

Task and Finish Group: Business Leaders' Pay, Conditions and Recognition

Hayley Dunn, ASCL Business Leadership Specialist and Louise Hatswell, ASCL Conditions of Employment Specialist: Pay were asked by ASCL Council's Conditions and Employment (C&E) Committee, to lead a task and finish (T&F) group looking at the issues relating to business leaders' pay, conditions and recognition. This report summarises the scope of the group, what the group discussed, the findings, how information has been communicated to members, actions taken and next steps.

The T&F Group ran for a year through the 2021-22 academic year.

The work of the T&F Group was premised by the findings in the ASCL **2021 Pay Survey** and Building Block 2: Teachers and Leaders of the **ASCL Blueprint for a Fairer Education System**.

For reference, here is a summary of the ASCL Pay Survey 2021 findings:

ASCL Pay & Conditions Survey February 2021	No of Respondents	Any additional hours post-Covid (weekly)					Workload manageable			Acceptable work/life balance		
		None	1-5	5-10	10-15	15+	Yes	No	Unsure	Yes	No	Unsure
Overall	1,890	29%	16%	28%	16%	11%	36%	48%	17%	20%	72%	8%
England	1,828	29%	16%	28%	16%	11%	35%	47%	17%	20%	72%	8%
Wales	62	19%	15%	32%	15%	19%	18%	52%	31%	11%	76%	13%
SBLs	213	28%	23%	27%	12%	10%	37%	47%	16%	30%	61%	9%

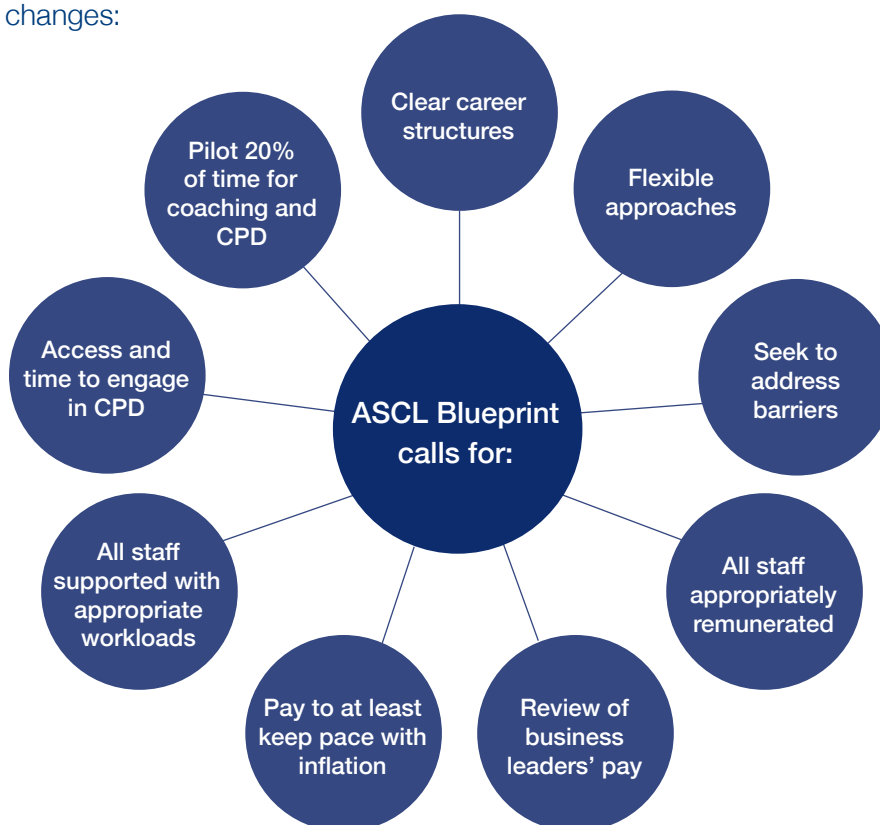
Respondents were given the option to submit comments relating to the questions on workload and work-life balance. The following is a selection of these comments by school business leaders (SBLs):

