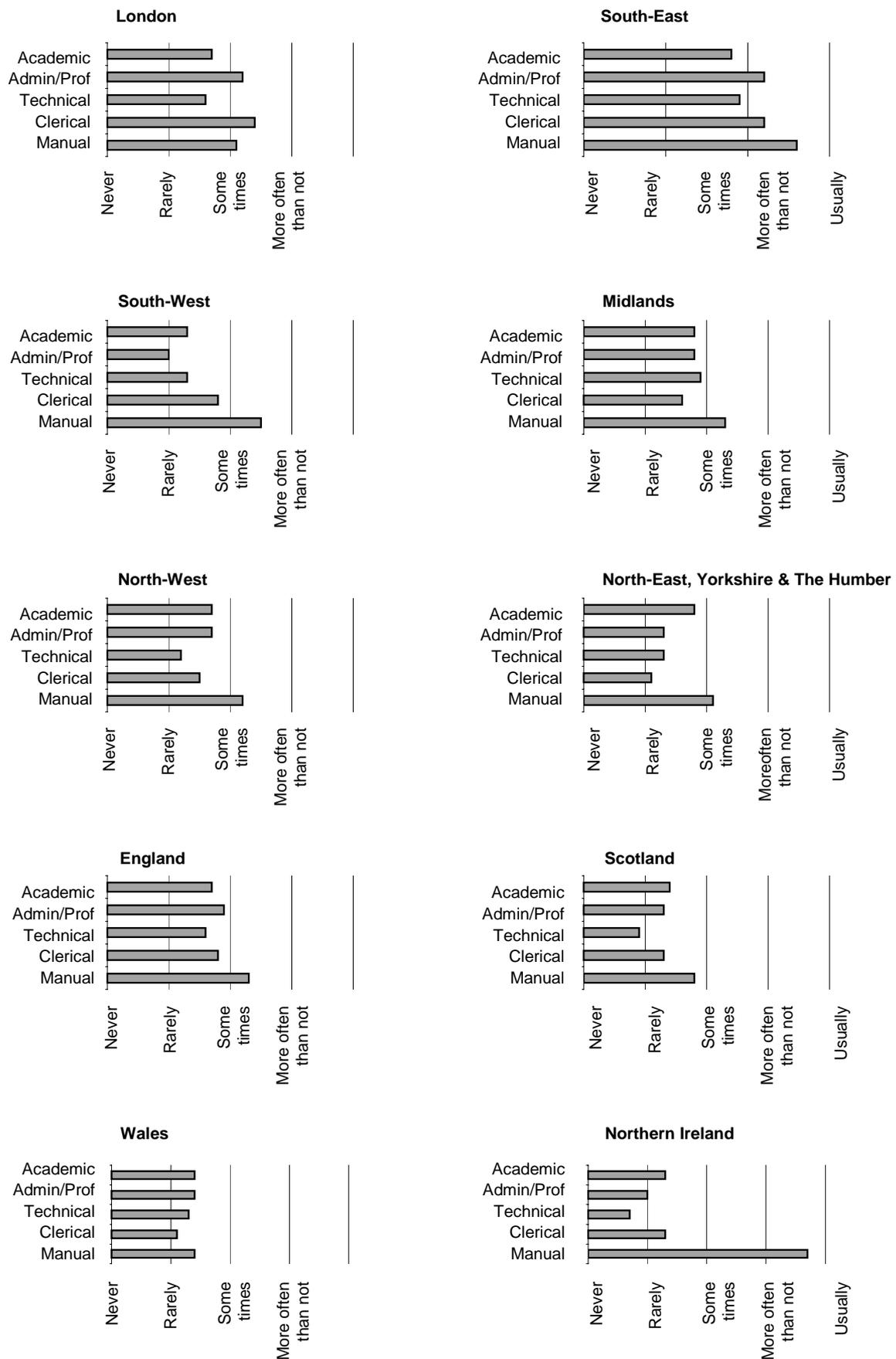
With the exception of clerical and manual staff, where institutions in London and Northern Ireland respectively were experiencing greatest problems retaining staff, retention difficulties were on the whole worse for institutions in the South-East. However, institutions in the Midlands experienced the same level of difficulties as the South-East in regard to retaining technical and academic staff.

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the regional differences.

**Figure 1 – Regularity of recruitment difficulties in English regions, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, using average scores, 2001**



**Figure 2 – Regularity of retention difficulties in English regions, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, using average scores, 2001**



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### 3: Specific recruitment and retention difficulties

The previous chapter considered the regularity throughout the year with which institutions were experiencing recruitment and retention problems across five broad staff groups. This chapter looks at the particular types of post to which institutions had difficulty recruiting and retaining staff.

Questionnaire one asked institutions to specify in which academic subject areas they were experiencing recruitment and retention problems, as well as the job categories (for example professors, lecturers and/or research assistants). The questionnaire also asked institutions to identify any support staff occupations (for example, accountants, administrators, catering etc) for which they had experienced recruitment and retention problems in the previous 12 months. Respondents were asked whether these latter difficulties were with managerial or non-managerial positions.

An overview of the results is presented here for academic and support staff groups.

#### Academic staff

Two-thirds of institutions provided details of at least one academic subject area in which there had been recruitment difficulties in the previous 12 months. Where institutions reported difficulties in recruiting academic staff, these were spread, on average, across five subject areas. In comparison, one-half of all institutions reported retention difficulties and, on average, were experiencing such problems in four subject areas.

An analysis of the subject areas causing problems showed that computing/IT and business subjects (such as accountancy/finance, management, law and economics) continue to present institutions with the greatest recruitment and retention difficulties. As in previous years, engineering, biological sciences, professions allied to medicine (PAMs) and education were also causing problems in a significant proportion of institutions.

In total, 83 institutions recorded recruitment difficulties in at least one subject area. The subjects most frequently identified in the responses are listed below in descending order of frequency. However, subjects which are offered by relatively few institutions have less chance of being towards the top of this composite list, but overall may be experiencing severe problems. For example, of the six institutions offering veterinary science, five institutions said that, when trying to recruit in this area, they had experienced problems.

- Computing/information technology/information systems (65 institutions)
- Business-related subjects (61)
  - Business and management (42)
  - Accountancy and finance (37)
  - Economics (24)
  - Law (21)
- Engineering subjects (31)
  - Electrical/electronic engineering (26)
  - Mechanical engineering (16)
  - Civil engineering (14)
- Health service related subjects (30)
  - Nursing/midwifery (30)
  - Professions allied to medicine (11)
- Science subjects (30)
  - Biological sciences (26)
  - Chemistry (10)
  - Physics (7)
- Education (16)

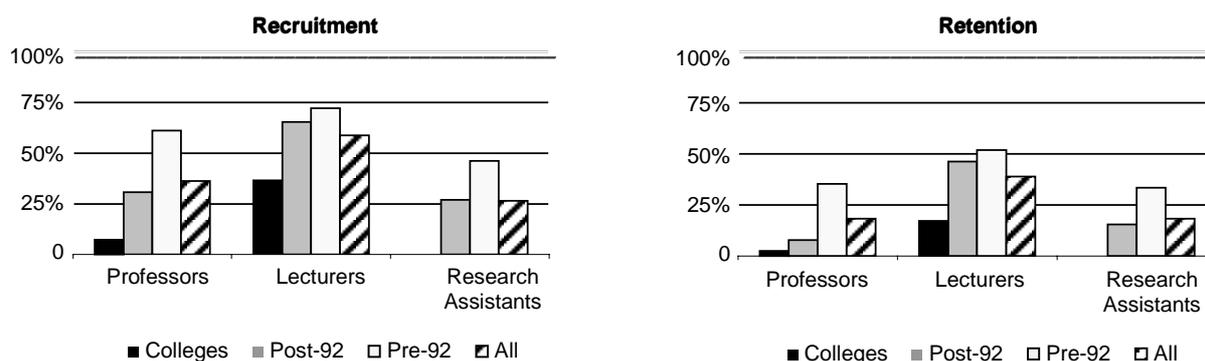
- PE/Sports science (11)
- Mathematics (8)
- Veterinary science (5)
- Psychology (4).

### Staff levels

Institutions reported that lecturers were the most difficult staff group to recruit, followed by professors and then research assistants (see Figure 3). Almost 60 per cent of all institutions reported difficulties in recruiting lecturers, with universities experiencing greater problems than colleges.

More than one-third of institutions reported that recruiting professors was a problem, with pre-1992 universities having the most difficulties. For research assistants, 40 per cent of universities reported recruitment difficulties, with pre-1992 universities again experiencing the greatest problems. (No HE colleges reported any recruitment or retention difficulties with research assistants.) As might be expected, institutional retention problems follow the same trends as for the recruitment problems described above.

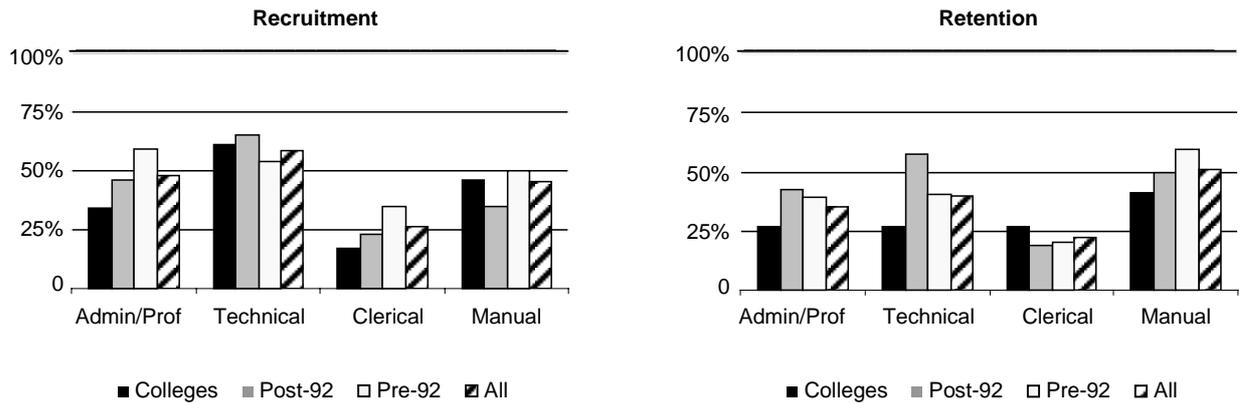
**Figure 3 – Academic staff recruitment and retention difficulties, by position and institution type**



### Support staff

In general, pre-1992 universities reported experiencing the greatest recruitment and retention difficulties for support staff. The exception to this was for technical staff, where post-1992 universities were experiencing a greater level of difficulty (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4 – Support staff recruitment and retention difficulties, by institution type**



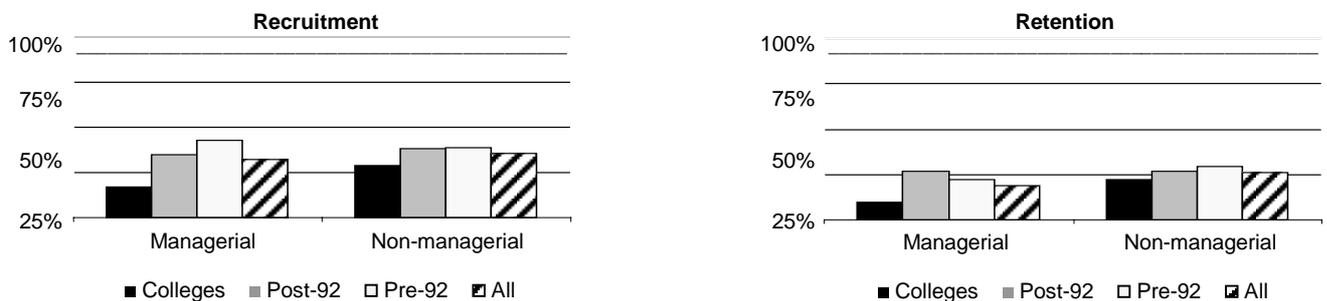
This following section looks in more detail at specific recruitment and retention problems in institutions. The analysis will identify specific positions causing concern within the administrative and professional, technical, clerical and manual staff groups, and compares managerial and non-managerial positions.

**Administrative and professional staff**

For professional staff posts, such as those in finance and personnel, institutions were generally experiencing greater problems recruiting non-managerial staff than managerial staff. However, pre-1992 universities were experiencing greater difficulties recruiting managerial staff.

Retaining non-managerial professional staff was also a greater problem for institutions than was retaining managerial staff. While almost 20 per cent of institutions reported difficulties in retaining managerial level professional staff, over 25 per cent had difficulties with non-managerial staff. Again, universities were experiencing more problems than HE colleges, with post-1992 universities experiencing the greatest problems.

**Figure 5 – Administrative and professional staff recruitment and retention difficulties, by institution type**



## Technical staff

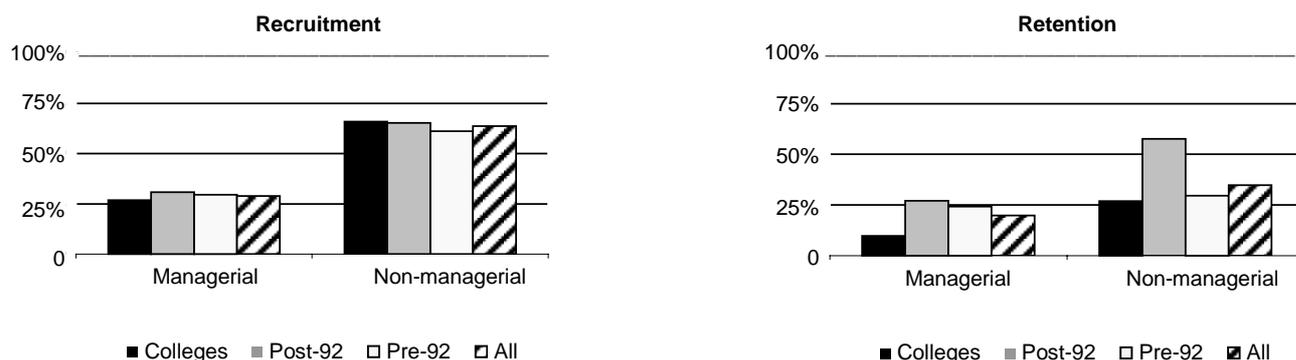
Over one-quarter of institutions reported problems recruiting managers for specific technical posts, while almost two-thirds of all institutions reported difficulty recruiting to non-managerial positions.

Recruiting computing and IT staff continued to be the most problematic area for institutions. Around 40 per cent of institutions found that technical IT managers were difficult to recruit, and almost 60 per cent had difficulty filling lower grade posts – typically for support and help-desk staff and programmers. One in five institutions reported difficulties in recruiting laboratory staff, predominantly for non-managerial positions.

Similarly, institutions – particularly post-1992 universities – reported greater difficulty retaining non-managerial technical staff than retaining managerial staff. Over one-third of institutions reported problems retaining junior staff, compared with just under one-fifth reporting problems retaining managerial staff. Where this was the case, the difficulties related almost entirely to computing and IT staff.

The scale of problems reported is thus substantially greater than implied by institutions' reports on the regularity of their difficulties in recruiting and retaining technical staff. The explanation is probably that many face major difficulties in recruiting certain types of technical staff, but can recruit other types of technician more easily.

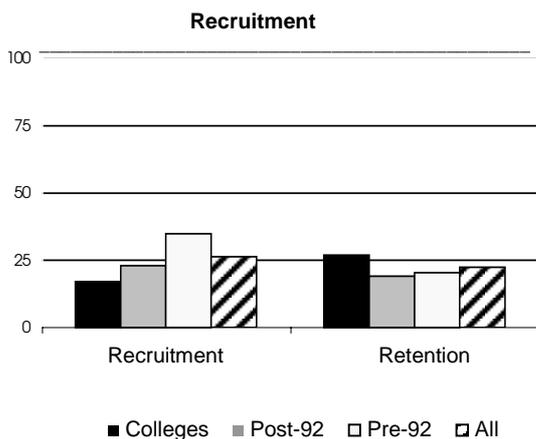
**Figure 6 – Technical staff recruitment and retention difficulties, by institution type**



## Clerical staff

Over one-quarter of institutions reported problems recruiting staff to specific clerical positions. Universities experienced greater problems than colleges, with pre-1992 universities experiencing the greatest difficulties. Over one-fifth of institutions reported difficulties retaining staff to specific clerical posts, with colleges experiencing greater difficulties than universities.

