

Briefing: 2019 Member Survey

It is essential for us to understand more about the working lives and experiences of our members and build the robust evidence base required to achieve positive change for psychologists.

The Survey:

Early in 2019, we partnered with the Institute for Employment Studies to carry out an online survey to enable a better knowledge base for the development of our services, products and advocacy activities.

The main focus of the survey was to understand members' experience of work, in particular:

- Career journey and future intentions.
- Workforce issues and pressures.
- Health and wellbeing in the workplace.
- Experience of bullying and discrimination in the workplace.
- Diversity within the profession.
- Views of the psychology profession.

The survey was co-produced by IES researchers and BPS expert members and staff.

The overall member response rate was 16.85 per cent, representing 5,772 members.

Eleven follow up interviews were also conducted to enrich the qualitative data already obtained from the survey.

Key Findings:

The Value of Psychology

Psychology is a People focused profession – 64% of those members who responded became a psychologist as they wanted to help people; 58% wanted to understand why people behave the way that they do and 31.8% wanted to understand how people relate to each other.

Moreover, training and education in Psychology extends its usefulness both within and beyond careers in Psychology. 1 in 3 members who are non-psychologists reported that they always use their psychological knowledge and skills.

The long-lasting value of psychology education is a message which we need to put at the heart of all of our campaigning and our work to improve the working conditions for our members and the public image of psychology as a profession.

Professional Identity:

Identity as a psychologist is important to our members. This confirmed by 84.4% of respondents.

Psychology is a very positive profession – about being a psychologist and that it is a very interesting profession (97%); 2 thirds would opt for a career in Psychology if they could choose their career again; 2 thirds also believe that Psychology is a high status, valued profession and would recommend being a psychologist as a career.

Belonging to a community of peers such as the BPS is a key part of being a Psychology for 4 out of 5 respondents.

Much pride and personal meaning is derived from being a Psychologist (90% and 90.5%): it gives job satisfaction (90.4%), personal satisfaction (90.4%), feeling valued for their psychological skills and knowledge (81.6%) and feeling valued by their employer (54.2%).

This is a profession which people are proud to be a part of, and where there is a genuine desire to help people and to provide the best possible services to the public.

If this positive feeling can be harnessed by policy makers, government and organisations, and the BPS will be doing all that we can to make sure that it is, then psychologists will be able to contribute even more to service users, clients and wider society.

Career Journey:

39% of members who responded to the survey always wanted to become a Psychologist. However, there are clear barriers in the training routes – from insufficient careers information (23%), difficulties in securing training opportunities (23%), unclear pathways (23.2%, and especially so in the private sector of for health, occupation and sports and exercise) and financial barriers (24.8% - and especially so for women and ethnic minorities, counselling, health and sports and exercise).

There are also difficulties in securing appropriate employment with a mismatch between the number of applicants and the number of roles (28.9% and especially so in clinical psychology and in the third and public sectors) and a lack of appropriate jobs (22.9%). However, men are more likely to report experiencing no barriers (almost 40%).

These difficulties also extend into professional development as only half of respondents are able to access it when they wanted. For others, key barriers are lack of funding from their employer (60.2%),

having to self-fund (44.2%) and having the time (47.4%). These difficulties are especially acute in the public and third sectors, and for clinical psychologists.

Three quarters of respondents know what they need to do in order to progress their career, but less than 50% felt that they have a good opportunity to do so (although men are more likely to feel able to).

1 in 4 members who responded feel that they have good opportunities for pay progression (again, men are more likely to feel this as are those psychologists working in the private sector and in occupational psychology).

However, non-financial rewards and feeling valued for what they contribute is reported by 50% of respondents.

The NHS Long Term Plan and its clear pledges to deliver more psychological treatments mean that a significant expansion of the NHS psychological workforce is required, and there is an opportunity to look at the kinds of psychologists which are being trained but are unable to find appropriate employment.

Moreover, there is a need to address the availability of CPD. The BPS is currently working on a revamped professional development offering, including a new online platform which will make accessing our CPD opportunities much easier for members.