- Excessive workload: Always feel a failure as there is always a task that hasn't been completed or failed to meet deadlines. No tasks have been removed from schools to compensate for the additional Covid19 workload.
- Best description is 'firefighting'. Demands increase year on year and I can no longer keep pace with the workload. One example - Budget monitoring; we used to do eight per year, but ESFA dictate we must do 12. Each one takes 4/5 days to complete ie an extra 16-20 days work - that's a month's work! No extra resource to complete the work. Gender Pay Gap reporting was introduced a few years back - another 3/4 days work!! And go it goes on.
- I do manage but that is because I work an additional 20-30 hours per week over and above my contracted hours.
- We're being asked to do more and more with less, which unfortunately means some areas will be afforded less or no attention.
- Have worked in arts, media, FE, HE and local government. Never experienced workload like it. Not enough staff to work proactively, constantly changing demands on time (eg GDPR/DPO role, COVID, track and trace etc).
- The only way it is manageable is to work long hours, but there are only so many hours in the day and at some point we need to sleep!

- If I were to do everything re compliance it would not be sustainable, I have to make judgement calls.
- Definitely not, I currently an experiencing anxiety, especially on a Sunday night as I struggle to see how I will face the challenges for the coming week.
- Each year the amount I have to do as a Business Manager increases. The resources available for me to employ staff to manage the full range of requirements in a modern secondary are currently not sufficient, but we continue to try to find greater efficiencies.

What does the ASCL blueprint say about pay?

In summary, Building Block 2: Teachers and Leaders in the ASCL **Blueprint for a Fairer Education System** calls for the following changes:



What was the scope of the group?

The participants in the T&F group were ASCL members in leadership roles with a range of diverse roles and characteristics, including:

- Employees from maintained, academy and independent schools
- Primary, secondary, and special schools
- England and Wales
- Single schools and groups of schools
- Female and male
- A local representative
- A leader of a school business leaders' regional network
- Current and previous ASCL Council members
- ASCL Council executive business leader representatives (past and present)
- ASCL Associate members
- Business leaders, chief executive officers, trust executive, headteachers and principals

The group was advisory in nature and had no decision-making powers, this responsibility remained with the ASCL Council Conditions and Employment Committee.

Each meeting of the T&F Group focused on one of the following core strands:

- Pay
- Conditions
- Recognition
- Workload
- Recruitment and retention
- Professional development
- Wellbeing

What did the group discuss?

The T&F Group meetings were framed around key questions to facilitate the conversations. These included:

Pay, conditions and recognition

- Conditions can be just as important as pay, sometimes more so. What are the key elements we should focus on for business leaders?
- ASCL has a position statement on SBL pay, does this need reviewing and strengthening?

Workload

- Which area of demand has the most pull on business leaders' time? (This could be an activity, an individual or a group)
- What advice, guidance or tools should we be asking the Government or other regulatory bodies to develop? Or that you would like to see ASCL develop?
- Which returns (statutory or non-statutory) take a significant amount of time to complete and/or to compile the information required?
- What are the biggest barriers to keeping workload manageable?

Recruitment and retention

- What strategies are schools/trusts using for succession planning?
- How are you finding the current recruitment market?
- What recruitment strategies are you or colleagues using to attract candidates?
- Which retention strategies do you find work best in your context?
- Are their recruitment and retention challenges specific to your context or local area?
- What would you trial if you had the resources?

Professional development

- What is your approach to your own professional development?
- Are the current available qualifications meeting individual and employer needs?
- What are the gaps/barriers?
- Could we map a career development plan?

Wellbeing

- How do you look after your own wellbeing?
- Heads/CEOs: How do you look after your SBL's wellbeing?
- What wellbeing/health related topics should we be discussing?

How were findings communicated?

The reporting mechanism included written and verbal updates to the ASCL Council Conditions and Employment Committee from ASCL specialists and from committee members who were also part of the T&F Group. Regular communications were provided to ASCL members via the Business Matters newsletter and Business Brunch podcast.

