Conditions and Benefits in the London Social Welfare Advice Sector

Report commissioned by the

Advice Workforce Development Programme

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1. Executive Summary

Introduction

The research informing this report was conducted between October 2024 and March 2025, using a mixed methods approach including evidence review, workforce and organisation surveys, interviews with leaders and advice workers and focus groups. This report aims to provide recommendations regarding working conditions and benefits for the London advice sector. It is accompanied by a companion report examining pay in the sector.

658 organisations were identified as within scope of the project, with organisations with an annual income of <=£500,000 accounting for 65% of organisations and 20% of the workforce. Organisations with an annual income of more than £1m account for 21% of organisations and 62% of the workforce.

Perceptions of advice work

89% of advice workers reported being either quite happy or very happy with their overall job. Fewer advice workers were happy with their pay and benefits (49%), work-life balance (63%) and training and career progression (53%).

There was a significant relationship between overall happiness and happiness with both work-life balance and training and career progression. All respondents who were happy with their training and career progression were also happy in their overall job compared with 69% of those unhappy with their training and career progression.

The most common causes of stress were levels of pay (58%), job security/funding concerns (53%), high caseload/workload (51%) and dealing with emotionally challenging cases (43%).

Whether advice workers were stressed about levels of pay or job security/funding concerns had no impact on their overall happiness in their job. However, advice workers who were unhappy with their overall job were more likely to identify lack of training, inadequate supervision, support or feedback, general mood or conditions of work, lack of autonomy or control and inability to use annual leave as causes of stress.

The most common aspects that people enjoy about their current job were making a positive impact (89%), supportive management (46%), flexibility and work-life balance (46%), positive organisational culture (45%), community engagement (43%) and recognition and appreciation (41%).

The most popular words advice workers used to describe how they feel at work were supported (37), busy (36), happy (33), stressed (31), tired (19), valued (18), satisfied (17), frustrated (16),

overworked (14), overwhelmed (12) and underpaid (12). Manager/Supervisors were more likely to use negative sentiment words and less likely to indicate that they felt supported.

Benefits and working conditions

The most widely provided benefits by advice organisations were 25+ days annual leave (88%), flexible working hours (80%), remote working options (79%) and above statutory sick leave (65%).

42% of organisations with an income less than or equal to £500,000 offered less than 25 days per year annual leave compared with just 6% of organisations with an income of more than £500,000.

61% of organisations reported providing an individualized training and development plan compared to just 14% of advice staff who reported receiving it as a benefit.

The benefits considered most important by advice workers were 25+ days annual leave (84%), remote working options (61%) and flexible working hours (54%).

The most frequent working patterns of advice staff were non-flexible set contracted hours (43%) and working flexible hours with set core hours (36%). Adviser/caseworkers (49%) and Support/admin (69%) roles were more likely to work non-flexible hours than Manager/supervisors (31%) or Legally qualified staff (33%).

20% of Adviser/caseworkers are working on a temporary contract compared to 5% of employees in the whole economy.

Training and career progression

Over half Manager/supervisors (53%) and Adviser/caseworkers (56%) did not have any advice related qualifications. The most frequent level of advice qualification for Manager/supervisors was a level 5 equivalent qualification (20%) while for Adviser/caseworkers it was level 3 (21%).

20% of Adviser/caseworkers were working towards an advice related qualification, with the majority doing so through their employer.

30% of advice workers disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "I have good opportunities for professional growth". 19% of advice workers disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "I feel my personal development is encouraged and supported". 30% of advice workers disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "I have a clear understanding of my career path within my organisation".

The most common opportunities for career progression provided by organisations were internal job postings (69%), support for vocational qualifications (45%), leadership/management development programs (33%), lateral moves across departments (33%) and mentoring or coaching programs (29%).

18% of organisations reported having no formal career progression opportunities. Organisations with a smaller income were more than seven times as likely as those with larger incomes to have no formal career progression.

Interviews with advice workers identified two themes in relation to career progression: limited scope for progression within their own organisation and inconsistent pay across the sector making finding suitable roles more difficult. The main barriers to career progression identified by organisations were the size and/or the flat management structure of their organisation and insecure or inadequate funding.

Wellbeing

24% of advice workers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "My work is negatively affecting my mental health and wellbeing".

74% of advice workers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I have a strong sense of belonging within my organisation". 72% of advice workers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I feel my organisation knows me as an individual and values my contribution".

Recurring themes in both the focus groups and interviews with advice workers and leadership were the high level of commitment of staff and high levels of stress.

The most common employee well-being initiatives offered by advice organisations were an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) (62%), mental health first aiders (46%), and free mental health resources (38%). Access to an EAP was considered an important benefit by just 6% of advice staff.

74% of organisations offered advisers regular time away from seeing clients as part of their working conditions. The most frequent actions taken by organisations to prevent burnout amongst staff include managed caseloads, working flexibly, supportive/proactive line management, clinical supervision, time away from clients and setting boundaries/encouraging breaks/leave.

When asked what the advice sector could do differently to be a better place to work, the most frequent responses from advice workers were higher pay and/or improved benefits, better access to training/career progression, longer-term funding/job security and better work-life balance.

Disability and representation

56% of responding organisations (100% of DDPOs) had a written reasonable adjustments policy. 28% of organisations provide employees with disability leave, although 31% did not know if they offered disability leave or not. 77% of organisations (100% of DDPOs) offer some accessibility as standard.

22% of respondents to the advice worker survey considered they had a disability according to either the Equality Act or Social Model of disability. When asked whether their employer offered disability leave, 50% of these respondents did not know while a 33% said their employer did not offer it.

24% of respondents who had a disability did not need any reasonable adjustments, while the remainder needed some adjustments and either had them all in place (42%) or some in place (33%). No respondents to the survey said they had a request for reasonable adjustments completely denied.

The most common reasonable adjustment that people had in place was working flexibly/with adjusted hours (69%) and time off to attend appointments related to their disability/condition (53%).

75% of organisations were aware of the support available through Access to Work, although this was lower in smaller income organisations (52%). 21% of organisations who were aware of Access to Work support had experienced delays or other problems with the process.

When asked about barriers to recruiting disabled people into the advice sector, the most common responses from organisations were the inaccessibility of existing office spaces, reasonable adjustments (both in terms of employers understanding of them and the funds to facilitate them), and financial constraints including limited HR support and concerns around meeting targets when people may work at a slower rate or need additional flexibility.

In both interviews and survey responses from DDPOs, they highlighted not only the positive impact that staff with lived experience can have on the quality of advice provided, but also the importance of recognizing that properly supporting disabled clients can take more time, which may have an impact on reasonable targets within funding contracts.

Summary Recommendations

Below are a summary of the recommendations from this report. Not all recommendations will be right for all organisations, and smaller organisations in particular may be more dependent on the coordination activities of umbrella bodies and funders to implement changes. Where the introduction of new policies is recommended, umbrella bodies might offer templates for adoption and adaption.

The full set of recommendations is available in section 9.2 of the main report.

Benefits

- Organisations should aim to offer all staff 25+ days of annual leave (excluding bank holidays). Any required changes to organisational leave policies should take place alongside wider discussions around workplace stress and enabling capacity to take annual leave.

- Umbrella bodies and funders to consider the viability of establishing a small bank of locum staff to help cover periods of staff leave in smaller advice organisations.

- Organisations should offer flexible working hours and remote working options for all staff where consistent with service delivery models, with a clear written policy to ensure both staff and managers understand the requirements and boundaries.

- Umbrella bodies and funders to assist advice organisations to audit all staff on temporary contracts to identify those who could be offered permanent contracts without any material increase in legal/financial risk to employing organisations.

- Organisations should aim to offer an enhanced employer contribution for pensions of at least 5%, with a longer term aim of 7% employer contributions and becoming Living Pension accredited employers.

- Organisations should aim to offer better than the statutory minimum parental leave policy and benefits.

Disability and representation

- Organisations should offer some forms of accessibility as standard across the organisation and make efforts to notify staff (existing and new) of what options are available.

- Organisations should have a written reasonable adjustments policy, including a requirement to ask all new employees whether they have any required adjustments.

- Organisations should aim to develop a disability leave policy which allows for additional leave for reasons related to pre-disclosed impairments or conditions that does not count towards sick leave.

- Umbrella bodies should develop written reasonable adjustment policy templates and guidance on how to support staff through the Access to Work process to support smaller advice organisations.
- With appropriate remuneration, umbrella bodies should draw upon the knowledge and expertise of DDPOs to further develop inclusive policy for the sector.

Health and Wellbeing

- All organisations should openly encourage the use of annual and other leave and ensure that staff feel able to take a break from work without feelings of guilt or worry over backlog of work when they return.
- Organisations should aim to implement an occupational sickness pay (OSP) scheme providing better than statutory minimum sickness benefits.
- Organisations should offer all staff access to an Employer Assistance Programme (EAP) and ensure that staff are aware of the availability and benefits of the scheme on offer. Smaller organisations should explore whether membership organisations already provide this service.
- Funders could build upon the 'Funder Plus' offer to provide access to clinical supervision or relational leadership coaching to all organisational leaders.
- Umbrella bodies/funders could examine establishing action learning sets
- Umbrella bodies/funders should consider whether they might be able to support smaller organisations with occupational health and person-centered HR support in some circumstances.
- OSP, EAP and disability leave should all form part of a health and wellbeing strategy which is communicated clearly to staff so they know what help is available. Umbrella bodies should help with template policies and guidance for smaller organisations.
- Umbrella bodies to consolidate resources for tackling workload stress, including training materials, guidance and best practices.

Training and career development

- Create facilitated development pathways for those with leadership/management roles.
- Establish regular, shared leadership, learning and training programmes and opportunities that are open to all staff and communicate these effectively across the sector.
- Funders/umbrella bodies to explore lobbying for changes to the Apprenticeship Levy and other relevant funding mechanisms to remove barriers to recruitment.

- Collaborate on a sector-wide leadership development initiative focusing on situational leadership.
- Umbrella bodies/funders should consider how best to support organisations in providing internal coaching and mentoring programmes.

Other

- Umbrella bodies/funders should support smaller organisations with access to professional HR advice services and/or template policy documents.
- Develop guidance around the Full Cost Recovery of roles to both improve the funding itself, and also simplify the process for both organisations and funders.
- Create sector-wide frameworks for minimum bid standards to encourage use of the minimum salary rates and inclusion of on-costs and cost of living increases in funding applications.
- Umbrella bodies/funders to develop communications strategy to consistently communicate the value and rewards of working in the advice sector.

2.   Glossary

Abbreviation	Meaning
AQS	Advice Quality Standard
ASA	Advice Services Alliance
ASHE	Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings
ATW	Access to Work
AWDF	Advice Workforce Development Fund
CAB	Citizens Advice Bureau
Chi-squared	A test used to examine whether there is a meaningful relationship between two categorical variables.
CI	Confidence Interval
CILEX	Chartered Institute of Legal Executives
CIPD	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
DDPO	Deaf and Disabled People's Organisation
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
EAP	Employee Assistance Programme
FCA	Financial Conduct Authority
Fisher's Exact Test	A statistical test used to check for a relationship between two categorical variables, especially when sample sizes are small.
IDVA	Independent Domestic Violence Advocate
IMA	Institute of Money Advisers
LCN	Law Centres Network
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LLST	London Legal Support Trust
LWF	Living Wage Foundation
NJC LGS	National Joint Council for Local Government Services
NLP	Natural Language Processing
OISC	Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner
ONS	Office for National Statistics
OSP	Occupation Sick Pay
PQE	Post-Qualification Experience
SSP	Statutory Sick Pay

3. Introduction

3.1. Background

Across the charity sector organisations are facing increasing demands for services, coupled with stagnant, or often reducing, funding streams (Civil Society, 2023). Managers working in the non-profit sector identified a lack of available/suitable candidates, salary constraints/budget and candidates lacking relevant skills as the biggest current recruitment challenges (TPP, 2024).

In *Advising Londoners* (ASA, 2020a), the authors discuss the rising demand for social welfare advice services alongside shortages in current provision. Low wages, job security and well-being/burnout as key challenges that the sector must address to improve retention of existing staff. *"Advice providers and stakeholders consistently told the research team about the difficulties they faced with recruiting and retaining staff, volunteers, leaders and trustees with sufficient skills and experience. There is a shortage of new social welfare advisers and lawyers coming through, and a skills deficit at management and governance level. There is also a common perception that the advice workforce is unrepresentative of the community in London."*[1]

The report identified wages, job security and well-being/burnout as key challenges that the sector must address to improve retention of existing staff. A follow up report aimed at summarising the key drivers of skills gaps in the advice sector (Rathbone et al, 2022) concurred that low pay and staff well-being was a concern. This report also discussed issues of leadership, the sector's reliance on short-term contracts, the impact of a lack of sustainable funding, underfunding leading to staff working unpaid hours, training provision and a lack of career progression or pathways as being key workforce challenges within the advice sector.

Pay was also an issue when recruiting legally qualified staff. In the Legal Aid Census 2021 (Denvir et al, 2021), legal aid organisations reported that difficulty in finding suitably qualified legal aid lawyers was linked to better salaries elsewhere (40%) and mismatch in the demand for, and availability of, lawyers (37%). The most common primary motivations for working in Legal Aid were the opportunity to help those facing economic, cultural or social disadvantage (26%), the opportunity to apply my skills to help others (18%) and the opportunity to make access to justice more equitable (13%). Organisations providing community care legal aid have experienced particular difficulties retaining and recruiting experienced staff as supervisors, which creates challenges in sustaining legal aid contracts given the specific supervisor requirements (Ashton et al, 2022).

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[1] ASA, 2020a, para 5.41

The Institute of Money Advisers (2024) found that money advisers were most likely to be dissatisfied with pay (49%), workload (45%), career development opportunities (31%) and the support they receive for wellbeing (30%).

Advice UK (2024) recently found that 88% of advice centre staff said recruiting and retaining staff is a significant hurdle, with 42% stating it is extremely or very challenging. Kara & Cornish (2023) found that isolated sole advisers, managing peer identities and wellbeing, low pay, insecurity and poor career progression opportunities were key challenges facing Deaf and Disabled People's Organisations (DDPOs) providing advice.

In 2023, funders including City Bridge Foundation and Trust for London responded to these reports by pooling money through the Propel fund, and forming the Advice Workforce Development Fund [2](AWDF). This initiative supported eight community-led partnerships to pilot and expand recruitment, training, and development programs, aimed at attracting new talent to the London advice sector while creating clear progression pathways for existing staff.

In 2024, the AWDF put out a call for tenders to undertake research into current salaries and conditions within the London advice sector and to produce reports on both pay and working conditions. This report is the second of two and focuses on benefits and working conditions in the London advice sector with its companion report focusing on pay.

3.2. Research Objectives

The objectives for this research report are to examine the benefits and working conditions for people working in the advice sector currently and explore how these conditions can be improved. This will cover:

- Statutory conditions and enhancements (such as maternity leave; workplace pension schemes, etc.);
- Flexible and remote working;
- Workplace benefits (travel to work schemes, gym membership, etc.);
- Reasonable adjustments and access to work;
- Access to training and career development support; and
- Approaches to employee wellbeing.

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[2] https://adviceworkforcedevelopmentfund.org.uk/

3.3.　　Methodology

The project ran between October 2024 and April 2025. To address the research objectives the following activities were undertaken:

1. Analysis of Charity Commission data to scope London advice sector
2. Rapid evidence review of existing reports and data on benefits and conditions, both within the sector specifically, in wider potentially comparable workforces (e.g. local government services), and relevant national policy on benefits and working conditions (e.g. statutory sick pay, etc.)
3. An online survey of advice sector organisations.
4. An online survey of London advice workers.
5. Interviews with organisation leaders (11) and advice workers (10)
6. Two focus groups, one with nine leaders of advice sector organisations (including Law Centres, Citizens Advice, small community groups and DDPOs) and one three representatives from advice sector support organisations.

The survey of advice sector organisations was distributed through networks and organisational contacts between November 2024 and January 2025. In total 82 responses were received which equates to 12.5% of the 658 advice organisations in London.

Over one third of responses (37%) were from Client-specific advice agency/community group (e.g. Disability Group, Refugee Group, Women's Group, etc.) with Subject-specific advice agency (21%) (e.g. money advice, housing advice, etc.) and Community based legal practice or Law Centre (13%) the next largest organisation types (see Table 1). Where respondents had stated "other" they were typically a combination of two of the options (e.g. location and client specific service). Over two thirds of respondents (71%) were from an organisation where advice was the main purpose of organisation.

Table 1: Organisation survey response by organisation type

Organisation Type		n	%
Client-specific advice agency/community group		25	37.3%
Subject-specific advice agency		14	20.9%
Location-specific advice agency/community group		7	10.4%
General advice agency		6	9.0%
Community based legal practice or Law Centre		9	13.4%
Other		6	9.0%
Advice Main Purpose of Organisation	Yes	58	70.7%
	No	24	29.3%
Network	Citizen's Advice	21	25.6%
	Law Centre Network	7	8.5%
	Advice UK	33	40.2%
Base		82	

The survey of advice sector workforce was distributed through networks and organisational contacts between November 2024 and January 2025. In total 229 responses were received which was slightly lower than the project target of 240 but provides a good basis for high level analysis.

Respondents were asked to identify which job role type most closely suited their position, and then asked for further detail specific to the job role types. The most common responses were from Adviser/Caseworkers (40%), Advice Supervisor / Team Leader (15%) and Solicitors (7%) (see Table 2).

Table 2: Survey response by job role

Job Role Type	Job Role	n	%
Manager/Supervisor	Chief Executive Officer	7	3.1%
	Director/Head of Service	9	3.9%
	Advice Supervisor / Team Leader	34	14.8%
	Other Managers/Supervisors	12	5.2%
Legally Qualified Staff	Solicitor	17	7.4%
	Supervising Solicitor	13	5.7%
Adviser/Caseworker	Trainee Adviser/Caseworker	10	4.4%
	Adviser/Caseworker	91	39.7%
	Paralegal	5	2.2%
	Trainee Solicitor	4	1.7%
	Other Adviser/Caseworker	11	4.8%
Support/Admin	Receptionist / Administrator	11	4.8%
	Other Support/Admin Roles	5	2.2%
Base		229	

Full details of the methodology and a further breakdown of survey response is provided in Annex 2.

3.4.   Definition of London Advice Sector

This report assumes the same working definition of social welfare advice as adopted in *Advising Londoners* (ASA, 2020a), encompassing advice on the following topics:

- Welfare benefits
- Debt
- Immigration
- Employment
- Housing
- Disability, discrimination and community care

The term 'advice' includes information, support, assistance and legal advice given in the areas of law outlined above, also known as 'social welfare law'. Advice services can also include casework on behalf of a client and (in some circumstances) representation of clients at tribunal or court. Although social welfare advice will often include advice on aspects of the law, many services in these areas are delivered by lay people (i.e. those without professional legal qualifications). Some advice sector organisations, including Law Centres, employ legally qualified staff.

The majority of the London advice sector falls outside of statutory regulatory frameworks. The key exceptions are:

- those giving advice on immigration and asylum, which must be registered with the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC);
- those engaging with other agencies on behalf of a client in relation to managing debts, which must be registered with the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA); and
- those employing lawyers working in professional capacities for members of the public.

A summary of the regulatory position is provided in Table 3.

Table 3: Regulation and recognised levels of advice for advice areas

Type of Advice	Regulated by	Recognised levels of advice
Immigration	Office of the Immigration Standards Commission (OISC)	Level 1 – Advice and Assistance Level 2 – Casework Level 3 – Advocacy and Representation
Money and Debt	Financial Conduct Authority (FCA)	Unregulated activities – guidance on options and information Regulated activities (FCA) – any engagement with credit agencies on behalf of a client.
Welfare Benefits, Housing, Employment, Discrimination, Disability and social care	N/A	**Advice**: Ability to interpret law and guidance to inform and guide clients **Casework**: presenting a range of options, advocate and represent clients with other agencies **Representation** of clients including at court or tribunal

In initial discussions with the project Task and Finish group, it was agreed to exclude Trade Unions and Student Unions, although they are both likely to provide social welfare advice, and organisations providing primarily health or mental health advice even though some may also provide social welfare advice. While Local Authorities and MPs surgeries may also provide advice, these are also outside the scope of this project.

Organisations squarely in scope of this project included those who were already involved in the AWDF programme, or who are part of a relevant network, and London Legal Support Trust (LLST) Centres of Excellence. Also in scope were London-based Law Centres, Citizens Advice, Age UK and organisations who hold the Advice Quality Standard (AQS). We used this starting data to build a Natural Language Processing (NLP) model to identify advice charities from the information provided to the Charity Commission. This process, which is detailed in Annex 3 of the companion report on advice sector pay, identified a total of 658 London advice sector organisations.

3.5. Characteristics of the London Advice Sector Workforce

Full details of the characteristics of the organisations contained in the London Advice Sector are contained in the companion report on advice sector pay. As noted in that report, organisations with income of less than or equal to £500,000 per year make up 65% of the in-scope organisations (see Table 4).

Table 4: Latest reported income of advice sector organisations in London

Income band	n	%
<= £100,000	278	42.2%
£100,001-£500,000	152	23.1%
£500,001-£1,000,000	91	13.8%
£1,000,001-£3,000,000	90	13.7%
>£3,000,000	47	7.1%
Base	658	

The companion report on pay provided estimates of London Advice Sector employment based on the data collected in the organisational survey. Based on responses from 82 sector organisations, the overall estimated London advice sector workforce is 9,562 (+/- 2,727 95% CI). The workforce in organisations with income of more than £1m accounts for nearly two thirds (62%) of the total sector workforce. Organisations with an income of <= £500,000 accounted for 20% of the workforce, despite accounting for 65% of organisations. 53% of the workforce were directly involved in the provision of advice, meaning support/admin/leadership account for nearly half the workforce.

It also provides a more detailed discussion about how the advice workforce was defined for this project. The remainder of this report provides data from the worker surveys for the following groups:

- Manager/supervisor
- Adviser/caseworker
- Legally qualified staff
- Support staff/admin/other roles

3.6. Report Structure

The remainder of this report is divided into four chapters:

- Chapter four examines advice workers job satisfaction and their perceptions of their working environment, including causes of stress, enjoyment and how work makes them feel.
- Chapter five examines the benefits offered by organisations and those received and deemed most important by advice workers. It then provides additional details on annual leave, parental leave, flexible working, and occupational pensions.
- Chapter six looks at training and career progression in the London advice sector, including perceived barriers to career progression.
- Chapter seven discusses the role of wellbeing in the London advice sector, including organisational wellbeing initiatives and worker opinions on how to make the advice sector a better place to work.
- Chapter eight looks at disability and representation in the London advice sector, including the role of reasonable adjustments and Access to Work, and perceived barriers to employment.
- Chapter nine pulls together data from the previous five chapters, draws conclusions about benefits and conditions in the sector, and makes recommendations. It also outlines the limitations of the research and identifies areas for future research.

4. Job satisfaction and perceptions of working environment

4.1. Job satisfaction

While the worker survey collected valuable data on job satisfaction and wellbeing within the advice sector, it is important to keep in mind that this data may be affected by participant bias. Staff who are most unhappy in their roles may be less likely to respond, leading to an overrepresentation of more positive perspectives. It is important that the following data is treated as an accurate but limited snapshot of a certain set of workers, and is not intended to portray the situation of all those who work in the sector.

The majority (89%) of advice workers reported being either quite happy or very happy with their overall job (see Table 5). Legally qualified staff (33%) and Adviser/caseworkers (35%) were more likely to respond that they were very happy with their overall job than Manager/supervisors (27%) and Support/admin (25%), although the differences between groups were not statistically significant.[3] Only two respondents reported being very unhappy with their overall job.

Table 5: Satisfaction with overall job by job role

Overall job satisfaction	All	Manager/ Supervisor	Legally Qualified Staff	Adviser/ Caseworker	Support/ Admin
Very happy	31.9%	27.4%	33.3%	34.7%	25.0%
Quite happy	56.8%	66.1%	60.0%	51.2%	56.3%
Indifferent	6.6%	1.6%	3.3%	9.1%	12.5%
Quite unhappy	3.9%	4.8%	3.3%	3.3%	6.3%
Very Unhappy	.9%	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%	0.0%
Base	229	62	30	121	16

When asked how happy they were with their pay and benefits, just under half (49%) of respondents reported being either quite happy or very happy with their pay and benefits (see Table 6). Over one third (35%) of respondents reported being quite or very unhappy with their pay and benefits.

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[3] Fisher's Exact (two-tailed p = .355).

