

Case Study: Education



New lessons learnt at Royal Holloway University

Executive Summary

Royal Holloway University is part of the University of London, with a 180 acre campus in Egham, Surrey. The Facilities Management Department approached Working Time Solutions Ltd to support working time arrangements change for their Estate Services.

Working together, the team implemented an annualised hours system which not only helped the organisation save money, but also reduced overtime and improved employees home/life balance.

Key challenges

- Rising customer expectations – staff, students and visitors expected quicker response times
- Peaks and troughs in demand
- Align Estate Services with other parts of Facilities Management
- Harmonisation of working hours across the university departments
- Reduction in overtime, call outs and the use of contractor and agency staff
- Reduction of costs and operational efficiency increased

Key outcomes

- More flexibility of staff to meet changes in demand or special events
- Satisfied the business need and improved the customer service experience
- Improved the work life balance for the employees
- Aligned service hours with other parts of Facilities Management
- Removed the need to budget for overtime
- Removed the need for 3rd part contractor or agency spend
- Delivered operational savings

Key learnings

- Direct, open, honest and transparent communication is critical
- Vital to include the right people from the beginning of the project
- Ensure all stakeholders take ownership (employees, management, HR, unions)
- Setting of realistic and achievable timescales
- Recognition and acceptance that it is not possible to keep everyone happy
- Remember people are involved, not numbers – it is not about ‘us and them’

Background

The Estate Services Department is responsible for the maintenance and repair of the grounds and over 100 buildings, from a diverse range of grade 1 listed to modern facilities. They support over 1200 staff, 6000 students, of which 2500 are resident and a variety of conferences and events. The department employ a range of skills including electricians, plumbers, builders, carpenters, painters, maintenance engineers, grounds and gardeners, on a full time, direct employed basis.

The Issues

The department was facing a number of challenges and wanted to explore alternative ways of organising staff rotas to meet with new demands. The main issue was rising customer expectations where staff, students and visitors were expecting quicker response times to logged issues including: electrical and heating faults, blocked drains and damaged locks.

Therefore, a better match of resource to demand was required. Existing working patterns only covered 8am to 4pm, Monday to Friday, when the actual requirement was from 7am to 10pm, 7 days a week. The university also had distinct peaks (end and beginning of term) and troughs (holiday periods) throughout the year so it was important to find a system with greater resource flexibility to meet the changing demand.

These changes had already been made in other parts of the Facilities Management department so it was important to align the Estate Services with the rest of the team. For example, customer services were already working extended hours to meet demand, however, Estates Services, which was tasked with actioning logged jobs, still only provided standard day cover.

In fact, working hours needed to be harmonised across the university departments from 38 hours per week, to 35 hours per week, while combatting the over-reliance on overtime, call outs and the use of contractor and agency staff.

Finally, the banking crisis and the changes in University funding arrangements meant that costs needed to be reduced too and operational efficiency increased.



The Solution

Working closely with the Working Time Solutions team, the trade unions and staff, the department embarked on an in-depth demand, skills and resource analysis and re-alignment process. This included examining both historical and future data to create working patterns which best met the new challenges while being mindful of any revisions to contractual hours and holiday entitlements for staff.

A variety of rota designs were created that utilised a mixture of none, part and fully rostered holiday options, including different shift lengths, standby shifts and reserve hours. The trade unions were engaged and staff consulted on the options available, with the decision to roster to a gross system (holiday on request), which incorporated a reserve of hours to call upon, from standby shifts rostered into the patterns.

Three separate pattern designs were developed, based on the relevant requirement for that resource; one for a multi-trade team, consisting of plumbers, electricians and maintenance assistance, a second for the gardeners, a third for the trade team, which encompassed the builders, carpenters and painters.

An operating guide was created to ensure that call out and standby were used in a way that was both fair and reasonable for both employer and employee, that holiday requirement, now governed in hours, rather than days, was understood, and that employees had the opportunity to shift swap both actual and standby shifts when required.

The multi-trade team covered demand seven days per week, 7am through to 10pm, with a reserve of circa 80 hours per employee, with standby shifts covering the seven days. The teams were populated to ensure that there was always either the right skill on site to resolve the issue immediately, or, a maintenance operative available to make safe.

The trade team covered demand five days per week, 7am to 6pm, as restrictions were in place governing the type of work these skill sets could undertake. A reserve of

circa 40 hours was in place for this group of employees, with standby on weekends and extended shifts during the week.

The gardeners were rostered to a seasonal summer and winter pattern, with more hours available to work in the summer period, compared to the winter option. A reserve of circa 40 hours was in place for this group of employees, with standby on weekends and extended shifts during the week.

In order to help manage the new ways of working WORK Suite Management and Time software modules were utilised. This allowed employees clocking activity to be recorded, enabling management to decide whether the reserve should be utilised in either increase availability (shift reductions) or decrease availability (shift increases). Accounts were designed to automatically update when specific events were applied, recording both extra and lost hours, for each employee within the department.

The Outcome

The project has been a great success both from a business and staff point-of-view. While there was some initial resistance to change internally, the benefits delivered soon outstripped any concerns with the new way of working delivering:

- The flexibility of staff to meet changes to demand or special events
- Satisfied the business need and improved the customer service experience
- Improved the work life balance for the employees
- Aligned service hours with other parts of Facilities Management
- Removed the need to overtime (2010/2011)
- Removed the need for 3rd part contractor or agency spend (2010/2011)
- Delivered operational savings