

Long term skills planning is crucial in a challenging post- Brexit & Covid world

Hosted by Ria Bailes

Speakers

Olukemi Jaboda - People Director at Langley Housing Trust

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- Partnerships & Growth at Futures Housing Group



BPC

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Session notes

Ria Bailes introduced the third webinar in the series between CIH and BPC looking at skills for the sector. We covered the challenges to finding the skills we need that are important to the long-term success of the sector.

BPC work with the housing sector providing tangible solutions to business-critical problems. The CIH and BPC have collaborated to put on this series of webinars aimed at providing relevant insight for leaders. BPC operates across four key areas.

- **Leadership effectiveness** - helping leaders to perform at their best so their teams can excel. Modern leadership is characterised by the ability to foster connection between people and organisations. BPC helps leaders build an environment where their people can thrive.
- **Organisational change** - fast paced change is a characteristic of the modern world. Whether it is technological change, an organisation's response to societal changes or structural change, people are at the centre of every organisation and BPC helps to deliver people-focused change.
- **Business growth** - we recognise leaders' responsibility to identify challenges to forward progress and navigate challenging operating environment. We help leaders devise a coherent approach to growing their business.
- **HR Consultancy** - our range of general HR services complement the rest of our offer.

We covered the importance of long term skills planning and debating the risks associated with skills shortages at a strategic level. We believe that these risks should be captured on organisation's risk registers. After all, if the purpose and objectives of an organisation are clear then the Board's role is to ensure it has the right strategy and resources to fulfill those objectives. Having the right resources and skills for success is a critical component.

We invited keynote speakers to offer their unique insight as leaders in the field. Below are key areas of discussion.

Finding the skills we need

Long term planning

- We know that these are challenging times for the housing sector and employers need to consider developing skills as a long-term investment activity as well as obtaining skills through traditional means.
- We must acknowledge that there are significant pressures facing us such as financial capacity, demands on our financial resilience through service delivery, building safety, net zero and investing in new and existing homes. At the same time, it is likely that we will also need to deal with a cap on rent increases. This means that there will be significant trade-offs that HAs will need to consider and a risk that skills planning for the future takes a back seat.
- Removing investment into skills development and planning would cause longer term difficulties for the sector. We are already experiencing pressure on resourcing and service delivery as a result of the state of the labour market and national skills shortages (see notes from previous sessions). HAs commonly report difficulties with attracting and retaining trades operatives, care workers and IT resource. The direct link between skills development and service performance is unfortunately rarely articulated well to senior audiences.
- Removing skills investment also fails to take into account the long-term nature of skills development and the current critical timing given emerging skills needs such as biodiversity.
- Organisations therefore need to include skills as part of their business planning and integrate investment in skills with strategy objectives, performance targets and risk.

Market outlook

We invited a labour market specialist to give us insights into current behaviours and trends.

Economy: High inflation rate (9.9%), close to the highest rate in 40 years & a recession is projected from Q4.

Key challenges for UK businesses: Record high inflation, cost of materials and energy, supply chain issues, economic uncertainty, staff shortages and rising labour costs.

Covid: continues to impact long term sickness absence and the long term effect on available talent.

Pay: remains high on the agenda but the flexibility to balance personal interests, family, friends and work is consistently demanded by candidates and the existing workforce. This needs to feature in attraction and retention strategies.

Finding the skills we need

- **Labour market:** High demand for staff, low unemployment (3.6%), but there are fewer people in employment than predicted and high economic inactivity.
 - There is higher inactivity amongst people over the age of 50.
 - Falling real pay (regular real pay -2.8% y-o-y)
 - Increasing pressure on employers to help mitigate the impact of price rises on staff.



Linking skills to your strategy

We explored how others have incorporated skills into corporate plans and described the following steps;

- Establishing a clear purpose for the organisation, horizon-scanning, setting out priorities and what we want to achieve. Having the right people around the table is important. Organisation strategies should not be solely about numerical targets but should represent the various components of how organisations operate. The people around the table to build the strategy should reflect this therefore.
- Explore what skills will help us to be who we are, what we want to achieve and what we want to do in future. It is important for us to focus on skills and not people. When we look at workforce and succession planning this is a different exercise to skills planning – all directly linked back to short, medium and long term objectives. The way that we source the skills across those different timeframes will vary.
- Turning to how you then obtain the skills you need, we need to consider whether we purchase skills in a traditional sense from the labour market or grow our own, recognising the challenges with the labour market (which are unlikely to ease any time soon). Internal talent mobility is more important than ever and it is helpful to recognise the link to employee engagement and retention.

Finding the skills we need

- The diversity of workforce and skills builds resilience into your organisation as well as the benefits that diversity brings to decision-making and risk. At a time when the labour market is significantly challenging and we are all chasing short supplies of skills, reaching into parts of the labour market that may be overlooked is important.
- Lastly, finding skills is everyone's responsibility, both from an individual perspective in terms of upskilling ourselves to maintain relevant and valued skills, and also for everyone to be thinking about what skills are needed and how they can help to obtain them for the organisation. This may include networks and collaboration with other industries for emerging skills needs.

Points to take away

- Take the opportunity to build on the success of emerging talent programmes to grow your own. Success is caveatted with the acceptance that this will not give you immediate results and you have to invest time.
- The speakers agreed that there needs to be an impactful narrative supporting housing as a sector of choice for employment given its incredible breath of roles and its social purpose. This is likely to only be achieved through collaborating together.
- We know the current recruitment market is fast moving and speed of recruitment processes is essential or talent will be lost.
- There is value in apprenticeships for certain skills. Careful consideration should be given to where apprenticeships can be used to fill skills gaps. It is worth questioning whether apprenticeships can keep up with the emerging skills needs. Some of our new skills may not yet be supported by apprenticeship standards.
- Look at modular learning where people can choose to upskill in specific areas, recognising speed and instant gratification is important in an increasingly fast-paced society. Modular learning may be more popular than a qualification which takes two years to complete by which time the individual's ambitions have changed. Assessing existing skills helps to identify unknown workforce skills and shortcut lengthy upskilling programmes.
- Consider the value of lateral job moves because vertical progression is not for everyone. Focus on how you can use the lateral move to help the individuals long term career aspiration and organisational needs. We recognised that this requires a culture shift to give colleagues the confidence to feel they don't have to measure their success through vertical promotion and that there is a validity in taking many different routes to your own career path.

Finding the skills we need

A big thank you to our speakers. We have more sessions coming, updates are below. If you would like to be involved then please contact Ria Bailes by email ria@bailespartners.co.uk

Dates for your diary

Session #4 Building talent pipelines	3rd November 2022	10-11.15am
Session #5 Strategic skills planning tools	28th November 2022	10-11.15am

Stay in touch

If you would like to discuss any of the themes explored within this series or would like to be involved in future sessions, then please contact us by email hello@bailespartners.co.uk