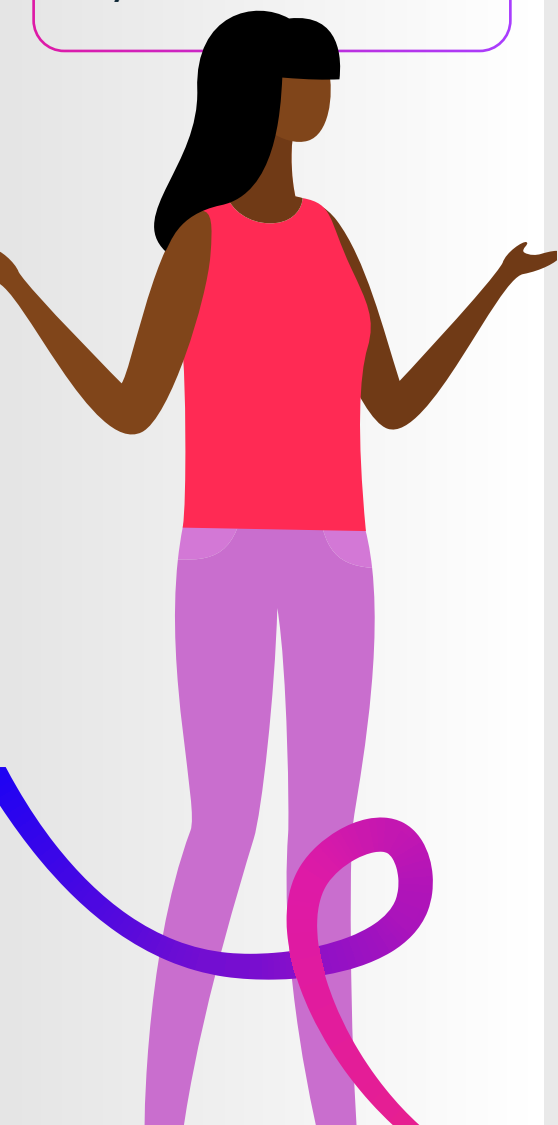


Reducing operational overload in higher ed HR

A practical guide to
reducing manual work,
improving visibility
and managing
workforce complexity



Higher education HR leaders are balancing work-force complexity, compliance demands and employee expectations while operating with lean teams and disconnected systems.



Workforce models are becoming more difficult to manage. HR teams are balancing seasonal hiring cycles, grant-funded roles, union requirements and multi-campus operations — often without additional resources or integrated technology.

The challenge is rarely one major operational breakdown. More often, it is the accumulation of small inefficiencies across recruiting, onboarding, payroll, compliance and reporting workflows.

For most institutions, the issue is not effort or commitment. HR teams are already operating at capacity. Disconnected systems and manual processes make it harder to work efficiently, maintain visibility and respond strategically.

Modern all-in-one HCM platforms are helping higher education leaders reduce that burden by connecting workflows, centralizing workforce data and automating repetitive administrative work. The result is not simply greater efficiency, but a more connected and responsive HR operation.

Where the week goes





The hidden burden in higher education HR

Most higher education HR leaders cannot point to one major issue consuming their time.



We can now make data-driven decisions. Previously, it was a very reactive service that we provided from people and culture.

Leeds Trinity University
after modernizing its
HR operations.



Instead, operational strain builds through dozens of recurring activities happening continuously across the institution:

- Coordinating hiring workflows
- Responding to employee questions
- Tracking onboarding progress
- Reconciling workforce data
- Compiling reports manually
- Following up across departments
- Managing compliance documentation

The pressure increases further in higher education environments with complex workforce structures that include adjunct faculty, grant-funded employees, student workers, seasonal staff and multi-campus operations.

HR teams are expected to deliver better visibility into workforce planning, retention, engagement and compliance — often with limited staffing capacity and disconnected systems.

As operational demands increase, strategic work becomes harder to prioritize. Workforce planning, manager support and employee engagement initiatives often compete with day-to-day demands that cannot be delayed.

Many institutions find themselves operating reactively rather than proactively.

