

birdsong
charity consulting

Is the grass greener?

Voluntary sector staff perceptions
of working life in the
private and public sectors

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Introduction

The data contained in this report was obtained as part of the 2010 *Charity Pulse* survey process. *Charity Pulse* is the annual voluntary sector-wide staff satisfaction survey conducted by Birdsong Charity Consulting and *Third Sector* magazine. This year's survey ran from 8 March to 16 April 2010.

Charity Pulse is a unique approach to measuring staff satisfaction in the sector, because it enables individuals working for any charity to take part. The aim of the research is to build up a picture of working life in charities and help to raise the standard of people management in the sector.

672 charity people took part this year, representing over 160 different charities.

Overview

Staff retention in the voluntary sector

The *Charity Pulse 2010* survey reveals a disturbing statistic. Only 56% of charity staff¹ are planning to be working for their current charity in a year's time.

Last year we saw this figure increase by 9% to 64%, reflecting the impact of the recession. So with the effects of the recession still very much with us, why has this figure dropped to pre-recession levels?

Our survey finds that dissatisfaction in the voluntary sector is growing² - and growing to such an extent that nearly half of all charity staff are currently wondering: Is the grass greener elsewhere?

Employment options outside the sector

In the continuing uncertain economic and political times one could be forgiven for thinking that charity staff would be sitting tight and waiting for the storm to pass. The results of the survey suggest that this is not the case.

While many charity employees will be looking within the voluntary sector for their next job move, others will be considering whether a move to the public or private sector could be more attractive. So what do charity staff think the benefits of changing sectors would be?

This report sets out what charity staff see as the main attractions of the other sectors - and provides some useful pointers for charity leaders wishing to retain their brightest and best.

1. Staff on permanent contracts.
2. For more information on current levels of voluntary sector staff satisfaction, see our main *Charity Pulse 2010* survey report: *Recession Bites* (to be published in July).

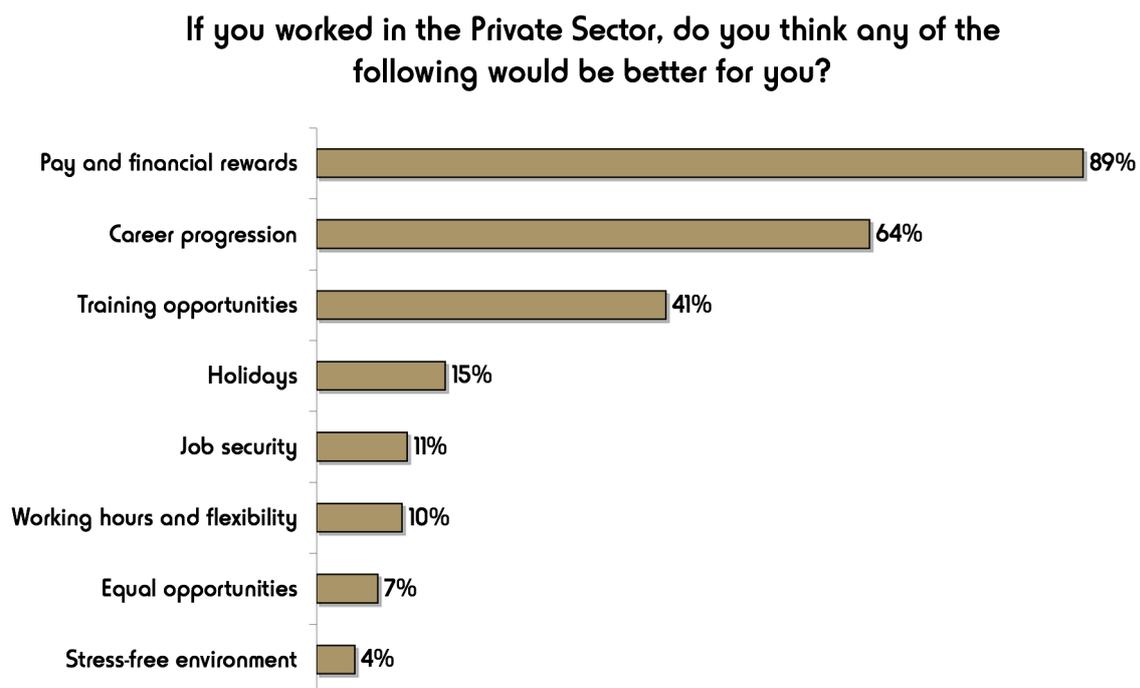
The Private Sector

We asked charity staff to consider eight aspects of their job and tell us whether they thought any of them would be better if they were working in the private sector.

