

# **Policy review: Funding for MPs' staff**

March 2020





## **Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority**

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## Foreword

This report sets out the findings from a review conducted by the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) into the way UK Members of Parliament (MPs) use the staffing budget provided to them. We looked in detail at the data we hold about how MPs spend their staffing budget, the number of staff members they employ and the roles in which they employ them. We ran a survey and a call for evidence, giving staff members and MPs the opportunity to tell us in more detail about the issues and challenges they face. We conducted one-to-one interviews with a small group of MPs and staff members, and sought feedback through staff representative groups.

Through this work, we received significant feedback from MPs and their staff members that there has been increasing pressure on the funding provided for staffing costs. This stems from an increase in constituency casework caused by Brexit, benefits reform and other UK-wide issues; changes in the ease and frequency of communication between constituents and their MPs; and a change in expectations about the accessibility and responsiveness of MPs. We have also heard from staff members who did not believe they were being supported or fairly paid for their work, in part because their job descriptions did not reflect the complexity and sensitivity of what they do. Expenditure on staff training, health and welfare in many offices is minimal.

The issues described by MPs and their staff members are complicated and will require solutions on a number of fronts; funding from IPSA is only part of the picture. Nevertheless we believe IPSA can add value by supporting MPs to recruit and retain highly skilled and experienced staff. The changes we have made will help to ensure that staff are paid fairly, reflecting the work they actually do; and that they are supported in professional development through relevant training and workplace support.

Equipping MPs in this way to be good employers and enabling their offices to serve their constituents well requires investment: the changes we have made represent an additional cost of up to £19.7 million per year. To some observers, this may seem a high price; while to some MPs and staff members it may still feel insufficient to tackle the scale of the challenges they face. We have made the changes we believe to be fair, reasonable and evidence-based, carefully balancing our dual responsibilities to safeguard taxpayers' money and to support MPs in carrying out their parliamentary work.

These changes are aimed at enhancing value for money and efficiency for MPs' offices, and we will monitor how the additional funding provided to MPs is used over the next financial year. We will also look at other ways in which IPSA can further support professionalisation, efficiency and good employment practice within MPs' offices. We will work closely with the House of Commons as it establishes its new Human Resources department to help ensure its success. We will implement the White report recommendation to share information with the department to help it fulfil its monitoring and support functions. We will explore ways to support the sharing of best practice among MPs' offices, so that staff members have access to more tools to work more efficiently and to develop professional networks.

## Findings and recommendations

1. From our review, there is evidence of high demand for the services that MPs and their staff members provide, as well as an indication that this demand is increasing. This is an almost universally held view amongst those who engaged with the review. Constituents turn to their MPs for advice about immigration, debt, benefits and other issues. MPs' offices are both the 'first port of call' as well as the last resort for people who have not been able to find the support they need elsewhere. At the same time, MPs' offices are receiving huge volumes of correspondence, driven in large part by the move toward digital means of communication, campaigning and petitioning.
2. Staff are often handling complex work, in some cases without the necessary training. They report difficult and sensitive interactions with constituents who suffer from poor mental health, which they are not equipped to deal with. The expenditure on staff training, health and welfare costs in many MPs' offices is very low, averaging below £1,000 per office per year.
3. In addition, the high level of staff turnover – while partly attributable to the nature of MPs' terms in office – is concerning. Without systematic data on why staff leave their jobs, it is not possible to draw conclusions about the reasons for the high turnover. It could be part of the natural movement of ambitious professionals working in politics; but equally it may be a symptom of the stress faced by staff members because of the work they do. The report of Gemma White QC's inquiry on bullying and harassment of MPs' parliamentary staff<sup>1</sup>, published in July 2019, showed that some staff members have been treated poorly by their MP employers. Staff members have also told us that the lack of pay progression (and in some cases, the lack of any annual adjustments to pay) contributes to staff members' decisions to move on. The loss of experienced staff and frequent recruitment of new staff can in turn have an impact on the efficiency of MPs' offices as well as the pressures on those staff members who remain.
4. The squeeze on resources is not unique to MPs' offices and impacts across many parts of the public sector. While we recognise the dedication and commitment of MPs' staff members to assist constituents wherever possible, we are not persuaded that simply increasing the number of staff members in MPs' offices to take up the slack for other public services is the first solution to addressing these concerns. Relying on MPs' offices to attempt to deal with issues that are better referred to other agencies may not always provide the solutions that constituents need. This is a systemic problem, and is not one that extra staff in an MP's office can address on its own.
5. However, there are things IPSA can do to support MPs and staff members doing this rewarding but demanding work. We want to enable MPs to be good employers and to be able to serve their constituents well. We think that a significant part of our role in this is supporting MPs to recruit, retain and develop highly skilled and experienced staff. In aid of this objective, we are increasing the financial support for staffing in order to ensure fair pay for staff, commensurate with similar roles in other sectors; further training to help staff gain skills that will assist in dealing with the increasing complexity of work; and additional support for staff members' health and wellbeing in the workplace.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CDP-2019-0195>

## Changes in 2020-21

6. Based on the recommendations from the review, the following changes will be implemented from 1 April 2020.

- The staffing budget for the 2020-21 financial year has been set at **£188,860 for London Area MPs and £177,550 for non-London Area MPs**. This 13-14% increase from the 2019-20 budgets reflects the points below.
- **Job descriptions:** MPs' staff job descriptions have been updated, following stakeholder engagement and expert, independent advice, to ensure they reflect the complex, sensitive nature of work carried out by staff members, as well as the skills (such as technological ones) that are necessary to work in a modern Parliament. Any new staff employed from 1 April 2020 onwards must work to one of the updated job descriptions. We encourage MPs, as part of their adherence to good employment practice, to consider whether job descriptions for existing staff should be updated too, to ensure that staff are working to job descriptions that accurately reflect what they do. Amending job descriptions should be done in consultation with individual staff members.
- **Staff salaries:** The staff salary ranges have been adjusted, based on the updated job descriptions and a market benchmarking exercise. Some ranges will see increases of up to 12 per cent. Funding has been made available in the 2020-21 staffing budget to enable MPs to move their staff onto an updated job description, and for them to be paid a fair market rate for their work. All staff must be paid a salary that falls within the updated ranges from 1 April 2020. Staff members whose salaries currently fall below the new minimum of their range will automatically be moved up to the new minimum.

