

Health and safety pay survey 2008

*Around 650 people took part in our third annual pay survey at the end of last year. **Louis Wustemann** crunches the numbers*

RETURNING to work after the Christmas break is one of the times when people traditionally take stock and when many consider whether it's time to move jobs.

In a period of economic insecurity, fewer are likely to take the plunge, preferring to stick with the devils they know and grateful that nothing is forcing them to look for new employment. But there will still be movers, and those staying put will be interested in how their pay and conditions compare to their peers'. For all of these we carried out our annual health and safety salary survey.

The survey was conducted in October with specialist recruiters Attwood Burton, who asked health and safety practitioners on their books to answer an online questionnaire. HSW also invited readers to participate via our email newsletter and an invitation on our healthandsafetyprofessional.co.uk website.

Our online questionnaire brought 644 responses from health and safety professionals, 29% more than our last pay survey (see www.healthandsafetyprofessional.co.uk/health-and-safety-pay-survey-2007), 611 of them of them in the UK and 33 working overseas.

The largest employment sector in our poll is construction, which accounts for a quarter of the sample (162). Manufacturing is a close second with 22.5% (143). Around 14% (89) work in the public services, including central and local government, defence and the NHS. Some 12% (78) are in private services organisations, such as law firms and call centre operators, and 7% (45) work for transport and logistics firms. Retail, hotels and catering, financial services and

energy and water companies each provided less than 5% of the total.

The south-east of England provided the greatest proportion of respondents (193 or 30% of the total), while the East and West Midlands accounted for 24% (155), 11.5% (74) were in the North West, 58 (9%) from the North East, 54 (8.5%) from the South West, 30 (around 5%) from Scotland and 20 (3%) from Wales.

Low and high

Survey respondents chose which of a list of job titles corresponded most closely to their own, ranging from health and safety assistant to health and safety director, ignoring any extra responsibilities.

So health, safety and environment managers will have placed themselves simply in the health and safety manager category and health, safety and quality advisers will come under the health and safety adviser heading.

We asked respondents to locate their current salaries in bands ranging from £20,000 and £80,000, mostly in £2500 increments. There were 25 people in the poll who said they earned more than £80,000; not surprisingly, almost two-thirds of them hold director-level posts. At the other end of the range

were another 25 who report earning under £20,000. Though most of these were administrators or advisers, there were three health and safety managers in this lowest group.

We calculated average salaries using the medians (the midpoints in the range of respondents' answers). This measure is favoured by pay specialists as it eliminates the distortion a few very high or low-paid individuals can have on mean average salary figures.

The median band for the whole survey sample was £35,000 to £37,999, but that covers all job titles from the humble administrators up to executive posts.

Figure 1. Median salary band by job title



Figure 2. Median salary band by highest qualification



More meaningful are the averages for individual job titles shown in Figure 1. The sub-samples for health and safety advisers or managers were large enough to give figures for some sectors such as manufacturing and public services; these are listed in Table 1.

Where regional numbers were large enough to give a reliable figure we have calculated the median average by job title for that area. So it's possible to say that health and safety managers in the East Midlands and the North East earn £32,500 to £34,999 on average, while in the North West those with the same title earn £30,000 to £32,499 and in the West Midlands earnings jump to £35,000 to £37,499. In the South East, where numbers were largest, advisers are paid £35,000 to £37,499 and managers £40,000 to £42,499, while in the South West advisers have an average salary between £32,500 and £34,999.

Qualified successes

The Work and Pensions Select Committee's recommendation in 2008 that health and safety practitioners should hold some form of accreditation of competence has sparked

a debate among the professional bodies about how best professional competence can be measured and validated, which is being encouraged by the HSE (see the interview with Judith Hackitt on page 21 of this issue). Arguably, vocational qualifications are not the be-all and end-all of competence, but for anyone entering the profession in the last two decades they are probably its foundation.

Our request to respondents to nominate their highest professional qualification revealed a healthy range of academic

achievement. Around a quarter (159) hold the National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health (NEBOSH) National Certificate, generally regarded as the starting point on the qualifications ladder. At the far end of the spectrum, 8% (52) have gained health and safety masters' degrees. In between are 6.5% (43) with the NEBOSH Construction Certificate, 21% (135) with the NEBOSH National Diploma, 4% (25) with the British Safety Council Diploma, 15.5% (97) who had achieved Scottish or National Vocational Qualifications (S/NVQ) Level 4, 10% (64) with health and safety bachelors'

degrees, and 7.5% (48) holding postgraduate diplomas. The salaries of our respondents broken down by highest professional qualification, in Figure 2, show the financial benefits of further education. Mark Burton, director of recruiters Attwood Burton, draws attention to the sharp increase in average salaries that happens when you get to degree level. "There's an obvious premium there for people who are prepared to put in the time and effort," says Burton.

