

BC Excluded Employees Workplace Views

The BC Excluded Employees' Association regularly surveys its members to better understand their concerns. These concerns have a broad impact on the public sector and ultimately the services provided to British Columbians because many of them pose a threat to the effectiveness and efficiency of work that serves the public.

A survey concluded in March 2023 identified that the top issues as staffing and succession planning, with salaries and compensation following. There are also significant concerns about a shortage of staff and managers to fill positions left vacant from permanent or temporary departures, burnout and lack of workplace flexibility, and incentives to apply to excluded management positions given the compensation rates. If not addressed, all of these have serious implications and the association welcomes the opportunity to work with the BC Public Service Agency to find creative solutions.

The survey also tested the pulse of its members on remote work and issues related to older workers.

The survey asked respondents to rate the negative impact of the various issues both on themselves, as well as the negative impact on the effective functioning of the branch. By separately ranking impacts to individuals and branches the survey provides a richer sense of the most urgent challenges within the BC public service that will require collaborative and focused efforts to resolve.

The data tells an important story but equally noteworthy are the unprecedented number of comments members volunteered while doing the survey.

Staffing and Succession Planning

Demonstrating their commitment to the public service, the top issues for excluded employees were not directed at their personal wallets. Association members are most concerned about matters related to their day-to-day life on the job, staff turnover, and the ability to achieve their work goals. More than 80% of respondents ranked the following as having a "significant or extreme negative impact" on themselves and their branch:

- Lack of coherent plan to address ongoing and increasing loss of staff in key skill areas.
- Incentives that encourage staff to move jobs frequently.
- Time lags in hiring process.

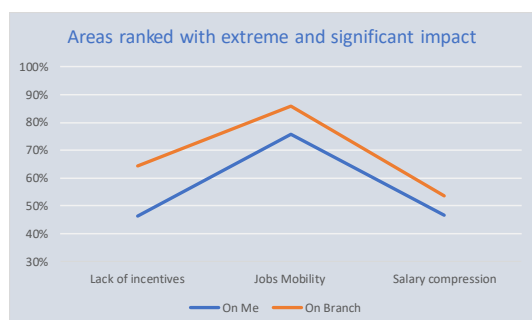
I can't stress how difficult the last year has been as I lose staff — including high performers where experience is critical for success — just because of salary or they aren't making the same as new hires in the same role.

The high turnover and continuous loss of skilled and experienced staff hinders efficiency and consistency in service delivery. The BCPS should take serious consideration of the WES results and turnover rates to be a real "employer of choice".

It's depressing to constantly hire and train new talent only for those people to move elsewhere within a few months. TAs are unique and great opportunities but at the moment, one feels the initiative is counterproductive.

There has been plenty of talk about succession planning, but little is done that actually addresses it. Current leadership at my workplace is doing more to drive senior people out and discourage people from career development than to actually motivate leaders to develop and stick around. Poor senior management right now is more talk and less walk.

High performing internal staff have no incentive to apply for an excluded position. They have calculated that their EDOs are worth approximately \$8,000/year and their work life balance is significantly improved with this benefit. It is not worth it to move to an excluded position because the pay is not high enough to outweigh this and to take on additional responsibilities, work extra hours and all of the other impacts of moving into an excluded position.



Areas ranked as having extreme and significant impact	on me	on branch
Lack of incentives for high performing Bargaining Unit staff to move into excluded roles	46.46%	64.45%
Incentives that encourage staff to move jobs frequently	75.77%	85.90%
Salary compression	46.60%	53.78%

It is very difficult to convince high-performing 27's to move to banded positions. The salary is the same as a band 2, they are losing their flex days and, in my organization, they also lose one day of Work From Home. (Included can WFH three days a week, excluded only two).

Survey respondents bemoaned high staff turnover and continuous loss of skilled and experienced staff due to salary and compensation not being competitive.

Salaries and Compensation



Following staffing concerns, 70-80% of respondents rated the following issues around salaries and compensation as having “some negative” impact on their branch:

- Lack of across-the-board increases linked to cost of living.
- Inconsistent application of performance pay among Ministries.
- Policies/practices resulting in new hires and TA's getting higher pay than longer term, experienced staff.

Respondents emphasized that unequal pay for similar positions, or greater pay for ones that are less demanding, makes it hard to recruit and keep staff. They state they do not feel rewarded for work performance and that there is no incentive for loyalty, experience and knowledge. Respondents expressed strongly that they felt unfairly treated by the employer when it comes to these compensation issues.

Our rates of pay are handcuffing our ability to hire and retain staff as we're no longer even close to parity with the private sector. Starting rates for Bands and limited increases means managers are leaving positions for parallel jobs just to get a raise.