Table 6: Satisfaction with pay and benefits by job role

Happy with pay and benefits	All	Manager/ Supervisor	Legally Qualified Staff	Adviser/ Caseworker	Support/ Admin
Very happy	9.2%	9.7%	6.7%	9.1%	12.5%
Quite happy	39.7%	50.0%	33.3%	34.7%	50.0%
Indifferent	16.6%	14.5%	23.3%	17.4%	6.3%
Quite unhappy	28.4%	21.0%	33.3%	31.4%	25.0%
Very Unhappy	6.1%	4.8%	3.3%	7.4%	6.3%
Base	229	62	30	121	16

Legally qualified staff were the least likely to report being happy (40%) and among the most likely to report being unhappy (37%) with their pay and benefits along with Adviser/caseworkers (39%). Conversely, Manager/supervisors were the most likely to report being happy (60%) and the least likely unhappy (26%), although the differences between job roles were not statistically significant[4].

When asked how happy they were with their work-life balance, just under two-thirds (63%) of respondents reported being either quite happy or very happy with their work-life balance (see Table 7). Under one fifth (18%) of respondents reported being quite or very unhappy with their work-life balance.

Table 7: Satisfaction with work-life balance by job role

Happy with work-life balance	All	Manager/ Supervisor	Legally Qualified Staff	Adviser/ Caseworker	Support/ Admin
Very happy	20.9%	18.3%	13.3%	24.4%	18.8%
Quite happy	42.2%	45.0%	40.0%	40.3%	50.0%
Indifferent	18.7%	13.3%	23.3%	21.0%	12.5%
Quite unhappy	13.3%	18.3%	23.3%	9.2%	6.3%
Very Unhappy	4.9%	5.0%	0.0%	5.0%	12.5%
Base	225	60	30	119	16

Legally qualified staff (53%) were the least likely to report being happy and the most likely to report being unhappy (23%) with their work-life balance, although the differences between job roles were not statistically significant[5].

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[4] Chi squared test $X2(4, 213) = 5.559$, p = .236

[5] Chi squared test $X2(4, 209) = 4.357$, p = .365

When asked how happy they were with their training and career progression, over half (53%) of respondents reported being either quite happy or very happy with their training and career progression (see Table 8). Nearly one quarter (23%) of respondents reported being quite or very unhappy with their training and career progression.

Table 8: Satisfaction with training and career progression by job role

Happy with training and career progression	All	Manager/ Supervisor	Legally Qualified Staff	Adviser/ Caseworker	Support/ Admin
Very happy	12.3%	8.2%	10.0%	15.7%	6.3%
Quite happy	40.4%	45.9%	53.3%	35.5%	31.3%
Indifferent	24.6%	27.9%	13.3%	24.8%	31.3%
Quite unhappy	17.5%	13.1%	23.3%	16.5%	31.3%
Very Unhappy	5.3%	4.9%	0.0%	7.4%	0.0%
Base	175	47	30	85	13

Legally qualified staff (63%) were the most likely to report being happy and also the most likely to report being unhappy (23%) with their training and career progression, although the differences between job roles were not statistically significant[6]. There was no significant difference in happiness with training and career progression based on the number of years a respondent had been working in the sector.[7]

There was a significant relationship[8] between happiness with overall job and happiness with pay and benefits, with 96% of respondents who were happy with their pay and benefits being happy in their overall job compared to only 77% of those unhappy with their pay and benefits (see Figure 1).

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[6] Chi squared test X2(4, 212) = 3.151, p = .538

[7] Fisher's Exact (two-tailed p = .440). Job happiness scale converted to 3 point to enable analysis.

[8] Fisher's Exact (two-tailed p = .001). Both scales converted to 3 point to enable analysis.

Figure 1: Satisfaction in aspects of job by overall job satisfaction
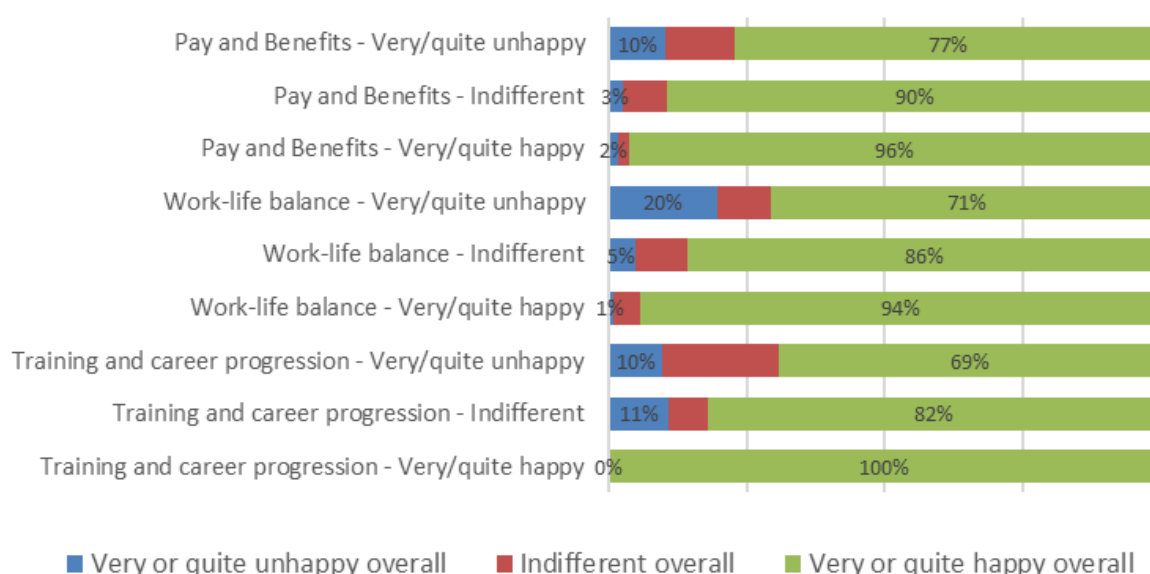
While the level of dissatisfaction with pay is higher than dissatisfaction with either work-life balance or training and career progression, the latter two play just as important a role in overall job satisfaction. If high numbers of staff are both dissatisfied with pay but also satisfied with their overall job, then other factors must be having an impact on their job satisfaction.

There was a significant relationship between happiness with overall job and both happiness with work-life balance and happiness with training and career progression. Of those respondents who were happy with their work-life balance, 94% were also happy in their overall job compared with 71% of those unhappy with their work-life balance. Notably, all (100%) respondents who were happy with their training and career progression were also happy in their overall job compared with 69% of those unhappy with their training and career progression.

4.2. Causes of stress

When asked about causes of stress in their current job, the most frequent answer selected was levels of pay (58%) (see Table 9). The next most frequent causes of stress were job security/funding concerns (53%), high caseload/workload (51%) and dealing with emotionally challenging cases (43%).

Levels of pay was the most frequent cause of stress identified for both Legally qualified staff (67%) and Adviser/caseworkers (61%), while for Manager/supervisors it was high caseload/workload (58%) and for Support/admin it was job security/funding concerns (56%).

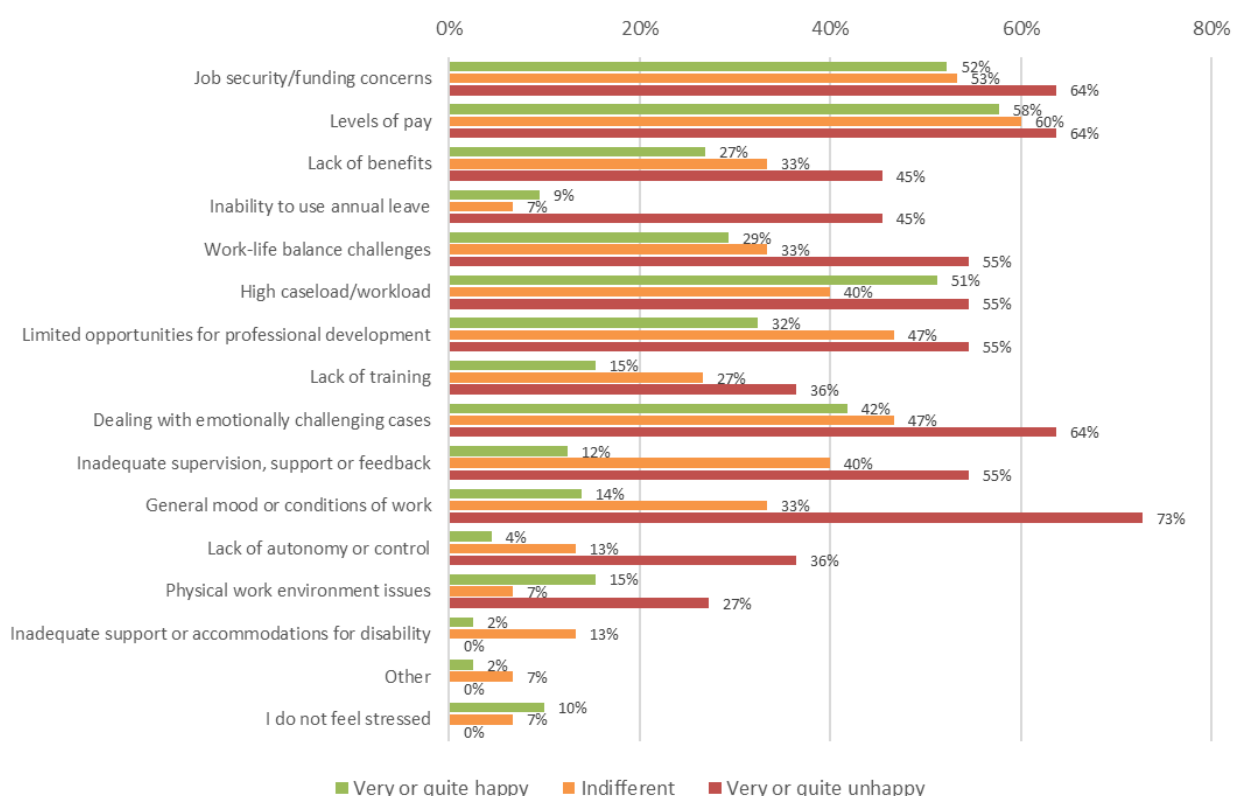**Table 9: Causes of stress in current job by job role**

	All	Manager/ Supervisor	Legally Qualified Staff	Adviser/ Caseworker	Support / Admin
Levels of pay	58.1%	53.2%	66.7%	60.5%	43.8%
Job security/funding concerns	52.9%	51.6%	50.0%	53.8%	56.3%
High caseload/workload	50.7%	58.1%	56.7%	46.2%	43.8%
Dealing with emotionally challenging cases	43.2%	37.1%	53.3%	43.7%	43.8%
Limited opportunities for professional development	34.4%	27.4%	26.7%	40.3%	31.3%
Work-life balance challenges	30.8%	38.7%	43.3%	24.4%	25.0%
Lack of benefits	28.2%	27.4%	23.3%	30.3%	25.0%
General mood or conditions of work	18.1%	21.0%	6.7%	21.0%	6.3%
Lack of training	17.2%	17.7%	23.3%	13.4%	31.3%
Inadequate supervision, support or feedback	16.3%	19.4%	16.7%	16.8%	0.0%
Physical work environment issues	15.4%	14.5%	13.3%	16.8%	12.5%
Inability to use annual leave	11.0%	16.1%	13.3%	7.6%	12.5%
Lack of autonomy or control	6.6%	6.5%	3.3%	7.6%	6.3%
Inadequate support or accommodations for disability	3.1%	3.2%	3.3%	3.4%	0.0%
Other	2.6%	1.6%	6.7%	1.7%	6.3%
I do not feel stressed	9.3%	11.3%	10.0%	8.4%	6.3%
Base	228	62	30	120	16

We compared happiness with overall job with the causes of stress (see Figure 2) using Fisher's exact test. Levels of pay (p = .95) and job security/funding concerns (p = .737) were high amongst all respondents, with no significant difference between respondents based on overall happiness with their job.

Respondents who were unhappy overall with their job were more likely than those who were happy to identify general mood or conditions of work (73% of those who were unhappy overall compared to just 14% of those who were happy, p < .001), inadequate supervision, support or feedback (55% unhappy compared to 12% happy, p < .001), inability to use annual leave (45% unhappy compared to 9% happy, p = .005), lack of autonomy or control (36% unhappy compared to 4% happy, p < .001) and lack of training (36% unhappy compared to 15% happy, p = .048) as causes of stress.

Unsurprisingly, respondents who were happy with their overall job were more likely to say they do not feel stressed (p = .016).

Figure 2: Causes of stress in current job by overall job satisfaction

Cause	Very or quite happy	Indifferent	Very or quite unhappy
Job security/funding concerns	52%	53%	64%
Levels of pay	58%	60%	64%
Lack of benefits	27%	33%	45%
Inability to use annual leave	9%	7%	45%
Work-life balance challenges	29%	33%	55%
High caseload/workload	51%	40%	55%
Limited opportunities for professional development	32%	47%	55%
Lack of training	15%	27%	36%
Dealing with emotionally challenging cases	42%	47%	64%
Inadequate supervision, support or feedback	12%	40%	55%
General mood or conditions of work	14%	33%	73%
Lack of autonomy or control	4%	13%	36%
Physical work environment issues	15%	7%	27%
Inadequate support or accommodations for disability	2%	13%	0%
Other	2%	7%	0%
I do not feel stressed	10%	7%	0%

■ Very or quite happy ■ Indifferent ■ Very or quite unhappy

"So a lot of people are coming to us with a lot of anxiety and a lot of problems; not having enough money, not having a safe place to live, and if you have multiple people that you're dealing with in that situation at once, you are just going to feel quite a lot of pressure and it's something that gets much better with time, and you kind of learn how to deal with it and you know what you can do and what you can't do and it gets easier…" (Interview - Benefits Adviser)

4.3.   Aspects people enjoy

"…I like doing benefits work, I think... I find especially in-person, working with clients really gratifying, I like going to court to represent appeals, I think that's an area where there isn't really a ceiling in terms of you can always learn something new about how to approach it..." (Interview - Welfare Rights Manager)

When asked what aspects of their current job they enjoy the most, by far the most frequent response was making a positive impact (89%), followed by having supportive management (46%), flexibility and work-life balance (46%), positive organisational culture (45%), community engagement (43%) and recognition and appreciation (41%) (see Table 10). Legally qualified staff

were more likely than other job roles to identify positive organisational culture (70%)[9] and mission driven work (63%)[10] as aspects they enjoy.

"My moral compass and the work that I enjoy, the work that makes me feel good, like I'm doing something of value, that's in the social welfare sector." (Interview - Housing caseworker)

Table 10: Aspects people enjoy by job role

	All	Manager/ Supervisor	Legally Qualified Staff	Adviser/ Caseworker	Support / Admin
Making a positive impact	88.6%	85.5%	90.0%	90.8%	81.3%
Supportive management	46.1%	38.7%	53.3%	46.7%	56.3%
Flexibility and work-life balance	45.6%	33.9%	56.7%	49.2%	43.8%
Positive organisational culture	44.7%	40.3%	70.0%	41.7%	37.5%
Community engagement	43.0%	37.1%	33.3%	46.7%	56.3%
Recognition and appreciation	40.8%	40.3%	50.0%	37.5%	50.0%
Mission-driven work	38.6%	35.5%	63.3%	35.0%	31.3%
Training and skills development	23.2%	17.7%	16.7%	27.5%	25.0%
Salary/compensation	12.3%	8.1%	20.0%	10.8%	25.0%
Opportunities for career progression	10.1%	8.1%	13.3%	10.0%	12.5%
Good benefit package	3.5%	1.6%	6.7%	4.2%	0.0%
Other	2.6%	4.8%	3.3%	1.7%	0.0%
None of the above	.4%	0.0%	0.0%	.8%	0.0%
Base	228	62	30	120	16

Comparing happiness with overall job with the aspects of their job that people enjoy (see Figure 3) using Fisher's exact test, respondents who were happy with their overall job were more likely than those who were unhappy to identify salary/compensation ($p < .001$), supportive management ($p < .001$), mission-driven work ($p = .016$), positive organisational culture ($p < .001$), opportunities for career progression ($p = .001$), training and skills development ($p < .001$) and recognition and appreciation ($p < .001$) as aspects they enjoy about their current job.

"I had £8,000 worth of unpaid tax written off for [one client]…And that is lifechanging for somebody. They haven't got that burden. And getting someone a benefit they deserve. You know, hopefully this guy I'll get his gas turned back on and get him so he's not

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[9] Chi squared test X2(2, 213) = 8.782, p = .013

[10] Chi squared test X2(2, 213) = 8.727, p = .013

frightened of the debts. I like battling with these organisations." (Interview - Debt advice supervisor)

Figure 3: Aspects people enjoy about current job by overall job satisfaction
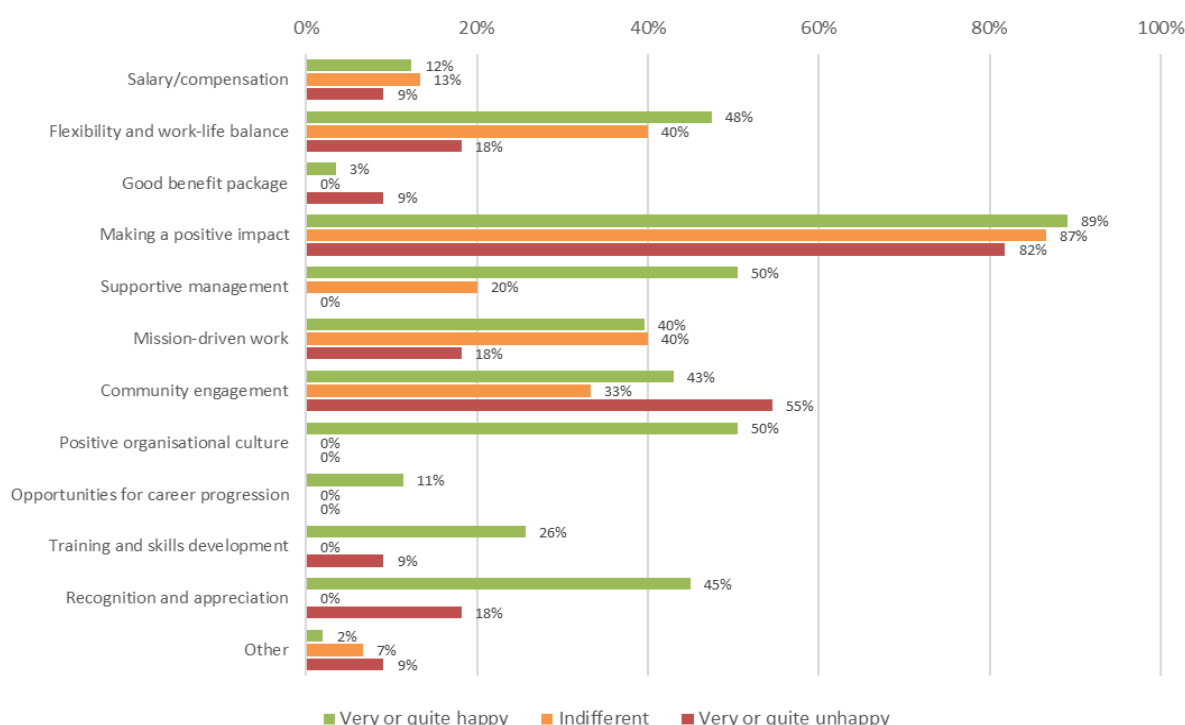
The majority of advice worker interviews identified getting good outcomes for a client as one of the most fulfilling aspects of the job. Making a positive impact, community engagement, problem solving and casework were all mentioned by advice workers.

> *"…it can be very, very fulfilling and that's why I do it, to be honest. People are incredibly grateful for the help that you give them. Someone you meet for the first time and they've got barely enough money to live on and they're sleeping on their friend's sofa, and a few months later you've doubled their income and they've got their own place to live, it's completely life-changing and people are very grateful." (interview - Benefits Adviser)*

4.1.   How people feel at work

In the survey of advice workers we asked all respondents which three words best describes how they feel at work. We then cleaned and coded the words into positive, negative or neutral (indeterminate). The benefit of this approach is that it avoids providing the respondent with a list of pre-populated words or phrases which might then bias their response. Figure 4 displays the 50 most frequent words used by respondents to describe how they feel at work. The most popular words were supported (37), busy (36), happy (33), stressed (31), tired (19), valued (18), satisfied (17), frustrated (16), overworked (14), overwhelmed (12) and underpaid (12).

Figure 5 shows every word that appears more than five times, and is coded by positive sentiment (green), negative sentiment (red) or neutral (blue). Many of the most frequent negative sentiment words are linked to either high workload (stressed, tired, overworked, overwhelmed) or perceived lack of organisational worth (undervalued, underpaid), while some of the most frequent positive sentiment words are linked to supportive management or good organisational culture (supported, valued, appreciated, motivated, engaged).

Figure 5: Sentiment of words used to describe how people feel at work by job role
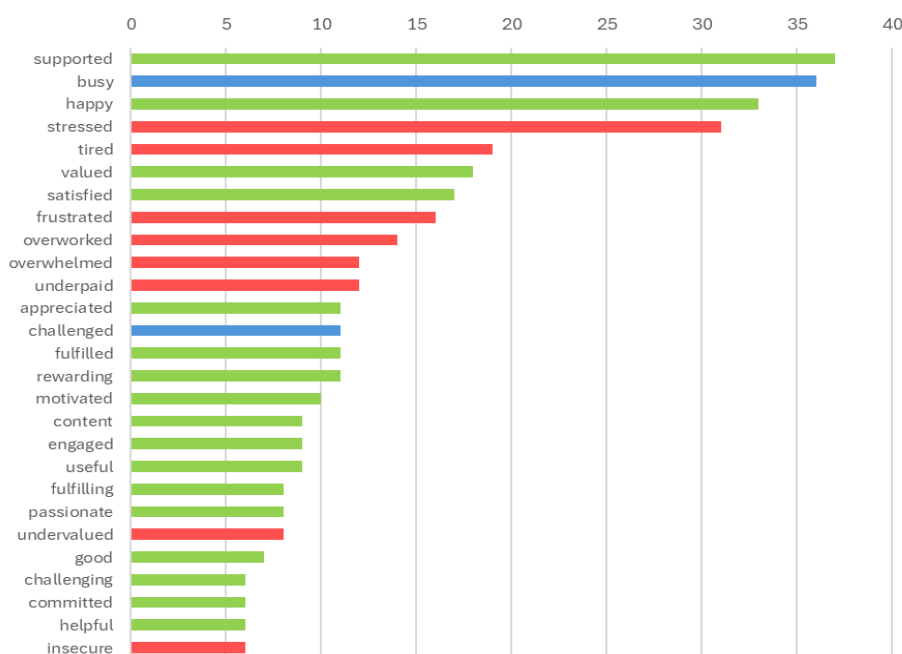
"…but a lot of the time I do think I make, or add to, the stress myself, so I think when I actually am really feeling overwhelmed, I can always go to my ... line manager … she's just so understanding, she's always like, look, if it's ever too much, stop enquiries, reception will say no to any new enquiries, so that can happen, but I think it's just... it goes back to why I want to do this job, so I feel bad saying no, but then I guess... I think the longer I'm in this role the more I'm realising that I have said no to some people in order to do good quality work for others." (Interview – Solicitor)
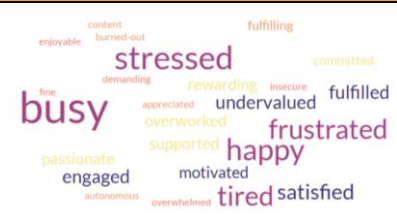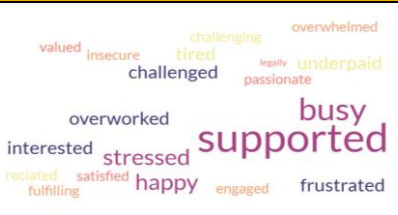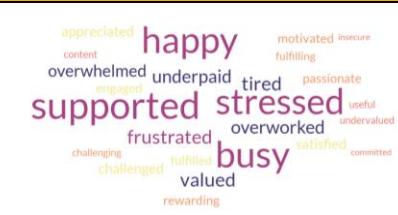
Having coded each word to a positive, negative or neutral sentiment, we then compared the ways in which different job roles describe feeling at work. Overall, around one third (31%) of words provided by respondents were negative compared to just over half (51%) which were positive (see Figure 6). Manager/supervisors were more likely to express negative sentiments and were the only group in which nearly as many negative words as positive were used to describe how they feel at work.

