

Annual Report on Human Resources

FSA BC 24/06/06 - Report by Jo Bushnell, People Director

1. Summary

1.1 This paper provides an annual report on human resources matters, highlighting our current workforce position, reflections on the preceding year and horizon scanning for the year ahead.

1.2 The Business Committee is asked to **note** the reflections on the preceding year, and plans for 2024/25.

2. Introduction

2.1 This paper provides the annual report for the Business Committee on Human Resources in the FSA. The paper covers an overview of our current workforce and its diversity, a review of 2023/24 and horizon scanning for 2024/25.

3. Our current workforce

3.1 The FSA's total headcount was 1,582 people (including Wales and Northern Ireland) as of 1 April 2024. Our annual staff turnover for 2023/24 was 11%, consistent with the wider civil service.

3.2 Following the cap on Civil Service growth announced in October 2023, His Majesty's Treasury (HMT) have now confirmed that our Westminster-funded headcount is fixed at 1,330 by March 2025. Headcount figures for Wales and Northern Ireland are yet to be determined pending the review of the settlement from the Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Assembly. The headcount for Wales and Northern Ireland as of 31 March 2024 was 60 and 78, respectively. We have introduced fixed establishments and a robust recruitment approvals process to minimise any non-essential growth, whilst prioritising our work to optimise our available resources. HR and Finance colleagues will continue to work across the FSA to minimise and mitigate risk in this area. A review of this position is planned for the end of quarter one 2024/25.

3.3 **Diversity and Inclusion:** we have now achieved Disability Confident Leader level, a requirement of the [National Disability Strategy](#). This was a significant project for the newly formed Disability Action Group and our application received commendations for our organisational approach to recruitment, our workplace adjustments guidance for managers and our approach to analysing our Civil Service People Survey results by protected characteristics.

3.4 Based on the available data, our workforce representation appears to be below the Civil Service benchmark for disability, sexual orientation and ethnicity. However, representation for these groups is not reducing significantly over time.

3.5 As of April 2024, we are now able to collect data on Socio-Economic Background (SEB), caring responsibilities and multiple disabilities via our new finance and HR system (Workday). This will enable future reporting and provide further insights.

3.6 Our declaration rates are broadly in line with those across the Civil Service although declaration of disability is below the Civil Service rate. Whilst higher declaration rates would enable more accurate insights, our Statistics Team in the Science, Evidence and Research Division have confirmed that our declaration rates are sufficiently high to enable us to make decisions around Diversity and Inclusion which align with the [Civil Service Diversity and Inclusion Strategy](#).

3.7 Further work will be completed during 2024/25 to ensure new joiners know how to complete declarations on Workday and understand why people may choose not to disclose their protected characteristics.

4. Review of 2023/24

4.1 **HR Casework:** any issues of misconduct are managed under our discipline policy. In the last year, 22 disciplinary investigations resulted in nine employees having formal disciplinary action taken against them. The number of ongoing investigations is below five.

4.2 Our dispute resolution policy (previously the grievance policy) is in place to manage concerns, problems or complaints that employees raise. Our emphasis is on using informal channels including workplace mediation to resolve issues wherever possible. As a result of this the number of formal disputes in the last year was five.

4.3 We have set a completion date of 90 days to complete all formal HR cases. In 2023/24, average completion days were 104 for disciplinary and 150 for grievance cases. We have now trained additional Investigating Officers and strengthened the central HR resource which leads this portfolio. Consequently, we anticipate an improvement in this performance 2024/25.

4.4 **Recruitment:** throughout the year we conducted 298 recruitment campaigns, resulting in 249 appointments (including four Senior Civil Servant (SCS) candidates) – 51% of our appointments were internal candidates, and the highest levels of recruitment were in our Operational Delivery directorate.

4.5 Recognising the importance of the policy profession in delivering our priorities and enhanced responsibilities post-EU Exit, we run generic recruitment campaigns to fill these roles. This removes the need for candidates to submit multiple applications and helps to create a more agile workforce whilst developing a talent pipeline to meet the growing demand for policy professionals and ensuring the most efficient use of recruitment resource across the FSA.

4.6 We ran two generic policy campaigns in 2023/24, recruiting to Higher Executive Officer (HEO) and Senior Executive Officer (SEO) roles across the FSA. These attracted a total of 1,288 applications and we filled 27 roles at HEO grade and 14 roles at SEO grade. We will further invest in the development of the policy profession through our strategic capabilities forecast and corporate development plan.

