

Big Data: Towards enhancing academic and non-academic turnover and retention in Higher Education

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Abstract

This research study seeks to explore the issue of employee turnover and retention of non-academic staff in the University of West London. Using a qualitative approach allows for vital insights from employees of the university, this research suggests non-academic staff are experiencing various factors which are impacting on their decision to stay in employment at UWL or leave the institution. The research study will incorporate a comprehensive review of past literature on this topic. The research found that non-academic staff were experiencing lack of support in their roles which leads to the role being challenging and increased workloads. This problem is further exacerbated by workplace stress and the lack of reward and recognition and unclear career advancement opportunities. The research study has outlined several recommendations that the University of West London should consider in reducing turnover and increase retention of non-academic staff.

1. Introduction

It is a challenge for any organisation to ensure sustainability and retain employees to remain competitive. The success or failure of an organisation depends on the quality of people found within it, therefore the retention of employees has become a critical issue (Khan, 2003). One of the key trends for HR is the notion of keeping employees happy, this is because of staff turnover being a concern and the need to lower attrition needs to be a priority for HR teams (Figueroa, 2015). Employees are an important asset and the success of a business is dependent upon the effectiveness of its workforce (Samuel and Chipunza, 2009). The University of West London (UWL) operates in the Higher Education (HE) sector and struggles with perceived high staff turnover within its management, professional and support staff (non-academic). Employee turnover refers to the proportion of employees who leave an organisation over a set period, expressed as a percentage of total workforce numbers (CIPD, 2017). This forces the organisation to replace them with new employees at an additional cost, an organisation with a high rate of employee turnover faces greater risk of failed performances in the long run (Tracy and Hinkin, 2008). It encompasses all leavers both voluntary and involuntary and is then described as "overall" employee turnover.

High turnover can be harmful to a company's productivity if skilled workers are often leaving, and the worker population contains a high percentage of novice workers (Taylor, 1998). Employees leave an organisation for various reasons, some depart involuntarily because of dismissal, redundancy or retirement. The clear majority resign of their own accord, either to take up new jobs and explore opportunities in other companies or to start their own business. It is estimated that an employee will change jobs seven times in a career lifetime (Jo, 2008). Staff turnover in HEI's can have detrimental effects on both students and the remaining staff members, who struggle to give and receive quality services, when positions are vacated and then filled by inexperienced personnel (Powell, 2010).

2. Literature Review

Data has been gathered from UWL’s HR metrics (2017) and external sources (DLA Piper Data - HR bench marker for the HE sectors), which identifies a significant trend of increasing employee turnover amongst non-academic staff, with employees that joined the institution within the last 3 to 5 years. The data shows that there is a problem of retaining non-academic staff and the increasingly high levels of employee turnover, has a negative impact on the organisation and are not sustainable in the medium or long term.

The table below gives an indication of voluntary turnover of non-academic staff:

Figure 1: Voluntary employee turnover 2016/17

Employee turnover %	UWL 2016/17	London, HE sectors average (2016)	Variance to London HE sectors	HE sectors average (2016)
All employees	13.56%	10.8%	2.76% adverse	7.7%
Academic	10.03%	7.1%	2.93 % adverse	-
Support Staff	22.83%	14.2%	8.63% adverse	9.5%

DLA Piper Data (HR Bench marker – Performance Indicators 2016)

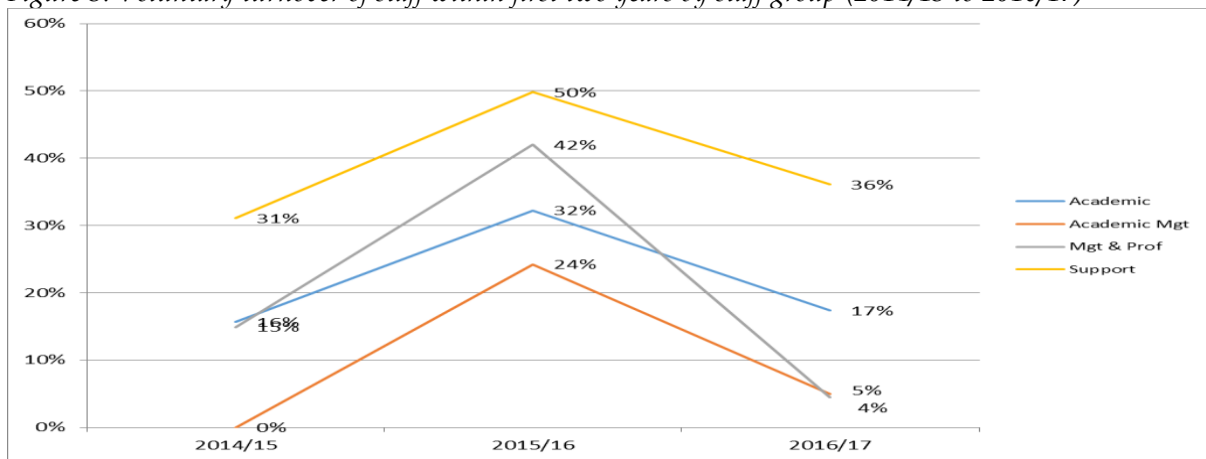
Figure 2: UWL voluntary turnover of staff 2014/15 to 2015/16 by staff group