Figure 6: Sentiment of words used to describe how people feel at work by job role
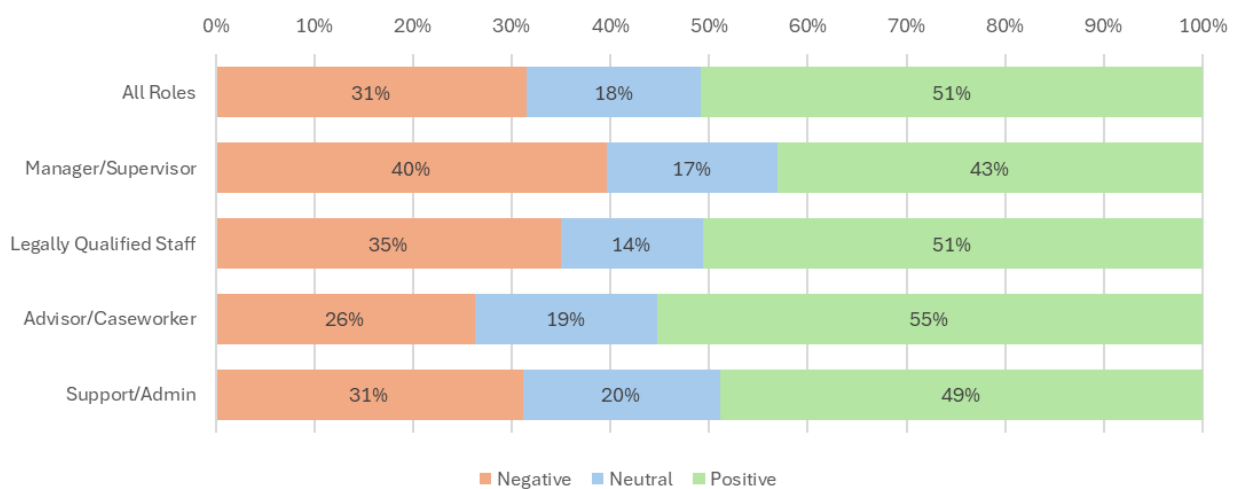
Comparing the most frequent words used by job role (as shown in Table 11), it is notable that "supported" is the most frequently occurring word for both Adviser/caseworkers (19) and Legally qualified staff (8) but does not feature in the top ten words for Manager/supervisors. The top five words for both Adviser/caseworkers and Legally qualified staff suggest workers who have a high workload (busy, stressed) but do not feel alone in the more stressful elements of their role (supported, happy). Those respondents in Manager/supervisor roles were more likely to use negative sentiment words and less likely to indicate that they felt supported and valued in their position.

Table 11: Word cloud of three words describing how people feel at work by job role

Manager/Supervisor	Legally Qualified Staff	Adviser/Caseworker
busy (14), stressed (10), happy (9), frustrated (8) and tired (8)	supported (8), busy (6), happy (4), stressed (4), and challenged (3)	supported (19), busy (16), happy (16), stressed (14) and valued (12)
Base: 62	Base: 30	Base: 120

"I think what could really be improved is a change in culture to try and avoid burnout, because we've had two people who I think experienced burnout; one of whom left the organisation and the other had to take a period of leave, and I think that's probably because people start and really push themselves too hard, and I don't think there's enough communication about the risks to wellbeing of doing that." (Interview - Immigration Solicitor)

5. Benefits

5.1. Existing evidence

Employee benefits play an important role, not just in improving recruitment, but also in protecting against in-work poverty[11] and maintaining employee wellbeing. In a survey of people currently employed in the Charity sector (CharityJob, 2023), the most common benefits received were 25+ days annual leave (not including bank holidays) (80%), remote working options (79%), flexible working hours (71%), training and development opportunities (53%) and mental health and wellbeing support (50%).

From the same list, respondents were asked to select up to five benefits most important to them when considering job opportunities. The most commonly selected benefits 25+ days annual leave (not including bank holidays) (71%), flexible working hours (67%) and remote working options (66%), training and development opportunities (44%) and four-day work week on full-time pay (27%).

A similar picture was observed in a survey of non-profit professionals (TPP, 2024), where the most valued benefits were flexible working hours (71%), enhanced pension contributions (59%) and annual leave (51%). The average days leave per year was 27, and average enhanced pension contributions from employers was 8%.

Existing data on the benefits currently received by advice sector workers is limited. The most common benefits reported by respondents to the Institute of Money Advisers (2024) survey were Occupational pension (84%), Access to an Employee Assistance Programme (40%), Cycle to work scheme (23%), Retail discounts (17%) and Subsidised parking (12%).

Both the survey of workers and the organisational survey asked respondents about the benefits available to employees. The worker survey also asked respondents which benefits were most important to them. The next section will focus on the differences between benefits reportedly offered by organisations and received by workers[12], followed by a section comparing those benefits received by workers to which were most important to them.

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[11] https://www.cipd.org/en/knowledge/guides/in-work-poverty/

[12] It should be noted that the response from workers is not limited to those who work for organisations who responded to the organisation survey, nor vice versa. This means one potential cause of any difference between benefits reported as offered by organisations and received by workers could be down to a difference in sample. Any discussion of these differences will therefore only focus on those benefits where the 95% confidence intervals for worker and organisation data do not overlap as this provides some evidence that the differences are not driven by a difference in sample.

5.2. Benefits offered vs benefits received

Figure 7: Benefits offered by organisations and received by workers
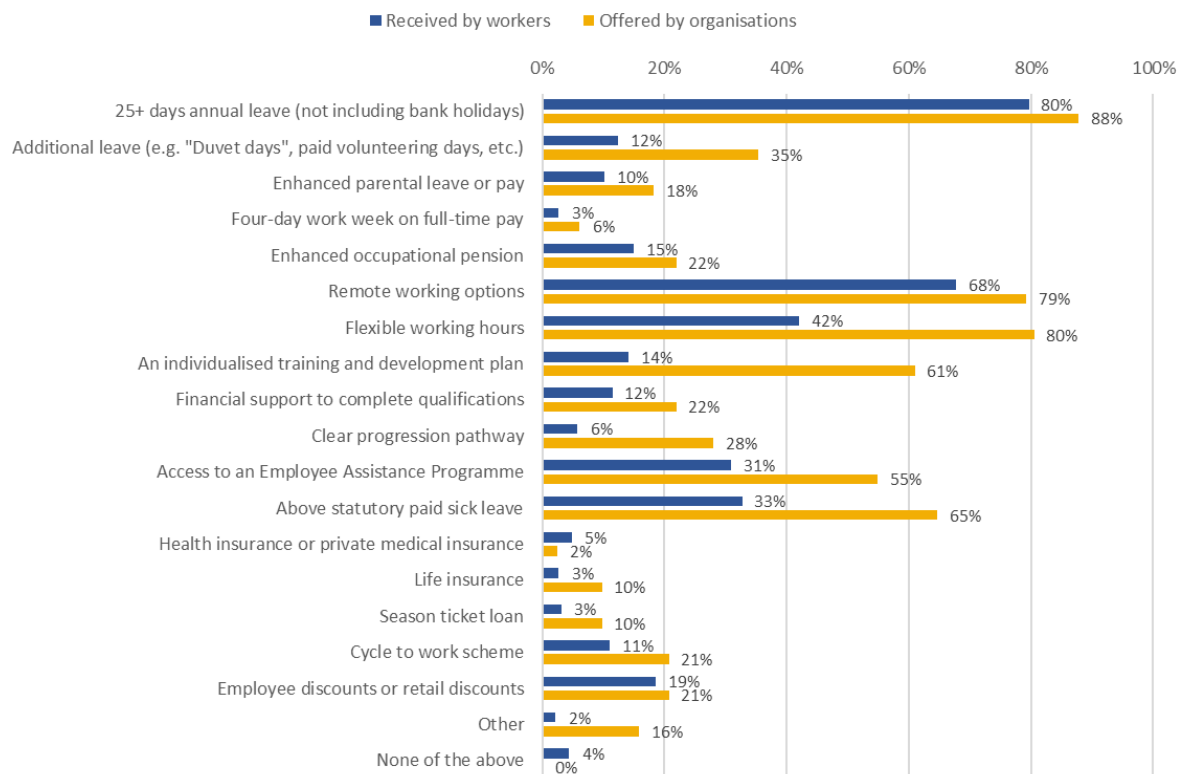
Base: Organisation 82, Worker 226

The most widely provided benefit was 25+ days annual leave (not including bank holidays) which was offered by 88% [CI 81%,95%] of organisations and received by 80% [CI 74%,85%] of workers (see Figure 7). Additional leave (e.g. "Duvet days", paid volunteering days, etc.) was offered by 35% [CI 25%,46%] of organisations and received by 12% [CI 8%,17%] of workers.

The next most frequent benefit offered by 80% [CI 72%,89%] of organisations was flexible working hours. This was only identified as a received benefit by 42% [CI 36%,48%] of workers. There are several possible reasons for this difference including:

- a lack of awareness amongst workers/lack of communication from organisations about flexible working policy (which feels unlikely given the generally informed responses by this sample of workers);
- differing understanding of what is meant by flexible working hours;
- policy vs culture meaning that while flexible hours are offered they are implicitly discouraged by management practices or attitudes; and
- limited flexibility in practice/constraints of workload meaning that while the organisation offers "flexible hours" the realities of the job mean that working hours are often inflexible.

There was also a notable difference in the proportion of organisations offering (79% [CI 70%,88%]) and workers receiving (68% [CI 62%,74%]) remote working options, although as there was overlap in the confidence intervals this could be down to the differing samples.

Around two thirds of organisations (65% [CI 54%,75%]) provided above statutory paid sick leave, compared with only one third of workers (33% [CI 27%,39%]) who reported it as a benefit. It is more likely that this difference is down to a lack of awareness amongst workers as it requires knowledge of statutory sick leave as well as the organisation's policy. If a worker has not had time off sick it unlikely to be an area of focus for them in terms of employment benefits. Occupational sick pay (OSP) will be discussed in section 5.2 below.

More than half of organisations (55% [CI 44%,66%]) provided staff with access to an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), compared with less than one third of workers (31% [CI 25%,37%]) who reported it as a benefit. Again this may be due to a lack of awareness amongst workers of the availability of EAP as if they have not used it they may not be aware that it is available. Employee wellbeing is discussed in more detail in section 7.

Finally, more than half of organisations (61% [CI 50%,72%]) provided an individualised training and development plan compared with less than one fifth (14% [CI 10%,19%]) of workers who reported receiving it as a benefit. What is notable about this is that unlike some of the other benefits above which require awareness of a benefit from staff, individualised training and development plans are specific to individual workers and so if they are being provided then staff should know about them.

There was also a disconnect between the quarter of organisations (28% [CI 18%,38%]) who reported providing a clear progression pathway and the proportion of workers (6% [CI 3%,9%]) who reported receiving it as a benefit. Training and career progression is examined in depth in section 6.

5.3.   Benefits received vs. considered most important

Figure 8: Benefits received by workers and those they deem most important
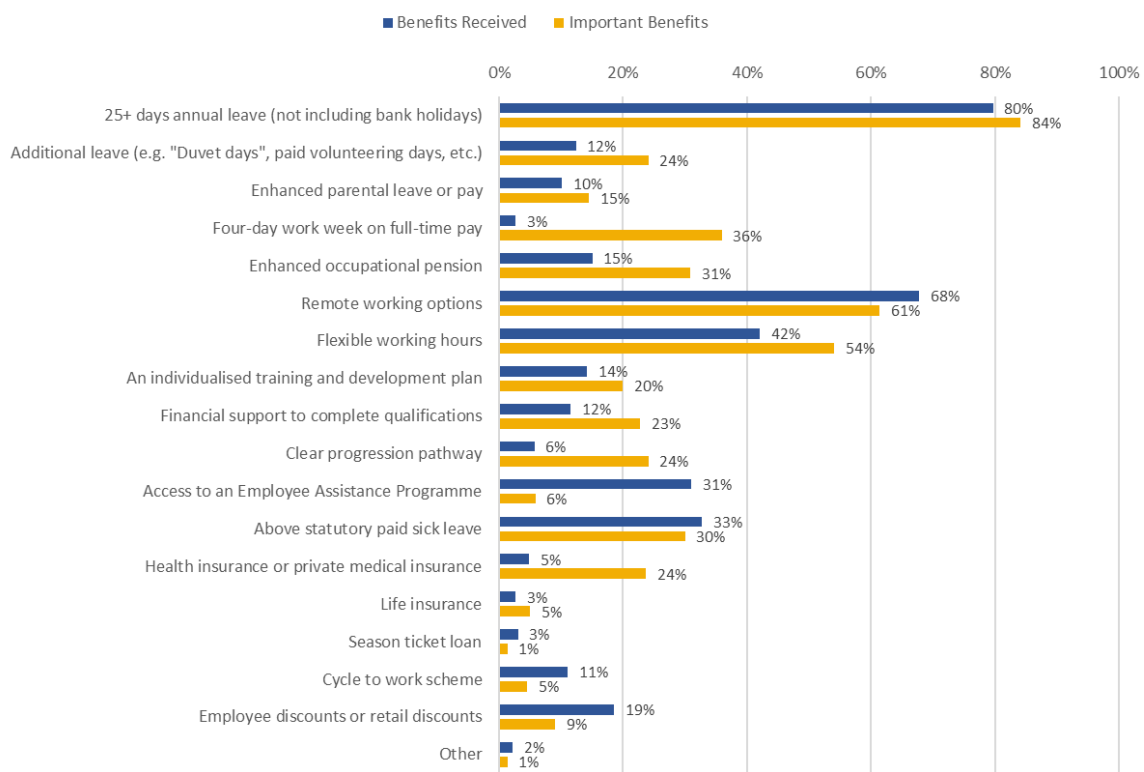
Base: Benefits received 226, most important 220

The most important benefit to advice workers was 25+ days annual leave (not including bank holidays) which was identified as one of the top five most important benefits by 84% [CI 79%, 89%] of respondents (see Figure 8), and was, as previously mentioned, received by 80% of respondents. The remainder of this section focuses on benefits where the proportion receiving them and those who thought they were important were markedly different.

The next three most important benefits were remote working options (61% [CI 55%, 68%]), flexible working hours (54% [CI 48%, 61%]) and a four-day week on full-time pay (36% [CI 30%, 42%]). While remote and flexible working were available to over half of respondents, only 3% [CI 1%, 5%] reported having a four-day working week available. Flexible working (including condensed hours working) is discussed in further detail in section 5.3.

Just under one third (31% [CI 25%, 37%]) of respondents identified enhanced occupational pensions as one of the most important benefits, although this was only received by half that number or respondents (15% [CI 10%, 21%]). Occupational pensions are discussed in section 5.4.

Additional leave (e.g. "Duvet days", paid volunteering days, etc.) was considered important by around one quarter of respondents (24% [CI 18%, 30%]) and was received by just over one tenth

(12% [CI 8%,17%]), although as previously mentioned this is much lower than reported in the organisational survey and is discussed in more detail in section 7.3.

A clear progression pathway was considered important by nearly one quarter (24% [CI 18%,30%]) of respondents but was received by a small proportion of workers (6% [CI 3%,9%]), although again this is much lower than reported in the organisational survey and is discussed in more detail in section 6.

Health insurance or private medical insurance was considered important by nearly one quarter (24% [CI 18%,29%]) of respondents but was again received by a smaller proportion of workers (5% [CI 2%,8%]). Non-taxable benefits including employee/retail discounts[13] and Cycle to work schemes[14] were both received by a higher proportion of respondents than considered them important.

The only other benefit which was received by a notably higher proportion of respondents than considered it important was Access to an Employee Assistance Programme which was received by over one third (31% [CI 25%, 37%]) but considered one of the most important by only 6% [CI 3%, 9%]. This is discussed alongside other well-being issues in section 7.

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[13] received: 19% [CI 13%, 24%]; important 9% [CI 5%, 13%]

[14] received: 11% [CI 7%, 15%]; important 5% [CI 2%, 7%]

5.4.   Annual leave

Current statutory annual leave entitlements in the UK are defined by the Working Time Regulations 1998. These specify that:

- Workers are entitled to 5.6 weeks of paid annual leave per year. For someone working five days a week, this equates to 28 days per year.[15]
- Employers can choose to include bank holidays as part of the 5.6 weeks' statutory leave. As there are currently 8 regular bank holidays[16] this means that all full-time workers are entitled to at least 20 days annual leave not including bank holidays.
- Part-time workers are entitled to 5.6 weeks of paid holiday, calculated on a pro-rata basis.

The fact that it is optional for bank holidays to be included in a workers leave entitlement can create confusion when comparing leave entitlement as "28 days inclusive of holidays" is equivalent to "20 days annual leave" (which must exclude bank holidays as it would otherwise be below the statutory minimum). Employers may also offer additional leave but only at set times of the year, for example if their office closes around the end of the year they may provide these days as non-optional annual leave.

When asked for the standard full time leave entitlement for staff at the start of their employment (excluding bank holidays) the mean average was 25.6 days per year and the median was 25 (see Table 12).[17]

Table 12: Average basic annual leave entitlement by organisational income

	Mean	Median	Minimum	Maximum	Base
<=£500,000	23.9	25.0	20.0	30.0	26
£500,001 to £1m	25.7	25.0	20.0	30.0	30
More than £1m	27.2	28.0	22.0	31.0	24
Total	25.6	25.0	20.0	31.0	80

Almost all responding advice sector organisations with an income of more than £500,000 offered basic annual leave entitlement of 25 days or more (see Figure 9). For smaller organisations (income

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[15] https://www.gov.uk/holiday-entitlement-rights

[16] https://www.gov.uk/bank-holidays

[17] In cleaning the annual leave reported by advice organisations we approached several organisations to clarify whether bank holidays had been included and adjusted the data accordingly. The quality of the annual leave data reported here is variable and care should be taken when drawing conclusions.

<=£500,000), 46% offered less than 25 days per year (with one quarter offering the statutory minimum).

Figure 9: Basic annual leave entitlement by organisational income
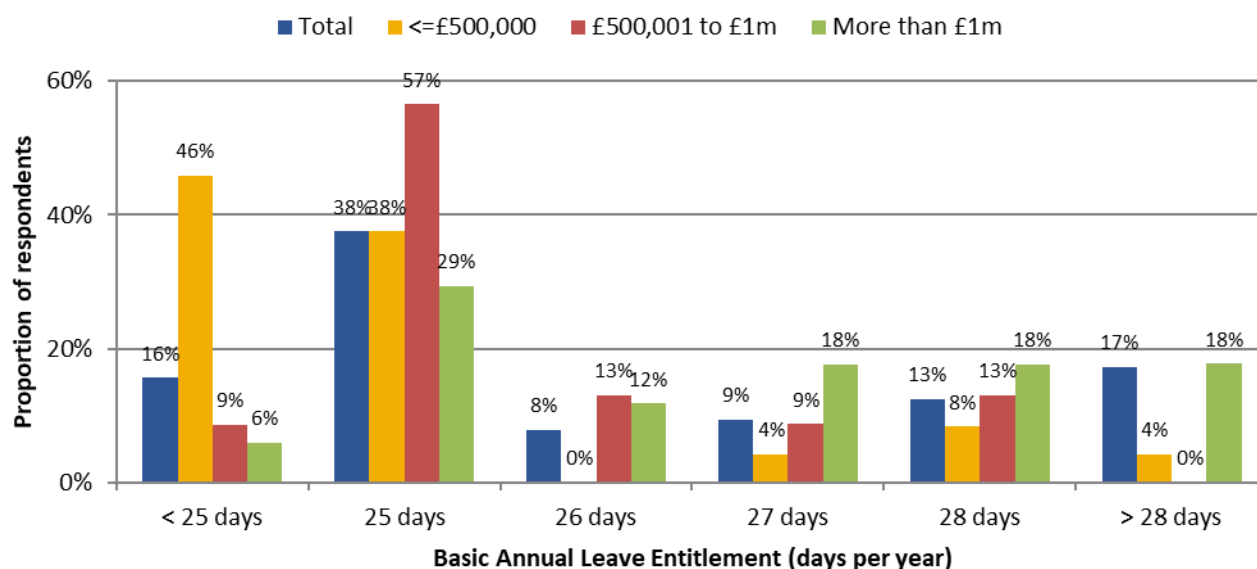
Under half (43%) of respondents said their organisation offered an increase in annual leave entitlement based on the length of service (see Figure 10). Smaller organisations were less likely to offer an increase in annual leave than those with larger incomes.

Figure 10: Whether offers an increase in annual leave entitlement based on the length of service by income
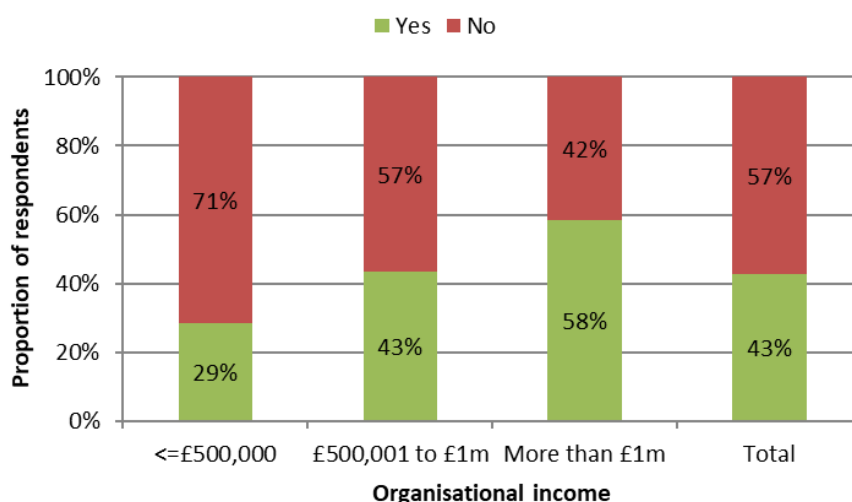
Of those organisations which did offer an increase in annual leave entitlement based on the length of service, 33 provided details about how their system worked. There was much variation but the most common attributes were that the system either started upon completion of the first full year (39%) or after a set number of years (25% were after 2 years, 23% were after 5 years). The majority

(82%) increased the annual leave entitlement by one day per year with the remainder typically increasing by a set number of days after a set period (e.g. three days increase every five years). Most (82%) specified a maximum number of annual leave days with the most common being 28 days (16%) and 30 days (39%).

In the interviews with sector leaders, many of them said they provided a leave entitlement over the statutory minimum. Some organisations also close their offices in particular period (notably between Christmas and New Year) and give this time as additional leave to employees.

"We offer really good quality amounts of leave: 25 days plus public holidays plus period between Christmas and New Year; and our office is closed in the last week of August." *(Leadership Interview, Specialist Advice Charity)*

5.1. Maternity pay, paternity pay and parental leave

5.1.1. Statutory requirements

Statutory Maternity Leave (SML) is 52 weeks. It's made up of 26 weeks of Ordinary Maternity Leave and 26 weeks of Additional Maternity Leave. Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) is payable for up to 39 weeks, provided employees meet specific eligibility criteria (including being employed for 26 weeks).[18] The first six weeks of SMP are paid at 90% of the employee's average weekly earnings. The remaining 33 weeks are paid at £184.03 per week (from April 2024) or 90% of their average weekly earnings, whichever is lower.

Statutory Paternity Pay (SPP) provides eligible employees with up to two weeks SPP, taken either as a single block or as two separate weeks, to be taken within 52 weeks following the child's birth or adoption. It is paid at £184.03 per week (from April 2024) or 90% of their average weekly earnings, whichever is lower.

Statutory Adoption Leave (SAL) provides eligible employees with up to 52 weeks of leave following the adoption of a child. The first six weeks of Statutory Adoption Pay (SAP) are paid at 90% of the employee's average weekly earnings. The remaining 33 weeks are paid at £184.03 per week (from April 2024) or 90% of their average weekly earnings, whichever is lower.[19]

Employees can also share leave and parental pay entitlements with their partner through Shared Parental Leave (SPL) and Statutory Shared Parental Pay (ShPP). Employees can start SPL if they're eligible and they or their partner end their maternity or adoption leave or pay early. The

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[18] https://www.gov.uk/maternity-pay-leave/pay

[19] https://www.gov.uk/employers-adoption-pay-leave

remaining leave will be available as SPL. The remaining pay may be available as ShPP. SPL can be taken in up to 3 separate blocks of leave, with parents choosing how much of the SPL each of them will take.[20]

In addition, eligible employees have a right to take up to 4 weeks of unpaid parental leave per year to look after their child's welfare.[21]

5.1.2. Enhanced parental pay and leave

Around one in five (18%) organisations reported providing enhanced parental leave or pay as an employee benefit. Of the sixteen organisations that provided additional information about their parental leave benefits, nearly half (7) had a qualifying period that employees would need to have worked before being eligible for the benefits, which were typically either 1 or 2 years of continuous employment. The enhancements themselves varied considerably with the most generous providing 6 months full pay. Other examples included:

- Maternity pay of 13 weeks full pay, 13 weeks half pay and then 13 weeks SMP alongside 3 weeks full pay of (gender neutral) new parent leave.
- 12 weeks full pay, 12 weeks half pay, 12 weeks statutory
- 9 weeks 90% pay, 17 weeks London Living Wage rates, 12 weeks statutory
- 6 weeks full pay, 6 weeks half pay - gender neutral

There was no obvious pattern in the provision of additional parental pay/leave, although most (11) provided a period of at least six weeks full pay for enhanced maternity pay.

