



# RIBA Presidential survey: Workplace and Wellbeing conditions

Summary Report on Main Findings

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A portrait of Muyiwa Oki, RIBA President 2023-2025. He is a Black man with short, dark hair, smiling and looking slightly to his right. He is wearing a black blazer over a black t-shirt. His hands are clasped in front of him. He is wearing a gold ring on his left hand and a black watch on his right wrist. The background is a blurred interior space with bookshelves filled with books.

**Image:**  
Muyiwa Oki,  
RIBA President  
2023-2025

# Foreword

By **Muyiwa Oki**, RIBA President 2023-2025

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The architect's profession needs to be a fulfilling and enriching career where individuals feel valued. Our profession thrives on values and vision, but we have also developed a dangerous relationship with overtime, long hours and a workplace culture that can take more than it gives.

As RIBA President, it remains my priority to champion changes to improve fairness and dignity in the workplace. The first step to solving the problem is understanding its scale and complexity. For that reason, we commissioned this report, which presents the views of over 1,450 individuals working in practice.

The result paints a sobering picture of extensive overtime and absent compensation. We found that low pay, exacerbated by additional hours without compensation, means significant numbers of young, early-career staff are not receiving the Real Living Wage. Perhaps unsurprisingly, our findings also show that young, early-career staff are more likely to be dissatisfied with their pay and conditions than older, more senior staff.

We issued a Practice Note to RIBA Chartered Practices in November 2024, reminding them of their obligation to pay at least the Real Living Wage, as defined by the Living Wage Foundation, to all staff, including freelancers and students – taking care to compensate overtime with pay or time off in lieu. Again, I remind practices that they must uphold this requirement.

“Using these findings as well as the latest industry research, we will be establishing a task force to lay out a strategy for architecture and RIBA chartered practices to change course.”

The findings of our survey make clear the need to address the culture of unpaid overtime, low wages and insufficient support for professionals. Dignity, safety and fair treatment are the foundations of a healthy and thriving architecture sector – not optional extras.

We know too that the last few years have been exceptionally difficult for many practices, their owners, and leaders. For too many, profits have failed to increase while practice costs, including salaries, have risen.

The wheels are already in motion. Using these findings as well as the latest industry research, we will be establishing a task force to lay out a strategy for architecture and RIBA chartered practices to change course: pinpointing the areas for action, priorities we should focus on, explaining the trade-offs we face, and offering pragmatic initiatives to resolve them.

Our upcoming review of the RIBA Code of Practice, which sets out the standards required of RIBA Chartered Practices, will look specifically at the requirements around employment and workplace wellbeing.

As the only practices endorsed by RIBA, Chartered Practice status is a sign of a commitment to excellence in design and service delivery. Our review aims to ensure that all are fully accountable for the support they provide to employees, both financially and in their working culture.



**Muyiwa Oki**,  
RIBA President 2023-2025

# Executive Summary

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In the late summer of 2024, RIBA researched Workplace and Wellbeing conditions among those in practice, using qualitative interviews and a quantitative survey. Over 1,450 people responded to the survey, with younger people being especially willing to take part. Based on percentages of respondents, the findings include:

Overtime is prevalent in the profession. Ninety per cent of employees in practice work more than their contracted hours. On average, employees in practice are contracted for 37.5 hours per week but work 44 hours. Most are not compensated for this additional work time; two-thirds of those who responded to the survey received no compensation and only 6% received payment.

Low pay, exacerbated by additional hours without compensation, means significant numbers of young, early career-stage staff are not receiving the Real Living Wage, as defined by the Real Living Wage Foundation. Seventy-six per cent of Architectural Assistants with Part 1 qualifications and 13% with Part 2 qualifications do not receive the Real Living Wage. By age, sixty-nine per cent of those aged between 21 and 24, and 11% of those between 25 and 34, do not receive the Real Living Wage.

Many of those working in practice rely on additional sources of income to meet their living costs.

Most people, 55%, who work in practice are dissatisfied with their current pay and conditions. Young, early career-stage staff are more likely to be dissatisfied than older, more senior staff.

Fifty-four per cent of practice staff view their role as detrimental to their mental health and wellbeing. Young, early career-stage staff are more likely to describe their role as detrimental to their mental health and wellbeing and be dissatisfied with their pay and conditions than older, more senior staff.

Employing organisations are often seen as not providing sufficient support for their staff. For example, only 27% agree that their organisation ensures they are not put under excessive stress, only 29% agree that support for mental health and wellbeing is adequate, and just 35% agree that their organisation ensures they can maintain a healthy work-life balance.

Many challenges of working in practice, such as long hours, are shared by most. However, there is often a marked difference in how practice work is viewed (and remunerated) between early-stage career staff, and those more senior.

Analysis of responses also uncovers differences between different groups of people and different kinds of practice. While these are much less stark, they remain important, and are included in the main report below, where significant.

The qualitative research uncovers further challenges, including those felt by women, those with caring responsibilities, and members of Black, Asian, minority ethnic groups. The report includes quotations from qualitative research participants.

## 54%

of practice staff view their role as detrimental to their mental health and wellbeing.

# Introduction

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The RIBA Presidential survey: 'Workplace and Wellbeing conditions' was carried out following a request from RIBA Council to:

“Undertake a survey of employees in RIBA chartered practices to ascertain the extent of unpaid overtime working that is taking place and identify any patterns”.

The survey was live from the end of June to the end of July 2024 and received over 1,450 responses, providing a sufficiently large dataset for confidence in the findings being indicative, and for the analysis to be detailed. A series of in-depth interviews were also conducted, with 20 people working in practice.

This report presents an overview of the findings. It is thematically structured, integrating insights from both research methods to provide a comprehensive view of workplace conditions and wellbeing in architecture practices.

Given the extent and richness of the data provided, not all permutations are given; instead, this report presents the main findings.



