



*Careers for*  
Human Resources Graduates

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## NOTE:

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## Introduction

At a time of growing international globalisation, there is an increased level of recognition that better management and utilisation of Human Resources are the keys to maximising business success. The new millennium is an exciting era for managing people, and the advent of new technologies has increased the need for innovative approaches to the management of those who work both inside and outside their businesses. This booklet provides information about the various functions of the people management profession including areas of specialisation and future growth, the skills and qualities required to embrace such a career and a few tips on the best ways to enter this diverse field.

## Overview

In the past, the generic term for 'staffing' functions within organisations was Personnel. However, Personnel had become only one – usually administrative – function alongside Industrial Relations, Training, Health and Safety and so on. The increasingly urgent demands for strategic planning for and development of organisations' Human Resources resulted in widespread adoption of the term Human Resource Management (HRM).

An organisation's Human Resources, or human capital, consist of all people employed by an organisation; they are what every organisation depends upon to make it operate. HRM refers to those activities and employees that assist the organisation to meet its stated operational objectives by providing a motivated, well trained work force which understands what the business is about, knows where it fits in within the organisation and how it can contribute to the organisation. HRM deals with recruiting and selecting the most suitable and qualified staff for the organisation; it is concerned with their development, motivation and training in order to minimise turnover and increase performance. Increasingly, HRM is also concerned with the strategic issues associated with people management, with those involved in HRM focussing on organisational change, statutory compliance and industrial matters and performance optimisation. Today HRM professionals work jointly with the Board and senior management team on critical people issues.



In most organisations the HR function covers the following activities:

#### **Statutory and Compliance Services**

- Legislation governing work arrangement: WorkChoices legislation, Federal and State Awards, Australian Workplace Agreements, etc.
- Industrial Relations
- Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S)
- Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO)

#### **Training and Development**

- Learning
- Classroom
- Self-directed
- On the job
- Succession planning
- Career development
- Program design
- Mentoring

#### **Strategic Planning and Organisational Improvement**

- Work force planning
- Corporate direction
- Roles and structures
- Team development
- Workplace reform

#### **Knowledge Management**

- Using Information Technology
- Analysis of information for decision making
- Statistical modelling
- Evaluation of programs

#### **Personnel Services**

- Recruitment
- Counselling
- Termination

#### **Personnel Administration**

- Payroll
- Records
- Remuneration
- Benefits
- Superannuation

The range of activities performed by an HRM

//HR planning, for example, helps an organisation maximise the use of its current employees and to determine when to take on new employees with the required skills.//

practitioner varies greatly according to the size and structure of the organisation, the type of industry or field of activity. A company with less than 100 employees may not have an HRM specialist. In this case the management team may carry out the strategic HRM functions while the HR administration is conducted by line managers and other administrative staff. In larger organisations there may be two broad types of HRM practitioners: the generalist and the specialist. The generalist deals with the whole range of HRM functions, while the specialist deals more or less exclusively with one function. While generalists tend to work within organisations, there is a trend towards companies outsourcing certain HR functions with specialist HR practitioners acting as consultants or contractors. As we will see, personnel administration has tended to take a back seat in favour of major areas of specialisation such as Training and Development, Industrial Relations and Occupational Health and Safety.

The roles of Human Resource practitioners in an organisation are diverse.

- They provide a support service and serve as technical advisers to line managers on issues such as recruitment, training and safety.
- They play an important role in defining the HR policies that guarantee fair treatment of all employees, recognition of staff needs and democratic processes.
- They serve an audit role ensuring that managerial decisions agree with the HR policies and are consistent across the organisation.
- They explore ways of improving employee productivity and satisfaction, and keep managers informed about changes in employment legislation.
- They manage changing business processes brought about by a dynamic business environment, for example business restructures.
- They provide an ethical and legal understanding of the frameworks required for managing people in various types of business.
- Senior HR managers provide strategic input into the decision making processes within their organisations.
- They build the 'corporate wisdom' of their organisations through staff development and managing human resource information systems.
- They assist the organisation to be 'customer focused' by aligning the needs and requirements of the employees with those of the customers.

## Functional Areas of Human Resources Management (HRM)

### Human Resources/Work Force Planning

The primary role of the HRM division or department is to help the organisation achieve its objectives. Its most critical function therefore is to work out, in conjunction with other managers, what the business requires of its employees and when this is needed, in both the short and longer term. This sets the framework for all HRM activities, in particular recruitment and selection, and training and development. HR planning involves determining the number of employees and the type of skills required to meet the organisation's short- and long-term objectives. It involves assessing whether employees are properly organised and trained to do what is necessary to implement the corporate strategy. HR planning, for example, helps an organisation maximise the use of its current employees and to determine when to take on new employees with the required skills. It also helps training offices focus their attention on designing training programs supporting the strategy of the organisation.

### Recruitment and Selection

Attracting and selecting the most suitable and qualified people are the first steps towards organisational effectiveness. Companies are fully aware that recruiting the wrong person can be extremely costly and thus take a great deal of care in selecting new employees.

Whenever a position is created or becomes vacant, HR practitioners need to develop or review the position description for the role through the process of job analysis and an assessment of required competencies. This requires that they assess where the position fits within the overall structure of the company, determine the appropriate salary range for it, identify the skills and experience levels required and assess the technical and personal competencies desired in the position holder. The HR practitioner should undertake such assessments before they place an advertisement through the organisation's own internal advertising system, via the internet, in a newspaper or through some other sourcing mechanism. The recruiter may opt to use external agencies to assist with the process of attracting and short-listing candidates.

In recruitment, job analysis is the main source of information about the position to be filled and the type of person needed to fill it. Job analysis is the systematic process of identifying the tasks, responsibilities and outcomes of jobs, and the



knowledge, skills and abilities required to perform these duties. Job analysis is essentially based on observation by supervisors of the employees carrying out their duties. The result of the job analysis is the position description and personal requirements. Before advertising a vacant position, the HR practitioner and the line manager decide if the position is appropriately graded and check that the position description reflects the needs, role and work value of the position.

HR departments constantly need to improve the way jobs are advertised so that they attract the right applicants. Applications are then received and acknowledged. On the basis of the specific job requirements, people are short-listed by the HR staff and invited for an interview. An HR manager must know where and how the best candidates are to be found and use the right method to attract the best person for the role.

Internet applications have increasingly become a part of recruitment and selection processes. Such web-based processes can be as simple as accepting a candidate's résumé through the online application system, through to conducting preliminary questioning and testing via an online mechanism. Many organisations are also utilising psychometric testing as a means of determining skills and aptitudes of candidates, and an understanding of the underpinning theory behind such testing is important for those involved in recruitment and selection.