**Figure 7 – Clerical staff recruitment and retention difficulties, by institution type**



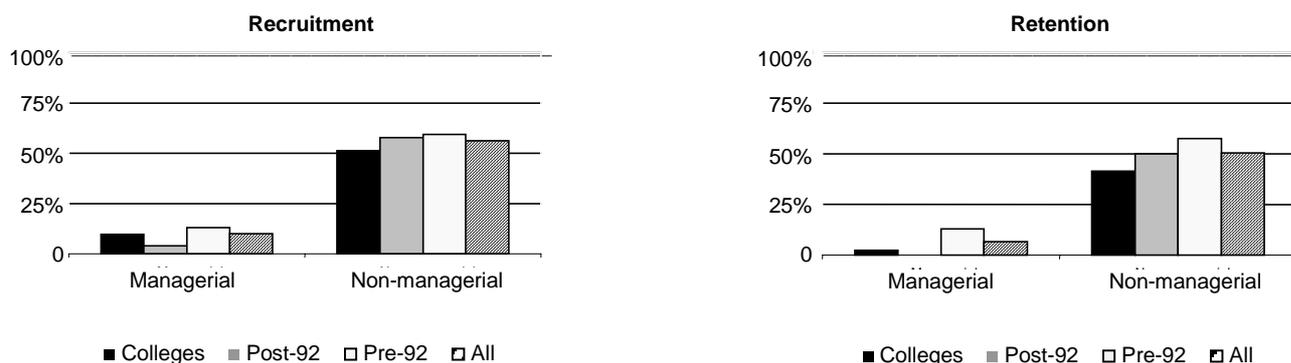
**Manual staff**

In the manual staff area, again it was non-managerial staff who were causing institutions the greatest recruitment and retention problems. While almost 10 per cent of institutions were experiencing recruitment problems with manual staff managers, more than one-half of institutions reported difficulties recruiting manual employees.

The manual staff causing institutions most recruitment difficulties were those in catering and cleaning, with one in three institutions experiencing difficulties in each of these areas. However, almost 20 per cent of institutions reported difficulties in recruiting maintenance staff (typically craft trades), and a further 15 per cent experienced difficulties with security staff.

Institutions' experiences of retaining manual staff were broadly similar to the recruitment patterns mentioned above, with non-managerial staff causing the greatest problems. Over one-third of institutions had difficulties retaining catering staff and one in four experienced difficulties in retaining cleaning staff. Institutions also had problems retaining their maintenance and security staff, with one in ten institutions reporting difficulties in this area.

**Figure 8 – Manual staff recruitment and retention difficulties**



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## 4: Reasons for recruitment and retention difficulties

As well as asking institutions to describe the nature of the key recruitment and retention difficulties they faced, questionnaire one asked them to identify what they saw as the reasons for those difficulties. Institutions were asked to comment separately on pay-related difficulties, and on any other difficulties affecting recruitment and retention.

### Pay issues

Two-thirds of all respondents mentioned pay as being a major factor underlying recruitment and retention problems in the sector. Almost one-quarter of institutions mentioned pay rates in, and competition for employees from, private sector organisations, especially for support staff, but also for those academic staff with expertise that was valued in the private sector. Academic staff most likely to leave for the private sector were those employed in IT and computing, law and accountancy.

Institutions mentioned that competition for support staff was more common than for academic staff, and that IT specialists, secretaries, clerical staff and manual employees were most likely to be affected. Institutions also mentioned professional support staff in accountancy, finance and personnel as being the subject of competition from private sector employers.

Although the attraction of higher pay levels in the private sector was often mentioned, pay levels in some sections of the public sector were also highlighted by institutions. For some academic staff – most notably for professions allied to medicine and teacher education posts – higher NHS and school teaching salaries continued to act as a disincentive for practitioners to join higher education. The higher salaries, and in some cases better conditions of employment, also meant that institutions were losing both academic and support staff to employers in the NHS or in state schools.

Some respondents described the ‘uncompetitive’ pay levels in higher education as impacting on the quality of candidates applying for vacant posts and on the ability of the sector to attract young academics.

### Non-pay issues

Institutions in London and other major UK cities reported that the combination of low salaries and high housing and travel costs exacerbated recruitment and retention problems. Again, this often led both to a limited pool of applicants for vacancies and to the quality of applicants being poor.

Institutions indicated that both high and low turnover rates among some staff groups were causing recruitment and retention problems. On the one hand, high turnover rates among manual, clerical and junior professional posts (and in some institutions among academics) were causing concern. Where academics were leaving, this was often for institutions which offered better promotion prospects or which had better reputations or research opportunities.

On the other hand, at some institutions low turnover rates of senior academics and professional staff were also causing difficulties. In these cases, this was impacting on internal promotion opportunities for more junior staff and causing some staff to leave and join institutions which could offer better career prospects.

One in five institutions mentioned that fixed-term contracts were causing recruitment and retention problems in their institution. As one respondent remarked: ‘Job insecurity (as a result of fixed-term contracts) means staff are always looking around for new opportunities.’ Finally, for some manual staff groups, such as cleaners, institutions reported that early morning starting times, a lack of public transport, and even the high cost of car parking was making it difficult for institutions to fill these positions.

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## 5: Staff turnover data and unfilled vacancies

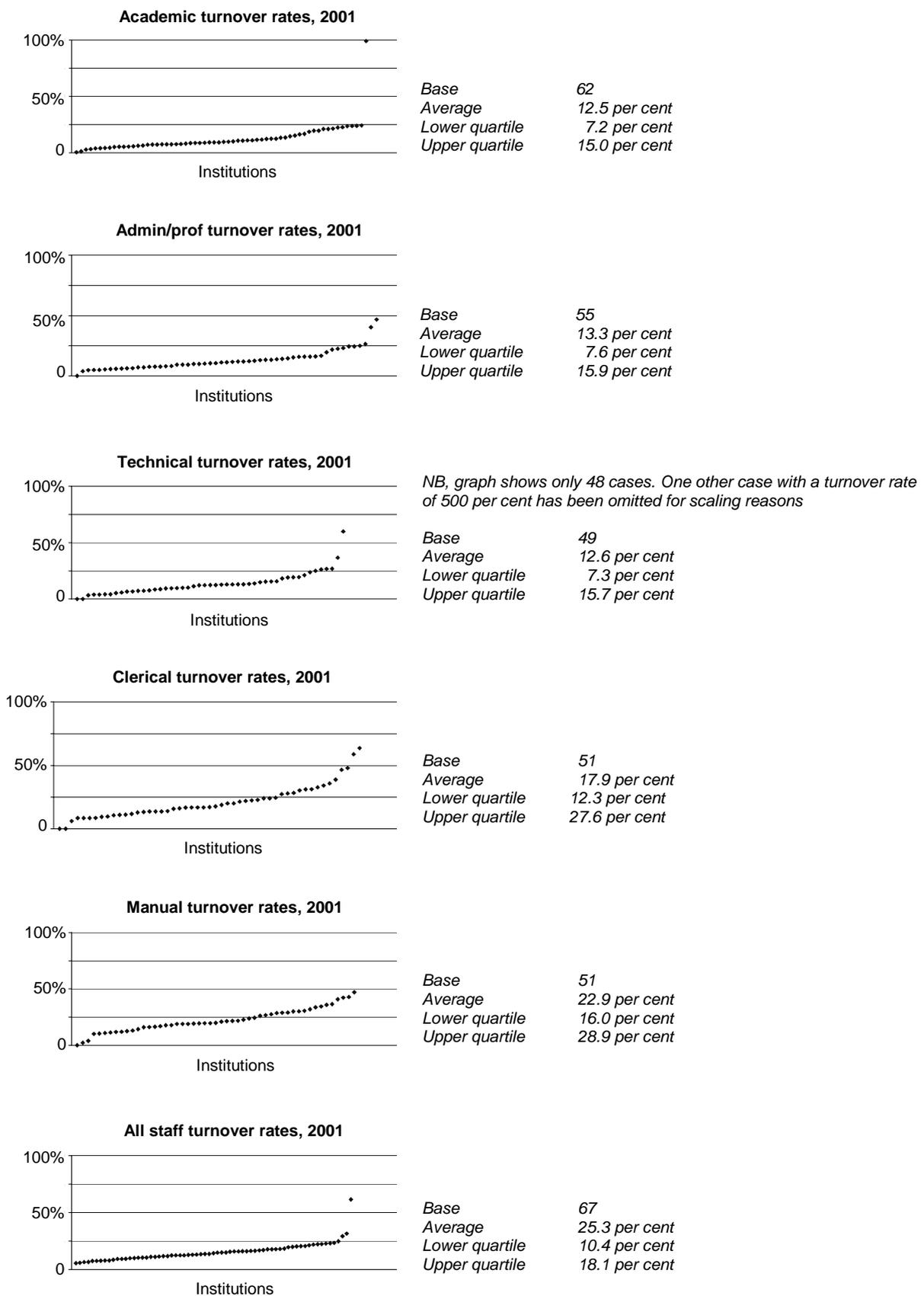
Questionnaire two asked institutions to provide turnover data, defined as the percentage of staff (excluding those who completed fixed-term contracts) leaving in the last year. These were to be grouped into permanent and fixed-term staff (or both together if separate figures were unavailable) for each of the five broad staff groups.

The following pages detail staff turnover rates using scatter diagrams. In each case, staff turnover rates have been calculated for each institution and then presented showing the lowest turnover rates first (bottom left hand side of the graphs) through to the highest rates (top right hand of the graphs).

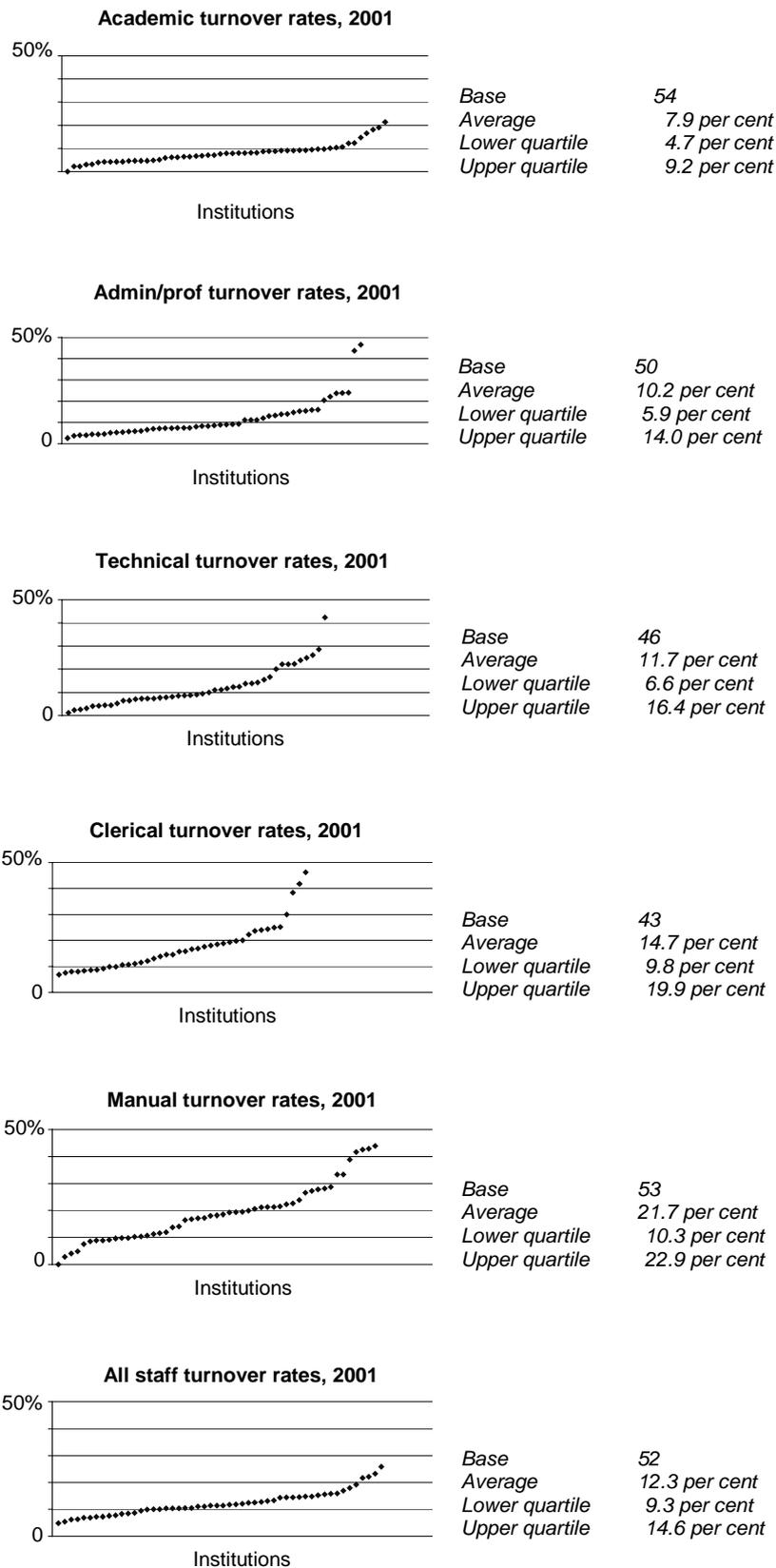
Figures 9, 10 and 11 on the following pages illustrate turnover rates for fixed-term and permanent staff combined, for permanent staff, and for fixed-term staff in each staff group. In the case of the combined permanent and fixed-term staff rates, these are data from institutions who provided combined information on permanent and fixed-term staff (questions 9-11), as well as data provided by institutions separately on permanent staff (questions 1, 5 and 7) and fixed-term staff (questions 2, 6 and 8).

Manual and clerical staff groups have the highest turnover rates, of around 20-25 per cent per year. Although academic, administrative and professional, and technical staff show lower staff turnover rates, a significant minority of institutions show exceptionally high staff turnover rates in these areas, as well as in manual and clerical staff groups.

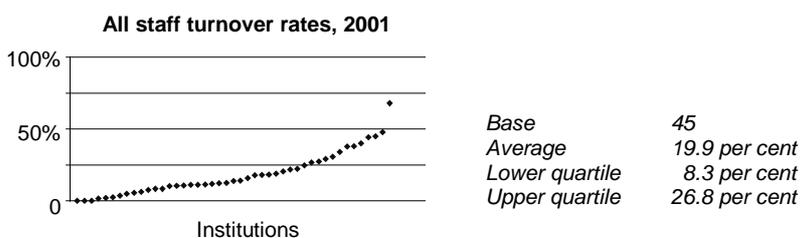
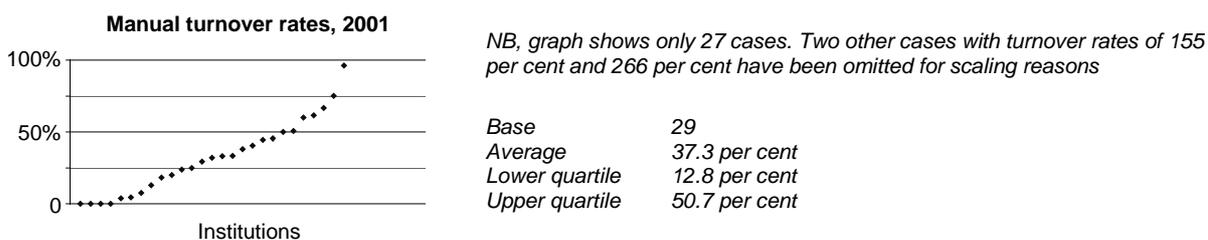
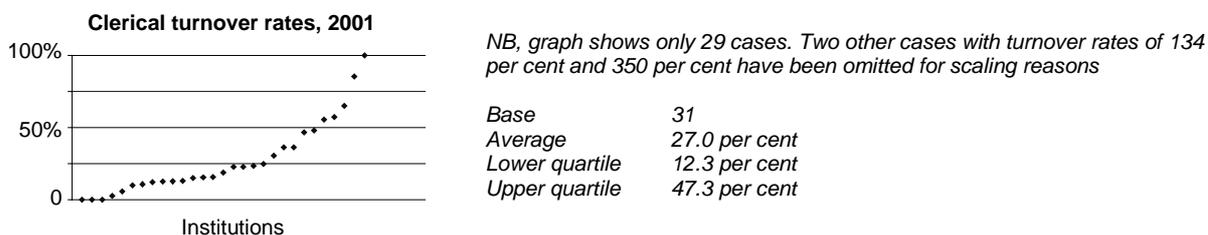
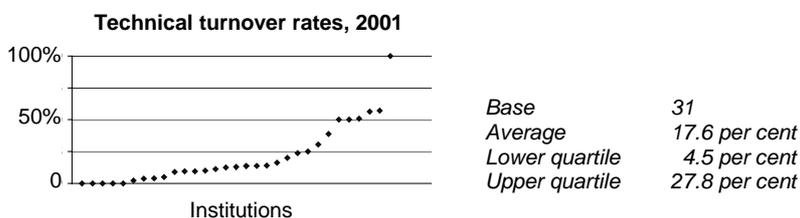
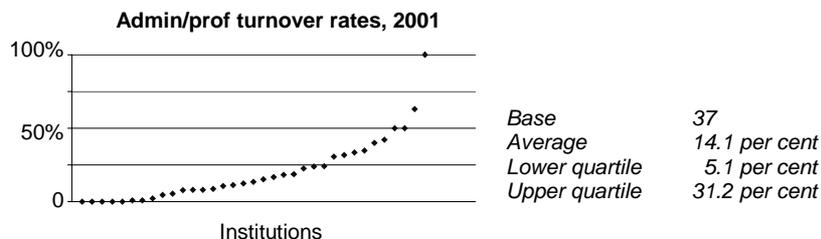
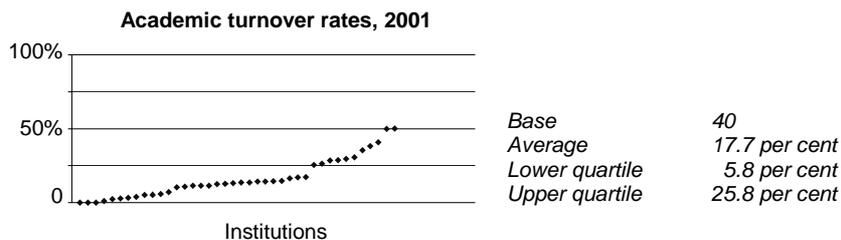
**Figure 9 – Scatter diagram illustrating total staff (combined fixed-term and permanent) turnover rates, 2001**



**Figure 10 – Scatter diagram illustrating permanent staff turnover rates, 2001**



**Figure 11 – Scatter diagram illustrating fixed-term staff turnover rates**



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## Unfilled vacancies

Questionnaire two also asked institutions for data on any vacancies which had remained unfilled after three months. Of the 86 institutions that completed questionnaire two, information on unfilled vacancies was provided by 61. Several institutions stated that they did not collect information on duration or number of vacancies.