	2014/15		2015/16			2016/17			2014 to 17 Average Turnover
	Total Leavers	% Turnover	Total Leavers	% Turnover	Current Headcount	Total Leavers	% Turnover	Current Headcount	
Academic	27	10.34%	35	13.54%	277	29	10.03%	289	11.30%
Academic Mgt	2	6.67%	4	9.20%	42	5	9.62%	52	8.50%
Mgt & Prof	16	12.03%	21	17.07%	125	7	4.67%	150	11.26%
Support	58	21.80%	67	25.33%	266	63	22.83%	276	23.32%

(UWL HR Metric data 2016)

Voluntary turnover for support staff is at 23% which is high in comparison to the sector. Figure 2 shows an increase in turnover form 2015/16, with a slight dip in 2016/17. Similarly, voluntary turnover within two years of appointment is high for support staff, DLA Piper (2016) report a HE sectors voluntary turnover of staff within two years at 9.8% whilst UWL is much higher as shown in figure 3.

Figure 3: Voluntary turnover of staff within first two years by staff group (2014/15 to 2016/17)



(UWL HR Metric data 2017)

It would be expected that high employee turnover in London HEI’s would occur given the challenge of HEIs in the London region and the increasing vacancy rate and mobility of the London jobs market. In breaking down staff turnover of non-academic staff further, figure 4 highlights which

central service functions are most critical and have a high turnover of staff. The following departments have voluntary turnover more than 20% for 2016/2017 - International Office, Research and Enterprise, Instil, Marketing and Communications, Property Services and Student Services.

Figure 4: UWL voluntary turnover of staff 2014/15 to 2016/17 by central service /YTD (2017/18)

	2014/15		2015/16			2016/17			2014 to 17	2017/18 to date		
	Total Leavers	% Turnover	Total Leavers	% Turnover	Current Headcount	Total Leavers	% Turnover	Current Headcount	Average Turnover	Total Leavers	% Turnover	Current Headcount
Academic Quality & Standards Office	2	50.00%	0	0.00%	6	3	50.00%	6	33.33%	1	25.00%	4
Academic Registry	4	40.00%	4	40.00%	10	1	9.09%	11	29.70%	3	37.50%	8
Alumni & Development	2	33.33%	0	0.00%	6	1	16.67%	6	16.67%	2	33.33%	6
Directorate & Legal	0	0.00%	6	46.15%	13	2	15.38%	13	20.51%	1	6.25%	16
Finance	5	15.15%	5	22.73%	22	4	18.18%	22	18.69%	0	0.00%	22
Graduate School	1	11.11%	1	50.00%	2	0	0.00%	4	20.37%	1	25.00%	4
HR	4	36.36%	2	14.29%	14	3	18.75%	16	23.13%	0	0.00%	17
INSTIL	3	33.33%	2	15.38%	13	4	36.36%	11	28.36%	1	8.33%	12
International Office	5	71.43%	1	11.11%	9	4	57.14%	7	46.56%	1	12.50%	8
IT Services	7	15.56%	6	17.14%	35	4	9.30%	43	14.00%	3	7.69%	39
Library	8	22.86%	13	43.33%	30	7	15.91%	44	27.37%	1	3.23%	31
Marketing & Communications	6	16.67%	16	55.17%	29	9	25.71%	35	32.52%	2	5.71%	35
Property Services	2	6.06%	1	9.09%	11	3	27.27%	11	14.14%	0	0.00%	11
Registry Services	4	16.67%	2	7.41%	27	0	0.00%	26	8.03%	4	17.39%	23
Research & Enterprise	1	33.33%	1	20.00%	5	3	42.86%	7	32.06%	0	0.00%	8
Strategic Planning	0	0.00%	1	16.67%	6	1	14.29%	7	10.32%	0	0.00%	7
Student Services	8	27.58%	10	28.57%	35	8	24.24%	33	26.80%	7	15.56%	45
Grand Total	62	35.18%	71	26.01%	273	57	18.87%	302	26.69%	27	9.12%	296

(UWL HR Metric data 2017)

It is important to note that non-academic staff also work within the various academic schools in the university, but the researcher was unable to gain data on this. The data available measured turnover for the whole school which includes both academic and non-academic employees. Figure 5 below indicates that support staff are more likely to leave UWL on average after 5 years' service in comparison to the sector average of 6 years.

