

Education provision in policy design

Employees moving abroad with their families expect children’s education to be addressed. If it is not, this has serious implications for the talent pool willing to relocate internationally.

Organisational support for the education of international assignees’ children is a critical component in international assignment policy design.

THE NEED FOR EDUCATION SUPPORT

Language and curriculum differences between the home and host country school systems can present considerable barriers to family mobility. Parents will be concerned that disruption to children’s education might damage examination achievement and future access to further and higher education. The availability and quality of pre-school childcare is also of concern for working parents.

Children’s schooling and childcare availability affect willingness to relocate internationally. This is particularly so when moves to developing or culturally dissimilar countries are involved. Indeed, research

shows that schooling for accompanying children falls within the top five elements in the international assignment compensation package relevant to the assignment take-up decision.

POLICY ELEMENTS

International assignment policies may include a range of benefits associated with children’s education. These include: meeting the costs of school fees for international schools or schools offering the home country’s curriculum in the host location; boarding school fees if children remain in the home country; air fares to reunite parents and children in holiday periods; costs of additional expenses (such as books/music lessons); home to school travel costs; fees associated with school search consultants; nursery/pre-school fees; fees to maintain education continuity until critical stages are reached on repatriation.

COST CONCERNS/POLICY REDUCTIONS

The costs associated with the provision of school fees and associated expenses are a dynamic issue. Organisational practice continues to change as employers juggle the competing pressures of cost containment while facilitating assignee mobility.

Employers have reduced the level of educational support available. For example, some employers have imposed limits on international school fees that will be funded, expecting parents to make up any difference if they select more expensive education provision than funded in policy.

When employees paid for private education in the home country, employers may only fund the difference between these costs and costs in the host country. Boarding school costs and additional expenses are less likely to be funded.

CHANGES TO MOBILITY STRATEGIES & ASSIGNEE PROFILES

There has been increasing emphasis on using unaccompanied short-term and flexible assignments. This minimises disruption to children’s schooling as partners and family remain in the home country. While this has cost benefits, such mobility is damaging to family relationships. This strategy also reduces the talent pool from which employers can select assignees.

The proportion of assignees taking children with them on assignment has also fallen. This reflects a change in assignee profiles reflecting a higher proportion of younger, childless, assignees.

EQUITY & TALENT ISSUES

Research shows that the provision of education support encourages mothers to accept assignments. Cutting back on school fee payments reduces mothers’ willingness to relocate internationally. This has implications for gender equity.

Reducing children’s education support might lead to direct cost savings but at the expense of an assignee resourcing strategy that precludes/excludes talented staff that place their children’s education and future careers ahead of their own.

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