According to CIPD (2022), the most common enhancement to maternity allowance (offered by one fifth of employers) was 26 weeks of enhanced maternity pay at or near the full rate of pay followed by 13 weeks at the SMP rate or 90% of the average weekly earnings. Almost half of employers in the CIPD research did not offer any additional paternity leave, with one of the key recommendations that the UK government should *"Enhance the statutory paternity/partner provision to six weeks at or near the full rate of pay, to help deliver more balance and choice over the distribution of caring responsibilities and better reflect the changing nature of modern families."*[22]

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[20] https://www.gov.uk/shared-parental-leave-and-pay-employer-guide

[21] https://www.gov.uk/parental-leave

[22] CIPD (2022), p. 2

5.2.   Occupational sick pay

Statutory Sick Pay (SSP)[23] is paid at a rate of £116.75, and is paid only to employees who earn an average of at least £123 per week and have been ill for more than 3 days in a row. The recently published Employment Rights Bill[24] aims to remove both the lower earnings limit and the three 'waiting' days, meaning employees will be eligible for SSP from day one of sickness absence if the bill becomes law.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD, 2021) examined existing statutory and occupational sick pay (OSP) in the UK and produced recommendations for both the UK government and employers which included:

> *"If they don't already have one, employers should consider the benefits of introducing an occupational sick pay scheme to provide income protection beyond the statutory minimum for employees who can't work when sick. Employers should ensure the design of their scheme, including the qualifying criteria and duration of payments, supports the effective return to work and rehabilitation of individuals." (CIPD, 2021, p. 3)*

Around two thirds of advice sector organisations (65%) stated they provided above statutory paid sick leave, although only one provided any details about the working of their schemes which had a probationary period and after five years continuous service paid 1 month's full pay and 1 month's half pay.

A 2023 survey of employers on health and wellbeing at work (CIPD, 2023b), found that 69% of all employers (72% of non-profit sector and 84% of public sector) had OSP. A 2019 Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) research report[25] found that large employers (250+ employees) were more likely to pay sick pay above the statutory minimum than small employers (2-49 employees) (77% and 26% respectively).

Data from the CIPD Labour Market Outlook survey (CIPD, 2021) survey show that around a third of all employers, and those in the voluntary sector, offer employees access to their OSP from their first day of employment (see Figure 11). The most common qualifying criteria (where they exist) in the voluntary sector were for 6 months (26%) or 3 months (18%) continuous employment.

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[23] https://www.gov.uk/statutory-sick-pay/eligibility

[24] https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3737

[25] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sickness-absence-and-health-employer-behaviour-and-practice/sickness-absence-and-health-in-the-workplace-understanding-employer-behaviour-and-practice-an-interim-summary

Figure 11: What length of service, if any, is needed for employees to qualify for occupational sick pay?

Legend: None, 3 months, 6 months, 12 months, 2 years, Other, Don't know

All employers: None 33%, 3 months 19%, 6 months 21%
Public sector: None 46%, 3 months 13%, 6 months 19%
Voluntary sector: None 34%, 3 months 18%, 6 months 26%
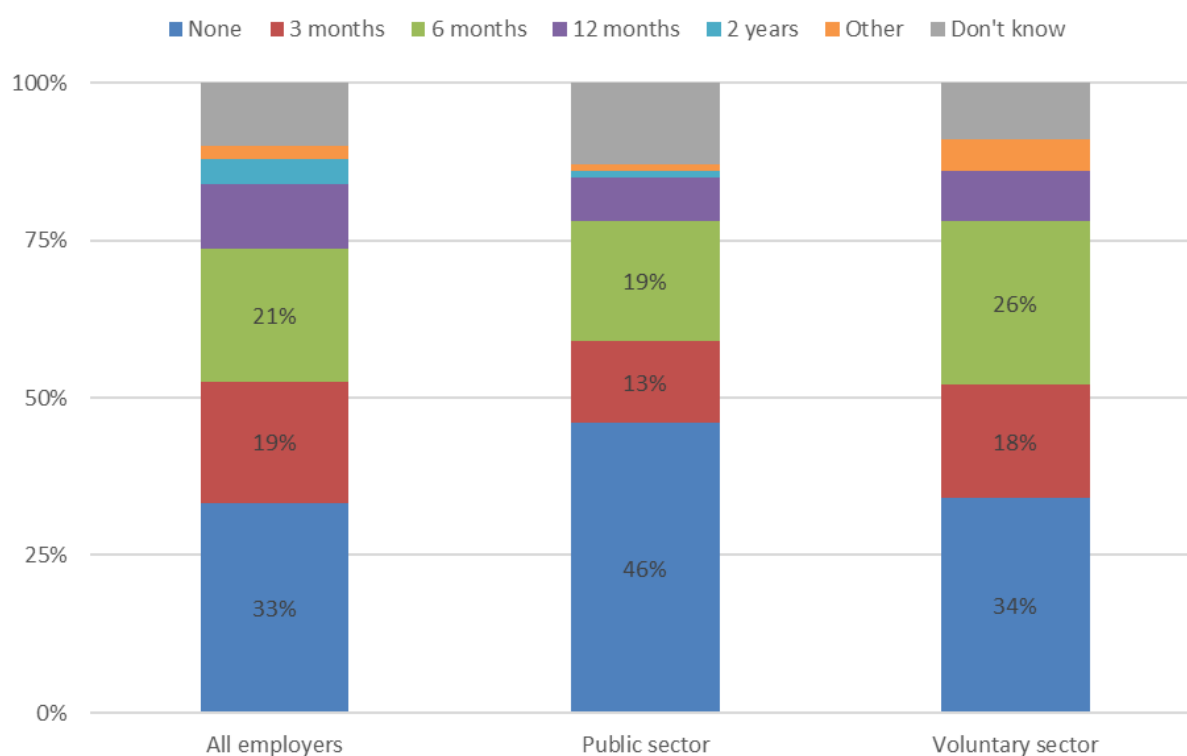
Base: all offering occupational sick pay: 768; public sector: 193; voluntary sector: 60; Source: CIPD Labour Market Outlook, spring 2021 (CIPD, 2021).

The same survey provided details of how many months' full pay are provided under employers' occupational sick pay schemes (see Table 13). By far the most common in the public sector was 6 months (60%), while in the private sector it was less than 3 months (31%). The voluntary sector had the greatest variation with the most common provision 6 months (25%), 3-5 months (24%) and Other (18%).

Table 13: Number of months' pay provided under employers' occupational sick pay schemes (%)

	All employers	Private sector	Public sector	Voluntary sector
Less than 3 months	23%	31%	4%	12%
3-5 months	18%	20%	9%	24%
6 months	31%	22%	60%	25%
more than 6 months	7%	8%	9%	7%
Other	9%	8%	6%	18%
Don't know	11%	11%	12%	14%
Base	768	453	183	56

Base: all employers providing OSP. Source: CIPD Labour Market Outlook, spring 2021 (CIPD, 2021). Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

Alongside the desire to protect employees from financial hardship, employers must also consider both the affordability of their OSP and avoid creating disincentives for a return to work. An independent review of sickness absence (Black & Frost, 2011) referenced a number of studies suggesting a causal link between high sickness absence and generous OSP.

5.3.   Flexible and remote working arrangements

"we have boundaries, we have limits where it unduly affects the service or other people working in the service…but we are ultimately flexible on how people work." (Leadership interview – DDPO)

The majority (85%) of respondents were working on permanent contracts, with the proportion higher for Manager/supervisors (94%) and Legally qualified staff (97%) (see Table 14). One fifth (20%) of Adviser/caseworker roles were on temporary contract basis. The overall figure for temporary contracts for employees in the wider economy is 5.3%[26] suggesting that there is much greater use of temporary contracts in the advice sector, particularly for Adviser/caseworkers. This is likely due to uncertainty over funding for these roles as has been discussed elsewhere in this report.

Table 14: Full-time/part-time status by job role

Employment status	All	Manager/ Supervisor	Legally Qualified Staff	Adviser/ Caseworker	Support/ Admin
Permanent	85.2%	93.5%	96.7%	80.2%	68.8%
Temporary/Contract	14.8%	6.5%	3.3%	19.8%	31.3%
Base	229	62	30	121	16

Under two thirds (62%) of respondents were working in the sector full-time, with the proportion higher for Legally qualified staff (77%) and Support/admin (75%) (see Table 15). Over one third (42%) of Adviser/caseworkers reported working part-time. The overall figure for part-time working in the wider economy is 24%[27] suggesting that part-time working may be more prevalent amongst Adviser/caseworkers than in other parts of the economy.

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[26]

https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/fulltimeparttimeandtemporaryworkersseasonallyadjustedemp01sa

[27] House of Commons Library (2025), p. 13

Table 15: Full-time/part-time status by job role

Full-time/part-time status	All	Manager/ Supervisor	Legally Qualified Staff	Adviser/ Caseworker	Support/ Admin
Full-time	62.4%	61.3%	76.7%	57.9%	75.0%
Part-time	37.6%	38.7%	23.3%	42.1%	25.0%
Base	229	62	30	121	16

Further analysis of working hours and overtime working is included in the companion report on Advice Sector Pay.

> "[As a manager] once people are up and running, I don't really care how often they're in the office and how often they're not, as long as when their clients need them in the office, they're in the office…When people are new I tend to tell them, come in at least twice a week, just so you can start getting used to the faces, so that if there are any problems you only have to lean over your shoulder and say, hey, what does this mean, or something like that, rather than feeling like they have to call me and feel awkward about that…" (Interview - Welfare Rights Manager)

The most frequent working patterns were non-flexible set contracted hours (43%) followed by working flexible hours with set core hours (36%) (see Table 16). Adviser/caseworkers (49%) and Support/admin (69%) roles were more likely to work non-flexible hours than Manager/supervisors (31%) or Legally qualified staff (33%).[28]

Table 16: Working pattern by job role

Employment status	All	Manager/ Supervisor	Legally Qualified Staff	Adviser/ Caseworker	Support/ Admin
Non-flexible set contracted hours	43.4%	30.6%	33.3%	49.2%	68.8%
Work flexible hours with set core hours	36.4%	50.0%	36.7%	31.7%	18.8%
Work flexible hours with no set core hours	7.0%	8.1%	13.3%	5.8%	0.0%
Compressed hours	4.8%	3.2%	13.3%	4.2%	0.0%
4 day working week on full pay	4.4%	4.8%	3.3%	4.2%	6.3%
Other	3.9%	3.2%	0.0%	5.0%	6.3%
Base	228	62	30	120	16

Given the difference in the proportion of organisations offering flexible working hours (80%) and the staff saying they received them as a benefit (42%) we examined what proportion of workers who

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[28] Fisher's Exact (two-tailed p = .01).

reported working some flexible hours[29] also identified those as a benefit in the survey. Around one third (34%) of staff who reported working some flexible hours above did not identify "working flexible hours" as a benefit they received in the same survey.

Table 17: Whether reported flexible hours as a benefit by job role

	All	Manager/Supervisors	Legally Qualified Staff	Adviser/ Caseworker
Flexible working but no benefit reported	34%	37%	20%	36%
Flexible working and benefit reported	66%	63%	80%	64%
Base	120	41	20	55

"I do think if we made it easier or slightly more inviting of people working against schedules it feels like an easy way to being more effective in terms of how we recruit because my view is the roles that I'm managing, lots of the support we do is remote I think as long one's available generally throughout the day whether one starts at ten and ends at six or starts at eight and ends at four, it's usually inconsequential, so I think more flexibility is something as an organisation we could be better…" (Interview - Service Manager)

In both the leadership focus groups and several leadership interviews, the COVID pandemic was identified as a pivotal moment in the moving organisations towards remote and more flexible working arrangements. Participants mentioned that some time in the office was required, either in contractual terms (e.g. one organisation has a minimum one day in the office a fortnight) or, more commonly mentioned, whenever they need to see a client. Participants identified both positives (in terms of flexibility and work-life balance) and also negatives (in terms of lost informal conversations and an impact on staff development).

"I think it works really effectively. And I think it's great for our clients as well, they're not forced to come into a central London office space to do something they could on Zoom, on Teams, on the telephone, on WhatsApp." (Focus Group participant)

Advantages of team hybrid arrangements mentioned were the conversations between team members, development of volunteers, younger and newer staff, accelerated learning, listening to others, mutual help and team work. According to data from the ONS Time Use Survey, employees

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[29] All those who did not respond either Non-flexible set contracted hours or Other. Support/admin excluded from individual reporting due to small resulting sample but included in total.

who can work from home (including with a hybrid arrangement) spent more time on rest, exercise, sport and well-being.[30]

According to data from the ONS Opinions and Lifestyle Survey,[31] in January 2021 34% of working adults were working from home, 39% travelled to work only, and just 9% had some form of hybrid working. The latest data from March 2025 shows a significant fall in home working to 15% and an increase in hybrid working to 29% (41% travelled to work only). This is likely to have been affected by the Employment Relations (Flexible Working) Act 2023 coming into force in 2024. This gave employees additional rights to request flexible working arrangements from their first day of employment.[32] Employees have the right to request a change to the number of hours they work, their start and finish times, the days they work, and where they work. Employers must then deal with these requests in a 'reasonable manner'.[33]

Despite the legislative shift, there is evidence that in some sectors home working is being removed as an option and hybrid working is being more strictly defined in some sectors. [34]

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[30] https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/whoarethehybridworkers/2024-11-11

[31] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/datasets/publicopinionsandsocialtrendsgreatbritainworkingarrangements

[32] Statutory flexible working governs how employees can request changes to how they work and how employers should respond. These are distinct from employer-set flexible working policies and flexible working as a reasonable adjustment which is governed by different legal requirements (see section 8.3).

[33] https://www.gov.uk/flexible-working

[34] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c8ew0jrjxz9o

5.4.   Occupational pension

Automatic enrolment was introduced in the UK in 2012 and obliges employers to enroll all qualifying workers into a workplace pension scheme. The statutory contribution rates for 2025/26 is 8% total contributions, of which at least 3% is from the employer.[35]

Enhanced occupational pensions offer more generous employer contributions than the statutory minimum requirements. Just over one fifth of advice organisations (22%) reported providing enhanced occupational pension as a benefits, although this varied by organisational income from just 4% of organisations with income of <=£500,000 to 33% of those with an income of more than £1m.[36]

In the Leadership interviews, two people talked about increasing employer pension contributions from 3% to 5% as part of a range of measures to improve recruitment.

There are various types of occupational pension schemes available, including defined benefits (e.g. final salary or career average schemes) and defined contribution schemes. Use of defined benefit schemes has seen a decline in recent years due to concerns around affordability. Data from the Pensions Regulator[37] indicates that only 3% of registered charity defined benefit pension schemes are still open to new members, with the vast majority (78%) closed to future accruals (CTFA), where existing members can no longer accrue new years of service and no new members can join.

The Living Pension standard[38] is a voluntary savings target for employers, to help workers build up a pension pot that will provide enough income to meet basic everyday needs in retirement. It is independently calculated based on the real cost of living. The current Living Pension savings rate is 12% (compared to the statutory requirement of 8%), with the difference made up by an increase in employers' pension contributions to at least 7%.

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[35] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-the-automatic-enrolment-earnings-trigger-and-qualifying-earnings-band-for-202526-supporting-analysis/review-of-the-automatic-enrolment-earnings-trigger-and-qualifying-earnings-band-for-202526-supporting-analysis#:~:text=contribution%20rates%20for%20employers%20and,3%25%20is%20from%20the%20employer

[36] Chi squared test X2(2, 82) = 8.47, p = .013

[37] https://www.thepensionsregulator.gov.uk/en/document-library/research-and-analysis/occupational-defined-benefit-landscape

[38] https://www.livingwage.org.uk/living-pension

6.   Training and career progression

6.1.   Existing evidence

Real terms per employee training spend has fallen by 25% in the charity sector since 2011 alongside a 20% reduction in training time per employee between 2011 and 2022 (Uppal, 2024). Funding is an obvious barrier (with 93% of charities identifying cost as a barrier to accessing management and leadership training (Cranfield Trust, 2024)), as are the use of short-term contracts and time availability (Uppal, 2024). The charity sector offers less job-specific and new technology skills training compared to both private and public sectors (Kitson, 2024b).

The unique makeup of parts of the workforce pose unique organisational challenges. A report by the Advice Services Alliance (2020b) outlined the role that law students or recent graduates, keen to gain practical experience, play in providing a resource for advice sector organisations. This can result in high staff and volunteer turnover, particularly on an academic yearly basis. Organisations unable to offer training contracts or career development opportunities are unlikely to retain qualified individuals.

Recent changes in working practices, like the shift to "blended advice"[39] , have also created new challenges for adviser's professional development, supervision and relationships with colleagues. A report for the Ministry of Justice (Mant et al, 2023) found that new modes of advice delivery could also create additional workload for advisers and posed unique challenges to staff wellbeing. Organisations would need to consider how to maintain a sense of community whilst advisers are using blended models of advice.

London Funders (2019) briefing on supporting people working in community-facing organisations identifies three types of workforce pressure: beneficiaries (increasingly complex cases, less support, poorer mental health, etc.), organisational (unstable funding, workforce changes, reduced training/supervision, etc.), and personal (low pay, insecure contracts, etc.) The paper also discusses the link between supervision and learning and development for all staff and their emotional wellbeing.

Career progression is an important retention tool (as seen by training and development opportunities being a top five most important benefit to 44% of non-profit candidates (CharityJob, 2023)). A small sample survey of AQS members (Advice Services Alliance, 2020b) found that nearly

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[39] Blended advice refers to models of advice delivery which involve providing legal advice through some combination of face-to-face interaction and remote communications.

one in five respondents thought a clear career structure and progression route may make a career in the advice sector more attractive.

Providing learning and development opportunities is also an important element of building trust between employer and employee and can help employees feel valued and supported, which in turn has positive effects on wellbeing and engagement (Mind, 2024).

Respondents to a survey of Youth Access organisations (Youth Access, 2021) identified training needs in relation to developing areas of specialist knowledge, campaigning and advocacy, leadership and team working, as well as digital skills. A survey of small London advice organisations (ASA, 2021) found that *"there is a substantial digital skills gap that needs to be addressed. Supporting organisations to expand their workforces and team working capabilities was also a key issue identified across participants, as was recruiting staff with specialist knowledge or developing this knowledge among existing staff."* [40]

The picture is not uniform across the sector, the majority (69%) of debt advisers responding to an IMA survey (Institute of Money Advisers, 2020) were satisfied with their training, although only 35% reported being satisfied with career opportunities.

6.2. Experience and qualifications

Almost half (48%) of respondents had been working in the sector for 10 years or more, increasing to 69% of Manager/supervisors (see Table 18). Support/admin staff were the most likely to have been in role for 1 year or less (50%), followed by Adviser/caseworkers (14%). It is notable that 38% of Adviser/caseworkers have been working in the sector for 10 years or more, suggesting a wealth of experience in roles that are not classified as supervisory or managerial.

Table 18: Survey response by length of time working in sector and job role

| Time working in sector	All	Manager/ Supervisor	Legally Qualified Staff	Adviser/ Caseworker	Support/ Admin
1 year or less	11.4%	1.6%	0.0%	14.0%	50.0%
2 – 3 years	16.2%	8.1%	16.7%	21.5%	6.3%
4 – 5 years	7.9%	8.1%	6.7%	8.3%	6.3%
6 – 9 years	17.0%	12.9%	23.3%	18.2%	12.5%
10 years or more	47.6%	69.4%	53.3%	38.0%	25.0%
Base	229	62	30	121	16

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[40] ASA, 2021, p.29

Respondents who were working either in Manager/supervisor roles or as Adviser/caseworkers were asked for their highest advice related qualification. Over half of both groups stated they did not have any advice related qualifications (see Table 19). The most frequent level for Manager/supervisors was a level 5 equivalent qualification (20%) while for Adviser/caseworkers it was level 3 (21%).

Table 19: Highest advice qualification level by job role

Highest Advice Qualification Level	All	Manager/Supervisors	Adviser/Caseworker
Level 1	4.1%	1.7%	5.4%
Level 2	4.1%	3.3%	4.5%
Level 3	18.0%	13.3%	20.5%
Level 4	5.8%	8.3%	4.5%
Level 5	12.8%	20.0%	8.9%
None	55.2%	53.3%	56.3%
Base	172	60	112

The specific qualifications mentioned by the most people were the Level 3 NVQ Certificate in Advice and Guidance (City & Guilds), the Level 3 Certificate in Generalist Advice Work (OCN) and Other Level 5 qualification or higher (see Figure 12).

Figure 12: Highest advice related qualifications
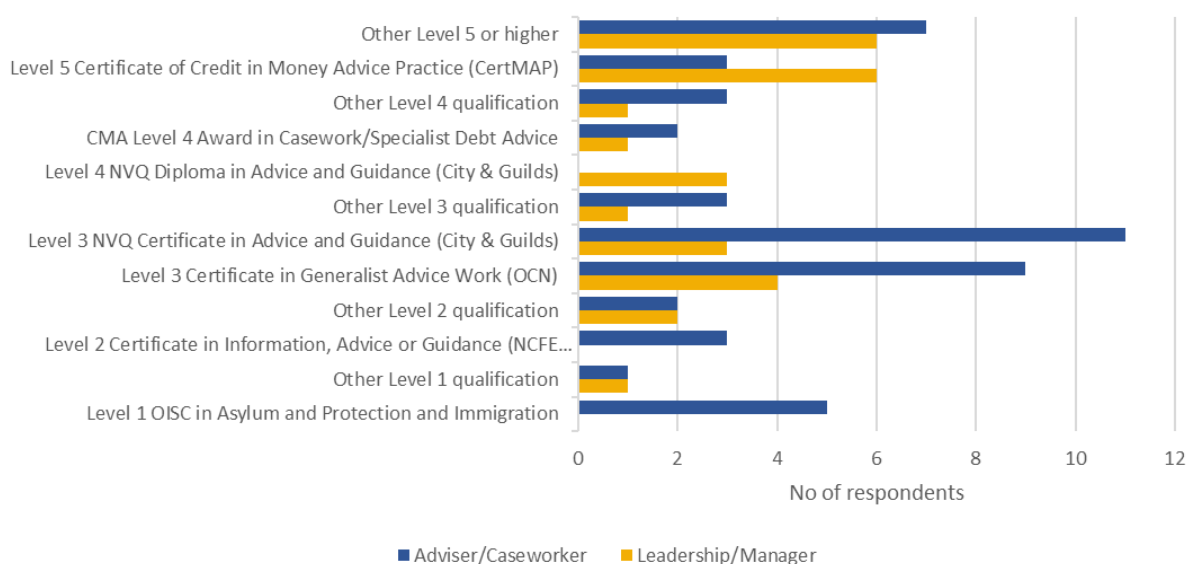
All advice staff were also asked about relevant accreditations and memberships. The most frequent accreditation for adviser/caseworker was IOSC level1 (13%), for Legally Qualified Staff was IOSC level 2 or 3 (13%) and or Manager/Supervisors was IMA accreditation (15%) (see Table 20).

Table 20: Accreditations and memberships by job role

accreditations and memberships	All	Manager/ Supervisor	Legally Qualified Staff	Adviser/ Caseworker
IOSC level 1	8%	5%	0%	13%
IOSC level 2 or 3	5%	2%	13%	5%
IMA accreditation	7%	15%	3%	6%
IMA membership	5%	10%	3%	3%
Member of London Money Advice Group	5%	11%	0%	3%
No Response	70%	58%	80%	69%
Base	229	62	30	121

The majority (87%) of advice staff were not currently working towards an advice-related qualification (see Table 21). Around one fifth of Adviser/caseworkers were working towards an advice related qualification, with the majority doing so through their employer.

