



# Working in Consultancies

Prospect survey report  
January 2025

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Most consultancies are in the private sector, where union membership density is 12%. It consequently might have been expected that most respondents would be from branches covered by a collective bargaining agreement or those who needed help with a specific problem at work. However, the figures for those motivations were 19.6% and 17.4% respectively.

1 in 2 members felt that there were issues specific to consultancies and members typically desired increased trade union involvement in the workplace.



**Collective bargaining would benefit consultants as membership rates are low and pay bands aren't transparent””**

In some consultancies, employees are paid vastly different salaries for the same work. Trade unions like Prospect can help consultants by ensure minimum salaries for each technical grade and will use the new Employment Rights Bill to bargain for consultants across sectors.

Overall, focus group participants felt that “the results looked like them” with some caveats. This means that we can consider that the results of the survey are reflective of the experience of consultants who are members of Prospect with a degree of certainty.

Three broad topics were identified within the results as presenting the greatest concern for respondents.

- Training and Development;
- Identity and Inclusion;
- Workload.

# Training and Development

## Summary

Common themes across respondents were a lack of opportunities for career progression and professional development alongside unclear reporting lines when seconded. As one respondent put it *“Training and development is remarkably poor considering that it (consultancy) is a knowledge based business”*. With 62% of respondents reporting that they had no clear pathways for progression and only 52% having access to paid time for Continuous Professional Development (CPD), there is a clear issue when it comes to being able to progress within their jobs for workers in professional services.

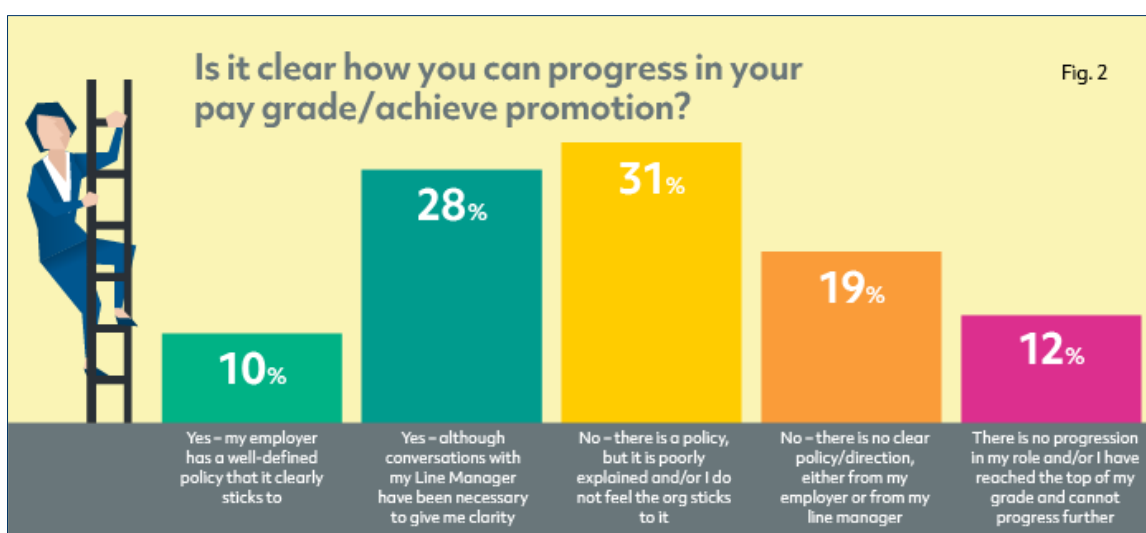
## Career Development

One area that is key for progression for many in the sector is achieving chartership, with 40% of respondents reporting that their employer expected it of them. Despite this, and the fact that chartership benefits consultancies as they can charge their employee's work at higher rates, only 1 in every 3 were provided paid time to develop their application.



***There is a frustration that pay progression is now limited by being chartered, as I'm not chartered I am stuck at a lower pay grade than others above me that have less responsibilities.”***

