

Introductory guidance to secondment

Originally issued in June 1999; latest revision February 2007

This fact sheet gives introductory guidance. It:

- describes the basic process
- details different types of secondments
- gives the benefits to the secondee, the home organization and the host organization
- highlights the role HR can play.

What is secondment?

Originally, the term secondment referred to the temporary transfer of an employee to another department within an organisation. However, these days the term is used more broadly to cover a temporary movement or 'loan' of an employee to another part of an organisation or to a completely different organisation. Employees are now seconded into organisations ranging from major commercial concerns through public services and schools to small local groups and charities. Organisations benefit from both inward and outward secondment. Typically, paid secondments require formal arrangements, are full time and last up to twelve months.

Secondment is increasingly being recognised as valuable for development. As organisations adopt ever flatter management structures, opportunities for promotion through a succession of line management positions are limited. Secondment offers employees career development opportunities and is increasingly being used as part of talent management programmes. It also provides organisations the chance to develop its skills base.

Although secondment is often regarded as a marginal activity that is supported mainly by large organisations, the increasing flexibility of working patterns means that it may become increasingly important in the future. According to the CIPD's Managing employee careers survey¹, secondment is one of the top ten most commonly used career management practices and 67% of respondents considered them to be 'effective' or 'very effective'. Similarly in the recent CIPD/DDI leadership forecast², 63% of respondents identified external assignments as very effective (the highest response rate) for developing leaders.

The basics

How long does a secondment last?

The duration depends on the circumstances. Short-term secondments may last less than 100 hours (often part time); long-term secondments can last a year or more.

Who is eligible for secondment?

This is a policy decision made by each organisation. It may be open to all, or have restrictions such as only offered to managers, technical and professional staff, highfliers, those on talent management programmes or employees with a specified length of service.

Who pays?

Generally, the organisations that supply the secondees continue to pay their salary during the secondment period. For a commercial secondment, however, this cost is then reimbursed by the host organisation.

Types of secondment

Secondments can take place:

- within an organisation
- externally to another organisation (ie public sector to private or vice versa, to a voluntary organisation).

Secondment within an organisation

This is a valuable way of providing staff development opportunities, particularly within flat organisational structures with limited opportunities for promotion. It is also useful for resourcing short-term assignments or projects. The employee benefits by gaining wider experience and acquiring new skills without the disruption of relocation and with the benefit of continuity of employment. The main disadvantage for all parties is that there is not the completely fresh outlook that an external secondment may bring.

External secondment

By exposing firstly the host organisation and the employee, then subsequently the seconding employer, to different work practices, external secondments can benefit all three parties. However it is essential that all three are clear about their responsibilities in this situation. Specific questions that need to be answered prior to a secondment, include:

- Is the secondment for a fixed term or for an indefinite period that is subject to notice?
- Although the seconding employer will generally be responsible for basic salary, what are the arrangements for overtime, bonuses, expenses, training etc?
- What will happen if long-term absence or persistent short-term absence occurs?
- How will supervisory and disciplinary matters be dealt with?
- If it is long-term, how will performance management and development be managed?
- Does indemnity insurance need to be provided?
- Who will fill the role in the home organisation? How will the secondee retain contact?
- How will the end of the secondment be managed (for example, return to original role)?

It is essential that all parties are clear about their obligations, expectations, accountabilities and performance objectives.

The host employer should be careful that it does not treat the secondee as an 'employee'. For instance whilst it will need to know when an employee intends to take holiday it should not assume direct responsibility for either authorising or paying for holidays. Similarly expenses should form part of the 'charge' between the host and seconding employers.

The host employers should not be responsible for disciplining the employee, but will want access to a mechanism, by which it can require the seconding employee to institute such a procedure. Alternatively, the host employer may wish to define an employee's misconduct, as a 'trigger' event, allowing it to terminate the agreement with the seconding employer. 'Trigger events' could also include, for example, long term sickness of the employee.