What were the findings?

In relation to pay, the group participants cited phenomenal differences in pay and job descriptions for roles with the same title. Some local authorities were cited as a barrier to re-evaluating pay to an appropriate level. The group reported colleagues being refused equal pay discussions. Experiences were shared of broader remuneration packages and enhancements. It was concerning to hear of instances of salaries being reduced when a postholder left.

Concerns about conditions included access and opportunity to work flexibly, with polarised examples shared, a view that increasing automation would bring greater flexibility, business leaders having no directed time, in some circumstances narrow opportunities to take annual leave, examples of short-term and long-term benefits.

The group shared many examples of professionals leaving or retiring from the profession. The most concerning element is those choosing to leave the profession due to better working conditions in other sectors and industries. Other examples included instances of experienced business professionals moving to roles with flexible working practices or better pay, examples peers who have moved recently into the charity sector and to accountancy and audit firms.

Some are concerned about the rapid development of specialist and hybrid roles with system developments widening the gap. Recent recruitment exercises found a limited supply of qualified or experienced professionals for senior posts.

The group felt that mutually supportive relationships, onboarding, and training are all important factors for recruiting and retaining business leaders.

Recognition of business leaders as a key part of the leadership team, involvement in strategic direction and decision making was varied. Some business leaders are excluded from senior leadership team meetings and decisions, and there are instances of blurred boundaries on tasks and responsibilities. There is a wide variation on the understanding of the role and inconsistent use of the Institute of School Business Leadership (ISBL) Professional Standards.

The group felt strongly that there should be parity with other leadership roles where appropriate.

Workload was the most significant concern shared by the group and led us to running additional roundtables with other stakeholder groups. Individuals and groups provided a wide range of examples that are impacting on business leaders' workload.

Various demands on time: examples cited included staff, parents, phone calls, interruptions, emails, finance, daily firefighting, arranging supply cover, staff recruitment, finance, mental health, HR, new Government policies (examples included GDPR and sustainability) and covering colleagues' workload when absent.

Examples of barriers to keeping workload manageable included leadership colleagues being unaware of what the role entails, delegation, time management, fluctuations in staff attendance, insufficient quiet time, inadequate funding, unpredictability, lack of definition of the role, volume of work, new leadership team, lack of admin support and capacity, too many new initiatives, multiple site management, time constraints, and not being involved or informed of leadership decisions.

Some activities and tasks take a long time to complete, for example, workforce census, pupil census, governor reports, BFR (Budget Forecast Return), finance budget setting and budget re-forecasting, and compliance.

There's an increasing number of returns and an increased level of detail required, examples include Covid grants and school-led tutoring grants.

The lack of automation is hampering improving workload and there are too many management information systems.

Business leaders also cited a lack of structured training or designated time frame to becoming fully competent in the role.

The qualitative information from the ASCL pay survey reflects the group and stakeholder feedback. The survey respondents reported excessive workload, difficulty keeping pace, and working unsustainable long hours.

The group discussed the consideration of minimum qualifications, whilst also recognising the many business leaders with lengthy experience.

There was some uncertainty that existing qualifications support the move to leadership and felt there is demand for getting back to in-person training following the pandemic. They discussed the benefits of learning alongside peers in a face-to-face environment.

Access to the apprenticeship levy was cited as a barrier for some.

The key challenges facing business leaders relating to professional development are time, access, support, and funding.

The group shared some great examples of organisation-wide wellbeing strategies, including wellbeing packages, frameworks, and initiatives. Initiatives included access to independent coaching and counselling.

The group discussed the importance of access to services and support, organisational culture, work-life balance and role modelling from the top. The group (particularly the business leaders) also felt it was important that business leaders take a lead on managing themselves and their own wellbeing. They believe there is increased awareness, but still felt a sense of needing to justify prioritising their own wellbeing and flexible working.

What actions were taken?

