

Recruitment & Retention Research Project

Prepared by Adare Human Resource Management
on behalf of the Local Drugs & Alcohol Task Forces.

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1. Executive Summary

In January 2023, Adare Human Resource Management (hereafter referred to as 'Adare HRM') were engaged by the Local Drug & Alcohol Task Forces to conduct a research project in relation to two areas of strategic Human Resource importance, namely Recruitment and Retention. This review was to take place across twelve Task Forces and some of their associated projects.

The objective of the Research Project was:

“To ascertain a deep and clear understanding of the existing challenges & burdens experienced across twelve sister organisations in the areas of Recruitment and Retention.”

This research report provides insight into common challenges faced, potential reasons behind these challenges and a high-level summary of areas/methods of potential improvements.

The methodology of the research project included both quantitative collection of data by way of a survey and qualitative data collected through interviews. The online Recruitment/Retention Survey was completed by participants between 8 February 2023 and 22 February 2023. The interviews took place between 8 February 2023 & 22 February 2023.

The survey consisted of twenty-nine questions designed to ascertain the key challenges faced by the participating Organisations in the areas of Recruitment and Retention. Questions were in multiple choice and free text format (a copy of the full survey can be found at Appendix 1). Participants from each of the twelve different Organisations completed the survey, three of these were Local Task Force Co-Ordinators and the remaining nine were Project Managers for associated projects.

Adare HRM conducted one-to-one online interviews with each of the twelve survey participants via Microsoft Teams. The purpose of these interviews was to obtain more in-depth information to support further elaboration from the participants regarding their recent challenges with Recruitment and Retention and the potential influencing factors.

Having established the common Recruitment and Retention challenges using the aforementioned methodology, Adare HRM have made 7 recommendations for the participating Organisations to consider in order to improve outcomes in these areas.

2. Summary of Survey Responses

Survey Findings Overview

It was evident that recruitment is a critical challenge with 100% of survey participants reporting they had experienced some form of recruitment challenge. Across the twelve organisations, there was evidence of commonality between the types of recruitment challenges experienced.

From a retention perspective, the evidence presented a divergence of experiences between the participant. On the more positive end, 17% of survey participants advised that they had not experienced retention challenges in their Organisation. Overall, 75% of participants confirmed that employees did not usually leave their Organisation within the first twelve months. Positive retention trends were also reported during the interviews, with one participant stating, *“Retention has been good, we have people working here over 15 years”*.

However, there are also contrasting examples with one participant explaining they had lost 50% of their staff in the past twelve months. The causation of the retention challenges experienced appears to overlap heavily with that of the recruitment challenges experienced. The challenges are outlined in detail below, along with Adare HRM’s corresponding recommendations.

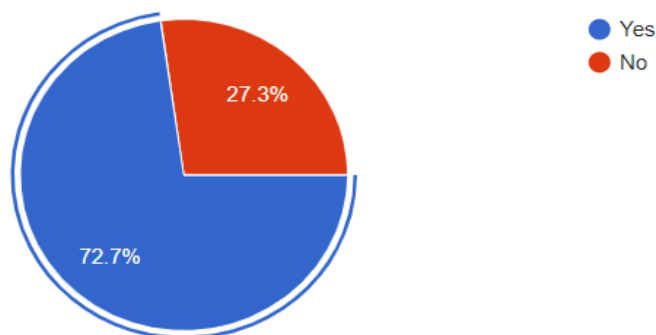
Below we have outlined some of the key information obtained from the survey.

Key Information Obtained

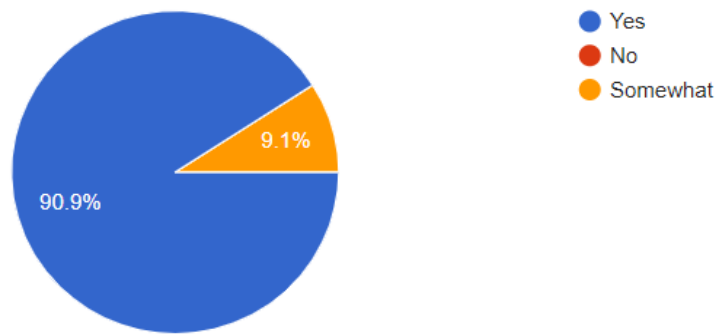
What level of responsibility do you have with regard to recruitment?