In addition, funding is available from the staffing budget for MPs to provide a cost-of-living increase in salary for staff whose salaries already fall within the new salary ranges; our recommendation for the 2020-21 year is a 2% increase, in line with guidance in the wider public sector. This is not a limit on pay increases for staff, but we expect any requests for salary increases above a 2% cost-of-living increase to be accompanied by a revised job description for the individual staff member (as above, a process of consultation with the staff member is needed). This is to provide assurance that staff members are being paid commensurate to the job they actually do.

- **Training, health and welfare:** An extra amount of £4,000 has been added to the staffing budget of each MP to provide additional support for training, wellbeing, health and welfare costs of their staff. This is intended to cover two to three days of training and wellbeing per year for each staff member, as well as one-off health and welfare costs, such as eye tests or occupational health assessments.
- **Internships:** Although it does not impact on the staffing budget directly, IPSA has also agreed to fund additional internship placements as part of the Speaker's Parliamentary Placement Scheme. This scheme is run by the House of Commons and provides placement opportunities to individuals from diverse educational and experience backgrounds, and who do not have access to some traditional routes to working in Parliament. This additional funding for the

Speaker's internship scheme also responds to a recommendation made by the Sutton Trust in their report 'Pay As You Go?' published in November 2018.<sup>2</sup>

## **Value for money**

7. The changes we have made to the staffing budget are significant, and represent a large cost to the public purse, of up to £19.7 million per year. As a regulator with statutory responsibility for public money, we have thought carefully about how to ensure value for money. We have opted not to ringfence the additional funding provided this year, nor to compel MPs to use it in certain ways; MPs are the employers of their staff and we believe that they have the responsibility, and the discretion, within their budgets to arrange their offices in the most effective way and to respond to the specific circumstances in their constituencies.
8. However, we are clear about the intention behind these changes: they are made with the objective of supporting the recruitment and retention of high-quality staff, as well as of supporting their professional development through training and fair pay to recognise experience and skills. As above, we expect, as part of good employment practice, that MPs decide the appropriate salary for each member of staff and apply the correct job descriptions. Any requests for salary increases above a 2% cost-of-living increase should be accompanied by an updated job description.
9. Some staff members told us during the review that they saw a risk in increasing the staffing budget, in that some MPs would use the additional funding to take on more staff on low salaries, rather than to ensure their existing staff are paid fairly and supported through training and wellbeing initiatives. We do not control MPs' actions as employers, but we will be using expenditure data and payroll information to check how MPs are using this extra funding over the coming year. Findings from this analysis may influence future decisions about how we regulate use of the staffing budget.

## **Further work**

10. The challenges faced by MPs and their staff in the employment setting extend beyond salaries, job descriptions and training, and IPSA is just one of a number of actors in this area.
11. For instance, the lack of HR support for staff members who encounter employment issues or problems with their employers has long been acknowledged. One of the main recommendations from the White Report to address bullying and harassment experienced by staff, is that the House of Commons set up a properly resourced, proactive department with responsibility for overseeing employment practices in MPs' office and supporting both MPs and their staff. The department would also have a monitoring and welfare function.
12. IPSA supports the White report recommendations and is committed to working closely with the new HR department to help ensure it is able to support both MPs and staff members effectively.
13. Research and feedback during this review has also highlighted the importance of improving efficiency within MPs' offices in order to deal with large and ever-growing volumes of casework and correspondence; and of supporting professionalisation of office and financial management. It

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/internships-pay-as-you-go/>

would not be appropriate for IPSA to oblige MPs to organise their offices in a certain way; ultimately, solutions aimed at greater efficiency and professionalisation have to come from MPs

and their staff members themselves. We are open to exploring ways of supporting such solutions, for instance through facilitating the sharing of learning and good practice between MPs' offices and within political parties.



## Background to the review

14. IPSA is the regulator of business costs and expenses for MPs in the UK. Our founding legislation gives us a dual role: to ensure that MPs are resourced appropriately to carry out their parliamentary functions; and to ensure that MPs' use of taxpayers' money is transparent and well regulated. To do this, we established the Scheme of MPs' Business Costs and Expenses ('the Scheme'), which sets out the amount of funding available to MPs in different areas, as well as the rules for what they can and cannot claim.

### About the staffing budget

15. Under the Scheme, IPSA provides all MPs with a staffing budget to meet the cost of staff who support MPs in performing their parliamentary functions – including salaries, employer's national insurance and pension contributions – as well as to fund a number of other staffing-related costs, such as training and one-off health and welfare costs for staff members.

16. In order to be paid with IPSA funds, staff members must be employed by MPs on a standard IPSA contract, using one of seven standard job descriptions and paid within the relevant salary range, as set out in the Scheme.

17. IPSA sets the level of the staffing budget each year, based on a number of assumptions of the 'average' MP's office:

- a complement of four full-time equivalent (FTE) staff;
- staff mix including an office manager, a senior parliamentary assistant and two caseworkers;
- for London Area MPs, all staff members based in London; and
- for non-London Area MPs, three staff members based in the constituency and one staff member based in London.