Failure by the parties to resolve these matters prior to entering into a secondment arrangement could cause the employers, and particularly the host employer to lose the advantage (particularly associated with avoiding personnel problems) gained by entering into such an arrangement.

The voluntary sector

Employers release employees to work in voluntary organisations for periods of as little as 100 hours (either over a period of time or in a single block). This will typically be funded out of a community relations budget.

As organisations are becoming increasingly aware of their corporate social responsibilities, this is gaining in popularity.

Benefits of secondments

The secondee:

- has the opportunity of wider career and personal development than at work
- acquires valuable experience in project management
- is able to test and apply specific skills in a different organisational environment
- gains a new skills and experiences in challenging areas.

The secondee's employer:

- gains enhanced employee skills, teamworking and cross functional communications
- improves workforce morale and motivation
- develops wider networks and contacts
- builds a reputation as a good employer and contributor to the community.

The host organisation:

- gains assistance with projects
- gets an external perspective.

Possible pitfalls of secondments

The secondee:

- may have difficulty settling back in their own role when the secondment ends.

The secondee's employer:

- may have to deal with dissatisfied staff who were not selected for secondment.

The host organisation:

- secondee fails to fit into the culture.//////////

Examples of different types of secondments

- Senior civil servants seconded into industry to gain experience of the private sector.
- Junior/middle managers seconded into a voluntary sector scheme to gain project management and leadership experience.
- Technical specialists gaining experience of the supply chain through secondment to their suppliers or customers.
- Teachers exposed to industry to observe different cultures and working practices.
- • Mid/senior level leaders being seconded to different organisations to provide them with experience of leading in different organisational contexts.

Jobs that are suitable for being filled by secondment include:

- a review project
- the introduction of a new initiative
- policy development
- a specific task of limited duration or with an uncertain future
- a short-term appointment to start a new work area prior to making a permanent position.

Organisations that co-ordinate secondment opportunities

Business in the Community was founded in 1982 to meet the responsibilities that businesses have to their communities. It has a membership of about 700 companies. Its purpose 'is to inspire, challenge, engage and support business in continually improving its positive impact on society'. The involvement of employees, supported and encouraged by their employers, is central to the work of Business in the Community.

- [Visit the Business in the Community website](#)

Employees in the Community Network (Eitcn) is for managers, including personnel and HR managers, in any organisation that has an interest in employer-supported volunteering (including secondment). It covers organisations that provide or receive volunteers. Its aims in relation to secondment are to 'promote ... employer-supported volunteering as a key part of company community involvement in the public, private and voluntary sectors ... and promote best practice within member organisations and more widely'. It offers various activities and services to promote this end, including network days and presentations on good practice.

- [Visit the Employees in the Community Network](#)

HTI is a not-for-profit social enterprise organisation which has been seconding senior teachers into business for nearly 20 years. By taking a funded secondment into business for anything from six weeks to 12 months, educationalists can undertake interim management responsibilities, stretch their leadership skills in a new environment and understand what industry requires of young people who will become the employees of tomorrow.

- [Visit the HTI website](#)

Interchange is a Government initiative managed by the Cabinet Office which promotes and encourages the exchange of people and good practice between the civil service and other sectors of the economy.

- [Visit the Interchange website](#)

Pilotlight works to help small, innovative charities grow by recruiting proven leaders and high fliers from business and industry who want to donate their skills to charities.

- [Visit the Pilotlight website](#)

The Whitehall and Industry Group (WIG) is an independent, membership organisation which brings senior people together to improve understanding and co-operation between the public, private and voluntary sectors. It offers people exchange, leadership programmes and events. WIG's people exchange activities include the brokering of cross-sector attachments and secondments which provide opportunities for individuals to gain insights into other sectors through business-focused projects and remits. These are individually tailored to meet both the candidate's learning objectives and the host organisation's requirements.

