

Elizabeth Bennett, Cohort 5

HR Business Partner



I have been a HR Business Partner (HRBP) since April 2013 and it has been a bit of a baptism of fire as I came from a role which was not very HR specific. I joined the HR Fast Stream in September 2011 as a customer relationship manager for Civil Service Resourcing (CSR). I was involved in the on-boarding of two government departments onto the new cross-government e-recruitment system which gave me a good grounding in change management, project management and stakeholder engagement. For the last six months of my first placement I moved to work for the Central Fast Stream Team in CSR on the development of the new generalist Fast Stream model which was a very exciting, fast-paced project which was overseen by the Minister for the Cabinet Office.

Moving from a corporate role to an operational HRBP role was a big change for me as I was used to working to project deadlines and having a clear, structured work plan. My work now is dictated by what the business needs, so it is much more reactive than proactive work. I am the HRBP for three business areas within Core Defra: Food and Environmental Risk (FER); Resource Atmosphere and Sustainability (RAS); and Information Services (IS).

These directorates cover some weird and wonderful topics. In my first few weeks in the role, I worked with one of my directors to set up the Elliot Review team which has spent the last year investigating fraud in the food chain as a result of the horsemeat scandal; I have sat in on meetings where a senior management team has debated whether the use of ice cream chimes constitutes a noise nuisance; and someone in one of my business areas emailed me to suggest that I think about drafting some 'lift etiquette guidance' as he felt they were being misused and he was fed up of continually waiting for lifts to arrive!

On the more serious aspects of the HRBP role, over the past year I have worked with directors to improve their staff engagement scores, carried out a critical role review to ensure that we have the right staff in the right place at the right time, and supported directors on their talent management reviews. The wonderful thing about the HRBP role is that you never can predict what you are going to be asked to do or what is going to happen. For example, the HRBP team within Core Defra is about to go through training to prepare us for the possibility of an animal disease outbreak so we are able to support the department and the agencies should there be a national emergency. It is a role which is continually changing but is also very challenging and rewarding. Over the past 12 months my resilience and confidence in my own ability has grown and I am just about starting to feel like I am ready for the last few months with the assessment centre, interviews and hopefully a Grade 7 promotion!