Depending on the size of the organisation, a person from HR may be involved to a greater or lesser extent in the interviewing and selection process. Generally, although a person from HRM may be involved in the interviewing process, the final decision rests in the hands of the manager who will work with the person (the line manager). The role of the HR practitioner in the selection process includes designing an interview guide for line managers, ensuring that the recruitment process complies

with the legislative requirements and ensuring that applicants are assessed solely on their merits and not discriminated against. In other organisations, it will be the responsibility of the HR practitioner to actually conduct the interview and select a short-list of preferred candidates for final assessment by others. Under both scenarios, however, HR practitioners must assist line management find the best fit between the applicant and the position, and must also think about how the individual will contribute to the organisation's future development and fit in with the organisational culture. The last part of the selection process includes checking references, in some cases organising medical examinations and advising unsuccessful applicants.

Recruitment often covers interstate and international transfers, and graduate recruitment programs in the case of larger organisations. Additionally, some organisations use third party recruitment consultants either exclusively, or to fill particular (often senior) positions. In this instance, the role of the HR professional is to liaise with the external agency as well as with line management.

### Induction

Once the new employee has been appointed, HR staff may arrange the induction of the employee into their new job and department so that they become productive as quickly as possible. The induction process is critical for new staff in that it will determine their first impression of the organisation and impact on their decision to stay. Induction procedures vary according to the organisation. New employees may receive an employee induction booklet which includes general information about the organisation, its activities and its key objectives, or may be granted access to the organisation's intranet (an in-house internet) where this information is available. These methods often also detail information about the policies and procedures of the organisation, conditions of employment, superannuation, Occupational Health and Safety, Equal Employment Opportunity, career development and training, standards of business conduct, grievance procedures, ethical standards and performance management requirements.

New employees may be required to attend a standard induction program along with other new recruits of the organisation. This usually gives them an opportunity to hear from various line managers, ask them questions, broaden their understanding about how they fit into the organisation and meet other new staff. In some organisations, an induction program is worked out with the manager to whom

//Many organisations are also utilising psychometric testing as a means of determining skills and aptitudes of candidates...//

the new employee is reporting. The program is tailored to suit a particular person starting in a specific role. The aim is to give new employees both a good appreciation of their future role and a real understanding of what is required of them, together with knowledge of what happens within the division in which they are operating.

In some specialised induction areas (for example, in graduate recruitment), new employees may be rotated through various areas of the organisation's activities. It may be the responsibility of the HR practitioner to organise and monitor such rotation programs.

### Performance Management

Performance management is the continual process of evaluating the performance of employees. The purposes of performance appraisal are to:

- define a person's role in the organisation and to align the expected performance of the individual with the overall organisational and departmental goals and objectives
- set performance targets and explain the performance expectations the organisation has of them
- motivate employees and encourage them to be more productive by giving them regular feedback about their current performance level
- determine remuneration and benefits based on individual and team performance
- evaluate individual and team accomplishments
- promote employees and identify individuals with managerial potential
- provide a basis for career succession planning
- assess employees' training needs and identify possible career paths.

While many employers ensure that their staff are able to receive feedback on a regular basis, most organisations have a formal appraisal once or twice per year. It is the line manager's role to sit down with employees individually, to set objectives for the following year, to review those objectives regularly and to keep employees on track. The role of the HR practitioner is to write policies regarding

performance management, to administer the whole process and to ensure that all employees are treated fairly. In some cases, the HRM practitioner may become involved in the counselling process, particularly if a discipline issue arises, and frequently in the process of reaching agreement on training plans.

### Training and Development

HR Development (HRD) is a growth area of HRM. Changes such as award restructuring, technological change, performance based remuneration systems, multiskilling of staff (developing more than just basic skills in staff members), organisation development and government legislation have all contributed to the importance of this function.

Training means providing employees with the relevant skills to help them reach their maximum potential, both personally and professionally, so as to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the



organisation. Training has changed since the 1960s. It is now developing into a key part of the corporate strategic planning and it is becoming more result orientated. In addition, training must be undertaken where the staff member is located, so increasingly the internet and the intranet are playing a part in training. An HRD practitioner needs to be aware of the organisation's future objectives to know how skills can be improved to make employees more productive and satisfied.

The role of an HRD practitioner varies according to the organisation. Some trainers are more involved in coordinating training activities and in evaluating their cost-effectiveness than in conducting training programs themselves. In general, the role of a HRD practitioner is to:

- assist managers in defining the competencies (skills, knowledge and attributes) required by people to do their jobs well
- identify training needs through performance appraisal, job analysis, consultation with line managers, staff questionnaires or competency-based assessment
- ensure that identified training needs reflect the direction and the needs of the organisation at a corporate level
- design and evaluate training courses that will enable the organisation and the individual to achieve their goals
- conduct training courses, that is, to teach or facilitate others' learning
- evaluate training courses after they have been taken and ensure that employees are using their new skills.

The ability to demonstrate increased competence and better performance as the result of a training course is extremely important, as these criteria are often used for wage and career progression. Increasingly, the HRD practitioner is asked to design a training program that will attract highly capable staff who may choose to work for an organisation based on the opportunities to learn from the position.

//EEO...means that people are treated fairly and equally in the workplace, and that they are being promoted on the basis of their work performance.//

Many organisations prefer to run in-house programs tailored to their specific needs rather than standard packaged courses. Training courses may include technical skills, writing skills, presentation skills, supervision skills for managers, performance appraisal, communication and interpersonal skills. Organisations will often contract external consultants for specialised courses that do not need to be conducted in-house. These might include negotiating skills, time management, 'training the trainer', supervision, managerial style, customer focus and interpersonal skills.

### Remuneration and Benefits

Dealing with remuneration and benefits is probably one of the most delicate functions of HRM as it plays an important part in attracting the right applicants, and in retaining and motivating current employees. When designing compensation packages, HR practitioners need to ensure that they reflect the culture of the organisation and the quality of the staff, and also that they are flexible enough to encourage performance-oriented people. Ensuring consistency with other organisations and the requirements of trade unions may also be important in particular cases.

Remuneration programs usually cover base salaries, employee benefits such as superannuation, housing loans, health schemes, share plans, company vehicles, car parking and various incentive pay schemes. Increasingly, remuneration packages may also be designed to take into account 'work-life' balance, flexible working patterns such as job-sharing, child-care responsibilities or even the ability to work remotely or on a part-time basis. Salary packaging benefits may be provided by the organisation for the employee, and may cover the purchase of laptop computers, overseas travel, school fees and so on. Those HR professionals involved in salary packaging need to be very familiar with taxation laws, awards and enterprise agreements.