4.7 To ensure we fill our posts as quickly as possible, we encourage all hiring managers to create a reserve list. This remains open for 12 months and can be used to fill the same role or similar roles, identifying suitable candidates on average 49 days faster than by advertising. The generic HEO/SEO policy campaigns during 2023/24 generated 20 reserve candidates, 15 of whom were subsequently appointed.

4.8 Recruiting to our critical Trainee Meat Hygiene Inspector roles remains challenging however, we have seen some improvement in the success of our more recent recruitment campaigns. New recruitment strategies including social media activity, online open evenings and more tailored assessment criteria have resulted in our fill rate increasing. In 2020/2021 we filled 5 out of 56 roles, and in 2022/2023 we filled 56 roles of 109 advertised. We continue to explore

new and innovative ways to attract candidates to support our aim of filling 50% of our Meat Hygiene Inspector roles with FSA employed staff. Currently the figure stands at 43%.

4.9 **Civil Service People Survey (CSPS):** we achieved a 69% engagement score for the second year running, against a Civil Service benchmark of 64% (down from 65% in 2022). We have used our 2023 organisational-level CSPS results to understand the impact of our People Plan rather than to inform a separate set of activities. Actions to address divisional-level results are being taken forward through local action planning.

4.10 **People Plan 2023-2026:** we published [our People Plan](#) in April 2023, outlining the three key themes of an Excellent Employee Experience, Maximising Capability and an Enabling Organisation. Since then, the wider [Civil Service People Plan](#) has been published and the Minister for Cabinet Office set out the government's long-term commitment to modernisation and reform in the Civil Service in their speech at the Institute for Government's Annual Conference 2024. Encouragingly, there are strong synergies between our People Plan themes and the wider civil service approach.

4.11 Year one of our People Plan focused on strengthening our foundations, particularly around critical aspects that support our people in delivering our priorities and [strategy](#) such as line management, prioritisation, recognition and reward and culture. Whilst it will take time to fully embed and realise the impact of some of these deliverables (particularly those designed to drive culture and behaviour change), our 2023 CSPS results provide us with a sense of the immediate impact of others (see [Table 1 of Annex](#)). The FSA delivered its 2023/24 People Plan objectives as planned. Year two deliverables have been reviewed and prioritised to reflect our CSPS results and input from senior management (see [Table 2 of Annex](#)).

4.12 **Pay and Reward 2023/24:** the 2023/24 delegated staff pay award was delivered in August 2023, the start of the pay year. All eligible staff received a payment equivalent to at least 5% for our two lower pay bands, Administrative Officer (AO) and Executive Officer (EO), and 4.5% for HEO to Grade 6. To address potential capacity and capability shortages in priority areas, toxicology and some veterinarian roles moved to our market-facing/niche pay band which resulted in higher pay increases for these groups of staff. None of the individuals in toxicology and veterinary roles who moved to the market-facing/niche pay band have left the FSA. Recruitment activity has been limited to a single role and this was filled at the first attempt. Prompted by a decision made by the Cabinet Office, a one-off non-consolidated payment of £1,500 was made to staff below SCS in addition to the annual pay award.

4.13 The pay award to senior civil servants followed the Government's acceptance of the Review Body on Senior Salaries recommendations. The FSA applied an across-the-board increase for all SCS of 5.5% with a further 1% of the SCS pay bill directed at progression increases for those lower in the pay ranges who are delivering in role and demonstrating the necessary expertise.

4.14 A non-consolidated pay budget is used for our reward and recognition scheme. This is set at 0.5% of our pay bill. In 2023/24 95% of this budget was utilised representing a spend of £403,000.

5. Horizon scanning:

5.1 We remain committed to the delivery of our mission, 'food you can trust,' and on achieving the strategic priorities in our three-year Corporate Plan. However, we are now operating in a more difficult context with the introduction of the cap on Civil Service headcount growth as well as additional budgetary pressures as we move into 2024/25 delivery. Our annual business plan focuses on our priorities within this operating context and has been based on affordable headcount budgets and resources for the year. As resources are allocated annually, some work

has been stopped, paused, or scaled back.

5.2 Our HR Business Partners have supported the creation of the annual business plan to ensure that we are utilising our existing resource effectively to deliver on our Strategy and delivery priorities. During 2024/25, HR Business Partners will continue to work closely with our leaders to identify pivotal roles within the organisation as well as rolling out and embedding strategic workforce planning to ensure that we use our available resources effectively. This work will focus on the delivery of the existing business plan as well as ensuring we are properly positioned to deliver new and emerging priorities as they arise.