Figure 5: Average length of service of leavers for non-academic staff

Staff category	London, HE sectors average (2016)	HE sectors average (2016)
Non-academic	5.2 years	6.3 years

DLA Piper Data (HR Benchmarking - Performance Indicators 2016)

The data shows a high turnover of support staff which could affect UWL in many ways such as:

The cost of replacement, recruitment and loss of productivity

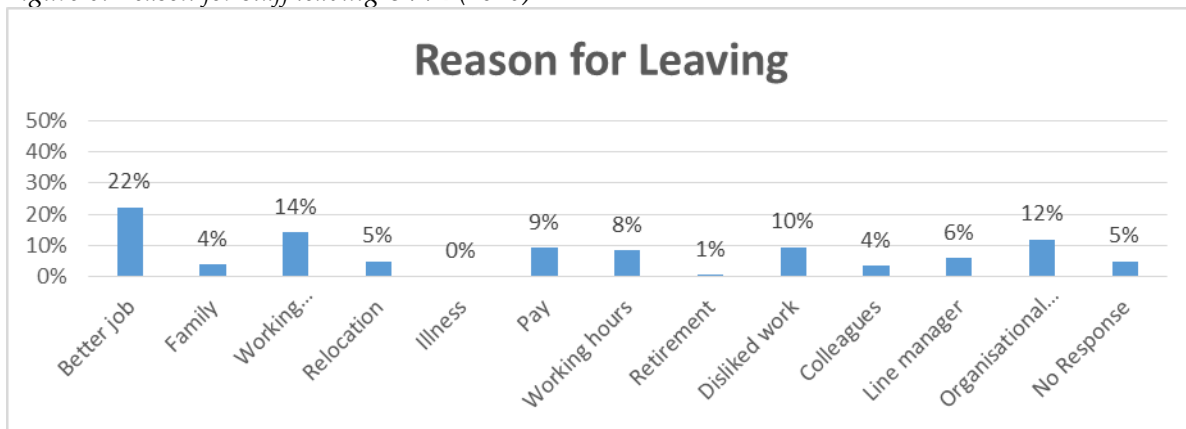
Loss of key competence, knowledge and skill for UWL - competent staff could move on to competitors instead of contributing and adding value to UWL.

Low retention is an indicator of low morale and engagement which could be due to added workload on current staff who have to continually fill in gaps of work and headcount of leavers.

Higher levels of sickness absence from those staff covering vacancies, this may have an adverse cost implication for UWL. In 2016/17 there were 36 episodes of stress related absence accounting for 22 % of all recorded absence (UWL HR metrics, 2017).

Data collected from UWL metrics (2017) shows that the most frequently quoted reasons for staff leaving based on "Exit Survey" data is shown in figure 6, it shows that employees are leaving for better jobs and relating pay as a reason for leaving. In addition, employees are usually moving for better career development, promotion and reward opportunities this corroborates with the responses received from the interviews conducted. In most cases these moves are to other competing HEIs. Working conditions, working hours and relocation may relate to where UWL is unable to accommodate flexible working requests.

Figure 6: Reason for staff leaving UWL (2016)



(UWL HR Metric data 2016)

The graph indicates the top reason for leaving as "better job" this relates to the overall job description and tasks associated with a role. People look for alternative roles they feel as though their current position no longer challenges them. The next highest reason for leaving was working conditions, this relates to the environment and resources available. Following that reason was organisational structure, this could be an obstruction in terms of hierarchy and employees not being able to be a part of the decision-making process. Other reasons such as disliking the work, pay and working hours all indicate frustration and unhappiness on the part of the employees and thus fuelling their decision to leave the university. It is also important to note that no employees left because of illness and a low percentage of staff leave UWL due to retirement or issues with colleagues and line manager.

However past review of exit questionnaires for staff leaving during 2014/15 (UWL,2017) indicated:

36% of leavers regarded career development/progression prospects as satisfactory;

38% of leavers rated the support received from their manager as poor or inadequate;

44% of respondents highlighted workload as a factor in their decision to leave;

19% indicated leaving for better pay.

The above exit interview data gives further insight into why support staff at UWL tend to leave.

Understanding Staff Turnover and Retention

Taylor (2014) defines employee turnover as the ratio of the number of workers that must be replaced in a given time period to the average number of workers. Griffeth and Hom (2001), define turnover across three dimensions - voluntary, involuntary and dysfunctional turnover. Voluntary turnover is initiated by an employee, while involuntary is initiated by the organisation due to an employee's poor performance or restructuring. Dysfunctional turnover is when high performers or employees who are hard to replace leave an organisation, this type of turnover can be harmful to an

organisation. A huge concern for most organisations is employee turnover and is a costly expense especially in lower paid job roles, for which the turnover rate is highest. Many factors play a role in the turnover rate of an organisation and these can stem from both the employer and employees; wages, company benefits, employee attendance and job performance are all factors that play a significant role in employee turnover (Khan, 2013).

A low rate of employee turnover is inevitable even when service conditions are perfect because some employees retire, move to other job roles or other personal reasons (Allen *et al.*, 2010). Turnover can be problematic and, in some cases, detrimental to organisations, however by implementing effective guidelines for managing turnover requires that all parties involved such as the HR department and senior management, understand the impact of turnover on the organisation and how to manage it.