Following feedback from the T&F Group several actions have been taken forward and include:

- Development of a new ASCL microsite **Business Leaders: Support Hub**, bringing together guidance and information on business leaders pay, conditions and recognition
- Influencing the DfE **School Resource Management (SRM): Building a Strong System** Strategy with a commitment:
 - from the DfE to work with ASCL on induction materials
 - to expect business knowledge to be at the centre of leadership decision making
 - to research into how CFOs and COOs work in strong trusts at executive and leadership level, and bursary funding for a second cohort of aspiring CFOs
 - ASCL called for Government to include support for equitable pay their School Business Professional Strategy Review
- The ASCL Council **position statement** on business leaders pay was reviewed and subsequently ratified by ASCL Council
- A new ASCL Council **position statement** for business leaders' conditions was developed and subsequently ratified by ASCL Council
- **Article** in *Leader* magazine shining a spotlight on the work of SBLs and the importance of equitable pay and recognition
- Updating of ASCL's pay and conditions guidance for business leaders

- Development of a business case template and guidance for members requesting a salary review
- A programme of ASCL-led stakeholder roundtables with the T&F Group, sector bodies, and ASCL members to discuss workload issues in more depth
- The creation of an internal repository of information for the ASCL Policy team enabling them to access and utilise historical and current information and insights on business leaders pay and conditions. This includes a library of example job advertisements, job descriptions and person specifications from recent advertisements
- ASCL raised the issue of inequitable pay with Baroness Barran, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for the School System) at the ASCL Conference for Business Leaders and with the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) in our oral evidence session in April
- Developed case studies based on some of the examples of practice shared
- Regular updates were included in communications to members via **newsletters** and **Business Brunch podcasts**
- An **article** was shared in *Leader* magazine sharing the benefits of offering flexible working for business leaders
- ASCL **survey** findings were shared with the DfE School Business Professional Policy Lead and followed up with several meetings with ASCL Specialists
- Called for the DfE to update the information on the National Careers webpage for the role profile of **school business manager**
- Supporting ISBLs review of the school business leadership professional standards
- Supporting DfE's development of estates professional standards
- Inclusion of a workshop session on 'working effectively with your business leader' in the ASCL New Heads Conference
- Supporting Education Support with developing wellbeing resources for business leaders
- Published a **blog** on the ASCL website highlighting the issue of pay parity for some SBLs

The meetings with the T&F Group have completed and this report summarises the insights and outcomes.

The support of the T&F Group has been fundamental in shaping our breadth of knowledge of the issues facing business leaders and employers. They have provided a broader depth to the issues and concerns and been vulnerable in sharing some of their own personally challenging experiences. They have supported the development of new ASCL position statements, helped form views and feedback for influencing the DfE's SRM Strategy, and provided case studies for the new microsite. We hope they will continue to use their networks to increase the profile of SBLs pay. We are hugely grateful to them for their support, time, and commitment to the group.

What are the next steps?

There are some immediate next steps that ASCL policy specialists will look to take forward, these include:

- Updating the ASCL pay and conditions guidance considering recent announcements
- The development of a business case template for members wishing to request a review
- Launching the new ASCL microsite Business Leaders: Support Hub
- Continuing to campaign on pay, conditions, and recognition
- Engage and influence strands of the DfE SRM Strategy
- Provide support to other organisations, such as the National Governance Association and the Institute of School Business Leadership with development of their advice and guidance relating to business leaders

- Scope the potential outline for business leadership workload reduction toolkit
- Research and consider initiatives used in Wales on identifying workload burden
- Scope the potential for an ASCL ‘Business Essentials’ CPD webinar series

Conclusion

ASCL’s focus on business leaders pay, conditions and recognition must remain high. The issues must be a core strand of ASCL campaigning until the issues of parity, pay and working conditions are addressed for ASCL’s business leader members.

To stay up to date with developments, if you are an ASCL member and you haven’t done so already, sign up for the monthly Business Matters newsletter [here](#).

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ASCL SBL Pay, Conditions and Recognition T&F Group Leads, 2021-22

September 2022



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