5.3 **Corporate development plan:** our strategic capabilities forecast identified three priority areas. Our corporate development plan lays out our annual steps to invest in these areas, progress us towards achieving our strategic capability requirements and maintain professional standards across the FSA. Our approach includes both learning and cultural interventions.

5.4 **Priority 1: business delivery** (encompassing generalist data and digital (D&D) capability, effective decision making, working towards defined professional standards, service delivery and incidents handling). Interventions include:

- improving D&D skills, harnessing their power to make better decisions, improve service delivery and enhance user experience.
- the recent launch of the 'FSA Policy School,' an intervention designed by the policy profession to help attendees build policy expertise, critical thinking, and communication skills. Further work is underway to develop internal training on Regulated Products to share expert knowledge more widely across the profession.
- defining and implementing targeted learning requirements for incidents handling as part of our Risk and Crisis Management (RCM) programme, to build resilience in responding to and managing incidents.
- a project led by the Strategy Unit to clarify internal delegations (from Chief Executive to directors and their deputies) and develop our broader principles for delegation, building upon the recently agreed [Board Operating Framework](#) (BOF) which is embedded in our induction training.
- the Legal Team engaging across the business to raise awareness (particularly with colleagues who may be new to decision-making in a public body context) and sharing Government Legal Profession guidance covering legal concepts that often surface in our work such as consultation, proportionality and justiciability.
- Training in risk assessment remains a priority. The FSA in-house risk assessment training programme which launched in January 2022 provides basic risk assessment induction training, together with more extensive programmes including food safety incidents, toxicology, microbiology, and imports assessment. The programme is supplemented with external technical courses including sessions led by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations/World Health Organisation, European Food Safety Authority, British Toxicology Society and the Institute of Food Science and Technology. In the last 12 months, through professional development existing staff have gained accreditation including chartered scientists and UK registered toxicologists. Externally, the FSA has worked with the British Toxicological Society on their skills gap programme for regulatory toxicology. This will deliver an online training programme for early-career toxicologists in 2024, with the FSA being a leading supporter amongst other partners in government and industry. We are also working across government with other regulators (e.g. Health and Safety Executive and the Office of Public Service and Science) to look at how UK-wide skills gaps might best be addressed.

5.5 **Priority 2: leadership and management** (encompassing behaviours and abilities). Interventions include:

- investing in our leaders and managers through our newly developed FSA leadership and management framework (FSA Ascend) to deliver a consistent standard of people management and ensure we are effectively, consistently and inclusively managing workload and resources to drive performance.
- introducing a mandatory management objective around performance management, reiterating the importance of this critical management skill in driving delivery and standards.
- piloting training designed to help leaders guide themselves and others through complex problem solving and to manage the process of systemic change. This is being tested using Regulated Products as a real-world example.

5.6 **Priority 3: communications and relationships** (encompassing stakeholder engagement and communication skills). Interventions include:

- targeted cohorts of ‘Engaging, Collaborating and Partnering’ training for business areas where building stakeholder engagement skills is a priority.
- regular cohorts of ‘Advance your Writing in Government’ training to ensure drafting skills meet the standards expected across the Civil Service.
- piloting new learning which focuses on ensuring our written papers, policies and briefings are articulate, engaging and decisive.

5.7 **Pay and reward 2024/25:** the Civil Service pay remit guidance for 2024/25 is expected to be published in late spring/summer. We must use this guidance to review, and set pay for staff in grades up to Grade 6. In advance of its publication, FSA senior leaders are engaged in identifying priority areas and/or workforce issues where pay is a contributory factor.

5.8 The FSA cannot commence formal pay negotiations with Trade Unions before our pay remit has been approved. When ready, the pay remit business case will be submitted for approval to the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) Minister.

5.9 Pay for SCS will be determined by the Government following recommendations made by the Review Body on Senior Salaries.

6. Conclusions:

6.1 The Business Committee is asked to note the reflections on the preceding year, and plans for 2024/25.

Annex

Table 1 - Year One People Plan deliverables and corresponding 2023 CSPS results where applicable.

People Plan theme	Year One Deliverable	2023 CSPS results (where applicable)
An Excellent Employee Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewed our pay & benefits offer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our people feel more positive about our reward and benefits offer this year, with an increase of 6% points since 2022. • We have also observed a tenfold increase in use of our employee benefits platform, Edenred.
An Excellent Employee Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refreshed and promoted our ASPIRE values, embedding them throughout our reward and recognition scheme, performance management and policies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our people demonstrate strong awareness of our refreshed ASPIRE values, with 93% of staff stating that they are familiar with them.