Employee retention is an important issue facing an organisation because of the shortage of skilled workers, economic growth, and high employee turnover (Samuel and Chipunza, 2013). Once an organisation has captured skilled employees, the return of investment requires closing the back door to prevent them walking out (Selesho, 2014). This means that employees are more likely to remain with an organisation if they believe at it shows more interest and concern for them, if they know what is expected from them, if they are given a role that fits their capabilities, and if they receive regular positive feedback and recognition (Samuel and Chipunza, 2013). Employees feel comfortable staying in roles where they are well informed on issues concerning the organisation and their well-being.

There are many arguments that can be made in favour of certain amounts of staff turnover. Firstly, organisations need to be rejuvenated with fresh knowledge and skills to avoid becoming stale and stagnated. This can usually be seen at senior levels whereby new leadership is often required occasionally to drive change forward. However, new people bring fresh ideas and experiences which make organisations more dynamic. Secondly, it can be argued that a degree of turnover helps managers to keep firmer control over labour costs. According to Torrington *et al.* (2014) when income falls in an organisation it is possible to hold back from replacing leavers until the business picks up again. By doing this, organisations can minimise staffing budgets while maintaining profitability. It can also be argued that some employee turnover is “functional” rather than “dysfunctional” because it results in the loss of poor performers and their replacement with more effective employees.

The arguments against staff turnover indicate that there are costs associated with replacing people who have left such as recruitment and selection costs. When looking at staff retention it highlights that people who leave an organisation represent a lost resource in which time and money has been invested. Subsequently, high turnover rates are symptomatic of a poorly managed organisation. This can influence the labour market, as high turnover in an organisation sends a negative message and creates a poor image in labour market which makes it harder to recruit good performers.

2.2.1 Causes of Employee turnover

Turnover is an employee behaviour caused by a series of incidents that result in an employee leaving the organisation by choice or by the wish of management. White (1995) found that the causes of employee turnover fall under three categories – job dissatisfaction, errors in employee selection and poor management. Role ambiguity can also lead to employee turnover, which refers to the difference between what people expect in a job and what they feel they should be doing. This leads to uncertainty on about what their job role should be and creates a misunderstanding of what is expected and how to meet the expectations, or the employee believing that the role should be different. Insufficient information on how to perform the job, may cause employees to feel less involved and satisfied with their jobs which leads to lack of commitment to the organisation and a propensity to leave.

Taylor (2014) proposes that there are push and pull factors which explain turnover among members of an occupational group. Firstly, pull factors occur when there is an attraction of alternative employment. Employees may be happy with their current job but decide to leave in search of

something better such as higher rate of pay, a better benefits package, job security and better career advancement opportunities. Where pull factors have been identified, an organisation looking to reduce turnover would need to find out what employees really value, what they are looking for in their careers and then enhance the organisations ability to provide it. Secondly, push factors are based on the perception that something is wrong with the existing employer and move to secure a better job, Taylor (2014) suggests that such employees are likely to join another organisation without knowing much about it, simply because they no longer enjoy their existing job. Examples of push factors range from a dislike of the prevailing organisation culture, disapproval of changed structures and personality clashes with colleagues. When push factors are pre-eminent the organisation must respond by addressing the cause of the dissatisfaction. This may take the form of ensuring good selection of management and providing them with better training and appraising them regularly. It could also mean examining organisational policy or enhancing the quality of working life. According to Freeman and Medoff (1984) they proposed the employment relations of “voice” rather than of “exit”, meaning to provide structures and culture which encourages the resolution of dissatisfaction internally before it generates resignations.

Many researchers have debated the nature of the decision-making process, which happens before the final decision to quit, the work of Mobley (1977) has been influential in devising an approach of the “10-stage model” which considers the complexity of most resignation decisions:

- Evaluate existing job
- Experience job dissatisfaction
- Think of quitting
- Evaluate expected utility of search for a new job and the cost of quitting
- Decide to search for alternatives
- Search for alternatives
- Evaluate alternatives
- Compare best alternative with current job
- Decide whether to stay or quit
- Quit

Mobley’s model includes both push and pull factors and suggests that in practice dissatisfaction occurs first and triggers the search for a new job. There are arguments of the model in terms of how the stages follow one another in a linear sequence, other models proposed by Steers and Mowday (1981) and Price and Mueller (1986), identify various elements that can lead to a resignation and remove the concept of linear stages, the purpose of the model is to identify the different factors that lead to employee turnover and suggest how each relates to each other. The Price and Mueller model features a clear separation of “job satisfaction” and “organisational commitment”, asserting that it is possible to be satisfied in your job yet be uncommitted to the organisation you work for. It can be said that reduced commitment leads to turnover, which can be brought about because of both dissatisfaction with a job as well as other factors. This is an important distinction for managers who want to get a better understanding of turnover in their organisation.

More recently, a model by Rhoades *et al.*, (2001) identifies various items that can be labelled and represented in a variety of HR practices. The model proposes that organisational rewards, procedural justice and supervisor support lead to perceived organisational commitment. However, the model stopped at commitment and failed to extend to the actual turnover decision. Allen *et al.*, (2003) draw on this model and suggest that perceptions of supportive HR practices add to the development of perceived organisational support, which mediates the relationship between these practices, job satisfaction and organisational commitment. Allen *et al.* (2003) found that decision-making, fairness of rewards and growth opportunities represented the perceived supportive HR practices. These variables then influence the perceived organisational support, which influences job satisfaction and commitment and in turn influencing turnover.

