

## **Breakout Session: Pay and Conditions Workshop**

**Moderators:** Liz Bayram and Julie Bishop

**Speaker:** Ben Hickman (Researcher)

Ben presented the key findings from the two research reports being launched today on Pay and Conditions. These were commissioned as part of the Advice Workforce Development Fund.

Some of the key findings included:

- Pay in the advice sector is below market rate for comparable jobs in other sectors
- The picture is complex as there were a combination of factors which contributed to job satisfaction, more than just pay.
- Whilst there were high levels of job satisfaction (89%), this was not reflected in happiness with pay and conditions. More people were unhappy with pay and benefits than with work-life balance, training or career progression.
- The main causes of stress were pay, followed by job security and high caseloads.
- People frequently reported that making a positive impact was what they enjoyed most about the work, with the top three benefits being annual leave, remote working and flexible working (although many reported difficulties in taking annual leave).
- 22% of organisations with an income under £500,000 did not pay the London living wage to their staff.
- 20% of advisors/caseworkers were on temporary contracts compared to 5% of UK workforce.
- Only 4% of organisations had a pay policy which guaranteed pay increases – inflation/increments.
- Half of the workers were regularly working overtime and not being paid fairly for this.
- Largest single barrier to career progression was size and structure of organisation, especially in smaller organisations.

Ben then outlined some of the suggestions made about how things could be improved:

- Making pay 'fair enough' – improving flexibility and work-life balance
- Reduce unnecessary stresses at work, e.g. issuing permanent contracts – as this sends a message that staff are 'wanted'
- Increase collaboration especially to support career progression
- Freeing up time – for annual leave/training etc.

In the open discussions the following questions and points were raised:

- Would it be helpful to publish everyone's pay scales within an organisation?  
Although it was noted that this may be difficult due to confidentiality, however,

having a written pay policy was crucial, which should include policies on increments and cost of living increases.

- How does it compare with other sectors happiness on pay and conditions? Ben said that there is no real data to compare with. There may be some data in the Labour Force Survey (but this would be limited).
- Why was the focus on minimum pay levels rather than setting bands? Was there a danger that this could lead to a drive downwards? Ben said that this was a starting point but there was a concern that setting a band could disadvantage those being paid above the upper level of the band.
- It was noted that the minimum pay level included London Weighting.
- There was concern about how to free up time to take up training – an issue across the sector.

In three small groups the following questions were discussed:

**1. How can we free up staff time – for annual leave, training, well being activities?**

Suggestions were grouped into loose themes:

**Mental Health** – Give permission to take time; a well being hour; empowerment activities; real vs perception; More support for advisors/less KPI's; Help staff to 'let go'; remove them from frontline work for a week; Lead from the top; Opportunities for staff to plan services.

**Expectations** - Stop work outside core responsibilities/JD's; Are we too holistic? Co-dependency; prioritise and drop; Do less; 4-day week.

**Funding** - increasing funding reserve; funding creates silos - up skill in general skills; communication around funding.

**Tech** – Using technology to assist; Use AI for case notes; AI/Tech for note taking/write ups.

**Change approach** – Decrease drop-in services; line manager training on helping staff boundaries/workloads; Job insecurity driving overwork.

**Policy** – reduce workload; mandatory downtime for training; doing more research on client needs; take stock and think about what takes up staff time the most.

**Buddy schemes/handover** – partnership working; buddy up caseworkers to support one another with annual leave; re-think workload management/handover process; shared supervisor; external buddy.

**Less** – volunteers; less meetings; low hanging fruit?

**2. Is it feasible to establish a sector-wide approach to career progression, and if so, what would it look like?**

Points raised in group discussions:

- Entry level is easier to think of/bringing in entry level staff who can work in advice
- Organisational collaboration
- Less defined and more flexible can be a positive – explore other opportunities
- Not much headroom for those who don't want to manage
- Support from managers and others
- Specification of roles
- Clear criteria about career development
- Development within the role e.g. a new project
- Consider having a stepped phased progression within specific roles
- What is career progression? (Changing social pressures of what we do'

In the feedback discussion, an example was given of CAB's and Law Centres in Yorkshire working together to establish career pathways. Although it was noted that it would be important to bring in smaller organisations as they could be in danger of losing out.

It was also pointed out that there can be limited options if you are a specialist caseworker and not interested in moving into management. What other options might there be?

Liz and Julie thanked everyone for their contributions.