

4.02 Business Efficiency Assignments

This policy provides information on the conduct of business efficiency assignments (BEAs) and sets out the steps involved in such assignments.

- Business Efficiency Assignments or BEAs comprise the examination of blocks of work (existing or proposed) at Branch, Divisional, Departmental or inter-Departmental levels. For more information please refer to [Section 2 Scope and Definitions](#)
- [Section 3 Business Efficiency Assignment Programmes](#) explains that these normally be undertaken in accordance with work programmes prepared by Departments
- [Section 4 Arrangements for Consultation during Assignments](#) explains what contact arrangements will be appropriate during the assignment
- Where external assistance is required, steering groups or other professional advice may be sought. Please see [Section 9 Use of Steering Groups](#) and [Section 10 Use of Specialist/Professional Advisers](#)

The following terms within this policy are defined in the glossary:

There are currently no terms within this policy defined in the glossary.

You may also be interested in the following policies:

There are currently no related policies.

This policy is version 2.0

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This homepage is only a guide to the policy, not the policy itself. In the event of any discrepancy between the content of this homepage and the associated policy, the wording of the policy shall apply.

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4.02 BUSINESS EFFICIENCY ASSIGNMENTS

1 Introduction

1.1 This section of the HR Handbook provides information on the conduct of business efficiency assignments (BEAs) and sets out the steps involved in such assignments.

1.2 The section provides information for Departments commissioning a BEA and officers in business areas where an assignment is to be carried out.

1.3 This section also provides guidance on best practice for consultation with Trade Union Side (TUS) on business efficiency assignments. Departments should agree arrangements for implementing this guidance with TUS, which can be tailored by Departments or Agencies in consultation with Departmental TUS. Where any existing agreements provide for arrangements other than those covered in this section, it will be open to the Department and the TUS to maintain existing arrangements or to vary them in line with this section.

2 Scope and Definitions

2.1 BEAs may be carried out by business consultants working in Departmental Business Efficiency Units, any other Departmental Business Efficiency Unit or Delivery and Innovation Division (DID). BEAs may also be carried out by persons from outside the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) employed for the purpose by the Department, working alone or jointly.

2.2 Assignments will comprise the examination of blocks of work (existing or proposed) at Branch, Divisional, Departmental or inter-Departmental levels. The main criteria will be to ensure that:

- there are adequate, but not excessive, resources including staff at the appropriate grade in sufficient numbers to carry out the necessary functions in the most efficient manner and that essential work is not left undone; and
- appropriate organisational and management structures exist to support the function.

2.3 The term ‘Trade Union Side’ (TUS) includes the Trade Union Side of the Central Whitley Council as well as the Departmental and Local TUS of the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA). In any cases of doubt, the definition of ‘TUS’ in particular instances will be for central or Departmental determination as appropriate.

2.4 BEAs and related assignments are undertaken for a wide range of clients in the NICS, Northern Ireland Office (NIO) and Non-Departmental Public Bodies. Examples of the services provided include:

- reviewing organisational structures, business processes and staffing; and
- assisting organisations in taking forward improvement projects.

2.5 The assignments can vary widely in scope and complexity.

3 Business Efficiency Assignment Programmes

3.1 Assignments will normally be undertaken in accordance with work programmes prepared by Departments. It will be open to both Management and Trade Union Sides to put forward suggestions for assignments or to propose variations in the scope of the planned assignments. Work programmes may be altered to reflect changing priorities. Where such alteration results in either the introduction of a new assignment or the cancellation or postponement of a planned assignment, Management should give Trade Union Sides as much notice as possible of the change.

4 Arrangements for Consultation During Assignments

4.1 Where it is intended to commission or undertake a BEA, the client should notify Departmental TUS of the starting date as early as possible to provide the opportunity for preliminary discussion. In the case of assignments conducted in more than one Department, similar provision should apply between the Department of Finance and Personnel and Central TUS.

4.2 TUS representatives at the appropriate level, for example central or Departmental, should be notified at the outset of the nature of the assignment, its scope and purpose, the expected timetable and so on. These will normally be described in a formal Terms of Reference or assignment proposal which will be prepared by the business consultant and will be issued to TUS for consultation by the client prior to any work commencing on the assignment.

4.3 TUS should be given the opportunity before, during and up to the completion of a BEA to present any views which it may wish the client and the business consultant to take into account. This should include provision for a pre-report discussion between the business consultant and TUS. The client and business consultant should, whenever possible, be available for any meeting which might be requested.

5 Project Initiation

5.1 After an initial meeting with the client, the objectives of the assignment, as agreed between the business consultant and the client, should be clearly defined and set out formally in a project proposal or Terms of Reference.

5.2 It will be the responsibility of the client, as detailed in the Terms of Reference, to issue the project proposal and Terms of Reference to TUS.

