

**Leeds College of Building**

**Recruitment research project**

**Case studies, summary and  
recommendations report**

**December 2021**

## Contents

Background .....	3
Agency A.....	6
College B .....	9
College C.....	11
College D .....	15
College E.....	18
Summary .....	20
Recommendations .....	21
Conditions .....	21
Channels .....	22
Process .....	23
Retention.....	24

## Background

Leeds College of Building is struggling to recruit staff to certain posts. In particular it faces a significant challenge recruiting staff to electrical installation lecturing roles.

The electrical installation sector, according to the college, is recruiting a limited number of apprentices or new entrants into the sector. This in turn is leading to a skills shortage which is fuelling salary inflation. Student and staff recruitment in areas like construction are often inversely proportional – when the construction industry is booming (as is currently the case), applicants are plentiful and lecturers in shorter supply. When in the industry enters a slump, applicants are rarer and lecturers more readily available.

The college is therefore finding it difficult to attract the right people into these lecturing roles when industry pays so handsomely. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that the industry is unable to recruit staff from the continent or elsewhere because certain industrial regulations are unique to the United Kingdom; recruitment issues are not considered to be related to Brexit.

The college has a retention problem as well as a recruitment problem. It loses lecturers back into industry due, it is considered, to 'irresistible pay offers'. Recently one member of staff has left the college to move to another college. It's not entirely certain why they left; it appears the departure may be related to location and pay.

The college undertakes exit interviews, but it is considered that some members of staff are more candid than others in explaining their rationale for departure.

The college recruits from a broad catchment in terms of staff, which includes Lancashire, North Lincolnshire, North Yorkshire as well as West Yorkshire. Its core staff recruitment area is a 40-minute travel radius.

The college has some difficulty in recruiting in other lecturing areas but is finding recruitment in electrical installation particularly challenging. Where the college has succeeded in recruiting candidates from industry in other areas, it is not entirely clear why it has been successful in doing so.

The college considers that it has increased pay as much as it can and that the hours, contractual terms and conditions of these electrical installation posts would be attractive to candidates making decisions prioritising lifestyle over pay. It is not clear what volume of candidates would fit that description.

This post - electrical installation lecturer - is full time with a grade valued at £33,449 to £35,411. There is an additional incentive in the form of a 'golden hello' of up to £5000 if the applicant has qualified teacher status. The candidate needs to stay on for a set period to be eligible. The college has been recruiting to the post for over three months.

The college is currently advertising the role via jobs boards in a process managed by Only FE.

Occasionally the college will use an agency to support recruitment. It is considered that agencies tend to approach the same candidates that the college approaches and there is a question mark about value. Agencies are known to erroneously recommend electrical engineer lecturers for electrical installation lecturer posts. The college marketing manager has suggested that it engages agencies to support recruitment in this instance.

The college would consider a job share but is mindful that this is a daytime role. It will accept unqualified teachers and look to train them up – this is likely with those coming from industry. The qualification process takes around a year, with the lecturer gaining an equivalent of a Level 4 teaching qualification.

The college has an equal pay policy across posts and currently does not adjust or make exceptions.

One application for the post is in the pipeline.

The college commissioned Chalkstream to provide research and consultancy to support it in recruiting to these posts. The college wants to understand what will attract people to the role and what it might do that is different or new in order to recruit new electrical installation lecturers.

The college is interested in alternative models of employment. It would be interested in hearing more about models where posts are sponsored by employers or there is broader employer involvement.

In order to support the college, Chalkstream recommended:

1. A review of relevant research, in order to understand:
  - broad trends in pay and conditions for comparative posts UK further education
  - the strategies and tactics adopted by institutions in comparable situations
  - what has worked in other colleges faced with similar challenges and a similar geography or catchment.

2. A review of published job adverts related to electrical installation lecturing posts in the UK, with a particular focus on those within the Yorkshire area, in order to understand:

- average (and the ranges of) terms and conditions of advertised posts, including salary points
- commonalities across duties, responsibilities and person specifications
- the number and proportions of posts by college and agency
- differences in conditions according to geography
- which agencies specialise in this area
- the nature of the offer from competitive organisations
- what is required for the college to compete with other education institutions.