Remuneration and benefits systems vary from company to company. Some organisations are currently adopting a pay-for-performance policy, whereby salaries are linked to an individual's performance, to their ability to achieve the targeted goals and to the acquisition of new skills developed through training. Other organisations are developing tailor-made compensation packages designed to suit their particular needs. These tailor-made remuneration packages need to be worked out in consultation with employees, and the appropriate legal agreement to cover the

working arrangements may need to be discussed. In some cases, work arrangements may be governed by an Award, Collective Agreement, Australian Workplace Agreement or some other type of industrial instrument and the HR practitioner will need to have an understanding and knowledge of what is appropriate in each instance. Remuneration and benefits are very complex issues which are becoming extremely challenging, and the HR practitioner requires an up-to-date knowledge of legislation and organisational policies which may impact on this area.

### Equal Employment Opportunity

Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) is an important issue in Australia. EEO means giving all people a 'fair go' in employment. It means selecting applicants on the basis of their skills and qualifications rather than their sex, race, religion or impairment. It means promoting a working environment that is free from racism, sexism and sexual harassment. EEO also means that people are treated fairly and equally in the workplace, and that they are being promoted on the basis of their work performance. EEO should be distinguished from 'affirmative action', which promotes people from minority groups who may be unable to attain the position.

The role of the HR practitioner in terms of EEO is to:

- maintain an understanding of the legislation impacting on these areas and inform and advise management of any changes to the regulatory environment
- develop policies tailored to the organisation regarding EEO
- educate about EEO issues such as sexual harassment
- collect and analyse employment information, such as the number of men and women in base level positions and key positions, their rate of promotion and their turnover rates
- advise management of the implications of the employee profile for EEO
- identify forms of discrimination in employment, both hidden and visible
- monitor the recruitment and selection process, ie. ensure that job descriptions are objectively written and that questions asked during the interview are job-focused and relate to the selection criteria
- ensure that employees have equitable access to training and career opportunities
- advocate for the disadvantaged employee
- ensure that changes within organisations are not discriminatory.



## Occupational Health and Safety

Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) is an important part of HRM. Organisations have become aware of the benefits of having a healthy work force and have realised that providing a safe work environment is conducive to a high level of productivity. Each state has an Occupational Health and Safety Act that provides the framework for the prevention of occupational injury and sickness. The objective of the legislation is the involvement of employees and employers in improving health and safety standards.

The role of an OH&S officer is to do their utmost to ensure that accidents are prevented from occurring as this can lead to legal action against the company. This means the OH&S officer needs to:

- keep up-to-date with the legislative requirements regarding OH&S and make sure that the organisation complies with them
- develop policies and rules to increase work safety
- educate people and raise the level of awareness by providing adequate information to employees on workplace health and safety, including health hazards and safety regulations
- increase employee involvement in monitoring the workplace through the election of health and safety representatives (the role of a representative is to perform routine safety inspections to assist in detecting problems before any harmful event takes place, and to investigate accidents and incidents when they occur)
- supervise the creation of a committee composed of representatives and managers to jointly evaluate the workplace for health hazards and search for solutions to alleviate hazards which have been identified
- design jobs to be more comfortable and therefore more productive.

//The challenge for the HR manager in the technological age is to humanise the system to ensure that the personal, and therefore human, needs of employees do not 'get lost'. //

## HR Administration

While the majority of HR activities can be placed into one of the functional areas detailed in this section, there remain a number of activities handled specifically by generalists within an HRM division. For instance, while some organisations will operate payroll functions from the Finance Division, in other cases these are performed by Remuneration. Staff transfers involving intrastate and interstate removals may be outsourced to an external agency – or handled within HRM. Large organisations with international links may have several HR officers dedicated to supervising overseas moves and the families of affected staff. Particularly in small organisations or those operating in highly specialised activities, a range of other tasks may be undertaken by HR including external relations (or dealing with the media), schools liaison and the management of property, car parks, canteens and so on. HR administration is often the 'entry level' for HR practitioners.

## Human Resources Information Systems (HRIS)

Automated systems and software packages are playing an increasingly important part in HRM. HR practitioners need to understand information systems and how they contribute to the HR function. One of the major impacts of HR Information Systems (HRIS) has been to change the role of the HR function from an information support role to a technical support role. HRIS helps increase the efficiency of record keeping, handling data and producing reports, and improves the accuracy of information recorded. The use of HRIS therefore allows HR practitioners to spend more time analysing data, doing research, planning and advising line managers about HR matters. HRIS can be used for a wide range of purposes ranging from day to day personnel administration and salary reviews, right through to HR strategic planning.

The expansion of Information Technology also has implications for the ways in which jobs are designed and remunerated. HRIS is becoming a strategic tool for organisations as it is designed to 'capture corporate wisdom'. Employees may have access to online training and development, online data entry for weekly time sheets, online policy and procedures manuals and so on. The challenge for the HR manager in the technological age is to humanise the system to ensure that the personal, and therefore human, needs of employees do not 'get lost'. However, the use of HRIS is a highly analytical task and requires strong quantitative skills from its practitioners.

## Industrial Relations

The Australian system of Industrial Relations has recently been under strong pressure to change to allow organisations to become more productive, more competitive and to develop a multiskilled staff. The present trend is towards a simplified system of Industrial Relations across the country, and towards a shift of responsibility for Industrial Relations back to management and to individual organisations and employees. The WorkChoices legislation, introduced in 2005, was designed to free managers and employees to negotiate conditions of employment that reflect the needs of the organisation and of its staff.

In this environment, the role of the Industrial Relations (IR) practitioner is to:

- remain abreast of legislative changes, requirements and obligations in respect of employment issues, and recognise what opportunities exist in their own organisations arising from any changes to legislation
- communicate changes in legislation in an effective manner to both management and staff
- ensure that any minimum standards for employment conditions (such as annual, parental and sick leave) are incorporated into organisational agreements
- maintain harmonious relations within the organisation between management, staff and other stakeholders
- ensure the successful development of appropriate employment agreements through a highly consultative process with management and staff
- work with any employment agreement consultative committees about ways to address issues such as performance-based remuneration, flexibility of hours, leave, allowances, simplified job classification and multiskilling through training
- draft appropriate employment agreements and ensure that they meet all the legal requirements
- answer any queries and provide information to all staff on both the development and content of the employment agreement
- negotiate the employment agreement with relevant parties, including trade unions when appropriate
- present the employment agreement to the relevant Industrial Agency for approval
- establish an on-going cooperative relationship with employee bargaining representatives, including trade union delegates if appropriate
- assist in settling disputes
- educate staff about various IR issues
- interpret awards for employees whose terms and conditions of employment are still covered by an award.



## Organisational Change

Organisations are going through a significant period of change in order to become more efficient and competitive, to produce higher quality services or products and to increase productivity. Additionally in Australia, many domestic companies are being internationalised through being taken over by foreign companies, as well as through expanding their operations overseas.

There are two broad approaches to organisational change. One takes the organisation as the unit of change, and redesigns the structure and roles within that structure. The other takes the individual as the unit of change, and develops the competencies of people. Ultimately, both approaches will have to be utilised if lasting change is to be realised.