6 Fact Finding

6.1 Business Consultants may issue Job Evaluation and Grading Support (JEGS) Job questionnaires (JQs) to staff while conducting BEAs. Their purpose is to ascertain the key duties, responsibilities and accountabilities of a post (whether existing or proposed) in a form which will assist with the assessment of need, organisational structure and the associated work volumes and job weight/grading. JQs are generally followed up by an interview, to gain further information and validate facts from the current postholder, line manager or client. It is important to note that it is the post that is under review and not the performance of the postholder.

6.2 As part of the interview process a business consultant will seek substantial work volume details from a postholder and must agree representative time spends for each element of the post's activities which should be signed off by the postholder's line manager. It is important to ensure that the information gathered reflects the role of the post both at the time of the interview and, where possible, for the foreseeable future. Historic 'one-offs,' which are not representative of the day-to-day responsibilities of the post, should therefore be discounted.

7 Job Evaluation

7.1 The information in a JQ may also be analysed using job evaluation techniques in other words the Job Evaluation and Grading Support (JEGS) methodology or Job Evaluation for Senior Posts (JESP), in order to determine a job weight (which will determine grade level) for a post. Job weight is a measure of the relative value of jobs in an organisation, assessed through analysis of the job content against a set of common criteria.

7.2 Job evaluation measures jobs, not job holders. It does not measure an individual's performance or the loading of a post (i.e. the volume of work); rather it is a technique used to define relativities between jobs on a consistent and systematic basis.

7.3 JESP, JEGS and Civil Service Grading Guidance are used by Departments when undertaking job evaluation.

7.4 The recommended stages for undertaking a job evaluation are:

- JQ issued to and completed by post holder and signed off by their line manager
- interview conducted with the post holder
- analysis of post using JEGS, JESP or grading guidance as appropriate

- Quality assurance

7.5 Where there is no incumbent post holder, the job description should be developed and signed off by the line manager.

8 Analysis and Presentation of Findings

8.1 The business consultant should undertake a structured analysis of the information obtained during the fact finding stage of the review. From this the business consultant should develop assignment recommendations and ideas with the client in a participative manner and discuss the content of the final report before it is produced.

8.2 The findings should be presented to the client and a Review Report produced where necessary. Where the findings and recommendations are delivered to management in the form of a presentation, this presentation should also be provided to Trade Union Side.

8.3 On completion of an assignment, Management should consult with Trade Union Side in the normal way on any recommendations which are to be implemented which impact on matters such as structure, staffing (numbers or grading), organisation or methods of carrying out the work.

8.4 It is recognised that if scope for immediate improvement is identified before an assignment has been fully completed it may be desirable to implement appropriate recommendations at that time, in other words prior to a written report being issued. In such cases, Management should consult Central or Departmental TUS prior to implementation. In practice, such recommendations could be expected to be mutually acceptable to both TUS and the client.

8.5 The general aim should be to complete the post-report discussion process without delay. TUS should be given adequate time (say, 4-8 weeks) to respond to those recommendations which the client proposes to implement. However it is accepted that large or intricate assignments may necessitate a longer period of time commensurate with the complexity of the assignment. Those Departments who operate Implementation Action Plans may also wish to set appropriate timescales for TUS responses.

9 Use of Steering Groups

9.1 On occasions, the client may wish to appoint a Steering Group to direct or to oversee an assignment, for example where the assignment raises major issues of Departmental policy which need to be addressed at the most senior management levels, or where the scope of the assignment is so broad as to cover the responsibilities of several Divisions or Departments.

9.2 The use of a Steering Group will neither interfere with nor diminish the rights of TUS in regards to consultation procedures or access to the business consultant throughout the assignment.

10 Use of Specialist/Professional Advisers

10.1 It may be necessary due to the nature of some assignments, for example, an assignment of the work of professional groups or specialisms, to give consideration to the appointment of an adviser from within the relevant discipline to act as a source of advice or reference for Assignment Officers on professional or technical matters.

10.2 The selection and role of a specialist/professional adviser will be a matter for consultation between the Assignment Officers, the client and Trade Union Side as appropriate. Where the appointment of external consultants is proposed the agreed Guidelines of Best Practice should be applied.

11 Records Management

11.1 Paper and electronic records should be kept in line with the requirements of Public Records Office Northern Ireland (PRONI) and Departmental procedures and in adherence to any requirements under the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

12 Disclosure of Reports and Release of Material

12.1 A report will normally be issued at the end of each assignment and the client should normally make it available, in confidence if necessary, to TUS. **Exceptionally**, the client retains the right to withhold any particular report in whole or in part. If a report is withheld, the reason should be explained, in confidence, to TUS.

12.2 The degree of disclosure by TUS will depend upon particular circumstances but TUS has the discretion to consult members affected by report recommendations. In any cases of difficulty there should be joint client/TUS discussions.

12.3 The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives anyone the right to access information from public authorities, and is entirely retrospective. Information gathered during a business efficiency assignment is potentially disclosable under the Freedom of Information Act, Data Protection Act and Environmental Information Regulations and each request for information must be judged on its own merits against the legal requirements.