

## Our Multi-front Solutions:



- Tackling the pay issue
- Increasing visibility
- Growing our own
- Partnering
- Embracing hybrid
- Retention strategies



In their talk at the November BA Manager Forum, Eric Cumberlidge and Karen Jones talked through the challenges they faced at NFU Mutual in securing and retaining BA talent. They shared their now 5-year journey taking NFUM from a purely hiring practice to one based far more on learning and development.

### **Recruitment and Retention: Challenges**

BA Managers from a range of sectors highlighted a current of issues impacting successful recruitment including:

- Lead in time (often 6 months plus).
- Changes in projects/ portfolio priorities.
- Quality of BAs available.
- Levels of experience and pay expectations.
- Volume of applications (too few or too many!)
- Use of AI in CVs/applications and generating interview answers.

How can we learn from the successes of other organisations that have adopted a specific strategy to tackle these challenges?

### **Recruitment and Retention: Case Study**

Which? UK Insurance brand of the year, NFU Mutual has a significant change portfolio across its commercial lines, personal lines and financial services which serve over a million customers. Like all organisations, NFUM has had to tackle resourcing issues including the competitive market conditions, applicant quality, the rise of hybrid working, and the balance of experience vs. cost – where the higher cost experts only have a short working life ahead of them while lower cost candidates lack experience.

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5-year journey taking NFUM from a purely hiring practice to one based far more on learning and development.

Organisations wishing to hire and retain experienced and skilled BAs face significant challenges. When a job is advertised the quality of candidates can be poor, and the recruitment process lengthy and painful. Organisations need business analysts to help them as they manage business change, but finding good people is harder than ever before. There are simply not enough sufficiently well skilled BAs out there.

A multi-faceted approach can be required to solve a complex problem, and NFUM have made several interventions to provide both immediate and longer-term solutions.

### **Tackling the Pay Issue**

With experienced BAs able to pick and choose in a competitive market, all organisations must pay more to attract talent. Since the pandemic there is an expectation (certainly within financial services) for London salaries with WFH flexibility. Pay also plays out in the retention stakes as organisations compete for talent and experienced BAs are prepared to move jobs for sometimes significantly better salaries and opportunities. Some organisations have their hands tied by salary band restrictions for different BA levels.

NFUM firstly adjusted remuneration to meet salary expectations, addressing salary bands for existing staff. New bandings are not the highest in the market but healthy enough to be in the mix for attracting staff who are looking for a job change.

### **Partnering**

Hiring will always be a part of the NFUM approach to securing talent. Maximising what you can take from the market without being completely at its mercy could be the watchword.

To find the best possible candidates in a competitive market, NFUM have partnered with an award-winning Technology recruitment company with extensive experience in talent acquisition across all technologies in particular financial services and the public sector. The company offer line manager support, a full-service, joint planning and knowledge retention.

Partnering in this way has helped reduce manager time spent reviewing CVs. An increase in “suspect” CVs where an applicant inflates their limited experience, presents a new challenge for recruiters. These CVs clutter and frustrate the recruitment process and recruiters have needed training to spot the bogus CVs to focus on those with a genuine skillset. Three hires of candidates with good baseline experience have been made over the last year.

### **Increasing Visibility**

The Head of Business Analysis Eric Cumberlidge commented that “no one ever woke up dreaming of being an analyst at a sleepy Midlands insurance company”. Perhaps not, but the company has a good story to tell both in terms of its ethos and its investment in business analysis as a profession. The trick is to raise the company and the team profile.

NFUM held a successful social media campaign for the Business Analyst Apprenticeship scheme, offering an attractive starting salary, with the option of a bonus plus academic fees paid. It promised promotion and a significant salary increase on qualification with rapid progression. This campaign achieved over 111,000 views and 1,023 clicks.

Recruiting experienced BAs proved a greater challenge. In January 2023 NFUM put a rolling advert on their website, and increased recruitment visibility on LinkedIn. This resulted in the recruitment of three graduates each with 1-2 years of experience, all of whom added value to the team.

### **Growing (and Retaining) Your Own**

NFUM has moved from being purely a *hiring* BA practice to being a *learning* BA practice, with a focus on learning, training, and sharing knowledge. The question asked was: “If we don’t create new BAs, who will?” and the answer was to look at training for everyone from new starters to mid-level BAs.

NFUM first looked at Business Analyst apprenticeships in 2018 and were one of the early adopters of the AssistKD apprenticeship programme developing twelve BAs between 2018 and 2023. Business Analysis was the first discipline within the IT department to benefit from apprentice hiring, in effect a ‘pilot’ programme.

NFUM has developed a comprehensive ‘onboarding’ plan for apprentices, including induction activities, internal projects, job placements, mentor visits and training courses. Each apprentice has a dedicated support network in place with ‘buddies,’ a people manager, an AssistKD Mentor, a Project Mentor and, of course, the campus culture of the team. The investment of manager and colleague time is significant but the cost-benefit analysis stacks up well over time. Comparing a home-grown apprentice to an experienced hire (when available) reveals a saving of around £100 per day. For a team cross-charging for its services, this is a substantial saving.

Whilst apprentices can join the scheme at any age, the salary bandings for the apprentice roles at NFUM have attracted younger candidates. The average age of NFUM’s BA team members has dropped by almost ten years in the last five years, with the average age likely to drop further with the new cohort of apprentice BAs. The age is likely to drop further as experienced BAs retire and new BAs come on board. This has provided succession planning within the team, as many BAs were starting to consider retirement options.

As NFUM’s BA Practice embraces a new culture of training and development, there has been an influx of talent, enthusiasm, and fresh approaches. The team is invigorated, the office is a fun place to be, ‘old dogs’ are learning ‘new tricks’ and finding they are enjoying mentoring. The team is producing quality work to agreed standards.

### **Embracing Hybrid, and the Attraction of a Vibrant, ‘Learning’ BA Practice**

The new hybrid, flexible way of working offers broader opportunities for candidates. NFUM has been able to cast the net wider geographically when looking for new talent. Recruits are willing to travel up to 1.5 hours to work if they are hybrid working and at home for half of the week.

Young BAs are looking for a vibrant work environment and are keen to learn. Mid-level BAs are also keen to learn and to progress their qualifications, and to mentor apprentices in a ‘campus’ culture.

The encouragement of ongoing learning appears to be habit forming and BAs can take the BA International Diploma and Advanced Diploma. In 2023 NFUM opened a Level 6 IT degree apprenticeship. A Leadership and Management degree scheme is planned for 2024.

### **Retention**

The creation of a more vibrant and learning BA practice along with a clearly mapped route for progression has increased retention. A little surprisingly, NFUM accept that they may lose home

grown talent along the way but see the bigger picture of well-trained and motivated BAs bolstering the profession as a whole.

They also encourage internal conversations about which projects/types of projects are most interesting and motivating to different members of the team, allowing internal movement – so no-one becomes stuck!

The school of thought that argues for not growing your own (only hiring experienced professionals) feels short sighted when you see clear and ongoing professional development and a team meeting both the needs of the organisation and individual fulfilment.

### **Summary**

At the June 2023 BA Manager Forum event several BA leaders “confessed” to having compromised on the quality of their external hires with regrets along the way. A rethink of the ‘art of the possible’ in a competitive market and a longer-term view could be the way forward.

There is not a one size fits all for organisations who struggle to attract and retain BA talent ...but a more considered and braver approach to the market can pay dividends.