The 61 institutions which provided information on unfilled vacancies together employed over 130,000 staff; over the last 12 months these institutions had advertised over 20,000 staff vacancies. In these institutions, almost 1,250 or 6 per cent of vacancies remained unfilled after three months.

Unfilled vacancy rates for academic posts were the highest at 6.5 per cent, followed by administrative/ professional staff at 5.9 per cent, clerical staff at 5.8 per cent, technical staff at 5 per cent and manual staff the lowest with 4.4 per cent.

## 6: Future expectations

A new question was added to this year's survey to assess institutions' expectations of future recruitment and retention difficulties within the sector. To ascertain this, institutions were asked if they expected recruitment and retention difficulties to 'ease', 'remain the same', or 'get worse' in the next 12 months.

A sizeable proportion of institutions were expecting recruitment and retention issues to worsen across the various staff groups over the next 12 months. The majority of institutions could see no hope of amelioration of their difficulties in the near future, expecting recruitment and retention problems to remain at the same levels throughout 2002.

**Table 11 – Future expectations for each staff group**

	Recruitment			Retention		
	Ease (per cent)	Remain the same (per cent)	Get worse (per cent)	Ease (per cent)	Remain the same (per cent)	Get worse (per cent)
Academic	5.4	77.5	17.1	4.5	88.3	7.2
Administrative/professional	2.7	90.0	7.3	7.2	85.6	7.2
Technical	7.3	81.7	11.0	7.3	84.4	8.3
Clerical	3.6	87.4	9.0	6.4	87.3	6.4
Manual	5.7	85.7	8.6	8.7	84.5	6.8

### Academic

Almost 80 per cent of institutions expect academic recruitment difficulties to remain the same in the next 12 months, while a further 17 per cent expect recruitment difficulties to worsen. Fewer than 5 per cent expect the situation to ease in 2002.

While around 20 per cent of colleges and of pre-1992 universities expect difficulties in recruiting academic staff to worsen in the next 12 months, only 5 per cent of post-1992 universities expect worsening difficulties.

Almost 90 per cent of institutions expect retention problems to remain the same in the next 12 months and less than 4 per cent expect them to ease. The remaining 7 per cent expect retention problems to get worse.

### Administrative and professional

A total of 97 per cent of institutions believe that problems with the recruitment of administrative and professional staff would remain at current levels or worsen in the next 12 months, while less than 3 per cent expect the situation to ease in 2002.

Over 90 per cent of institutions expect their retention difficulties to remain at current levels or worsen in the next 12 months, with colleges expecting it to worsen more severely than other institutions. Only 7 per cent expected the situation to improve in 2002.

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## **Technical**

Only 7 per cent of institutions expect recruitment difficulties for technical staff to ease during 2002, with the remainder expecting the situation to continue unabated or to worsen. When compared with universities, higher education colleges are more likely to expect recruitment of technical staff to become more difficult in the next 12 months.

Over 90 per cent of institutions expect the current levels of technical staff retention difficulties to remain the same or worsen in 2002, while around 8 per cent of institutions expect retention of technical staff to ease.

## **Clerical**

For clerical staff, one in ten institutions expect recruitment difficulties to worsen in 2002, with colleges and pre-1992 universities expecting most difficulties. For retention of these staff, equal proportions – over 6 per cent – expect things to worsen or to ease in the next 12 months. While 5 per cent of colleges expect retention of clerical staff to worsen, almost 10 per cent of pre-1992 universities expect retention difficulties to worsen in the next 12 months.

## **Manual**

Almost 9 per cent of institutions expect recruitment of manual staff to worsen in the next 12 months, compared to almost 6 per cent who expect it to ease. Colleges are expecting greater deterioration than the universities, with almost 15 per cent of colleges expecting recruitment difficulties to worsen in 2002.

All post-1992 universities expect retention of manual staff to remain at the same levels over the next 12 months. One in eight colleges and less than 4 per cent of pre-1992 universities expect retention of manual staff to worsen in 2002.

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## Appendix A – Redesign of survey questionnaire

After the 2000 survey, IRS Research recommended a number of changes to the survey questionnaire for 2001. It was felt that the slow response rate of institutions completing the 2000 survey, although partly attributable to the workload commitments of higher education institutions, was compounded by the design of the questionnaires. The wording and layout caused some institutions difficulties and, during the management of the previous year's survey, IRS Research received queries from institutions seeking clarification on a number of questions. These issues are summarised below, along with an indication of the way in which the design was modified in order to resolve the problem.

### Coverage of the questionnaire

In the previous surveys, information on the nature and extent of institutions' recruitment experiences, the numbers of staff employed and leaving, and the number of vacancies and unfilled vacancies was requested in one questionnaire. For the 2001 survey, the questionnaire was redesigned and presented as two separate documents: questionnaires one and two (see following pages). Questionnaire one asked institutions about the nature and extent of recruitment difficulties with regard to different staff groups, while questionnaire two asked institutions about the numbers of staff currently in employment within the institution, numbers leaving, number of vacancies and numbers of unfilled vacancies over the previous 12 months.

This allowed institutions to allocate responsibility for completion and return of each questionnaire to different individuals, thus reducing administrative load for any one individual completing the survey.

### Response options

In previous years, institutions had also been asked to write in the departments in which they were experiencing recruitment and retention problems, and at which staffing levels. For the 2001 survey, response categories were provided to enable respondents simply to tick those subject areas causing particular recruitment and retention problems, and thus minimise time spent in replying. Categories of staff and occupational level were also provided. For academic staff, institutions were able to select 'Chairs/Professors', 'Lecturers', 'Research Assistants' and 'Others'. For support staff two options were given: 'Managers' and 'Others'. Where institutions ticked the 'Other' option, they were asked to indicate to which type(s) of staff this related.

Finally, a new question was added to the survey, asking institutions if they expected recruitment and/or retention difficulties to 'ease', 'remain the same', or 'get worse' in the next 12 months. It was hoped that the sector's human resource and personnel professionals, who have experience of dealing with recruitment and other human resource activities on a day-to-day basis, would provide further information which could assist UCEA and others in developing future policy.

The redesigned questionnaires are presented on the following pages.

## Questionnaire one



### Survey of Staff Recruitment and Retention

The following section of the survey is concerned with staffing numbers and turnover rates in your institution. When describing this, please provide information using the following broad staffing groups:

**Academic, Administrative/Professional, Technical, Clerical and Manual.**

We understand your institution may not operate these same staff categories, but would appreciate it if you could use them when completing the survey. Listed below are examples of these staff categories

<u>Academic</u>	<u>Admin/Prof</u>	<u>Technical</u>	<u>Clerical</u>	<u>Manual</u>
Department heads	Accountants	IT support	Admin assistants	Catering assistants
Lecturers	Personnel staff	Lab technicians	Secretaries	Grounds staff
Research assistants	Managers, Librarians	AV technicians	Junior support staff	Cleaners

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.  
Please return it by 12th OCTOBER 2001 to:

UCEA Survey c/o IRS Research 18-20 Highbury Place London N5 1QP  
or Fax it back on 020 7226 8618

**IF YOU HAVE ANY QUERIES PLEASE CONTACT MICHAEL THEWLIS ON 020 7354 6795**

INSTITUTION NAME	.....
YOUR NAME	..... Tel. number .....

**1. Please indicate the regularity with which your institution has experienced difficulties over the past year in recruiting and retaining the following broad groups of staff:**

**How often do you have difficulty in RECRUITING staff in the following groups?**

Staff Group	Always	Usually	More often than not	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Academic	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>6</sub>
Administrative/Professional	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>6</sub>
Technical	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>6</sub>
Clerical	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>6</sub>
Manual	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>6</sub>

**How often do you have difficulty in RETAINING staff in the following groups?**

Staff Group	Always	Usually	More often than not	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Academic	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>6</sub>
Administrative/Professional	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>6</sub>
Technical	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>6</sub>
Clerical	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>6</sub>
Manual	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>6</sub>

2. Using the tables below, please record any ACADEMIC RECRUITMENT and RETENTION difficulties your institution may be experiencing. Tick the boxes ONLY if you are experiencing difficulties.

Academic RECRUITMENT difficulties				
	Chairs/ Profs	Lecturer	Research Assist's	Other academic grades (please state)
Accounting / Finance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Biological sciences	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Business / Management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Chemistry	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Civil engineering	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Computing / IT	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Economics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Electrical and electronic engineering	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Law	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Mechanical engineering	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Nursing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Physics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Professions allied to medicine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Others (please state)	Chairs/ Profs	Lecturer	Research Assist's	Other academic grades (please state)
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
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_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____

Academic RETENTION difficulties				
	Chairs/ Profs	Lecturer	Research Assist's	Other academic grades (please state)
Accounting / Finance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Biological sciences	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Business / Management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Chemistry	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Civil engineering	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Computing / IT	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Economics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Electrical and electronic engineering	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Law	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Mechanical engineering	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Nursing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Physics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Professions allied to medicine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Others (please state)	Chairs/ Profs	Lecturer	Research Assist's	Other academic grades (please state)
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
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_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____

3. Using the tables below, please record any RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION difficulties for SUPPORT STAFF, your institution may be experiencing. *Tick the boxes ONLY if you are experiencing difficulties.*

<b>Support staff RECRUITMENT difficulties</b>			<b>Support staff RETENTION difficulties</b>		
<b>Administration and Finance</b>	<b>Manager</b>	<b>Others (please state)</b>	<b>Administration and Finance</b>	<b>Manager</b>	<b>Others (please state)</b>
Academic administrators	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> _____	Academic administrators	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> _____
Accountants	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> _____	Accountants	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> _____
General administrators	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> _____	General administrators	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> _____
Finance	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> _____	Finance	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> _____
Personnel	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> _____	Personnel	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> _____
<b>Technicians</b>	<b>Manager</b>	<b>Others (please state)</b>	<b>Technicians</b>	<b>Manager</b>	<b>Others (please state)</b>
Audio visual	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> _____	Audio visual	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> _____
IT	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> _____	IT	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> _____
Laboratory	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> _____	Laboratory	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> _____
<b>Manual</b>	<b>Manager</b>	<b>Others (please state)</b>	<b>Manual</b>	<b>Manager</b>	<b>Others (please state)</b>
Catering	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> _____	Catering	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> _____
Maintenance	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> _____	Maintenance	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> _____
Security	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> _____	Security	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> _____
<b>Others groups (please state)</b>	<b>Manager</b>	<b>Others (please state)</b>	<b>Others groups (please state)</b>	<b>Manager</b>	<b>Others (please state)</b>
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> _____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> _____
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> _____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> _____
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> _____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> _____
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> _____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> _____
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> _____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> _____
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> _____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> _____

**4. Please describe the nature of the KEY recruitment and retention difficulties faced by your institution.**

*Be as specific as possible, using grades, specialisms and modes of employment and what you believe to be the reasons. Continue on a separate sheet if necessary.*

(i) **Pay-related difficulties** .....

.....

.....

.....

(ii) **Any other difficulties** .....

.....

.....

.....

**5 Please write any other comments about recruitment or retention difficulties which have not been covered.**

*Be as specific as possible. For example, you may want to include problems recruiting or retaining young staff or those on fixed-term contracts, or arising from too little turnover among staff groups. Continue on a separate sheet if necessary.*

.....

.....

.....

.....

**6. In the NEXT 12 MONTHS, do you expect RECRUITMENT and RETENTION in the following staff groups to ease, remain the same, or get worse?**

Staff Group	RECRUITMENT			RETENTION		
	Ease	Remain the same	Get worse	Ease	Remain the same	Get worse
Academic	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>
Admin/Professional	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>
Technical	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>
Clerical	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>
Manual	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>

**Why do you say that?** .....

.....

.....

.....

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.  
 Please return it to:  
 UCEA Survey c/o IRS Research 18-20 Highbury Place London N5 1QP  
 Or fax it back on 020 7226 8618

## Questionnaire two



# Survey of Staff Recruitment and Retention

The following section of the survey is concerned with staffing numbers and turnover rates in your institution. When describing this, please provide information using the following broad staffing groups:

**Academic, Administrative/Professional, Technical, Clerical and Manual.**

We understand your institution may not operate these same staff categories, but would appreciate it if you could use them when completing the survey. Listed below are examples of these staff categories

<u>Academic</u>	<u>Admin/Prof</u>	<u>Technical</u>	<u>Clerical</u>	<u>Manual</u>
Department heads Lecturers Research assistants	Accountants Personnel staff Managers, Librarians	IT support Lab technicians AV technicians	Admin assistants Secretaries Junior support staff	Catering assistants Grounds staff Cleaners

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.  
Please return it by 12th OCTOBER 2001 to:

UCEA Survey c/o IRS Research 18-20 Highbury Place London N5 1QP  
or Fax it back on 020 7226 8618

**INSTITUTION NAME** .....

**YOUR NAME** ..... **Tel. number** .....

	Academic	Admin./ Prof	Technical	Clerical	Manual	Total (exact caseload)
1. How many <b>permanent staff</b> were employed at your institution on 1 <sup>st</sup> August 2000						
2. How many <b>fixed term staff</b> were employed at your institution on 1 <sup>st</sup> August 2000						
3. How many <b>vacancies</b> occurred between 1 August 2000 – 31 July 2001						
4. How many of those <b>vacancies</b> were <b>unfilled</b> after 3 months						
5. How many <b>permanent staff</b> were recruited between 1 August 2000 - 31 July 2001						
6. How many <b>fixed term staff</b> were recruited between 1 August 2000 - 31 July 2001						
7. How many <b>permanent staff</b> left between 1 August 2000 - 31 July 2001						
8. How many <b>fixed term staff</b> left, before their contract ended, between. 1 August 2000 - 31 July 2001						

***If you do not know the breakdown of your permanent and fixed term staff, please answer the following***

	Academic	Admin./ Prof	Technical	Clerical	Manual	Total (exact caseload)
9. How many <b>permanent and fixed staff</b> were employed at your institution on 1 August 2000						
10. How many <b>permanent and fixed term staff</b> were recruited between 1 August 2000 – 31 July 2001						
11. Total number of <b>permanent &amp; fixed term staff</b> who left between 1 August 2000 – 31 July 2001						

**IF YOU HAVE ANY QUERIES PLEASE CONTACT MICHAEL THEWLIS ON 020 7354 6795**

## Appendix B – Detailed data on regularity of recruitment difficulties

<b>Academic</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>1998</b>
Always	1.1	0.8	0.0	0.0
Usually	3.2	1.6	4.0	0.7
More often than not	13.8	9.3	12.8	5.1
Sometimes	53.2	77.5	69.1	72.5
Rarely	25.5	10.1	12.8	19.6
Never	3.2	0.8	1.3	2.2

<b>Admin/Prof</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>1998</b>
Always	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.0
Usually	2.1	4.7	4.7	2.2
More often than not	21.3	10.9	6.8	6.5
Sometimes	38.3	54.7	62.8	52.2
Rarely	35.1	26.6	21.6	32.6
Never	3.2	3.1	3.4	6.5

