
Workforce Cost Planning: Headcount, Pay Bill and People Investment Decisions Course

9 – 13 November 2026
Cape town





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Programme Summary

Workforce cost planning, covering headcount, pay bill and people investment decisions, is the subject of this five-day training course for HR directors, finance partners and budget owners, ending in a workforce cost plan for one business unit. People costs are usually the largest line in an organisation, yet they are often budgeted by rolling forward last year. The programme moves from principles, through diagnosis of current workforce costs, to design of a costed plan, then to application on one unit. Mars Training Centre UK delivers this programme on workforce cost planning for HR and finance leaders.

The Business Case

When headcount is agreed without a costed link to the business plan, hiring outruns revenue, pay decisions are made in isolation and training or recruitment budgets are cut first when pressure arrives. Leaders who can model the pay bill, test staffing scenarios and put a cost-benefit case for people programmes can defend budgets to a finance committee and adjust early when results diverge.

- Cost Control: Improves as headcount and pay bill are modelled against the business plan.
- Budget Credibility: Rises as people programmes carry a costed case and measured benefits.
- Planning Agility: Grows as scenarios show the cost of hiring, freezing or restructuring.

Principles and Evidence Base

- ISO 30414: The programme uses its human capital reporting guidance to select workforce cost and productivity measures in Session 1.
- Cost-benefit analysis: The programme applies it to compare people programmes in Session 3.
- Scenario and sensitivity analysis: The programme applies it to test staffing demand and pay assumptions in Session 3.
- Variance analysis: The programme applies it to monitor actual people costs against plan in Session 4.

Intended Participants

- HR directors who own the people plan and must justify its cost to the executive team.
- Finance partners who build and challenge departmental budgets.
- Budget owners who agree headcount, hiring and training spend with their teams.
- Reward and talent specialists who supply pay structures and programme proposals.

The programme serves banks, hospitals, manufacturers and public bodies, and suits mixed groups where HR and finance colleagues must agree one workforce budget.



Learning Outcomes

1. Participants will be able to select workforce cost and productivity measures from ISO 30414 for a given business unit.
2. Participants will be able to diagnose the drivers of current pay bill, vacancy and turnover costs.
3. Participants will be able to construct a headcount and pay bill model linked to the business plan.
4. Participants will be able to evaluate a people programme using a costed benefit case.
5. Participants will be able to prioritise competing workforce spending requests against a fixed envelope.
6. Participants will be able to justify a workforce budget to a finance committee.

Programme Structure

Day 1: Workforce Cost Planning Principles

Which workforce costs and measures belong in a budget?

- Workforce Cost Taxonomy
- ISO 30414 Measure Selection Sheet
- Business Plan to Headcount Link Map
- Budget Calendar and Ownership Matrix
- Planning Assumptions Register

Day 2: Diagnosing Pay Bill, Vacancy and Turnover Costs

What drives today's people costs, and where do they leak?

- Pay Bill Breakdown Analysis
- Vacancy Cost Calculation
- Turnover and Replacement Cost Review
- Overtime and Contractor Spend Analysis
- Establishment versus Actual Reconciliation

Day 3: Designing Headcount Models and Investment Cases

How is a workforce plan costed, tested and compared?

- Headcount Demand Forecast Model
- Pay Bill Projection Template
- Staffing Scenario and Sensitivity Test
- Training and Recruitment Investment Case
- Programme Comparison Scorecard



Day 4: Budget Control, Variance and Governance

How is the plan held to account once approved?

- Monthly Variance Report Format
- Hiring Approval Rules
- Reforecast Trigger Checklist
- Workforce Cost Dashboard
- Finance Committee Submission Paper

Day 5: Applying Workforce Cost Planning to One Business Unit

Is the unit's workforce plan ready for approval?

- Applying the Session 2 Cost Diagnosis to the Unit Data
- Running the Session 3 Headcount and Pay Bill Model
- Testing the Session 3 Investment Case Under Scenarios
- Setting the Session 4 Variance and Reforecast Rules
- Completing the Workforce Cost Plan

Methodology

The programme uses a data workshop built on anonymised establishment lists, payroll summaries, vacancy records and programme proposals. Participants work in teams as HR lead, finance partner and budget owner, take one business unit from cost diagnosis to a submitted plan, and record the assumption behind each figure so that another team could challenge it.

- Suggested activity: Building a pay bill projection from an establishment list.
- Suggested activity: Costing a training proposal and presenting its benefit case.
- Suggested activity: Defending a revised plan after a simulated hiring freeze.

Capstone Output

Each participant completes a workforce cost plan for one business unit. It holds a cost diagnosis, a headcount and pay bill model, scenario results, one costed investment case and variance rules. The plan is used to brief a finance committee, guide hiring approvals and set the monthly monitoring routine for the budget year.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is workforce cost planning suitable for HR staff without a finance background?

Yes. Workforce cost planning is taught in plain steps for HR and finance colleagues, and assumes familiarity with a payroll report but no earlier budgeting experience.



Which guidance does workforce cost planning rest on in this training?

Workforce cost planning rests on ISO 30414 for human capital measures, together with cost-benefit, scenario and variance analysis.

How is the workforce cost plan used at work?

You use the workforce cost plan to brief a finance committee, guide hiring approvals and monitor actual people costs against budget.

How does workforce cost planning differ from a strategic HR programme?

Workforce cost planning centres on headcount, pay bill and costed people investments, while a strategic HR programme centres on organisation design and talent direction.