

The FDA Submission to the Lords Public Services Committee Inquiry into Designing a Public Services Workforce Fit for The Future

Who We Are

The FDA is the union for senior managers and professionals in public service, representing more than 19,000 members at grades HEO and above. Membership includes senior civil servants, government policy advisors, prosecutors, diplomats, tax professionals, economists, solicitors, and other professionals working across the Government and the NHS.

Our responses to a selection of questions posed by the consultation are set out below.

Question: How might the public sector become more attractive as an employer, particularly in comparison with the private sector? How might it become attractive enough to retain workers throughout their careers while maintaining a level of turnover that brings fresh ideas to organisations?

The FDA believes that embracing the opportunities for hybrid and flexible working presented by digital technologies will help the make public sector a more attractive employer.

Working patterns were changed dramatically by the COVID-19 pandemic, with most FDA members working entirely from home during the lockdowns. As we emerge from the pandemic, we are still establishing what the future world of work will look like, but evidence shows that while employees value some time in their workplaces (e.g. for collaboration and team relationship building) a majority of those in desk-based jobs continue to value an element of home working in their jobs, as the location does not impact the work outcome/outputs but location can impact the individual.

The FDA's own research shows that 97% of members would like to have the option of working from home in future¹. Meanwhile McKinsey research has found that 25% of workers who have worked from home during the pandemic would consider moving employers if they were required to attend the office full time².

Clearly, if the public sector is to compete with the private sector it must offer flexibility and a form of hybrid working.

The public sector must also address entrenched pay disparities with the private sector.

¹ [Working Hours Survey: 97% want to continue working remotely | The FDA Trade Union](#)

² [What employees are saying about the future of remote work | McKinsey](#)

Research from Incomes Data Research commissioned by the FDA shows a gap of around 15 per cent opening up between civil service and wider economy pay rates between 2010 and 2021.³

Meanwhile, research recently commissioned and published by the government found that, compared against its historic relationship with private sector wages, the recent period of public sector pay restraint constituted *“the longest period of sustained downward pressure on public sector pay in recent history”*. It concluded that: *“Given the duration and magnitude of the current public-private sector wage gap there is a risk... [of] skill shortages in certain areas of the public sector.”*⁴

A recent survey of FDA members in the Senior Civil Service (“SCS”) found that:

- 84% are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with overall SCS pay arrangements.
- 94% do not believe the current reward framework is fit for purpose.
- 86% do not see a clear link between performance and pay outcomes.
- 88% are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the pace of their progression in pay band.

Current civil service pay structures are not fit for purpose, and since the abolition of pay progression a decade ago staff at SCS level and below are stuck in the lower ends of pay ranges with no means of meaningfully progressing to the rate for the job.

The FDA recommends the introduction of competency-based pay progression, which would allow staff to move through pay ranges in line with their experience and professional development. This would reflect good practice in the private sector and help to recruit and retain staff.

Question: How can providers of public services recruit a more diverse workforce? How should they improve their recruitment of BAME people, people with disabilities, older people and people who use public services and live in the communities that providers serve?

FDA research has shown the benefits of flexible working in terms of recruiting a more diverse workforce. This includes non-standard work patterns that better match an employee’s non-work commitments (e.g. caring commitments) as well as remote/hybrid working⁵.

Flexible working can better serve the needs of staff with protected characteristics and help to recruit and retain a more diverse workforce, but there is a risk that it can also be stigmatised for the same reasons. There is also a risk that working outside of standard hours

³ *Senior Civil Service: pay comparisons, a report for the FDA*, Incomes Data Research, February 2021.

⁴

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/869631/The_dynamics_of_public_and_private_sector_wages_pay_settlements_and_employment_March_2020.pdf

⁵ <http://www.fda.org.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.aspx?IID=1116&SID=4789>

can also encourage a culture of 'always being on' and/or inappropriate expectations for response times.

The FDA recommends that flexible working is encouraged as a genuine option for all staff to remove stigma, empower staff and act as a factor in recruitment and retention.

The FDA also recommends a right to disconnect, as well as engagement by employers with trade unions to create a culture where flexible working works for all and is guided by realistic expectations of workloads.

We recommend a flexible working passport which will allow staff to take alternative working patterns to new roles.

Flexible and hybrid working is a key part of the government's Places for Growth programme, which aims to move civil service jobs out of London and allow people to build careers in other areas of the UK. As an example, the Ministry of Justice now advertises vacancies nationally and allows any non-operational job (excluding ministerial support roles) to be done from anywhere in England and Wales and will facilitate existing civil servants based in London to move to regional locations.

This change in Ministry of Justice workforce planning is explicitly focussed on spreading economic growth, spending and jobs across the whole country and ensuring that the Ministry of Justice is recruiting from, and more reflective of, the communities it serves.

Question: What have been the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit on the public services workforce? Have these events created opportunities for workforce reform?

Many employers, including the civil service, were moving towards hybrid working before the COVID-19 pandemic, but there is no doubt that the pandemic has escalated the pace and scale of that shift.

The widespread provision of IT equipment and training means that staff who previously had not considered remote/hybrid working as an option are able to work productively and efficiently from home, as well as in offices.

One FDA member who works at an arm's length body described their experience of working on a project with HM Treasury during the pandemic:

"Previously we would have all had to travel across London and then navigate security etc, to meet in a room with HMT officials. If further questions or points of discussion emerged after the meeting, we would have to reschedule another physical meeting when everyone's diaries could accommodate it.

Using Teams, we were able to secure a higher turnout for the meetings because stakeholders could more easily join for the sections that were relevant to them, and if another question or discussion point came up after the meeting, we could schedule another Teams call at short notice for further discussion, even if it was only for 10 or 15 minutes. It worked much better and was much more productive."

All of this was possible before the pandemic, but the technologies that allow this more productive way of working have now been culturally embedded, and any challenges around change management on such a scale have disappeared. The public sector should embrace these opportunities to improve productivity.

Question: It is difficult to predict accurately how the public services workforce will need to change in the long term, and yet it is necessary to prepare now for the future. What is an appropriate approach to long-term planning for workforce needs and demand in public services, and how should current training adapt, not just at the point of employees' entry into the workforce but throughout their careers?

The FDA has long held that focusing training only in specific parts of the public sector, and more often specific parts of those parts, does not deliver appropriate development for staff or value to the taxpayer.

We have consistently highlighted to successive governments the advice they have commissioned about joining up training and roles especially at senior levels in the public sector.

Over this time, the civil service has adopted three successive programmes for training its staff (professional Skills for Government, followed by the CS Competency Framework, and now the Civil Service Success Profiles). However, these programmes have failed to ensure that training is joined up across departments, devolved administrations, the NHS, the police etc.

We are pleased, however, that Welsh and Scottish Devolved Governments are in the process of making sure their approach 'joins up' providing a good example for the UK Government.

The FDA currently provides our own training to members across national governments and the NHS to fill gaps. We have also worked with the Local Government Association, and we have even secured funding to offer training to help public servants move across different parts of the public sector by training them around the different assessment processes.

The FDA recommends that public sector training should be joined up across public sector bodies to ensure better value and wider career options for staff which would enable experience and skills to be better shared across the whole sector.

Summary

The FDA recommends flexible and hybrid working as a tool to retain and attract talent into public service, as well as helping to improve productivity, tackle inequalities and better empower communities.

The FDA recommends the introduction of a competency-based pay progression mechanism in the civil service.

The FDA recommends that public sector training should be joined up across the whole sector.