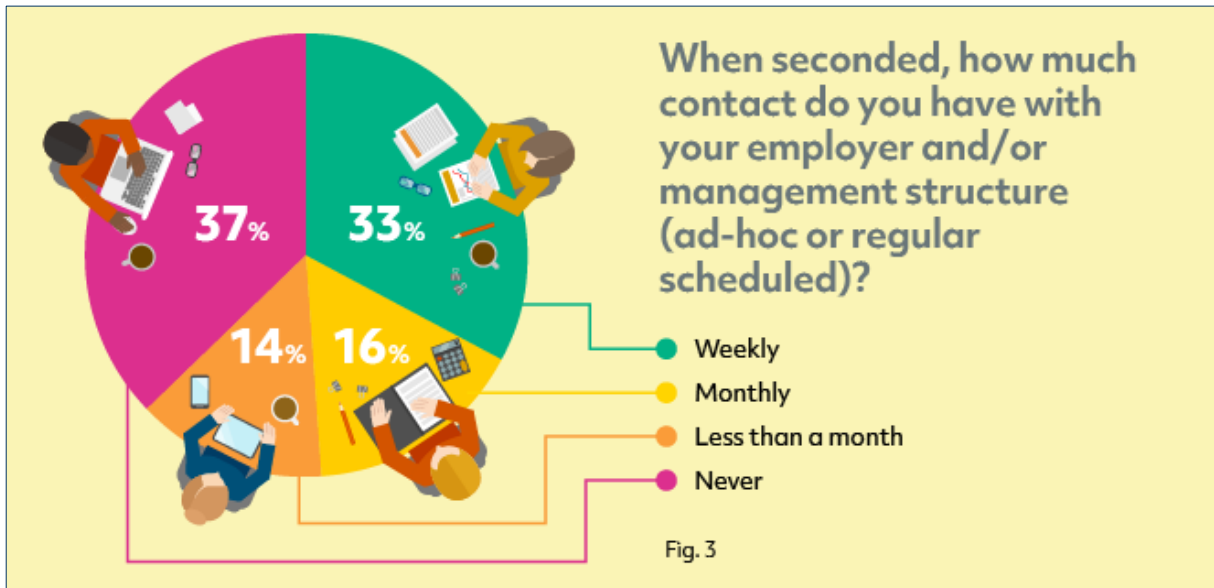
63% of respondents also reported that it is difficult to recruit and retain staff. Many feel they must leave their current organisation to progress in their career due to a lack of internal opportunity, which is further corroborated by the finding that 90% of workers who leave either join other consultancies (63%) or their clients (27%).



The nature of the work explains the aforementioned dynamic, with respondents in the focus groups reporting that the nature of the work means that you are often *“there to do a specific job”* and nothing more, thus having little scope for development outside of their job. Access to training and professional development is also often contingent upon the relationship with and support received from a worker's manager, with worker isolation being a theme picked up later in this report.

## Secondments

It is common practice for consultancies to second their staff to client sites on either a part-time or full-time basis. Figure 3 shows the frequency of contact that takes place during times of secondment, and it was concerning to learn that only 33% would have weekly contact with their employers and 37% never have contact with their direct employer/management structure.



What this means is that a secondee could

- be isolated from their employer;
- miss out on important training and development opportunities;
- carry the burden of navigating the client-consultant relationship alone, including the risk their employer would disadvantage them to benefit their client.

Support for secondees is a topic Prospect are actively working on in key locations, ensuring that Prospect workplace reps are trained and able to offer support to members in navigating this complex situation.



# Identity and Inclusion

## Why do Consultants Join Prospect?

When asked, the three most popular reasons for joining Prospect given by members were

- They believed in protecting workers' rights;
- It was part of their political identity; and
- They wanted to be part of a wider community.

However, there are clearly 2 distinct groups of consultant members within Prospect:

1. Those who have come from privatised civil service departments, and who are likely to be on legacy terms with a recognition agreement;
2. Those who come from private sector consultancies, who are likely to be on statutory terms, and whose employer is likely to “tolerate” unions at best.

Moreover, when the results were broken down, almost 70% of respondents were not attached to a specific branch which was a surprising result in itself and suggested an interest in engaging more with Prospect work.

In the focus groups, several members named solidarity and promoting workers' rights as being their reason for joining. In these sessions, the desire to socialise and connect with other professionals in a similar situation was repeatedly stressed, for professional as well as personal reasons.

It also suggests that there is the opportunity to highlight trade union themes of solidarity and emphasise Prospect's campaigns for improvements to workplace legislation. For example, it should be communicated that many parts of the Employment Rights Bill have been proposed are a direct result of trade union influence, while the Right to Switch Off can be traced to Prospect's Right to Disconnect campaign.

## How do Consultancies Handle EDI?

81% of respondents knew that their employer had an EDI policy, respondents highlighted several areas for improvement, particularly around gender inequality and understanding disabilities.