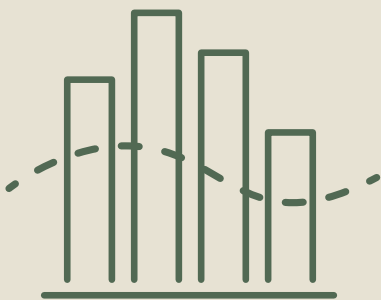
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# About the data

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# About the data

## Quantitative Research

The 1,450 responses to the RIBA Presidential survey: 'Workplace and Wellbeing conditions' provide a detailed dataset that reflects experience of current pay and conditions within practice. Respondents were self-selecting, so findings should be seen as indicative rather than definitive.

Further, the data includes a range of groups, such as region, gender, age, ethnicity, practice size, career stage and role. We might expect members of different groups to have different experiences, and this is explored.

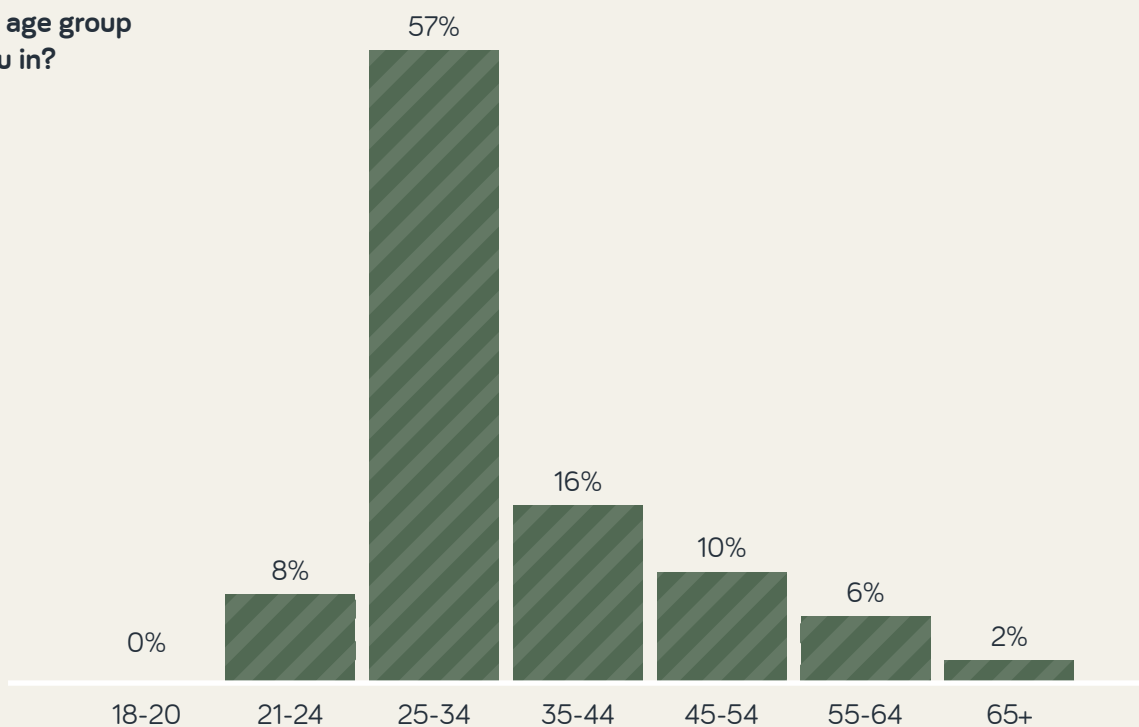
Both employees and practice owners are well represented, although this report concentrates on employees.

The survey responses were distributed unevenly.

Young people, early in their careers, are most likely to have responded, indicating that these topics are especially pertinent to this group. The two graphs below illustrate this. Fifty-seven per cent of responses came from people aged between 25 and 34 (Graph 1), and 33% per cent came from among Level 7 Apprentices and Part 1 and Part 2 qualified Architectural Assistants (Graph 2). This uneven distribution means the results are frequently presented by significant grouping, rather than in total.