The HR practitioner may be involved in organisational change from a number of perspectives. There are HR practitioners who work within senior management to identify changes required within the organisation and design the change process. Others may be involved in the implementation of change, either by the imposition of previously decided changes or by direct participation in the change. It is a fact of organisational life that many people feel they are victims of change, and HR have a role in ensuring appropriate support is available to help them cope with those feelings and return to being productive members of the changed organisation.

Change management is one of the biggest growth areas of employment for senior HR professionals.

## International HRM

With the increase of international opportunities, especially in the Asia Pacific region, Australian organisations will need to have a pool of qualified and well trained employees to send on short- or long-term overseas assignments. The role of international HR practitioners will be to:

- develop a strategic plan which encompasses the commitment of the organisation to the overseas personnel function in line with the organisation's overall business planning
- select employees with potential for overseas assignment by assessing their technical expertise, education, experience, linguistic skills, personal flexibility, ability to train locals, diplomatic skills and, in particular, their ability to adapt to a new culture
- provide expatriates (and their families) with the necessary cross-cultural training and counselling before their departure, in order to help them operate more effectively overseas
- provide an adequate remuneration package including an allowance for living overseas, the cost of relocation, accommodation, transport, etc.
- ensure that the overseas assignment is part of an overall plan to benefit the future career of the expatriate as well as utilising the experience in the organisation's global expansion strategy
- maintain frequent contact with expatriates and organise annual visits
- facilitate the readjustment of expatriates upon their return, by giving them a clear idea of where they will fit in the company after the overseas assignment. The 'strategic plan' must include the guidelines for the support that will be provided upon repatriation and must be discussed during the selection process, rather than leaving discussion of this crucial issue until the expatriate returns.

## Qualifications, Skills and Personal Attributes

Australian Human Resources Institute (AHRI) participated in research in 2006 conducted by Dave Ulrich and Wayne Brockbank of the University of Michigan and based on the existing AHRI management model (see figure on page 11) and this research developed the AHRI Model of Excellence. With a base capability of being Business Driven and aligning people management strategies with business objectives and the external environment, HR professionals require the following additional capabilities.

- **Strategic Architect:** Sets and drives the HR vision for the organisation.
- **Stakeholder Manager:** Identifies and responds to stakeholder demands and manages relationships.
- **Work Force Designer:** Builds organisational capability through high performing people.
- **Credible Activist:** Exercises influence and provides HR advice to achieve objectives.
- **Expert Practitioner:** Applies expert HR knowledge to deliver value to the business.
- **Culture and Change Agent:** Facilitates change in response to internal and external operating environments.

//HRM...influences the whole organisation and contains many specialist areas... HR practitioners need to have an understanding of the organisation as a whole, and of its various functions.//

## HR Generalists

HRM is a very pervasive type of function. It influences the whole organisation and contains many specialist areas; therefore HR practitioners need to have an understanding of the organisation as a whole, and of its various functions. Although the traditional view of 'personnel' was that it involved 'looking after people', today very few HRM jobs are premised on a benevolent or welfare approach. HR people must be business driven. They should be familiar with the essential aspects of finance and economics. They should also have some knowledge of psychology and even taxation, as well as understanding the legal implications of HRM.

Successful HRM practitioners have come from a very wide variety of academic backgrounds. When entry level positions in HRM are advertised, they tend to specify a background in Business Studies, Economics, Law or Psychology. Nevertheless, a Social Science degree or a broader generalist degree, perhaps with a sub-major in Business, is becoming increasingly acceptable. A good combination of studies for a graduate wishing to start a career in HR would be to have a Bachelor of Business or Commerce with a major in HRM. Ideally, the graduate would have included Finance subjects such as income tax or payroll tax, as well as Law subjects such as Employment and Contract Law and Organisational Behaviour subjects covering Economics, Sociology and Psychology.

As the primary function of HR is to help business achieve its objectives, HR people are first and foremost business professionals. However, HR practitioners should also be able to relate to and communicate with a wide range of people. They need to have strong interpersonal and general management skills, together with negotiation skills.

While higher education qualifications play an important part in determining the suitability for a position, work experience is considered equally important. Graduates should consider gaining some work experience during the holidays or before starting their studies. HR departments value people with a variety of experiences, because it demonstrates adaptability and suggests an ability to relate to a wide range of people.

## Methods of Entry and Possible Career Paths

There are many ways to enter a career in HRM. The direct method is to undertake a specialised HR course or a Business course with a major in HR or Industrial Relations, and from there work experience as an HR generalist. Final year university students should visit their Careers Service on campus for details of employers currently recruiting graduates with their skills. The Careers Service can direct you to various sources of information



Source: HR Competency Model (Ulrich & Brockbank 2007) and AHRI HR Management Model 2003

such as recruitment activities on campus and online resources. Ideally graduates should try to target large organisations because of their training capacity, the breadth of experience they can offer and the opportunities to specialise they often provide. Since this is not always possible, particularly when the job market is tight, graduates should not be averse to starting in an administrative or secretarial role, or perhaps in a different functional area of the organisation.

There are a number of recruitment forums and Careers Fairs held each year, which can help the graduate student refine the type of position they would like to hold.

In addition to these formal programs, there are an increasing number of internet recruitment sites which will provide assistance with résumé development, interview skills and job search techniques. They provide the way to get an idea of what jobs are available, what skills are required to obtain various positions and the types of salary packages available. These are also an excellent starting point for the mid-career professional who is considering joining the HR profession.

Many HR positions are created by growth in an organisation and by the sudden realisation that there is a need for an HR person to 'look after the people'. There is a tendency in those organisations to appoint somebody who is already there, rather than to search for a specialist from outside. This particularly occurs in small- to medium-sized enterprises where the HR manager is most likely to 'graduate' from an administrative role, such as office manager or personal assistant to a manager.

Graduates might have to decide relatively early on whether they want to be in a generalist role or in a specialist role. Popular areas of specialisation are Training and Development, Industrial Relations and Occupational Health and Safety. It is now possible to undertake studies in any of those areas. This decision will determine the type of industry and organisation graduates should target, and will also affect their work location. Industrial

Relations positions for example are often on site or at a remote location. Even if graduates decide to specialise, they will still need to have a basic understanding of other HR functions and how their job fits in with these.

A typical career path for graduates in a generalist role would be to start in a base-level position. This might involve activities such as record-keeping, leave administration, payroll administration and working with HRIS. As their understanding of the organisation and of the various facets of HR increases, they might be expected to start drafting policies, and to be involved in junior-level recruitment and job evaluation. Depending on their aptitude and qualifications, they might be given a greater variety of tasks and more autonomy, under the supervision of a manager who would structure their career development. It might take 10 or more years to reach the position of HR manager, and during that time graduates are advised to move around within the organisation or between organisations. Besides developing multiskilling, job rotation enables HR practitioners to keep in touch with the business, to spread their HR expertise down the line and also gives them a better perspective of the organisation.

