



NCVO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Good employment practice case study

Updating and consulting on HR policies within an organisation

Gurdip Rai, HR advisor for Hillingdon Association of Voluntary Services (HAVS) spoke to us about the process she follows to update her organisation's HR policies.

How did this come about – what brought the issue to light?

With many legal changes in October, Gurdip took the opportunity to update HAVS's HR policies and make them consistent.

Who was involved in the updating process?

Gurdip worked with her HR Assistant to produce the policies. All staff and the management committee were involved in the consultation and approval of the documents.

What did the process involve?

- **Identifying policies to update.** *“All policies had an element of change. We needed to prioritise.”* HAVS had 31 existing policies to review and 6 new policies to draft.
- **Drafting policies.** Gurdip and her HR Assistant used [XpertHR](#) to cross-check each policy one at a time. The HR Assistant produced first drafts which Gurdip then reviewed.
- **Creating quick reference guides.** The HR team produce 'quick reference' guides for each policy. These state the updates that have been made. *“It's much simpler. Staff can see the changes at a glance as bullet points.”* Gurdip recommended this method over using 'tracked changes' or highlighting a Word document.
- **Deciding on the most appropriate method of consultation.** *“Of course, all organisations have different approaches. It's much easier to gain consensus on policy changes which are favourable to the employee.”* Gurdip recommended balancing the depth of consultation with the volume of policies to be reviewed. Sitting down individually with staff, explaining the changes and gaining written consent is preferable especially where changes may be less popular. However email was deemed the best option in this instance.

- **Beginning staff consultation.** *“It’s quite a long process. We have 13 employees to consult with.”* Gurdip began with the three most important policies and circulated these to staff via email for questions and comments.
- **Forwarding policies to management committee for approval.** *“The policies have now gone to the management committee. The management committee have taken away the policies individually as the staff did. They could have chosen to work with a select panel, but they opted to all be involved in the review.”* The Chair organised a separate meeting aside from the management committee meetings to review the policies. In two and a half hours, five policies were signed off. *“This is effectively the fourth check: having gone past the HR Assistant, the HR Advisor, the staff, the management committee provide the final review.”*
- **Uploading updated policies to web portal.** *“We launched our web portal recently. I want to make full use of our HR function in that and give our members a quick reference point.”* Gurdip provides external support to HAVS’s member organisations as well as working with HAVS staff. Uploading the HR policies to the portal is a key way to facilitate this.

What has been the big impact of these changes?

- **Fair policies and procedures that are up-to-date.** *“I hope to see the benefits of process in the long run. It’s not something to rush by.”*
- **Learning experience for HR team.** *“We’ve learned a lot through this process. As a team, we’ve really looked to see how a policy has developed and looked at where we would like to take it.”*

What was key to the success of this policy review?

- **Communicating changes well.** The HR team has drafted ‘line manager briefings’ to help managers put the policies into practice. *“The line manager briefing is like an abbreviation of the general policy and procedure. Managers want to know what they need to do. It’s like a synopsis of the policy. The briefing explains how to approach a specific situation, providing the essential do’s and don’ts. It’s no longer than an A4 page for each policy.”*
- **Striking a happy medium.** Consulting via email helped the HR team to review a large number of policies in one sitting. Gurdip said it was important to circulate the policies to staff in manageable bundles.

What were the main challenges?

- **Time constraints.** *“We had 37 policies to review in two months. It needed further time. We started at the beginning of August aiming for 1 October. But we’ll be looking at December or mid January for all policies to have a signature on them. By that time, I know that three policies will need updating again. For staff, I give 10-15 working days to review five policies. For the trustees, we post the five policies and give them three weeks to review the bundle. Come April, this will be much easier. The hard work has been done.”*
- **Ever changing legislation.** Consultation can be lengthy so it’s wise to keep an eye on legal changes that may be occurring while your policies are undergoing review.

Is there anything that would have been done differently?

- **Completing the first tranche of updates sooner.** *“It was a while before we were able to begin our first review of policies. I wouldn’t leave it that long. It’s much easier to do when you keep up on top of changes.”*

Are there any future developments in the pipeline now?

Gurdip is leading her next policy review in April with the aim of introducing face-to-face consultations with staff on policy changes.

Any advice for organisations looking to adopt a systematic approach to updating their HR policies?

- **Keep records of legislation changes.** *“Every time you read something, make a note. Keep a notebook and know what’s in the pipeline.”*
- **Prioritise.** Begin with the policies that need the most significant changes and work through them in a manageable order.
- **Prepare and plan.**
- **Don’t underestimate timing.** Be realistic with what you can achieve in the time available.
- **Keep staff in loop.** *“It’s important to keep the conversation going and let staff know what’s ahead.”*

About HAVS’s HR and workforce

- **How many paid staff do you have?** 13 staff
- **How many trustees sit on your board?** 10 trustees
- **How many volunteers do you have?** 6 volunteers