Institutionalised

Around a third of our survey sample (204 respondents) are chartered members or fellows of the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) but when you add affiliate, graduate and tech members, the proportion associated with IOSH rises to just under three-quarters. More than a quarter (188) are either members or affiliates of the UK's other major practitioner body, the International Institute of Risk and Safety Management. Around another one in 10 respondents (60) are members of the environmental managers' body, the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment.

For anyone who prefers life outside the institutional fold there may be some comfort in the fact that one in seven professionals in our poll had no professional memberships. But the median salary band for these refuseniks is £30,000 to £32,499, compared with £37,500 to £39,999 for those paying any sort of professional membership dues.

Pay freezes

Asked what sort of pay increases they had received in 2008, 479 participants reported

Figure 3. 2008 pay rises

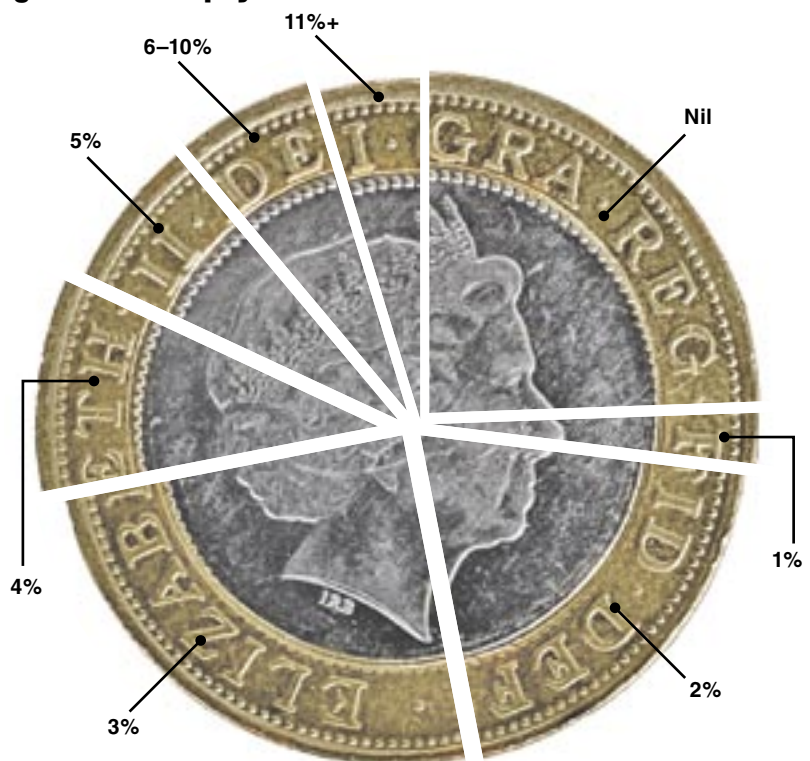
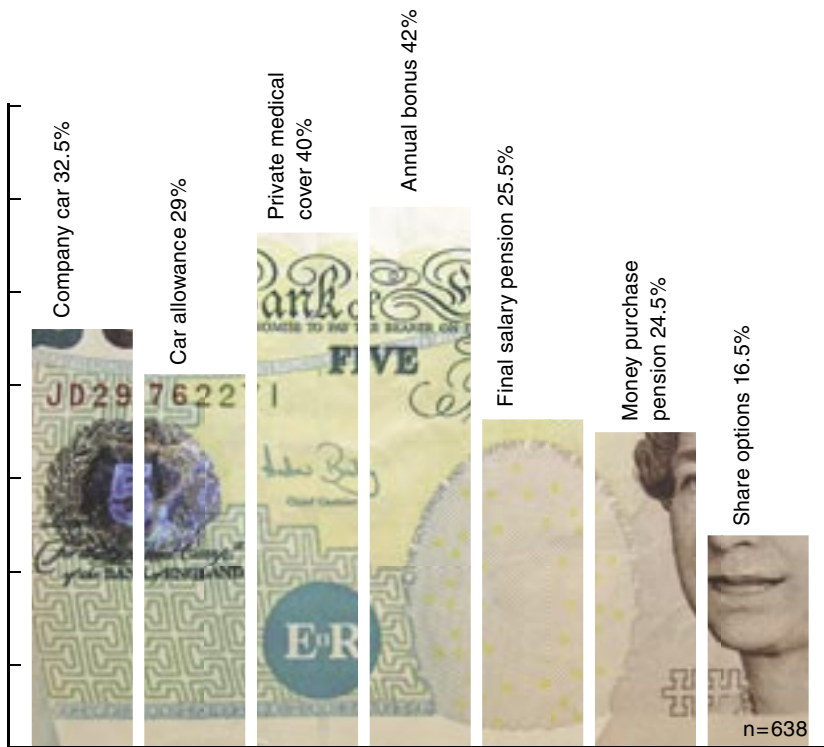


Table 1. Median salary band by sector

	Health and safety adviser	Health and safety manager
Construction	£35,000–£37,499	£42,500–£44,999
Manufacturing	£30,000–£32,499	£35,000–£37,499
General services	—*	£40,000–£42,499
Public services	£32,500–£34,999	£35,000–£37,499

*Insufficient data

Figure 4. Employee benefits



rises ranging from 1% to more than 10%. The median increase among those who received anything was 3%, in line with most other professional groups in the economy.