75% of participants advised that they had *“overall responsibility”* for recruitment. The remaining 25% of participants stated that they had a *“high-level”* of responsibility.

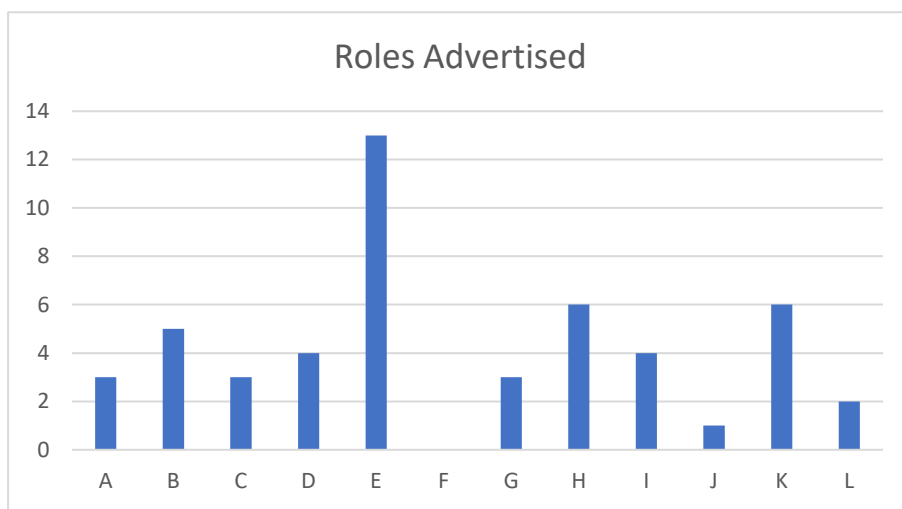
Are the benefits provided by the Organisation outlined in your job advertisements?



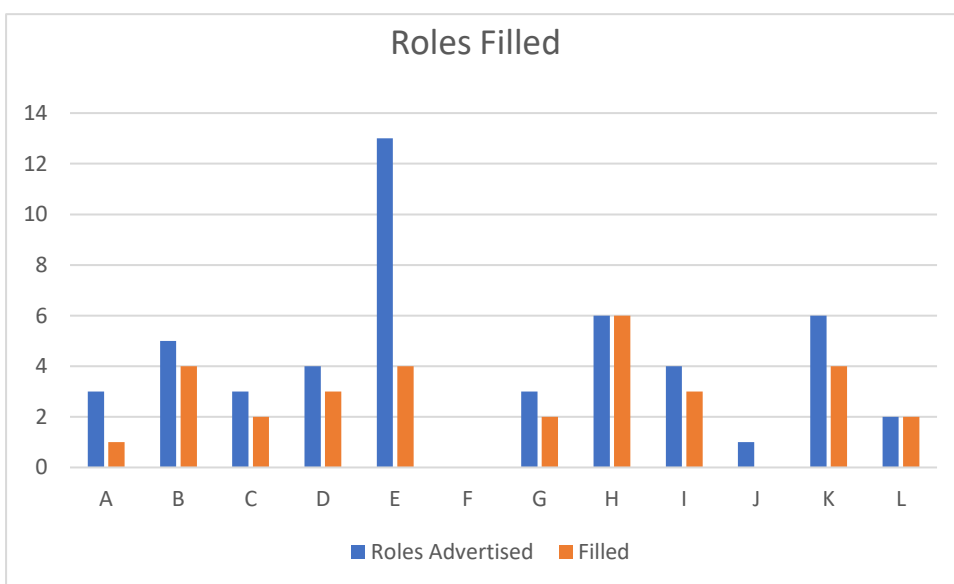
Do advertisements outline the nature of the work carried out by the Organisation?



How many roles has your Organisation attempted to recruit in the last 12 months?



Of these roles how many were filled successfully?