Two areas emerged as clear winners - namely pay and financial rewards, and career progression. 89% of charity staff believed that their salary would be boosted by a move to the private sector and 64% that their opportunities for career progression would be enhanced following such a move.

41% also thought that there would be greater training opportunities in the world of business, but when it came to other terms and conditions, the voluntary sector was clearly preferred. Only 15% thought that they would get more holiday entitlement in the private sector and just 10% thought that they would have better working hours. Only 11% thought their job would be safer than in the voluntary sector and just 4% felt they would experience less stress.

What do voluntary sector workers think is better about the private sector?



Overall, with the exceptions of reward and career progression, the majority of charity employees think that they are better off - or at least as well off - in the charity world as they would be in the private sector.

The Public Sector

When voluntary sector staff were asked for their opinions of working life in the public sector, their views were more mixed.

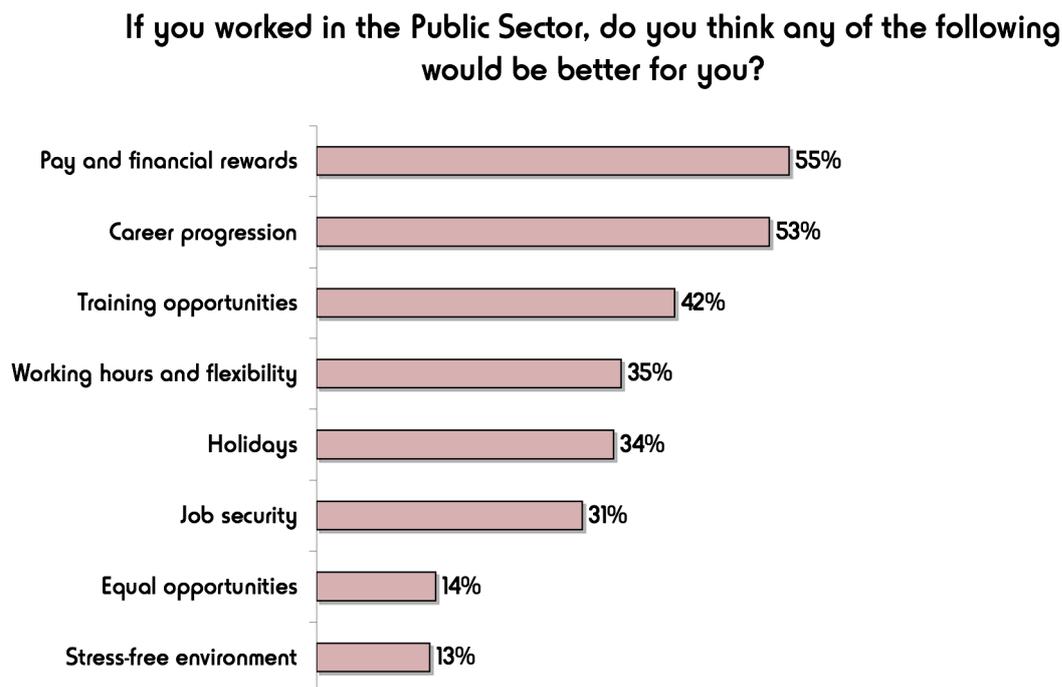
As with the private sector, pay and financial rewards, career progression and training opportunities were rated most highly, but the responses were less emphatic. 55% of respondents believe that their pay and other financial rewards would be greater if they moved to the public sector, compared to the equivalent figure of 89% for the private sector.

53% think that career progression would be better and 42% that there would be more opportunities for training.

But this is where the similarity with the private sector ends. Significant numbers of charity staff feel that other terms and conditions would be also more favourable in the public sector.

35% voluntary sector staff think that working hours would be better than with their current employer and 34% that they would get more holidays. 31% think that their job would be more secure (three times the private sector figure). 14% think equal opportunities would be better and 13% that they would experience less stress.

What do voluntary sector workers think is better about the public sector?



So there is a more varied picture here, with the public sector performing strongly in a number of the softer areas - such as working hours and flexibility - where the voluntary sector has traditionally performed well.