18. Although most annual adjustments to the budget are modest, reflecting cost of living increases or pay policies elsewhere in the public sector, the staffing budget has also seen more significant changes. In 2012-13 IPSA increased the staffing budget to accommodate four FTE members of staff, up from three and a half FTE. As a result, the London Area staffing budget increased by 25% on the previous year and the non-London Area budget increased by 19%.

19. The budgets were given a large one-off increase again in 2017-18 as a result of an independent market review of MPs' staff pay ranges, completed in 2016. The review recommended increases in most cases, and significant increases of more than 20% to the minimum of certain salary ranges. IPSA accepted the staff pay ranges recommended by the market review and increased the budgets to accommodate them. We also adjusted the non-London Area to take into account the fact that many non-London MPs will have at least one member of staff working in Westminster. This resulted in increases to the London Area budget of 8.8% and to the non-London budget of 6.7%.

20. In the 2019-20 financial year, the level of the staffing budget is set at £166,930 for London Area MPs, and £155,930 for non-London Area MPs.

## **IPSA's role in staffing**

21. MPs are the legal employers of their staff. Notwithstanding the requirements of the Scheme, such as those relating to standardised contracts, job descriptions and salary ranges, MPs have the discretion to set up their offices in the manner they choose. This extends to the recruitment and management of staff.
22. IPSA's statutory and regulatory remit does not extend to employment issues or problems that take place between an MP and their staff. Inevitably, however, because of our role in providing funding and our function as the payroll agent for MPs' staff, we do sometimes have sight of these. We already work closely with the Members' HR team in the House of Commons, who support MPs where such issues arise, and we are committed to continuing this close cooperation with the new HR department being established in the House.

## **Purpose of this review**

23. In recent years we have received anecdotal feedback from MPs and their staff about the challenges they face in meeting the demands of parliamentary and constituency work within the funding provided. We can also see from payroll data that there is a high level of turnover amongst MPs' staff members. While moving between jobs frequently may be partly an aspect of parliamentary culture, our discussions with stakeholders indicate that in some cases it is evidence of the strain felt by staff members. The information we hold for internal processes – such as MPs' applications for additional funding to meet unexpected or exceptional costs, and instances where MPs have overspent their annual staffing budgets – also shows that a minority of MPs find themselves unable to manage within the budget.
24. On this basis, we set out in 2019 to conduct a review with the following objectives:
  - To re-examine the assumptions used in calculating the staffing budget;
  - To seek both wide-ranging and in-depth feedback from MPs and staff members on the pressures they face in deploying their staffing budget;
  - To ensure that the standard MPs' staff job descriptions and salary ranges set by IPSA are fit for purpose; and
  - To collect and analyse any other information about how MPs use their staffing budget.
25. The review was conducted in several parts during 2019. The first was to hear the views of MPs and staff about their experiences and concerns, through a survey and call for evidence. We used this information in conjunction with the payroll and business costs data we hold to gain a fuller understanding of how MPs use their budget and the pressures on their work. In addition, we worked with staff representative groups, notably the Members' and Peers' Staff Association (MAPSA) and Unite the union, to review and update the standard job descriptions. Finally, we commissioned an independent market review to ensure that staff salary ranges reflected the work that staff do, their skills and the pressures they face.

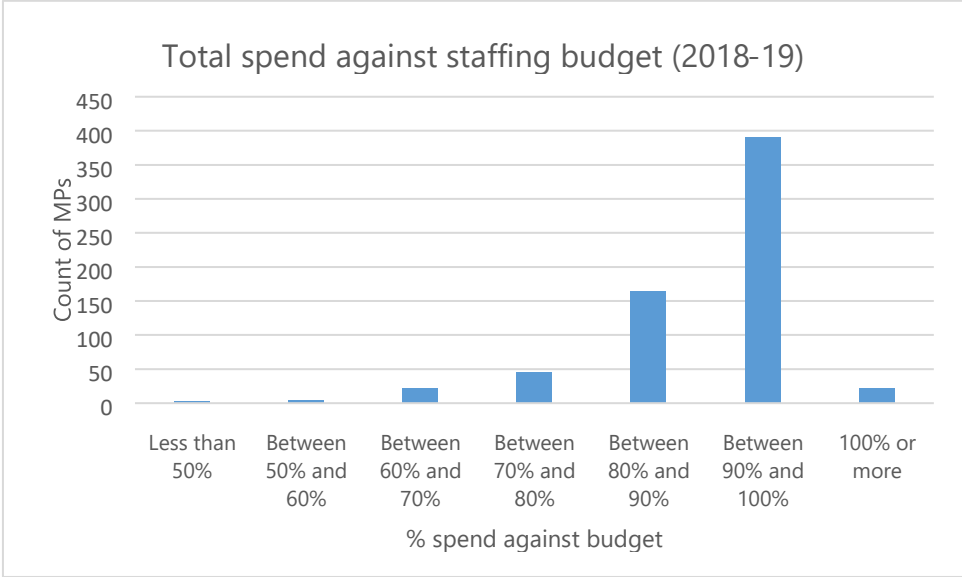
# Detailed findings: What the data tell us

- 26. IPSA holds a wealth of data about MPs’ staffing arrangements. Using this, we looked at how MPs chose to use their staffing budget and the typical makeup of their staffing contingent. We did not use personal information about staff members in any of this analysis. Our findings are summarised below.
- 27. In general, this analysis has been interesting but not surprising. Our data show that most MPs spend most of their staffing budget; that staff turnover is high; that there is significant variation in the make-up of MPs’ offices; and that MPs spend very little on non-employment costs, such as training and health and welfare for staff. These findings led to the changes we have made to increase funding for training, health and welfare costs, as a way of better supporting staff members in the workplace.