Table 21: Currently working towards an advice-related qualification by job role

Are you currently working towards an advice-related qualification?	All	Manager/ Supervisor	Legally Qualified Staff	Adviser/ Caseworker
Yes, through my employer	10.0%	6.7%	0.0%	15.5%
Yes, in my own time	3.3%	1.7%	3.6%	4.5%
No	86.7%	91.7%	96.4%	80.0%
Base	198	60	28	110

Of those 23 workers currently working towards a qualification, the most common was the Solicitors Qualifying Exam (SQE) (8), followed by IOSC level 1 (3), IOSC level 2 or 3 (4), and Level 4 NVQ (4). Other qualifications mentioned included Diploma for Financial Advisers (DipFA), Chartered Institute of Legal Executives (CILEX) paralegal Level 3, Citizens Advice Adviser, Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA), Legal Aid Agency Welfare Benefits Supervisor Standard, Trainee Legal Advice Worker and NVQ assessor.

Interviews with advice workers indicated a mixed picture when it came to onboarding and ongoing training. One person highlighted how difficult it can be to find people who had any relevant experience, which results in a limited pool of people they can recruit, and instead people who have really good fundamental skills could be trained as advice workers in welfare rights specifically:

> *"Maybe individual advice organisations are shying away from doing that because of the draw on their own resources, but then the sum total of it is there's a shortage across the overall sector, so it does feel important that it's done." (Interview – Service Manager)*

Elements that were mentioned as useful by interviewees included membership of external networks of advisers, mentoring, and better written resources:

"I had to figure things out by myself and ask for a lot of help…… overall I felt that the on-boarding could be enormously improved. I would have found it very useful to have a written resource that was far more concrete and have the nuts and bolts of how processes were, including financial processes." (Interview - Immigration Solicitor)

Leadership interviews and focus groups identified a number of consistent themes in relation to workforce development. A lack of workforce planning, coordinated training efforts and clear career pathways was identified in both focus groups and four interviews as being a barrier, alongside limitations in terms of staff time to complete training and money to fund the training.

"People are so busy, how can they take time to think about training?" (Focus group participant)

One interviewee spoke about how many big corporate law firms have unspent apprenticeship levy, but they are unable to use this money as the levy only covers training costs and they don't have the funds to cover the salary of the apprentice:

"if you could use apprenticeship levy more flexibly and use it to fund salaries and supervision, as well as the cost of training, then that would be a game changer I think for us." (Leadership interview – law centre)

6.3.   Career progression

As previously mentioned in section 4.1, nearly one quarter one fifth (23%) of respondents reported being quite or very unhappy with their training and career progression. All respondents were also asked to what degree they agreed with some follow up statements around career progression.

Just under half (44%) of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I have good opportunities for professional growth", while just under one third (30%) disagreed or strongly disagreed (see Table 22). Adviser/caseworkers were the least likely of the job roles to agree (39%) and the most likely to disagree (38%), although the differences between job roles were just short of being statistically significant[41].

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[41] Chi squared test X2(4, 211) = 9.131, p = .057

Table 22: Has good opportunities for professional growth by job role

I have good opportunities for professional growth	All	Manager/ Supervisor	Legally Qualified Staff	Adviser/ Caseworker	Support/ Admin
Strongly agree	9.3%	9.8%	10.0%	10.0%	0.0%
Agree	35.7%	47.5%	30.0%	29.2%	50.0%
Neither agree nor disagree	24.7%	23.0%	33.3%	22.5%	31.3%
Disagree	23.3%	13.1%	26.7%	28.3%	18.8%
Strongly disagree	7.0%	6.6%	0.0%	10.0%	0.0%
Base	227	61	30	120	16

Just over half (54%) of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I feel my personal development is encouraged and supported", while just under one fifth (19%) disagreed or strongly disagreed (see Table 23). Adviser/caseworkers were the least likely of the job roles to agree (51%) and the most likely to disagree (22%), although the differences between job roles were very small and not statistically significant[42].

Table 23: Personal development is encouraged and supported by job role

I feel my personal development is encouraged and supported	All	Manager/ Supervisor	Legally Qualified Staff	Adviser/ Caseworker	Support/ Admin
Strongly agree	20.3%	19.4%	23.3%	20.2%	18.8%
Agree	33.5%	33.9%	33.3%	31.1%	50.0%
Neither agree nor disagree	26.9%	30.6%	26.7%	26.9%	12.5%
Disagree	15.0%	11.3%	16.7%	16.0%	18.8%
Strongly disagree	4.4%	4.8%	0.0%	5.9%	0.0%
Base	227	62	30	119	16

"my work isn't being checked and I'm not getting that sort of rigorous feedback about [the] quality of my work and how I can improve. Of course I can improve. Just because I'm a supervisor doesn't mean that [I'm] brilliant." (Interview - Debt advice supervisor)

Only two fifths (39%) of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I have a clear understanding of my career path within my organisation", while just under one third (30%)

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[42] Chi squared test X2(4, 211) = 1.19, p = .885

disagreed or strongly disagreed (see Table 24). Adviser/caseworkers were more likely to disagree (33%) than agree (32%) with the statement, although the differences between job roles were not statistically significant[43].

Table 24: Has a clear understanding of career path within organisation by job role

I have a clear understanding of my career path within my organisation	All	Manager/ Supervisor	Legally Qualified Staff	Adviser/ Caseworker	Support/ Admin
Strongly agree	11.4%	11.3%	10.0%	10.8%	18.8%
Agree	27.6%	41.9%	26.7%	20.8%	25.0%
Neither agree nor disagree	31.1%	22.6%	36.7%	35.0%	25.0%
Disagree	21.9%	17.7%	23.3%	22.5%	31.3%
Strongly disagree	7.9%	6.5%	3.3%	10.8%	0.0%
Base	228	62	30	120	16

The organisational survey collected data on what opportunities for career progression exist within their organisation. The most common opportunities reported were internal job postings (69%) and support for vocational qualifications (45%) (see Figure 13). Around one third of organisations provided leadership/management development programs and mentoring or coaching programs. Nearly one fifth of organisations (18%) had no formal career progression opportunities

Figure 13: Opportunities for career progression in organisation

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[43] Chi squared test X2(4, 212) = 8.486, p = .075

Organisations with a smaller incomes (32%) were more than seven times as likely as those with larger incomes (4%) to have no formal career progression (see Table 25).[44] They were also less likely to offer leadership/management development programs[45] (16%) and none had structured career ladders.[46]

Table 25: Opportunities for career progression in organisation

What opportunities for career progression exist within your organisation?	Total	<=£500,000	£500,001 to £1m	More than £1m
Internal job postings	69.20%	52.00%	65.50%	91.70%
Support for vocational qualifications	44.90%	44.00%	34.50%	58.30%
Lateral moves across departments	33.30%	20.00%	34.50%	45.80%
Leadership/management development programs	33.30%	16.00%	31.00%	54.20%
Mentoring or coaching programs	29.50%	28.00%	20.70%	41.70%
Tuition reimbursement or support for external qualifications	14.10%	12.00%	10.30%	20.80%
Structured career ladders	11.50%	0.00%	17.20%	16.70%
Job rotations	6.40%	4.00%	6.90%	8.30%
No formal career progression opportunities	17.90%	32.00%	17.20%	4.20%
Base	78	25	29	24

Interestingly, the relationship between career progression opportunities and organisational income was not always a linear one. More small income organisations (44%) offered support for vocational qualifications than those with a medium income (35%), with the same true of mentoring or coaching programs (28% and 21% respectively), although in both cases the differences were not statistically significant[47].

In the interviews with advice workers two themes emerged in relation to prospects and progression. The first was that there was limited scope for progression within their own organisation and the second was that pay is inconsistent across the sector which made finding suitable roles more difficult. Experiences of training amongst those interviewed varied, from a person whose role has a

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[44] Fisher's Exact (two-tailed p = .028).

[45] Chi squared test X2(2, 82) = 9.556, p = .008

[46] Fisher's Exact (two-tailed p = .045).

[47] Chi squared test X2(2, 82) = 3.297, p = .207, Chi squared test X2(2, 82) = 3.607, p = .181

requirement to undertake a number of training modules each year to another who has had to find their own training through free webinars and has only had IT-related training from their employer.

"I've learnt so much in the past year and a half because I've really been thrown in the deep end, but there's no progression into... there's no other roles available here and very few law centres have employment solicitors, even fewer have an employment supervisor, someone that they manage, so … I think if I ever wanted to apply for a job that was sort of a promotion in a way, I think I would have to look for something like perhaps working in a trade union…" (Interview – Solicitor)

6.4.   Barriers to career progression

We asked respondents to the survey of advice organisations what the main barriers to career progression were in their organisation. This was an open question and responses have been thematically coded.

Of the 68 organisations that identified barriers to career progression within their organisation, two thirds (67%) identified the size and/or the flat management structure of their organisation as the main barrier to career progression (see Figure 14). In essence there are not roles for people to progress into without either additional funding allowing for organisational expansion or more senior people leaving, which rarely happens.

"We are too small, jobs are tied to funding opportunities, and the organisational structure is too flat" (Survey response - Location-specific advice agency/community group)

"Individual plans to upscale skills and learning but career progression will depend on expansion (increased funding) or key people leaving as a small charity." (Survey response - Client-specific advice agency/community group)

Figure 14: Barriers to career progression
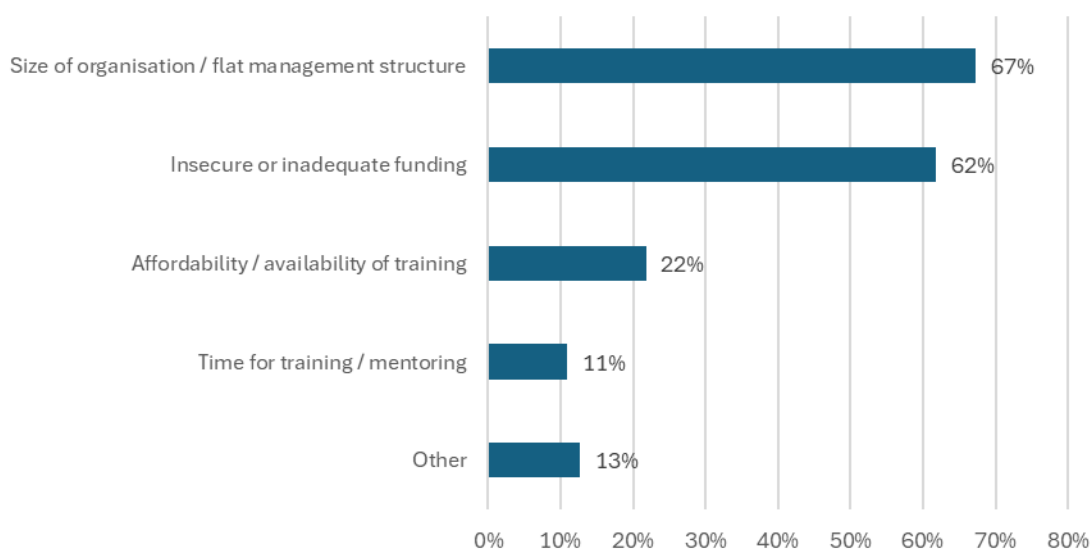
Linked to limitations regarding organisational size were the concerns around funding (62%), mainly in terms of it being short-term/insecure or simply a lack of funds to support training and development and the higher salary expectations that come with more senior and skilled staff. Short-term, insecure funding means that organisations are focused on fundraising and do not have the capacity for longer-term strategic workforce planning.

"As a small organisation there are limited opportunities for staff to move on into vacant roles. Insecure funding means that we are rarely able to grow the staff team in a strategic and creative way." (Survey response - Client-specific advice agency/community group)

"Working to tight budgets across our services means internal opportunities for more senior roles are limited and within existing roles while there may be opportunities to take on more responsibilities we can not always increase pay to reflect the level of responsibility. Budgets and the money we receive for delivering services can then be cut from Commissioners year by year when they are looking to make contractual savings." (Survey response - Community outreach organisation)

Another knock on from a lack of funds was the affordability and availability of appropriate training, which over one fifth (22%) of organisations identified as a barrier. Staff time (both to receive training and for more senior staff to act as mentors) was another recurring concern.

"I think it can be hard to enable advisers to develop managerial skills - the advice service is underfunded and all of our adviser capacity is usually focused on providing [advice]" (Survey response - Subject-specific advice agency)

Other barriers identified included a lack of suitable candidates, the need for clear progression pathways, and the difficulty in training people up to roles with particular specialist skills (including cultural, language or IT requirements).

"Progression is most limited at the adviser to supervisor level, where it is difficult to build skills to step into a more managerial role. It is also somewhat difficult for those stepping up from supervisory roles to pure managerial roles where previous exposure to the expectations of a senior management role have been limited." (Survey response - Location-specific advice agency/community group)

In the focus groups, one participant talked about the impact on motivation when repeatedly having to say no to requests for training that are not aligned to the organisation's strategy because of tight budgets. This could be addressed by making more use of local networks, sharing resources, action learning sets, nurturing, mentoring. The value of local networks (and restoring them where they had ended) was endorsed by another participant as a means of sharing information about free training and knowledge about topics such as legal aid.

7. Wellbeing

7.1. Existing evidence

A TPP survey (TPP, 2024) found that over one third of professionals working in the non-profit sector felt their job was negatively impacting their mental health and wellbeing. There was a similar picture in the advice sector. Advice UK (2024) found that nearly one in five advice centre staff rated their wellbeing as 'very poor' or 'poor' with only 3% rating their wellbeing as excellent. In the Legal Aid Census 2021 (Denvir et al, 2021), 49% of legal aid practitioners identified work as having a 'negative' or 'extremely negative' impact on their mental wellbeing.

The Institute of Money Advisers (2024) found that 52% of respondents to a survey of money advisers in 2023 'often' feel stressed or anxious at work and 34% 'often' experience negative effects on their mood, relationship or personal activities. 54% of respondents perceived that workload requirements have had a 'major' impact on stress levels and the mental health of colleagues in their workplace. This has a knock-on to retention as 46% of respondents who were dissatisfied with their workload did not intend to be in the same job in a year's time (ibid).

There was a similar picture in an earlier report, taken from a survey of the sector four years earlier. One third (34%) of debt advisers responding to an IMA survey (Institute of Money Advisers, 2020) were dissatisfied with the wellbeing support provided by their employer, with 65% agreeing they often feel stressed or anxious at work. 91% of debt advisers believed that workload requirements resulted in increased adviser stress and poor mental health (ibid).

Sustained working pressures and poor work/life balance can lead to stress and burnout, reducing levels of employee performance and morale. (Mind, 2024) *"Flexible working, in terms of working time, location or the pattern of working, can support healthier and more productive ways of working for all staff."* [48]

The stress caused by supporting clients in crisis who are so dependent on public services, alongside low awareness and poor remuneration, was identified as a key contributor to retention problems in community care legal aid services (Ashton et al, 2022).

Youth Access organisations (Youth Access, 2021) reported that the rise in demand for services, complexity of this demand, and difficulties associated with remote working had all impacted the mental health and wellbeing of staff.

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[48] Mind, 2024, p. 5

7.2. Advice workers reported wellbeing

As previously mentioned in section 4.2, only one in ten (9%) respondents reported not feeling stressed in their current job. All respondents were also asked to what degree they agreed with some follow up statements around well-being.

> *"[wellbeing] is absolutely crucial... not just because the work can be traumatic, and it's highly pressurised and highly skilled and all the rest of it, so you kind of owe it [to] people to treat them decently anyway, but in our sector where we can't pay very much either and there's a real difficulty around recruitment and retention, it's the only tool you've got in the box basically to keep people onside, so you've got to pay attention to it."* (Leadership interview – law centre)

Just under a quarter (24%) of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "My work is negatively affecting my mental health and wellbeing", while under half (46%) disagreed or strongly disagreed (see Table 26). Support/admin (38%) and legally qualified staff (33%) were the most likely of the job roles to agree their work was negatively affecting their wellbeing, although the differences between job roles were not statistically significant[49].

Table 26: Work is negatively affecting mental health and wellbeing by job role

My work is negatively affecting my mental health and wellbeing	All	Manager/Supervisors	Legally Qualified Staff	Adviser/ Caseworker	Support/ Admin
Strongly agree	8.4%	8.2%	6.7%	7.5%	18.8%
Agree	15.4%	14.8%	26.7%	12.5%	18.8%
Neither agree nor disagree	30.0%	34.4%	26.7%	27.5%	37.5%
Disagree	29.1%	29.5%	30.0%	30.0%	18.8%
Strongly disagree	17.2%	13.1%	10.0%	22.5%	6.3%
Base	227	61	30	120	16

Despite the high levels of stress reported, there were also strong positive indicators with around three quarters (74%) of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I have a strong sense of belonging within my organisation", while under a tenth (9%) disagreed or strongly disagreed (see Table 27). Support/admin (81%) and legally qualified staff (83%) were the most likely of the job roles to have a strong sense of belonging, although the differences between job roles were not statistically significant[50].

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[49] Chi squared test X2(4, 211) = 3.902, p = .424

[50] Fisher's Exact (two-tailed p = .737).

Table 27: Has a strong sense of belonging within organisation by job role

I have a strong sense of belonging within my organisation	All	Manager/Supervisors	Legally Qualified Staff	Adviser/ Caseworker	Support/ Admin
Strongly agree	32.6%	35.5%	43.3%	25.2%	56.3%
Agree	41.4%	38.7%	40.0%	45.4%	25.0%
Neither agree nor disagree	16.7%	16.1%	13.3%	18.5%	12.5%
Disagree	6.2%	8.1%	0.0%	6.7%	6.3%
Strongly disagree	3.1%	1.6%	3.3%	4.2%	0.0%
Base	227	62	30	119	16

"I think there's something about working in an organisation that thinks a lot about line management and wellbeing in terms of staff. Here there's an awareness of the connection between good management and wellbeing. Compared with smaller organisations, and when I volunteered for a different charity, which was a very small advice charity, I certainly think there's more structure here, there's more thought about wellbeing." (Interview - Service Manager)

Around three quarters (72%) of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I feel my organisation knows me as an individual and values my contribution", while one in ten (10%) disagreed or strongly disagreed (see Table 28). Legally qualified staff (87%) were the most likely of the job roles to feel their organisation knows them and values their contribution, Adviser/ caseworker work the least likely to agree (67%), although the differences between job roles were not statistically significant[51].

Table 28: Organisation knows me and values my contribution by job role

I feel my organisation knows me as an individual and values my contribution	All	Manager/Supervisors	Legally Qualified Staff	Adviser/ Caseworker	Support/ Admin
Strongly agree	33.3%	36.1%	36.7%	28.0%	56.3%
Agree	38.7%	37.7%	50.0%	39.0%	18.8%
Neither agree nor disagree	17.8%	14.8%	10.0%	22.0%	12.5%
Disagree	5.8%	8.2%	3.3%	4.2%	12.5%
Strongly disagree	4.4%	3.3%	0.0%	6.8%	0.0%
Base	225	61	30	118	16

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[51] Fisher's Exact (two-tailed p = .291).

"…we already put ourselves under pressure because we're the type of people who want to help. We're in this sector because we want to help people and people's lives are really difficult and you feel like you've got to you really got to do your best for them to improve things you've got to battle with bailiffs and battle with the court. It is difficult emotional work. So you need support from the agency to deal with that." (Interview - Debt advice supervisor)

Recurring themes in both the focus groups and in the interviews with both advice workers and leadership were the high level of commitment of staff and high levels of stress. One focus group discussed the importance of monitoring and managing stress to ensure staff did not suffer from burnout. Some ways of doing this that were discussed were reducing the role of targets, the importance of recognition and feeling valued, catch-up breaks, talking therapy, to be able to talk to someone within the organisation and knowing that there is someone to talk to externally.

"we sometimes refuse funding because they are demanding it, but we can't possibly achieve. Staff well-being is very, very high on agenda." (Leadership interview – DDPO)

Several of the leadership interviews mentioned the importance of open, informal support from management and how they saw supporting staff wellbeing as key to their leadership role.

"Trying to kind of create a sort of positive collegiate atmosphere because you know, we're paying rubbish money and they're doing difficult jobs." (Leadership interview – law centre)

"Moving away from those formal touch points into much more interactive, like when do you need it? Just tell me when you need it and you know." (Leadership interview – DDPO)

In terms of potential barriers to wellbeing, the level of demand for services and clients' needs were mentioned in several leadership interviews, although the degree to which participants saw this as something that it was their responsibility to manage varied:

"…we cannot do that much of because it is [a] charity and we have to cater as much as possible for our clients." (Leadership interview – Client-specific advice agency/community group)

"…because people come with this real vocational commitment to their work, and they also have real people that they're working with... you can see why it's so hard. Even with all the role-modelling, even with all the techniques, even with the really clear statement of our expectations, it's very difficult to get people to finish on time." (Leadership interview – Client-specific advice agency/community group)

The impact of remote working on the availability of peer support and informal debriefing was also mentioned in one of the focus groups and two interviews:

"If you're in the office, you can talk about stressful cases. That doesn't happen remotely….The small conversations matter—we're losing that support." (Focus group participant)

7.3.   Wellbeing initiatives

"I can confidently say that people know that we acknowledge the fact that what they do is a stressful job and that we are ready to provide specific support and information if they so wish." (Leadership interview - General advice agency)

Recent research into health and wellbeing at work (CIPD, 2023b), suggests that the most common focus of employee health and wellbeing initiatives is overwhelmingly mental health. However, employers are also increasingly making some effort to promote values, social relationships, work–life balance, physical health, personal growth and financial wellbeing. There are a range of initiatives that organisations can offer their staff to support their mental health and wellbeing including an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). An EAP is a confidential, employer-funded service that provides staff with access to professional support to help them manage both personal and work-related concerns, including difficulties with mental health.[52]

As previously discussed in section 5, over half (55%) of organisations reported providing staff with access to an EAP as a benefit, compared to less than one third (31%) of workers who reported receiving it. In the same organisational survey, we asked for details about other wellbeing initiatives, whether advice staff are offered regular time away from clients and what the organisation is doing to prevent burnout amongst their staff.

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[52] For more information about EAPs see https://www.hr-inform.co.uk/how-to-guide/how-to-implement-an-employee-assistance-programme

Table 29: Employee well-being initiatives offered by organisation

Does your organisation offer any of the following employee well-being initiatives?	Total	<=£500,000	£500,001 to £1m	More than £1m
Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)	62.2%	32.1%	70.0%	87.5%
Mental Health First Aiders	46.3%	21.4%	56.7%	62.5%
Wellness Action Plans (from Mind)	7.3%	0.0%	6.7%	16.7%
Headspace/Calm apps (or similar)	12.2%	7.1%	16.7%	12.5%
Free resources	37.8%	28.6%	40.0%	45.8%
Other	19.5%	14.3%	23.3%	20.8%
None of above	13.4%	35.7%	3.3%	0.0%
Base	82	28	30	24

Slightly more organisations (62%) reported offering an EAP when asked in the context of wellbeing initiatives as opposed to employee benefits as reported above (see Table 29). Smaller income organisations (32%) were less likely to offer an EAP than larger income organisations (88%).[53] They were also more likely to not offer any employee wellbeing initiatives (36%) than larger income organisations.[54] Aside from EAPs, the most common wellbeing initiatives were Mental Health First Aiders (46%) and free resources (38%).

A 2023 survey of employers on health and wellbeing at work (CIPD, 2023b), found that 82% of all employers (86% of non-profit sector and 87% of public sector) had an employee assistance programme which would suggest that the larger income advice organisations are in line with the wider charity sector.

Over one third (35%) of organisations reported offering additional leave, although there was a clear disconnect with the number of employees who reported receiving them which was notably lower (12%). This may indicate that advice organisations need to be more transparent about what additional leave is available to improve awareness amongst staff. Examples of additional leave mentioned by organisations included well-being or duvet days, which are typically a limited number of leave days which an employee can take with no notice, and Birthday leave (which is time off for the employee's birthday).

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[53] Chi squared test X2(2, 82) = 18.068, p < .001

[54] Fisher's Exact (two-tailed p < .001).