Another way people can enter a career in HR is by gaining entry into an organisation in a different functional area, developing a good understanding of the company, undertaking a postgraduate course in Human Resource Management part-time and then moving into the Human Resource Management department when the opportunity arises.

The Australian Human Resources Institute (AHRI), the national peak body for human resource and people management professionals in Australia, provides a number of education pathways and opportunities to obtain a professional HR qualification that is practical, relevant and cost effective. The Foundations of Human Resources is an introductory course in HR for those new to the field and for those wishing to gain a broader understanding of its functional areas. It does not have prerequisites and students can gain advanced standing in the Professional Diploma course. The Professional Diploma of Human Resources provides line managers and HR professionals with a formal progressive program of study in leading edge HR practice, and may provide a pathway into formal postgraduate studies. The Graduate Diploma in HR allows practitioners to build on their work experience by acquiring knowledge of academic disciplines and the theoretical background that supports and substantiates the contribution of HR to organisational effectiveness. 

//Graduates might have to decide relatively early on whether they want to be in a generalist role or in a specialist role.//

## GRADUATE PROFILES

### Angela Flett

– AHRI Foundations of Human Resources, AHRI Professional Diploma of Human Resources, Graduate Diploma of Human Resources, MBA

“I am passionate about continuous improvement and am always keen to learn and attend anything that I can.”

My first job was working for an engineering company in their administration department. My main duties included processing of accounts payable, and assisting with payroll. It gave me a really good grounding to move into a more senior payroll role. Working in payroll was my first step in the field of HR and basically I just progressed from there moving through a HR officer role to management.

I chose HR because I really enjoy having the people contact and assisting organisations with culture change programs. I think if you put the time and effort in, you can really make a difference.

In the last six months I have moved from the HR Manager in a company that employs 400 people, to a general management role (within the same company) developing healthy, convenience meals for time poor executives. This has been a real learning curve for me but has allowed me to use a much broader range of skills gained through completing the MBA.

The biggest challenge I face as an HR practitioner is having enough time in the day to be able to mentor and give employees support while still getting through the mountain of paperwork. In a senior HR role in a SME it is critical that you set aside enough time to work on the strategic planning aspects of the business, or you can get caught up in the day to day issues too much.

Although I have moved into general management HR is still an important part of my role so I keep myself up to date with any changes by continuing to read publications such as the

*HRMonthly* and attend seminars and workshops. I am passionate about continuous improvement and am always keen to learn and attend anything that I can.

The new role has the potential to grow significantly with the possibility to set up export markets, so I would like to take that forward. I will probably end up doing further tertiary education (I'm not sure in what field), although at the moment I am really enjoying spending more time with my family, and catching up on all those chores that got missed while I was studying.

### Ilana Gold

– Bachelor of Arts, Graduate Diploma in HRM & IR

“After my graduate diploma I spent 12 months travelling through Europe and America. It was a fantastic opportunity for personal development...”

I received my Bachelor of Arts (Social Sciences) degree from La Trobe University, majoring in sociology, and then I completed a Graduate Diploma in HR Management and IR at The University of Melbourne.



My first 'real' job was at Telstra in customer service. I worked there for two years while studying for my graduate diploma and the training I received was invaluable. During my studies I developed skills in service focus, problem solving, professionalism, empathy, self-awareness, productivity and initiative. Throughout this period I was exposed to situations that moulded my professional interaction. I experienced all types of management styles, and learned to appreciate established operational policies and procedures, and how to respond to strategic plans. I was fortunate to have a particularly effective supervisor, from whom I learned a lot, especially about navigating corporate policies.

After my graduate diploma I spent 12 months travelling through Europe and America. It was a fantastic opportunity for personal development, and I would encourage anyone who has the desire to travel to do so.

As the HR Manager of three key businesses within the Village Roadshow Group – Village Roadshow Limited, Roadshow Films and Production – my role is to provide effective HR practices and solutions to approximately 500 employees. I also provide broad operational direction on employment relations, recruitment, work force planning, remuneration, performance management, policies and procedures and learning and development. Additionally, there's a need to deliver HR strategies and plans to ensure these businesses meet their objectives, resulting in the company meeting its overall goals. This will be achieved by working very closely with the HR team to develop and implement value-adding initiatives throughout the organisation.

//I've always been interested in human behaviour in the workplace, so I thought a career in HR would be suitable.//

Lauren Cox – Bachelor of Business Management

## Lauren Cox

– Bachelor of Business Management

"...get into the work force during your time at uni...to learn general workplace skills and etiquette."

My name is Lauren; I completed a Bachelor of Business Management majoring in HR/IR at The University of Queensland. With a fabulous reputation and facilities, my choice of UQ was an easy one.

I've always been interested in human behaviour in the workplace, so I thought a career in HR would be suitable. I'm very happy I made this choice.

Throughout my university studies I was employed on a part-time basis at Shop-A-Docket and on completion of my degree I was fortunate enough to be offered a position as HR Officer. Having worked in two other positions before taking up my current role, this provided me with the corporate knowledge that made the transition into HR a lot smoother. I was very lucky to start my new professional career in a familiar environment.

My position as HR Officer is giving me a wonderful grounding for my career ahead. Activities and responsibilities within my role include:

- answering employee enquiries on leave entitlements and pay
- coordinating employee salary sacrifice laptop scheme
- supervising reception plus two employees
- updating HR policies and forms – uploading to intranet
- liaising with building management in relation to fixing issues/problems.

At this stage I don't plan on doing any further study at uni, but there are plenty of professional development seminars/courses and TAFE courses in workplace assessment, training and OH&S that I'd like to pursue. It is necessary for everyone in their chosen profession to keep themselves updated with the latest insights, information and developments. Education never ceases, and is a contributing factor to professional advancement and success.

My advice to anyone studying HR, and in fact all students, is to get into the work force during your time at uni (not necessarily working in your field of study), to learn general workplace skills and etiquette. A student with work experience is far

better off than one without. Try to attend as many HR and workplace skills events that your university provides; networking can mean a possible opportunity down the track. Attend a few AHRI events throughout the year if you can, they provide great seminars and information.

HR is an exciting and evolving industry to be a part of, with many different areas of specialisation...take your pick!

## Sally Johnson CAHRI

– Bachelor of Applied Science, Graduate Diploma in Adult Education and Training, AHRI Professional Diploma of Human Resources

“I’ve always enjoyed the breadth of opportunities offered in HR...working with and learning from people in a range of areas and professional disciplines.”

My career began when I accepted a traineeship in medical laboratory science at Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital. For six years I worked full-time while attending RMIT three to four nights a week. It was an amazing experience; I don’t think a day went by when I didn’t learn something new. During that time I did a bit of tutoring which was

probably the start of my journey towards learning and development. I left Fairfield to take on a senior scientist role at the Red Cross Blood Bank Victoria.