## Spend against the staffing budget

- 28. Staffing costs make up the largest heading of funding provided to MPs by IPSA. In 2018-19, they totalled £91 million, out of £183 million. An analysis of spend against budget amongst individual MPs showed that in 2018-19, the majority of MPs (63%) used over 90% of their budget and the vast majority (88%) use over 80% of their budget. However, most MPs (60%) had at least 5% (or around £7,500-£8,500) left in their budget at the end of the financial year.

The table below shows the number of MPs compared with % budget against spend.



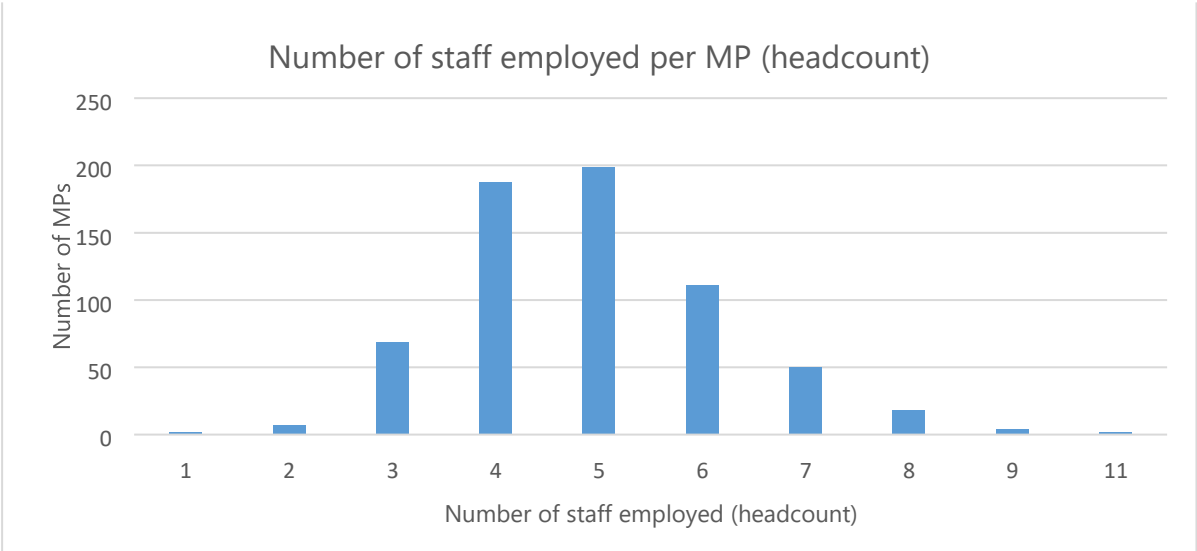
- 29. MPs can apply to IPSA for additional funding where their spending under a particular budget has exceeded or may exceed the budget limit for the year and they consider this to be the result of exceptional circumstances. Internal data show that the number of applications for increases to the staffing budget is consistently lower than applications for increases to the office costs budget. This may be because the staffing budget can be used to claim for a narrower range of cost types than the office costs budget, and staffing costs tend to be more regular and predictable, and therefore easier to plan for.

30. Since 2012, IPSA has received 28 applications for additional funding relating specifically to increased casework. The majority of these applications were refused, and nine were approved. It is IPSA’s policy that additional funding is not available to cover costs relating to MPs’ regular parliamentary functions, such as routine casework, even when there are high volumes. We have provided MPs with an uplift to their staffing budget to fund additional caseworkers when something exceptional affects the MP or their constituency specifically (for example, a major factory closure impacting on the local economy).

**Number of staff**

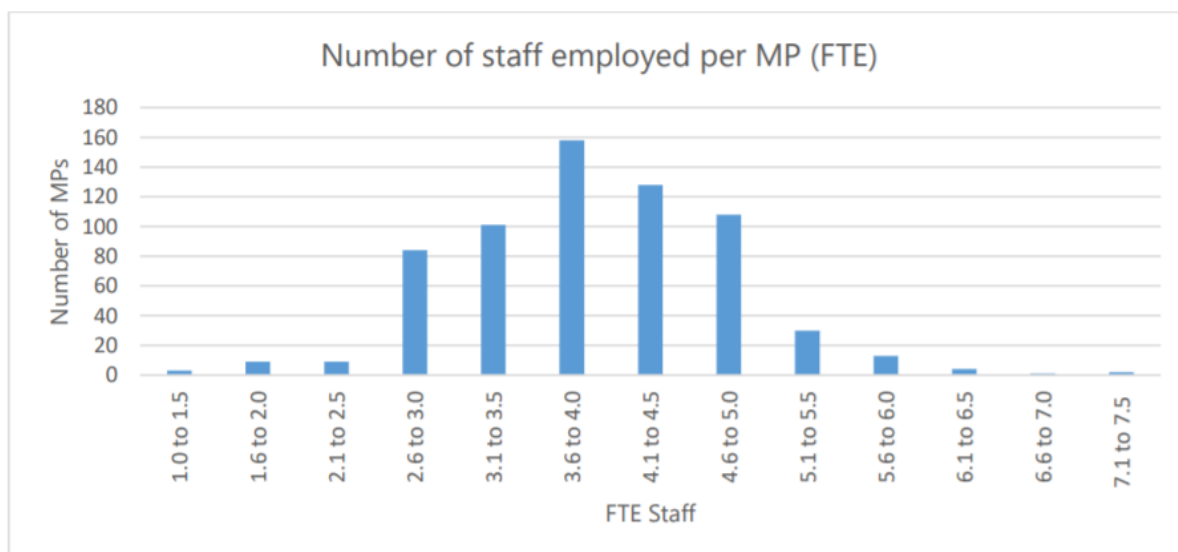
31. At the time of this analysis, MPs employed 3,188 salaried staff<sup>3</sup>. In addition to this MPs can employ casual staff to work specific hours. All 650 MPs employed at least one salaried staff member. The vast majority (about 75%) of MPs employed between three and five FTE staff; four FTE was the mean average. A significant number of staff members, around 40%, are employed on a part-time basis, and therefore the total number of staff members ranged all the way up to 11.