"Duvet days are a step in the right direction, but companies must ensure that such initiatives are not skin-deep perks to attract talent – they must form part of a wider strategy." People Management Article[55]

Around three quarters (74%) of organisations offered advisers regular time away from seeing clients as part of their working conditions (see Table 30). There was no significant difference between organisations based on income.[56]

Table 30: Advisors given regular time away from clients

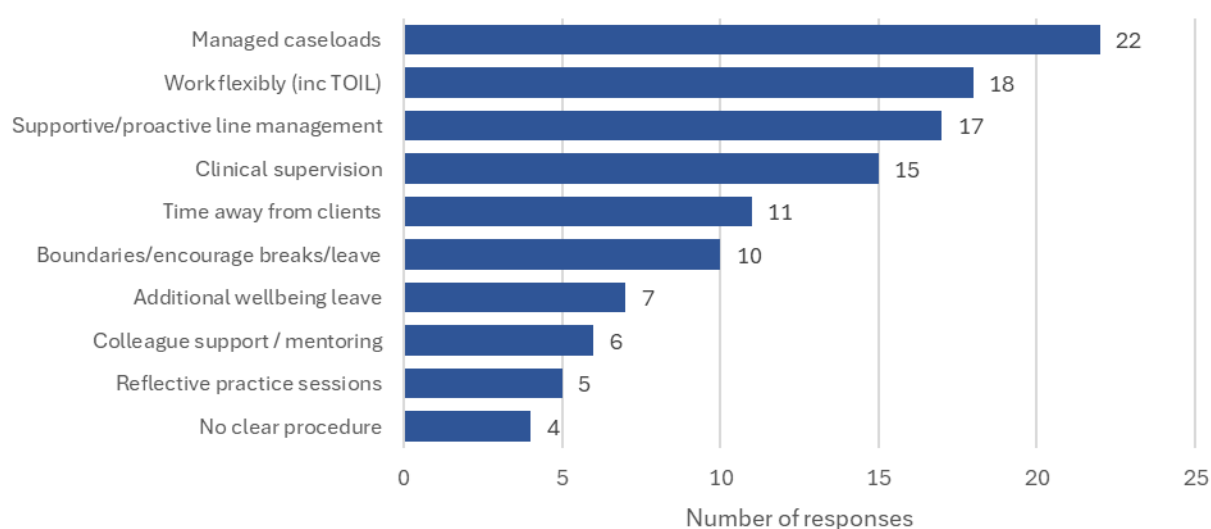| Do you offer advisors regular time away from seeing clients as part of their working conditions?	Total	<=£500,000	£500,001 to £1m	More than £1m
Yes	74.0%	76.0%	72.4%	73.9%
No	26.0%	24.0%	27.6%	26.1%
Base	77	25	29	23

All respondents to the organisational survey were asked the open question "What is your organisation doing to prevent burnout amongst your staff?" with responses thematically coded.

Of the 65 organisations that responded to the question, 22 (33%) were managing caseloads to prevent burnout amongst their staff (see Figure 15). The next most frequent were working flexibly (including providing time off in lieu) and supportive/proactive line management practices.

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[55] https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/article/1746129/staff-need-more-than-duvet-days-combat-work-related-stress

[56] Chi squared test X2(2, 77) = 0.09, p = 1.00

Figure 15: Organisational policies to prevent burnout

Policy	Number of responses
Managed caseloads	22
Work flexibly (inc TOIL)	18
Supportive/proactive line management	17
Clinical supervision	15
Time away from clients	11
Boundaries/encourage breaks/leave	10
Additional wellbeing leave	7
Colleague support / mentoring	6
Reflective practice sessions	5
No clear procedure	4

Respondents spoke about setting clear workload limits and monitoring capacity, including regularly assessing their workload distribution and addressing any imbalances. Two mentioned conducting wellbeing surveys to identify staff at risk of burnout and taking proactive measures to support them.

"EAP including access to 10 counselling sessions per year. Clinical supervision for those at risk of vicarious trauma. Managed caseloads. Casework supervision structure. Bi-annual wellbeing survey. Individual health and safety plans." (Survey response - Client-specific advice agency/community group)

Flexible work arrangements were widely used to help prevent burnout. Managers spoke about ensuring employees can adjust their schedules based on personal needs and workload. This included encouraging remote work where possible, to allow for better work-life balance. Some mentioned providing additional leave options such as wellbeing days. Others (7) encouraged staff to take regular breaks to ensure they have downtime during the workday.

"The organisation encourages employees to maintain a healthy work-life balance, allowing time for exercise, family, and self-care. Staff are encouraged to take breaks and take lunch breaks. Workplace culture offers three additional leaves, such as celebration leave and birthday leave, and encourages employees to use them." (Survey response - General advice agency)

Supportive and proactive line management was mentioned as crucial in preventing staff burnout. Managers spoke about maintaining regular one-on-one meetings where they can check in on staff wellbeing and discuss challenges. Several managers emphasized the importance of informal communications and stated they operate an open-door policy to encourage staff to come and talk to them.

"Individual clinical supervision is offered to all staff. We have monthly line management which considers wellbeing and signs of burnout." (Survey response - Client-specific advice agency/community group)

"Excellent line management - investing significant time to reflect and work through issues including work stress; refusing funding or contracts that ask for an unrealistic level of outputs; training - setting boundaries, managing difficult situations; providing many ways to ask for help from managers and colleagues - especially for remote workers; leading by example; actively triaging services as a whole to keep the workload manageable; Having open conversations about workplace stress - in supervision, team meetings and whole organisation meetings." (Survey response - Client and location specific advice agency/community group)

Many organisations (15) offered clinical supervision where employees can reflect on their work, process emotional challenges, and receive professional guidance.

"We have a wellbeing working group of staff who create opportunities for staff to discuss wellbeing issues. We have a small budget for wellbeing activities and the working group advise on best use of this. We provide monthly clinical supervision to all frontline staff. Group supervision sessions are available 6 weekly for all staff. flexible working options available. Staff may take one week each 6 months working at a location which is not their home - this can be outside UK so staff can visit family/friends elsewhere while working during work hours." (Survey response - Client-specific advice agency/community group)

As previously mentioned, around three quarters of organisations provide regular time away from clients. This was mentioned explicitly by some (11) managers as key to reducing burnout, although there was a variety of arrangements mentioned, with varying degrees of formality. Some allow employees to allocate a portion of their time to non-client tasks, such as administrative work, training, or professional development, while one mentioned having formal policies to ensure that for every hour of client interaction, staff received dedicated admin time. One manager spoke about rotating roles to provide variety and help prevent emotional fatigue.

"Advice giving time for staff is set by a Rota which allows for working days away from advice giving to have a break as well as catch up on other work. This is at least one day a week." (Survey response - Subject-specific advice agency)

"We manage caseloads closely and allocate 0.5 hours of admin for every 1 hour of client-facing work." (Survey response - Client-specific advice agency/community group)

"We are trying to introduce variety to people's workloads so all advice staff provide advice support across different channels: outreach, telephone, email etc. We also involve them in delivering training to volunteers to build our volunteer base and bring in extra support with their workload. Feedback has been that the variety reduces the intensity of having to

work in the same way every day with clients." (Survey response - Location-specific advice agency/community group)

Managers (10) also emphasized the importance of setting clear work-life boundaries, ensuring both that staff are not expected to be available outside of working hours and that they feel encouraged to take annual leave. Two organisations mentioned specific mandatory leave policies and monitoring, which require staff to take a minimum number of days off at regular intervals.

" We promote the importance of taking regular breaks and vacations to recharge. We actively encourage staff to use their annual leave and provide additional mental health days when needed." (Survey response - Subject-specific advice agency)

" We hold debrief and reflective practice sessions, encourage and ensure staff take breaks and that they are booking and taking their annual leave throughout the year." (Survey response - Community outreach organisation)

Other strategies mentioned included peer support systems, mentoring, reflective practice sessions, and dedicated wellbeing programs. A handful of organisations (4) reported having no clear procedures to address burnout, often due to resource constraints:

"Nothing as we are a community-led organisation with lots of formal and informal demands on our staff. We are proud to be customer-focused, but we are burning out due to lack of resources and capacity to address demand." (Survey response - Client-specific advice agency/community group)

7.4.   How to make the advice sector a better place to work

We asked respondents to the survey of advice workers what the advice sector could do differently to be a better place to work. Responses were then thematically coded. By far the most frequently mentioned way in which the advice sector could be a better place to work was with higher pay and/or improved benefits (see Figure 16). This was followed by better access to training/career progression, longer-term funding/job security and better work-life balance.
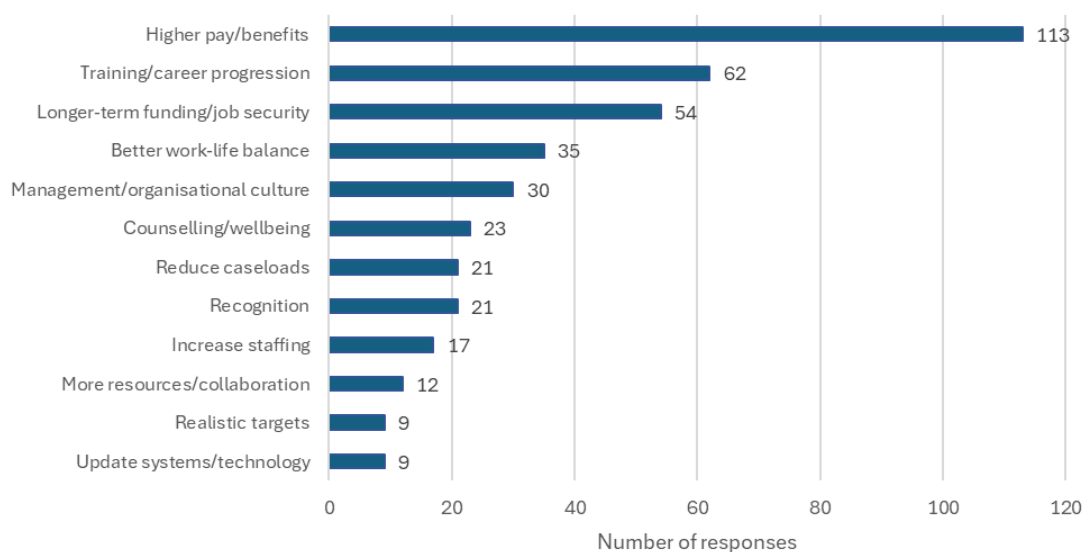
A brief summary of the key points made under each theme,0 including anonymized quotes from respondents, is provided below. A more detailed exploration is provided in Annex 3.

Low pay was frequently identified as the biggest barrier to both retention and job satisfaction. Many employees felt that their salaries do not reflect the knowledge, experience and emotional intelligence required for their roles. Alongside general calls for improved wages, there were specific mentions of a lack of cost of living increases and the need for a minimum standard pay rate to make moving within the sector easier. Benefits mentioned by respondents included private medical insurance, subsidized gym membership and pensions.

> *"Better pay isn't just about fairness—it's about survival, especially in high-cost areas."*
> *(Survey response - Manager/Supervisor)*

Employees reported feeling stuck in their roles, with limited opportunities to develop new skills or advance within their organisations. Existing training programs are often informal or underfunded, and clear career pathways are lacking. Some suggested more regular training programs, mentorship programs, leadership development courses, and formal accreditation pathways as ways to provide professional development opportunities and clearer routes for promotion.

> *"Without a clear career pathway, people either leave or stagnate in their roles." (Survey*
> *response - Paralegal)*

Another common theme was the lack of stable, long-term funding, and its impacts in terms of job security, staff retention, and service continuity. Respondents spoke about how short-term funding cycles create uncertainty about their roles, leading to high turnover and affecting the continuity of services for vulnerable clients. There were frequent mentions of the need for better, more sustainable funding models that allow for strategic planning and improved job security.

"I love this work, but I can't build a future in a sector where my job is only secure for 12 months at a time." (Survey response - Advisor/caseworker)

Increasing demand for services has not been met with corresponding increases in staffing, leaving employees overburdened. Many feel unable to take leave due to the lack of cover, with some organisations offering only the legal minimum in annual leave. Suggested improvements included clear policies on working hours and overtime, flexible working options, better workload planning to ensure cover when staff take leave, increased annual leave entitlements and additional leave or wellbeing days.

"There's no cover when I'm off, so I feel guilty taking my full entitlement. I end up saving leave instead of using it." (Survey response - Advisor/caseworker)

Respondents identified ongoing management issues, with a perceived lack of effective leadership and poor communication between senior teams and frontline workers. There was evident frustration with what was described as a reactive management culture, and a perception that targets were prioritized above staff wellbeing. Suggestions for improvements included regular check-ins, more transparent decision-making, better support from managers, a shift from crisis management to long-term planning and a workplace culture that values staff wellbeing and professional growth.

"Senior management needs to listen to frontline staff. They make decisions that don't reflect the challenges we face daily." (Survey response - Advisor/caseworker)

Respondents frequently spoke about the high levels of stress involved in their work. Unrealistic performance targets, often tied to funding agreements, further contribute to stress and reduced service quality. Many feel that there is too little structured support in place to help staff, which often leads to burnout. Some respondents spoke about high workloads and targets taking precedence over staff wellbeing. Suggested improvements included better mental health resources, structured supervision, and a cultural shift that values staff wellbeing as much as client care.

"Burnout is common because there's no time to step back and recover." (Survey response - Advisor/caseworker)

Beyond these core issues, staff also highlighted a lack of recognition for their efforts, outdated IT systems that hinder efficiency, and chronic understaffing that increases pressure on existing employees. Some emphasised the need for stronger collaboration both within the sector, and with local authorities and government bodies, to improve service delivery.

8.   Disability and representation

8.1.   Existing evidence

Disabled people face a higher risk of poverty, with 31% of disabled people living in poverty, 12 percentage points higher than the rate for people who were not disabled. This is driven partly by the additional costs associated with disability and ill-health, and partly by the barriers to work that disabled people face (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2024). Disabled people are also more likely to use advice services, with 47% of citizens advice clients over the past 12 months reporting a long term health condition or disability[57].

Deaf and Disabled People's Organisations (DDPOs) play a vital role in supporting both individuals and communities and bring "added-value" by being user-led. This added-value includes expertise of lived experience (allowing a deeper understanding of people's needs), peer support, accessibility, and holistic, whole-person centred provision (Harrison & Lazard, 2021).

"The ability of DDPOs to meet more complex access needs flows from a deep understanding of Disability politics and the experiences and needs of people with a wide range of impairments. This combines professional expertise with expertise from lived experience, whether personal or from others in the wider organisation." [58] Clients helped by advisers with lived experience reported feeling understood and supported, receiving help beyond their initial expectations, and benefiting from the adviser's connections to other community resources. (Kara & Cornish, 2023)

Small advice organisations that provide advice and support to specific diverse communities also provide "added-value" through being embedded within their communities, offering culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate services that meet the unique needs of their client groups (Advice Services Alliance, 2021).

DDPOs recognise the importance of a more intersectional[59] approach so they can better reflect, understand and represent the full diversity of the Disabled people they serve. However, funding and capacity issues often preclude specific actions (Harrison & Lazard, 2021).

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[57] https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/citizensadvice/viz/AdviceissuesTrendsNovember2024/Cover

[58] Kara & Cornish (2023), p. 8

[59] Intersectionality is an analytical framework for examining how race, gender, sexuality, disability, class and other social and political identities "intersect" with one another to create different modes of discrimination and privilege.

This section explores both disabled advice worker's experience of the sector and also what organisations are doing, and can do, to reduce the barriers to employment for both disabled people, and other people from marginalized backgrounds.

8.2. Organisation policies

"it's worth it because we're getting great results and it comes back to trust – how do you build good relationships with people? A disabled person supporting another disabled person...there's much quicker trust built between people and people tell you their whole story…" (Leadership interview – DDPO)

We asked respondents to the organisational survey whether their organisation was a disability-confident employer.[60] Just over half of respondents (51%) were disability-confident employers, rising to 75% of the eight organisations which we were able to identify as DDPOs (see Table 31).

Table 31: Disability-confident employers by organisational income

Is your organisation a disability-confident employer?	Total	<=£500,000	£500,001 to £1m	More than £1m	DDPOs
Yes	51.2%	60.7%	40.0%	54.2%	75.0%
No	31.7%	25.0%	36.7%	33.3%	12.5%
Don't know	17.1%	14.3%	23.3%	12.5%	12.5%
Base	82	28	30	24	8

Just over half (56%) of all organisations (100% of DDPOs) had a written reasonable adjustments policy (see Table 32).

Table 32: Written reasonable adjustments policy by organisational income

Do you have a written reasonable adjustments policy at your organisation?	Total	<=£500,000	£500,001 to £1m	More than £1m	DDPOs
Yes	56.1%	46.4%	63.3%	58.3%	100.0%
No	29.3%	28.6%	30.0%	29.2%	0.0%
Don't know	14.6%	25.0%	6.7%	12.5%	0.0%
Base	82	28	30	24	8

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[60] https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/disability-confident-campaign

Just over one quarter (28%) of organisations provide employees with disability leave, although nearly one third of respondents did not know if they offered disability leave (see Table 33).

Table 33: Disability leave by organisational income

Do you provide employees with disability leave?	Total	<=£500,000	£500,001 to £1m	More than £1m	DDPOs
Yes	28.0%	25.0%	33.3%	25.0%	75.0%
No	41.5%	39.3%	50.0%	33.3%	0.0%
Don't know	30.5%	35.7%	16.7%	41.7%	25.0%
Base	82	28	30	24	8

Over three quarters (77%) of all organisations (100% of DDPOs) offer some accessibility as standard (examples might include wheelchair accessible work spaces, sit/stand desks, noise cancelling headphones, etc.). (see Table 34).

Table 34: Accessibility as standard by organisational income

Does your organisation offer some accessibility as standard?	Total	<=£500,000	£500,001 to £1m	More than £1m	DDPOs
Yes	76.8%	67.9%	86.7%	75.0%	100.0%
No	20.7%	28.6%	13.3%	20.8%	0.0%
Don't know	2.4%	3.6%	0.0%	4.2%	0.0%
Base	82	28	30	24	8

"Usually accessible practice is just better for everyone." (Leadership interview – DDPO)

8.3.   Reasonable adjustments

Reasonable adjustments are changes an employer makes to remove or reduce a disadvantage related to someone's disability.[61] It is too often seen as the responsibility of the employee to make requests, instead of accessibility being offered as standard (e.g. wheelchair accessible work spaces, sit/stand desks, noise cancelling headphones, etc.). In a recent survey by the Business Disability Forum (2023), 78% reported that they, rather than their employer, had to initiate the process of getting adjustments.

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[61] https://www.acas.org.uk/reasonable-adjustments

Some people have to wait too long for reasonable adjustments to be made though, with one in eight disabled employees waiting over a year to get the adjustments they need. And even after adjustments have been made 56% of disabled employees said there were still disability related barriers in their workplace (Business Disability Forum, 2023).

The advice worker survey asked respondents whether they considered themselves to meet wither of the following definitions of disability:

"We recognise that disabled people are not disabled by their impairment or health condition or by using British Sign Language but by policies, processes and environments which may not be accessible to them.

The Equality Act 2010 defines disability as: "A physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities"

A total of 49 people from 222 (22%) responded to the survey said they considered they had a disability according to one of the definitions above (with seven not answering the question) (see Table 35). The following questions regarding disability leave, reasonable adjustments and access to work were asked only of those who considered themselves to have a disability.

Table 35: Disability by job role

Do you consider yourself to meet either definition of disability?	All	Manager/ Supervisor	Legally Qualified Staff	Adviser/ Caseworker	Support/ Admin
Yes	22.1%	20.3%	23.3%	21.4%	31.3%
No	77.9%	79.7%	76.7%	78.6%	68.8%
Base	*222*	*59*	*30*	*117*	*16*

When asked whether their employer offered disability leave, half of respondents (50%) did not know while a third said their employer did not offer it (see Table 36). Awareness of whether employers offered disability leave was lowest amongst Adviser/caseworkers (54%) and Support/admin (80%) staff. Nearly three quarters (71%) of Legally qualified staff said their employer did not offer disability leave.

Table 36: Disability leave by job role

| Does your employer offer disability leave?	All	Manager/ Supervisor	Legally Qualified Staff	Adviser/ Caseworker	Support/ Admin
Yes	16.7%	33.3%	0.0%	16.7%	0.0%
No	33.3%	25.0%	71.4%	29.2%	20.0%
Don't know	50.0%	41.7%	28.6%	54.2%	80.0%
Base	*48*	*12*	*7*	*24*	*5*

Just under a quarter of respondents who had a disability (24%) did not need any reasonable adjustments (see Table 37), while the remainder needed some adjustments and either had them all in place (42%) or some in place (33%). No respondents to the survey said they had a request for reasonable adjustments completely denied.

Table 37: Requested reasonable adjustments by job role

Have you requested any reasonable adjustments at your current job?	All	Manager/ Supervisor	Legally Qualified Staff	Adviser/ Caseworker	Support/ Admin
Yes, and I have them all in place	42.9%	45.5%	42.9%	50.0%	0.0%
Yes, and I have some in place	33.3%	9.1%	42.9%	35.0%	75.0%
Yes, but the request was denied	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
No, I don't need any reasonable adjustments	23.8%	45.5%	14.3%	15.0%	25.0%
Base	*42*	*11*	*7*	*20*	*4*

The most common reasonable adjustment that people had in place was working flexibly or with adjusted hours (69%) (see Figure 17). Over half of respondents (53%) were given time off to attend appointments related to their disability or condition – as this a type of disability leave it suggests that there may be confusion around what disability leave is in the previous question when only 17% reported their employer offers it.
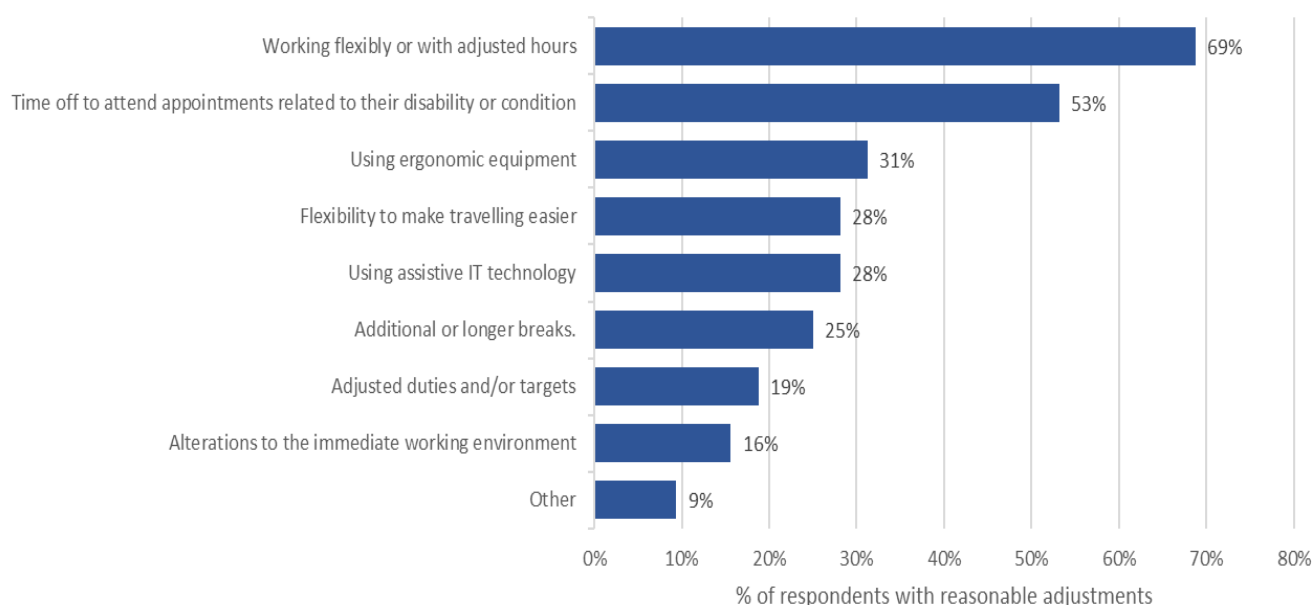
Base: 32

Eleven people who had all adjustments they needed provided some additional details, of which 10 were generally positive about the experience. The one person who had some issues related to delays in getting support through Access to Work.

> "My organisation was very accommodating in offering adjustments, I felt like I was listened to and it was easy to ask for and implement them when I was hired." (Survey response - Advisor/ Caseworker)

Ten people who had not yet received all adjustments they requested provided some additional details about their experience. Four people mentioned costs restraints as the reason their request had not been granted, while three identified a lack of understanding from their manager.

> "Adjusted hours, altered lighting, longer breaks - Manager just doesn't understand what it's like to live with a disability." (Survey response - Manager/Supervisor)

8.4.   Access to work

> "most of it has been people who have existing access to work and then have just wanted to change it or amend it. So they're pretty quick on that. But yeah, there's really, really big delays now….it's clunky, and it's very equipment, IT focused…trying to get ongoing support, which for some people is just what they need is really difficult." (Leadership interview – DDPO)

Access to Work is a UK government-funded scheme that provides grants to help individuals with disabilities or long-term health conditions start or stay in employment.[62] It covers costs that may go beyond the reasonable adjustments employers are legally obligated to provide people.

Just under one quarter of respondents (23%) who reported having a disability had applied for Access to Work support (see Table 38). Of those eleven people, four of them reported that their employer helped them to apply for Access to Work support.