The pay model is designed to keep managers moving around so they won't become stagnant or block the growth of new managers. However, managers moving around are eligible for 8-10% increases while those staying in place get the usual 2% in range increase until they hit the top of their grid.

This model has caused major disparities within larger organizations at the same management level. The lifers are paid considerably less than the new people. Senior managers have been voicing the counter argument that long term managers add to stability and retain historical knowledge that is critical, especially with the high retirement numbers now. We have also been asking to address the disparities through a one-time salary fix but that has yet to be approved by PSA.

We are incentivized to move often, negatively affecting depth of knowledge in the branch and overinflating the total payroll of government as people will move as often as they can to benefit from pay increases. More significant pay increases or bonuses for people staying in role and performing well would reduce this effect.

I took a TA in a different ministry and got significantly more money than a colleague who took a permanent equivalent position in my previous ministry. I've been contacted by at least six people from my previous ministry asking if there are vacancies...Adding insult to injury, they've hired externally at a higher rate of pay.

It's demoralizing to know that — even though I've been a dedicated, reliable, and valuable part of my management team for five years — people doing my exact same position [in other parts of] the province are being paid significantly more than me... [A recently hired work colleague] with six months supervisory experience and minimum technical experience [was offered] \$10,000 more than my starting offer. I still don't make what he was offered!

I'm wondering why I became a manager in the first place; I've lost job security, I've taken on a huge amount of work and responsibility at the expense of time with my family, yet the difference in pay between me and the (included) people I supervise is laughably small.

The BC Public Service is losing its competitive edge as the newer generation is not looking for union safety or good pensions. They want compensation, benefits and bonuses. We are struggling to hire and retain even within the public service.

Why would anyone take on the level of responsibility, work hours and conditions that is expected for an excluded when you are getting paid essentially the same and in some cases much more if you are an included member doing overtime. I think it is up to the individual to create a career path but knowing how to do it and supports out there are always greatly appreciated.



Remote and Virtual Workplaces

The global pandemic has transformed the workplace. Many of those changes are here to stay, compounding a decade or more of other rapid workplace and demographic shifts that have compelled employees to adapt at an unprecedented rate. The subject of remote and virtual workplaces is top of mind for many excluded employees and prompted the second greatest number of comments — 20% — in the 26-question survey covering a range of subjects.

Rankings on how the remote and virtual workplace was impacting their work and their branch's work ranged dramatically. Some managers find building a culture with a remote team is more difficult and not as effective whereas other managers have noticed working remotely has had a positive effect on themselves and their branch, providing an improved work-life balance.

As a front-line service provider in a rural community, it [mostly] falls on staff who work in the office, including managers, to deal with client rather than those working remotely or virtually. It is inequitable.

Building a culture with a remote team is more difficult, not as effective and not as rewarding.

Working remotely has had a positive effect on our division and branch. There is more work-life balance...

[Prior to government's new direction on remote work] we lost a lot of staff to other ministries and health authorities because the other organizations have more flexible work options.

The lack of flexibility from senior executive in our ministry sends the message that staff aren't trusted to work remotely, and to supervisors that we aren't trusted to manage our staff and deal appropriately with performance issues.

My experience with remote work during the pandemic has been that in many cases my introverts perform better working remotely. Nobody's work ethic has shifted significantly because they are working remotely; our rock stars are still rock stars; our poor performers are still poor performers.



Older Worker Issues

The age demographic in the public service has changed profoundly over the past few years. Prior to the survey the association had anecdotal feedback that some older workers felt pressured to retire. Survey results did not indicate this is a major concern with most respondents saying this had no negative personal impact (44% of respondents) while 37% reported it did not impact their branch.

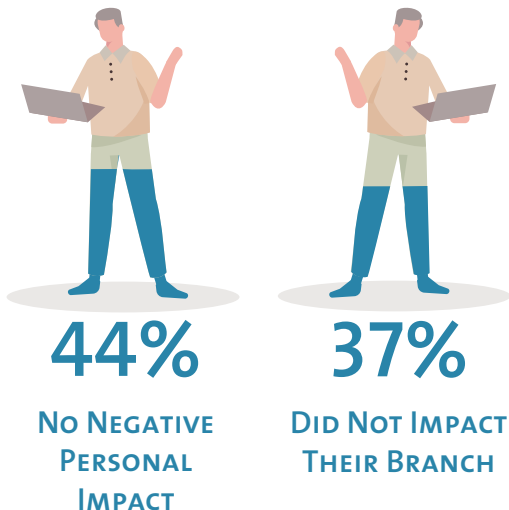
Comments highlighted the value of experienced and knowledgeable employees continuing to work due to shortage of staff and lack of knowledge among new employees. However, some noted that poor retiree benefits deterred those wanting to retire, and others noted a lack of recognition for experience and long service.