<b>Technical</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>1998</b>
Always	1.1	1.6	1.4	0.8
Usually	5.4	3.9	7.4	2.3
More often than not	15.2	15.0	10.1	13.5
Sometimes	32.6	46.5	46.6	50.4
Rarely	39.1	28.3	28.4	25.6
Never	6.5	4.7	6.1	7.5

<b>Clerical</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>1998</b>
Always	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.0
Usually	5.3	7.0	3.4	3.7
More often than not	12.8	5.5	6.7	3.7
Sometimes	25.5	37.5	35.6	31.6
Rarely	44.7	39.1	44.3	44.9
Never	11.7	10.2	10.1	16.2

<b>Manual</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>1998</b>
Always	6.7	4.0	5.4	1.5
Usually	14.4	16.7	10.2	8.2
More often than not	23.3	12.7	15.6	13.4
Sometimes	25.6	31.7	32.0	29.1
Rarely	21.1	26.2	26.5	30.6
Never	8.9	8.7	10.2	17.2

## Detailed data on regularity of retention difficulties

<b>Academic</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>1998</b>
Always	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.0
Usually	2.2	0.0	0.7	0.7
More often than not	5.4	3.9	3.4	1.5
Sometimes	51.6	67.7	62.4	52.6
Rarely	37.6	26.0	31.5	40.7
Never	3.2	1.6	1.0	4.4

<b>Admin/Prof</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>1998</b>
Always	0.0	1.6	0.0	0.0
Usually	4.2	0.0	0.7	2.2
More often than not	12.5	9.4	6.7	5.9
Sometimes	43.8	57.5	58.4	54.1
Rarely	35.4	29.9	31.5	31.9
Never	4.2	1.6	2.7	5.9

<b>Technical</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>1998</b>
Always	0.0	0.8	0.7	0.8
Usually	4.3	4.0	2.7	2.3
More often than not	6.5	9.7	9.4	7.6
Sometimes	27.2	39.5	39.6	38.9
Rarely	52.2	40.3	39.6	39.7
Never	9.8	5.6	8.1	10.7

<b>Clerical</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>1998</b>
Always	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Usually	9.6	3.9	2.7	2.3
More often than not	14.9	8.7	6.7	9.7
Sometimes	18.1	36.2	36.7	29.1
Rarely	51.1	44.9	46.0	43.3
Never	6.4	6.3	8.0	14.9

<b>Manual</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>1998</b>
Always	3.3	1.6	2.7	1.5
Usually	14.4	9.5	4.1	2.3
More often than not	20.0	13.5	17.6	10.6
Sometimes	31.1	34.1	35.8	37.1
Rarely	22.2	29.4	31.1	33.3
Never	8.9	11.9	8.8	15.2

# Case studies

## Recruitment and retention of staff in UK higher education 2001

The logo for irsresearch, featuring a stylized 'i' with a horizontal line above it, followed by the text 'rsresearch' in a lowercase, sans-serif font.

Jennifer Hurstfield  
and Fiona Neathey



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## Executive summary

This report is based on an analysis of interviews and other data collected in a sample of 14 higher education institutions. The institutions were selected to achieve a spread by region and type.

This research was conducted during the same period as the annual survey of recruitment and retention of staff in higher education, also by IRS Research.

This year's survey findings indicate that recruitment difficulties are continuing to worsen for most institutions in certain subject and support staff areas, and a minority of institutions are experiencing recruitment and retention problems across all staff categories.

Among academic staff, the survey indicates particular problems in recruiting academic staff in computing/IT, business-related areas, engineering, biological sciences, professions allied to medicine (PAMs) and education. Appointment to lecturer posts and to senior academic posts was particularly difficult in several institutions.

Among support staff, problems were reported recruiting managerial staff. But the most acute difficulties were found in recruiting and retaining non-managerial, manual, technical and clerical staff.

Responses to the survey also indicated that higher pay levels offered by the private sector were viewed as a key factor in attracting and retaining support staff and some groups of academic staff, particularly in law, IT and engineering. In some subject areas, higher salaries in the public sector, for example in health and education, were affecting recruitment to HE institutions.

The findings from this qualitative research project, set out below, support the general conclusions of the survey and provide a more detailed picture of the nature, causes and impact of recruitment and retention difficulties in HE institutions.

## Key findings of the case study research

### Overview of recruitment and retention difficulties

- All the institutions were experiencing recruitment difficulties in recruiting academic staff in one or more of the following areas: business-related areas (including law and accountancy), computing/IT, engineering, health professions and mathematics. There were also difficulties in other areas, including education.
- There was evidence of a decline in the number of applicants to academic posts. Data from particular shortage disciplines also indicated a decline in the quality of applicant pools, leading in some cases to the inability to appoint.
- Appointment to both lecturer posts and to senior academic posts is seen as particularly problematic by a number of institutions.
- Support staff recruitment and retention problems have emerged as significantly more critical issues for a number of institutions in the last two years.
- Support staff shortages are found in both white collar and manual areas. In the white collar areas a key concern is recruitment to professional posts in, for example, IT and finance. Some institutions reported difficulties recruiting estates managers, and professionally qualified staff such as building surveyors. However, in some institutions, filling junior clerical posts is proving most difficult.

- 
- In the manual areas, recruitment difficulties are particularly affecting cleaning staff and skilled manual posts such as electricians.
  - Retention difficulties for academic staff were found to be much less serious than the recruitment problems. The main area in which academic retention difficulties were cited was computing, followed by other business-related areas.
  - Several support functions were cited as giving rise to serious concerns regarding retention. IT/technical support staff and manual staff were seen as particularly difficult to retain, followed by staff in general administration and personnel functions.

### **Reasons for recruitment and retention difficulties**

- The four main factors identified as contributing to difficulties in recruiting academic staff were: remuneration, shortage of qualified candidates, location-related reasons, and competition from other employers.
- Low pay levels in comparison to private sector competitors remain the main reason given by institutions for difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff in both academic and support roles. However, workload seems to be having an increasing impact on staff retention.
- Data from focus group discussions with new academic entrants in six institutions indicate that pay and administrative workload issues are key factors in affecting decisions to stay within or leave the sector. New entrants are attracted to academic work for reasons such as autonomy, flexibility, and the content of the work itself. However, only just under half the new entrants were clear that they would still be in the HE sector in five years' time, and they were aware of their market value to employers outside the sector.

### **Recruitment strategies**

- Strategies being used by institutions to address academic recruitment difficulties include: flexibility in starting pay arrangements; and non-pay benefits such as more time for research and study leave. In support areas, some institutions have introduced market supplements to help them to compete with other employers. A number of English institutions are using funding under the HEFCE's rewarding and developing staff initiative to review remuneration for academic and/or non-academic staff.
- Other recruitment strategies include the use of part-time contracts for staff who wish to maintain a career in their non-HE profession; and changes to recruitment advertising.

### **Impact of recruitment and retention difficulties**

- Heads of human resources (HR) seemed more aware than was the case two years ago of the impact of recruitment and retention problems on the effective functioning of their institution.
- Some institutions were feeling the impact of staff recruitment difficulties on one or more of the following: the level of student intake; the quality of courses that they can deliver; and their capacity to undertake research.
- In some academic shortage areas – particularly business-related areas, engineering, mathematics and computer science – institutions are relying heavily on recruitment from overseas to fill teaching posts. While many of these appointments are of high intellectual calibre, a number of institutions have concerns about the impact of poorly spoken English on teaching quality.

- 
- Shortages of support staff are also affecting the ability of some institutions to conduct their core activities. HR heads spoke of the disruption of support services to academic staff and students and the negative impact on the ability to conduct and complete research.
  - Across the board, existing staff are being placed under further pressure as a result of recruitment and/or retention problems. In both academic and support areas staff are facing increasing workloads as a result of recruitment problems. This is manifested in higher stress levels and/or lack of capacity to deliver parts of the job, such as course development and research.

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## 1: Introduction

In July 2001, IRS Research was commissioned by the HEFCE, SCOP, UCEA and UUK to conduct a research project on the recruitment and retention of staff in higher education institutions. The aim was to provide an up-to-date picture of the extent of recruitment and/or retention difficulties faced by UK HE institutions and the impact of any difficulties on the ability of these institutions to deliver 'world-class higher education which the UK needs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century' (Bett Report,<sup>1</sup> 1999).

The study involved 14 case studies of institutions, and built upon the findings of the previous research project, conducted by IRS Research in 1999.<sup>2</sup> This earlier study indicated that particular departments and support functions were facing recruitment and retention difficulties, and identified factors that were contributing to these difficulties. It also explored the impact of these difficulties on the effective functioning of the institutions, and some of the strategies being used to address the problems.

By returning to a sample of institutions two years later, it has been possible to explore the extent to which recruitment and retention difficulties appear to have intensified or diminished during the period. In addition it has enabled the more systematic exploration of issues which emerged as important during the course of the earlier study. The 14 institutions consist of eight that were part of the 1999 study plus six additional ones.

The current project concentrated on the following areas:

- Identification of the academic departments and support functions facing particular recruitment and/or retention problems and the nature of these problems.
- Identification of recruitment and/or retention difficulties in respect of particular categories of staff (including particular grades/levels of staff and those requiring professional expertise).
- Difficulties experienced and anticipated because of the age distribution of current staff (overall and in particular subject areas).
- Difficulties in attracting an adequate field of sufficiently qualified applicants for new/vacant posts; how these difficulties have been/are to be handled; and the consequences of the difficulties.
- The extent to which attracting adequate fields of suitably qualified candidates is dependent on applications from non-UK candidates.
- Identification, where possible, of the extent to which current pay, conditions of service, likely career prospects, and other factors underlie recruitment and retention difficulties.
- Exploration of mobility within the sector (turnover of key staff, movement regionally/nationally, between different types of HE institution, and into and out of the sector).
- The impact of recruitment and retention problems on the ability of institutions to innovate and on the quality of teaching and research.
- Strategies utilised by institutions in responding to current recruitment and retention problems.

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<sup>1</sup> Independent Review of Higher Education Pay and Conditions, 1999, The Stationery Office.

<sup>2</sup> Recruitment and retention in UK higher education: case studies. An independent report by IRS Research, CVCP, February 2000.

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## 2: Methodology

The research was carried out in 14 institutions. Selection was designed to achieve a spread of institutions by type and size, with coverage of Scotland, Wales and the English regions. Of the 14, two were in Scotland, two in Wales, and the remaining ten in England. Six were pre-1992 or 'old' universities, five post-1992 or 'new' universities, and three were HE colleges.

In each institution four interviews were conducted: one with a senior human resources (HR) professional to provide an overview of staff recruitment and retention issues across the institution; two interviews with academic heads of department (HoD); and one with the head of a support function.

In 1999, institutions were asked to select the departments which they perceived as experiencing the most severe recruitment and/or retention problems. For this study, five academic subject areas were selected along with two support staff areas in which widespread recruitment and retention difficulties had been identified across the sector via the annual recruitment and retention survey.

The following academic departments/faculties and support staff groups were selected for the study:

### *Academic departments/faculties*

- Business-related subjects (including accountancy, economics and law)
- Computing/IT
- Engineering
- Health professions (excluding medicine and dentistry, because of a recent survey by the Council of Heads of Medical Schools)
- Mathematics

### *Support staff groups*

- Accountancy/finance staff
- Manual workers.

In each of the participating institutions, one academic department and one support staff group from the above lists was allocated by IRS Research. Each institution itself identified a second academic department that was critical in terms of its importance within the institution. This could be another of the five core areas already identified, or a different discipline.

The core areas were allocated by IRS Research on the basis of relative size (in terms of numbers of staff and students). Some institutions also selected their chosen second department from within those areas. The resulting distribution is shown in Table 1. The other subject areas nominated by institutions are shown in Table 2.

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**Table 1 – Representation of core subject areas**

Subject area	Allocated	Chosen	Total
Business-related areas including accountancy and law	3	5	8
Computing and IT	*3	1	4
Engineering	3	1	4
Health	3	2	5
Mathematics	3	-	3

Notes: \* One combined with mathematics

**Table 2 – Other subject areas**

Subject area	Total
Education	2
Open and distance learning	1
Media	1
Biological sciences	1

The support staff area of either finance or manual staff was randomly distributed across the sample of institutions, with the number of interviews evenly split between the two areas. However, the majority of those who were asked to provide a manager of manual staff to be interviewed chose to focus on the estates function. While this function includes a number of manual workers, it also covers a wide range of non-manual staff.

### Data collection

In order to ensure that all the interviewees provided responses based on their views of recent recruitment and retention experience, both HR managers and the heads of department were sent a letter in advance specifying the issues to be covered in the forthcoming interview and requesting particular information.

In the case of HR managers, information on recruitment exercises across the whole institution in the past 12 months was requested. Individual heads of department were asked to provide detailed data on recruitment exercises in their department over the previous 12 months. This included information on the number and quality of applications received, the number of candidates interviewed, and the number of posts requiring re-advertisement. The tight timetable set out for the research meant that some HR managers and HoDs were unable to provide the full range of data requested.

### Focus groups

To explore the views of new entrants to the profession, focus groups of staff in their first academic post were conducted. The aim of these groups was to explore the factors which initially attracted participants to an academic career; the factors which would encourage them to stay or leave; and their views on any recruitment or retention problems within their own institution.

The intention was to hold one focus group in eight of the 14 institutions. However, the timing of the research in September and early October meant that several institutions were unable to contact academic staff and organise a group. Six institutions successfully organised a group. The findings are presented in Chapter 12.

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### **3: Recruitment difficulties – institutional overviews**

The interviews with a senior HR manager in each of the 14 institutions covered the following issues:

- Recruitment and retention issues in the institution
- Areas of difficulty and the reasons for these problems
- Strategies being used to address these problems
- The perceived impact of any difficulties on the achievement of current and future institutional objectives.

#### **Measures of recruitment difficulty**

The methods by which institutions assess recruitment difficulty varied between institutions. Not all institutions keep central data and some rely on departmental monitoring reports. This reflects the extent to which the central HR function is involved in monitoring the recruitment exercises. In some cases it appeared that data were collected centrally but the resources were not available to analyse them in detail.

The main indicators of difficulty included the number of applicants; the quality of the pool of applicants and appointments; and failure to appoint and re-advertisements.

#### **The number of applicants**

The notion of what constituted a 'small' number of applicants differed between institutions and also between subject areas. In some institutions, trends in the number of applicants were viewed as a reliable indicator of difficulties.

An old university measured the average number of applicants per post. Its data showed that over a four-year period the average number of applicants for academic posts fell by a third. In academic-related administration posts there had been a decline of 25 per cent in the past 12 months.

For 60 positions an HE college attracted over 900 applications, an average of around 15 applications per position. However, for almost half of all positions, the institution received fewer than ten applications. On average this institution was able to shortlist four candidates per position. However, in five cases, the institution could not shortlist any applicants. In a further 25 cases, the institution shortlisted four or fewer applicants. Of these 25 positions, ten were for academic jobs, and 15 were for administrative and clerical positions.

#### **The quality of the pool of applicants and appointments**

In general, HoDs had more information on the quality of both applicants and appointments than the HR heads. The HoD evidence is discussed in Chapter 10. However, some examples were provided, by the HR heads, of institutions struggling to find sufficient qualified candidates to make a shortlist.

The HR head in an old university said there was evidence of a shortage of appointable candidates. It was appointing those who only just met the basic requirements in shortage subjects.

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## Failure to appoint and re-advertisements

Several institutions gave examples of failure to appoint.

In the last 12 months, an old university had conducted over 1,500 recruitment exercises. The institution was unable to fill one in ten of these positions, despite receiving, on average, 20 applications for each academic position advertised. However, support staff vacancies, which accounted for less than half of all the institution's vacancies, only managed to attract an average of ten applications per position. Technical positions were the most difficult to fill, with over one-third remaining unfilled after a recruitment exercise. A quarter of clerical positions were not filled, and one in five academic posts were not filled after an initial recruitment exercise. Subjects which were the most difficult to recruit to were the natural and physical sciences.

In some cases the institution had to re-advertise a post.

An HE college had 75 academic vacancies during the past 12 months. Nine of these (12 per cent) had to be re-advertised. The re-advertisements occurred in the following subject areas: social science, education, mathematics and IT, nursing, occupational therapy, PE and sports science, and health care. In contrast less than 3 per cent of support staff vacancies had to be re-advertised: these were for staff in catering, and in the computer and IT systems centre.

In some cases the institution was not able to make an appointment despite re-advertising. Examples were given, in areas such as mathematics and biosciences, of posts being left vacant after failure to recruit, even after re-advertisement.