3. Primary research with colleges and recruitment agencies, in order to understand:

- in greater detail how institutions have successfully adapted to the challenges of recruiting where industrial salaries are (considerably) higher than institutional salaries
- common barriers to success and how they are overcome
- the value of and best practice in working with agencies in this area
- additional institutional benefits (i.e., in employer relations) that might be accrued from different approaches.

Chalkstream has previously supplied separate reports in relation to Stages #1 and #2. This report represents a summary of Stage #3 (the primary research, in the form of case studies), findings from these three stages, together with recommendations for the college.

## Agency A

Chalkstream undertook two interviews with respondents at Agency A – one with a senior manager and another with a specialist responsible for placing electrical installation lecturers.

The majority of colleges in England are currently struggling to fill electrical installation lecturer posts, said the senior manager. “If you presented a fully qualified electrical installation lecturer to 200 colleges, 150 would take them now,” she said.

“If we were to create a table of what are the biggest problems in recruitment this would come at the top. The issues are not unique to electrical installation, but it is the one that's most problematic.”

Colleges therefore need to be very swift when inviting candidates for interview. “Don't wait four days,” says the senior manager. “If you do, you will lose the candidate. If you get someone for interview, interview them the same day. And don't forget that the candidate will have put their CV out to multiple agencies and directly. They don't have any loyalty to the agency. They will sometimes be put forward for the same job by three or four different agencies.”

It is important that colleges address some of the hygiene factors related to the job, as well as motivating factors such as salary. “Parking can make a massive difference to whether someone will take a job or not,” says the specialist. “There will be people who just write a place off because they can't park. It can be a total barrier.”

In terms of strategies to address the recruitment challenge, says the senior manager, there are two options facing a college. “One, how can we get permanent lecturers into FE? Two, how can we get or develop a part time lecturing position involving employers.”

“We have been looking at what we can broker in relation to number two. Supply is always the thing that comes up. There is just an absolute chasm between what they can earn in industry compared to what they can earn in a college.”

Colleges are also struggling with retention, added the senior manager. There is a disjoint between the needs of a college and the expectations of lecturers entering education from industry. “There is a preconception amongst older entrants to construction lecturing that the job appeals because they want to give something back. However, they have unrealistic expectations about the amount of work involved in being a full-time lecturer...Applicants do not factor that in to their decision-making presses. This poses problems for medium to long term retention.”

There is also often a disconnect between what the college says it will accept and what a manager can handle. “So, a Head of HR might say ‘we will take someone without the teaching qualifications’ but a manager in the department can’t take that because they don’t have the capacity to train up. They need someone teaching-ready.”

Practical challenges mean that employer sponsored roles are incredibly rare, says the senior manager. There are issues with matching timetables to business needs and challenges with size of enterprise. “A business is only going to donate or supply staff time if it is above a certain size, said the senior manager. “However, in certain parts of the construction industry, small to medium enterprises dominate. This may well be the case in electrical installation.”

Agencies are often used through a managed service model to help colleges get round the problem of pay scales.

In the past two years the agency has managed to fill permanent and temporary electrical installation lecturer, assessors and technician posts at a number of different colleges, on part time and full-time bases.

The agency advertises the posts using its ‘Broadbean’ system, which communicates vacancies via a range of online directories including Total Jobs, CV Listing, Construction Index (which is specifically for construction jobs) and Indeed. The latter, says the specialist, is the least effective channel. Posts are advertised for an average of two weeks before being delisted and readvertised at a later date.

The electrical installation lecturer vacancies were open for an average of six weeks and interest was ‘very limited’. “We tend to find that some names will come out over and over again,” says the specialist.

However, there was sufficient interest to generate a candidate for interview for each vacancy. In the case of the full-time electrical installation lecturer, the candidate was new to the agency and had previous teaching experience. He submitted his CV, was interviewed by the agency (remotely) and then the college but was not required to deliver a micro-teach.

He was appointed 16 months ago and has just left the post. "The college wanted to keep him, but they only had a full-time position and he wanted to reduce down to part time," says the specialist. "He stayed on until they found someone permanent. They have recruited that person directly from industry. They have found a permanent replacement."

