

# 1. Executive Summary

This report presents the results of a review of the UBC Okanagan (UBCO) Human Resource (HR) department, performed by MMK Consulting. The review was undertaken in anticipation of the departure of the current UBCO HR Director. It is intended to help assess UBCO's current HR operations and future opportunities, and to gather input to inform the search for the new Director prior to the departure of current Director.

The study findings reflect the results of individual and group interviews with more than 40 UBC staff and employee association representatives, as well as additional research and analysis of specific UBCO HR issues.

## Overall state of the UBCO HR support function

The twelve-person UBCO HR department is in general well regarded by the UBCO faculty and staff that it serves. UBCO HR's key strengths include:

- ▶ A strong service orientation, with quick responsiveness to UBCO enquiries and issues.
- ▶ Strong labour relations advisory expertise, resident in the two senior staff members.
- ▶ Good working relationships with employee associations, based on an "interest-based" negotiating framework.
- ▶ A strong return-to-work program (Workplace Re-integration and Accommodation Program- WRAP).
- ▶ Positive working relationships and morale within the UBCO HR department.

At the same time, some of UBCO's operating practices, for example with regard to faculty/labour relations, are very different from those on the Vancouver campus. These differences have led to concerns regarding UBCO's consistency of approach and alignment with UBC-wide HR policies.

## Analysis of key issues

Our findings and assessments/recommendations with respect to key HR issues are summarized as follows:

- ▶ **Labour/faculty relations** – The labour/faculty relations negotiating frameworks at UBCV and UBCO are very different. UBCO’s more informal labour relations negotiating framework has helped UBCO in developing a positive labour relations environment on the Okanagan campus, but has also raised issues regarding the consistency of collective agreement administration between the two campuses.

We do not recommend major changes to the UBCO HR model that could jeopardize the positive labour relations environment at that campus. In the short run, we see potential to increase consistency and precedent management by reviewing the UBC-wide guidelines for communicating with employee associations. Increased liaison (e.g. joint file management) between UBCV and UBCO based labour relations staff, to the extent that this can be encouraged, would also help to build internal relationships. Over time, UBC will need to bring its labour relations approaches at the two campuses into closer alignment.

- ▶ **Two-campus HR support services model** – The HR support services provided through the Okanagan-based UBCO HR group include labour/faculty relations; return-to-work; organizational development and learning; and HR administrative/transactional services. These UBCO HR support services report directly to the UBCO HR Director.

This review briefly considered the option of establishing direct reporting relationships to UBCV-based staff, likely on a dual-report basis, for the various UBCO HR support functions. This change would establish direct reporting linkages between UBCO HR services providers (labour relations, etc.) and their Vancouver-based counterparts. While this option would support closer integration of functions between UBCO and UBCV HR, it would also raise issues regarding the effectiveness with which relatively small groups of UBCO-based individuals could be managed by UBCV-based HR managers. It also received almost no support from UBCO faculty and staff in interviews. Accordingly, our recommendation is to stay with the existing two-campus support services model, and instead to look for opportunities for integration of specific services.

- ▶ **Workloads/resourcing** – Much of the long-term labour relations expertise at UBCO HR resides with two senior individuals – i.e. the HR Director, and the Manager of Human Resources/Labour Relations. This has led to too much of their time being spent on case files, and not enough time being spent on HR management/administration and strategic planning.

Based on our review, we conclude that the employee relations workloads/resourcing issue needs to be addressed on a priority basis. Our recommendation is to create a new position at an intermediate level of experience. In addition to addressing the workloads issue, this approach would also help to bridge the current gap in experience levels between the senior management staff and other UBCO HR employee relations staff. In the short term, a staff secondment from UBCV employee relations could be a useful interim approach in terms of quickly addressing current workloads issues, helping to strengthen connectivity between the two campuses, and enabling the new HR Director to be involved in recruiting the permanent new resource.

- ▶ **Transactional/administrative opportunities** – The research and interview program identified several HR administrative/transactional challenges and potential opportunities to improve services to the UBCO campus, while also increasing linkages to UBCV HR. Among them, our assessment is that the strongest administrative/transactional opportunities for UBCO HR to provide support for UBCO’s strategic direction include (1) immigration assistance for internationally-recruited staff, and (2) administration of joint faculty appointments. Working with UBCV HR to develop and deliver UBC-wide expertise on these complex issues would also provide opportunities for greater campus connectivity. In addition, a review and update to the UBCO HR website is recommended.

- ▶ **UBCO staff capabilities and growth potential** – UBCO HR staff display a positive work attitude, and several UBCO HR staff expressed strong interest in undertaking additional training to achieve professional growth and development. At this point, there is no candidate within UBCO HR that is ready to take on a more senior-level labour relations management role to relieve the current workload pressures on the Manager of Labour Relations.

## Meeting UBC’s future needs

The HR function, and leading practices within HR, have evolved over the past four decades. The most significant shift is that the traditional “HR Support” approach has evolved into an “HR business partner” approach, with the HR function having an increasingly important strategic role within organizations.

The UBCO HR function has established a strong reputation for its HR support services, in particular for labour relations case support and for its return-to-work (WRAP) program. It has also made some progress in terms of its strategic profile at UBCO – for example by having a seat at the Deputy Vice Chancellor’s table. However, it is perceived by UBCO faculty and staff more as a provider of HR support services than an HR business partner.

This perception will have to change in order for UBCO HR to become an effective business partner to the UBCO campus in achieving UBCO’s strategic vision of increasing its reputation for research excellence and in becoming a model for interdisciplinary studies within UBC.

## Areas of focus for the new HR Director

In positioning UBCO HR to meet the evolving needs of UBC over the next five to ten years, and changing the perception of HR on campus, we recommend the following priority areas of focus for the new HR Director:

- ▶ Address the short-term case workloads issue in handling UBCO labour relations case files. This will likely involve the recruitment of additional resources to take on individual caseload work, although not at the same level of experience and skill as the current manager of labour relations.
- ▶ Move UBCO HR further along the spectrum toward becoming a best-practices HR business partner, while recognizing the constraints of the existing UBC institutional framework. This would include developing a reputation on the UBCO campus as having specialist business partner expertise in the faculty and staff recruitment processes that will be critical to UBCO in achieving its strategic vision.
- ▶ Work with UBCV HR to build on common ground with regard to UBC’s labour relations environment and practices, including the nature of the working relationships with employee associations.
- ▶ Increase the levels of regular interaction between UBCO and UBCV HR staff at all levels, with particular focus on areas that are especially relevant to UBCO’s strategic goals and that require specialized HR expertise (e.g. immigration support, joint faculty appointments).