## Academic staff

According to the HR managers, all the institutions were experiencing difficulties in recruiting academic staff in some or all of the five core areas: business-related areas, computing/IT, engineering, health professions, and mathematics. Problems in computer science were mentioned by all 14 institutions. Eight of the respondents highlighted difficulties in business-related areas, particularly accountancy. Seven mentioned difficulties in engineering, where difficulties in recruiting specialists such as computer-related engineers were singled out for comment. Not all the participating institutions offered courses for health professionals, but of the 11 that did, nine were experiencing difficulties. Finally, in mathematics, five institutions were experiencing difficulties.

Several other academic areas were identified by HR managers as having problems. Areas mentioned by more than one institution included biological sciences, education, sports science and chemistry.

Interviewees were asked whether the difficulties were affecting all categories of academic staff or only particular grades. Responses varied according to discipline, but generally the most severe problems were being experienced at the more senior levels, particularly for professors, principal lecturers and heads of department. One HE college said that recruitment became more difficult with seniority. However, two old universities said that recruitment was equally difficult at all levels, while a third said this was the case specifically in the computing department. Four institutions mentioned particular problems recruiting junior academic staff.

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## Support staff

HR managers were asked if they were experiencing difficulties recruiting to any of the following six support functions:

- Accountancy and finance
- IT/technical support
- Secretarial and clerical support
- Manual staff
- Administration and personnel
- Technicians.

Of the 14 institutions, nine were experiencing difficulties in recruiting finance staff. One new university said that recruitment was no longer a problem since market supplements had been introduced, while another new university said that there was still a problem but that it was less severe since the introduction of market supplements. Institutions were split between those that were experiencing problems recruiting professional finance staff and those that emphasised difficulties at the more junior clerical level.

Difficulties recruiting IT staff were mentioned by eight institutions and most stressed the severity of these problems. Of the eight institutions that had difficulties recruiting secretarial and clerical staff, two identified particular problems with recruiting at PA level, while the remainder saw their problem as concentrated at the lower grades. Seven institutions were experiencing problems recruiting to administrative and personnel posts, with higher grade professional posts being particularly problematic.

Nine institutions had difficulties recruiting manual staff, with catering, cleaning and maintenance staff being frequently mentioned. The recruitment of technicians was regarded as difficult in six institutions, especially the recruitment of the more skilled or specialised technicians.

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## 4: Reasons for recruitment difficulties

The HR managers were asked to identify the reasons for any recruitment difficulties they were experiencing and whether the same or different factors affected academic staff and support staff.

### Academic staff

A wide range of factors was identified as contributing to difficulties in recruiting academic staff. However four key factors stand out as being most frequently mentioned: shortage of qualified candidates; location-related factors; competition from other employers; and remuneration.

### Shortage of qualified candidates

A national shortage of qualified candidates was widely cited by all types of institutions as a key factor affecting recruitment in health, education, and business-related areas.

### Location

Location was mentioned as both a positive and a negative factor, depending on the institution. The majority (eight) mentioned it as a negative factor. In particular, the cost of housing locally was seen as a deterrent to prospective job applicants, especially by HR managers in institutions in or near London, as well as in some other cities. However, the problems associated with housing and other living costs were seen as closely linked to remuneration levels being too low. Those who mentioned the positive aspects of location pointed to aspects such as the attractiveness of the area, and/or its proximity to a city.

### Remuneration

Remuneration was regarded as being a very important factor in recruitment difficulties by ten of the 14 institutions.

The level of pay was seen by one old university as a 'big problem' affecting the recruitment of junior academic staff.

A new university said that the severe problems in recruiting health professionals had resulted in having to pay higher NHS rates on occasion. Across most of its PAMs courses this institution is now paying lecturers the higher NHS rates, combined with academic terms and conditions which are more generous than the NHS ones.

An HE college said that it was having to match salary levels in the health and schools sectors in order to recruit academic staff, and this was resulting in pressure on the paybill.

### Competition from other employers

Competition from other employers was widely cited in conjunction with remuneration and location issues. The numbers mentioning competition from other HE institutions and from non-HE sector employers were similar. However, competition outside the HE sector from employers offering higher remuneration was specifically mentioned as a major factor in particular subject areas such as computing, law, business-related subjects, health, economics as well as newer areas such as media studies.

For colleges specialising in teacher education, the rise in school teachers' salaries had made it more difficult for colleges to recruit teachers into academia.

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## **Workload**

In addition to these four key factors, five HR managers mentioned workload as negatively affecting recruitment, and four said that perceived long hours had a negative impact.

An HR manager in an old university said: 'There has been a transformation in academic work from less pay [than offered by competitors] and a reasonable workload to less pay and a heavier workload.'

The use of short-term contracts did not emerge as a significant factor, as the majority of institutions appeared to have made recent efforts to reduce the number used. Several said that, with the exception of contract-linked research staff, they aimed to put all staff on permanent contracts. An old university and an HE college where short-term contracts are still in use said that they were concerned that these contracts might act as a deterrent to recruitment.

## **Support staff**

The following three factors were cited by significant proportions of interviewees as affecting recruitment of support staff: remuneration (cited by nine institutions), competition from other employers (eight), and shortage of qualified candidates (seven).

The remuneration package was most frequently mentioned. One old university said that it was a 'substantial factor' as it paid less than other competitors in both the private and public sectors. The relatively high pay that IT staff and accountants can command in the private sector was mentioned, as well as the higher salaries for professional finance staff in other parts of the public sector. But at the lower-paid levels, mention was made of competition for manual staff from the service sector (retail, hotels and catering) as well as the NHS. An old university said that catering staff could earn more in the local hotels. A college said that trades people could earn more by being self-employed.

The scale of the difficulties affecting support staff was reflected in the fact that 12 institutions saw their major competitors for these staff as being outside the HE sector, and said that this competition was affecting all levels of staff from junior to senior professionals. Five institutions also referred to competition from within the local HE labour market.

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## 5: Retention difficulties

In the previous research in 1999, retention problems were seen by HR heads as less serious than recruitment problems. Although the current research has found a broadly similar picture, in certain areas retention problems, particularly amongst support staff, have increased.

### Indicators of retention problems

The measurement of any retention difficulties is largely based upon the analysis of staff turnover rates. All institutions collected staff turnover data, but the extent to which these data were analysed according to department and grade varied.

In addition to turnover rates, some HR heads stressed that retention difficulties were not just a question of numbers. The loss of individual high calibre staff, for example professors or heads of research centres, could have a disproportionately large impact. As one HR head in an old university said: 'We are losing all our research stars.'

### Academic staff

The main area in which the severe retention problems were cited was computing (eight institutions), followed by business-related areas (five institutions). In business-related areas, the subjects that were particularly problematic were accountancy, law and economics. Four institutions cited retention problems in engineering, particularly in electronic or computer-related areas, and four mentioned health studies.

The main reasons given for retention difficulties were competition from other employers and remuneration. Only one of the case study institutions said that exit interviews were conducted by departments, and only a few HR heads had any central data on the destinations of leavers. However, around half the institutions said the main destination of academic leavers was outside the HE sector, while just under half said that they lost people to other HE institutions.

### Support staff

Several support areas were cited by HR heads as experiencing serious retention problems. Ten institutions mentioned manual staff, eight IT/technical support, and seven said there were problems in administration and personnel. Eight institutions cited difficulties retaining finance staff, and an additional one was expecting problems in the near future. Retention of secretarial and clerical staff was problematic in four institutions, with a fifth anticipating problems in the future. A similar number cited difficulties retaining technicians.

The two major reasons for these difficulties were the level of remuneration (cited by eight institutions) and competition from other employers (seven). In addition, five mentioned lack of promotion opportunities. One other factor affecting retention, cited by three institutions, was that of hours of work - in particular the heavy workload for administration staff.

Nine institutions said that they were losing support staff to employers outside the HE sector, both in the private sector (finance, IT companies, services) and the public sector (local government, NHS). Only four thought that staff were leaving to go to other institutions within the HE sector, and these staff appeared to be primarily graduates and professional staff.

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## 6: Destinations of leavers

Institutions were asked to provide information on the destinations of both academic and support staff who had left during the past 12 months. Data were requested at both institutional and departmental level. Most institutions were unable to provide aggregate information. However the personal knowledge of HoDs enabled them to provide a fuller picture. Key points from this analysis are:

- A similar proportion of staff has left HE to go into employment elsewhere as has stayed within the sector
- Business-related areas and engineering are particularly vulnerable to losing staff to other sectors
- Some institutions have seen a high proportion of their staff retire in the last year
- Analysis of the age structures of departments shows considerable variation, with the proportion of staff set to retire in the next five years ranging from under 10 per cent to over 25 per cent.

### Aggregate data from institutions

Only three of the 14 institutions (two old universities and one HE college) were able to provide aggregate data on the destinations of leavers. It appears that most institutions either do not collect this information, or they collect it but do not have the resources to analyse it. The following information was provided by the three institutions.

Old university. For almost two-thirds of leavers the institution had no information on their destinations. Overall, 15 per cent were known to have joined other HE or research institutions, and 5 per cent took up posts in the private sector. A further 11 per cent had retired and 3 per cent had died. However, these data were not broken down by academic and support staff.

Old university. Over 800 staff had left the institution in the previous 12 months. In 15 per cent of cases there was no information on their destination. Almost one in five took up a post in another higher education, research or education institution; 9 per cent went to work in the public sector; and 9 per cent went to the private sector. Seventeen per cent had retired, and nearly 20 per cent had left to continue their education. A further 10 per cent were not in regular employment, and 2 per cent were self-employed.

HE college. Over 80 staff had left in a six-month period. The institution did not know their destinations in more than 40 per cent of cases. Overall, around 15 per cent of staff left for other HE institutions and a similar proportion retired. A slightly smaller proportion left to take up positions in the public sector. However, this college did provide separate data for academic and support staff. These showed that a high proportion of academic leavers, around one-third, retired; another third left to join other HE institutions; and nearly one-fifth went elsewhere in the public sector. Among support staff, less than 10 per cent moved to other public sector organisations; nearly 5 per cent joined another HE institution; and the same proportion left to work in the private sector; 8 per cent had retired and 2 per cent were self-employed. In 70 per cent of cases the institution did not have data on the destination of support staff leavers.

In several institutions HR managers said that individual departments held the most detailed information, and HoDs tended to know the destinations of their leavers.

### Data from heads of academic departments

Heads of department were asked to supply information on the destinations of staff who had left their department during the past 12 months. Table 3 summarises data on the destinations of 98 academics in identified shortage areas who had left a post in the case study institutions during the

12 months prior to this research. The heads of 18 out of 28 departments/faculties were able to supply this data. In a further three departments there had been no resignations over the reference period. Seven departmental heads were not able to provide the requested information.

**Table 3 – Destination of academic leavers (data from heads of department)**

Subject	Destination					Total
	Retirement	Other UK HEI	Overseas HEI	Out of HE	Other/ not known	
Biological sciences	-	-	-	1	-	1
Business-related subjects	-	11	1	11	1	24
<i>Of which:</i> <i>Law</i>		5		5	2	12
<i>Accounting/finance</i>		1		4		5
Computing/ IT	2	3	1	-	-	6
Education	1	3	-	2	2	8
Engineering	7	2	-	4	-	13
Health studies	12	6	-	5	2	25
Mathematics	6	3	-	2	3	14
Media	-	1	-	3	3	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>98</b>

As Table 3 indicates, in some academic disciplines – notably mathematics, health studies and engineering – the largest numbers of leavers went into retirement. This included an engineering department in a new university where six members of staff retired early.

In engineering and business-related subjects, such as accountancy and law, leavers were more likely to go to a job outside HE than to move to a post in another HE institution. For example, the law department of a new university had seen five lecturers leave over the past year. Three of these went into private practice and two went to work in specialist private sector colleges offering legal training. In an old university four members of the accountancy department left, and of these three went into private practice.

These more detailed data for academic staff indicate that overall nearly one-third were retiring, nearly one-third were moving elsewhere in HE, and nearly one-third were moving out of HE altogether.

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## **7: Strategies for addressing recruitment difficulties**

HR heads were asked what initiatives their institutions were taking to address recruitment difficulties, including whether they were taking any measures with funding under the HEFCE's initiative for rewarding and developing staff.

### **Academic staff initiatives**

The following areas are ranked in order of the number of institutions undertaking particular initiatives:

- Addressing the remuneration package (10 institutions)
- Improving recruitment advertising (7)
- Offering part-time contracts (7)
- Enhancing non-pay rewards (6)
- Recruiting staff from abroad (5).

### **The remuneration package**

This area clearly was seen as a key one, although the national pay scales were seen as offering limited room for manoeuvre. However, one new university had introduced a new contract in which the minimum starting salary for academic staff has been increased to £21,000, and the pay scale thereby reduced by five points. Other steps being taken included: advertising posts across two grades (eg lecturer/senior lecturer) in shortage areas. Two old universities said that they were exploring ways of introducing merit/performance-related pay.

### **Improving recruitment advertising**

Initiatives included the use of on-line recruitment, and looking at better ways of communicating the range of benefits offered by HE employers.

### **Recruiting staff from abroad**

Use of this strategy has increased significantly since 1999. This does not refer to attempts to attract an identified eminent senior academic with a high research profile, but to recruiting lecturers from other countries, including Eastern Europe, as a means to fill gaps in areas experiencing problems. Three old, and two new, universities indicated that they had used this strategy, and one further old university, while not defining it as a 'strategy', had nevertheless recruited a large number of staff from abroad in disciplines such as mathematics and IT. In one new university the number of academic staff from abroad being processed for work permits had trebled in the last 12 months. The impact of this strategy on the perceived quality of teaching in some areas is considered in a later chapter.

### **Part-time contracts**

One strategy that was mentioned as being very successful by a few institutions was that of offering part-time contracts. However, this was seen as applicable in only a limited number of areas such as health studies, where appointments can be held in conjunction with work within the NHS; and in media, art and design where prospective HE staff also wanted the opportunity to work on a freelance basis.

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## **Measures funded under the HEFCE initiative for rewarding and developing staff**

The HR initiative applies solely to institutions in England. Informants in case study institutions in Wales and Scotland expressed concern at their exclusion from equivalent earmarked funds.

Below are some of the measures being taken to assist with recruitment under the HEFCE initiative:

- Wider payment of market supplements
- Additional administrative support for academic staff
- Reviewing fast-track progression schemes
- Targeting recruitment advertising at under-represented groups, particularly ethnic minorities
- Consideration of performance-related pay
- Enhancement of relocation packages
- Improvements in family-friendly policies
- Increased provision of staff development opportunities.

## **Support staff initiatives**

The key area being addressed here is that of the remuneration package. Three institutions said that they had already introduced market supplements and another is currently reviewing their use.

The other focus was on improving recruitment advertising, targeting it at under-represented groups and providing more assistance for manual workers with the application process.

## **Measures funded under the HEFCE initiative**

Fewer institutions identified measures funded through this initiative to recruit support staff. Those that were mentioned included the following:

- Payment of market supplements
- Conducting job evaluation exercises
- Payment of an IT loyalty bonus
- Management training for supervisors and line managers
- IT training for support staff to improve the job content
- Provision of staff development opportunities.

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## **8: Strategies for addressing retention difficulties**

### **Academic staff**

Generally, the retention of academic staff was not perceived as being such a serious problem as that of recruitment. As a result, fewer specific measures were cited by HR heads as being in place to address retention issues. There was a widespread view that, once staff were in post, some of the factors that had been important in affecting recruitment, such as location, were no longer significant in determining whether or not people stayed.

Five institutions were taking steps to enhance the remuneration package. Two institutions – one college and one new university – said that they would try to match salaries if someone had an offer from another HE institution.

In addition to remuneration, the main focus appeared to be on the issue of career progression. A few institutions said that they applied a 'flexible' or 'fast-track' approach to promotion to retain key people. One new university said that it was seeking to develop alternative career routes leading to the principal lecturer scale to reward excellence in teaching or entrepreneurship. One HE college said that it was planning to introduce a scheme for additional payments, above the top of the lecturing scale, for people who would not otherwise justify promotion but who had made a significant contribution to teaching and student-related administration.

### **Support staff**

For support staff, the major focus was on enhancing the remuneration package, mentioned by over half the HR heads. Market supplements, loyalty bonuses, and pay reviews were all mentioned. One old university was conducting a review of manual staff and looking at enhancing basic pay levels by consolidating allowances.

The second area mentioned was that of enhancing non-pay rewards and improving staff development opportunities. This included funding for staff to undertake university courses, opportunities for secondments, and IT training.

### **Measures funded under the HEFCE initiative**

The initiatives cited by institutions for retention were largely the same as those described in the previous chapter to boost recruitment. This is because measures related to remuneration are seen as having an impact on both recruitment and retention. The main distinctive initiatives in addressing retention are in the area of staff progression, with a few institutions having a specific focus on improving staff development opportunities for both academic and support staff.