The agency considers that the key to recruitment in this case was payment on an hourly basis at £25 per hour for a 37-hour week salary, even though teaching hours are fewer. The pay was around £1.50 per hour more than the lecturer's previous post and travel time was reduced. The candidate was also attractive to the college because he was known to, and recommended by, another lecturer already in post. The college's electrical installation department also benefits from a strong reputation, according to the senior manager.

"He will start off just teaching until he gets himself settled in but then there will be tutoring duties," says the specialist. "He is keen on that."



## College B

College B has recently recruited staff to three electrical installation posts:

1. Electrical installation instructor - £30,000 per annum.
2. Electrical installation lecturer - £36,000 per annum.
3. Electrical installation lecturer - £37,500 per annum.

The vacancies have been open for a very long time 'almost on a rolling basis', says the college's quality lead, who was 'drafted in' to address this issue due to the longstanding difficulties in recruitment.

Conversations about employer-sponsored 'shortage' roles have been fruitless. Larger employers have intimated that they would be reluctant to sponsor roles that might benefit smaller competitors. Indeed, says the quality lead, one large business recently told him that because smaller firms were more likely to struggle to fill vacancies, it was in the interests of larger firms not to support colleges, thus creating skills shortages that might cause those smaller competitors 'to go to the wall'.

Instead, the college attributes its new-found success in recruitment to working with a new agency - We Are Find, founded by construction and engineering specialist Jack English.

The agency specialises in permanent recruitment and was recommended to the college by HETA (a Yorkshire engineering training firm) and by a contact at GTA (civil and transport consulting engineers).

Jack was approached via LinkedIn, and it became clear that he 'understands the market better than anybody else', says the quality lead. "He also recognised that, post-Covid, a wage [hike] is not going to be enough to attract people. Pre-Covid you could offer £2,000 above salary and attract people and now it is more complicated."

The posts were communicated via We Are Find's networks. Following interview, appointments were made in November 2021, a fortnight after the agency was given the assignment.

"It remains to be seen whether they are right [for us]," says the quality lead. "One looks in particular like they will be a really good asset for the department. He was working for the local authority as an engineer. He wanted to move into teaching. He wanted to spend time in the workshop teaching kids how to put circuits together. It's that classic case of wanting to give something back, of coming full circle from an apprenticeship. He has joined us on something over £30k." This instructor will be studying a teaching qualification, for which he will be given time off to complete.

The two lecturer appointees have PETL qualifications, and one has additional experience of training in the workplace. One has moved from another college. “He was there in a long-term temporary position, and he wanted the stability of a permanent position. When he went to his college and told them he was leaving and why they said, ‘well, we will offer you a permanent post’. But he thought – ‘if you wanted me you should have given me your best offer before. If the only reason you are making me permanent is to keep me, that’s proof you don’t really want this as a permanent post.’”

Benefits include teacher pension scheme at 13% employer contribution and 55 days per annum annual leave – broken down into 42 bookable days, plus Xmas period and Bank Holidays.

“Where we have been advertising directly we have not been hitting the mark, that’s clear,” says the quality lead. “That is something for us to reflect on. If we were recruiting to construction and engineering again our first approach would not be to put an ad in the trade press or local media. It doesn’t work.”

In terms of retention, the college is involved in a Department for Education pilot project looking at providing additional support to new and inexperienced teachers. It has included these posts in that pilot, the features of which include

- time for remission
- dedicated coaches for new teachers
- supporting collateral such as new starter videos explaining ‘how to do complicated things simply’ and covering topics such as classroom management, planning, and pedagogy fundamentals.

The college will also be conducting salary reviews against the market on a scheduled basis ‘so we don’t lose people when wages in the market rise’, says the quality lead.

## College C

Two years ago, College C found itself 'in a really difficult place' in terms of trying to recruit to engineering, plumbing, electrical installation, and higher-level construction courses. "We were fishing in a very small pond," explains the HR lead, "and paying agency fees of around £70,000 per year."

Vacancies were open for months on end and re-advertising was the norm. The college was also losing staff back to business. It found that retention payments were being used by members of staff as bargaining chips for high salaries in industry. "The member of staff would pay back the £2000," says the HR lead, "because they got a job elsewhere, where the salary boost was [a lot] more than that."