**Graph 1:** Percentage of Respondents by Age

**Which age group are you in?**

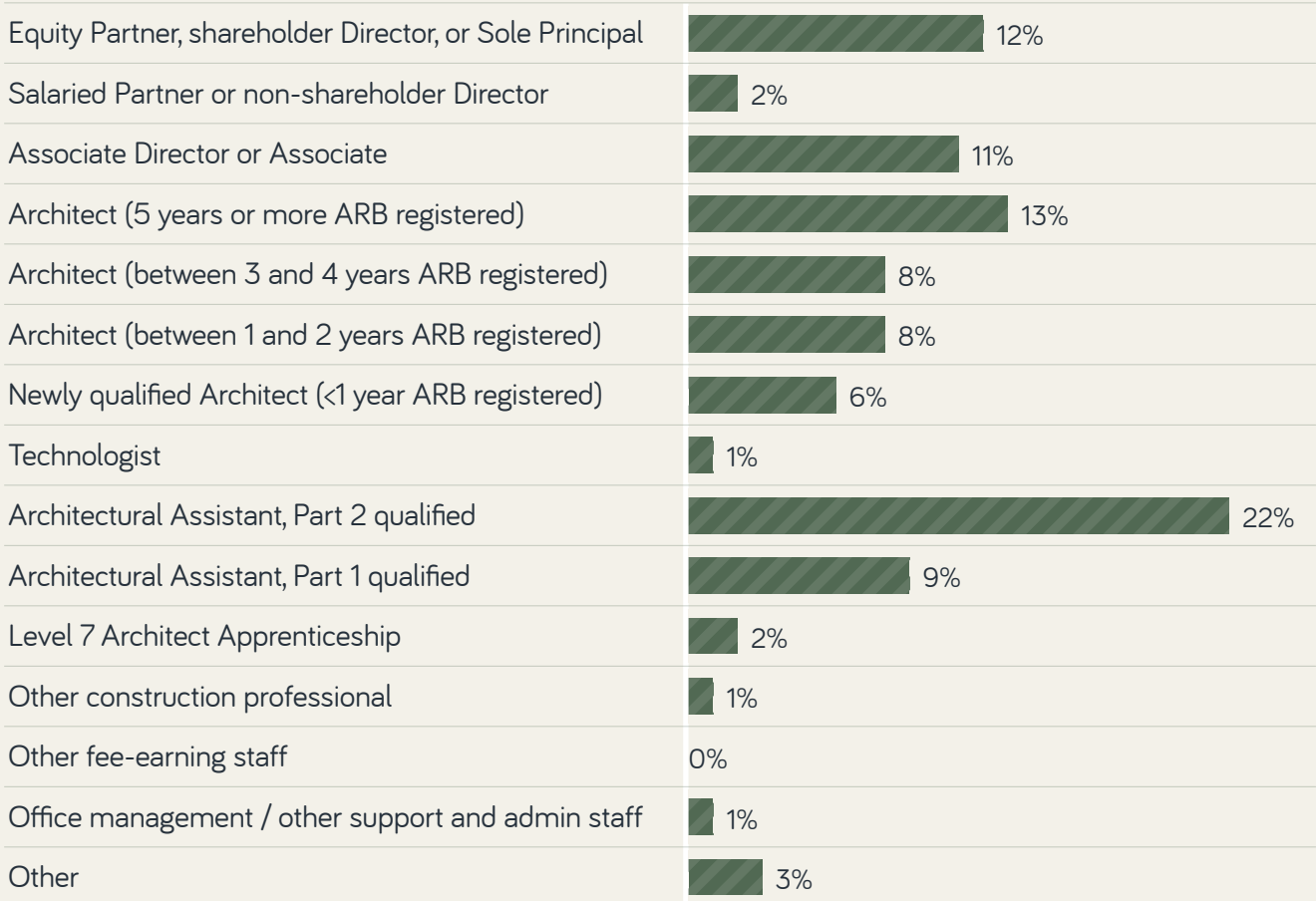




# About the data

**Graph 2:** Percentage of Survey Respondents by Role

Which of the following best describes your current role?



## Qualitative Research

In-depth, qualitative research interviews were conducted with 20 practice staff at various career stages, working in practices of different sizes and UK locations. Interviewees were from different genders, ethnicities, and career stages.

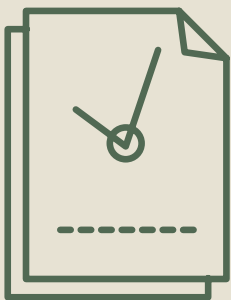
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## Employment Working Hours, Overtime and Contracts

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# Employment Working Hours, Overtime and Contracts

## Working Hours

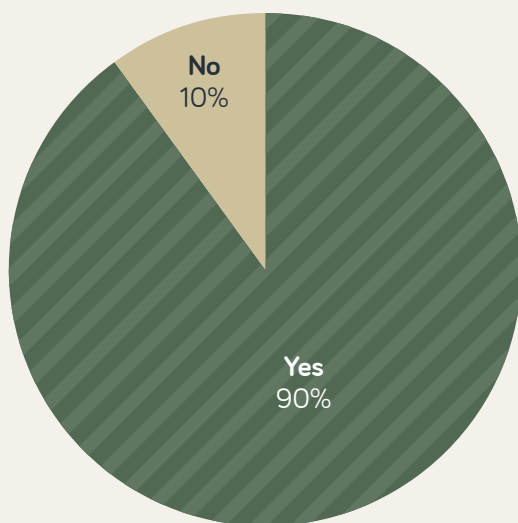
Working more than contracted hours is extremely common among respondents. Further, leave entitlement is not always taken in full; a quarter of respondents did not take all their annual allowance in the last leave period.

Ninety per cent of respondents have worked more than their contracted hours.

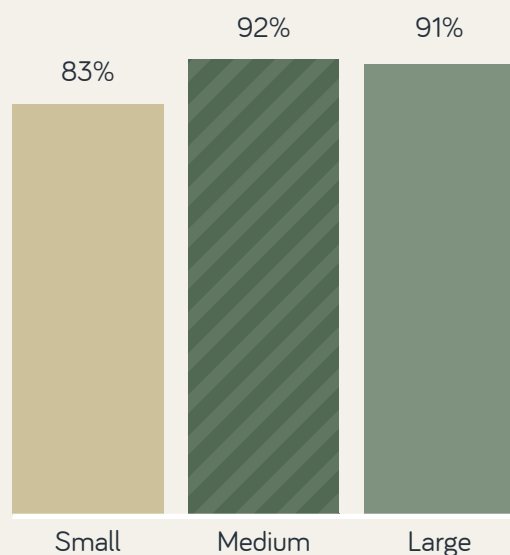
Among respondents, there is some variance by role type. For example, 86% of five-year plus ARB registered Architects have worked more than their contracted hours, compared with 96% of salaried partners and directors. However, there is no clear pattern of working more or fewer hours as seniority increases.

Staff in small practices (fewer than 10 staff) are least likely to work more than their contracted hours, although 83% of small practice staff do. Staff in medium (10-49 staff) and large practices (50+ staff) are more likely to work additional hours (92% and 91% respectively).

**Graph 3:** Do you ever work more than your Contracted Hours?



**Graph 4:** Per cent Working more than Contracted Hours by Practice Size



# Employment Working Hours, Overtime and Contracts

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## Qualitative Research – A culture of long hours

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Most of those interviewed regularly work hours over and above contracted hours.

The regularity with which this happens, and the number of extra hours worked varies. Some recounted working extra hours on an irregular basis at junctures in a project, others spoke of regularly working 50 hours, and, for a limited number, working up to 80 hours a week is not unusual.

A culture of working long hours is prevalent.

Long hours are worked across all levels within practices and many (particularly those who are in the early years of their career) struggle to challenge expectations to work beyond contracted hours and are concerned about the negative implications for their careers if they refuse to work overtime.

Most participants in the qualitative research, working at all levels within practices, were uncomfortable with the culture of long hours.

‘There is a general feeling that you must do what it takes to get the work done.’

‘It’s kind of normalised in the industry that you are going to be working overtime.’

‘There is a pressure for architects to work overtime and do whatever they are told to do because, you know, if you don’t want to be here someone else will, so we will just get rid of you.’