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## 9: Trends over two years

Of the 14 institutions, eight had participated in the earlier study in 1999. The HR heads at these institutions were asked whether they thought that recruitment and retention difficulties had increased, decreased or stayed the same over the two-year period.

Of the eight, seven thought recruitment difficulties had increased in some areas. Two specifically cited academic disciplines, while the others mentioned both academic and support staff. Four institutions said that some of the difficulties had stayed the same, but three of those still specified particular areas in which the problems had got worse.

With respect to retention, two thought the difficulties in retaining academic staff had stayed the same, but all eight thought some difficulties had increased. Five of these specifically mentioned some categories of support staff.

In contrast, one new university said that problems recruiting finance staff had decreased, and another new university had fewer problems either recruiting or retaining technical staff, since the introduction of market supplements.

Compared with two years ago, HR heads appeared to have greater knowledge of, and concern about, the impact of recruitment and retention difficulties on the ability of the institutions to carry out their activities. If there is one change that stands out from two years ago, it is that support staff difficulties are now seen as more serious than before, and are viewed as having a significant impact on the academic activities of the institutions.

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## 10: Recruitment and retention difficulties in academic departments

As part of this research project, two heads of academic departments and one head of a support function were interviewed in each institution. All the interviews involved the completion of a data sheet about recent recruitment exercises. However, it should be noted that departments were asked only to provide details on up to four recruitment exercises conducted in the last 12 months. In some cases departments had had a considerably larger number of vacancies to fill over that period. The findings in this chapter are based on the interviews with the HoDs and the analysis of the recruitment exercises in each department.

Some key findings of this chapter are:

- Recruitment difficulties are more common than retention difficulties, but the majority of HoDs interviewed were experiencing problems in both areas.
- Analysis of the recruitment exercises indicates that a high proportion in some subject areas were either resulting in an unfilled post; or in the appointment of a member of staff who did not fulfil all the requirements of the post. These included: accountancy/finance (68 per cent); computing/IT (46 per cent); and mathematics (37 per cent).
- The main reason for recruitment and retention difficulties given by HoDs across all areas was the HE remuneration package compared with that of labour market competitors.
- Other factors contributing to recruitment problems were seen as unwillingness of the most able students to make the sacrifices involved in undertaking a PhD, and problems with research funding.
- Reasons cited for retention problems included volume of work; the balance between teaching, research and administration; and the lack of promotion opportunities.
- Major strategies used by HoDs to address problems included making use of existing pay flexibilities; use of market supplements; encouraging secondments from health and education sectors; job redesign; and recruitment from abroad (especially in computing, IT and mathematics).

Recruitment and retention issues and the outcomes of recruitment exercises are analysed in the following departments/divisions:

- Business-related areas
  - Accountancy and finance
  - Law
  - Other areas including marketing and HR management
- Engineering
- Computing and IT
- Health
- Mathematics
- Education
- Biological sciences
- Media.

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## Business-related areas

Business-related subjects include management studies, economics, accountancy and law. However, law departments are sometimes separate departments or faculties and sometimes integrated within business studies or social science faculties. Eight HoDs were interviewed, of whom two were the heads of separate law departments.

All but one of the HoDs said that they were experiencing difficulties in recruiting. Both the quality and size of their applicant pools were considered to be serious problems.

Within business-related areas, accountancy was the hardest specialism to recruit. The key factor seen as explaining these recruitment difficulties was the shortage of qualified accountants prepared to enter an academic career given the higher level of remuneration available outside the HE sector.

In an old university experiencing 'very severe difficulties', the head of accounting said that universities were expecting graduates to get an MA followed by a PhD and research experience before securing an academic post. By the time they had done that they were in their thirties and could not be expected to work at a university for £22,000.

In a new university the shortage of qualified candidates for academic accountancy posts was attributed to 'the salaries offered when compared with private practice'.

The level of academic remuneration was generally seen as a major factor in all business-related areas. The private sector was a major competitor offering higher salaries.

The HoD in an old university said that starting salaries are the most important factor, particularly for graduates and PhD students. Once people left the HE sector for higher salaries in the private sector they seldom go back to considering academic jobs at all.

In one faculty in an old university, the head highlighted the particular problems of attracting economics graduates. The head considered that UK students were not continuing to do doctorates in economics because the career structure and remuneration were so poor. 'After a two-year MA, a graduate can earn more in the private sector. Fewer graduates think about an academic career now.'

In one of the law departments, the HoD said that it was difficult to get the most able graduates with a first class degree into academia. 'This used to be the obvious choice, but now when they have completed their training, they can get £30,000 in a major law firm as compared to £19,000 as a lecturer. One junior lecturer whom we had arranged to move from half-way up the A scale to the top of the B scale was headhunted by two different law firms in London and started on £40,000. Within a year he was earning £70,000.'

The four old universities, but not the two new universities or HE colleges, were also facing retention difficulties. Those who left tended either to move to other HE institutions for promotion, or to leave the HE sector for private practice.

Another concern mentioned by half the HoDs, again those in the old universities, was that workload pressures were affecting recruitment. One HoD in an old university said that the hours of work and workload had increased beyond all recognition.

Two HoDs said that they were trying to address the problem of filling academic vacancies by looking at ways of enhancing the remuneration package, through increased use of flexibility and by accelerating the promotion timetable.

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## Analysis of recruitment exercises in business-related areas

In this analysis data are included from general business departments that incorporate accountancy, finance, and law, as well as from specialist departments in these areas. In eight institutions, data were provided on recruitment exercises for a total of 30 posts. Twelve of these posts were in law; eight were in accountancy or finance; and ten were in other business subjects such as marketing or human resource management, or were research posts in a non-specified subject area. The following analysis supports the conclusion that the most consistent problems were found in accountancy and finance, where there was a high proportion of unfilled or inadequately filled posts.

### *Accountancy and finance*

Data were supplied on recruitment to a total of eight lecturing posts in four institutions. In only one case was the field described as 'reasonable'. In the remaining cases the pool of applicants was poor. For example, although one college had 37 applicants for three lecturing posts, very few of these had previous HE experience and it was only possible to fill 1.5 posts.

An old university had advertised a lecturer/senior lecturer post in accounting and a similar post in finance. For the first post there were three applicants, none of whom met the requirements of the post; for the second only one of seven applicants met the job criteria in full. In both cases the pools included applicants for whom English was not a first language and the standard of their English was of concern to the HoD.

Another old university had 45 applicants for a finance lectureship. Despite the number of applicants, it was difficult to produce a shortlist. Three applicants were eventually shortlisted, but two of these withdrew and no appointment was made.

Of the eight accountancy and finance posts advertised, no appointment was made for 3.5 positions. In another case the successful candidate withdrew following their appointment. In 2.5 of the remaining posts the appointed candidate was seen as fully meeting the requirements of the post, but in the case of the eighth post the person appointed had 'major gaps in experience'. Therefore in 5.5 of the eight posts advertised, the recruitment exercises resulted in an unsatisfactory outcome for the institution concerned.

### *Law*

Data were provided on recruitment exercises for a total of 12 posts in three institutions. One of these was a readership, two were chairs and nine were lectureships. In six cases HoDs specified that the pool was a good one. However, for five other posts (all lectureships) the pool was poor.

Seven of the ten applicants for a senior lectureship in law at an HE college were described by the head of department as 'lacking HE experience'.

The HoD in an old university said of the 16 applicants for a lectureship in commercial law: 'They were mainly academics without appropriate publications and/or experience, or practitioners who were not successful in private practice and who had no academic credentials.'

At a new university the field for a senior academic post in law was seen as poor by the HoD. He reported that there were very few applicants. The post was offered to 'the only feasible' candidate, who then turned down the position. The post was re-advertised, but the six applicants who subsequently applied 'did not have the experience or seniority that would make you completely confident'. However, an appointment was made.

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An appointment was made to all 12 of the law posts, but in the cases of three lecturing posts (one-third of all the lectureships) the person specification was not seen to be fully met by the appointed candidate, for example because they did not have the appropriate teaching experience.

### *Other business-related areas*

Four institutions provided information on recruitment to a total of ten posts in other business-related areas. These included two lectureships and a chair in marketing and two lectureships in human resource management. One post was a professorship in a public sector management area, and the remaining four posts were research positions. In one case the recruitment process had not been completed at the time of the research. In eight of the ten cases the HoDs commented on the pool of applicants: in five the applicant pool was seen as adequate or good, while the field for the three other posts was poor.

A college was seeking to appoint at senior lecturer or principal lecturer level to a human resource management post. It found applications to be 'disappointing', especially from those aiming for the more senior post. The appointment was finally made at senior lecturer level.

An old university had 20 applications for a lectureship in marketing, but only two of these were suitable for shortlisting. In the end no appointment was made.

However, where institutions had been able to make an appointment, in no case was the appointee seen as falling short of the requirements for the post.

## **Engineering**

All four departments were experiencing recruitment difficulties reflected in the size and/or quality of the pool of applicants.

In one old university, until this year the HoD had expected to receive 50-100 applicants for an academic post and to have shortlisted 15-20. But the number of applicants had declined to 30 or below and the number who could be shortlisted to fewer than ten.

Remuneration was seen as the key factor in all four departments. The main competitors are private industry, where candidates with PhDs can get a much higher starting salary than in the HE sector. Examples were given of high-tech companies offering a graduate with a PhD a starting salary of £25,000. One HoD said that some private sector companies not only paid engineers a higher salary but also offered a range of benefits that outstripped what the universities provided.

Two departments were experiencing retention problems. One reported that it was currently losing its most experienced and innovative staff. Another HoD said that it was particularly difficult to retain specialists in communications engineering and, to a lesser extent, mechanical engineering. A third HoD expressed serious concerns that the department could lose some of the most innovative academics who had created spin-off companies: 'They currently have a foot in both camps, but they could leave and go to the companies full-time.'

Two of the departments also reported significant problems recruiting and retaining support staff, including technicians, clerical, secretarial and administration staff. These difficulties were putting pressure on the research infrastructure.

The two departments that had participated in the research in 1999 said that both recruitment and retention problems had increased over the two-year period.

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## **Analysis of engineering recruitment exercises**

Four institutions provided data on 16 recruitment exercises. These data suggest that the institutions concerned are struggling with narrower and poorer pools of candidates than in previous years, but they are, by and large, able to make adequate appointments.

Four of the recruitment processes had not been completed at the time of interview. Of the remaining 12 posts, 11 were lectureships and one a readership. In four cases, including the readership, the size of the applicant pool was smaller than in previous years. None of the applicant pools was described as poor, but in one case there were only two shortlistable candidates. In one case, the comment was that 'there was only a minority of good candidates; most did not occupy comparable posts elsewhere, and 70-80 per cent were from non-UK postgraduates'.

However, in only one case was an appointment not made on the first round. In all cases where HoDs commented (eight posts), the appointee was reported as fully meeting the requirements of the post.

## **Computing and IT**

In four institutions interviews were conducted with the head of department, or faculty, responsible for computer science and/or IT. All four departments were facing recruitment problems and three had retention difficulties.

Problems were described as general in three of the four institutions. Specific problems cited were, in an old university, for both lecturing and research staff in informatics, and in a college, for networking and database specialists. In two of the three institutions involved in the 1999 study problems had become worse in the last two years; in one they had remained the same.

All four HoDs said that the main reasons for recruitment problems were the shortage of qualified candidates and the ability of UK competitors outside HE to pay higher salaries. In addition, two HoDs – in an old university and a college – said that the department faced competition from other countries. For example, the college had lost a network manager employed on a salary of £21,000 in the UK who moved to earn £60,000 in the USA.

Other reasons given by particular institutions for their recruitment difficulties included: problems with research funding (an old university); misunderstanding among potential recruits about what is required of IT lecturers in an education context (a college); and a workload involving 'too much teaching' (a new university).

Lack of internal promotion opportunities was cited as a major reason for retention problems. The heads of two departments – in one old and one new university – were concerned about the impact on staff retention of the age profile of the department.

In two institutions (a new and an old university) recruitment from abroad was one of the main strategies being used to address recruitment problems. Other approaches included developing links with industry; 'informal networking' as a means of attracting recruits from other institutions; and, in a new university, the use of both enhanced pay packages and part-time contracts to attract candidates.

## **Analysis of computing/IT recruitment exercises**

The data on recruitment exercises confirm that, for a sizeable proportion of computing/IT posts, it is difficult for departments to draw up an adequate shortlist, and a number of vacancies are not being filled in the first round of advertising.

Data were provided on recruitment to 16 posts in four institutions, but in two cases the recruitment process had not been completed at the time of interview. One of the posts for which the process

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had been completed was a chair and the remaining 13 were lecturing posts. In the case of four of the lecturing posts the field was mixed, while for two others it was described as adequate. For four posts, however, the pool was seen as poor, including two – an senior lecturer in media technology at a new university and lecturer/senior lecturer post in a college – for which it had not been possible to draw up a shortlist. In addition, one old university reported having had a total of just eight ‘shortlistable’ candidates for three lecturing posts.

In six of the 13 lectureships, the outcome was that either an appointment was not made on the first round or the successful candidate withdrew. However, in the seven cases where appointments were made, all appointees were said to meet the person specification for the post.

## **Health**

Interviews were conducted with the heads of five departments – three in new universities and two in old universities. Three of the five departments were experiencing general recruitment difficulties, while the other two had difficulties in specialist areas only. The areas in which the difficulties occurred varied; they included physiotherapy, midwifery, radiography, nursing, paediatrics, and nutrition.

Academic institutions face competition from the NHS where salaries, especially for senior posts, are higher. Pharmaceutical companies also offer higher salaries. This was seen as particularly affecting the recruitment of senior academics such as principal lecturers and professors.

In a new university the head of a nursing department said that principal lecturer salaries did not compare well with the NHS, where equivalent staff could earn up to £60,000. In addition, the NHS was seen as providing innovative and more exciting opportunities for staff development. Another university HoD criticised the starting salaries for academics, and said that the seven years of studying for a PhD needed to be reflected in improved pay for new entrants.

The three new universities were collaborating with the NHS to part-fund posts. In one of the universities a school of health used 83 lecturer-practitioners who split their time between the NHS and the university. In another university, to overcome the problems in recruiting staff in PAMs, the institution operates mixed contracts which allow staff to maintain their links with the NHS and receive NHS pensions, salaries and other benefits, while working in academia.

Two of the institutions were experiencing retention difficulties. In one of the old university departments retention difficulties were particularly acute among lecturers in specialised areas. In a new university the problems affected retention of PAMs staff, who usually returned to the NHS or sought promotion elsewhere. Lack of opportunities for promotion was widely seen as a problem. But one new university argued that it was difficult to get principal lecturers because few senior lecturers wanted promotion as there was only a small increase in pay but a large increase in responsibility.

## **Analysis of health recruitment exercises**

Three out of the five departments provided data on recruitment exercises to ten academic posts in nursing or midwifery. The data they supplied indicate that the pool of suitable candidates for such posts is very small, but that institutions are generally managing to make satisfactory appointments.

The information supplied covered a total of nine lectureships and one registrar position. In all but one case there were five or fewer applicants for the post – in one case no applicants. For all the posts there were no more than three ‘shortlistable’ candidates per post, but (except where there were no applicants) in all cases an appointment was made and the successful candidate was seen

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as meeting the requirements. However, for one appointment – a senior lectureship in adult nursing at a new university – the department concerned had to compromise by ‘changing some aspects of the person specification from essential to desirable.’

## **Mathematics**

Heads of departments or faculties including mathematics were interviewed in three institutions – two old universities and a college. All three institutions were experiencing some problems with the recruitment of staff and two of them also faced retention problems.

Statistics was cited by two old universities as a particular shortage area where there is strong competition from outside HE. However, one of these institutions described general problems extending across the discipline.

‘Our problem areas are: statistics – all grades, and maths lecturers in both pure and applied maths. Within applied maths it is particularly difficult to recruit to numerical analysis and we have very low numbers applying. Pure maths is easier but still very difficult.’

The problem faced by the college was a different one: here the national shortage of maths specialists in schools was making it very difficult to recruit lecturers with school teaching experience.

In the short to medium term the age profile of the existing workforce seemed likely to result in further gaps in staffing in both of the universities. In one case nine out of 44 staff were within five years of retirement, and in the other, seven out of 50 were in this age group.

In response to the problems they faced, the two universities relied strongly on foreign recruitment.

One HoD had recruited from the rest of the European Union and from the USA. ‘I could not staff the department without foreign lecturers. Eight out of my last nine appointments have been non-UK lecturers.’