With the highest end of the pay spine at point 36 (£34,616) for lecturing posts and a reluctance to raise that ceiling on the grounds of its possible impact on industrial relations, as well as an existing 25% gender pay gap, the college decided to raise the ceiling for specialist and shortage roles (in engineering, plumbing and construction) to point 39 (£37,820), funding the rise by moving away from agencies and shifting the £6000 to £7000 fee into salaries.

"We filled jobs a little bit quicker," says the HR lead, "but the biggest leap happened when we introduced flexible benefits. That was a game changer"

The college created a new type of contract for specialist and shortage posts, employing staff through a subsidiary company and shifting the pension from the teacher salary scheme to a National Employment Savings Trust (NEST) pension. The reduction in employer pension contribution (from 16.48% to 5%) was diverted into the basic salary. In addition, the college gave those staff on flexible benefit contracts the option of taking 41 weeks holiday, rather than the college standard of 51 weeks. In the new contract, the ceiling is now £43,048.

Advertising that higher wage led to a marked increase in the number of applications across construction, engineering, plumbing and electrical installation. "We doubled our numbers in terms of hiring inquiries. Every manager has said its increased the calibre and number of inquiries," says the HR lead.

The college advertises these kinds of roles through AoC Jobs, the CV Library, FE Week, the TES and a specialist publication called Blue Town, which publishes roles in specialist journals and undertakes managed searches and, at £1000 per role, is considered 'costly but effective'.

Agencies still play a part in recruitment but only for short term cover. In the last year the college has paid one finder's fee to an agency.

Recruitment now takes between two weeks to a month from advertisement, through CV submission, interview and micro-teach to placement.

Around two thirds of those appointed to these posts have come from education and a third 'off the tools'. The college pays 100% of the cost of a teaching qualification where required, a relatively recent development. "About three years ago we used to pay only 50%," says the HR lead.

"What has been really interesting is that the majority of applicants have actually gone for the standard package rather than the flexible package. So, they've been initially attracted by the higher wage, but they've decided to take the higher pension and holidays in lieu of salary.

"It's worth stressing this scheme has been vetted by lawyers and pension experts. This is not a new proposition to the private sector. Where it is new is to public sector organisations like colleges.

"What we have made really clear to people is that they need to take professional advice in relation to the pension. Also, they can come back in 12 months. As long as they give us 12 months' notice they can move either way. They can move between the traditional package and the flexible package.

"To give you an example of who this appealed to: We had a member of staff who opted for this so that they could get an increased wage in order to pay another son's university fees. This was a life saver for him.

"This appears to appeal to people at either end of the age spectrum. Where young people want to take it because it gives them better borrowing power for a mortgage. And older people want to take it because they might have a more developed pension pot already."

The HR lead admits that the flexible benefit contract was a controversial proposition in some quarters, in particular among members of the corporation. One governor was very concerned that it would undermine the teacher's pension scheme. Others worried that the proposition was overtly commercial. Anticipated resistance from unions did not materialise.

The college has now introduced the scheme across the college. It is focusing on retention through a variety of strategies, including succession planning. Its gender pay gap is 'not helped by increasing salary scales for engineers', says the HR lead, and it is encouraging new hires (in particular females) to join its emerging leaders programme.

"The flexible benefits are of course being developed further," says the HR lead, "and we're talking to [staff] about what they want need going forwards in terms of that package." It is considered that the standard contract holiday entitlement and pension are driving retention.

The HR lead thinks that the scheme may have 'a limited life span' as the sector 'will catch on to flexible benefits generally' and the college's position will look less competitive in the market.

"It is becoming so difficult to recruit to hard to fill vacancies," concludes the HR lead, "that one of the things we might need to do is look again at the pay spine. But I'm reluctant to go down that route because of the impact on the gender pay gap and employer relations. I'm loath to do it."