My move to HR was gradual and not really planned. The transition away from science began when I returned to work after the birth of my second child. I completed my graduate diploma while on maternity leave and moved into a laboratory trainer role, supporting the professional development of more than 100 scientists. From there, I joined the Training and Development Team in HR, where the scope of my role became much broader and included other HR projects and activities.

I’ve always enjoyed the breadth of opportunities offered in HR as well as working with and learning from people in a range of areas and professional disciplines. Learning and development is a particularly rewarding area to be in. The changes to Vocational Education and Training (VET), and higher education in Australia over the past 10 years have provided some great opportunities for partnership arrangements with industry.

I am currently on a 12-month secondment as Senior Adviser for HR Capability at the Victorian State Services Authority and developing an HR competency framework for the Victorian Public Service. It’s part of a larger work force strategy that is seeking to ensure the future capability and capacity of the service. Before starting the secondment I worked at the Department



of Sustainability and Environment, where I led a learning and development team with responsibilities for delivering outsourced corporate courses, leadership and management development programs, graduate programs and a science cadetship.

The transition from science to HR was one of the biggest challenges I've faced. Among other things I found it hard to leave the security and status offered as a scientist to join an area that, until recently, was still subject to debate about its validity as a profession. I am very supportive of AHRI's work in this area.

Like any working mother, work-life balance has also been a significant challenge. A focus on lateral career transitions has helped me build a solid portfolio of skills and experience within a predominantly 8.00 am-5.00 pm work schedule.

One of my passions over the past couple of years has been the development of learning and development reporting frameworks, metrics and benchmarking. Increased capability in this area has helped me to better manage my function and get learning and development on the agenda of senior leaders. I enjoyed the challenge of applying a scientific, evidence-based approach to resolve an HR problem.

In order to continue my professional development I actively participate in AHRI events and recently went to the 'HR: A Business Focused Workshop'. I also read *Asia Pacific Journal* and *HRMonthly* regularly. In my role I am a member of the Victorian Public Service Learning and Development Network – a representative group of senior L&D practitioners that operates as a community of practice and has been proactive in identifying and delivering value-adding initiatives to the service.

I am a member of the Institute of Public Administration Australia as I believe I'm more effective in my role if I'm in touch with issues

//I have found my studies most beneficial in providing a basis for researching, developing and implementing new staff induction...//

*Simon Ruttley – Bachelor of Business and Bachelor of Arts (Organisational & Social Psychology)*

and directions of the public service. Also, I did a leadership program this year, which gave me the chance to build on my existing skills and connect with issues faced by leaders from other industries.

I still haven't got my head around the fact that my children are growing up. The changes in my personal life will allow me to consider a wider range of career options. I'd also like to take on some further formal study. I don't think I will leave the public sector because of the opportunities it provides to make a difference.

## Simon Ruttley

– Bachelor of Business and Bachelor of Arts (Organisational & Social Psychology)

I have now decided to set up and run my own business, specialising in strategic Human Resources consulting.

After originally starting university studying two interesting but seemingly very different degrees, I was quick to find that my Bachelor of Business and Bachelor of Psychology actually supplemented each other perfectly within the field of Human Resources. While many in HR have only a business-related degree, I have benefited in my career by complementing my study of HR via the more traditional business route, with a more scientific approach to analysing and assessing the workplace as promoted through an Organisational Psychology degree.

After graduating, I bypassed the traditional graduate recruitment steps of applying for positions locally by travelling to the UK, where I secured an entry level position within a large HR team in a prominent government department. While this role was primarily in administration and did not necessitate a degree, it was hugely beneficial to witness HR strategies and principles in practice in 'a real office environment'. I was quickly promoted within the department before moving to two more senior positions at various private and publicly-owned companies.

After two and a half years working in London I returned to Brisbane and was hired as the Human Resources Advisor by William Buck Queensland, a leading national second-tier accounting firm. A process of continual growth and innovation within the firm has required that my role manage

a wide range of generalist HR activities, including: recruitment; induction and training; performance and remuneration management. I work alongside the firm's directors on a daily basis as well as maintaining contact with recruitment and training agencies, competitor firms and key industry bodies to ensure that the HR team are offering more than just the industry standards to their staff. I have been given the opportunity to apply a lot of the 'high end' strategic theory and methodology learnt at university when involved in process development and improvement. I have found my studies most beneficial in providing a basis for researching, developing and implementing new staff induction, recruitment, staff benefits, retention and training programs.

The majority of my career progression has been based on the opportunities and the quality and diversity of work I have had at each workplace, and it is this work experience rather than further tertiary study which will continue to be the major factor in my further career development. However, I have gained a huge benefit from being a member of HR and relevant industry bodies in both England and Australia (eg. AHRI).

My advice to HR graduates is to thoroughly research (and network within) the industry and jobs market, and then get your foot in the door in a progressive company where you have the ability to demonstrate your skills and ambition. Rely on your business network, ask lots of questions and don't be afraid to take a risk and accept new and more challenging roles.

## Sue Pedri

– Bachelor of Science (Psychology) and Masters in Applied & Organisational Psychology

“... start thinking as early as possible about what you enjoy doing, and in what way you would like to contribute to an organisation.”

I was always interested in studying Psychology, and was attracted to UNSW as it had a broad Psych program. I learned about the different areas of specialisation in Psychology and realised there was a great deal more than just the clinical/counselling side. In particular, I realised that I was more interested in the field of Organisational Psychology, which I then went on to study at a postgraduate level.

After completing my undergraduate Honours degree, I joined the Commonwealth Bank where I commenced as a Psychologist in the Corporate Human Resources area. Realising the value of my knowledge and skills, I was sponsored to complete my Masters in Organisational Psych at UNSW. I then moved through various divisions of the CBA to more general Human Resources roles. My last role with the CBA was General Manager Talent and Organisational Development in the Institutional and Business Bank. This role involved leading the creation of a high performance business culture by



providing talent identification, career management and retention programs to develop the required work force capabilities. I was responsible for the strategic development of frameworks for recruitment, work force planning, diversity, learning and development, service culture and talent management.

The next career move was to Qantas where I partnered strongly with the Corporate Finance area to design and implement a Performance Management System for the top 1000 staff. I was also accountable for Change Management programs across Qantas.

I have now decided to set up and run my own business, specialising in strategic Human Resources Consulting. I am currently working with a range of clients from finance to consulting and mining, assisting them with HR systems and practices that enhance the delivery of their business objectives.

I have the value add of coming from an educational background that is centred on working from conceptual frameworks, understanding human behaviour in organisations, systems thinking, etc. This is a plus when I compare my training to that of many other HR professionals. I have also had to learn other skills along the way – primarily around what makes businesses tick, what are the business value drivers, etc. and using this to guide the advice I give and the solutions I offer.