The HoD in the other university explained why this strategy was effective: ‘We attract staff from other countries. The style of applied maths in the UK is seen as attractive. Also we have more opportunities for permanent posts than a lot of institutions in other EU countries, where there tends to be a lot of fixed-term contracts and a few people in very high status positions. We also get a lot of people from China and Russia – just because they want to get out.’

Other recruitment strategies included appointing at above the minimum advertised pay rate: this was applied to some degree by all three institutions.

Increased pay, including ‘promotion’, was being used as a measure to retain key staff in all three institutions. This included the one university that was not currently experiencing retention problems, but where the HoD was endeavouring to anticipate potential difficulties. ‘We have a few highly poachable people and I’m trying to hang on to these.’ For example he was trying to get promotion for a talented applied mathematician.

## **Analysis of mathematics recruitment exercises**

In the three institutions, recruitment exercises had been conducted for a total of eight posts. In a number of cases, particularly appointments to specialist areas such as statistics, the data indicate that it is proving difficult to make adequate appointments.

All the eight vacancies were lecturing posts. In two cases the pool of candidates was described as poor. In one case – a lecturing post in an HE college – no appointment was made. In two other cases the appointed candidate only partially met the requirements of the post. One of these

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involved the appointment by an old university of a candidate from India, who had the appropriate subject knowledge but no teaching or post-doctoral experience. He has since taken unpaid leave in the USA. His replacement was appointed at senior lecturer level, to attract a candidate from China.

## **Education**

In both the HE colleges that provided teacher training there were reports of difficulties recruiting academic staff in the departments of education. In one department the difficulties were 'across the board'; in the second they were up to and including senior lecturer level.

Both HoDs said that the problems were not related to any shortage of qualified candidates. However, as one put it, 'The overriding reason for recruitment difficulties is the very sharp increase in competition from schools. There is no shortage of qualified candidates, but the recent increase in school teachers' pay makes it unattractive to move from schools to HE institutions.'

Both departments were looking for candidates with a relevant higher degree and several years' teaching experience. They were finding it much harder to attract suitable applicants since the teachers' pay structure had been revised. According to one of the HoDs: 'The academic SL scale goes up to £31,000. Classroom teachers can now earn up to £44,000 in the new school salary structure.'

The other HoD expressed concern about the future with respect to recruitment: 'Pay is the main issue now. There are some people still prepared to work in HE for the job satisfaction, but the number seems to be dropping.'

To address recruitment difficulties, one college had introduced a secondment scheme whereby teachers were seconded to the college for one or two years. They were still being employed by the schools, but the college paid the salaries. Seconded staff retained continuity of employment, pension rights and other entitlements. The college has been able to make several appointments, and regards this as a successful initiative, necessitated by the difficulties in making appointments in a number of subject areas.

Neither department was experiencing problems retaining staff. As the leaver data discussed in Chapter 6 shows, only two staff had moved out of HE. However, the fact that they had both moved to posts in schools bears out the comments that the compulsory education sector is now the major competitor for such staff.

## **Analysis of education recruitment exercises**

The two HoDs supplied information on recruitment exercises for a total of nine vacancies. All the positions involved were lectureships at senior lecturer or principal lecturer level. In one institution the field of candidates for all five of its vacancies was poor. For example, the college had two vacant posts for senior lecturers in science. There were fewer than ten applicants for each post, more than half of whom were from overseas. The remainder included candidates with little classroom experience.

The second institution had 'good' pools for two posts and an 'acceptable' pool for one post, but the field for a senior lecturer in primary language and literacy was 'disappointing'. The college was unable to make an appointment to this post.

However, for the remaining posts across the two institutions an appointment was made, and the successful candidate was seen as fully meeting the requirements of the job.

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## **Biological sciences**

Just one head of a biological sciences department was interviewed. However, this is an area where HR directors in other institutions also reported recruitment difficulties.

Pay and competition from the private sector were seen as key factors affecting recruitment. PhD students have opportunities to command higher salaries in industries such as pharmaceuticals. There are also research institutions that attract potential academics who find the teaching workload off-putting.

The HoD described two recent recruitment exercises for lecturing posts. In both cases the field of candidates was seen as disappointing. While in both cases an appointment of a suitable standard was made, both the successful candidates were internal candidates, one of whom had previously been doing the job on a fixed-term contract.

## **Media studies**

The head of a media school in a new university was interviewed but no recruitment exercise data were supplied.

The impact of competition from the private sector on recruitment of junior lecturers was highlighted in this department. This particularly affects subject areas such as communications, corporate media and computer animation. The HoD would like to be able to attract young lecturers with the ability to become research-focused academics, but is finding this difficult.

‘There is an overall problem recruiting very good lecturers at entry level because the pay is way below the industry pay levels. There are not enough research students in this area because graduates leave to earn much higher salaries in industry.’ To address the pay differentials, staff are usually appointed at the top of the senior lecturer scale, and if necessary honoraria are used to reward extra responsibility.

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## 11: Recruitment and retention difficulties in support functions

As well as the problems with support staff faced by academic departments discussed in the previous chapter, HE institutions also experience significant recruitment and retention problems for central support functions. The problems concerning IT support have been highlighted in the annual recruitment survey, and in the interviews with HR managers in the case study institutions. In this chapter the issues in the finance and estates support functions are examined.

### Finance

The heads of finance and accounting departments were interviewed in seven institutions. Two of the departments – both at new universities, one in the south and one in the north of England – were not having problems in recruiting or retaining staff. However, five were facing some recruitment problems and four expressed concerns about the retention of staff.

Specific areas of recruitment difficulty varied between institutions. In two cases, one a college in the South-East and one an old university in central England, recruitment problems were seen across the board. The old university had concluded recruitment exercises for 40 posts (25 per cent of the department) over the past 12 months.

One old university was not facing problems with the recruitment of professional staff, but was finding it difficult to recruit clerical staff, especially to its financial accounting and student fees sections. In contrast, one new university in Scotland and one in London were finding it most difficult to recruit to professionally qualified and part-professionally qualified positions. In the university in Scotland the retention problems in respect of professional staff were so acute that the department had seen 100 per cent turnover in relevant posts over a two-year period.

All the departments that were experiencing recruitment difficulties said that competition from the private sector was a key source of their problems. One old university with general recruitment problems in finance said that clerical pay levels were too low compared with the local labour market. An HoD facing particular problems with recruiting clerical staff explained that the pay for clerical posts was too low when the range of skills required was taken into consideration.

Private sector competition was equally important where a shortage of qualified professional or part-professional staff was the key issue. One HoD said: 'Oil companies cream off the best staff. They offer much better pay to experienced staff and although their rates for newly-qualified staff are similar to ours they can offer other benefits such as company cars.'

Another finance head outside London faced private sector competition: 'Agencies tell us that our rates are £5,000 to £10,000 below the market rate.' In addition, this university competes to its disadvantage with London HE institutions paying a London weighting.

Within the South-East and some other major cities, location, and particularly urban housing costs, was cited as a key factor in recruitment difficulties.

Three factors emerged as the main reasons for the retention problems faced by some departments: pay levels, heavy workload, and limited progression opportunities.

Two major strategies were being used by departments to address recruitment and/or retention problems: the use of recruitment agencies, and measures to review and enhance remuneration. For example, an institution with difficulties in recruiting clerical staff was planning to go through a major regrading exercise in order to recognise the required skills in terms of pay. Another was looking to increase the flexibility of its pay structure for professional staff to aid in both recruitment and retention. It was also enhancing non-pay benefits such as access to study leave. A London institution was seeking to enhance certain jobs both to make them more satisfying and to provide a basis for regrading. It had also used market supplements in the past.

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## Analysis of finance recruitment exercises

The recruitment exercise information highlights the problems faced by institutions in recruiting support staff in both the professional and clerical/administrative areas of finance departments. In most cases institutions were faced with a poor pool of applicants and more than a quarter of posts were vacant after the first round of advertising.

Data on recruitment exercises for a total of 39 staff were provided by eight institutions. Four of these posts were in professionally qualified positions. The number of applications ranged from one per post to 70. However, in the clerical/administrative positions a large pool does not seem to be necessarily associated with a good pool. For example, one institution advertised for a total of six clerical posts in management accounting. There was an average of 70 applicants for each post but 'candidates on the whole were of very poor quality; few had the experience and qualifications that we required.'

Respondents' views of the pool of applicants for non-professional posts can be broadly categorised as poor in the case of 23 posts (60 per cent), satisfactory for three posts and good for nine. Two of the professional posts had a satisfactory pool of applicants, and in the remaining two posts the pool was seen as poor. In a total of nine of the 35 (26 per cent) clerical/administrative posts no appointment was made in the first recruitment exercise. In a further four of these posts, and for one of the professional posts, an appointment was made that did not meet the original requirements of the job.

In one institution all the recruiting managers in a large finance department were asked by the HoD for their assessment of the quality of the pool of applicants. The overall comment was: 'For the higher grades the best comment is indifferent and for the lower grades the quality of applicant is generally very poor.' In the same institution one post had been re-advertised twice and no suitable candidates had applied.

## Estates

In seven institutions the head of department responsible for manual workers was interviewed. In all cases the individual interviewed was the head of the institution's estates or facilities function – who was considered the person best able to describe the position in relation to manual workers (both skilled and others). Some also discussed problems with the recruitment and retention of professional staff such as surveyors and mechanical and electrical engineers, managers and clerical workers. Six institutions were facing recruitment difficulties in some areas and four mentioned retention problems.

Four of the seven HoDs cited problems in the recruitment of workers for their direct labour force, most commonly cleaning staff. For example, in an old university 23 out of 34 posts in the direct labour department were vacant when this research was conducted. In two of the other four institutions – a college and an old university – the HoDs mentioned specific problems in recruiting skilled manual workers such as plumbers and electricians.

Three institutions were facing difficulties in recruiting professionally qualified staff. For example, the HoD in a new university said: 'It is very difficult to recruit professionally qualified staff such as qualified and experienced building surveyors, or design, mechanical and electrical engineers.' A lack of suitable recruits to clerical positions was mentioned by an old university, and a new university cited problems in recruiting to managerial positions in its estates department.

Where institutions were experiencing retention problems in their estates departments this was most commonly with cleaning staff, for whom three departments reported retention difficulties. In addition, two HoDs – in old universities – cited difficulties in retaining both skilled and professional engineers.

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Five of the seven HoDs said that one of the main reasons for their difficulties in recruiting manual staff was low pay relative to the rates paid by competitors. In the South-East the construction sector was seen as the main competitor, although local government, the NHS and other HE institutions were also cited. Elsewhere the hospitality and retail sectors were mentioned. One HoD in an old university said: 'Our recruitment process can be daunting and people can get easier jobs for better pay in places like Tesco.' The HoD in a college said that trades people were paid £7.56 an hour at the college, but would get £10 an hour from a local contractor. However, one HoD in a new university felt that pay was less important than non-pay issues such as the working hours on offer and access to holidays. Other reasons cited for difficulties in recruiting manual workers included travel difficulties and costs for some locations.

All three HoDs experiencing problems with recruiting professional staff felt that there was a general shortage of suitably experienced and qualified staff in this area, with the competition for staff driving up private sector salaries and making pay rates in the institution uncompetitive by comparison. The HoD of an old university said that competitors in the private sector: 'Offer higher pay and benefits for longer hours.'

Enhancement to the pay of individuals or a more general restructuring of the pay system were the main approaches being used to address recruitment difficulties. Two institutions, both old universities, were conducting a large-scale review of manual worker terms and conditions. In one of these a new shift system was to be introduced that would enhance pay by 25 per cent, and so make it higher than that of many competitors. The additional flexibility provided by the shift system would also assist managers in dealing with their serious staffing shortages. In addition, a number of institutions were using non-pay benefits to attract manual staff. These included improved training provision and greater flexibility in the choice of hours.

For professional staff the main responses were ad hoc pay enhancements to 'the right candidate' in the form of appointment at a higher pay level than that of existing staff. However two HoDs – one in an old and one in a new university – said that this had had a negative impact on the morale of existing staff.

### **Analysis of estates recruitment exercises**

Data were supplied by seven institutions on recruitment to a wide range of posts in their estates sections. These included eight middle or senior management positions, three professional posts, 17 clerical posts (all in one institution) and a secretarial vacancy, and 30 manual posts. This information highlights the recruitment problems discussed above: across all kinds of posts institutions found themselves unable to fill over half the vacancies in the first round of recruitment.

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## Managerial positions

In five of the eight managerial posts the field was seen as poor.

Only two of 16 applicants for a deputy director post in an old university appeared to meet the job requirements. One of these was offered the post but declined it.

In a new university there was only one applicant to an assistant director position in business services. In the same institution the 20 applications for a capital project manager post were described as 'terrible' by the head of department. No appointment was made to either of these positions.

In total, out of the eight managerial posts, five were vacant after the first round of recruitment.

## Professional posts

Information was provided on recruitment to three professional posts: a design engineer and a senior assistant surveyor, both at old universities, and a senior building surveyor at a college. For the third post the field of nine applicants included four candidates who were 'very good indeed' and an appointment was made. However, the pool of applicants for the other two posts was poor. There were only five applicants for the design engineer post, none of whom had the required skills mix and consequently no appointment was made. Similarly, the poor field meant that no candidate was appointed to the surveying post.

## Clerical and secretarial posts

One old university supplied data on recruitment to a total of 17 clerical posts, and in another institution a vacancy for a secretary was discussed. The analysis of this information supports the picture of difficulty in recruitment to clerical positions that was identified by the finance departments of a number of institutions

In the case of the estates clerical positions there were between five and 25 applications for each post. However the pools were variable and ten of the 17 posts (59 per cent) had to be re-advertised. The secretarial vacancy attracted only three candidates. However their applications were all of high quality and an appointment was made.

## Manual posts

Data were provided on 25 manual vacancies in an old university; two electrician posts, one in an old university and one in a college; a plumber in a college; and two caretakers, also at a college. A large number of manual posts remained vacant after the first round of recruitment.

An old university received 54 applications for a total of 25 manual posts. Only 22 of these were seen as suitable for a shortlist and 15 posts (60 per cent) remained unfilled after the first recruitment round.

None of the applicants to an electrician post at a university met the requirements of the post, and no appointment was made. The four applicants to a similar position at a college were described as 'mixed'. The college was unable to make an appointment as the most suitable candidate turned down the job offer.

However the same college was able to successfully recruit a plumber, despite a poor field. Two caretaker positions in another institution attracted a good field – in one case half of the 50 applicants were considered suitable for the job. In both cases good appointments were made.

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## 12: Focus groups – views of new entrants

To explore the views of new entrants to the profession, focus groups of staff in their first academic post were conducted. The aim of these groups was to explore the factors which initially attracted participants to an academic career; the factors which would encourage them to stay or leave; and their views on any recruitment or retention problems within their own institution. Six institutions successfully organised a group.

In view of the concerns expressed by HoDs and HR heads about the potential problems replacing staff who retire, the views of these new entrants throw light on the factors that would encourage them to stay in or leave an academic institution. Most of the participants came from disciplines which were experiencing recruitment difficulties in their institutions. The disciplines represented included accountancy, computing, economics, engineering, health, law, pharmacology and media studies.

A further indication of the increased recruitment of overseas teaching staff is that one of the focus groups in an old university had seven participants, all of whom came from abroad including China, the Baltic States and the Middle East. Several were not fluent in English or were reticent about entering the discussion.

### Recruitment factors

The participants were asked about why they had joined the institution. Although personal circumstances had shaped individual decisions, certain factors were frequently mentioned including job security, flexibility of time, intellectual autonomy, and the challenge of teaching and research.

The attraction of job security was particularly important to those who had come from working on short-term research contracts, where they were continually looking for the next grant. Time flexibility was widely seen as an attractive aspect of HE work. Some full-time staff with families said the flexibility allowed them to combine work and family commitments.

None of the participants mentioned the attractiveness of the salary as a reason for joining the institution. Instead they tended to give reasons why, despite the money, they had taken an academic post. For example, one female engineer, who had initially worked in industry where the salaries were higher, had discovered that her job there lacked intellectual challenge and that, as a single parent, the flexibility of an academic job suited her much better.

There was a lot of enthusiasm for the idea of intellectual autonomy, expressed as the freedom to pursue your own areas of interest whether in teaching or research. However, there was more stress on this in the old universities, than in the other institutions where there was less time allocated for research.

### The nature of the current job

The groups also explored the content of their current jobs. The balance of activities between teaching, research and administration varied between institutions as well as between different subject areas. Overall, most participants were spending between 10 per cent and 35 per cent of their time on administration. Two participants who had been in post longer than the rest said that they now spent around 50 per cent of their time on administration.

The majority of participants were concerned that the amount of administration would increase and that it would be at the expense of their opportunities to do research. Ideally, it appeared they would like to divide the bulk of their time between research and lecturing with the remainder (up to 20 per cent) on administration. But they considered it inevitable that the amount of time spent on

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administration would increase, and this emerged as a factor that would lead some new entrants to leave. There were also criticisms voiced of the lack of value accorded to administration.