‘People are asked to sign an overtime waiver, and it is made clear that if you don’t sign it will be an issue for you.’

# Employment Working Hours, Overtime and Contracts

## Overtime

On average, respondents who were employees in practice were contracted for 37.5 hours per week but work 44 hours.

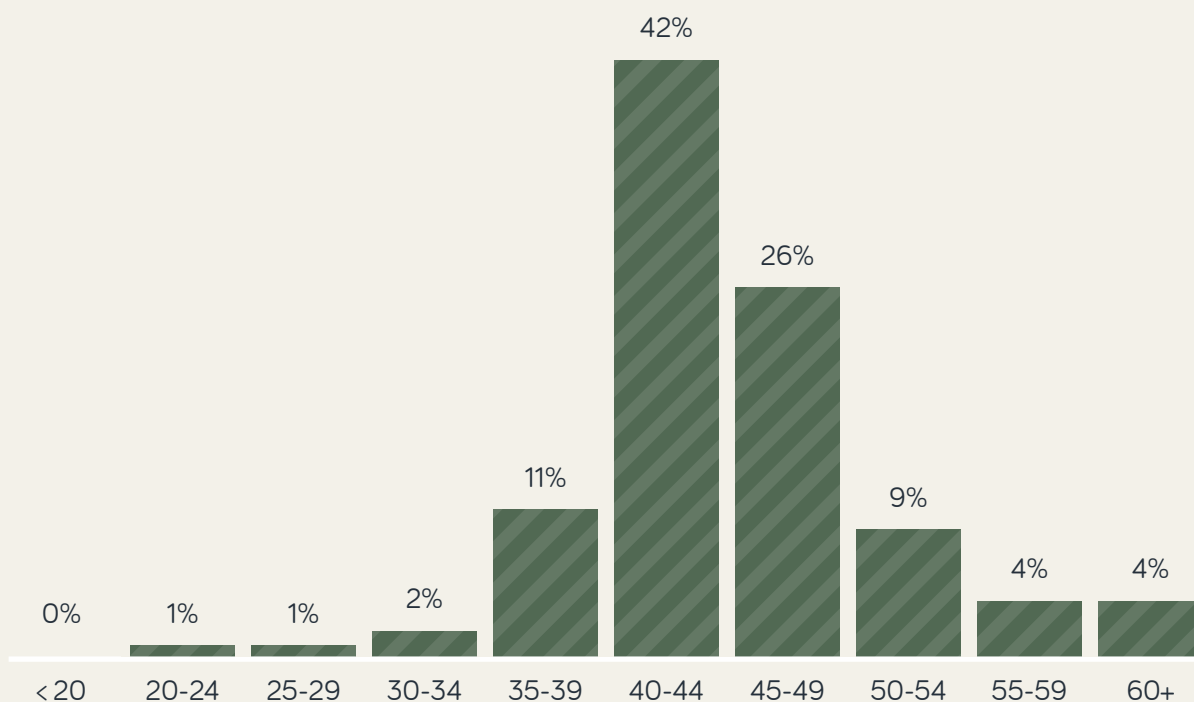
Equity Partners, Shareholder directors and Sole Principals average 41 hours per week and, not being employees, have been excluded from the 'employee' calculations.

The percentage distribution of hours employees work is shown in the graph below. The largest group, 42%, works between 40 and 44 hours per week. Just over a quarter (26%) work between 45 and 49 hours, and 17% work 50 or more hours per week.

The number of hours varies only slightly by gender, ethnicity, and age (except among those 65 and over, who work significantly fewer hours). Employees in London work longer hours, (averaging 45 hours per week) than those outside London (42 hours). Those in large practices average more weekly hours (45) than those in small and medium-sized practices (43 hours).

Most staff do not receive compensation for the additional hours they work.

**Graph 5: Employees – Hours Worked**



# Employment Working Hours, Overtime and Contracts

Over two-thirds, 67%, told us they were not compensated for additional hours and, on average, those within this group work 5.7 hours each week beyond their contracted time.

Only 6% reported receiving paid overtime.

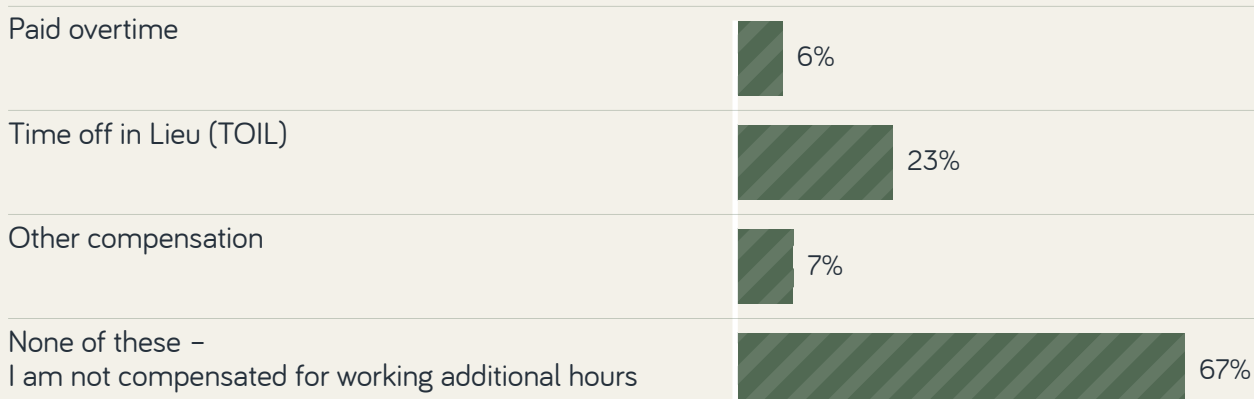
Twenty-three per cent received 'Time Off In Lieu', and 7% received some other form of compensation, which included, by way of example, being provided with some food while working additional hours or being given permission to take their children to an appointment.

The likelihood of being compensated for additional hours worked increases somewhat as seniority increases. For example, 70% of Architectural Assistants, Apprentices, and newly qualified architects are not compensated for working additional hours. This compares with 67% of architects qualified for a year or more and 61% of Associate Directors or Associates.