People Plan theme	Year One Deliverable	2023 CSPS results (where applicable)
An Excellent Employee Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed and launched our FSA management charter which articulates our expectations of FSA people managers, reflects our ASPIRE values and correlates to the newly developed Civil Service Line Management Standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All CSPS question scores regarding managers are stable or improved since 2022, with the most improved score related to receiving regular performance feedback (+5% points)
An Excellent Employee Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrated wellbeing into our working environments with a high volume of wellbeing initiatives, including recruiting and training more Fair Treatment Champions, launching the new Mental Wellbeing community group, completing an ergonomic risk assessment review for time spent on the line between breaks in meat plants and conducting surveys on facilities and Food Business Operators' office environments to inform action plans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 54% of frontline colleagues said the FSA provides good support for employee health, wellbeing and resilience vs. 68% for non-frontline colleagues. The engagement score for frontline staff saw a substantial increase in 2023 rising from 57% the previous year to 62% in 2023. There was also improvement in all the core themes of the CSPS however, frontline colleagues rate their physical health significantly less positively and have significantly more experience of musculoskeletal problems. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significantly more non-frontline colleagues felt anxious at the time of the survey vs. frontline colleagues.
Maximizing Capability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduced EMT champion-chaired Action Groups to evolve our inclusion governance and support strategic and corporate delivery. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our overall Inclusion and Fair Treatment score in the CSPS has increased by 1 % point from 2022 to 84% - 3% higher than the CS benchmark of 81%. The gaps between the scores of those who have a protected characteristic and those who do not, are narrowing.
Maximizing Capability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed our strategic capability skills forecast to understand what skills and capabilities we need to deliver our strategy and informing our new annual organisational development plan for 24/25. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This was reviewed, amended and signed off by EMT in January 2024, for launch in quarter one of 2024/25.
Maximizing Capability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed our Leadership and Management development framework 'Ascend' with close links to both our Management Charter and the Civil Service line management standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This was reviewed, amended and signed off by EMT in January 2024, for launch in quarter one of 2024/25.
An Enabling Organisation	Rolled out Phase 1 of the Connect programme by introducing Workday.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workday system went live on 3 September 2023.
An Enabling Organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progressed our estates strategy by ensuring our offices are more proportionate to our needs and better suited to collaborative working. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Throughout 2023/24 we have reduced our York and London offices to reflect our requirements, and relocated our Birmingham and Cardiff offices to modern, co-located premises.
An Enabling Organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving our approach to corporate planning & prioritisation by launching our three-year corporate business plan and running bi-annual senior management workshops to review progress, priorities and emerging risks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 69% of people said they have an acceptable workload in the 2023 people survey, a 2%-point increase from 2022. 80% feel they have a good work-life balance, a 3%-point increase from 2022. There are no significant differences in responses regarding workload between frontline and non-frontline staff.

Table 2 - People Plan Year Two deliverables.

People Plan Theme	Year Two deliverables 2024/25
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<p>An Excellent Employee Experience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish a breakdown of reward & recognition awards by protected characteristic to ensure transparency around how reward is spent. • Continue to promote awareness and uptake of workplace adjustments for both frontline and non-frontline staff, including new guidance and e-learning for managers. • Continue to drive progress towards health, safety and wellbeing targets. • Review and update our 'Our Ways of Working' guidance. • Continue to embed our ASPIRE values to shape our culture and behaviour and ensure they resonate with people across the organisation. • Support our managers to uphold our management charter by embedding it in relevant job descriptions and by introducing a mandatory management objective. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Continue to integrate wellbeing into work environments by promoting our Fair Treatment Champions and mental health network.
<p>Maximising Capability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue the work of Inclusion Action Groups, carry out actions to achieve Carer Confident Level 3 in 2025/26, and focus on evidence-based inclusion actions. • Launch and embed FSA Ascend, our leadership and management framework. • Implement our 2024/25 organisational development plan, informed by the Strategic Capabilities Forecast. • Maintain frontline colleague engagement channels e.g. regional engagement and development days. • Evolve our approach to succession planning and talent management by formally identifying pivotal or business critical roles within directorates and designing a new centralised approach to developing our internal talent pipelines. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Complete the Cabinet Office Assurance framework, continuing to increase our declaration rates and supporting our staff networks' evolution to align with the Civil Service Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.
<p>An Enabling Organisation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to embed Workday and explore possible additional functionality. • Progress a modern hybrid estates strategy which optimises use of our estate and aligns to the Government Property Agency model. • Maintain leadership focus on corporate planning & prioritisation.