Table 1: Pay scales at College C

Scale Point	1) Current Scale (Lecturer)	2) 30 Days Holiday, 16.48% Pension	3) 40 Days Holiday, 5% Pension	4) 30 Days Holiday, 5% Pension
Holidays	40	30	40	30
Pension	16.48%	16.48%	5.00%	5.00%
15	£ 18,731	£ 19,448	£ 20,533	£ 21,320
16	£ 19,286	£ 20,025	£ 21,142	£ 21,952
17	£ 19,864	£ 20,625	£ 21,776	£ 22,610
18	£ 20,450	£ 21,233	£ 22,418	£ 23,277
19	£ 21,058	£ 21,865	£ 23,084	£ 23,969
20	£ 21,607	£ 22,435	£ 23,686	£ 24,594
21	£ 22,252	£ 23,104	£ 24,393	£ 25,327
22	£ 22,915	£ 23,793	£ 25,120	£ 26,083
23	£ 23,601	£ 24,505	£ 25,872	£ 26,864
24	£ 24,304	£ 25,235	£ 26,643	£ 27,664
25	£ 25,027	£ 25,985	£ 27,435	£ 28,486
26	£ 25,773	£ 26,761	£ 28,253	£ 29,336
27	£ 26,546	£ 27,563	£ 29,101	£ 30,216
28	£ 27,340	£ 28,387	£ 29,970	£ 31,119
29	£ 28,159	£ 29,237	£ 30,868	£ 32,051
30	£ 29,003	£ 30,115	£ 31,794	£ 33,012
31	£ 29,868	£ 31,013	£ 32,743	£ 33,997
32	£ 30,767	£ 31,946	£ 33,727	£ 35,020
33	£ 31,683	£ 32,897	£ 34,732	£ 36,063
34	£ 32,634	£ 33,884	£ 35,774	£ 37,145
35	£ 33,607	£ 34,895	£ 36,841	£ 38,253
36	£ 34,616	£ 35,942	£ 37,947	£ 39,401
37	£ 35,651	£ 37,017	£ 39,082	£ 40,579
38	£ 36,720	£ 38,127	£ 40,253	£ 41,795
39	£ 37,820	£ 39,269	£ 41,460	£ 43,048

## College D

College D has experienced electrical installation lecturer recruitment difficulties over many years and its approach to recruitment has changed quite significantly over this period of time. However, these posts remained quite difficult to fill.

“It’s like one of those never-ending questions,” says the head of HR. “I’ve been here nine years tomorrow and it feels like that in some way, shape or form, the electrical installation lecturer position has been advertised since then. It’s not been easy to fill from when I started. We’ve gone through different ways of trying to do things, different places to advertise and we have come to start using social media more. We have relied heavily on networks, and people who are in the right networks sharing.”

The most recent post for electrical installation lecturer was first advertised in early October 2021 and was open for eight weeks. In relation to the interest received it was commented:

“It was not massive and most of the applications that we end up with in these areas tend to be from agencies, which aren’t often actual people that are interested, they are people’s CV’s that they have found and that is very different. And we do have a lot of false starts or even starters that don’t stay with us very long. They often don’t understand what it is that they are coming into and then decide that it isn’t for them. It is really hard.”

College D has now selected someone as a result of the recent recruitment drive and the post has been offered. The college goes through a set of required checks for safe recruitment and that is the stage that they are currently at in the recruitment process. A start date will be agreed once the checks are complete.

The college has done a lot to make the terms and conditions of the post as attractive as possible, particularly in relation to non-salary related rewards attached to the post, but they recognise that they are not always going to compete on salary, if at all.

The head of HR says: “This is where I think that it is a complete change for some people. So, they’ll go from earning a significant amount to us, but we do try and offer as much as we can where we can. That is what we are doing but the advantages are very different.”

Teaching staff at the college received 40 days holiday a year plus 10 working from home days. The college has promoted hybrid working ‘from the lockdown where we can for academic staff’.

The pension – a teacher’s pension for teaching staff and a local government pension for professional services staff - is ‘a big pull for a lot of people’, says the head of HR.

“Both are very attractive schemes if people are interested in that, but you are talking about people coming to us and potentially halving the money that they have been earning elsewhere and there is no way that we can compete with that.”

The college has explored market supplements and 'golden hellos', with little effect. It funds teaching qualifications in full.

There are different types of people that have applied and expressed interest in the electrical installation lecturer post, and it is not always a career change that people are seeking.

The head of HR says: "We often get people that are coming to the end of their careers in the trade and want to switch to something that is maybe a bit less manual or physical, but we've also had quite a few recently that have a role in a company where they think that they can go more part-time and come and work for us part-time as well, or that they have got family members that can take a lead in the company and think that they can balance the two. Some do that really well and some fall at the first hurdle and just can't do it, but you are not going to know that until you start somebody and work with them."