People I studied with during my Masters have provided me with great networking opportunities that have led to several work contracts.

If you see yourself working in a capacity similar to me, my advice would be to position yourself as a Human Resource Specialist with a background in Organisational Psychology. Most people still believe that Psychology is all about clinical work. I am happy to say that this mind-set is slowly changing, but there is still a way to go.

//Many HR positions are created by growth in an organisation and by the sudden realisation that there is a need for an HR person to 'look after the people'.//

## Trends in HRM

### Strategic Involvement of HRM

In the past, HR practitioners have often been confined to administrative tasks and short-term operations. They have struggled to achieve the same status as other line managers who they served and advised.

Today, the HR function is transforming its focus from the management of human resources to the development and maintenance of organisational effectiveness. Human Resource practitioners are operating at all levels within organisations. Senior HR managers are members of the senior management team. They are influencing corporate direction through recommending policies and strategies and ensuring that HR practices align with overall corporate strategy. Junior and mid-level HR officers are assisting and advising line managers and other people within the organisation, to ensure that HR policies are implemented.

With the rapid rate of change, the increasing complexity of business operations and the growing involvement of line managers with HR issues, there has been a greater push for HR departments to add value to the bottom line outcomes of an organisation. Senior HR staff are now more likely to be involved in advising top management, in business planning and in organisational change. Areas in which HR functions are concentrating to become more effective include:

- contributing to the profitability of the organisation through the provision of high quality staff and reducing turnover
- using HR information systems for greater efficiency
- training line managers to take full responsibility for HR type activities
- moving HR practitioners closer to line operations.

HR is also increasingly being called upon to create and sustain organisational cultures that promote the organisation's competitive advantage. As such, there is an increasing need for HR practitioners to assist in diagnosing and changing employees' mind-sets and mental models, and to contribute to the establishment and maintenance of desired corporate cultures.

### Boundaries of HRM

Currently, traditional notions of the boundary between HR and other business functions are changing. With an increasing trend towards outsourcing, and an increasing contribution from

other departments such as communications, marketing, finance and IT play in the delivery of HR services; HR practitioners will continue to need a wide range of skills and attributes to contribute effectively to organisational performance. HR is increasingly seen as a shared responsibility of all organisational managers, and this will lead to greater integration of HR functions with departmental and organisational strategies and programs.

HR practitioners are no longer only based in an administrative building away from the front line, geographically removed from the rest of the business. Increasingly, they will be further integrated into various parts of the organisation, working closely with line managers. The purpose of HR specialists will be to put their expertise at the managers' disposal and to support them in being more active with, and responsible for, their staff. The role of HR practitioners will be to develop line managers' interpersonal skills, to train them to handle HR issues, to advise them on matters such as management style and communication processes and to assist them with organisational development. They will need to audit them to ensure that HRM is handled fairly and equitably across the organisation. The relationship between staff experts and line managers will become a partnership, whereby the objective will be the creation and the maintenance of healthy HR in the organisation.

#### *Globalisation*

The boundaries of HR practice are also expanding due to globalisation. HR managers need to be able to determine any HR implications of a more globalised business environment, and must understand how to develop managers into effective global leaders. Legislative requirements need to be understood, not only at the local and national level, but also from the international perspective.

## Management of Diversity

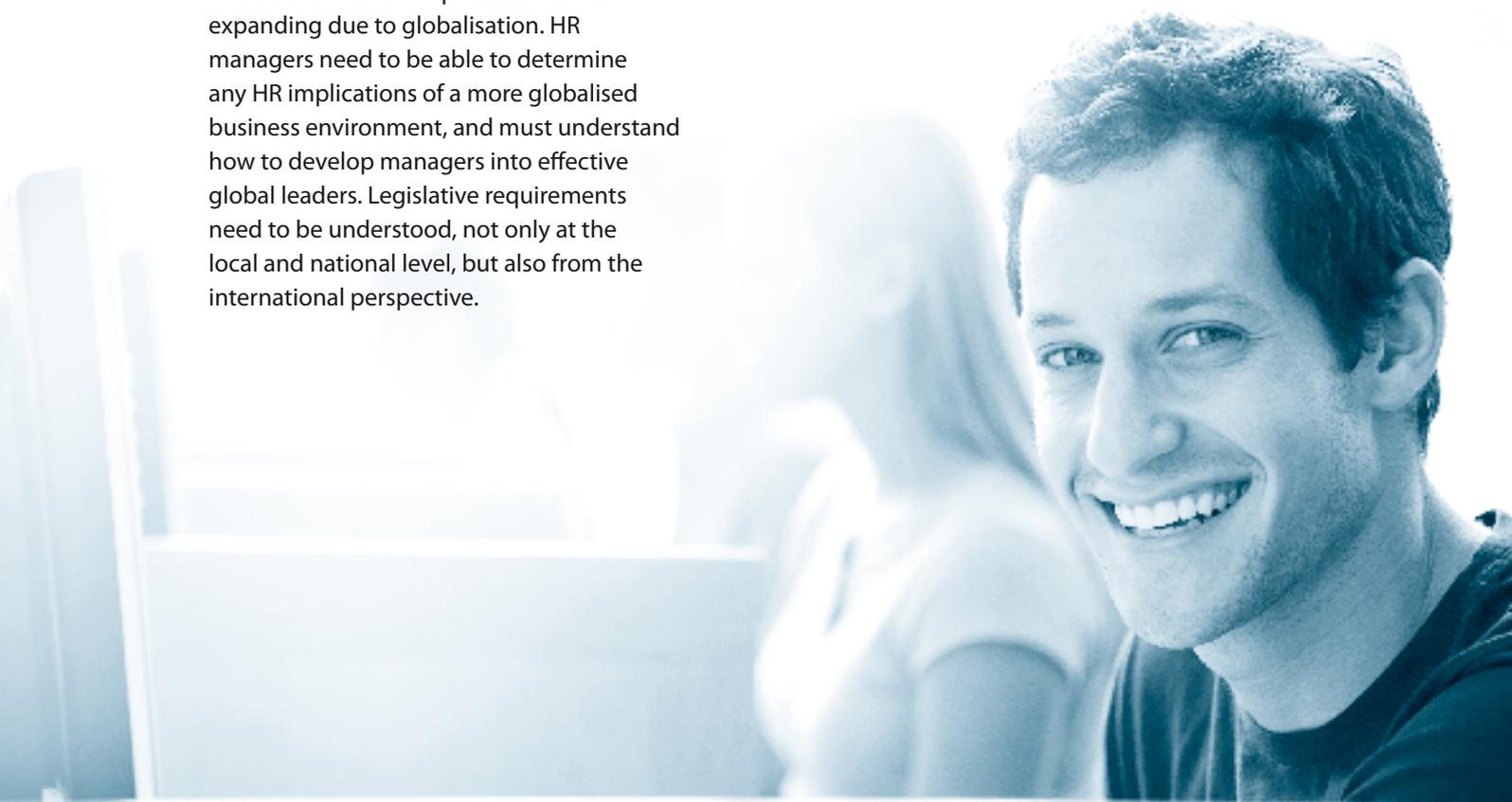
Managing diversity, that is managing an ethnically diverse work force, is a HR issue that is becoming extremely important to Australia's future.