Men (71%) are more likely to work additional hours without compensation than women (64%). Across the country, the smallest proportion of those who work without compensation is in Wales and the West (52%). This compares with 67% in the capital, 77% in Midlands and East Anglia, and 75% in the North of England.

Employees working in medium-sized practices are more likely to work additional uncompensated hours. Here 70% of staff work additional hours without compensation, compared with 65% in both large and small practices.

**Graph 6:** When you work more than your contracted time, does your organisation offer any of the following compensation?



# Employment Working Hours, Overtime and Contracts

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## Qualitative Research – Why long hours?

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Participants in the qualitative research identified the following factors.

- Unrealistic fee structures
- Poor management of client expectations
- Poor management and allocation of practice resources
- Unpredictability of construction projects
- Exploitative drive for profitability

This list is not exhaustive as other, often personal, reasons can play a part too.

# Employment Working Hours, Overtime and Contracts

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## Contracts

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The majority, 90%, of practice staff have a Contract of Employment. This rises to 96% when Equity Partners, shareholder Directors or Sole Principals are removed from the calculation (who may have no need for a contract or may have separate legal arrangements in place).

The roles most likely not to receive a contract of employment are Architects who have been ARB registered for five years or more (6%) and newly qualified Architects (4%).

Staff are more likely to have a Contract of Employment if they work in a large practice. Excluding Equity Partners, shareholder Directors or Sole Principals, 98% of those working in practices with 50 or more staff have a contract of employment, compared with 94% of those with fewer than 50 staff.

## Pension Provision

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All employers must offer a workplace pension scheme to those over 21 and younger than the retirement age.

Overall, 89% of employees in practice are part of a pension scheme offered by their organisation. Eight per cent have been offered a pension scheme and chosen not to join, and 3% have not been offered a scheme.

Those most likely to have been offered a pension scheme but not joined are those under 25 (22%). Similarly, this group is more likely not to have been offered a scheme (7%).





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## Pay and Benefits

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# Pay and Benefits

## Payment of the Real Living Wage

The Real Living Wage Foundation provides a minimum hourly rate an employee needs to meet their everyday needs. It is now £13.85 in London and £12.60 in the rest of the UK, although it was £13.15 in London and £12.00 elsewhere at the time of the survey.

All RIBA Chartered Practices are required to pay the Real Living Wage to all staff for all the hours they work. The survey data suggests that this requirement is not always satisfied.

A note on the data. To calculate the Real Living Wage, the given annual salary was divided by 52 and then by the weekly contracted hours if overtime was compensated, or total hours if not, to provide an hourly rate. This was compared with the hourly rate set by the Real Living Wage Foundation.

The graph below highlights the percentage of staff not paid the Real Living Wage by role.

**Graph 7: Percentage not paid the Real Living Wage by Role**

Other	14%
Other fee-earning staff	0%
Other construction professional	0%
Office management / other support and admin staff	0%
Technologist	0%
Level 7 Architect Apprenticeship	50%
Architectural Assistant, Part 1 qualified	76%
Architectural Assistant, Part 2 qualified	13%
Newly qualified Architect (< 1 year ARB registered)	2%
Architect (between 1 and 2 years ARB registered)	6%
Architect (between 3 and 4 years ARB registered)	1%
Architect (5 years or more ARB registered)	0%
Associate Director or Associate	0%
Salaried Partner or non-shareholder Director	0%

# Pay and Benefits

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All Salaried Partners, Associate Directors and Technologists are paid the Real Living Wage, indicating adequate compensation at more senior levels (within the narrow definition of the Living Wage Foundation). Where qualified architects are not paid the Real Living Wage, this is due to extensive uncompensated overtime.

However, young professionals and those in early career stages are frequently not receiving the wages needed to meet their everyday needs, the Real Living Wage.

Seventy-six per cent of Architectural Assistants with Part 1 qualifications and 13% with Part 2 qualifications do not receive the Real Living Wage.

Sixty-nine per cent of those aged between 21 and 24, and 11% of those between 25 and 34, do not receive the Real Living Wage.

Overall, the data indicates that employees in small and medium-sized practices (fewer than 50 employees) are less likely to receive the Real Living Wage than those in larger practices (50+), with 82% and 91% receiving the Real Living Wage, respectively.

Staff in London (85%) are slightly less likely to receive the Real Living Wage than those in the rest of the UK (87%).

Looking at the wage distribution by ethnicity, those who describe their ethnicity as 'White' (88% paid the Real Living Wage) are most likely to receive the Real Living Wage, while those identifying as 'Black' (81%) and as "Other Identity" (74%) are the least likely.

Men (83%) are less likely to be paid the Real Living Wage than women (89%).

“Young professionals and those in early career stages are frequently not receiving the wages needed to meet their everyday needs, the Real Living Wage.”

# Pay and Benefits

## Other Income

Many of those working in practice rely on additional sources of income to meet their living costs, as shown in the graph below:

A significant percentage of early career professionals, such as Part 1 (61%) and Part 2 (43%) qualified Architectural Assistants and newly qualified Architects (43%), rely on additional income sources. The reliance on additional income sources decreases as qualifications and experience are gained. Nevertheless, over a quarter of architects, qualified for five years or more, rely on an additional income source.

This income can come from various sources.

The most common is “Income from my partner”, with 25% of newly qualified architects relying on their partner’s income, falling to 13% among 5+ years qualified. This may not be too concerning, as financial interdependence is typical of partnerships.