Table 38: Access to Work by job role

Have you applied for Access to Work support?	All	Manager/ Supervisor	Legally Qualified Staff	Adviser/ Caseworker	Support/ Admin
Yes	22.9%	50.0%	14.3%	16.7%	0.0%
No	77.1%	50.0%	85.7%	83.3%	100.0%
Base	48	12	7	24	5

"Currently having an ongoing argument with Access to Work about what I need - my manager was not helpful but another person is the organisation has been super helpful." (Survey response - Manager/Supervisor)

Three quarters of organisations (75%) were aware of the support available through Access to Work (see Table 39), with smaller income organisations (52%) less likely to be aware of Access to Work than larger income organisations.[63]

Table 39: Awareness of Access to Work by organisational income

Are you aware of the support available through Access to Work?	Total	<=£500,000	£500,001 to £1m	More than £1m	DDPOs
Yes	75.0%	52.2%	76.7%	95.7%	100.0%
No	25.0%	47.8%	23.3%	4.3%	0.0%
Base	76	23	30	23	8

Over one fifth (21%) of organisations who were aware of Access to Work support had experienced delays or other problems with the process (including getting reimbursed with money from DWP) (see Table 40).

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[62] https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work

[63] Chi squared test X2(2, 76) = 11.668, p = .003

Table 40: Problems with Access to Work by organisational income

Have you experienced any problems with the process or delays with Access to Work?	Total	<=£500,000	£500,001 to £1m	More than £1m	DDPOs
Yes	20.8%	30.0%	19.0%	17.6%	50.0%
No	79.2%	70.0%	81.0%	82.4%	50.0%
Base	48	10	21	17	8

Two organisations reported having lost staff due to being unable to put in adjustments or access the required support in a timely manner.

"We had an employee who was physically disabled. Access to Work agreed to fund equipment and other reasonable adjustments to assist her in working. Although we had modified working arrangements to accommodate her in the meantime, because of the significant delays by Access to Work she was unable to continue in the role until the equipment was received and she had to resign." (Survey response - Subject-specific advice agency)

8.5.   Barriers to employment

"Yep, just it's a whole approach - like you've got to understand, what are the barriers #1, what are the barriers to people looking for work, getting work and staying in work? And if you can't answer those questions, you're not going to be a good employer. " (Leadership interview – DDPO)

We asked respondents to the survey of advice organisations what the barriers are to recruiting disabled people into the advice sector. It was an open question and responses were then thematically coded.

The most frequently cited barrier to employing people with a disability was the inaccessibility of existing office spaces (19). Respondents mentioned that due to affordability they were limited in what they could do, with some situated in older, or even listed buildings, with no ability to make the appropriate adjustments.

"For us - our office space. It's the only space we can afford, but it is not accessible for people with mobility requirements." (Survey response - General advice agency)

"Antiquated offices and equipment as a result of limited resources - may present challenges to those with physical disabilities." Survey response - Client-specific advice agency/community group

Reasonable adjustments (12) were identified as a barrier both in terms of employers' understanding of them and how to properly implement and find the funds to facilitate them.

"Understanding what we can offer, how to offer real and impactful reasonable adjustments, understanding Access to Work." (Survey response - Client-specific advice agency/community group)

"Barriers include inaccessible workplaces; inflexible line management; lack of understanding about how to make a decision about reasonable adjustments - lack of confidence to say when an adjustment isn't reasonable..." (Survey response – DDPO)

Financial constraints (13) were identified, not only in terms of reasonable adjustments but also in terms of limited HR support and concerns around meeting targets when people may work at a slower rate or need additional flexibility.

"With constraints on funding and limited HR resources it can be difficult to recruit people with disabilities with confidence that you're able to support all of their needs. Fortunately it has not limited us to date, but we receive very few applications from people who outline any disabilities." (Survey response - Location-specific advice agency/community group)

"Having enough funding to provide opportunities for disabled people. We have the support mechanisms in place but not enough money to get them into this sector." (Survey response – DDPO)

Other Barriers mentioned included inflexible management (4), inaccessible application processes (3), and problems with Access to Work (3).

"Not having an accessible application process including advertising, application and interviews etc." (Survey response – DDPO)

Three organisations said they had not experienced any barriers to employing disabled people.

In one of the focus groups there was some discussion around the need to be considerate when recruiting people with lived experience to avoid them feeling as though they are being defined by this or it feeling exploitative. In a leadership interview with a DDPO, they highlighted the importance of recognizing that properly supporting disabled clients can take more time, and so they will see fewer clients which has an impact on what targets would be achievable within funding contracts:

"supporting disabled people with advice and … casework takes longer, because the nature of the barriers people experience are the highest in terms of receiving support and services and their disproportionate discrimination and oppression over a very long time…means that to work successfully with people takes longer" (Leadership interview – DDPO)

9. Conclusions, recommendations and limitations

9.1. Conclusions

The objective of this report was to examine the benefits and working conditions for people working in the advice sector currently, and explore how these conditions can be improved. This work was motivated by two earlier reports examining the rising demand for social welfare advice services alongside shortages in current provision (ASA, 2020a) and the key drivers of skills gaps in the advice sector (Rathbone et al, 2022).

Recent research (Advice UK, 2024) found continuing recruitment and retention challenges, which were echoed in this project in the responses from, and discussions with, organisational leadership. In both focus group and interviews, participants spoke about the difficulty of recruiting experienced legal staff, with repeated vacancies attracting no applicants, and organisations not even trying to recruit to cover staff on maternity leave. There appeared to be slightly more positive views on the recruitment of trainee or apprentice solicitors and through volunteer routes (for those organisations large enough to have a pool of volunteers).

Feedback from current advice staff point to a workforce that is under intense pressure, facing high caseloads, stress and vicarious trauma, feels underpaid and lacks job security. There are also limited opportunities for progression, especially in smaller organisations where size and flat structures mean staff can remain in the same roles for years with little scope for advancement.

And yet, overall satisfaction was high with 89% of advice workers reporting being either quite happy or very happy with their overall job. Advice staff overwhelmingly identified making a positive impact as the aspect of their work that they enjoy the most. This was often complemented with supportive management, positive organisational culture, and flexibility and work-life balance. Staff felt busy, stressed, overwhelmed, but also satisfied, valued and supported. This was not always the case, however, with respondents in Manager/supervisor roles notably less likely to indicate that they felt supported and valued in their position.

Wellbeing was a recurring theme, with a quarter of advice workers indicating that their work is negatively affecting their mental health and wellbeing. Some respondents suggested that culturally staff wellbeing comes second to client needs, funder-imposed targets or simply keeping services running. This was mirrored by some of the responses from organisational leadership which indicated resource constraints meant they had no clear procedures to address burnout.

Manager/supervisors also need interventions designed to increase their subjective sense of support both because they are people whose wellbeing matters too, and because from a strategic perspective it will be impacting on their ability to offer optimal leadership and model healthy

behaviours. This is particularly important given the evidence that suggests Managers/supervisors were less likely to feel supported and valued in their position.

The research highlighted conflicts between organisations' desire to be good employers and the pressure in practice to compete for contracts and funding and to deliver services to meet need. As one focus group participant put it when speaking about the tension between competitive pay (to attract staff) and competitive tendering (to win an essential contract), there is a danger of "a race to the bottom".

In this context, it is particularly important to consider what this work ultimately seeks to achieve and how it might best contribute. The lack of sustainable, long-term funding is a thread that runs through much of what we have examined and was a recurring theme throughout. Alongside the short-term nature of funding, participants also highlighted full cost recovery issues (e.g. a lack of management fees, training costs, cost of living increases, etc.) that could be improved. As much as the authors may wish otherwise, and whilst there may yet be meaningful changes to funding practice, there is no prospect of a significant increase in funding for services any time soon. Public sector bodies are facing another round of job cuts and cost cutting[64], while many local authorities are struggling to avoid bankruptcy.[65] Given the continued cost of living crisis[66] it is also highly likely that demand for advice services will continue to rise, alongside other unmet social need.

The companion to this report has provided recommendations for a sector-wide minimum pay scale, with the aim of reducing pay disparity and improving the ability of organisations to attain adequate funding for advice roles. The recommended pay scales are modest and in isolation must be anticipated as unlikely to completely address the high level of dissatisfaction around pay that the majority of advice workers reported in this project. In a wider society in which economic markers are one of the key proxies for individual 'success', and rates of pay one of the key mechanisms by which someone's value at work is (ostensibly) acknowledged, remuneration will always be a sensitive subject.

It is already broadly accepted that pay on its own is unlikely to be sufficient to be a key motivator of potential recruits to the advice sector. The two-factor theory of job satisfaction (Herzberg et al, 1959) distinguishes between "motivators" which cause satisfaction and "hygiene factors" which cause dissatisfaction. Remuneration falls into the latter, meaning that low pay can cause dissatisfaction but

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[64] https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/mar/23/rachel-reeves-promises-economy-and-living-standards-will-improve

[65] https://www.countycouncilsnetwork.org.uk/councils-warn-of-financial-catastrophe-in-12-months-time-with-unmanageable-send-deficits-risking-bankruptcy/

[66] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cly1vwd57y2o.amp

that higher pay will not automatically lead to higher satisfaction. The approach of this report is to consider how the advice sector might ensure that pay meets the "hygiene" test, that it is not an active barrier to recruitment and retention.

More recent work on employee motivation (Pink, 2009) makes a similar distinction, recognizing that if people are underpaid, or their pay seems unfair, it is likely to be experienced as demotivating, but higher pay in itself (or other extrinsic rewards) does not necessary result in increased motivation. Instead, he identifies key intrinsic motivators as being autonomy, mastery, and purpose.

The headline recommendation is therefore that the sector be encouraged and supported to provide baseline pay and extrinsic rewards/benefits that are perceived as fair enough, whilst doubling down on its efforts and investment to maximize intrinsic motivation. This reflects the reality of both the funding landscape and wider operating context of the advice sector. This is not advocating for passively accepting something that is unjust, it is about moving to acknowledge, contain and then limit the negative implications of wider structural injustices impacting on the advice sector.

The sector can continue to advocate for societal norms in which salaries are more closely allied to social value added, income inequality is reduced, and advice work is significantly better funded. In the meantime, with a minimum pay scale in place and work ongoing with funders to ensure full cost recovery of roles, there is much else that the sector can do to improve the day-to-day experience of those working in the advice sector, and to work towards the creation of a more joyful, generative and sustainable sector.

The recommendations included in this report are based on two assumptions. Firstly, that individual organisational circumstances differ and there must be space for local variation and flexibility, with smaller organisations likely to need the most support. And secondly, that whilst there is much that can be done to improve the conditions in the sector, there are some structural limitations to career progression. Many organisations are small, with flat structures, and there is often little scope for internal progression without more senior staff leaving. In this context it is important for employers to recognise both the importance of sector cooperation and that people choosing to leave for other employment opportunities is not inherently a sign of failure.

The companion report on advice sector pay has already set out recommendations for a new sector wide minimum pay scale. Alongside this, to meet the ambition of pay and benefits structures that are considered both fair (enough) and adequate it would also be advisable to provide above-statutory parental leave and enhanced employer contributions to pensions (with the longer-term aim of being a Living Pension employer).

A good starting place for what other steps employers might take to ensure pay is fair and adequate is made in 'Capital Improvement' (Hyde et al, 2024) a report for the Social Market Foundation on a new in-work poverty benchmark for London employers. This takes a three tiered approach to

reducing in-work poverty, which enables relatively low barriers to entry alongside opportunities for employers to building on their initial efforts over time. Other employment benefits (such as cycle to work schemes, life and/or health insurance, employee discounts, etc.) can be important elements of a whole benefits package, but are not the priority for the majority of Advice staff and are considered second or third tier actions in 'Capital Improvement'. They are therefore not included in the recommendations of this report, but should be considered in any future assessment of progress.

Advice staff consistently identified above statutory annual leave and remote and flexible working as one of their most important benefits. It makes sense to build on the sector's advantages in areas such as work-life balance and flexible working by offering consistent and transparent approaches in these areas, and by exploring how existing practices might be improved and expanded upon. The majority of organisations who responded to our survey reported having annual leave entitlement (excluding bank holidays) of 25 days per year or more, although almost half of organisations with an income of <=£500,000 had a lower annual leave entitlement and there remain question-marks over the consistency and quality of the data.[67] The sector might look to build on this by ensuring that all organisations are supported in offering better than statutory annual leave entitlement and provided with guidance on how to present these entitlements transparently and consistently.

Our evidence suggests the sector has embraced flexible working arrangements (with over half advice staff reporting working some flexible hours) and should look to cement news ways of working as the default. Not only is there evidence that flexible working can have positive impacts on wellbeing but it is also one way of employers offering some accessibility as standard. Employers have a responsibility to ensure that flexibility is not harmful to workers (e.g. through unpredictable working schedules or too few hours to pay the bills). Organisations might consider becoming an accredited Living Hours employer[68] to demonstrate their commitment to ensure that flexibility works for their staff. There was clear enthusiasm for a four day week amongst advice staff, and where it meets organisational need this should be encouraged as providing advice staff a better work-life balance.

However, there is little point in the sector adopting generous annual leave and flexible working policies if workers feel unable to utilise them on the basis of caseload pressures or organisational capacity challenges. Policy adjustments to annual leave entitlement or working arrangements will need to be made as part of a wider strategic approach to health and wellbeing aimed at creating more structural support for staff (including leaders and managers) to have restorative time away

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[67] There is some evidence that some respondents included bank holidays in their response despite the question requesting they be excluded. Where possible this has been checked and corrected.

[68] https://www.livingwage.org.uk/living-hours

from work. The sector should also explore whether there are ways that they can collaborate more effectively to cover periods of staff leave (possibly through a bank of experienced locum staff).

Around a quarter of advice staff indicated their work was having a negative effect on their mental health and wellbeing. Advice staff mentioned the negative impacts of excessive caseloads in both survey responses and interviews, linking these to both wellbeing and reduced service quality. Some also expressed views that targets set were often unrealistic and based on the need to win funding rather than deliver a sustainable service.

The approach that organisations took to wellbeing varied considerably, and there was evidence that despite best efforts, there is more that can be done. Although the majority (62%) of organisations are providing staff with access to an EAP, only 6% of advice workers considered this an important benefit. This is not necessarily a cause for concern, as provision of access to an EAP should be viewed not as a "benefit" but as a necessity for a responsible employer given the high stress and risk of vicarious trauma faced by many people working in the Advice sector. It may be helpful for staff to be made more aware of the potential support available to them, both by employers and umbrella bodies who could consolidate resources for tackling workload stress, including training materials, guidance and best practices.

When asked how the advice sector could be a better place to work, the most frequent responses from advice workers was focused on higher pay/benefits. As acknowledged, this can be addressed in part, with implementation of pay scales and benefits to ensure that pay/benefits are fair enough. But the evidence suggests that it will not be enough. Other frequent responses were training/career progression, better job security (linked to longer-term funding), better work-life balance, changes to management/culture, and better mental health resources. These are all things that can be realistically improved.

Advice staff cannot be fully insulated from the fact of an unstable and uncertain funding landscape, but it may well be possible for organisational leadership to insulate advice staff from some of the felt negative effects of that uncertainty more effectively. In blunt terms, funding to enable to organisations to continue to employ its staff will either be achieved or it will not. In the meantime permanent contracts send an important psychological message to staff that they are valued and that the organisational intention, at least, is to continue to employ them. Umbrella bodies may wish to consider instructing an employment lawyer to prepare a short advice to offer Boards and leadership teams about when it meaningfully protects the organisational interest to offer staff a short/fixed term contract only and when it might makes no real practical difference (save perhaps to undermine the morale of workers who are subject to recurrent short term contracts).

Advice staff identified ongoing management issues, with a perceived lack of effective leadership and poor communication between senior teams and frontline workers. There was evident frustration with

what was described as a reactive management culture, and a perception that targets were prioritised above staff wellbeing, while managers similarly report feeling unsupported.

Some leaders we spoke to outlined an open-door, holistic approach to staff wellbeing that encouraged informal and continuous conversations between advice staff and those in management positions. But for this to be a viable approach, managers need to have the time and skills to really listen to, learn from, and adapt organisational strategy in response to these conversations. Managers need support to manage the interpersonal and relational challenges of leading people, to reflect on the things they could do differently or better, and attend to their own development needs. Again there is a need for a coordinated sector response, as individual organisations are generally too small for internal leadership development initiatives.

As mentioned previously, the size and structure of many advice organisations, along with insecure or inadequate funding, are clear barriers to internal career progression. In essence, there are few roles for people to progress into without a) deliberate organisational expansion/restructuring or b) more senior people leaving. In a number of the organisations we spoke to people had held senior roles for a long time, without having had sufficient support to invest in their own development or reflect on their own potential for onward progression. This potentially contributes to a sense of 'stuckness' in the sector.

Alongside this was a lack of workforce and succession planning, limited coordinated training efforts, unclear career pathways, and limitations in terms of staff time to complete training and money to fund the training. There was a widespread sense that the sector was not making the most of existing resources in relation to training budgets and helping staff to develop or deploy skills beyond those felt to be immediately necessary in their current role. Some respondents spoke of unspent training/development budgets as staff simply did not have the time or inclination to use them. This suggests there is an untapped resource of human potential.

The value of lived experience in the advice sector, and in DDPOs in particular, is widely recognized in both the sector and wider supporting literature. In terms of making advice work more accessible, there appeared to be some confusion around disability leave, with higher proportions of advice workers reporting being given time off for their disability than receiving disability leave as a benefit. There also appear to be a lack of understanding and transparency when it comes to reasonable adjustments. One possible explanation for this may be the lack of HR support available to smaller organisations, combined with a lack of time for appropriate management training. Given the breadth of knowledge and expertise available in DDPOs, this is an area where the sector may be able to develop shared policy and documentation as to best practice.

There was a sense in talking to sector leaders that collaboration in the sector is stymied by the fact that organisations are competing with each other for funding (and therefore survival). Working

towards a more sustainable sector is likely to require brave organisational leadership to acknowledge and explore the reality of relationships now, and to consider how to build on shared understandings, constructively air latent conflicts, and generally increase trust.

The range of membership and umbrella bodies in the sector (Advice UK, Advice Services Alliance, Citizens Advice, London Legal Support Trust, Law Centres Network, Institute of Money Advisers) have an important role in providing leadership in this area. One example of how shared sector resources might improve services was the trialing of AdviceUK's wellbeing service, offering an EAP service free to members. Umbrella bodies could explore other ways they could provide shared sector resources, including the possibility of a bank of locum staff to cover staff leave (and so facilitate better work-life balance in the sector), shared accessible office space or access to specialistic HR support.

Collaboration is also likely key to how the sector interacts with funders. Funding is widely perceived to be the biggest structural barrier to long-term visioning, strategy and planning. Short-term, project-based grants make it harder to support long-term staff development and too many of the sector leadership are focused on fundraising to the expense of strategic or generative thinking. Some funders are beginning to offer longer-term funding, but this is still the exception rather than the rule. The sector needs to develop a unified response to this if they are to see tangible improvements.

There are also areas where the sector might lobby for policy change more effectively with one voice. One example that came up repeatedly in talking to leaders was the Apprenticeship Levy. As it currently stands, it cannot be used to cover salaries or supervision, which severely limits its usefulness to some advice organisations. How the sector responds to, develops and utilizes advances in AI technology is also an area where greater sector collaboration could have a transformative impact. Finally there was sense that the sector needs to improve how it presents itself, that advice work was undersold in terms of the value it offers as a career despite being more flexible, more creative, and more rewarding than slightly better paid opportunities in other sectors.

By way of a conclusion, it may be useful to return to the ideas of autonomy, mastery and purpose that Pink (2009) identifies as key to intrinsic motivation. Through the nature of the commission, these reports on pay, benefits and conditions are primarily concerned with extrinsic motivators. These are of course important, but they will only take the sector so far.

There is a meaningful opportunity for the advice sector also to reflect on what it might do differently or better to increase and maintain intrinsic motivation across the entirety of the workforce. Despite the many and real challenges detailed here and elsewhere, this research suggests real reasons to be hopeful.

Organisational culture is critical to increasing levels of intrinsic motivation. It is a credit to the advice sector that half of respondents described organisational culture as positive and enjoyed supportive

leadership. It is also an invitation to reflect together on how to improve on those figures over the next few years.

The advice workforce already has a well-defined sense of purpose (with 89% identifying making a positive impact as something they enjoy about their current job). This could be supported with more consistent recognition from management, performance metrics that aim to reflect social purpose, and shared initiatives to identify and understand the circumstances which impede people's sense of purpose.

Again in terms of autonomy, the potential for flexibility in delivery of advice work seems already well suited to providing workers with a meaningful sense of control of their work. The evidence suggests this could be built upon by developing less reactive management practices, better structural safeguards and normative practice to ensure manageable workloads, and more deliberate efforts to delegate and share responsibilities and to identify and grow leadership potential at all levels.

The area that appears most ripe for development is the idea of 'mastery' (working at just the right level of challenge with the resultant sense that one is improving/progressing is inherently motivating). Creating meaningful space for the advice workforce to enjoy building upon, updating and evolving their considerable knowledge, skills and understanding may be key to its future sustainability.

9.2.   Recommendations

Based on the findings of this project, the following non exhaustive set of recommendations are proposed, alongside the recommendations around pay contained within the companion report on advice sector pay.

We recognise that not all recommendations will be right for all organisations, and that smaller organisations in particular may be more dependent on the coordination activities of umbrella bodies and funders to implement changes. Where the introduction of new policies is recommended, umbrella bodies might offer templates for adoption and adaption.

Individual organisations will be best placed to consider which recommendations might be most relevant to the particular experiences and perceptions of their own workforce. Many of the recommendations for benefits or conditions detailed are either extrinsic motivators or hygiene factors (i.e. they seek to address a source of discontent or demotivation).

Benefits

1. Organisations should have facilitated conversations with all staff, including any relevant union representation, before any changes to pay, benefits or conditions, focusing on reasons, intentions and fairness.

2. Organisations should aim to offer all staff 25+ days of annual leave (excluding bank holidays). This is equivalent to 5 days more annual leave than the statutory minimum. Employers should also consider implementing an increase in annual leave based on length of service to encourage staff retention. Any required changes to organisational leave policies should take place alongside wider discussions around workplace stress and enabling capacity to take annual leave.

3. Umbrella bodies and funders should consider the viability of establishing a small bank of freelance or centrally employed locum staff to help cover periods of staff leave (parental/sickness/annual leave) or staff shortages in smaller advice organisations.

4. Organisations should offer flexible working hours and remote working options for all staff where consistent with service delivery models, with a clear written policy to ensure both staff and managers understand the requirements and boundaries. Increases in flexibility/additional autonomy could be trailed on temporary basis and learning shared across the sector.

5. Consider obtaining an advice from an employment lawyer about the circumstances in which the use of temporary and fixed term contracts are necessary in the organisational interest.

6. Umbrella bodies and funders to assist advice organisations to audit all staff on temporary and fixed term contracts to identify those who could be offered permanent contracts without any material increase in legal/financial risk to employing organisations.

7. Organisations should aim to offer an enhanced employer contribution for pensions of at least 5%, with a longer term aim of encouraging sector employers to contribute 7% and become Living Pension (LWF) accredited employers.

8. Organisations should aim to offer better than the statutory minimum parental leave policy and benefits.

Disability and representation

9. Organisations should offer some forms of accessibility as standard across the organisation (e.g. wheelchair accessible work spaces, sit/stand desks, noise cancelling headphones, flexible working hours, etc.) and make efforts to notify staff (existing and new) of what options are available. (Umbrella bodies/funders should consider whether they can facilitate shared accessible work spaces).

10. Organisations should have a written reasonable adjustments policy, including a requirement to ask all new employees whether they have any required adjustments. Employers should be clear on the limits of what reasonable adjustments they can offer and provide managers with support to become more confident in these discussions.

11. Organisations should aim to develop a disability leave policy which allows for additional leave for reasons related to pre-disclosed impairments or conditions (e.g. medical appointments, treatment side effects, etc.) that does not count towards sick leave.

12. Umbrella bodies should develop written reasonable adjustment policy templates and guidance on how to support staff through the Access to Work process to support smaller advice organisations.

13. With appropriate remuneration, umbrella bodies draw upon the knowledge and expertise of DDPOs to further develop inclusive policy for the sector.

Health and Wellbeing

14. All organisations should openly encourage the use of annual and other leave and ensure that staff feel able to take a break from work without feelings of guilt or worry over backlog of work/cases when they return.