2.2.2 Impact of turnover and retention on Higher Education Institutions

The retention of employees in HEI's is a concern, because they are losing qualified staff to the private sector and to other HEI's that can offer better rewards and benefits. HEIs are adopting more traditional business models (Parker, 2013) putting them in a vulnerable position to control costs, leading to added pressure for managers to retain valued employees. Retaining employees will depend upon an organisations capability to understand why employees choose to stay and work for an employer.

Employee turnover is not a new concept to HEI's, as the number of student numbers increase so does the demand for staff therefore affecting retention and turnover. It is important for HEIs to meet the expectations of employees and stay up to date with job prospects for new and existing employees, to the level in which other organisation meets these expectations. According to Bushe (2012), retention refers to the process of the ability of an HEI to not only employ qualified academic staff but also to retain competent professional staff through the establishment of quality work-life, staff climate, place of work and being an employer of choice. This involves influencing an employee's decision to be committed and remain with the institution, even when job opportunities do not exist. Universities by their nature, serve as a store house for knowledge and very few institutions can afford to employ, train and permit their most valued and talented employees to leave when it is difficult to find better replacements (Netswera *et al.*, 2005). For HEIs to effectively manage and retain their employees, they should pay attention to the importance of job satisfaction and its effect on the performance level of employees. To encourage the retention in higher education institutions Netswera *et al.*, (2005) suggest the following as important:

Communicating how each employee contributes to the corporate vision and mission

Developing a climate of trust

Improving the skills level of managers who supervise professional staff

Providing management training

Clarifying roles and responsibilities to accelerate earning contribution

Investing and maintaining ongoing commitment by rewarding staff financially

According to Armstrong and Long (1994) they suggest that the objective of the reward system when used to retain staff must include attraction and motivation at all organisational levels. To achieve these objectives, management must develop competitive terms of service and remuneration packages, to recruit skilled professionals and retain their services.

2.2.3 Improving employee turnover and retention

When trying to improve employee turnover, an organisation needs to formulate plans and strategies. Griffith and Hom (2001) suggest possible remedial action that can be considered when reducing turnover such as job enrichment, work environment, induction practices, employee selection and reward practices. If an organisation has problems retaining staff, it can experience many adverse impacts, therefore having a retention strategy in place is very important. An organisation will need to carry out enough research to find out why employees are leaving and if so what section of the organisation. The research can take the form of labour turnover data or exit interview data, which will form the groundwork for developing a strategy to retain staff. The organisation needs to focus on the reasons for voluntary staff turnover and form an action plan to address common causes of dissatisfaction across the workforce. According to CIPD (2017), employers need to develop a long-term strategy that addresses the various reasons that has prompted a high resignation rate, and that typically a high voluntary rate is not solely attributed to dissatisfaction with one or many common issues. Employers may need to address several work-related areas to improve employee motivation and retention. As suggested by CIPD (2017) an organisation may want to look at the following areas before devising a retention strategy:

- Improving recruitment and selection practices
- Improving induction practices

- Enhanced training and development provision
- Career and job development
- Flexible working
- Improving line management skills
- Pay and benefits provision
- Non-financial reward and recognition
- Health and wellbeing initiatives
- Improving communication with staff

The above list is not exhaustive, and an organisation can look at specific areas depending on their needs. In formulating a retention strategy, it is important that the HR department within the organisation gain the buy-in from senior management, and any initiatives arising from the strategy are supported by line management and seen through to completion. HR plays a key role in reducing turnover and increasing retention by re-recruiting and re-engaging. By re-recruiting, this shows the employee that there are new and exciting career opportunities available and they are valued. In addition, re-engaging allows employees to have a positive relationship with management, belief in senior management and an overall sense of personal accomplishment in their work and what they do (Taylor, 2014).

2.3 Factors affecting employee retention

Retention ensures that an organisation keeps hold of its best employees, resulting in high productivity. Research has suggested that employees are less likely to consider looking for new jobs when they feel fulfilled in their existing roles. Job enrichment plays an important role where retention needs to be increased, according to Griffith and Hom (2001) employees have perceptions of what their job role should be such as, the job being meaningful, opportunities for self and career development, autonomy and positive feedback given on performance. This study will look at some specific factors which affect employee retention – reward, work environment, communication and work place stress.

2.3.1 Reward and Recognition

An employee reward system consists of the use of integrated policies, processes and practices for rewarding employees in accordance with their contribution, skill, competence and their market worth (Armstrong and Murlis, 2007). A reward system consists of financial rewards and employee benefits which together comprise total remuneration, and consists of non-financial rewards such as recognition, praise, achievement and responsibility. The combination of both types of financial rewards comprises the total reward system.