The table below shows number of MPs compared with number of staff employed (headcount). The majority of MPs have between 4 and 5 members of staf.



<sup>3</sup>Data from February 2019. We have excluded 12 paid interns on the Speaker's Parliamentary Placement Scheme which are not funded through MPs’ staffing budgets.

The table below shows number of MPs compared with the number of full-time equivalent staff. The majority of MPs have 3.6 to 4 full-time equivalent staff members.



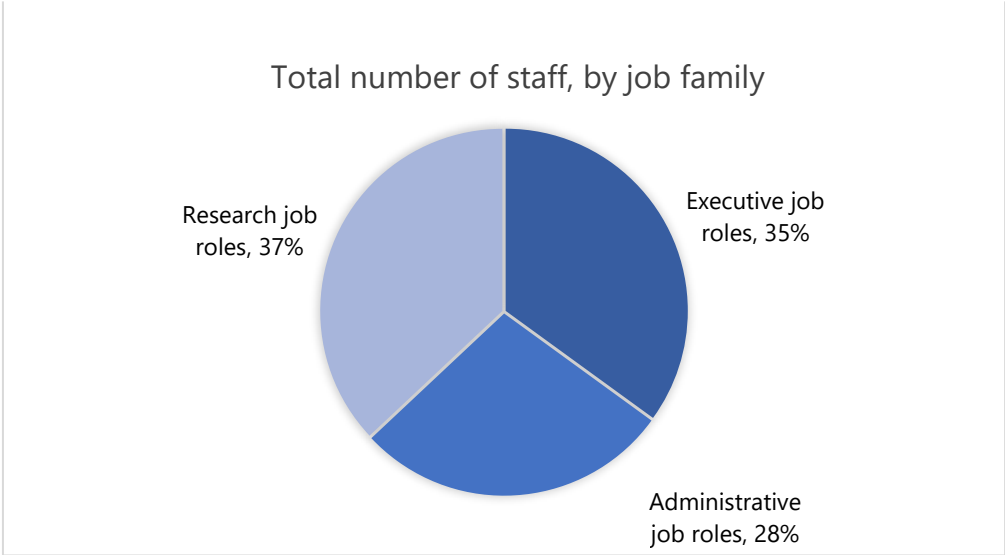
### Job roles

32. Staff employed by MPs since May 2010 must be employed to do work that complies with job descriptions published by IPSA. The table below shows the seven standard job roles, each incorporating a number of job titles, and corresponding to a salary range. They are split into three job families – administrative, executive and research.

	<b>Administrative</b>	<b>Executive</b>	<b>Research</b>
Level 1	Secretary Personal Assistant Executive Officer Administrative Officer	Caseworker Communications Officer Constituency Assistant Support Officer Constituency Support Officer	
Level 2	Senior Secretary Senior Executive Officer Senior Administrative Officer Administrative Manager	Senior Caseworker Constituency Communications Manager Constituency Support Manager Senior Communications Officer	Parliamentary Assistant Researcher Research Officer
Level 3	Principal Secretary Office Manager Executive Office Manager Chief of staff		Senior Parliamentary Assistant Senior Researcher Research Manager

33. Just over a third (35%) of FTE staff are employed in the Executive job family, which includes caseworkers and communications officers. A similar number (37%) are employed in the Research job family, encompassing parliamentary assistants and researchers. 28% are in administrative job roles as shown in the chart below.

The chart below shows the total number of staff by job family. 37% have research job roles, 35% have executive job roles and 28% have administrative job roles.



34. That said, payroll data show a lot of variation in the makeup of individual MPs’ offices. MPs representing primarily urban constituencies tended to hire slightly more executive staff, such as caseworkers, and MPs representing primarily rural constituencies tended to hire more research staff.<sup>4</sup> There is not a significant difference in the level of administrative staff.

35. In addition to salaried staff, MPs can take on staff on a ‘casual’ basis, meaning that they work occasionally without a set number of days or hours. The use of casual contracts is not widespread; on average casual staff working for MPs work just under two days per month.

**Location of staff**

36. Payroll data generally support the assumption that non-London Area MPs employ most of their staff in the constituency. The vast majority of both administrative and executive job roles (78% and 92% respectively) were based in the constituency, whereas research staff tended to be based in Westminster.

