

➤ Achieving Better Public Services - The Work of the Audit Commission

Introduction

Accounts have to be checked to make sure they are true and fair. This process is called an 'audit'. Bodies in both the private and public sectors have to have this process carried out. The public sector includes health, schools, police and roads. These are all paid for out of local or central tax. The Audit Commission is the body that checks their accounts. It is an independent body. Its job is also to make sure that tax money is being spent wisely. It looks at the actions of public bodies and rates them to show how efficient they are. The bodies it works with are called its clients.

Roles

A body like the Commission needs many skills. There are therefore different job roles. These are on three levels:

- * Clerical staff who carry out paper work.
- * Supervisors in charge of staff.
- * Managers who look after teams and projects. They make key decisions and work with clients. They also help people to gain accountancy qualifications.

The Commission employs staff in three main areas.

- * Financial auditors. These are mainly trained accountants. They deal with finance, accounts and any cases of fraud.
- * Performance auditors. These will know the public sector well. Part of their job is to help it improve its efficiency.
- * Support staff. These include clerical jobs and internal finance.

Examples

Helen and Arati show two of the roles. Helen is a project manager. She manages a development team. She used to be a recruitment expert. One of her first jobs was to produce a series of best practice. To do this she had to recruit consultants and manage a team. She has also had training. Arati studied law and joined as a trainee auditor. He has worked with many different teams. He was funded to study for accountancy exams.

Skills

The central skills which are needed in staff are vital to a body's success. These are called core competencies. At the Commission these include being able to:

- * work with clients
- * manage the business
- * use their judgement
- * communicate well
- * have good technical knowledge.

Training and development

The Commission is keen to make sure its staff are well trained. All staff therefore have a personal development plan. This is used to show what sort of training they may need. On-the-job training takes place in the workplace. Off-the-job training takes place outside the workplace. Sometimes staff are seconded to work with clients.

Conclusion

The role of the Audit Commission is vital in making sure that public money is being well spent. It must also be efficient itself. To help this, it employs good staff. It also encourages staff to train to get better.