Organisations however are starting to recognise the benefits of having a multicultural work force.

- Creating a more tolerant corporate culture.
- Giving companies a competitive advantage in Australia and in international markets.
- Being more responsive to diverse ethnic groups of consumers.
- Improving decision making by valuing individual differences and encouraging input from minority workers.

Indeed, legal and ethical imperatives no longer allow organisations to ignore the issue of diversity.

In the future, organisations will need to make better use of their employees' skills and qualifications. They will also be required to develop diversity programs to promote increased sensitivity to cultural issues. Such programs will range from creating an awareness of race and gender differences right through to developing a career path for women and minority workers. The key to the success of diversity programs will be to use the right expertise, namely people who specialise in HR training, EEO, organisational development and communications.



## Technology

The importance of HRIS, steadily increasing over the last few years, will continue to grow. However, the focus will change from simply 'capturing numbers', to using the information to improve business performance. Information Technology should facilitate the role of HR as a business partner by simplifying the gathering of strategic data, and then analysing that data in ways that contribute to forming and implementing business strategy. The HR manager of the future will be highly technologically literate and will concentrate on enhancing business operations.

Technology also presents other challenges for the HR practitioner. With the pace of technological change, it becomes increasingly important for employees to receive adequate training and support to maximise technological efficiency. Corporate cultures may change as more and more activities and communications are conducted in the 'virtual environment', and staff members may need assistance in simply coping in an environment of 'information overload'. HR practitioners can play a crucial role in achieving optimal organisational performance in the face of such challenges.

## Changing Demographics of the Australian Work Force

HR professionals in the future will need to manage a diverse work force which, in Australia at least, will be relatively well educated. Consequently, the training needs of the organisation may be focused on developing cohesive teams of knowledgeable professionals. The focus may change from technical skills development (eg. computing, statistical analysis) to soft skills such as the ability to work with people and to communicate effectively.

## Future of HRM

In common with most business disciplines, HRM departments have been streamlined in most organisations, with many activities computerised, placed with outside agencies or pushed back to line management. Nevertheless, in many senses, HRM is a growth area. AHRI currently has a membership in the tens of thousands and continues to grow. Many people who are not HR professionals belong to the Institute to keep abreast of current issues in people management which are crucial to effective business functioning. Organisations have recognised the importance of HRM and are willing to pay for it, as the general increase in HR managers' salaries tends to indicate. HR managers are becoming more strategic, more result-orientated and more focused on servicing their clients, the rest of the organisation.

People management is constantly changing. New opportunities such as diversity management and international HRM frequently arise. There will always be a need for HR practitioners, since getting the most out of the work force is critical to the success of any organisation. The question is: what will be their role in the future? Maybe it is the combination of uncertainty, change and challenge that makes HR such an attractive career prospect.

//Organisations have recognised the importance of HRM and are willing to pay for it, as the general increase in HR managers' salaries tends to indicate.//

## Further Information

### Professional Associations

While AHRI is the principal professional body for the broad spectrum of HR work, there are many organisations representing the specialised areas. Some of these major organisations include:

#### **Australian Human Resources Institute (AHRI)**

This Australian professional organisation represents and serves people with HR responsibilities and interests from a wide variety of backgrounds. AHRI is an invaluable source of information which keeps its members informed of current HR issues in Australia and in the Asia Pacific. It offers a wide range of training courses, seminars, conferences and special interest groups, and is an excellent point of contact for those new to the industry as well as professionals. Membership is open to anyone with an interest in HR. Student membership offers full-time tertiary students an introduction to AHRI with their first year of membership free.

#### **Australian Institute of Management (AIM)**

The Institute aims to develop management and leadership excellence by supporting, developing, promoting and practising the profession of management at all levels. It offers a wide range of activities and services related to all aspects of management including HR issues. It has a number of special interest groups, meeting regularly, and these provide an avenue for networking and discussions with others working within your area of interest.

#### **Australian Institute of Training and Development**

The AITD was formed in 1971 to address the specific needs of training and HR development professionals. Members come from the corporate world, public sector and small business. They are either in-house learning and development professionals, or those who provide external learning services.

This group is for people with particular interests in the training function. Members have free access to an extensive professional library with a comprehensive collection on training. They may also take part in a variety of professional development activities and are kept informed about opportunities, functions and events in training. Joining the Institute is also another good way of networking. Student membership is available for full-time learning and development students.

#### **Industrial Relations Society of Australia**

The Society brings together representatives of management, trade unions, government services

and the professions, together with specialists in the various academic disciplines concerned with Industrial Relations, and seeks to develop an integrated approach.

#### **International Association for Human Resource Information Management**

The International Association for Human Resource Information Management (IHRIM) aims to be the leading global source of knowledge for the application of HR information and technology to improve organisational effectiveness. It provides information about HR information management, systems issues, trends and technology.

#### **Recruitment and Consulting Services Association (RCSA)**

The Recruitment and Consulting Services Association Ltd is the voice of the Australian and New Zealand recruitment and on-hire industry. The RCSA provides their members with advice on Industrial Relations issues and provides an educational program that is suitable for recruitment specialists.

#### **Safety Institute of Australia**

The Institute aims to promote the field of Occupational Health and Safety, as well as developing research into OH&S procedures and practices.

### Career Advice

As well as a range of materials from AHRI, further assistance relating to graduate careers in HR may be obtained from:

**GradsOnline** – Current information regarding graduate employment trends and graduate starting salaries in various fields including HR.

**Graduate Careers Australia** – GCA hosts Australia's official Higher Education graduate employment website. The site contains information of relevance to both student job-seekers, and those wanting information on career options and guidance. GCA's website includes information on the supply and demand of new graduates and interactive job search for graduates. Contact details for Careers libraries in universities are also available under Campus Contacts on the GCA site.

**Graduate Opportunities** – Australia's premier graduate employer directory available online and in hard copy from GCA or university Careers Services.

Careers libraries in universities and some TAFE colleges.

Career Reference/Information Centres in major centres. 

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This booklet is one of a series produced by GCA and intended for use by Careers Advisory Services in Higher Education in Australia. The booklets will also be of interest to secondary students and others considering further study.

A full list of titles is available on the GCA website – [www.graduatecareers.com.au](http://www.graduatecareers.com.au).

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