**Staff turnover**

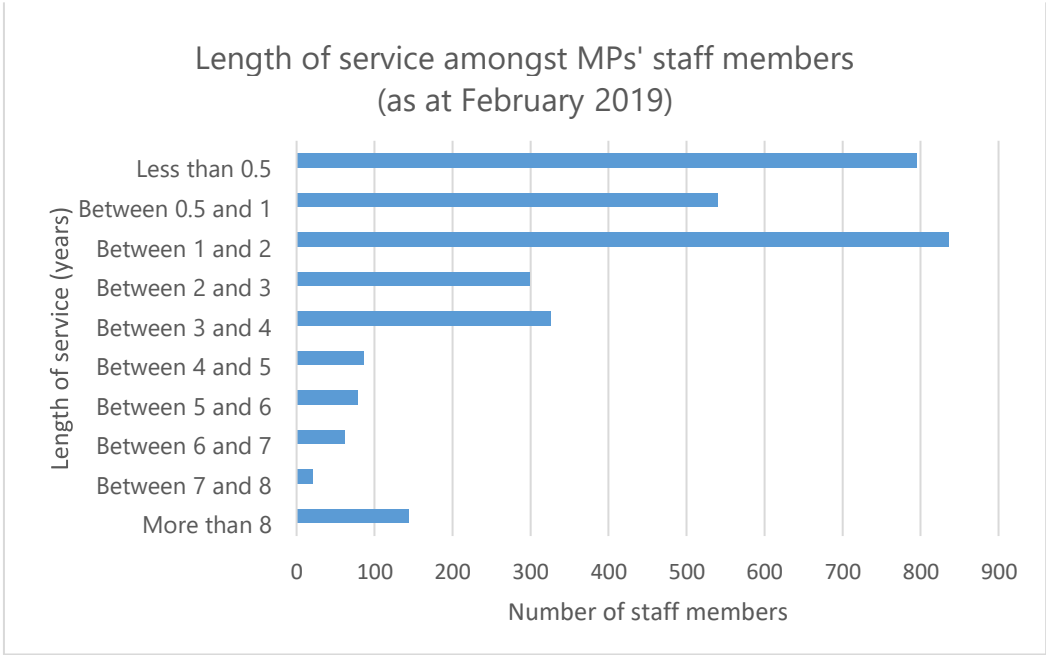
37. The rate of staff turnover amongst MPs’ staff is relatively high; in 2018-19, it was 38% (compared with an average of around 15% in other sectors).

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<sup>4</sup> We used the classifications from the Boundary Commissions England, Scotland, Wales and Northland Ireland of borough (or burgh) constituencies which are predominantly urban, and county constituency which are partly or mostly rural.

38. Using payroll data, we looked at the length of service of current staff in their current posts. At the time of this analysis, the average length of service for an MP's staff member in a particular post was just over two years, and a quarter of staff had been employed in their roles for less than six months. The more senior staff (staff on higher salary ranges) in each job family have longer average length of service than more junior staff. In most cases staff based in London have a shorter length of service than staff based outside London.

The table below shows the length of service of MPs' staff in years compared with the number of staff members.



39. Length of service and staff turnover is greatly impacted by the cycle of General Elections. The data show a spike in new staff members who were employed around the time of the 2015 and 2017 General Elections (with corresponding length of service of about four years and two years). Over the coming months, we expect to see a similar cohort of new staff added to the payroll by MPs who were newly elected in December 2019.

40. However, turnover remains high even in non-election years. On average, the IPSA payroll team processes about 100 leavers and 100 new starters into MPs' offices each month.

**Volunteers and interns**

41. MPs can hire employed interns from their staffing budget. They can also engage volunteers. Volunteers with an agreement in place can claim incidental expenses such as travel and some food, from the MP's staffing budget. One hundred sixty-one MPs claimed costs for volunteers in 2018-19. Most of those engaged one or two volunteers throughout the financial year. At the time of analysis, there were 90 paid interns employed by MPs. Most of the MPs who have an employed intern only have one.

## **Other staffing resource**

42. In addition to employing staff, MPs can claim for costs relating to other staffing resources. Most MPs (76% in 2018-19) subscribe to one of the 'pooled services', organisations which provide research, briefing and drafting services to groups of MPs (largely aligned with political parties), and have an arrangement with IPSA in place to fund the cost of this support.
43. MPs can also claim for 'bought-in services', where staffing services are provided by companies, self-employed individuals and others not on the MP's payroll. This can help the MP access specialist or additional support for one-off projects, or to complete work that may require a different skillset or expertise than that of their salaried staff. In 2018-19, 46% of MPs claimed for bought-in services, spending around £3,700 on average.
44. As part of an assurance review that IPSA conducted in 2018<sup>5</sup>, we looked at a sample of the bought-in services claimed from MPs' staffing budgets. The most commonly claimed professional services were for office support, research and media and communications services.

## **Training, health and welfare costs**

45. We looked at how MPs use their budgets to fund other staff-related costs, such as staff training and one-off health and welfare costs (e.g. eye tests for staff members). MPs spend very small amounts in each of these areas. In 2018-19, the average (mean) expenditure on such costs was about £940, or around 0.6% of the total staffing budget.

## **Detailed findings: What MPs and their staff said**

46. As stated above, a key objective of this review was to gather detailed information and feedback from MPs and their staff about how they use the staffing budget, the pressures they face, and how the budget and other staffing arrangements could be changed to support them more effectively. To achieve this, we conducted an online survey and a call for evidence between 10 January and 14 February 2019, and subsequently contacted individual offices to conduct more detailed interviews. In total, we received 166 responses to the survey and evidence from 14 MPs' offices, and carried out five interviews. We also met an MPs' Staff User Group to seek further views.
47. We are grateful for the time taken by MPs and staff members to engage with us. Their feedback through the survey, call for evidence, interviews and other discussions confirmed some of what we knew anecdotally: namely, that the biggest pressure facing offices is from the constituent-facing roles of casework and correspondence with constituents. While many respondents said that additional staff would be helpful, there was no strong push for vastly different staffing arrangements or parameters from those already in place. However, feedback from MPs and staff members did point more toward increasing funding for training, health and welfare costs and for paid internships.