There are also two other strands as to why College D believes that it has been successful in recruiting electrical installation lecturers: employer engagement and staff welfare.

"We've done a lot of work in the last 4 or 5 years around employer engagement," says the head of HR, "and a lot of our successful appointments have come through referrals from people that have come to work for us and then have encouraged other people to apply through that route. It's because we are good to work for, that is the bottom line."

The head of HR also thinks that its engagement, enrichment and well-being programme for staff 'and the way that we've looked after our staff community' is a draw. "We have had a lot of people refer other people and they will say 'You ought to consider working at the college if a job comes up there and I think that you will really enjoy working there because of x, y and z'. We have made a big effort to build upon that side of things."

Linked to this approach of really looking after the staff community has been a focus on gaining recognition for their achievements through independent surveys.

"We've got three different awards for 'best company'. We have entered that in the last few years. So, we are in the top 25 of education providers in the UK. We are in the top 100 companies of our size, and we are also in the top 100 not-for-profit organisations as well as having 3-star employer engagement, which is classed as World Class. Those sort of accolades make a difference."

The college feels that the three strands taken together - the non-salary related rewards, employer engagement and looking after its staff community - have definitely helped the college attract staff with the right skills and experience. The college also actively seek to retain the existing electrical installation lecturers and assessors and have introduced a range of different initiatives, particularly in relation to how work is distributed and how teams work together across lecturers and assessors. The introduction of support to lecturers and assessors has been a particular feature of this approach.



“We’ve got support for our assessors with a post that works alongside the assessors and does some of the compliance things, health and safety and some of the pro-monitor type recording processes,” says the head of HR. “Some of it is about structure and some of it is about getting the right managers in there to support and having the right managers in the structure that can then help them if they are new to it and learning. It’s focussing on what they can do rather than what they can’t.”

It was evident that for College D there was no panacea for the recruitment of electrical installation lecturers and when asked ‘what, if anything, would you do differently if you had to recruit to the post again’ it was commented:

“That’s the golden question because I don’t know the answer. If we knew that answer then we wouldn’t advertise as frequently as we do. I don’t think that there is an answer...I think that it is just being open to doing things differently because doing the same thing over and over is not going to get you anywhere. We have had to try different approaches.”

## College E

College E recruited four people into electrical installation lecturer and trainer posts in the past year. Each post took around a month to recruit to, which is 'the standard term' at the college, says the Principal, who attributes their success in recruiting to three different factors.

Firstly, the college succeeded in its bid for funding under the Department for Education/Education and Training Foundation's Taking Teaching Further initiative, intended to attract experienced industry professionals with expert technical knowledge and skills to work in FE. The college used funding to host a series of industry events at the college with representatives from different types of businesses based in the region.

"We talked to them about teaching," says the Principal. "They have been able to have a taster of teaching. They have been able to try a lesson and see if they like it. They have been shown around. We have done that with Electrical, Early Years and Media. We've done it with Building and throughout Construction trades. That has been pretty successful. We have placed two electrical installation lectures as part of that scheme.

"Our feedback from people who have come to us through that scheme is that they would never have thought about teaching before those sessions. These are businesses that we have a relationship with already. We have a conversation with them and say that they can't find the people they need, so they need to support us to develop new people."

The phenomenon whereby larger companies fail to invest in training in order to push smaller firms out of the market is not a factor in the region, says the Principal, 'because almost all the firms are small enterprises here'.

Secondly, the college has adjusted its terms and conditions to become more attractive to those in industry or teaching elsewhere. This is particularly effective in 'poaching' staff from the private training sector, says the Principal. Two of the electrical installation lecturers appointed this year have moved to the college from private training providers.

The college allows lecturers newly recruited from industry to teach to a reduced timetable during an initial probation period. It allows lecturers in 'shortage' posts to maintain a 38-week timetable if they so wish.

“If people want to stay in industry we give them complete flexibility if they want to stay in industry and work with us part time,” says the Principal. “With self-employed individuals it's about allowing them to top up their existing job. A number come in part time. Not electrical installation posts though.”

The college has not, however, adjusted pay. The top end of the scale for electrical installation lecturers sits at £35,000, with £37,000 for programme directors. The Principal says he thinks that adjusting the ceiling is a ‘road to ruin’ due to the risk of pay inflation.