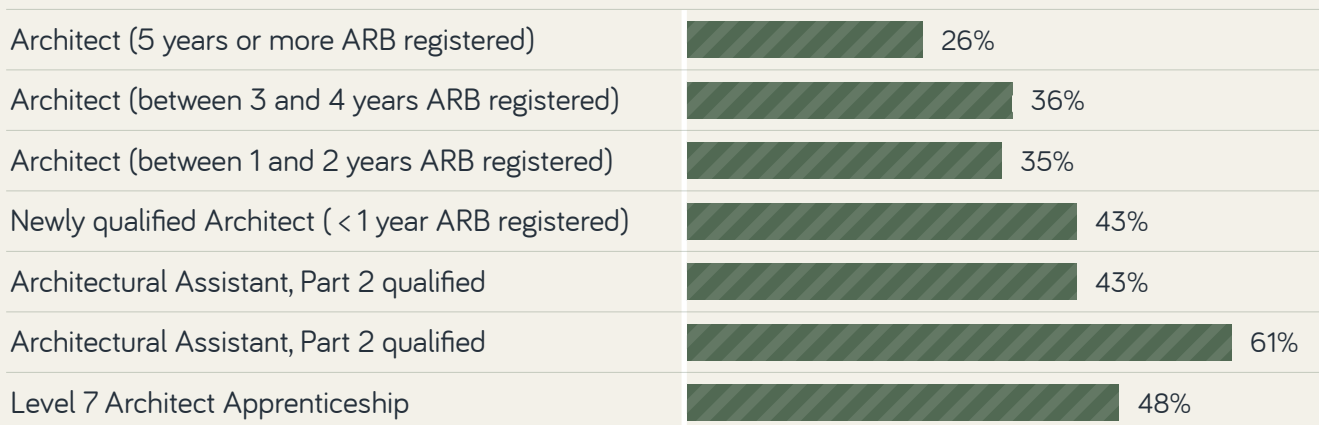
Fourteen per cent of Architectural Assistants, Part 1 qualified and 13% of Architectural Assistants, Part 2 qualified rely on “Income from other employment”. This level falls significantly as a career progresses.

Similarly, reliance on “Income from my family, e.g., my parent(s)” is highest among early career-stage practice staff; 30% of Part 1 Assistants and 17% of Part 2 Assistants rely on family. One in five newly qualified Architects report relying on income from family.

Reliance on family income, like income from other employment, falls as a career progresses.

Other sources of income respondents mention relying upon include savings, inheritance, freelance work, letting property, using credit facilities, and receiving benefits, such as Universal Credit, Child Benefit or Benefits for those who are disabled or have a health condition.

**Graph 8:** Do you rely on any additional source(s) of income to meet your living costs?



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## Attitudes towards Practice Work

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# Attitudes towards Practice Work

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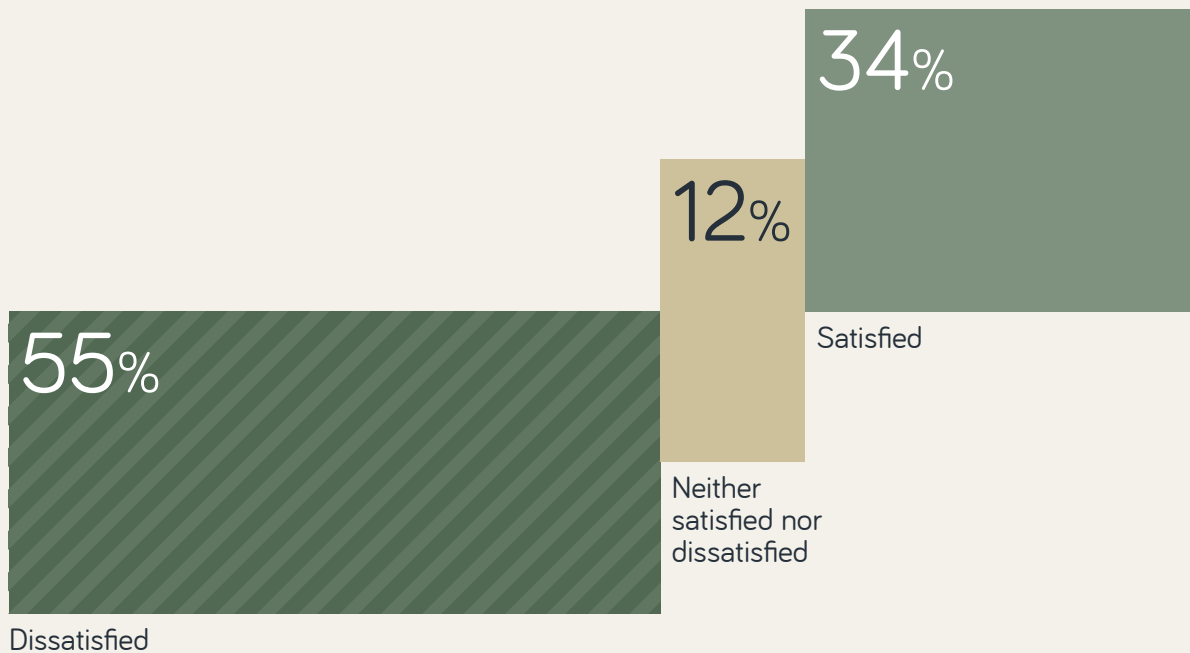
## Satisfaction

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Most people, 55%, who work in practice are dissatisfied with their current pay and conditions.

**Graph 9:** Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your current pay and conditions?

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Values do not total 100 due to rounding.

# Attitudes towards Practice Work

Satisfaction correlates with age. Younger people are, on balance, more likely to be dissatisfied with their pay and conditions. Older people are more likely to be satisfied, as the graph (10) below shows:

Similarly, dissatisfaction with pay and conditions is typically higher among early career-stage roles and lowest among more experienced professionals and those in senior roles.

For example, among Architectural Assistants, Part 2 qualified, 63% are dissatisfied with their pay and conditions, but this falls to 52% for Architects who have been ARB registered for five years or more and 37% for Associate Directors or Associates.

Looking at ethnicity, those who describe themselves as 'White' are less likely to be dissatisfied with their pay and conditions (50%) than 'Asian/ Asian British' (62%), 'Black/African/Caribbean/Black British' (65%), or a 'Mixed/Multiple ethnic background' (67%) or those of an 'Other Identity' (73%).