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<sup>5</sup> Assurance Review: Professional Services (published July 2019):  
[https://www.theipsa.org.uk/media/185413/professional-services-assurance-review\\_for-website.pdf](https://www.theipsa.org.uk/media/185413/professional-services-assurance-review_for-website.pdf)



## **Preferred arrangements**

48. The staffing budget is based on four full-time members of staff — assumed to be an office manager and a senior parliamentary assistant and two caseworkers. This is based on evidence received during IPSA's 2011 review of the staffing budget. We asked if this mix of roles was broadly appropriate; 68% of survey respondents said it was not. The most common feedback about the preferred mix of roles was that offices need more staff for constituent-facing roles such as casework.
49. When asked about their preferred location of staff (across Westminster and the constituency office), respondents described a distribution with a 2:3 ratio of Westminster to constituency staff on average. This matches IPSA's assumption that MPs would prefer their staff to be predominantly in their constituency, but also the view that additional staffing capacity is needed.

## **How staff spend their time**

50. We asked respondents to estimate the percentage of time staff spend on a range of parliamentary work. The results show that casework takes up the bulk of staff time, an average of 42% of time. There is a clear trend for casework taking up the largest amount of staff time, though there was a high level of variance within responses.
51. The average of 42% of staff time being spent on casework corresponds broadly with the finding that around 35% of staff employed by MPs are in the executive job family, which includes both caseworkers and communications staff.
52. There is a perception among some MPs and staff members that the nature of their constituencies means that they have a more constituent-facing work than other MPs' offices. We were interested in the effect of the number of electors in the constituency, the urban or rural nature of the constituency, and whether the constituency was in England, Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland, on the proportion of time respondents said they spent on casework. However, we did not find any strong correlation when looking at any of these factors, meaning that constituency type does not appear to have an impact on the volume of MPs' casework in any one area.

## **Capacity**

53. We asked respondents if they had the necessary staffing resources to perform a range of parliamentary functions effectively. The majority said that they did not believe they had sufficient capacity to deal with casework and correspondence with constituents on policy issues. A smaller number indicated that they also felt under-resourced to deal with research and work on initiating, reviewing and amending legislation. Meanwhile, most respondents believed they had the necessary staffing resource to support diary management and media management.
54. When asked about how their parliamentary work has increased or decreased over the last five years, a majority of respondents said work around responding to constituents and casework had both increased significantly. The response to the change in research and legislation-based work was more mixed with no overall majority, but most said that the amount of work in these areas had stayed the same over five years.

55. A small number of comments we received indicated that the number of staff members accommodated by the budget was sufficient, but that the problem was retaining skilled and experienced staff.

### **Changing nature of work**

56. The detailed feedback from the call for evidence, interviews and other discussions with MPs' staff told us that the biggest pressure on MPs' office was the changing nature of constituent-facing work. Staff described seeing themselves as 'the first port of call' for constituents with any number of issues, including concerns that would in the past have been dealt with by local councils, other agencies or advice services. There is a perception among many staff members that cuts to such services elsewhere have led to the increased pressure on MPs' offices.

57. Respondents also cited the ease of communicating with MPs online and via email, as well as the rise in online campaigns (such as those using the website 38 Degrees) as reasons for the increasing workload. Some offices told us that they employed one person simply to answer emails from online campaigns. One office reported receiving 2,000 emails in one weekend. Another said that, prior to 2011, they could log and respond to all correspondence received each day; but now they cannot even log everything they receive. One MP said the volume of correspondence had doubled since 2015. But we also found that offices dealt with this volume of electronic correspondence in very different ways, some more efficiently than others.

58. Offices described varying systems for responding to correspondence, including standard responses, bespoke responses and hard copy letters (even in response to emails). Others described the lengthy processes in place to log correspondence, commission information and lines to take from researchers, and modify standard responses.

59. Many respondents told us that, not only had the volume of casework and correspondence increased over the past five years, but the range, complexity and sensitivity of such work had also increased. Where constituents are facing a number of different needs or challenges, casework can involve multiple agencies. However, we also heard feedback about the barriers to referring casework to other agencies (where it might more logically be dealt with). For example, referral to

local councillors can be difficult because they receive far less assistance with casework; and MPs' offices sometimes have better connections and knowledge of local issues than other agencies. Referral of cases to someone else also takes additional time, including explaining the referral to the constituent.

60. Some staff members told us that they were increasingly having to support constituents with mental health issues. This can result in stress amongst staff members who are not well equipped to deal with these cases, and at times can also pose safety risks. MPs' staff feel a strong sense of responsibility for constituents who are distressed, some of whom may express suicidal thoughts, and therefore such cases took up a lot of staff time.

### **Job titles**

61. MPs staff must be employed with a job title from a set list of 27 job titles available on IPSA's staff contract tool. Prior to this review, we had received anecdotal feedback that these job titles were

too restrictive; however, 66% of respondents to the survey said that they were broadly appropriate.

62. Those who disagreed said they needed to be more flexible to reflect the fact that staff perform hybrid roles and are not only a caseworker or a researcher. Another MP said that there is “a lot of fluidity between roles”. For example, many respondents said that casework was undertaken by staff in all roles.
63. This topic is covered in more detail in the next section of this report.

### **Staff pay**

64. Much of the feedback about use of the staffing budget overlaps with concerns about staff pay. Although MPs are required to pay their staff within specified salary ranges, those ranges are wide, with the average difference between minimum and maximum salaries at about £10,700. The budget is set to accommodate staff salaries at the 60% point of the range, but it is up to MPs to set individual salaries as they choose, provided it is affordable within the overall budget.
65. There were concerns raised that the salary ranges themselves are not a fair reflection of the type and level of work done by MPs’ staff. We have addressed this issue through the market review of staff salaries, which is covered in the next section.
66. In addition, there were a number of responses, including from staff representative groups, suggesting that MPs’ staff members do not always receive annual increases (such as cost-of-living increases) to their pay in line with the annual adjustments made to the staffing budget. This concern was coupled with the concern from many respondents that the budget does not allow MPs to offer staff pay progression.
67. Staff pay was also linked to high staff turnover. Many respondents attributed this to the inability of MPs to offer pay progression within the existing budget to recognise and retain experienced staff. One MP said that the staffing budget arrangements actually encourage regular staff turnover, as staying within budget relies on being able to reduce pay when new, less experienced staff are hired; and that long-serving senior staff are penalised because they cannot be paid what they deserve.