Thirdly, the college is ‘growing its own’ from students into technicians. It has encouraged its skilled practitioners to recommend students for teacher training programmes. So far, however, no electrical installation students have moved into teaching at the college.

The college has been using a recruitment tool called Eploy, which the Principal describes as user friendly for applicants. “It is simple, and we get really positive feedback.” The college requires an interview and a ‘trade test’, rather than a teaching test, of applicants to posts of this type. “We need to know whether they can walk the walk, in terms of their trade,” says the Principal. “So, for instance with hairdressers, that is a cut.”

The college says it ‘does not spend much’ on recruitment advertising, eschewing advertising in the trade press and focusing instead on its employer relationships as the channel through which to locate talent.

The Principal says he is not sure he would do anything differently in terms of recruiting to these posts but admits that this kind of recruitment activity for shortage posts is intensive. “I have to say I would not want to be a college that specialises in construction or building. At least I can spread my bets and not have the same problem across all of the posts.”

“One other thing that we are doing is splitting staff recruitment from HR,” adds the Principal. “This is in order to give it absolute focus. We're splitting it from employer relations and employer responsibilities...So now we have two posts at senior level.”

## Summary

Recruiting to lecturing posts where education struggles to compete with industrial pay is a longstanding, pernicious, national, wicked and ongoing problem and the greatest challenge – in terms of vacancy numbers and duration – is in electrical installation.

Providing a salary that is comparable to industry is a necessary condition for successful recruitment, but it is not a sufficient one.

The salary offered by Leeds College of Building is competitive nationally and extremely competitive within the Yorkshire and the Humber region.

While colleges cannot reasonably compete with the salaries of self-employed electricians, they can contend with those of employed electricians and they are also able to attract self-employed professionals looking for a lifestyle change.

Where colleges have adjusted pay scales to match industry salary, they report success. While salary is the most important consideration, pensions, holidays and other benefits are important elements of the package. However, supplementary financial incentives such as golden hellos or retention payments are not effective in this market.

Flexibility in requirements is vital in this difficult recruitment market. The essential experience and educational requirements of the Leeds College of Building personnel specification represents one of the lowest hurdles to recruitment of most other FE Colleges under review, despite the above average salary being offered.

Colleges engage in a very wide range of activities to communicate vacancies including events, 'taste of teaching' programmes, industry shows, direct mail, word of mouth and targeted mail outs to industry. Chalkstream primary research indicates that advertising electrical installation posts through the standard trade press channels is not typically effective. Using the channels of employers with whom the college has an existing relationship, specialist recruitment sites or agencies appears to be much more effective.

Vacancy advertising should be clear about the financial package, involve simple, concise descriptions of criteria, reassure applicants that there is sustainable funding for the post, be published early in the academic year, in order to maximise the efficacy in relation to attracting candidates from other institutions, and contain key messages related to:

- helping people develop
- giving something back to the community and profession
- a change of career path – including self-employed professionals looking for a less physically demanding working day.

More importantly, it should fully set out the additional benefits/rewards that can be obtained in addition to the salary. It also is important that these compare favourably with local competition, including private training providers.

While the literature is far from positive in relation to agencies, it is apparent from Chalkstream's primary research that at least one agency has developed a proposition for recruiting to electrical installation posts that is worth further investigation.

Non-financial elements are more impactful than financial when it comes to retention. Continuous professional development, consistent quality in induction, and realism in the communication of the student support requirements of lecturing posts to professionals looking to shift from industry, are particularly important in this regard.

## **Recommendations**

It is evident from the research that there is a range of options that Leeds College of Building should explore in order to improve the efficacy of recruitment to electrical installation lecturer posts and other hard to fill vacancies across the college.

## **Conditions**

The electrical installation lecturer salary currently offered by the college is sufficient to compete with the wages of employed electricians and other college providers. It is not sufficient to compete with that of self-employed electricians. The evidence for supplementary payments such as golden hellos or retention payments is poor, and these should be avoided in relation to hard to fill vacancies.

In order to make the post as attractive as possible and compete effectively with private training providers, the college should communicate additional benefits, in particular pension, effectively and in detail (as set out in the summary).

