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Main points

Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST) plays an important role in preparing skilled workers. In our 2006 Report – Volume 1 (Chapter 3, pp. 45-57), we set out the results of our audit of human resource processes used by SIAST. We reported that, as of January 2006, SIAST had adequate human resource processes to build human capacity except for four areas. In brief, we recommended that SIAST improve how it:

- ◆ analyzes competency gaps in its entire workforce
- ◆ identifies and plans to address barriers to its human capacity
- ◆ informs key staff about trends and effective strategies to overcome barriers to human capacity
- ◆ monitors human resource risks and evaluates progress

By March 31, 2008, SIAST had taken some action on all four recommendations. Further action is required.

SIAST told us that restructuring for a more strategic approach and staff vacancies delayed SIAST's response. SIAST plans further action on the recommendations.

Introduction

Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST) is a public post-secondary education institution that prepares people for work in areas such as the trades, health sciences, and technology. SIAST's role is increasingly important to train replacement workers for those retiring from the workforce.

For the year ending June 30, 2007, SIAST's financial statements report revenues of \$174.4 million, expenses of \$173.7 million, and assets of \$86.2 million. The financial statements are on the website www.siastr.sk.ca in the *SIAST 2006-2007 Annual Report*.

SIAST has about 1,500 fulltime employees.¹ Effective human resource processes help agencies take timely action to hire and keep the right people. Forward thinking and innovative employees will help SIAST to achieve its objectives and prepare for the future.

This chapter explains action taken by SIAST up to March 31, 2008 on audit recommendations we made in 2006 about SIAST's human resource processes.

Building human resource capacity—a follow-up

In our 2006 Report – Volume 1 (Chapter 3, pp. 45-57), we concluded that at January 31, 2006, SIAST had adequate human resource processes to build human capacity except for its processes:

- ◆ to analyze and communicate workforce gaps and barriers
- ◆ to evaluate progress towards current and future human capacity needs

In 2006, we made four recommendations. On October 4, 2006, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts concurred with our recommendations. The recommendations are set out in italics under the relevant headings in this chapter.

¹ *SIAST 2006-07 Annual Report* p. 24 (number of employees), p. 34 (expenses).

SIAST has taken some action on all four recommendations and plans more. Further action is required.

Analyze competency gaps

In 2006, we recommended that SIAST analyze competency gaps for its entire workforce and provide periodic updates to the board.

SIAST is working to build a foundation that will allow it to analyze competency gaps for its workforce in the future. Restructuring its human resources helped SIAST move toward more proactive human resource planning. In addition, SIAST listed competencies required for key positions and began to revise position descriptions and recruiting materials to describe required competencies.

In 2007, SIAST assigned human resources staff to provide services to specific program areas (e.g., health, construction trades). This enabled these staff to achieve a greater depth of understanding of the issues faced in particular sectors and to anticipate problems. Human resources staff now work more closely with senior managers. Together they use a “workforce planning tool” to identify market issues and collect information about positions requiring expertise that is difficult to recruit. When complete, SIAST expects this information will help it analyze potential workforce gaps and make timely reports to the board about significant workforce gaps and possible solutions.

SIAST needs to make better use of its human resources information system to analyze frequent vacancies across all SIAST campuses and programs. For example, SIAST needs to know if certain types of positions are often vacant. In 2007, SIAST hired a recruitment-retention specialist to track vacant positions and consider the cause of the vacancies. When SIAST analyzes its information about vacant positions, it will be better able to tell the board about trends and take timely action to avoid workforce gaps.

Identify barriers to human capacity

In 2006, we recommended that SIAST identify barriers to its current and future human capacity and provide the board with a plan to address the significant barriers.

SIAST needs to clearly identify and inform the board about current barriers to human resource capacity. SIAST has begun collecting information (in its new “workforce planning tool”) about critical positions that are hard to recruit. This information will help it identify current barriers to human resource capacity across SIAST. The two barriers SIAST emphasized in 2007 were a competitive labour market and total compensation.

SIAST is using strategies such as market stipends to facilitate hiring into hard-to-recruit positions where compensation is a barrier. For example, to manage vacancies, SIAST approved a market stipend for the campus-nurse position, raising the rate of pay to reflect the pay offered for similar positions elsewhere in the province.

During 2007, SIAST analyzed labour market trends and barriers to human capacity in an ad hoc way related to specific recruiting challenges. A more comprehensive approach to identifying and analyzing barriers would help SIAST avoid long vacancies resulting in competency gaps. In 2008, SIAST is developing a recruitment and retention plan to address various barriers to human capacity. It also plans a more strategic approach to market stipends and other ways of dealing with compensation issues.

Inform staff about workforce trends

In 2006, we recommended that SIAST regularly inform staff involved in the recruiting process about trends in workforce gaps across SIAST and effective strategies to overcome barriers to human capacity.

At SIAST, operational managers initiate the hiring process and commonly make hiring decisions. Human resources staff facilitate the recruitment process. Operational managers monitor employment patterns in the relevant industries and may share this information informally when recruiting for a specific position. SIAST expects its human resources staff to monitor employment trends in assigned industries and to make ad hoc verbal reports of their findings.

SIAST needs a more formal, regular process to share workforce information among those involved in recruiting. SIAST’s senior managers and human resources staff should routinely inform each other about

trends in workforce vacancies and the supply of workers to replace staff who leave.

In 2007, SIAST human resources staff met twice with all senior managers to present best practices in human resource management and recruiting strategies. For example, a human resource manager explained an alternate way to coach employees and support effective performance. SIAST also discussed with its senior managers some effective strategies to overcome common recruitment barriers.

Monitor human resource capacity

In 2006, we recommended that SIAST's board work with management to identify the content and frequency of reports necessary to monitor human resource risks and evaluate progress toward its human capacity objectives.

SIAST has not identified the reports it needs to monitor human resource capacity. Performance measures are a board strategic priority for 2008, but in 2007 SIAST did not have performance measures related to human resource capacity. It does not routinely report human resource statistics to senior managers or the board. Human resources staff should inform senior managers about positions with high turnover and programs that have severe recruiting challenges. SIAST could then more effectively identify causes and find timely solutions.

In 2007, SIAST's board monitored a variety of risks through its Mid-year Performance Report. Recruiting and retaining talented staff was a board priority and an identified risk to SIAST's ability to achieve its objectives. However, the 2007 Mid-year Performance Report did not contain any human resource statistics or workforce trends. We continue to recommend that SIAST monitor human resource risks and evaluate progress toward its human capacity objectives.