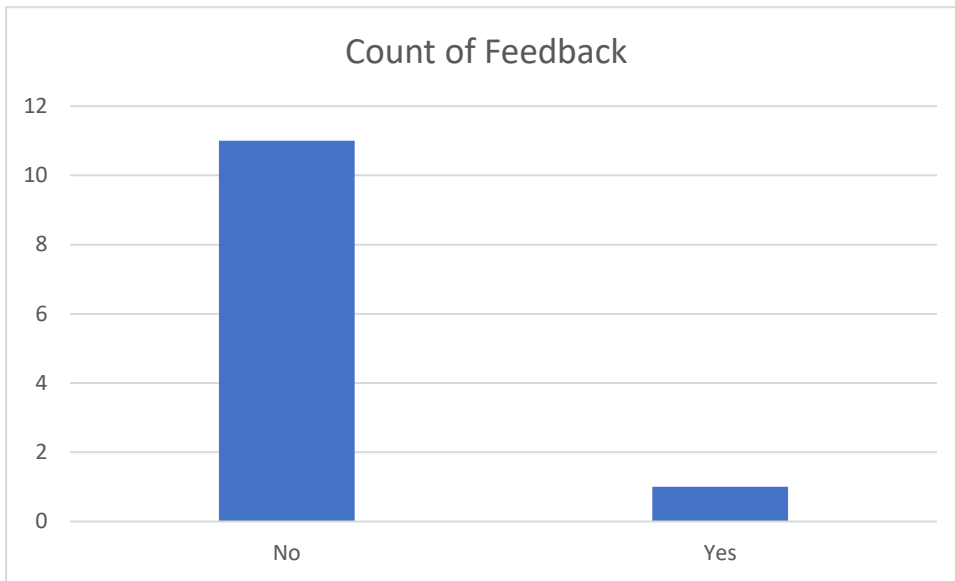


Overall, 62% of roles advertised were filled.

What are the main challenges you have personally identified in trying to recruit staff?

- 42% of participants identified uncompetitive salaries as a primary challenge.
- 42% of participants identified the experience/qualifications of candidates as a primary challenge.
- 17% of participants identified issues with the volume of applications received.
- 8% of participants identified that an inability to offer full time hours was a primary challenge in their Organisation.

Is feedback from candidates sought routinely as part of the recruitment process?



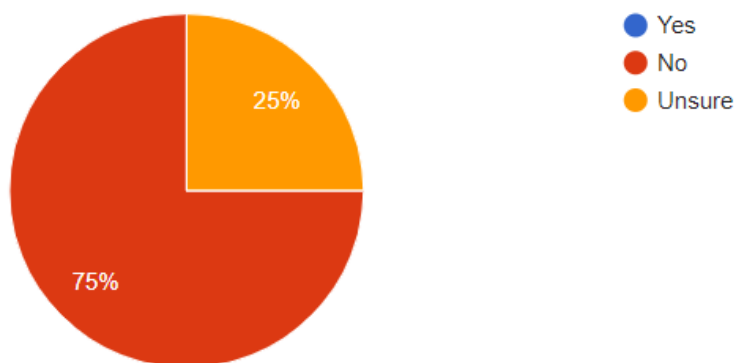
What platforms do you use to advertise job vacancies?

- 100% of Participants advised that Activelink was the primary platform utilised for advertising.

What are the main challenges you have personally identified in trying to retain staff?

- 50% of Participants stated that low salary was a primary issue in retaining staff.
- 25% of Participants noted that a lack of promotional opportunity was an issue.
- 8% of Participants advised that a lack of contractual security was an issue.
- 17% of Participants stated that they had not experienced retention challenges.

Is it common that staff will leave your Organisation within 12 months of starting?



3. SUMMARY OF ONE-TO-ONE MEETINGS

3.1 One-to-one interview findings overview

Recruitment & Retention challenges were expanded on by the Participants at interview. Common challenges identified at interview can be listed as follows;

- Perceived lack of funding allocated to salaries
- Uncompetitive benefits
- Volume of candidate applications
- Quality of candidate applications
- Contractual limitations linked to funding
- Career advancement

These areas will be explored in details within the findings section of this report.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Common Challenges

The abovementioned challenges uncovered by the survey and interviews are explored further in this section and Adare HRM's recommendations in relation to same are also detailed.