How fragmented HR operations create administrative burden

Most higher education institutions did not intentionally design fragmented HR operations.



Over time, HR professionals spend more time fixing process gaps than supporting institutional priorities.

These environments evolve gradually over time:



- One system for payroll
- Another for recruitment
- Spreadsheets for onboarding
- Manual reporting processes
- Email-based approvals

Individually, these processes may function adequately. The difficulty comes from keeping data, workflows and approvals aligned across multiple systems.

In many universities, critical processes also rely heavily on institutional knowledge — undocumented workarounds, manual steps and individual expertise that exist primarily in employees' heads rather than standardized workflows.

Over time, HR professionals spend more time fixing process gaps than supporting institutional priorities.

These challenges become even more significant during periods of increased demand:



- Seasonal hiring cycles
- Enrollment fluctuations
- Organizational restructuring
- Compliance reviews
- Budget constraints
- Email-based approvals

As a result, many colleges and universities begin looking for ways to reduce manual coordination and simplify workflows.



Our KPIs are being met where, two years ago, we wouldn't have hit them. It's a clear step forward in process efficiency.

London School of Economics
and Political Science



Artificial intelligence (AI) also plays a practical role when embedded directly into HR workflows rather than existing as a disconnected tool.

Combined with connected workforce systems, these capabilities help streamline repetitive tasks while supporting more responsive HR operations.

Practical automation for lean HR teams

For many HR leaders, automation discussions can feel abstract or overly ambitious. In practice, the most valuable forms of automation are often the most practical.

Examples include:

- Automatically routing approvals
- Centralizing onboarding tasks
- Surfacing timely workforce data
- Answering routine employee questions
- Reducing duplicate data entry
- Standardizing workflows across departments

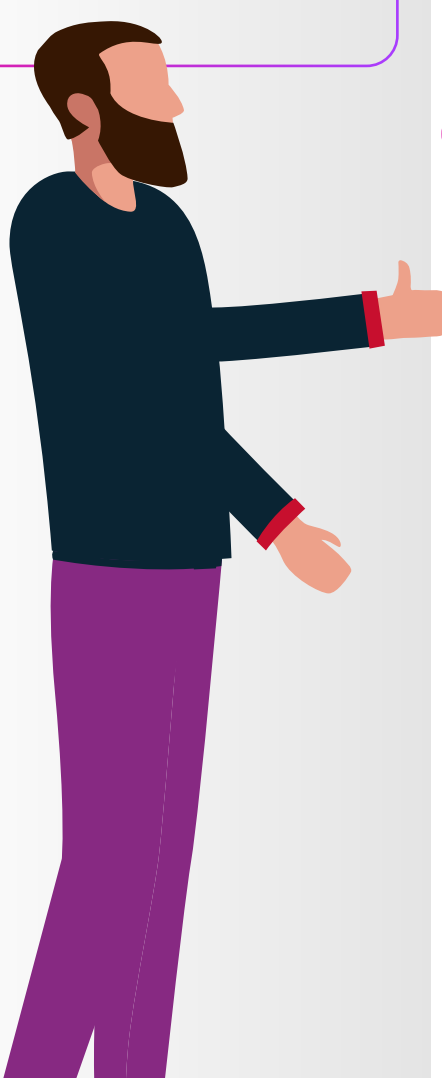
The goal is to reduce administrative friction so HR teams can spend more time supporting employees, managers and institutional priorities.

In higher education, relationships and culture remain critically important, which is why the most effective automation strategies are designed to support people rather than replace interaction.

These strategies improve consistency, simplify workflows and reduce manual coordination work.

Examples include:

- Resume parsing and screening
- Employee self-service support
- Workforce insights
- Workflow recommendations
- Survey and engagement analysis
- Reporting assistance



5 Practical workflow improvements for lean HR teams

The impact of modernization is easiest to understand at the workflow level.

For lean higher education HR teams, operational improvements often come from reducing persistent inefficiencies across multiple areas of work.

1

Self-service policy and HR support

A significant amount of HR time is spent responding to routine questions:

- PTO policies
- Payroll timing
- Onboarding requirements
- Institutional procedures
- Benefits clarification

When employees work across multiple departments or campuses, the volume of requests increases significantly.