I don't think there is anyone urging retirement in my division or ministry. If anything, we are urging retirees to come back as auxiliaries as we are desperate for staff in some areas.

Our ministry does not encourage this from what I have observed. They value their employees' seasoned knowledge and capability.

Some employees are well into their 60s and 70s but feel they cannot retire as they cannot afford to live on their pensions. The quality of work may not be what it once was and the workloads are significantly more.

There is no recognition or acknowledgement for older more experienced workers, the culture appears to value younger less experienced workers who have a tendency to move on to other jobs/employers as they do not see value in a long-term career here.



Conclusion

Overwork, understaffing, non-transparent performance pay have been exacerbated by the COVID pandemic and have correspondingly impacted the work force.

Some incentives are creating unintended negative consequences to career mobility. On the one hand, there is little, and decreasing, incentive for high performing bargaining unit members to move into managerial and excluded roles. On the other hand, inconsistent approaches to compensation contribute to loss of longer-term expertise in roles where this is important. In addition, the belief that the differential in salaries for similar positions is unfair has the potential to negatively impact the discretionary effort contributed by excluded employees across government.

While not new, these so-called perverse incentives, along with the other growing issues, are increasing the risk to the effectiveness and efficiency of the BC Public Service as a whole.

As BCEEa members discussed survey results, their enthusiasm for finding creating solutions to these issues of concern generated a range of initial ideas, for example:

- A “stay in place” bonus to retain staff in areas where knowledge is critical;
- Moving away from the current performance-based increases to a more transparent and rigorous system of salary increases,
- A contemporary and less rigid view of what constitutes merit; developed in consultation with the merit commissioner;
- More robust use of performance assessments including an exploration of how they could become part of the merit process;
- New policies that support double bunking of positions to ensure knowledge transfer in key areas; and
- Addressing compression and differential compensation for similar positions.

In recent discussions members welcome the upcoming in-range performance pay increases of 6.75% and for exceptional performance (20% cap) of 8.75%. However, these performance increases are in the context of BCGEU staff receiving 6.75% cost of living with guaranteed cost of living increments over the next few years, along with their regular annual step salary increases as well. Members have expressed concern that the 2023 increase does not address issues such as compression. In addition, without increased transparency into how decisions are made about who receives performance pay increases, members continue to question the fairness in the process.

The Association, its members and indeed all excluded managers are willing and want to partner in developing solutions that will rebuild capacity and morale and ensure the public service is able to provide services to the residents of BC now and in the future.

More thoughts from excluded employees

On Staffing and Succession Planning

Temporary assignments are creating tremendous, unsustainable pressures. Continuously training, mentoring and supervising new staff is leading to burn out of supervisors... Work continuity is also suffering. Experienced staff who stay in their positions for a long time have to take on more responsibility because everyone else is new and learning. Within a year, the new people are already starting to look for another job. There is ZERO incentive to stay in a position longer than two years. Instead, those who are loyal and reliable end up taking on much more work and responsibility for no extra benefit.

Pay rates for lower-level excluded staff are falling further and further behind pay advances for unionized staff as well as private sector. This is making it unappealing for staff to move from senior included positions into excluded management positions. This also makes it much more difficult to hold onto good mid-level excluded staff as they leave the public sector for the private sector.

[Salary compression makes] a constant battle for each new hire. Staff feel it is disrespectful that someone — often new to a band — is automatically paid more than experienced staff. This issue has caused a significant amount of discord in my office.

Pay equity and the need to evolve leadership competencies at executive level. The world has shifted and we as leaders need to evolve with it style wise. We have five generations in the workforce as leaders in the PSA we need to be able to work with and motivate all. The old guard and traditional command and control styles are a thing of the past.

Salaries and compensation

Incorporate flexible work days into excluded management options similar to the flex days that exist for included employees. As a single mother working in a mid-range excluded position having the option to work slightly longer days to be able to have a day to "manage my life" would make it more sustainable for me to take on challenging and rewarding roles and manage a better work life balance. This is critical to avoiding burnout.

Appendix

This survey's questions were developed in consultation with Association members and checked through a focus group process before being released. The questions responded to issues that had been identified over the previous months as being of specific concern to excluded staff.

By the end of the 10-day survey period 229 completed responses had been received, enabling the Association to confidently identify the highest priority issues for excluded staff members.