4.1.1 Challenge 1: Remuneration Package

Uncompetitive remuneration was identified as a primary challenge with regard to both recruitment & retention. Specifically, 42% of survey participants identified uncompetitive remuneration as a primary recruitment challenge faced by their Organisation. Furthermore, 50% of survey participants identified uncompetitive remuneration as a primary retention challenge. This was affirmed at the interviews held by Adare HRM, one participant stated, *"salaries are all funding dependent and are poor, there are no additional benefits provided."* This was affirmed by another participant who stated, *"conditions are not usually attractive, we don't offer pension."*

Another common theme which emerged at interview is that while the HSE was the funder for all of the participants, they were also the biggest competitor with regards to attracting and retaining staff. One participant noted *"the HSE is on a huge recruitment campaign and the pay rates are so much better."*

Recommendation: Based on the foregoing information gathered through the survey and interviews it was clear that the participants felt that the overall remuneration package on offer was a significant challenge in trying to recruit & retain staff. There was a notable desire amongst participants for a higher level of funding for salaries in order to attract talent. In particular, the participants wanted the salaries to be more competitive with HSE direct hires.

The allocation of funding is a matter between the funder and the participant Organisations and any changes in this area will likely require extensive engagement between the parties. However, a more favourable remuneration package including provision of a pension scheme, is always likely to lead to more favorable recruitment and retention outcomes. It would be a worthwhile exercise to engage in a salary benchmarking exercise for key roles to support this dialogue with the funder.

4.1.2 Challenge 2: Volume and Quality of Applications

17% of survey participants identified the volume of candidate applications as a primary recruitment challenge. This was affirmed by the participants at interview. One participant explained that a few years ago they would typically receive approximately 30 applications for a role. For the most recent recruitment campaign only 4 applications were received for one advertised role and of those only one candidate met the essential criteria. This experience was echoed by another participant who advised that they recruited a role in 2018 and had gotten 12-16 applications but for their latest role they only received 4 applications, 2 of whom were from internal applicants. One participant surmised *"the volume of applications is terrible."*

100% of survey participants advised that Activelink was the primary platform used for advertising roles. This was confirmed by the participants at interview. However, some of the participants also explained that they occasionally used other platforms such as jobs.ie and irishjobs when recruiting roles and that this had limited impact on the volume of applications.

42% of participants identified the experience/qualifications of candidates as a primary challenge. This was reinforced by the participants at interview. One participant stated *“the experience and qualifications we are getting is not at the same level as a few years ago.”* The same participant explained that a lower caliber of applicant was leading to *“knock on effects”* with Managers having to invest significant time in upskilling new hires. Another participant advised that the low volume and quality of applications was *“resulting in appointing people we might not have appointed before.”* This participant concluded *“we hired for attitude rather than experience.”*

It was noted at interview by several participants that the HSE were visiting third level institutions as part of their recruitment drive to promote some of the career pathways available to students within the HSE. It was confirmed by the participants that their Organisations were not engaged in any such practice.

73% of survey participants advised that the benefits provided by their Organisation were outlined in their job description. However, this was not reflective of the reality uncovered during interviews. All of the participants stated that they did not reference hybrid working in their job descriptions, this is despite the fact that 60% of the survey participants advised that their Organisation facilitated some form of hybrid working. One interview participant commented *“detail around flexible working never goes into the advertisements, this is something we could look at.”*

Furthermore, it emerged at interview that the majority of the participant Organisations did not reference flexible start/finish times in their job advertisements. This was surprising given that 67% of survey participants confirmed that their Organisation facilitated flexible start/finish times.

Recommendations: The information gathered through the survey and interviews clearly indicated that the volume of applications was a major recruitment challenge faced by the participants. The concerns raised about the overall remuneration package are likely to be intrinsically linked to the low volume of applications. Notwithstanding this, there were other apparent opportunities for enhancement within the recruitment process which may be more readily addressed by the participants as follows:

- (i) Activelink was identified by the participants as the primary recruitment platform utilised. This is a great resource as it targets individuals currently employed within the sector. However, greater efforts could be made to target *‘passive candidates’*. These are individuals who may not be actively looking for work in the sector but may be qualified to do so. In 2022, LinkedIn reported that approximately 70% of its users were *‘passive candidates’*. LinkedIn has an advanced search tool called ‘LinkedIn Recruiter’ which aids you to find professionals with the applicable qualifications and experience. Even without purchasing a licence for this product, LinkedIn can also be used to pro-actively source and contact potential candidates directly. This would be a useful tool in increasing the overall quantity & quality of candidates. While there is cost associated with the advanced search tool, use of LinkedIn is more cost effective than use of recruitment agencies which would charge a commission for each individual role.