Modern HCM platforms help centralize HR information and use AI-supported employee assistance to help employees find relevant policies and guidance without relying on repeated email exchanges.



Estimated time savings

2-3 Hours weekly

2

Smarter academic recruitment workflows

Hiring in higher education rarely follows a steady pace.

Academic hiring cycles, faculty recruitment, departmental expansion and grant-funded roles can create sudden spikes in recruiting activity that overwhelm lean HR teams.

Disconnected recruitment workflows often create delays through:

- Manual approvals
- Inconsistent candidate evaluations
- Spreadsheet tracking
- Repetitive data entry

These processes can be streamlined through:

- Centralized hiring workflows
- Automated approvals
- Interview coordination

Leeds Trinity University described its previous hiring process as:

"Previously hiring was a 14-page application form."

After modernization, the institution streamlined recruitment workflows while reducing administrative burden across the hiring process.



**Estimated
time savings**

2-4 Hours per
vacancy

5 Practical workflow improvements for lean HR teams

5 Practical workflow improvements for lean HR teams

3

Onboarding without spreadsheet tracking

Onboarding often becomes a coordination challenge across departments, supervisors and administrative systems.

 Tasks may involve:

- Document collection
- Approvals
- Training assignments
- Payroll setup
- Equipment requests
- Compliance tracking

When these processes rely on spreadsheets or email chains, delays and inconsistencies become common.

All-in-one HCM platforms help standardize onboarding workflows by centralizing tasks, reminders and employee records in one connected environment.

Centralized onboarding workflows reduce manual follow-up for HR teams and department managers while creating a more consistent employee onboarding experience.



Estimated time savings

1-2 Hours per hire



5 Practical workflow improvements for lean HR teams

4

Workforce reporting without manual compilation



Leadership increasingly expects access to timely workforce insights related to:

- Staffing trends
- Engagement
- Turnover
- Absence
- Hiring
- Compliance

However, when workforce data is spread across disconnected systems, generating reports often requires significant manual effort.

Leeds Trinity University previously relied heavily on spreadsheets and manual reporting processes. Quarterly dashboards reportedly took up to a week to compile.

After centralizing workforce operations, directors and deans gained access to up-to-date dashboards and on-demand reporting, while HR teams spent less time compiling data manually.



Estimated
time savings

1-2 Hours
weekly



5 Practical workflow improvements for lean HR teams



5

AI-supported engagement and manager workflows

Manager support and employee engagement initiatives often become difficult to sustain when HR teams are overloaded.

Preparing for check-ins, documenting conversations and coordinating follow-up activities all require time and consistency.



Modern HCM platforms can help simplify these workflows through:

- Guided check-in support
- Sentiment analysis
- Survey insights
- Follow-up reminders
- Centralized documentation

These capabilities help managers spend less time on administration and more time supporting employees directly.



**Estimated
time savings**

1-2 Hours
weekly

Together, these five workflow improvements can help lean higher education HR teams reclaim significant capacity each week while improving visibility, consistency and responsiveness across the institution.

Why connected systems matter more than isolated tools

The value of an all-in-one HCM platform is not simply that it includes more features.

The real advantage comes from connected operations. Modern cloud-based, mobile-first HCM platforms help bring workforce data, workflows and employee experiences into one connected environment.

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MHR just understood the needs and complexities of our business, and we were able to build our workflows around that to better the user experience.

London School of Economics and Political Science

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When recruitment, onboarding, payroll, workforce data, learning and reporting operate within one environment:



- Duplicate entry decreases
- Reporting improves
- Visibility increases
- Workflows become more consistent
- Administrative coordination is reduced

Operational simplicity is difficult to maintain across disconnected systems.

In fragmented environments, HR teams often spend significant time reconciling information across platforms rather than acting on insights.

Connected workforce operations are especially important in higher education, where lean teams support increasingly complex institutions.

People First, powered by MHR, was designed to support the realities of higher ed HR, including academic cycles, decentralized departments and complex workforce structures.