- [Visit the Whitehall and Industry Group website](#)

What HR professionals can do to encourage a successful secondment programme

- Ensure that the organisation has an effective secondment procedure that is well publicised to all staff, eg in staff handbook or on the intranet.
- Ensure that there is a clear business need for a secondment, with specific outcomes identified - ie in the performance management process capabilities and competences are identified.
- Convince senior management of the advantages of using secondment as an organisational and staff development tool.
- Advertise secondment positions effectively to the widest possible audience.
- Use local and national networks to make links with the external community.
- Actively seek secondment themselves in order to widen their experience of other working environments.
- Provide a tailored induction for both inward and outward secondees.
- Ensure that secondments are carefully monitored throughout.
- Encourage feedback and evaluation from secondees on their return.
- Review how knowledge and experiences gained by secondees have benefited the organisation.
- Be a contact point to facilitate communication between the home and host organisation.

References

1. CHARTERED INSTITUTE OF PERSONNEL AND DEVELOPMENT. (2003) *Managing employee careers: issues, trends and prospects*. Survey report. London: CIPD. Available at: <http://www.cipd.co.uk/surveys>

2. CHARTERED INSTITUTE OF PERSONNEL AND DEVELOPMENT. (2005) *UK global comparisons leadership forecast 2005-2006: best practices for tomorrow's global leaders*. Survey report. London: CIPD. Available at: <http://www.cipd.co.uk/surveys>

Further reading

CIPD members can use our Advanced Search to find additional Library resources on this topic.

- [Go to Advanced Search](#)

Books

Career discussions at work: practical tools for HR, managers and employees. (2005) London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. Available at: <http://www.cipd.co.uk/tools>

HARRIS, H. and DICKMANN, M. (2006) *International management development*. Guide. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. Available at: <http://www.cipd.co.uk/guides>

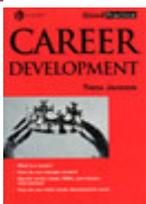
INCOMES DATA SERVICES. (2006) *Secondments and volunteering*. HR Studies. London: IDS.

TANSLEY, C. et al (2006) *Talent management: understanding the dimensions*. Change agenda. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. Available at: <http://www.cipd.co.uk/changeagendas>

Journal articles

WOOLNOUGH, R. (2005) Changing places. *Personnel Today*. 8 March. pp18-19,21.

This factsheet was originally written by Jean Richards and edited by Clare Hogg of Helios Associates Ltd. It has been updated by CIPD staff.



by Tricia Jackson

This section advertises the secondment opportunities currently available in government agencies. A secondment is defined as a temporary transfer of an employee to an agency or different business unit for development, to work on a specific project, or to foster inter-agency relationships.

Agencies

Agencies may consider whether it is appropriate to use a secondment to develop the skills of their staff, to resource projects needing specialist skills, or to forge links between agencies. Secondments can contribute to the people capability of the organisation.

See the [secondment resources](#) page for information on how to advertise a secondment opportunity on this website.

Individuals

If you are looking for a challenge or a development opportunity, you may not need to change jobs. Secondments are a type of development opportunity. Secondments can meet the development needs by giving opportunities to acquire new skills or to use existing skills in a different work context. They may give insights into the work of another agency or provide 'stretch' roles (acting up positions, project management experience, etc).

See the [secondment resources](#) page for background information on secondments, plus links to supporting resources including guidelines, a base secondment agreement, and checklists for host managers/home managers/secondees.

Community Internship Programme - an alternative secondment opportunity

The Community Internship Programme is an annual skill sharing and relationship building programme, offered by the Local Government & Community Development Branch of the Department of Internal Affairs. It provides grants for community organisations to 'borrow' skilled workers from their regular employers in the public, private and community sectors to undertake capacity-building projects ranging from 3-6 months each. For government employees, community internships offer professional development in a community environment, and for government agencies, an opportunity to strengthen existing relationships and build understanding with key community stakeholder organisations.

Application details, and the closing date for applications, is published on [the Department of Internal Affairs' website](#).

These resources are designed to assist agencies to organise secondments, and individuals and agencies to get the most out of the secondment experience. Many agencies will find the resources relevant and useful, and will see benefits in adopting them, but it is not compulsory to use them.