The college might consider the approach taken by College C – shifting agency payments into salary and using a subsidiary company to establish distinct flexible contracts in which holiday pay and pension contributions are also diverted into the salary. The evidence from that case study is that the higher wage will lead to a markedly increased volume and quality of applications, but applicants may well prefer, on engagement with the college, a traditional contract with lower wage. If the college does explore this option, it should take professional advice on pensions and conditions and it should consult widely internally.

The reputation of a department and a college affects recruitment to hard to fill vacancies. A strong reputation in relation to staff welfare is a necessary condition for quality recruitment. If any department has a poor reputation in the sector, the underlying issues should be addressed in parallel with the other changes suggested here. The college should also address any hygiene factors – such as availability of parking spaces – that are a barrier to recruitment. These, according to the agency case study, are important considerations in recruitment success.

Where the college is looking to engage self-employed, or employed electricians as dual professionals on flexible part-time contracts, it should do so on probationary terms in order to give the new recruit the opportunity to try their hand at teaching without a longstanding commitment. Teacher training qualifications should be, where required, fully funded in order to compete with college competitors in relation to attracting industry professionals.

## Channels

Vacancies should be targeted at employed electricians or at those self-employed professionals who are most likely to be looking to move into employment. In practical terms this might mean using particular networks (such as online discussion boards) to advertise posts – those of employees of the big utility firms within Leeds, for instance, or those used by self-employed electricians exploring or discussing closing down a business. Are there online forums for professionals in this position? Do trade, medical, accountancy, pensions or membership bodies run events for electricians looking to wind down, sell or close their companies?

Given that recruits to these posts are often influenced by family members who work in or are familiar with FE, the college should consider how it might use its staff network in communicating the vacancies and, potentially, the staff networks of other colleges.

If the college has not yet done so and is eligible, it should apply to the Taking Teaching Further scheme, run by the Department of Education and the Education and Training Foundation, in order to fund employer engagement in support of hard to fill vacancy recruitment. These might include events similar to those described in the College E case study.

‘Growing your own’ is unlikely to be fruitful in terms of electrical installation vacancies, particularly in the short term, but it may be worthwhile in other areas of provision.

The college should consider, given the size and nature of the recruitment challenge it faces, whether it should create a specialist recruitment function as part of the human resources team.

While it is highly unlikely that the college will secure employer-sponsored posts to fill electrical installation vacancies, the college should - independent of any Government funding - ensure that it focuses on *existing* employer relationships as a key recruitment channel. In doing so it should allow for as much flexibility in terms of hours of work and other conditions as possible, in order to attract dual professionals.

Trade press, in relation to hard to fill vacancies such as electrical installation, is unlikely to be an effective advertising channel. Where there is no proven result from trade press investment the college should discontinue investment and explore, instead, specialist channels such as Blue Town, while exploiting to maximum effectiveness its own employer, employee and alumni networks. CV Library, according to the case studies, may be worth investigation.

Finally, the college might consider a conversation with specialist agency We Are Find, as mentioned in the College B case study.

## Process

Upon receiving interest in any hard to fill vacancy, the college should invite to interview as quickly as possible – ideally contacting the applicant on the same day as application. The college might consider a ‘micro-trade’ demonstration as an alternative to micro-teach, alongside interview.

## Retention

Retention of staff recruited to hard to fill vacancies (in particular where the recruit as come from industry), as set out in the literature and case studies, requires effective management of expectations in terms of teaching and pastoral responsibilities. It is important for any college to reconcile college/HR/leadership commitments to new entrants with the immediate needs of a department.

It is very clear from the literature that induction quality varies considerably, and the college should engage in monitoring to ensure that quality is high and uniform.

Management support for new entrants is crucial for retention. Ongoing engagement with staff via line managers and the appraisal mechanisms in relation to welfare is vital, so that staff have an opportunity to raise concerns or ambitions regarding pay, hours, leave or other conditions before these become a reason to leave. Salary reviews should be scheduled in order to monitor pay against industry rates.

The college might consider dedicated coaches for new teachers, as per the College B case study, with specific support materials (such as instruction videos) for new entrants. If the college has not already explored the option of Department for Education Initial Teacher Education bursaries or grants in order to fund this kind of support, it should do so. Engaging hard to fill vacancy staff in emerging leader programmes is also recommended, in particular in relation (if viable) to female staff.