BC EXCLUDED EMPLOYEES 2023 PULSE CHECK SURVEY QUESTIONS






The BCEEAA's last survey was in January 2022 and looked at excluded employees' views on return-to-work plans, in preparation for the Association's meeting with the then head of the public service. As a lead up to the planned meeting with the current head, the Association's Board has suggested doing another quick survey to see how the themes and concerns that various members and colleagues have expressed are reflected among a wider group of excluded employees.

We think it's important to look at how these issues may affect individual excluded employees, personally, and also how in your opinion it's impacting the work of your Branch. For each of the following questions, we ask you to rate the impact on you, and on your branch.

As each of these issues have been identified to us as a negative impact, we are asking you to rate the issues by degree of negative impact – from "none" to "extreme". There is space following each thematic group for you to add other issues or make additional points of clarification. Your responses will help the Association understand what excluded employees' highest priority issues are, as the basis for dialogue with executive.






The survey will be open until the end of day Monday April 3. It takes about 6 minutes to complete. All answers are confidential and anonymous. We encourage you to pass the link on to other excluded employees, whether they are members of the Association or not.

Conventions:

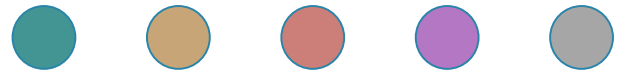
				
Has no negative impact	Some negative impact	Significant negative impact	Extremely negative impact	N/A

Salaries And Compensation

- Salary compression: bargaining unit increases, especially with Temporary Market Adjustments (TMAs), now outstrip Bands 1 and 2.

					
Impact on me					
Impact on my Branch's work					

2. Lack of consistency in pay rates for similar jobs across Ministries.



Impact on me					
Impact on my Branch's work					

3. Policies/practices resulting in new hires and TA's getting higher pay than longer term, experienced staff.



Impact on me					
Impact on my Branch's work					

4. Inconsistent application of performance pay between Ministries.



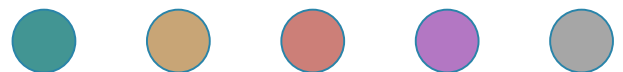
Impact on me					
Impact on my Branch's work					

5. Perdiem rates



Impact on me					
Impact on my Branch's work					

6. Lack of across-the-board increases linked to cost of living.



Impact on me					
Impact on my Branch's work					

7. Comments

Staffing and succession planning

8. Time lags in classification for excluded positions.



Impact on me					
Impact on my Branch's work					

9. Time lags in hiring process.



Impact on me					
Impact on my Branch's work					

10. Incentives that encourage staff to move jobs frequently. It has been suggested that staff will be more successful in getting promotions or salary increases if they move to another division or ministry rather than relying on the small performance pay increments. This increase in movement threatens continued expertise in branches especially where a strong knowledge base is required.



Impact on me					
Impact on my Branch's work					

11. Lack of coherent plan to address ongoing and increasing loss of staff in key skill areas.



Impact on me					
Impact on my Branch's work					

12. Older workers are unable to retire when they choose, due to the comparatively poor pension-related medical benefits package.



Impact on me					
Impact on my Branch's work					

13. Comments

Career development

14. Lack of incentives for high performing Bargaining Unit staff to move into excluded roles.



Impact on me					
Impact on my Branch's work					

15. Lack of clear career path planning and support..



Impact on me					
Impact on my Branch's work					

16. Comments

Remote and virtual work

17. Inconsistent application of policies, not clearly driven by work needs. It has been observed that there are instances where policies on virtual work appear to be driven by individual executive preferences rather than objective costs and benefits to staff and to the quality and nature of their work.



Impact on me					
Impact on my Branch's work					

18. Increased workload on supervisors to manage key tasks: performance measurement, positive work culture & staff engagement in remote/virtual settings.



Impact on me					
Impact on my Branch's work					

19. Comments

Management challenges

20. Employees feeling they are being urged to retire, implicitly or overtly.

Impact on me					
Impact on my Branch's work					

21. Comments

22. The last word... If you could pick one issue that the association should raise with the DM to the Premier and the DM of the Public Service Agency – what would it be?

Impact on me					
Impact on my Branch's work					

About me...

23. I work in:

☐ Victoria

☐ Urban area outside Victoria

☐ Non-urban area

24. Number of staff reporting to me directly and indirectly

☐ 1-5

☐ 6-15

☐ 15-30

☐ More than 31

☐ None

25. The work of me and my team is mainly

☐ Serving internal government clients

☐ Serving the public

☐ Other (please specify)

26. I've worked for the BC public service for

☐ 0-2 years

☐ 3-6 years

☐ 7-14 years

☐ 15 or more years

Thank you for completing this survey! Please feel free to forward the link to others. Results will be published on the BCEEa website.