Advertising open roles is a critical part of raising awareness of positions on offer and an opportunity to give potential candidates a sense of what it is like to work in that organisation. Where possible, ensure you have a website and social media accounts set up for the Organisation. Ensure the leaders/managers have a public profile and use these platforms to promote your organisation and your open roles. Collect testimonials from your team and share posts about your successes, promotions that have been made, courses completed etc. All of these items build your employer brand as an enjoyable place to work and will entice more interest in your organisation and volume of job applications for open roles.

- (ii) The HSE in its recruitment drive is targeting third-level institutions and advising students on career pathways available to them. There may be value in the task forces coming together and creating a plan to implement a similar approach. Reaching out to students in relevant educational programmes and building relationships with them, could create potential for increased awareness and interest in the participant Organisations.
- (iii) The content of the job advertisement is a critical element of the recruitment process. In circumstances where participants do not feel as though they are market leaders on salary, there must be a greater focus on drawing the attention of candidates to the other benefits of working in the Organisation. In 2021, Grant Thornton conducted a survey of more than 1,500 full-time employees of US companies entitled *"State of Work In America"*. They found that 51% of the employees interviewed said they would give up a 10-20% salary increase for more flexibility. We believe that the participants should take more of a strategic approach to job advertisements. Any flexible benefits offered by the participants such as hybrid working or flexible start/finish times should be referenced in job advertisements. We believe this refined approach targeting those who place high value on flexibility, could have a positive impact on overall application volume and quality. Promoting other benefits such as complimentary drinks and snacks, free parking, regular team social events, the fact you have low employee turnover etc. are also aspects that may be taken for granted but should be highlighted.

4.1.3 Challenge 3: Contractual Limitations

One survey participant stated that an inability to offer full-time hours was a primary recruitment challenge in their Organisation. This was affirmed by several participants at interview. One participant commented *"I am only able to fund-part time contracts."* There are parallels between this issue and the remuneration issue as both relate to an overall concern about the level of funding being granted to the participants.

One survey participant identified a lack of contractual security as a primary retention issue. This was also raised by a participant at interview who noted that *"job security"* was a major factor in retention, as some of their staff had left for more secure HSE positions. It became apparent at interviews that the participants were typically recruiting for fixed-term contracts which were *"subject to funding"*. The practice within the Organisation is that these contracts are offered on an initial one year basis and are considered *"rolling."* One participant noted in relation to this practice *"we offer an initial one-year fixed term contract and it is rolling year on year."* However, it was noted by several applicants that many of the applicable funding streams had not changed in several years, since the 2008 financial crash. One participant explained that their funding had stayed the same for 20 years.

Recommendations:

- (i) The ability to award full-time contracts is contingent on funding. As outlined in section 4.1, *Challenge 1: Remuneration Package*, any changes in this regard would require agreement for increased funding between the participants and the funder. Aside, from an increase in funding, the job advertisement could be critical in the framing of part-time hours. If the tone of the advertisement focuses on flexibility this may make the role a more attractive proposition. There are many people who prefer to work part time hours. References can be taken from the hospitality sector who typically offer minimum wage roles in many positions. They promote this part time option as a positive aspect of what they can offer candidates, allowing them to fit work in and around other personal commitments.
- (ii) In terms of the practice of issuing an initial 1 year fixed-term contract, this practice can be reviewed as a matter of urgency as there are some risks related to the approach.

Where a fixed-term contract is issued for the term of one year, a conversation should take place at the end of that period, followed by updated documentation to either renew or terminate the fixed term contract. If that does not happen and the employee continues to work, they may contend that they have acquired an implied contract of indefinite duration. It appears to be common practice that such conversations and contractual amendments are not occurring within the participant organisations. After 1 year, if there is no extension of the fixed-term contract and the employee continues working, there is no way for the Organisation to fairly terminate the contract by virtue of “*natural expiry*.”

There are strict obligations on employers when it comes to successive fixed terms contracts. If an employer intends to renew a fixed term contract, they must confirm in writing to the employee at the date of renewal what the objective grounds are for granting a further fixed term contract. Objective grounds are grounds that are objectively justifiable by the employer. They must correspond to a real need and legitimate objective of the employer, must be appropriate to achieve this objective and must be necessary to achieve this objective. In a scenario where the funding has been consistently rolled over year on year without change there is little benefit in issuing a fixed-term contract.