The work of Herzberg (1968) found that the factors causing job satisfaction are different from those that cause job dissatisfaction. The satisfiers are called “motivators” and dissatisfiers are “hygiene factors”. Meaning that there are two distinct human needs that are portrayed; physiological needs that can be fulfilled by money and psychological needs to achieve and grow (Herzberg, 1968). This theory of “motivation – hygiene” implies that management must provide hygiene factors to avoid employee dissatisfaction, but also must provide intrinsic factors for employees to be satisfied with their jobs leading to retention.

2.3.2 Work environment

Work environment refers to the working conditions in which employees must perform their duties and can affect employee satisfaction. Clements-Croome (2000) suggested that improvements to productivity can be substantial if attention is given to the design of appropriate office environments. An ideal work environment will allow staff to have a high degree of personal control over their own immediate environment, where this is not possible, the organisation should ensure that it surveys the opinions of staff regularly and follow up on any complaints about the environment in order to compensate for them not having direct control over it (Taylor, 2014). It is also argued by Griffith and Hom (2001) that large open plan offices tend to reduce employee’s feelings of autonomy and

significance which increases dissatisfaction. Unless it matches an established work place culture, it is best to get rid of open plan office “partitions” to decrease feelings of isolation. Employees who are satisfied with their work environment, are likely to be more motivated and productive and stay with the organisation.

2.3.3 Communication

There are various aspects of communication that can impact an employee’s decision to leave or remain in an organisation. Communication can take the form of regular staff briefings or with line manager and a good flow of information from senior management to staff. When there is good communication, staff feel involved in organisational decisions and are clear about the strategic direction. Taylor (2014) suggests that line managers have regular contact with staff as it necessary that managers notice their staff and show an interest in what they are doing and give them feedback. People are more likely to leave an organisation if they believe that they are being undervalued or are not given a chance to communicate by sharing their views and opinions. It is good practice to involve staff in decision making, which helps to boost self-esteem and shows that employees’ contribution is valued, and management is carried out by consensus. Employees want to work in organisations that listen and talk to them and are more likely to trust and remain with employers that communicate effectively.

2.3.4 Workplace stress

Stress in the workplace has become an issue for organisations in recent years as it is shown to link to performance, job dissatisfaction and turnover. It can be defined as “a mismatch between the demands of the job and the resources and capabilities of the individual worker to meet those demands” (Blaug *et al.*, 2007). According to Mayer (2001) workplace stress can occur due to many reasons such as the working environment being negative, too many responsibilities placed on an individual and not enough resources, working long hours with no reward and employees having no self-control regarding their careers. Job stress can influence employees job satisfaction which can lead to low performance and the intention to leave the job. Many researchers have found that the greater the amount of stress, the higher the turnover intention of employees (Chen *et al.*, 2010). A positive relationship was found between workplace stress and turnover (Noor and Maad, 2008).

3. Methodology

Research strategy is defined as a plan of how a researcher will go about answering their research question (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). The research strategy will follow inductive theory, because theory is the outcome of the research. The process of induction involves drawing out observations or findings and theories are proposed towards the end of the research (Saunders *et al.*, 2016)

Inductive approach is often called “bottom up” approach because it starts with specific cases and then works its way up to abstract level of theory. Once a researcher has identified patterns and trends amongst a set of data, then general conclusions or theories can be developed. By nature, inductive reasoning is more open-ended and exploratory.

Inductive strategy uses raw data to derive concepts, themes or a model through interpretations made by the researcher. Strauss and Corbin (1998) gave an understanding of inductive analysis as “the researcher begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data”.

In his review of literature (Thomas, 2006) states that findings from an inductive approach result from multiple interpretations made from the raw data by the researcher who codes the data. Therefore, the findings are shaped by the assumptions and experiences of the researcher conducting the study. For the findings to be usable, the researcher must make decisions about what is important in the data.

Research Approach

The research approach used in this study is qualitative research because it involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach to its subject matter. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011) qualitative researchers “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret

phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them". The aim of qualitative research is to understand the social reality of individuals as clearly as possible, the same way participants feel or live it. A qualitative approach is exploratory and seeks to explain "how" and "why", and therefore fits appropriately with this chosen research topic.

This study will use semi-structured interviews to gather data. Using this approach will help uncover trends in thought and opinions and allow problems to be delved into. Data collection is non-standardised, so questions and procedures may alter and emerge during the research process. It can be said that the success of the researcher's role is dependent not only on gaining physical access to participants, but also building rapport to gain cognitive access to their data (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). Data will also be obtained from UWL's HR metric performance indicators which will assist in benchmarking against other institutions in the HE sectors.

A qualitative research approach allows issues and subjects covered to be evaluated in depth and detail, the direction and framework of research can be revised as and when findings emerge. However, there are issues of reliability and validity when using qualitative data.

4. Data Analysis

Of the 231 responses that were collected, only 19 came from the Brentford Campus – 8.22% of all responses – and in total 5 questionnaires (2.16%) were discarded for being incomplete or answered entirely with a single response for each question.