Guidelines

The guidelines outline:

- the principles, objectives and benefits as outlined in the structured secondments policy;
- when to use secondments
- how to advertise, select and negotiate the secondment arrangements.

Advertising a secondment on this website

A form in Word (Rich Text Format) is provided (link above) for use in compiling a secondment advertisement.

Download the form, complete electronically, then forward to the human resources section of your organisation for uploading by the person designated to place advertisements onto this website.

Base secondment agreement

The base agreement contains the areas that should and could be covered. There are minimum areas that must be included. However, the way these areas are covered is entirely up to the three parties involved. They may choose to use:

- the base agreement as it is;
- alternative clauses to the clauses in the base agreement; or
- additional clauses to the clauses in the base agreement.

Checklists

The checklists for the home manager, host manager and secondee provide a guide to the key points to consider when organising a secondment.

Brisbane, Australia

[\[Print-friendly version\]](#)

Contact Officer	Manager, Policy Planning and Workplace Relations, HR
Approval Date	
Approval Authority	Vice-Chancellor
Date of Next Review	01/07/2005

[12.6.1 Eligibility](#)

[12.6.2 Description of scheme](#)

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Internal secondments are encouraged for the purpose of enhancing staff members' career development and for better use of human resources throughout the University.

Internal secondments involve the temporary transfer of a staff member to another position (which may be at a higher level), on a full-time or part-time basis, within the University for a period of not more than twelve months. Arrangements will be made by mutual consent between the heads of the relevant organisational units and the staff member concerned. In such circumstances there must be an agreement that at the end of the stated period the staff member will return to his or her previously held position or to another agreed position.

Secondment of staff to another work area can be beneficial to both the organisation and the individual. Organisationally, secondments can provide for the exchange of information and ideas and the enhancement of organisational relationships. Also, there may be benefits in the speedy recruitment of experienced staff who are knowledgeable of the organisation and " proven performers " within that environment. The individual can benefit by the attainment of particular skills and knowledge which enhance career opportunities and personal development.

Internal secondments are not a substitute for professional development programs.

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12.6.1 Eligibility

On-going and fixed-term staff are eligible to apply for secondment. This policy does not apply to senior staff (SSG1 - SSG7).

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12.6.2 Description of scheme

Internal secondments of staff fall into two broad categories:

- *Category A* - where an organisational unit requires a staff member for a specific purpose, such as to provide expertise or assistance on a project, to fill a vacant position for periods of up to twelve months, or to meet peak work demands.

For secondments under this category, the parties to the secondment may consider it useful for a report to be provided by the secondee at the conclusion of the secondment period. The provision of any such report must be agreed between the parties prior to the commencement of the secondment;

- *Category B* - where an organisational unit requires a project to be completed and provides an opportunity for a staff member to be seconded to another organisational unit responsible for developing the project. This category would generally apply to staff seconded to another organisational unit (eg Teaching and Learning Development Unit) in order to develop teaching materials or conduct research directly involved with teaching and learning at QUT. Secondments under this category are subject to support by the relevant heads of the organisational units concerned and approval by executive deans of faculty/heads of division. Approval will be based on the nature and benefits of the project and funding availability. Following such period of secondment, staff must produce a written report, as necessary, on findings or documentation of materials produced. Copies are to be made available to interested staff through the University library.

Special cases which fall outside the above categories may be approved by the Human Resources Director.

A full-time position may be filled by secondment on either a full-time or part-time basis, depending on the operational requirements of the organisational area and the needs or preferences of the staff member/s wishing to be seconded.

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12.6.3 Costs

Salary costs for internally seconded staff are paid by the organisational unit which obtains the most benefit from the secondment. It is expected that generally the host unit would pay salary costs for secondments under Category A and that the releasing unit would pay salary costs for secondments under Category B. Staff considering secondment under Category B are encouraged to apply for research grants.

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12.6.4 Application Procedures

Details of application procedures are available from Human Resources Department.