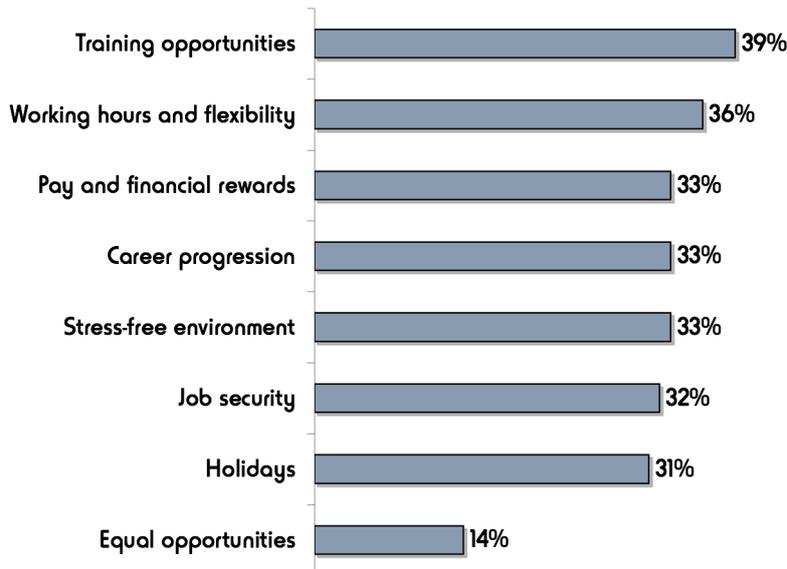
Is there envy between the private and public sectors?

The short answer to this question is *yes!* But it is somewhat one-way traffic. Apart for pay and financial rewards, the public sector clearly comes out on top.

These findings come from research carried out in January this year by IFF Research for *The Guardian*. The survey found that 39% of private sector workers would consider crossing over to the public sector but, on the other hand, only 18% of public sector workers would consider a move to the private sector.

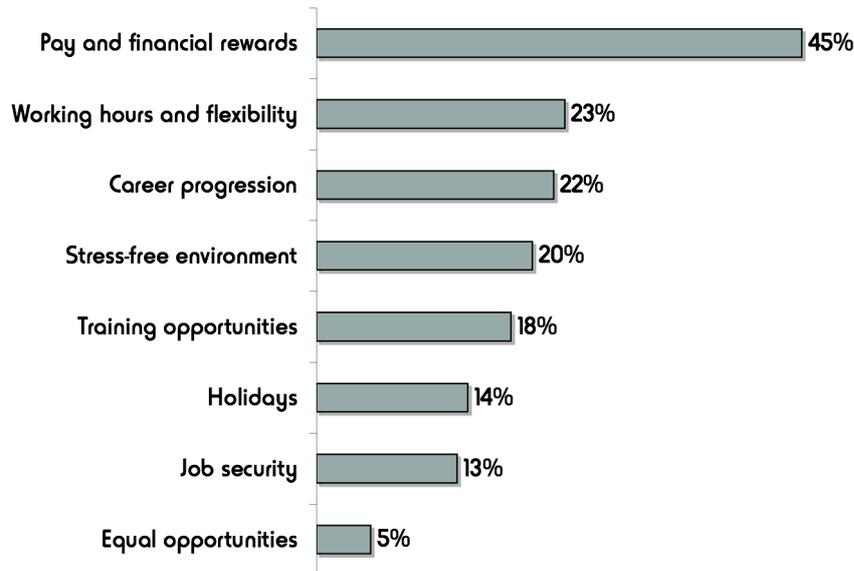
The Guardian reported that private sector employees are more than twice as likely to think that the grass is greener in the public sector in respect of job security, training, holidays and equal opportunities. They are also more likely to think it is less stressful, more flexible and better for career progression.

What do private sector workers think is better about the public sector?



Source: IFF Research
January 2010

What do public sector workers think is better about the private sector?



Source: IFF Research
January 2010

So the public sector was the winner in this particular contest - despite pre-election spending cuts looming.

Where does this leave the voluntary sector?

Charity staff have had a tough year. 60% of respondents to the *Charity Pulse 2010* survey told us that their charity had made staff redundant in the last 12 months.

Staff are less happy in their work and less engaged with their organisations. While a change in government since the survey carried out may shift perceptions of the public sector somewhat, if charity leaders want to reduce so called 'sector envy' among their staff they could do well to take heed of these findings.

Birdsong Charity Consulting

People work best when they feel good about themselves - when they are enjoying their work, feeling motivated and appreciated. They don't work best when they feel stressed, over-worked and over-looked.

Healthy people create healthy organisations and Birdsong exists to help charities work more effectively with their people. We help charities to become thriving, vibrant organisations where people love to work.

To find out more about Birdsong's *Charity Pulse* staff survey or to download other free guides and research reports visit: www.bird-song.co.uk