‘Administrators are not valued in the university, but without good administrators our whole department would fall apart and none of our research would get done to the high standard it does now. Because administration is not valued, no one wants to develop that side of their role.’

In two other groups, similar sentiments were expressed about the inadequacy of the administrative support for teaching. One group in an old university said that a pay increase was needed on the administrative side to get good secretaries, and that there was a lack of qualified administrative support for lecturers.

## **Career paths**

Many participants considered that there was little scope for promotion in their institution. In one new university it was difficult to become a principal lecturer unless someone left. In another new university, participants said that progression was very difficult. Two of them had been recruited at the top of the senior lecturer scale ‘to lure them from industry’. While these salaries had proved initially attractive, there was little prospect of progression. One of them said she would definitely go back to work in the private sector. In one old university, a participant commented: ‘There is very little pay progression, very little opportunity even to move up the scale in terms of promotion. You are always waiting for someone to retire or leave.’

It was clear from the discussions that many of the participants were aware of their market value to employers outside the HE sector. They were confident that they could move out if their aspirations were not met. Those from an NHS background could move back to work in the health service. Economists could go to finance institutions such as investment banks, or to government departments, or could become consultants. Law lecturers could work in private practice, and engineers could go to the private sector. Similarly, in the media area, the new entrants had skills that were in demand. In one focus group, the participants, all from disciplines experiencing recruitment problems, compared themselves with their colleagues in subjects such as politics or classics where there are not the same outside options.

The result of this awareness seemed to be that, far from viewing an academic career as a job for life, these new entrants were critically assessing their careers. Many of them were in their thirties and were conscious of issues such as promotion opportunities and career progression.

All the participants were asked to indicate where they saw themselves as being in five years’ time: in the same institution, in another HE institution, or not in HE at all. In view of the sensitivity of these issues and to maintain confidentiality, these responses were provided individually on a short questionnaire completed anonymously at the end of the discussion.

Less than half of the participants expected to be either in the same institution or in another HE institution in five years’ time. Four were definite that they would move out of HE, three were undecided whether they would still be in HE or outside, and a further three did not know at all. Of those who planned to move out of HE, two saw themselves working in private companies (media, communications), another (pharmacist) planned to work freelance, and the fourth (an economist) wanted to work in a government or policy research institution. Of those who were undecided, possible alternatives to HE work were seen as being in industry, consultancy or the health service.

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## Working conditions

There was considerable consensus between the groups in terms of the working conditions that they viewed positively and those that they viewed negatively. The following factors were frequently cited:

### *Positive aspects of working conditions*

- Autonomy
- Freedom to pursue research interests
- Colleagues
- Flexibility
- Variety of work
- Intellectual stimulation
- Helping students to learn and develop
- A balanced life.

### *Negative aspects of working conditions*

- Entry point salary too low
- Inadequacy of pay levels
- Pay not sufficient to afford local housing
- Lack of promotion opportunities
- Lack of administrative support
- Not enough time/support for research.

## Retention factors

Participants were asked what were the key factors that would encourage them to stay in an academic post and what might make them leave. These responses were also filled in anonymously on the short questionnaire.

In view of the comments about working conditions above, it is not surprising that 17 of the 28 participants said that an improved pay and reward package would be the main factor that would make them likely to stay. However, more than a third mentioned promotion prospects, better administrative support, and resources for research and for keeping up-to-date with teaching developments.

The factors identified by the highest number of participants as potentially leading them to leave academic work related to administration and workload issues. Of the 28 participants, 24 mentioned one of the following: too much administration, increased workload, insufficient time to do research, and too little autonomy. This was followed by 18 who mentioned pay factors, such as low pay, and lack of progression after reaching the top of the pay scale.

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## 13: Impact of recruitment and retention difficulties

HR heads and HoDs were asked about the impact of recruitment and retention difficulties in their institutions.

Key findings are:

- There was evidence of compromises on staff quality being made in both academic and support areas. These compromises consisted of recruiting staff who lacked particular skills or experience. Appointments were being made to academic posts where the individual lacked competences such as teaching and/or research experience or the ability to speak good English.
- Examples were given of a direct impact on the institution's ability to deliver particular courses or develop their research activities.
- Shortages in support areas were seen as leading to gaps in provision of support services to the institution.
- Across the board, existing staff were being placed under further pressure as a result of recruitment and/or retention problems.

### Impact on staff quality

Concern about the quality of academic recruits was expressed openly by half the HR heads and several HoDs. All those who expressed concern referred to the fact that academics were being appointed who were not as qualified or experienced as was desirable.

In an old university the HR head said that recruitment difficulties had led to having to fill some jobs on a short-term contract basis, because the applicants were not of sufficient quality for a permanent post. English language courses had had to be provided for mathematics staff who had come from abroad as they lacked proficiency in English. As a result of word-of-mouth reports, there had been a drop of 25 per cent in student intake in mathematics.

Another old university said that the staff recruited were generally less qualified than they would wish. 'We are increasingly relying on a pool of foreign academics, many of whom do not have English as a first language and who are unfamiliar with the British system. They have particular induction and training requirements. The large number of foreign recruits is leading us to review our new lecturer training provision. There could be an impact on the quality of teaching but none is yet apparent.'

One new university said that it had had to take less experienced staff than they wanted. This had affected other teaching staff as the new staff could only handle reduced teaching loads while they were being trained.

Similar concerns were voiced about the quality of new support staff by five institutions. Expressions such as 'deterioration in quality of support staff', 'lack of qualifications' and 'second best in quality' were used.

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## Impact on institutions' core activities

Difficulties in both recruiting and retaining support staff were widely seen as affecting the ability of institutions to conduct their core activities. Workload issues were also raised with respect to both academic and support staff. In areas of shortage, existing staff were under increasing pressure to cover the gaps, with consequences in some cases in terms of high stress levels.

A new university said that the academic recruitment problems had had a 'major impact. By and large the appointments have been sub-optimal and this impacts on colleagues who have to spend more time supporting, training and covering for individuals who are less than fully rounded.'

Difficulties recruiting to academic IT-related posts had led another new university to suspend some new course developments.

An HE college which has had to employ temporary IT staff said that this had put pressure on permanent staff, and had affected service delivery and the strategic development of the institution. Academics were not getting the IT support they needed to deliver some of their teaching. In the registry the difficulties had resulted in 'chaos' and people being promoted beyond their ability.

An old university said that the loss of IT staff had delayed the completion of research projects, and that it had had to offer completion bonuses to key people to retain them. Another old university said that recruitment difficulties were negatively affecting the research infrastructure.

One old university facing difficulties recruiting in the engineering department said that the remaining staff had to do more teaching and less research to fill the gaps.

A new university facing serious problems recruiting and retaining personnel and administrative staff said that staff were now working long hours with no extra pay. A rate of 30-40 per cent turnover in administration meant there was low morale among staff, and a situation of 'meltdown' had been reached, where staff end up just trying to survive from one day to the next.

## Impact at departmental level

HoDs provided specific examples of how the activities in their area of responsibility had been affected by recruitment and/or retention problems. Typical examples are discussed below.

### Academic departments

#### *Business-related areas*

The recruitment and retention difficulties were viewed by some HoDs as having an impact on their ability to fully cover specialist teaching areas. Econometrics was cited by one HoD as an area where difficulties in recruiting had led to ad hoc arrangements and existing staff having to teach more hours to fill the gaps.

Two other departments had had to take on temporary part-time staff to cover vacancies and this had affected the development of the department and research development. In one of these the result had been a slippage of one year in launching a new course in the Business School.

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## *Computing and IT*

In all four of the institutions where an HoD was interviewed the major impact of recruitment and retention difficulties was on the workload and stress of existing staff, and so on the ability to deliver all aspects of the department's work. Two department heads (in one old and one new university) expressed concern about the impact of recruitment and/or retention problems on the research capacity of their department. A college HoD said: 'The first thing you've got to do is ring fence teaching quality. Other things go: there is far less contact with industry; conference attendance has gone down.'

In a college and a new university the HoDs felt that the quality of staff recruited had declined as a result of recruitment difficulties. The HoD in the college said: 'It is difficult to recruit IT people with HE experience. We've ended up with some recruits who do not understand what the job requires.'

## *Health*

In one old university, recruitment difficulties meant that the department could not run a specialist course, which in turn affected its ability to recruit students.

The head of a health school in an old university said that 'if the difficulties do not improve with regard to the pool of candidates, then that will affect our research and ability to attract good quality researchers'.

## *Mathematics*

Recruitment problems and the strategies to deal with these had had an impact on the suitability of staff in all the institutions where interviews with heads of mathematics were conducted. One of the university HoDs said: 'In stats we have to accept people without the desired experience; also people who do not speak good English.' The HoD in the other university had recruited 'people who are not as good as I would like – a bit inexperienced and not enough evidence of research activity'. The college had been forced to recruit staff with less school teaching experience than was desirable.

In both universities the HoD cited examples of how recruitment problems were affecting the department's activities. In one department recruitment problems were threatening the status of a statistics degree: the HoD had to decide whether to downgrade the BA course from mathematics *and* statistics to mathematics *with* statistics.

In the other university problems in finding high quality new staff were impacting on the ability to attract research funding.

## *Education*

The impact of the difficulties was being felt in one college, where it had led to a delay in introducing a new MA degree. Although both colleges maintained that the quality of teaching and staff had not been compromised, one HoD said that they were just 'getting through by the skin of our teeth'.

## **Support functions**

### *Finance*

The main impact of the recruitment difficulties experienced by departments, and illustrated in more detail by the analysis of recruitment exercises, was that it was necessary to recruit staff lacking in some of the skills necessary for the post. This meant that there was increased pressure on management in terms of the training requirements of new recruits. Four of the five HoDs facing recruitment difficulties cited this as a major problem. The time involved in repeated recruitment exercises was seen as a further drain on management resources by three departments.

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Three heads gave examples of how the problems they faced were impacting on their ability to deliver a financial service to the institution.

Disruption to the work of the department caused by the use of temporary staff to fill vacancies had meant that the accounts receivable section had got behind with debt collection, with financial consequences for the institution.

Staffing problems at an old university and the subsequent pressures on management time had meant a delay in new developments, such as production of a detailed financial procedures manual.

A director of finance at another university said that, although key targets had not been affected by the department's problems, there had been an increase in minor mistakes made.

### *Estates*

Most HoDs said that they would not recruit sub-standard staff. However, two admitted that the quality of recruits had declined as a result of recruitment difficulties.

In one old university this had had an impact on the service delivered: 'The quality of manual staff has deteriorated. Buildings are not cleaned as often or as well as they should be. Basic health and hygiene cleans are not done. Some areas have only a quarter of the staff they should.'

The pressure on existing staff in situations where there are large numbers of vacancies was cited as the major impact of recruitment difficulties by four HoDs. In three cases the effect was that some work was either not done or was delayed.

The head of facilities at a new university had had difficulties in recruiting to three key managerial posts. In one case it was necessary to advertise three times, and even then the first-choice candidate rejected the job offer. The result of these problems had been a four-month delay in a major change programme with resulting insecurities for existing staff.

### **Impact on the age profile**

In some of the institutions, concerns were raised about the implications of recruitment difficulties on the age profile of the workforce. The profile of departments varied considerably, but the failure to attract new entrants was viewed as particularly problematic in subjects where a high proportion of the staff was nearing retirement age.

Although HoDs were asked for data on the age profile, not all were able to provide it at the time of the research. Half (14) of the academic departments did provide the data, and five of the 14 support functions did so.

In several academic departments the proportion of staff within five years of retirement was 10 per cent or less. However, in six the proportion was higher (note that some departments provided data only on those aged 50 and over):

- Mathematics and statistics: 14 per cent
- Mathematics: 20 per cent
- Engineering: 45 per cent (aged 50 and over)
- Management: 11 per cent
- Education: 26 per cent
- Open and distance learning: 18.2 per cent (aged 50 and over).

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In the support staff departments, one of the finance departments had 17 per cent of its staff within five years of retirement.

In a new university, the HR director provided a broad overview of the implications of the age profile. In this institution, there are virtually no under-35s, around 60 per cent of academic staff are in the 35-54 year age bracket, and in the Business School the average age of lecturers is 58. The consequence of low turnover, according to the director, is that the opportunities for career progression for younger members of staff are limited. There are a lot of people stuck at the top of the senior lecturer scale doing as much as a principal lecturer. But because principal lecturers are not moving on, the opportunities for progression are not there.

In the mathematics and statistics department in an old university, the head expressed concern about the age profile of his academic staff. Over the next ten years, 17 out of 50 academics are due to retire. He was not confident that sufficient new entrants would be available to replace them.

The head of a business-related faculty in an old university was particularly concerned that those who retired were unlikely to be replaced. The main reason was that universities could not compete on pay, and that the differentials between the HE sector and private sector employers had widened. It had proved impossible to retain one of the most talented postgraduate economics students for this reason.

In an old university, the head of HR also pointed to the trend for academic staff to retire earlier than they would have done. This was attributed to longer working hours and an increase in the workload.

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## 14: Conclusions

The findings from the 14 case studies are based on interviews with both HR managers and HoDs. The HR managers provided an overview of recruitment and retention issues in their institutions and their perceptions of the reasons for any difficulties. They also discussed the strategies they were adopting to address these difficulties and the perceived impact of current problems on the achievement of their institutions' objectives. From the individual HoDs it was possible to gain a more detailed picture of the recruitment and retention difficulties in particular subject/functions areas, as well as data on the outcomes of recruitment exercises in those areas over the past 12 months.

Although there are specific factors affecting some individual departments, certain concerns shared by both HR managers and HoDs emerge from the case studies. The broad picture from HR and the details from HoDs complement each other on a number of issues. As a result, the following broad conclusions can be drawn:

- All the institutions were experiencing recruitment difficulties in recruiting academic staff in one or more of the following areas: business-related areas, computing/IT, engineering, health professions and mathematics. There were also difficulties in other areas, particularly in education in the HE colleges.
- HR managers tended to emphasise the difficulties in recruiting more senior academic staff. Many HoDs, however, were particularly concerned about the difficulties in attracting new entrants to the profession.
- Difficulties in recruiting support staff were widespread. The most problematic areas were finance, IT and manual staff. The picture presented by HR managers of a deepening problem was backed up by the interviews with HoDs in the finance and estates functions.
- Indicators of recruitment difficulties included poor fields of applicants, unfilled posts, and compromises involving the appointment of staff who did not fulfil all the job requirements. The evidence from the recruitment exercise data supported the concerns of both HR managers and HoDs about the quantity and quality of job applicants in both academic and support areas.
- Both HR managers and HoDs identified the remuneration package and competition from employers outside the HE sector as major reasons for the current difficulties. Salaries in the private sector were attractive to new graduates in areas such as business-related subjects. But competition from the public sector was increasingly seen as affecting recruitment in areas such as health studies, education and support functions. The impact of location factors varied by institution, but in areas where the costs of living, especially housing and transport, were high, HE salaries were seen as inadequate to attract suitable recruits.
- Retention difficulties among academic staff were seen as less serious than recruitment problems. However, some academic retention problems were reported, particularly in business-related areas and engineering. In the support functions, both HR managers and HoDs expressed considerable concern about retaining manual, IT, professional and administrative staff. Similar reasons for retention problems were mentioned as for recruitment problems. But increases in workload were mentioned as a factor in affecting retention on both the academic and support sides. These increases were aggravated by delays in filling vacancies, particularly on the support side.
- These problems were having an impact at both an institutional level, and within individual departments, on the ability to deliver organisational objectives. Both HR managers and HoDs pointed to difficulties delivering courses, developing research activities and maintaining adequate support service provision.

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- A variety of strategies to address these difficulties were mentioned. The key initiatives were focused on the remuneration package, although the national pay scales for academic staff were seen as offering limited room for manoeuvre. However, the strategy of recruiting staff from abroad to fill gaps in shortage areas had resulted in problems in some institutions with respect to maintaining quality.

The main findings from these case study interviews were reinforced by the focus group discussions with academic staff. Participants in these discussions were predominantly new entrants to the profession. They said that they had been attracted to lecturing posts not by the financial rewards, but by factors such as job security, flexibility of time, intellectual autonomy and the challenge of teaching and research. Two-thirds of the participants said that an improved pay and reward package would be the main factor that would make them stay in the profession. Less than half said that they would still be working in the HE sector in five years' time.

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## Abbreviations

GOR	Government Office Region
HE	Higher education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HoD	Head of department
HR	Human resources
IT	Information technology
PAMs	Professions allied to medicine
SCOP	Standing Conference of Principals
UCEA	Universities and Colleges Employers Association
UUK	Universities UK

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