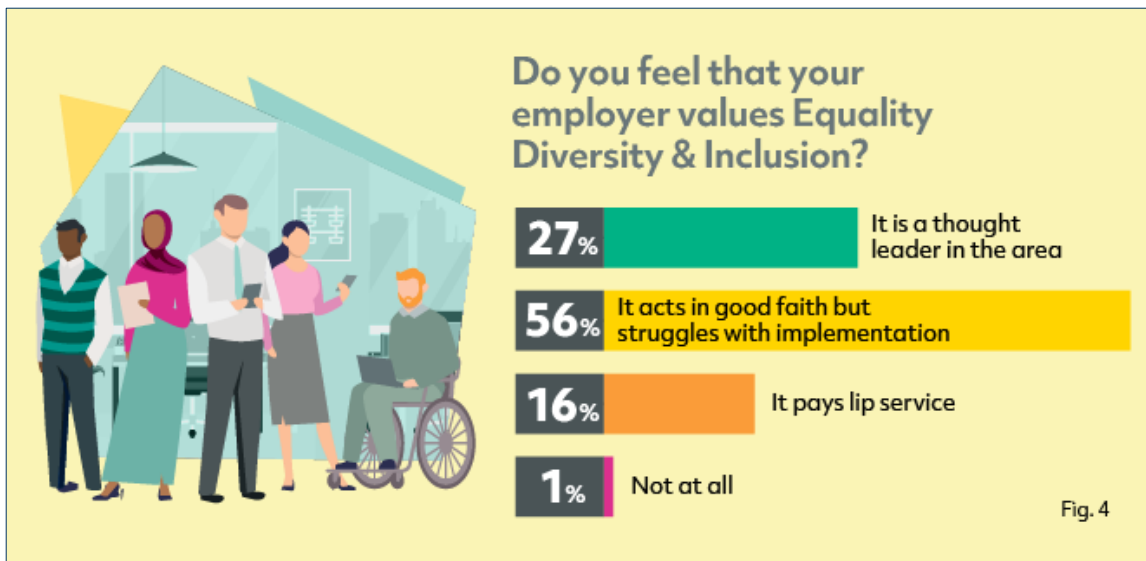


***I'm part of the gender equity community, and we do events and talks...but it has been impossible to implement real change."***



***When I raise the negative impact the company's approach is having on my disabilities, it seems to fall on deaf ears."***

It was acknowledged by most respondents that their consultancies do care about EDI, with 83% acting in good faith at the very least. However, they struggle to implement good EDI policies as displayed in Figure 4, suggesting that they might require some support in this matter.



It is important to highlight the influence that Prospect Equalities/EDI Reps can have in this regard, with branches having negotiated

- Implementation of an Ethnicity Rapid Action Plan;
- Pay awards including a budget for equal pay;
- Transgender inclusion policies;
- Free period products in toilets.

This is in addition to the involvement of Prospect reps in establishing Scotland's Fair Work Convention.

## Stability & Isolation

Consultancies typically recruit based on optimistic forecasts of bid success, passing the risks onto their employees if contracts do not come through (see page 9, **Table 1: Selection of Defence and Energy branches**). Consultants typically fed back that they feel in a precarious position.



***Job constantly feels insecure and redundancy at statutory minimum only."***



***Consultancies will generally make staff redundant if they lose an account/contract or they are forced to cut costs to make the account pay."***



The instability is exacerbated and the best exemplified by having to navigate the boundary between their employer and the client, where consultants can be isolated by the power dynamic involved.



***As consultants, we often have 2 different jobs - one for our client and one for the consultancy. It's a demanding workload and burnout levels are high."***



***More exposure to different organisations [means] more chance for conflict, though you will just be removed from the contract and put on others if they don't like you."***

These support the observations previously made (Training and ), providing an additional possible explanation for the high turnover and difficulties in retaining staff.

As a counter to this professional isolation, it must be noted that Prospect represents members across both the Energy and Defence sectors in both private and public sector employers as seen in Table 1. As a union, Prospect is well placed to offer members opportunities to meet and network with each other, including through training opportunities. As a consultant, you are most likely to move to a competitor or client, and Prospect membership can therefore provide continuous support and development throughout your career. Moreover, the ability to connect you to your clients outside of your direct project means Prospect can facilitate closer and better client relationships.