But excluded from these figures are a remarkable one-in-four respondents who said they had not received any rise at all. With price inflation above 3% throughout the year, this group reporting pay freezes effectively suffered a pay cut in 2008. It would be heartening to be able to put down the size of this cohort to the fact they were surveyed in November and they might have received pay awards in the last month of the year. Sadly, December is the quietest month for pay reviews, and the high number of freezes (most common in manufacturing and construction) almost certainly reflects the worsening state of the economy. While, as Figure 3 shows, half those polled received rises below the inflation rate, a fortunate few saw their pay rise by more than 10%; they are all the more fortunate because four out of five of them already earn at least £45,000 a year.

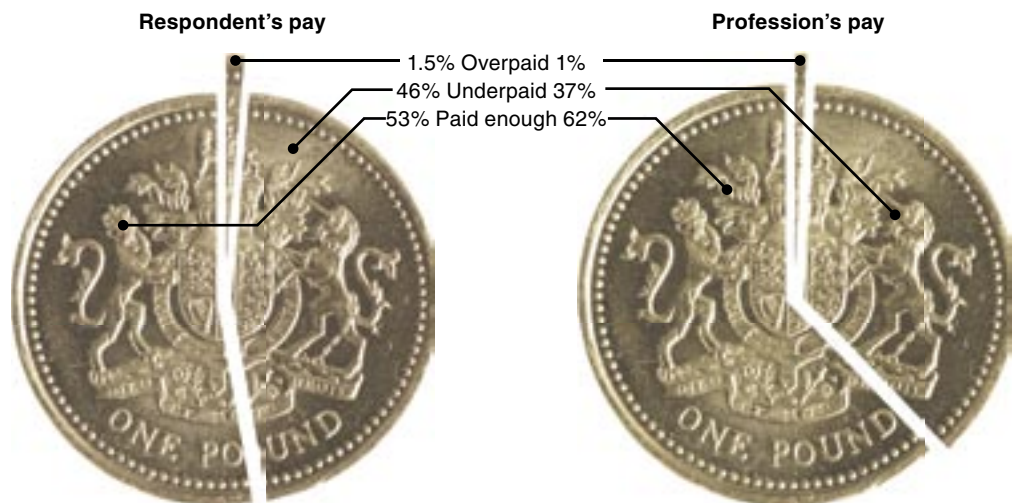
Benefits claimants

As Figure 4 shows, 270 of the health and safety practitioners surveyed (42%) also qualify for some form of bonus on top of their basic salaries. Only seven of these work for public sector organisations. Public services employees are also absent (for obvious reasons) from those who can acquire discounted shares in their businesses through government-approved share schemes (around 20% of private sector respondents). A fortunate 12% of those polled (78) are covered by both bonus and share option schemes.

The mobility required of most health and safety managers is reflected in the fact that 61.5% (396) have either company cars or cash compensation for using their own.

As in previous years, our poll tried to gauge how happy health and safety practitioners are with their financial lot. Though we do not have a matched sample for the three years, so can't put too much weight on the change, the hardening economic climate and those low pay rises may be reflected in the fact that 46% of respondents believe they are underpaid, up from 39% last year. We also added a broader question this year about how well they think their profession is remunerated. Clearly, a proportion felt they are personally hard-done-by, as 62% think the profession is

Figure 5. Salary satisfaction



decently rewarded, while only 52.5% would say the same about themselves.

To minimise the time it took to complete, our salary survey questionnaire was a simple tick-box exercise, with one exception. At the end of the form we offered respondents the chance to record their own thoughts about their pay and conditions. The general observations below were typical of the ones we received:

- "This is one of the few professions where to keep to recognised competency levels it is necessary to undertake a great deal of training and to keep up to date, unlike many other better-paid professions."
- "As a female working in a male dominated industry (construction) I found that the opportunities and salaries are still under a very strong glass ceiling."
- "Health and safety hasn't quite managed to follow the model of HR where it's considered to be a business partner."
- "Family-run firms do not seem to take health and safety as seriously as corporate firms and thus pay far less than the national average."
- "For a job where every day is different and you have to make snap decisions and stick to them, a lot of health and safety professionals are very underpaid and thought of as not being very cooperative."
- "We only become important when problems occur."

The tone of these and other comments like them suggests some safety professionals feel that it isn't just the public and the media who don't value their work enough. It would be nice to think that things might change in 2009, but somehow that seems unlikely.

Attwood Burton is the market-leading health, safety and environmental recruitment specialist, working alongside organisations in every industry sector to recruit the best professionals: www.attwoodburton.co.uk