Discrimination and Equality:

One particularly worrying finding is that a quarter of members who responded reported some experience of discrimination in the workplace during the last 12 months, whether within their organisation or externally.

Discrimination within an organisation was most likely to be experienced by female psychologists, ethnic minorities, those with caring responsibilities and older psychologists, while ethnic minorities and younger psychologists reported the most discrimination from outside of their organisation.

While the majority of members who responded to the survey feel free from discrimination at work, that 1 in 7 reported that they do not and 1 in 8 said that their organisation doesn't do enough to tackle it.

Some members also reported instances of bullying, abuse and harassment in the workplace, with 1 in 7 detailing that they had experienced at least one episode during the last year.

Results also showed a significant gender wage gap, averaging around £13,000, and out of respondents to the survey, male psychologists are nine per cent more likely to hold senior leadership and management roles.

The picture is similar when looking at the responses to questions on ethnicity, with our BAME respondents, on average, earning less and occupying fewer leadership positions.

The Board of Trustees recently agreed to form a presidential taskforce to investigate issues of diversity, equality and inclusion within the BPS, and they will ultimately be tasked with delivering a clear set of recommendations on how we can move forward in areas such as this.

Challenges for the Profession:

Well over half of respondents with management or supervisory responsibilities experience difficulties with recruiting psychologists; especially in clinical psychology and the public sector.

9 in 10 managers in the public sector reported that vacant posts have resulted in a negative workload of staff, a drop in the quality of service delivery, and an impact on delivery service times.

In comparison, retention rates are quite high – with only 25% of managers reporting difficulties. However this is worse in the public sector and HE than the private sector. Reasons for leaving include work-life balance, lack of progression and poor working practices.

Psychologists feel that they are routinely undervalued, especially within the NHS where medical professions such as Psychiatry dominate. Generally, Psychologists feel that they are viewed as non-essential and seem as only providing therapy.

Wellbeing:

Psychologists overwork. Only 5% of members who responded never routinely work more than the hours that they are contracted to work. Two fifths feel worn out at the end of the day and 1 in 3 find work emotionally exhausting. Unsurprisingly 25% are dissatisfied with their work-life balance.

There is a clear distinction between those who are employed and those who are self-employed – as the self-employed are highly satisfied with their wellbeing, mental health and WLB.

Stress levels are high. Nearly half of members who responded feel that they have too much to do; 1 in 5 spend time worrying about work and 33% regularly work unpaid overtime.

25% do not feel that they have the resources to do the job properly. Leading to difficulty sleeping, negative emotions, a desire to leave the job and an inability to perform the job to the best of their ability. This is especially so in Higher Education and within health psychology.

33% of members who responded feel that the support they receive at work is insufficient. Clinical, educational and health psychologists are most likely to be struggling with stress and burnout.

Having these figures and examples now gives us the opportunity to make a much louder noise about these issues, and it's an area where we will be taking forward the results of the survey and pushing the major employers of psychologists to ensure that our members are working in the kinds of environments that are good for their wellbeing and conducive to providing the best possible service, whether to service users or students.

The Health and Care Professions Council:

There is overwhelming agreement from members who responded that statutory regulation protects the public through training requirements, standards, CPD and increased public confidence.

However 1 in 4 do not believe that the HCPC adds value to the profession – occupational psychologists and clinical psychologists especially.

This seems largely due to the failure to protect the title “psychologist” but other reasons cited include that the HCPC lacks specialist psychological expertise, it is not considered a relevant regulator for non-health psychology practitioner areas (such as occupational psychology) and that the HCPC standards of equivalence and the assessment of this, is too low.

Summary:

The overall picture is of a profession where issues around recruitment of psychologists and wellbeing in the workplace are causing real problems for psychologists who have a genuine desire to help others and, of course, meaning that service provision is not where it could be.

The results of the survey will form the basis of much of our work over the coming months and years, as they give us robust evidence of the issues which are affecting our members.

We need to be louder, more united and a more effective professional body which achieves real change on their behalf.

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