**Table 1: Selection of Defence and Energy branches**

Defence	Energy
AWE	EDF
Ministry of Defence	Sellafield
BAE Systems	Nuclear Restoration Services
HSE	Office for Nuclear Regulation
Babcock	UKAEA

# Workload

## Summary

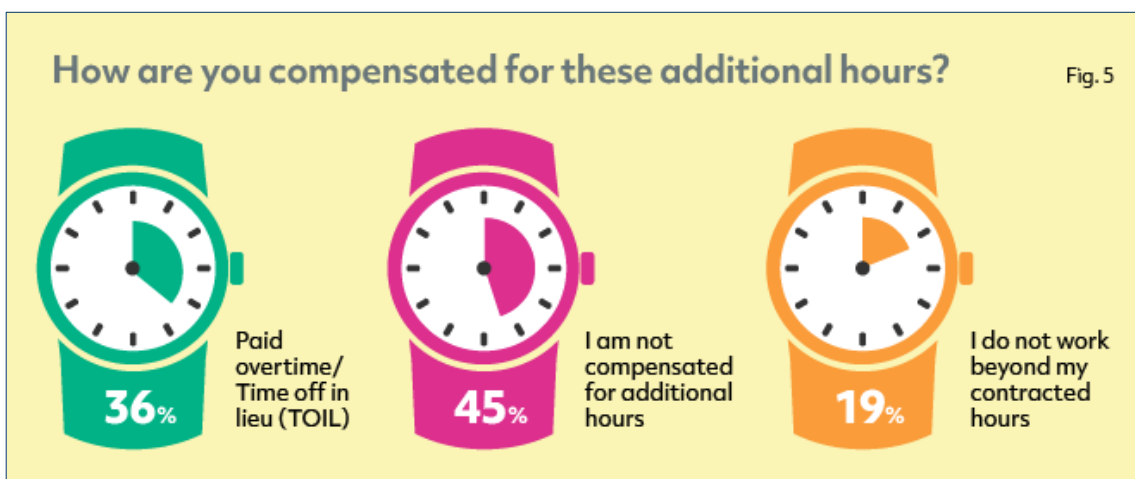
Workload was a significant issue among respondents, with concerns splitting broadly into 2 categories; hours worked and stress relative to pay. A further concern was the unpredictability of the work. Members reported huge variations in terms of workload, with periods of too much, and others where employees are “scratching around” for something to do, the combination two factors can cause numerous issues around stress and mental health. To further exacerbate the situation, as one respondent put it *“we often have 2 different jobs - one for our client and one for the consultancy. It’s a demanding workload and burnout levels are high”*.

There is a lack of knowledge that union membership is still the best way to improve terms and conditions such as workload, particularly when moving to a workplace where Prospect is not recognised.

## Hours Worked

76% of respondents said that they work more than their contractual hours, with 18% working 4 or more additional hours per week. As shown in Figure 5, 45% of respondents reported that that they were not compensated for these additional hours worked., As one respondent put it *“an expectation to work unpaid overtime is a general problem in the consultancy sector”*

These long, often poorly compensated hours were cited as an example of consultancy specific issues, due to management demands and a systematic practice of under-estimating time required to complete tasks. A significant minority (19%) felt that this was due to estimation procedures not being accurate, with a further 7% describing deliberate underestimation of hours to win projects.



## Stress Relative to Pay

Apart from a desire for an increase in basic pay, there was very much a view that pay is poor for the quantity work that is expected as there can be an implied obligation to work over contracted hours, combined with a lack of either overtime pay or toil. Only 33% of respondents feel that they are paid fairly compared to the rest of the market. A further 36% felt the pay was only adequate when viewed in conjunction with associated benefits (flexibility, private healthcare, pension).

Prospect has successfully helped many members negotiate better contractual terms and conditions, campaigned for the 'Right to Switch Off' in legislation and supported member requests for flexible working. All of these are actions that reduce workplace stress and improve wellbeing and underline how joining a trade union and getting active will benefit you at work.

## Case study – ALTEN



**Alten employees working on Hinckley Point C projects had received unsatisfactory pay increases for years and were concerned about their pension payments. After organising and joining Prospect, trade union members campaigned for better pay offers, including taking industrial action to push Alten to negotiate with them.**

**([Hinkley Point C supply chain workers claim they get paid 'unfairly' – BBC News](#)<sup>1</sup>)**

**Using Prospect's network within the Energy sector, including support from union representatives at EDF, Prospect negotiated an above inflation pay increase from Alten of 5% and a commitment to regular discussions throughout 2025. This concluded the dispute in a positive way for members and showed how different branches can work together to achieve successful outcomes.**

**Not a member? Join online today at [www.prospect.org.uk/join](http://www.prospect.org.uk/join)**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ckgdlq1ql5no>





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