15. Organisations should aim to implement an occupational sickness pay (OSP) scheme providing better than statutory minimum sickness benefits. The exact nature of the scheme should be decided by individual employers and should form part of a wider health and wellbeing strategy.

16. Organisations should offer all staff access to an Employer Assistance Programme (EAP) and ensure that staff are aware of the availability and benefits of the scheme on offer. Smaller organisations should explore whether membership organisations already provide this service (e.g. the free EAP provided to AdviceUK members).

17. Funders could build upon the 'Funder Plus' offer to provide access to clinical supervision or relational leadership coaching to all organisational leaders.

18. Umbrella bodies/funders could examine establishing action learning sets (one focus group participant explained that the action learning set he attended was facilitated from France because of a perceived dearth of options in the UK).

19. Umbrella bodies/funders should consider whether they might be able to support smaller organisations with occupational health and person-centered HR support in circumstances in which staff have been off work on long-term sick leave.

20. OSP, EAP and disability leave should all form part of a health and wellbeing strategy which is communicated clearly to staff so they know what help is available. Umbrella bodies should help with template policies and guidance for smaller organisations.

21. Umbrella bodies to consolidate resources for tackling workload stress, including training materials, guidance and best practices. This also could include future research exploring the role of technology.

Training and career development

22. Umbrella bodies should explore the reasons for the perception gap between organisations that reported providing individualized training and development plans and staff that feel they don't have them.

23. Create facilitated development pathways for those with leadership/management roles.

24. Establish regular, shared leadership, learning and training programmes and opportunities that are open to all staff and communicate these effectively across the sector.

25. Consider adjusting targets to dedicate more internal time to learning and development (to increase individual mastery).

26. Funders/umbrella bodies to explore lobbying for changes to the Apprenticeship Levy and other relevant funding mechanisms to remove barriers to recruitment.

27. Collaborate on a sector-wide leadership development initiative focusing on situational leadership.

28. Umbrella bodies/funders should consider how best to support organisations in providing internal coaching and mentoring programmes.

Other

29. Umbrella bodies/funders should support smaller organisations with access to professional HR advice services and/or template policy documents.

30. Develop guidance around the Full Cost Recovery of roles to both improve the funding itself, and also simplify the process for both organisations and funders. This could include a normative expectation that a certain percentage of time on funded roles be devoted to learning and development and include costs of external supervision/coaching or other support services.

31. Create sector-wide frameworks for minimum bid standards to encourage use of the minimum salary rates in funding applications and also the inclusion of on-costs (e.g. training, management fees) and cost of living increases.

32. Umbrella bodies/funders to develop a communications strategy to consistently communicate the value and rewards of working in the advice sector.

9.3.   Limitations and further research/guidance

While this report provides a comprehensive analysis of benefits and working conditions in the London advice sector, certain limitations should be acknowledged:

- Collecting information regarding specific recruitment and recruitment challenges direct from organisational leads would have been a useful addition to the evidence base.
- Variability in Roles: Job responsibilities within the sector vary widely, making direct comparisons and meaningful analysis challenging. The distinction between advisers and caseworkers and generalist/specialist is often unclear.
- Response rates were adequate but lower than hoped and limited some of the analysis possible (particularly for Legally qualified staff).
- There were barriers to the involvement of some organisations which resulted in data being collected at different times. While this didn't impact the findings, it would be beneficial to ensure that all future field work occurs at the same time.
- We did not ask respondents about remote working arrangements which would have been a useful addition to the data on flexible working arrangements.
- Respondents identified issues related to Full Cost Recovery, including a lack of cost-of-living increases in multi-year contracts, overheads, non-direct staff costs, etc. This was outside of the direct scope of the project but would benefit from additional research.
- The data collected on wellbeing through the worker survey may be affected by participant bias. Staff who are most unhappy in their roles may be less likely to respond, leading to an overrepresentation of more positive perspectives and potentially skewing overall findings.

The sector would benefit from future research/guidance in the following areas:

- Research into technological impact – the sector needs to assess how AI, automation, and digital platforms are transforming roles, required skill sets, and client-advisor dynamics. This could also examine the possibilities for sector collaboration.
- Research to further explore questions relevant to intrinsic motivation, organisational culture, and wellbeing.
- Research into the issues surrounding Full Cost Recovery, including how indirect costs are calculated and how to ensure consistency and simplicity alongside meeting the actual employment costs of the roles.
- Research into the perception gap between organisations that reported providing individualized training and development plans and staff that feel they don't have them.
- A map of available training and development opportunities to enable to sector to best utilize existing resources.

- Guidance for sector organisations on implementing occupational sick pay, including benchmarks and example schemes.
- Guidance for organisations on reasonable adjustments, including a template reasonable adjustments policy developed in partnership with DDPOs.
- Guidance for organisations around how to support staff with the Access to Work claiming process.

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Annex 2   Detailed Methodology

Before it is possible to undertake representative research in relation to pay and conditions, it was necessary to accurately identify the scope of the sector. This was done using data from the Charity Commission and a Natural Language Processing (NLP) model, detailed in which is detailed in Annex 3 of the companion report on advice sector pay.

This was followed by an evidence review that covered all existing reports relevant to advice sector pay, the availability of existing data on pay and conditions, both within the sector specifically, in wider potentially comparable workforces (e.g. local government services), and relevant national policy on pay (e.g. minimum wage, living wage, etc.)

The search strategy for this evidence review involved a systematic and targeted approach to identify relevant materials. Sources including government departments, sector-specific websites and academic journals were extensively searched. Search terms included variations of "advice sector pay", "advice sector workforce", "working conditions in charity advice", "legal advice workforce" and other related terms.

Inclusion criteria were established to ensure the relevance and reliability of the selected literature. Materials included in the review needed to be published or updated within the last five years to ensure the currency of the information (unless there were specific reasons for inclusion). Priority was given to authoritative sources, such as government publications, reports from reputable sector bodies, and academic studies. Publications not directly addressing workforce issues, pay, benefits or working conditions in the advice sector or not-for-profit sector were excluded. We also analysed data from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) and Labour Force Survey.

Over the first six weeks of the project we reviewed job sites for relevant roles to gather any available data on possible salaries, benefits and job descriptions. Those sites included:

- https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/wales/about-us/job-and-voluntary-opportunities/
- https://www.rightsnet.org.uk/jobs/
- https://findajob.dwp.gov.uk/
- https://vacancies.lawcentres.org.uk/
- https://www.charityjob.co.uk/jobs/

This information was then cleaned, coded to roles and standardized to full-time equivalent pay where necessary. We also received 3 years of data from the Advice Jobs website.

We undertook 11 interviews with representatives of sector organisations, typically Chief Executive Officers. Interviews were undertaken online (to reduce burden on interviewees) and were recorded and then transcribed. These interview transcripts were then thematically analysed.

We will also undertook 10 interviews with advice sector workers who had completed the online survey to provide additional depth and detail to the information they provided. The majority of interviews occurred in December/January.

Two focus groups were arranged, one with nine leaders of advice sector organisations (including Law Centres, Citizens Advice, small community groups and DDPO) and one with three representatives from advice sector umbrella organisations.

Organisation survey response

An online Survey of sector organisations was developed in partnership with our sector consultant and with feedback from the task and finish group of the AWDP. This was sent to all sector organisations in early November and stayed open until mid-January 2025.

It collected information from organisations on the advice sector workers that they employ, including data on FTEs, starting salaries, conditions and benefits offered, possible progression routes, reasonable adjustments and access to work, and information on wellbeing initiatives.

The survey of advice sector organisations was distributed through networks and organisational contacts between November 2024 and January 2025. In total 82 responses were received which equates to 12.5% of the 658 advice organisations in London.

Table 41: Organisation survey response by organisation type

Organisation Type		n	%
Client-specific advice agency/community group		25	37.3%
Subject-specific advice agency		14	20.9%
Location-specific advice agency/community group		7	10.4%
General advice agency		6	9.0%
Community based legal practice or Law Centre		9	13.4%
Other		6	9.0%
Advice Main Purpose of Organisation	Yes	58	70.7%
	No	24	29.3%
Network	Citizen's Advice	21	25.6%
	Law Centre Network	7	8.5%
	Advice UK	33	40.2%
Base		82	

Over one third of responses (37%) were from Client-specific advice agency/community group (e.g. Disability Group, Refugee Group, Women's Group, etc.) with Subject-specific advice agency (21%) (e.g. money advice, housing advice, etc.) and Community based legal practice or Law Centre (13%) the next largest organisation types (see Table 41). Where respondents had stated "other" they were

typically a combination of two of the options (e.g. location and client specific service). Over two thirds of respondents (71%) were from an organisation where advice was the main purpose of organisation.

Respondents were asked in which areas of social welfare law their organisation provided advice (see Table 42). The most frequent areas were Welfare benefits (87%), Housing (74%), Money and Debt (57%) and Disability and community care (48%).

Table 42: Organisation survey response by advice areas

Advice areas	n	%
Welfare benefits	71	86.6%
Money and debt	47	57.3%
Immigration	41	50.0%
Employment (excluding discrimination)	36	43.9%
Housing	61	74.4%
Discrimination	29	35.4%
Disability and community care	39	47.6%
Other	22	26.8%
None of the above	1	1.2%
Base	82	

The 41 organisations that provided immigration advice were asked whether they were OISC Registered. Thirty-nine of those organisations responded, with 90% saying they were OISC Registered.

Respondents were then asked about the advice services offered by their organisation which included advice, casework, and representation of clients (see Table 43). The majority of organisations provided advice (93%) and casework (89%), with half representing clients at tribunal or court (50%) (see Table 43). Where other was specified it involved outreach work, campaigns, community development and a child contact centre.

Table 43: Organisation survey response by services

Advice Service	n	%
Advice	76	92.7%
Casework	73	89.0%
Representation at Tribunal or Court	41	50.0%
Other	5	6.1%
Base	82	

The annual income bands of both respondent organisations and the London advice sector as a whole are provided in Table 44. Proportionately, small organisations with income of £100,000 or less were underrepresented in the survey response. Anecdotally, we know that some small organisations did not respond as the survey focused on employed advice workers and they instead relied on volunteers to provide advice.

Table 44: Organisation survey response by income band

Annual income	Survey response		Advice sector	
	n	**%**	**n**	**%**
<=£100,000	7	8.5%	278	42.20%
£100,001 to £500,000	21	25.6%	152	23.10%
£500,001 to £1m	30	36.6%	91	13.80%
£1m to £3m	17	20.7%	90	13.70%
More than £3m	7	8.5%	47	7.10%
Base	82		658	

Over half (56%) of responding organisations held the Advice Quality Standard (AQS), with the next most common quality standards the Citizens Advice Membership Scheme (16%), Specialist Quality Mark (16%) and LEXCEL (13%) (see Table 45). Only 18% of organisations did not hold a quality standard, with organisations with an income of £500,000 or less accounting for half (53%) of those without a quality standard.

Table 45: Organisation survey response by Quality mark standards

Does your organisation hold any of the following quality standards related to advice giving?	Survey response	
	n	**%**
Advice Quality Standard (AQS)	46	56.1%
Citizens Advice Membership Scheme	13	15.9%
Specialist Quality Mark	13	15.9%
LEXCEL	11	13.4%
Age UK's Information and Advice Quality Standard	2	2.4%
NCVO Trusted Standard	1	1.2%
No – we do not hold any quality mark standards	15	18.3%
Base	82	

In addition to the organisation survey we asked employers to distribute a short survey to their advice workers. This survey collected data direct from advice sector workers about their role, qualifications, pay, conditions and benefits, training and priorities.

Advice worker survey response

The survey of advice sector workforce was distributed through networks and organisational contacts between November 2024 and January 2025. In total 229 responses were received which was slightly lower than the project target of 240 but provides a good basis for high level analysis.

Respondents were asked to identify which job role type most closely suited their position, and then asked for further detail specific to the job role types. The most common responses were from Adviser/Caseworkers (40%), Advice Supervisor / Team Leader (15%) and Solicitors (7%) (see Table 46).

Table 46: Survey response by job role

Job Role Type	Job Role	n	%
Manager/Supervisors	Chief Executive Officer	7	3.1%
	Director/Head of Service	9	3.9%
	Advice Supervisor / Team Leader	34	14.8%
	Other Managers/Supervisors	12	5.2%
Legally Qualified Staff	Solicitor	17	7.4%
	Supervising Solicitor	13	5.7%
Adviser/ Caseworker	Trainee Adviser/Caseworker	10	4.4%
	Adviser/Caseworker	91	39.7%
	Paralegal	5	2.2%
	Trainee Solicitor	4	1.7%
	Other Adviser/Caseworker	11	4.8%
Support/Admin	Receptionist / Administrator	11	4.8%
	Other Support/Admin Roles	5	2.2%
Base		229	

Staff working at Citizens Advice and Law centres each made up around one quarter of responses (27% and 24% respectively). Law Centres accounted for almost three quarters of responses from Legally Qualified Staff (73%) (see Table 47). The next largest groups were Client-specific advice agencies (21%) and Subject-specific advice agencies (10%).

Over three quarters of respondents (82%) worked in an organisation in which advice provision was the main purpose.

Table 47: Survey response by organisation type and job role

Organisation Type		All	Manager/ Supervisor	Legally Qualified Staff	Adviser/ Caseworker	Support/ Admin
Age Concern or Age UK		3.9%	4.8%	0.0%	4.1%	6.3%
Citizens Advice		26.6%	30.6%	0.0%	32.2%	18.8%
Law Centre		24.0%	8.1%	73.3%	14.9%	62.5%
Client-specific advice agency		20.5%	25.8%	13.3%	20.7%	12.5%
Subject-specific advice agency		9.6%	17.7%	6.7%	7.4%	0.0%
Generalist advice centre		8.3%	6.5%	3.3%	11.6%	0.0%
Other		7.0%	6.5%	3.3%	9.1%	0.0%
Advice Main Purpose of Organisation	Yes	81.7%	77.4%	93.3%	78.8%	100.0%
	No	18.3%	22.6%	6.7%	21.2%	0.0%
Base		229	62	30	121	16

The majority of advice workers who responded to the survey were female (74%) This was slightly higher than in the charity sector, and notably higher than for the UK working population as a whole (see Table 48).

The age profile of respondents was older than the UK working population, but was similar to the profile for the charity sector overall. More than half of respondents to the survey (53%) were aged 45 and over, compared to 51% in the charity sector workforce and 42% in the overall UK workforce.

Table 48: Demographics of survey respondents compared to charity sector and UK workforce[69]

		Survey response	Charity Sector	UK workforce
Gender	Male	25.9%	32.7%	51.3%
	Female	73.7%	67.3%	48.7%
Age Group	Under 25	5.0%	4.7%	10.7%
	25 - 34	22.8%	21.6%	22.7%
	35 - 44	18.7%	22.5%	23.2%
	45 - 54	24.7%	23.4%	21.3%
	55 - 64	21.9%	22.3%	17.6%
	65 and over	6.8%	5.5%	4.5%
Ethnicity	White or White British	56.4%	86.0%	83.5%
	Mixed or multiple ethnicities	6.4%	2.0%	1.5%
	Asian or Asian British	19.1%	3.6%	8.4%
	Black or Black British	12.3%	6.8%	4.8%
	Other	5.9%	1.6%	1.9%
Disability	Yes	22.1%	26.8%	20.4%
	No	77.9%	73.2%	79.6%

The proportion of respondents who were white or white British was notably lower than in either the charity sector or wider UK workforce, although a better comparison may have been with the London based workforce (which was not possible given time constraints).

A slightly lower proportion of respondents considered themselves to be disabled (22%) compared to the wider charity workforce (27%), although this was still slightly higher than for the overall UK workforce (20%).

Further analysis of the advice areas covered, role and management responsibilities, employment status and contracted hours are provided in the companion report on pay.

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[69] Labour Force Survey (LFS) April-July 2024. Variables include SEX, ETHUKEUL, AGES and DISCURR20. Charity sector defined by SECTRO03 = 7. Working population defined by ILODEFR = 1. Notable differences in categorisation include LFS data reporting sex while worker survey collected gender (one respondent to the worker survey identified as non-binary/prefer to self-describe but is suppressed to avoid any risk of disclosure) and LFS collecting work-limiting disability and/or disabled according to the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) while the survey used Social Model of disability and Equality Act 2010 as definitions.

Annex 3 Additional responses to what would make Advice Sector a better place to work

Higher pay/benefits

Low pay was frequently identified as the biggest barrier to both retention and job satisfaction. Many employees felt that their salaries do not reflect the knowledge, experience and emotional intelligence required for their roles. Alongside general calls for improved wages, there were specific mentions of a lack of cost of living increases and the need for a minimum standard pay rate to make moving within the sector easier. Benefits mentioned by respondents included private medical insurance, subsidized gym membership and pensions.

> *"We fight for fair wages for our clients, yet we struggle financially ourselves."* *(Advisor/caseworker)*

> *"The sector will continue losing skilled staff unless salaries become more competitive."* *(Advisor/caseworker)*

Training/career progression

Respondents identified the lack training and career progression opportunities as a significant issue within the sector. One respondent reported feeling stuck in their role with no opportunity for advancement/development, leading to frustration and plans to leave the sector.

When training is provided, it is often informal or underfunded. There was little opportunity for people to develop new skills or look to expand their knowledge into new areas. There is no clear career progression path within the sector, which makes it difficult for people to see how they could develop within their roles. Staff spoke about feeling that they either have to stay in the same position for years or leave the sector to advance. Some suggested more regular training programs, mentorship programs, leadership development courses, and formal accreditation pathways as ways to provide professional development opportunities and clearer routes for promotion.

> *"There's no structured training program, and most of what I've learned has been through trial and error."* *(Advisor/caseworker)*

> *"Training should be available to all staff, not just managers or those in specialist roles."* *(Advisor/caseworker)*

> *"If we had more structured leadership training, we could develop our own managers rather than always hiring externally."* *(Manager/Supervisor)*

> *"I want to grow in this sector, but the lack of structured career progression makes it hard."* *(Advisor/caseworker)*

"More opportunities for internal progression would help prevent staff from leaving."
(Manager/Supervisor)

Longer-term funding and job security

Another common theme was the lack of stable, long-term funding, and its impacts in terms of job security, staff retention, and service continuity. Respondents spoke about how short-term funding cycles creates uncertainty about their roles, leading to high turnover and making it difficult to plan for the future.

Some people were funded on a temporary or project-based basis, meaning they frequently faced uncertainty around contract renewals and potential job losses. This lack of stability not only causes anxiety for staff but also disrupts services for vulnerable clients who rely on continuity of support.

Managers are often forced to focus on securing new funding/grants rather than investing in long-term workforce planning. One respondent spoke about how their organisation dedicates significant resources to writing funding applications instead of improving working conditions or service delivery.

Some respondents said that when funding is cut, frontline advice workers often bear the brunt of job losses, which leads to increased pressure on remaining staff. There were frequent mentions of the need for better, more sustainable funding models that allow for long-term job security. Unrealistic expectations from both Local Authorities and the Legal Aid Agency (LAA) were also mentioned.

"We spend so much time chasing new funding instead of improving services. It's an endless cycle." (Manager/Supervisor)

"Every year, we face uncertainty about whether our contracts will be renewed. This instability drives people out of the sector." (Advisor/caseworker)

"If we had longer-term funding, we could plan ahead, invest in training, and keep experienced staff." (Manager/Supervisor)

Work-Life Balance

As demand for advice services has grown, staffing levels and resources have not increased at the same pace. This results in some staff regularly working beyond their scheduled hours and feeling unable to take leave as there is often no cover available. There was critical mention of some organisations only offering the legal minimum annual leave entitlement.

Suggested improvements included clear policies on working hours and overtime, flexible working options (including hybrid work and compressed hours), better workload planning to ensure cover when staff take leave, increased annual leave entitlements and additional leave or wellbeing days to allow staff to recover mentally at times of high stress.

"There's an unspoken expectation that we will work beyond our hours to keep up with demand, but it's unsustainable." (Advisor/caseworker)

"I find myself answering emails late at night because there's just no time during the workday to catch up." (Operational/Admin/Other Staff)

"Taking leave just means coming back to an overwhelming backlog of cases. It doesn't feel like a real break." (Advisor/caseworker)

"There's no cover when I'm off, so I feel guilty taking my full entitlement. I end up saving leave instead of using it." (Advisor/caseworker)

"We should be encouraged to take leave, not feel like we're creating problems for our colleagues by doing so." (Operational/Admin/Other Staff)

"With the emotional toll this job takes, we should have more wellbeing days or additional annual leave beyond the legal minimum." (Manager/Supervisor)

Management/organisational culture

Respondents identified ongoing management issues, with a perceived lack of effective leadership and poor communication between senior teams and frontline workers. There was evident frustration with what was described as a reactive management culture, and a perception that targets were prioritized above staff wellbeing.

"Senior management needs to listen to frontline staff. They make decisions that don't reflect the challenges we face daily." (Advisor/caseworker)

"We're constantly in crisis mode. There's no long-term planning, just firefighting problems as they arise." (Advisor/caseworker)

"Managers should focus on staff wellbeing, not just hitting targets and moving on to the next crisis." (Manager/Supervisor)

Suggestions for improvements included regular check-ins, more transparent decision-making, better support from managers, a shift from crisis management to long-term planning and a workplace culture that values staff wellbeing and professional growth.

Wellbeing

Respondents frequently spoke about the high levels of stress involved in their work. Many feel that there is too little structured support in place to help staff, which often leads to burnout. Some respondents spoke about high workloads and targets taking precedence over staff wellbeing. There were repeated requests for better mental health resources, structured supervision, and a cultural shift that values staff wellbeing as much as client care. Other suggested improvements include

regular wellbeing check-ins, access to professional mental health support, mandatory debriefs, realistic workload management, and dedicated wellbeing days.

"We deal with distressing cases daily, but there's little emotional support for staff." (Advisor/caseworker)

"Burnout is common because there's no time to step back and recover." (Advisor/caseworker)

"Wellbeing shouldn't just be 'self-care'—the organisation needs to take responsibility too." (Manager/Supervisor)

"The emotional burden of this job is heavy. Counselling should be available to all staff, not just as a last resort." (Advisor/caseworker)

"Wellbeing support should be built into the job, not something we're expected to sort out ourselves." (Paralegal)

Summary of other themes

Recognition: respondents spoke about feeling that their hard work goes unnoticed, and a culture of appreciation is lacking in the sector.

"We work tirelessly to support others, yet we rarely receive appreciation ourselves." (Advisor/caseworker)

"Simple things like a staff recognition scheme or even a regular thank-you from management would go a long way." (Advisor/caseworker)

"Lack of recognition makes it easy to feel disillusioned with the job. It feels like we're taken for granted." (Manager/Supervisor)

Systems & Technology : respondents mentioned that outdated, inefficient IT systems slow down casework, creating additional stress and making life harder for staff. Many staff believe that investing in modern case management systems, automation tools, and better communication platforms would increase efficiency and allow them to spend more time helping clients.

"We waste so much time dealing with clunky, outdated systems. Upgrading technology would be a game-changer." (Operational/Admin/Other Staff)

"The systems we use were never designed for the volume and complexity of cases we handle now." (Advisor/caseworker)

"Investing in better technology would improve staff retention as it reduces unnecessary workload and frustration." (Paralegal)

Understaffing was another common concern, with existing staff expected to manage growing caseloads without additional support. This was often linked to concerns around both funding and staff wellbeing.

"Every year, we have more cases but the same number of staff. We can't keep stretching ourselves thinner." (Advisor/caseworker)

"Recruitment should be a priority – having more staff would help us support clients more effectively." (Advisor/caseworker)

Some respondents spoke about the need for **more resources and greater collaboration** both within the sector and with local and central government.

"Better collaborations between organisations to prevent clients from being stuck in a revolving door." (Manager/Supervisor)

"Stronger ties and communication lines with local authorities and government departments - allowing faster responses and results when undertaking casework on behalf of clients." (Advisor/caseworker)

Caseload management and realistic targets. Respondents mentioned the negative impacts of excessive caseloads, linking these to both wellbeing and reduced service quality. Linked to this was a feeling that often the targets set were unrealistic and based on the need to win funding. Potential improvements included caseload limits and supportive management practices.

"Increasing competition for decreasing funding pots can encourage organisations to promise more for less when teams are already overburdened, this should be discouraged so we can develop more sustainable advice models and encourage recruitment and retention." (Manager/Supervisor)

"We are handling way more cases than is sustainable. This impacts our ability to give each client the attention they need." (Advisor/caseworker)

"Caseload caps should be in place to protect staff from burnout." (Advisor/caseworker)

"Good management makes a huge difference. We need leaders who listen and act on staff concerns." (Advisor/caseworker)