

Corporate Services

Corporate Services provides support to the multifaceted research programmes within the HSRC. It comprises human resources (HR), information technology and systems (ITS), project finance and support, information services (IS), and building and facilities management.

The implementation of the HSRC's new vision necessitated the definition of new jobs and functions in Corporate Services. The number of positions in the organogram was reduced from 136 to 93. In the restructuring, some staff were redeployed and others retrenched or granted voluntary severance. Details are contained in the Council's report. Subsequent appointments have included the Executive Director of Corporate Services, Directors of ITS and HR, and the Head of IS. In the process, black members of staff increased from approximately 49% to 58%, and women in senior administrative posts from 57% to 62%.

Current and recently completed projects

Human resources: Recruitment of research and support staff continues. A task team for staff development has been introduced to facilitate mentoring, bursary schemes and technical and professional training for all staff, as well as assistance with publishing and conference participation for research staff in particular. Other HR strategies to be developed concern staff retention, diversity management, and HIV/AIDS.

At the suggestion of the Staff Union, an Employee Assistance Programme was implemented in 2000, through a private-sector agency. It assists staff with personal and work-related matters and promotes employee well-being.

The Staff Association merged with the Public Servants Association during the latter part of 2001. A new recognition agreement was negotiated and signed with management. Initial discussions on reviewing employment terms and conditions have taken place.

The required progress report on the employment equity plan adopted in mid-2000 has been submitted to government. Significant progress was recorded in removing unfair discrimination, improving representivity at the required rate to meet the specified goals, and promoting a culture of diversity.

Business process re-engineering: The design of an integrated resource planning system - including time-billing, project management, and procurement - has been initiated, after initial inputs from the research Executive Directors. It is especially necessary to provide research leaders with the information and services to manage the rapid expansion of contract-and grant-funded projects. Many previously manual operations are being streamlined and computerised, with the assistance of private-sector advisers. Early thinking is under way on a knowledge-management system. This will span current and previous research holdings and databases, the services from IS described below, and the website.

Information services: Under the new head there has been a strategic thrust towards increasingly electronic services to researchers, coupled with a sustained effort to understand their needs and to develop a responsive, high-quality service. This comprises:

- the library - including the maintenance of a hybrid information collection
- desk research - the packaging and delivering of information and research, alerting researchers to new information and trends
- knowledge sharing - contribution to the developing knowledge management system and the maintenance of a virtual library
- information literacy - providing courses at all the HSRC centres on information resources

Building and facilities management: Appreciable-sized offices were opened and equipped in Cape Town and Durban, followed by satellites in Bloemfontein and Port Elizabeth. These are conceived as sites of a single, distributed national office.

A new video-conferencing facility enables collaboration between the sites, and a new PABX system will allow call-transfers nationwide. Projects are also under way to reshape the interior of the main HSRC building in line with the more interactive functioning of the research programmes, to enhance security, and to refurbish the HSRC's second building at the outset of an extended lease from the tenants.