

Advanced Education, Employment
and Labour

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Main points

The Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST) made good progress in improving its human resource processes.

In our 2006 Report – Volume 1, we concluded that SIAST had adequate human resources 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. As of February 2010, SIAST has fully met our recommendations for analyzing and communicating workforce gaps and barriers. It is also close to meeting our recommendations for evaluating progress towards current and future human capacity needs. SIAST needs to identify how often the Board should receive reports monitoring human resources risks. SIAST also needs to provide the Board with progress reports on its human resources objectives using key performance measures.

Introduction

The mandate of the Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour (Ministry) is to foster development of an educated, skilled, and productive workforce that meets the labour demands of a growing and innovative economy.¹

The Ministry's responsibilities are set out primarily in *The Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training Act* and *The Labour Standards Act*.

The Ministry is also responsible for certain special purpose funds and agencies including the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST). Our 2009 Report – Volume 3 reports the results of the audit of the Ministry, its special purpose funds, and agencies for the years ending on or before June 30, 2009.

This chapter explains action taken by SIAST up to February 28, 2010 on audit recommendations we made in 2006 about human resources processes.

Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology

As a post-secondary education institution, SIAST helps prepare 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.

In 2008-09, SIAST spent \$202.7 million to provide its services and had about 1,600 full-time employees.² Effective human resources processes will help SIAST take timely action to hire and keep the right people to achieve its objectives.

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

¹Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour, 2008-09 Annual Report, p.5.

² SIAST 2007-08 Annual Report: p.40 number of employees, p.51 expenses.

- ♦ 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 agreed with our recommendations.

As of February 28, 2010, SIAST has completed action on three recommendations. Further action is required on one recommendation as explained below. The recommendations are set out in italics under the relevant headings of this chapter.

Building human resources capacity—a follow-up

Analyze competency gaps and report to the Board

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

SIAST has met this recommendation. SIAST analyzed vacant positions and told the Board about trends and explained that some vacant positions are difficult to recruit.

This information helped SIAST take timely action to minimize workforce gaps related to competencies or occupational groups. For example, nursing and medical diagnostic positions are consistently difficult to recruit. SIAST initiated an agreement with a local health region to obtain instructors for nursing and medical diagnostics. SIAST also updated the way it describes key positions to help identify competency gaps and treat vacant positions more consistently.

The Board received periodic updates on human resources issues and workforce gaps in 2009 (i.e., March, September, and October).

Identify and plan to address barriers to human capacity

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

SIAST has met this recommendation. SIAST identified barriers to its current and future human capacity. In 2009, it presented the Board with a Workforce Action Plan that outlines ways to resolve significant barriers.

SIAST's current barriers to its human resources capacity include the need for clearer, relevant position requirements so that unnecessary skills are not expected of applicants. SIAST also needs to overcome barriers related to consistent data entry at all SIAST locations, and recruiting that supports a diverse workforce. SIAST has taken action on these barriers.

Some barriers to human resources capacity will continue into the future. Finding instructors with extensive experience and advanced qualifications will continue to be challenging (e.g., journeyman certificate, doctoral or masters degree may be required for instructors). Other barriers expected to have greater impact in the future include large numbers of employees retiring simultaneously and a shortage of skilled, experienced candidates for vacant positions. Plans for resolving future barriers to human resources capacity are evolving.

Inform staff about useful recruiting strategies

In 2006, we recommended 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.

SIAST has met this recommendation. During 2009, SIAST communicated to its staff about trends in workforce gaps and strategies to overcome barriers to human capacity.

SIAST's main communication tool to inform staff about workforce trends and effective strategies was its Workforce Action Plan. It is available to all staff on an internal website and explains employee turnover and sick leave rates, and employee response to supervision compared to similar agencies. The Workforce Action Plan identified priority strategies to overcome major barriers to a full capacity workforce. For example, more qualified people apply if positions are permanent with flexible hours rather than short-term with fixed work hours. SIAST continued to emphasize the recruitment of Aboriginal people. It also expanded its efforts to retain mature workers and address related issues.

SIAST used formal and informal methods to inform its staff about trends and effective recruiting strategies. It used formal training to inform supervisors about effective ways to recruit and retain staff (e.g., supervisory skills, staffing processes). SIAST used verbal, informal communications to keep its human resources consultants and program heads informed about trends and strategies for recruiting. In 2008, the focus was on communication about workforce planning. In 2009, the focus was on recruitment including revising the hiring process for better consistency across SIAST's many programs and four campuses.

Monitor human resources capacity

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

SIAST has partially met this recommendation. It identified the general content of reports but not how often the Board expected to receive reports monitoring human resources risks and evaluating progress. SIAST worked actively on this recommendation.

In its strategic plan, the Board identified the general content of the reports it wanted to monitor progress toward its human resources objectives. For example, the Board requested information about employee retention and safety. A Balanced Scorecard Committee is defining performance measures for SIAST's strategic objectives. In February 2010, the Board had not yet received any reports using these measures. Management told us it will give the Board reports using these measures in 2011 after deciding on all measures for its Balanced Scorecard reports.

During 2009, the Board received a mid-year report with minimal human resources content and an annual report. In March and October 2009, the Board received two useful reports explaining SIAST's strategic workforce plan, hard to recruit positions, and other human resources risks.