If for example an Employee has 2 years’ service on fixed-term contracts and the funding for their role ceases, they will still be entitled to a redundancy payment irrespective of their fixed-term status. If a permanent contract is offered subject to continuing funding and that funding ceases, the role can still be made redundant at any point in time. There would be no entitlement to a redundancy payment if the employee has less than two years’ service but the role and individual can still be made redundant. Their entitlement would be to receive minimum notice.

It is recommended that the contract management process is reviewed, and that offering permanent contracts at the outset would be significantly beneficial from a recruitment & retention perspective.

4.1.4 Challenge 4: Career Advancement

25% of Participants noted that a lack of promotional opportunity was a significant retention challenge. This also emerged as a common theme at interview. One participant commented “*a lack of advancement is a primary issue with retention.*”

Recommendation: The survey uncovered that there was a focus on learning and development within the participant Organisations. 100% of the participants confirmed that Management held regular 1:1 meetings with staff. 92% of participants advised that they had some form of educational support in place within their Organisation.

This indicates that efforts are being directed in the correct way to support and guide staff development but this is not translating into promotional opportunities. In some organisations this is an unchangeable feature and may always result in some element of employee turnover for those who want to progress upwards in larger organisations. However, there are many opportunities to create a rich and challenging environment within one role if employees are supported to identify what their preferred areas of work are and potential development areas. A rewarding and engaging role can be created by delivering on these, within the means possible to support employees become expert in their role/area of interest and potentially move sideways to begin working in new areas.

One potential area which could be targeted is to develop formal mentoring programmes. Under such programmes, staff members are assigned a mentor (internal or external) who can coach them and guide

them on their career development. This would help the Organisation to get a greater understanding of the career paths their employees want to take. This can help to inform workforce planning decisions and potentially lead to better retention outcomes.

5. CONCLUSION

The information provided by the participants in their survey responses and at interview indicated that challenges relating to recruitment were more prevalent than retention challenges across the Organisations. Nonetheless, there were still some challenges cited in the retention space.

The common recruitment & retention challenges identified by the survey and through interviews with the participants were broadly categorised as follows;

1. Remuneration Package;
2. Volume and Quality of Applications
3. Contractual Limitations
4. Career Advancement

Having established these Recruitment and Retention challenges using the aforementioned methodology, Adare HRM made 7 recommendations for the participating Organisations to review & consider.

It is the view of Adare HRM that these recommendations, will assist the participants in taking actions at an operational level to improve overall outcomes in the areas of recruitment and retention.

Appendix 1

Recruitment & Retention Review Survey

1. What is the name of your Organisation?
2. What is your current job title?
3. What level of responsibility do you have with regard to recruitment?
4. Can you provide a brief outline of your recruitment process? For example, how many stages are there? Are there any psychometrics used?
5. Are the benefits provided by the Organisation outlined in your job advertisements?
6. Do advertisements outline the nature of the work carried out by the Organisation?
7. How many roles as your Organisation attempted to recruit in the last 12 months?
8. Of those roles, how many were filled successfully?
9. What are the main challenges you have personally identified in trying to recruit staff?
10. Is feedback from candidates sought routinely as part of the recruitment process?
11. Have you received any direct feedback from candidates as to why they did not take up a role? If so what was the nature of their feedback?
12. What platforms do you use to advertise job vacancies?
13. Are there any platforms you feel could be beneficial, that your Organisation is not utilising currently?
14. Can you advise what the change of headcount has been in your Organisation in the past 12 months?
15. What are the main challenges you have personally identified in trying to retain staff?
16. Have departing staff provided feedback as to why they are leaving? If so, what are the most common reasons provided?
17. Is it common that staff will leave your Organisation within 12 months of starting?
18. Does your Organisation conduct exit interviews?
19. Does your Organisation have a clear induction/onboarding process?
20. What benefits are provided by your Organisation?

21. Does your Organisation facilitate remote working (including hybrid) ?
22. Does your Organisation facilitate flexible start/finish times?
23. Do Line Manager's in your Organisation conduct regular one to ones with staff?
24. Are there any mentorship programmes in your Organisation?
25. Are there any educational supports in your Organisation?
26. Is there a performance management system in place within your Organisation?
27. How is salary reviewed in your Organisation?
28. Do you feel there is anything which helps your Organisation stand out from others in your sector?
29. Do you have any additional comments you want to make in relation to recruitment/retention in your Organisation?



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