Connected vs fragmented operations

Fragmented environment

Isolated systems

Duplicate entry

Reporting gaps

Disconnected workflows

Connected HCM environment

Shared workforce data

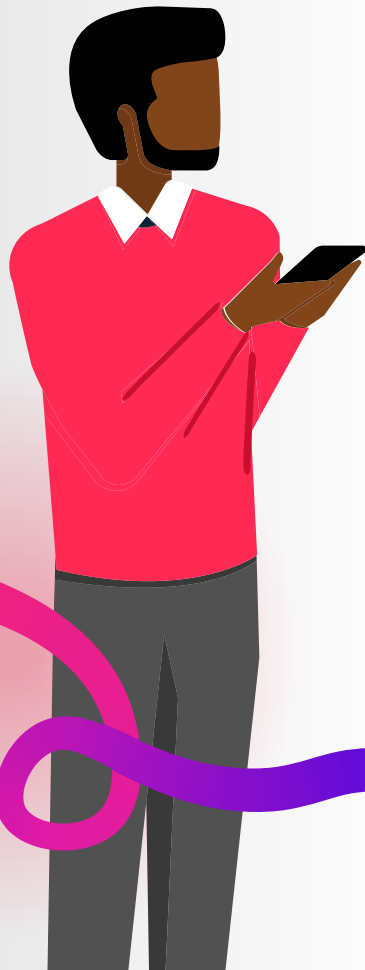
Centralized workflows

Unified reporting

Fewer handoffs

How higher education institutions are reducing operational burden

Higher education institutions evaluating modernization initiatives are often trying to reduce risk as much as operational burden. For many, the question is whether modernization can be implemented practically and successfully.



THE LONDON SCHOOL
OF ECONOMICS AND
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■

LSE sought a more flexible and scalable approach to HR modernization that could support complex workforce structures without the overhead of a large ERP environment.

Within the first month:

- 92% employee adoption was achieved
- 90% of users agreed the system was easy to use
- 100% of surveyed employees said they would recommend it

The school also improved:

- Onboarding efficiency
- Workforce visibility
- Learning management adoption
- Alignment with HR KPIs



Leeds Trinity
University

Leeds Trinity University expanded from a basic HR environment into a broader connected platform supporting recruitment, reporting and workforce operations.

Key outcomes included:

- Streamlined recruitment cycles
- Reduced spreadsheet reliance
- On-demand workforce reporting
- Lower administrative burden
- Improved data-driven decision-making

The university also reduced reporting timelines dramatically by replacing manual reporting processes with centralized dashboards and workforce visibility tools.

**Start
with
friction
points**

What practical modernization looks like for lean HR teams

Modernization does not need to begin with a large-scale transformation initiative.

For many institutions, the most effective approach starts with identifying workflow friction points and gradually simplifying the systems and processes creating unnecessary administrative burden.

1

Identify operational friction



2

Connect systems and workforce data



3

Simplify and standardize workflows



4

Improve workforce visibility



5

Expand automation strategically

The objective is not simply adding more technology. It is creating a more manageable HR environment that helps lean teams work more effectively within the realities of higher education.

That often means choosing systems built for the complexities of higher education rather than adapting generic corporate HR workflows.



Simplifying workflows helps HR teams contribute more strategically across the institution.

As repetitive coordination work decreases, HR teams gain greater capacity for:

- 
- Workforce planning
 - Manager support
 - Employee engagement
 - Retention initiatives
 - Institutional partnership

See how higher education institutions are reducing operational overload

People First, powered by MHR, was built to support the complexity of higher education HR, bringing recruitment, onboarding, workforce visibility and connected workflows together in one HCM platform designed for lean higher ed HR teams.

Schedule a personalized demo to see how higher education institutions are reducing manual work, improving visibility and reclaiming operational capacity with People First.





About MHR

MHR has been driving innovation across the HR technology space for over 40 years. We don't just meet the industry standard, we exceed it. Engineered with the latest SaaS technology, our product, People First enables increased employee productivity and organizational growth with a demonstrable return on investment.

People First is guided by what our customers and the market demand in a rapidly changing world.

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