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Biodiversity Net Gain

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Health and Wellbeing Survey – An Update

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Our recent health and wellbeing survey attracted over 600 responses. We will be analysing the results in full over the coming weeks but here is an initial look at the survey results.

The rationale for the survey, and for next month's Summer Conference on the health and wellbeing theme, came from a number of sources. The Employment and Salary survey, the results of which we published last autumn, included numerous comments from respondents describing the (negative) impact of their role on their health and wellbeing. Terms such as 'burned-out', 'exhausted', 'intolerable pressure' and 'isolated' were not uncommonly used. Anecdotally, both through direct calls from members or conversations at conferences and events, we are hearing far too many stories of members struggling to cope with the hours, the type of work, the separation from families and money worries. The perceived low valuing of their role by others was also a common concern. This was clearly something we needed to explore more fully and both the survey and the forthcoming conference have provided us with opportunities to do so.

High-level data

Just over 50% of respondents to the survey work in consultancy, with the next highest proportion (15%) working in local/national government (excluding the Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies). Almost two thirds were Full members but just under a quarter (24%) are from the 'junior' grades of Graduate and Qualifying. Almost 90% of respondents work full-time with over half of those working in excess of 40 hours per week (most commonly 40-50 hours per week).

The most commonly cited issues affecting health and wellbeing for both employed and self-employed respondents were long working hours and unrealistic workloads and/or deadlines (both 59% of respondents). Just over 50% had concerns about the unsociable working hours and a similar proportion had been affected by the mental demands of the role (compared to 18.5% concerned about the physical aspects) and 48% reported the unsociable working hours as causing concern.

Over 50% of employed respondents worked for an employer that has a Health and Wellbeing Policy (in addition to a Health and Safety Policy) but only 45% of these were well implemented.

Significant or very significant mental health problems were reported by just over 20% of respondents whilst 11% reported significant or very significant physical health problems (although a slightly higher percentage of self-employed respondents had experienced physical health problems). A similar proportion (11%) had experienced significant or very significant behavioural changes. In all instances a much higher proportion (30-40%) reported moderate problems. In the past year, 15% of employed respondents had had more than five consecutive days off sick for colds/flu or physical illnesses whilst 16% had done so for mental health illness reasons. For self-employed respondents the figures are 8% and 7% respectively.

The majority of those who took the survey said that they do feel comfortable discussing issues around health and wellbeing either within their organisation (most commonly with line managers and co-workers) or, for self-employed respondents, with peers. Anonymous helplines, whether internal or external, had been used by 12% of respondents but 5% felt that they had no one that they could

talk to within the workplace. Worryingly though almost 50% said that they would not disclose a mental health issue to their employer/line manager as a reason for their absence.

The most commonly recorded employer action to support health and wellbeing was to offer annual leave in excess of the statutory minimum (78%), flexible working hours (71%), measures to encourage/support physical activity such as running, cycling, etc. (50%), counselling (40%), work area assessment and adjustments (40%), stress management support (32%) and encouragement to undertake voluntary work during paid work time (32%).

In terms of direct support to individuals, the most requested action was for line managers to have a more realistic expectation of workload (22%) and practical help managing the work-life balance (20%).

Next steps

So what does all this mean? Well we will be using the results of the survey to inform the content of presentations at the Health and Wellbeing Conference next month (see page 21 for more information). This event will look at strategies for both individuals and employers to support health and wellbeing in the workplace. Over the next few months we will be doing some further analysis of the data, including looking for patterns between employed and self-employed members, differences between employment sectors and between seniority of roles. A more detailed report and analysis will be published either as a separate report in the summer or in the September issue of *In Practice*.

Thank you to all those who participated.