In considering the demographic information in Table 5, it can be observed that almost half of respondents are Undergraduate students not in their final year and as a result may not have the opportunity to complete the NSS should they withdraw from UWL due to dissatisfaction with the course or institution. The author notes that this may result in a disparity between the previously published NSS results and those gathered as part of this survey as students viewing their tenure at University through the prism of their being a valued customer may well change service provider before getting to the point of award if they are sufficiently dissatisfied.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

In conducting this research, it is evident that there are issues with the retention of non-academic staff and as a result UWL is dealing with a high turnover amongst this group of employees. The aim of this research was to understand employee turnover and retention of non-academic staff and its causes, using UWL as the context. The research objectives aimed to find out whether turnover causes increased pressure on staff and whether there is clear communication between line managers and staff. In addressing these research objectives, the study built on previous research, and used both primary and secondary data collection.

Many of the conclusions drawn out of the interview process corroborate with literature. The clear majority of respondents clearly believed that although they find UWL to be a great environment to work in, there are still issues which need to be addressed which has caused a high turnover of non-academic staff. This group of staff are influential and add to the continuity of educational services within the institution, so therefore they need to be valued. Employees are the backbone of any business success and therefore, they need to be motivated and maintained, and in the long-run returns on investments of the employees will be achieved.

Based on the data collection, the results confirmed the reasons for turnover amongst support staff as being lack of career progression and development, increased workloads leading to stress, lack of reward and recognition. It was identified that non-academic staff had good communication between them and managers, however this could be utilised better in tackling some of the issues raised in the study. Managers will need to ensure that focused discussion are had with staff, this will hopefully draw out any issues or concerns and allow support to be given.

Firstly, there was agreement from respondents that there is a lack of career progression and unclear career paths or development opportunities for non-academic staff, which presented as a major catalyst for actual and intended reasons to leave. Based on this analysis, it seems that poor promotion prospects

not only prompted initial thoughts about leaving but is a key factor in influencing voluntary turnover. Literature suggested that this causes widespread dissatisfaction among support staff and cite that low rates of advancement as one of the reasons for turnover. Similarly, literature also suggested that even if employees are satisfied with their present job, they may still leave if there is a lack of future opportunities. When there is a policy of promoting from within, it has an impact on the opportunities for advancement in the institution which determines whether employees will stay or leave. In conducting this research, respondents commented on lack of career progression being a frustrating aspect of their job experience. In examining this issue, it related to UWL's process of promotions for non-academic staff. It seems that the main difficulty of getting a promotion stems from lack of line management authority to make promotion decisions, all promotions must be approved by the senior management team of the institution. Respondents indicated that due to promotion outcomes being out of their line manager's control, this then imposed barriers to their advancement potentially leading to the employee leaving the university. The hierarchical culture of the university seems to impede career development as there are not many higher positions to move into as non-academic staff, whereas academic staff have clear promotion processes in place.

It is important to note that non-academic staff have a high likelihood of getting external job offers as they have greater job mobility, however based on the responses received from interviews with employees, support staff are not likely to leave a job role because of the "pull" of an offer, but rather due to something about their current job role which causes them to accept an offer from elsewhere. This can be seen in the responses given of feeling stuck in a position with no prospect of progression leading to turnover if a better opportunity presents itself. This clearly demonstrates that there is a retention problem with non-academic staff and the university will need to implement a strategy whereby support staff have clear career pathways or a means to be promoted.

The heavy workloads of non-academic staff were reported to be as a result of extra responsibilities taken on. This is due to staff that had left the institution and the position not being filled quickly, and due to an improper induction process for new starters to the university or in some cases induction taking place months after a person had started their role. The continuous turnover of non-academic roles in the institution leads to the remaining staff feeling pressured and having lack of commitment. This may cause staff to be off sick with work place stress or trigger wanting to leave the university. The university needs to review the turnaround times for filling vacancies and ensure that line managers are utilising regular one to one meeting with staff, this will help in identifying whether staff are coping well with workloads and if not allow proper support to be put in place.

Due to staff stating that they found their work environment "*positive*" and having good team morale, it is clear to see how work place stress occurs when a member of staff leaves as they emotionally struggle to cope with a member of the team leaving.

The lack of reward and recognition was also identified to aiding turnover of non-academic staff as UWL does not have any clear reward strategies in place. Non-academic staff are on defined pay scales, which once the top salary point is reached they can go no further. This has brought about feelings of being stuck in a position, coupled with the fact of limited promotion prospects. The data collected indicated that staff would stay at the university longer if proper strategies were in place to try and retain them.

Finally, communication between line managers was found to be good as stated by respondents, communication should be used effectively in identifying issues within departments that may potentially lead to staff leaving. Non-academic staff indicated that they want to be heard and to be a part of the decision-making process. UWL needs to ensure that management are conducting regular one to one's with staff and keeping abreast of any issues as they arise, this may lead to a reduction in turnover by eliminating the intention to leave. The findings of the study show that for retention of non-academic staff to be successful there needs to be good induction in place for new starters, as this sets the foundation for their employment journey at UWL. This then leads to better understanding of what the job entails and allows challenges to be better managed, which alleviates

any stress triggers. If there is a better understanding of the job, this opens more dialogue between non-academic staff and their line managers to have effective conversations that possibly explore an individual's career development and address issues with reward and recognition.