### **Internships**

68. Another issue raised by MPs and their staff was the use of unpaid internships. Thirty-eight percent of respondents to the survey said that they engaged volunteers and unpaid internships. This often included short periods of work experience for school pupils, or people volunteering on an ad hoc basis. Bringing interns into offices was viewed as a useful way of managing high levels of demand and workload, as well as offering opportunities for young people with an interest in politics. However, many respondents commented that they felt longer periods of unpaid work were inappropriate.
69. Separately, we have heard from some MPs that they would like to offer internship opportunities more often, but that they could not afford to do so within the budget. They are loathe to offer unpaid internships, as these are much less accessible to young people from less advantaged

backgrounds. It has been suggested that funding for internships should be 'ring-fenced' to ensure that all MPs can offer a paid internship placement if they choose to.

## Detailed findings: Job descriptions and salary ranges

70. The level of the staffing budget is closely linked to the standard salary ranges. Discussions with MPs and staff members about use of the staffing budget inevitably overlaps with feedback about staff pay and job descriptions.
71. When hiring a new staff member, MPs use the job description tool provided by IPSA to select a job title and build a job description for the individual. There is a degree of in-built flexibility in this process: each of the seven job roles can be assigned one of a number of job titles, and between eight and 19 responsibilities.
72. Each of the seven job roles is linked to two standard salary ranges – one for staff based in London and one for staff based outside of London. The ranges are kept purposely wide, to enable MPs to recognise different skill and experience levels within a given job role.

### Job descriptions

73. Although survey respondents thought that the job descriptions were broadly appropriate, staff representatives have also told us that the job descriptions do not fully reflect the level, complexity and diversity of work that staff members carry out.
74. In considering amendments to the job descriptions, we relied heavily on the results of a survey of MPs' staff, run jointly by MAPSA and the Unite union, which received more than 600 responses from staff. We discussed proposed changes in detail with staff representatives, to whom we are grateful for their time and constructive input. Further feedback was sought at two special meetings of the MP Staff User Group hosted by IPSA, as well as six interviews conducted with staff members.
75. The revised job descriptions have been published on [IPSA's website](#). Broadly speaking, the changes seek to modernise and remove outdated language; acknowledge the complexity and sensitivity of the work staff members do; reflect additional skills relating to social media and digital communication that are increasingly becoming indispensable in modern politics; and provide additional flexibility.
76. In order to provide this flexibility, the job descriptions now enable MPs to add free text to cover the unique responsibilities of individual staff members or to recognise a crossover between standard job roles. These additional responsibilities must be parliamentary in nature (i.e. rather than party political) and must be commensurate with the job family and salary level of the staff member.

## **Salary benchmarking**

77. Following the revision of the standard job descriptions, we engaged a market research company to carry out an independent benchmarking review, comparing the staff salary ranges set out in the Scheme with market rates across other sectors. We had previously commissioned a salary benchmarking review in 2016 and committed then to carrying out this exercise at regular intervals, to ensure that salaries remained fair in the context of the wider market. A summary of the report from Hays on their findings is available on IPSA's website.
78. This research included an extensive review of pay and reward data, industry intelligence and market information against specific peers and relevant organisations. Over 679 data sets were gathered across the seven posts, covering a range of organisational types including the Civil Service, local authorities, think tanks, universities, charities and the wider private sector.
79. The benchmarking review showed that MPs' staff salaries had fallen behind market rates for comparable jobs. We have taken action to rectify this, revising the salary ranges so that they reflect market conditions. The updated ranges are at Annex 1.

## Annex 1: Changes to MPs' staff pay ranges

Job Family/Level	2019-20 London minimum	2019-20 London maximum	2020-21 London minimum	2020-21 London maximum	2019-20 Outside London minimum	2019-20 Outside London maximum	2020-21 Outside London minimum	2020-21 Outside London maximum
Level 1 Administrative	£20,572	£27,124	<b>£22,402</b>	<b>£30,882</b>	£17,550	£25,287	<b>£18,391</b>	<b>£26,243</b>
Level 2 Administrative	£24,238	£34,947	<b>£26,251</b>	<b>£36,936</b>	£21,951	£31,337	<b>£23,397</b>	<b>£32,750</b>
Level 3 Administrative	£30,324	£45,152	<b>£33,759</b>	<b>£48,360</b>	£27,815	£41,242	<b>£30,000</b>	<b>£45,552</b>
Level 1 Executive	£21,960	£32,548	<b>£24,000</b>	<b>£35,002</b>	£19,641	£28,804	<b>£21,529</b>	<b>£31,705</b>
Level 2 Executive	£27,324	£38,421	<b>£32,000</b>	<b>£42,046</b>	£23,938	£36,645	<b>£28,311</b>	<b>£39,981</b>
Level 2 Research	£23,750	£35,308	<b>£25,500</b>	<b>£35,308</b>	£20,420	£32,353	<b>£23,839</b>	<b>£33,068</b>
Level 3 Research	£33,000	£50,540	<b>£36,575</b>	<b>£51,207</b>	£30,290	£44,539	<b>£32,811</b>	<b>£45,000</b>
Employed interns	£15,015	£20,572.50	<b>£15,990</b>	<b>£20,962.50</b>	£15,015	£20,572.50	<b>£15,990</b>	<b>£20,962.50</b>