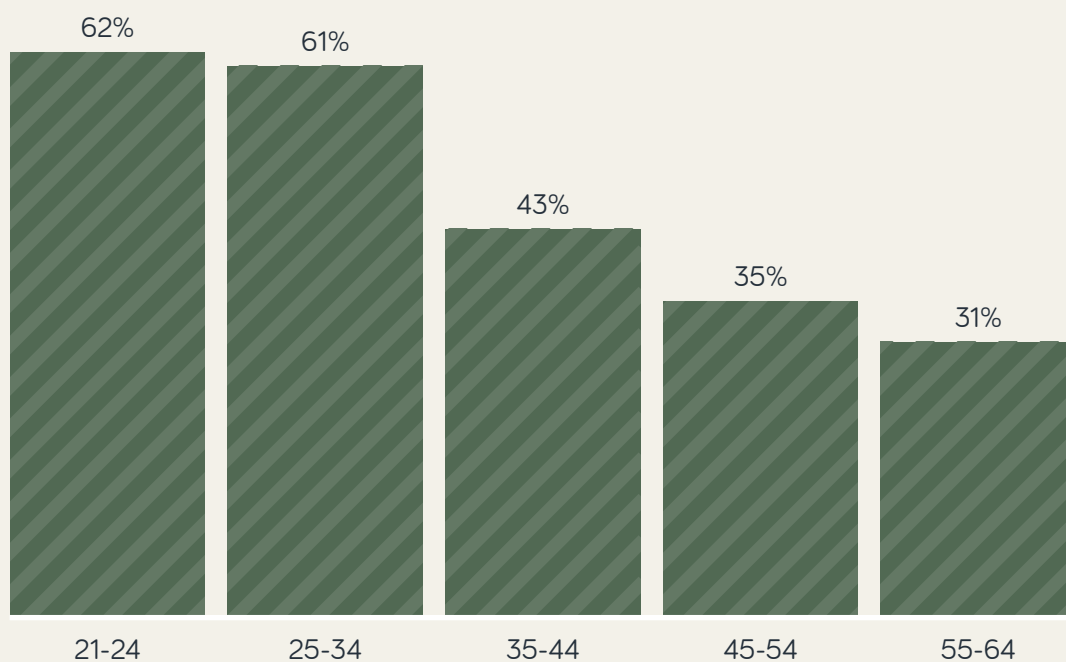
By gender, women (57%) are more likely to be dissatisfied than men (52%).

Turning to types of practice, dissatisfaction is slightly higher in medium-sized practices (58%) and slightly lower in smaller practices (54%) and larger practices (52%).

By region, London has the highest proportion of staff dissatisfied with their pay and conditions (59%), while the North of England has the lowest (42%).

Dissatisfaction is higher among architectural practices (58%) than among multi-disciplinary practices (43%).

**Graph 10:** Percentage Dissatisfied with Pay and Conditions by Age



# Attitudes towards Practice Work

## Mental Health and Wellbeing

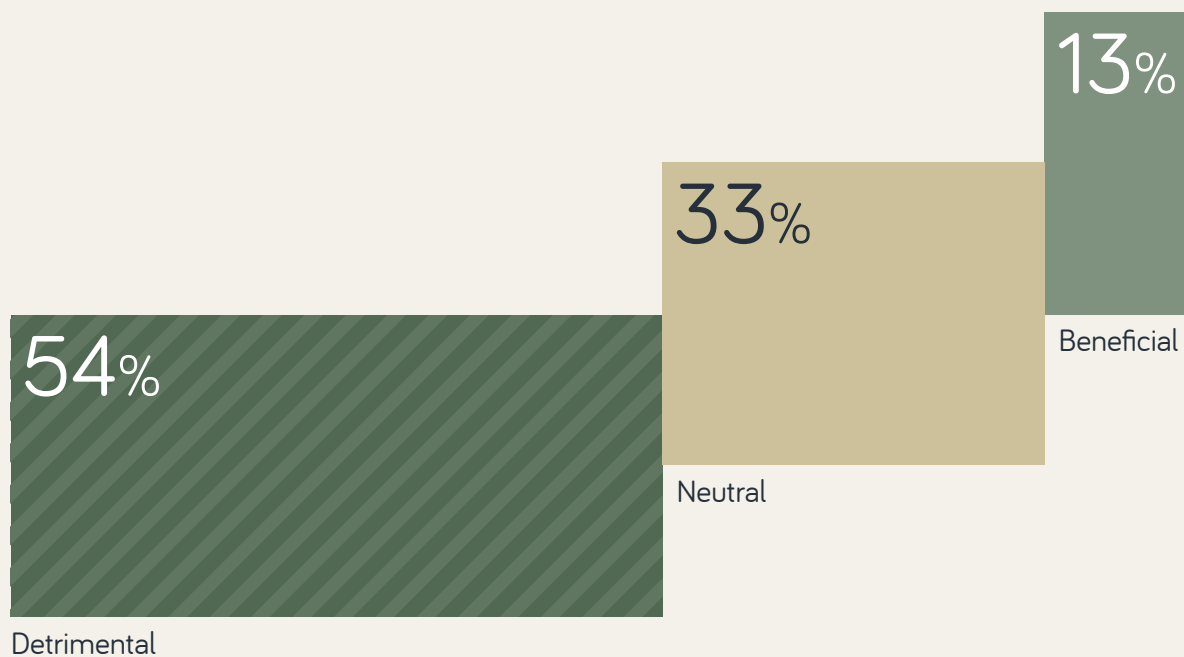
Most people who work in practice feel that their role has had a detrimental effect on their mental health and wellbeing, over the last three months.

Only 13% feel it has had a beneficial effect. As with overall satisfaction, different groups have different assessments.

For example, those who are disabled, have an impairment, condition, or access need are more likely to describe their role as detrimental (68%) when compared with those who do not (53%).

Those who describe themselves as being of 'Mixed/ Multiple ethnic background' (67%) or 'Asian' (59%) are more likely to describe their role as detrimental to their mental health and well-being, than those who describe their ethnicity as 'White' (52%) or 'Black/ African/Caribbean/Black British' (52%).