Therefore, based on the evidence and research it would be beneficial for UWL to implement retention strategies specifically focusing on non-academic staff as turnover is critical.

5. Recommendations

It is vital to implement practical strategies that can reduce the observed problems that have been identified, the following recommendations for improvements to the turnover and retention of non-academic staff can be offered as a result of the research findings.

Firstly, in tackling the issue of providing clear career development and progression opportunities it is imperative that UWL can understand and manage people's careers expectations and if the situation arises whereby promotions are not feasible, identify lateral moves that vary experience and make the work more interesting. Lateral moves can take place in the form of secondments, job rotations or project working which can provide wider development opportunities for staff.

Also, appraisals must be conducted regularly, and actions followed up rather than it being a paper exercise, this will help in facilitating discussions between support staff and their line managers by looking at their short and long-term aspirations. However, where a promotion can be made it is important that the promotion process is open and fair, UWL should follow good practice which involves ensuring a rigorous recruitment process is in place, and not promoting individuals beyond their capabilities who may later get overwhelmed and leave. Similarly, UWL should support employees by providing sufficient training and development before and after a promotion.

UWL can implement succession and talent planning which is the process of identifying successors to fill important roles and provides a basis for planning the career progression of non-academic staff and will ensure that staff feel valued. This will also alleviate the need for constant approval from senior management to approve promotions, if a plan is in place then approval would have already been given. The approach that UWL can take to implement succession planning is to identify and develop groups of job roles (non-academic) e.g. administrators, to enable potential successors to be considered for a range of roles. By having succession planning, UWL may be able to cut down on the costs associated with covering vacancies such as the use of agency staff to cover a job role; if a potential employee has been identified as being able to move into the vacant role due to succession planning then there is no need to use agency staff, which in effect will save money and allow managers to make best value recruitment decisions as well as boost the morale of staff.

UWL need to provide effective training to line managers, which promotes awareness and understanding of UWL's policies and procedures and develop the competencies and behaviours that are needed as line managers. Training should cover key areas such as having difficult conversations, absence management, appraisal, probation and performance management. The training can take the format of development courses delivered in house or by an external provider, interactive e-learning modules or workshops.

It is recommended that the induction process of new starters in particular for non-academic staff should be completed earlier on in post, this is influential in determining the quality and stability of the relationship between the employee and the university. There needs to be a robust probation process in place which will help identify any issues earlier on rather than when things escalate, and employees become dissatisfied and leave UWL. Line managers should ensure that support mechanisms are in place to allow employees to make a valuable contribution to the university.

As mentioned previously, non-academic staff have increased workloads due to turnover which often leads to workplace stress. It is recommended that UWL regularly review job content and design, as too much work placed on an individual may lead to excessive work pressures and thus increases the risk of turnover. There should be a process in place that monitors and reviews levels of

work-related stress and adequate referrals to occupational health should be made, this will provide recommendations on how best to support the employee. UWL can also implement well-being programmes or standalone initiatives which focuses on targeting behaviours that present health risks and supporting lifestyle changes among employees.

A well-being plan and policy can be introduced which sets out the responsibilities of managers, employees and HR and list any programmes that will be run.

Finally, it is important that UWL ensure that base pay and overall remuneration packages for non-academic staff are competitive and in line with market rates. Base pay is the initial rate of compensation an employee receives in exchange for services, in comparison to competitor universities the salary and grading structure can be increased to help retain staff. Likewise, it is important that UWL maintains consistency in the grading of roles, the findings indicated that administrators of one academic school are on a lower salary grade than another administrator in a different school, but both are doing the same job role.

While it can be difficult to implement a reward strategy that will be beneficial to all, there are some changes that can be made to the reward framework at UWL to help retain non-academic employees. UWL can devise a total reward strategy which will involve the design, management and communication of reward in a way that treats financial and non-financial benefits offered by UWL. This helps to ensure that non-academic staff are aware of the various benefits they are receiving. Developing a total reward strategy will involve implementing objectives, research, consultation, identification and prioritisation of key reward elements. The non-financial rewards and recognition that can be implemented and are often overlooked by employers are departmental awards, "thank you" cards or employee of the month schemes.

Additionally, UWL should consider conducting staff surveys for both non-academic and academic staff either annually or every six months which will allow the "employee voice" to be heard. Current employees can state what is working well in terms of working for the university and state what is not working so well and provide suggestions. It is imperative that UWL take on board the data from staff surveys as it will give an informed and accurate view of any issues among non-academic staff and help to shape retention initiatives.

Finally, to address the limitations of this research it is recommended that further research be conducted to investigate the concepts of employee turnover and retention amongst non-academic staff within higher education institutions, which will allow it to be used as benchmark. This can be accomplished by using large sample data to identify the exact causes and effects of employee turnover of non-academic staff in universities. This research provides some valuable guidance for senior managers and aid the HR department in formulating strategies to reduce turnover and increase retention of non-academic staff.

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