**Graph 11:** Overall, how would you assess your role's effect on your mental health and well-being, over the last three months





# Attitudes towards Practice Work

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Among age groups, those aged 25 to 34 are the most likely (59%) to say that their role is detrimental to their mental health and well-being, while those aged 55 or over are the least likely (45%). In line with this, early-stage career staff (Part 2 Architectural Assistants, Level 7 Apprentices, and Architects less than five years qualified) are more likely to say that their role is detrimental than more senior staff, such as Architects, five years or more ARB registered, Salaried Partners or non-shareholder Directors and Associate Directors or Associates.

Men (54%) and women (54%) are as likely as one another to say their role is detrimental to their mental health and wellbeing.

Long hours correlate with a role being detrimental to mental health and wellbeing. Those who do not take their leave in full (62%) and those who work more than their contracted hours (58%) are more likely to find their role detrimental to their mental health and wellbeing.

Looking at the data by region, practices in Wales and the West (65%) and London (57%) are more likely to describe their role as detrimental, while those in the North of England (44%) and the South of England (43%) are least likely.

Those working in medium-sized practices are slightly more likely (56%) to find their role detrimental than those working in small (52%) and large practices (54%).



# Attitudes towards Practice Work

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## Qualitative Research – The impact of working long hours

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The qualitative research suggests that working long hours over a prolonged period has a negative impact on mental health and wellbeing and, importantly, this impact is compounded by working extra hours without compensation.

Contributors to the research spoke at length, and often with considerable emotion, about the negative impacts of long hours, and lack of compensation for those hours, on mental health, physical health, relationships, and family life, and on the quality of work they produce.

### The impact on women

The qualitative research suggests that the demands of practice life affect architects of all genders, ethnicities and levels of experience, working in practices of all sizes, in all parts of the UK.

There are, however, pressures that women in particular experience in the role. These are, often, but not exclusively, associated with their role as parents and care givers.

The stories of contributors speak of sackings for being pregnant, lack of flexibility in work hours, being treated differently or 'less than' because they are working mums and a lack of support for those who want to combine a career as an architect and family life.

### The impact on Black, Asian, minority ethnic groups

Several participants in the qualitative research were from Black, Asian, minority ethnic groups. Their stories speak of unconscious bias, of being treated differently in the workplace, of seeing very little representation at university, in industry and within representative bodies.



# Attitudes towards Practice Work

## Organisational Support

The graph below shows whether survey participants agreed or disagreed with statements about organisational support.

Seventy-four per cent of respondents agree that their organisation ensures they ‘feel safe in their work’, wherever they carry it out. While most feel safe at work, not everyone does, with 12% disagreeing.

A minority, 27%, agree that their organisation ensures they are not put under excessive stress, while 49% disagree.

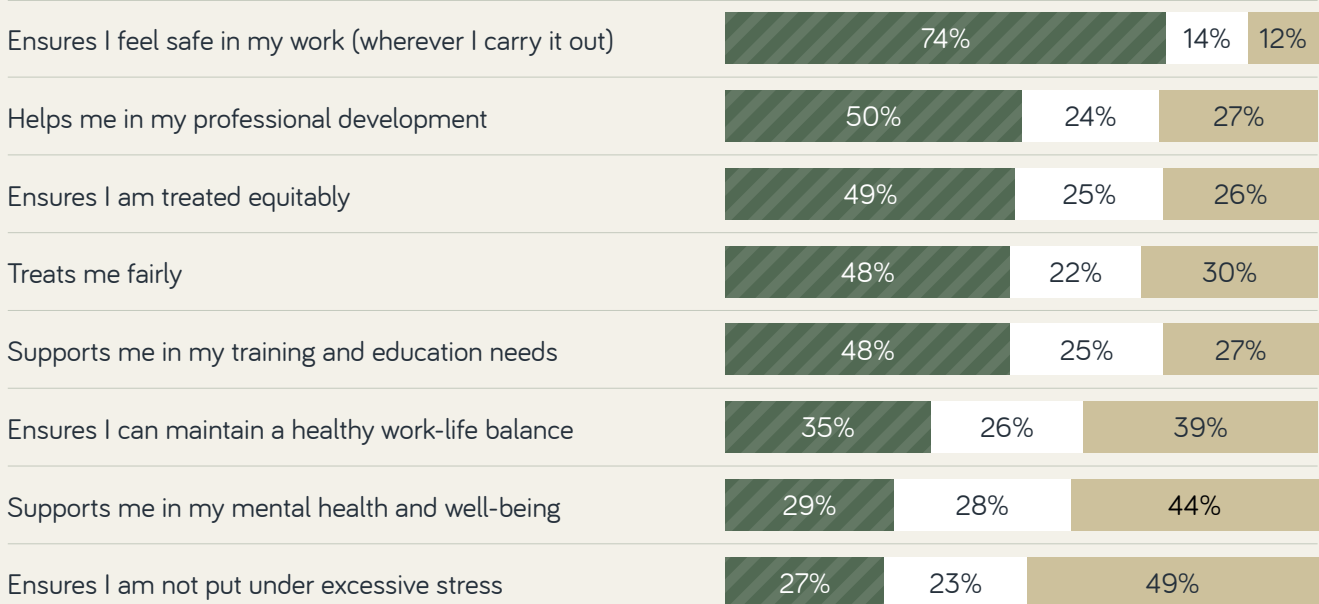
Twenty-nine per cent agree they are supported in their mental health and wellbeing. Forty-four per cent disagree.

Practice staff are more likely to disagree (39%) that their organisation ensures they can maintain a healthy work-life balance adequately, than agree (35%).

Half (50%) of practice staff agree that their organisation helps them in their professional development, but 27% disagree. A similar proportion (48%) agree they have support in training and education needs, while 27% disagree.

Approaching half (49%) feel they are treated equitably, and a similar number feel they are treated fairly (48%). On the other hand, 26% feel they are not treated equitably, and 30% feel they are not treated fairly.

**Graph 12:** Thinking about your experience, how far do you agree or disagree with the following statements? My organisation...



Values may not total 100 due to rounding.

Agree
  Neither agree nor disagree
  Disagree

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