

Questions About Pay and Equity

In 2001, the Ontario Literacy Coalition Board of Directors responded to member concerns about “wages, workloads, poor working conditions, and stress levels of individuals.”

The Board heard that similar “complaints are common in professions involving ‘caring labour,’ and [present] challenges [that lead] to problems of absenteeism, high employee turn-over, sick leaves and leaves of absences.” The Board struck a Pay and Benefits Review Sub-Committee to survey literacy workers in Anglophone programs. In early 2002 the OLC released *The Level of Pay, Benefits, and Working Conditions of Literacy Employees of the Anglophone Community in Ontario, 2001*. The following excerpts are from the report’s Executive Summary.

...The majority of respondents were female, averaging just under six years experience in the literacy field, earning an average wage of \$20.57 per hour. Less than 5% of respondents reported earning more than \$33.00 per hour, and only 15% reported union membership. Over half of those surveyed work for Community-Based literacy agencies where average wages are between 25% and 55% lower for all job categories when compared to the College and Board of Education sectors. Half of the respondents are teachers/instructors, 40% of who earned less than \$15,000 last year even though the mean salary for that job category was \$20,116 across all sectors. This can be explained by the fact that only 40% of respondents reported working full-time hours, and only one third of those surveyed were employed 52 weeks each year. Regular periods of unemployment and part-time hours contribute to low annual incomes for literacy workers.

...This feedback describes the state of literacy as it is now, for a relatively small sample (approx. 3%) of the entire Anglophone field population. While the individual statistics calculated in this report may not be applicable to the wider population as a whole, the

underlying beliefs, values and concerns expressed by this group warrant serious consideration nevertheless. These results prompt us to ask more questions, such as if literacy workers feel continued pressure and demands placed upon their time, do we risk losing them, possibly to retirement or employment opportunities elsewhere? How is the ageing population and expected shortage of skilled workers going to affect the literacy field in the future? The consensus that this survey has revealed is that these workers are here because they love the work; not because they feel they are well compensated for performing it.

To continue this work, the report recommended that the Pay and Benefits Subcommittee should distribute the key findings; “[d]evelop guidelines for wages, benefits and workloads for the major job classifications in the field; “analyze discrepancies...amongst sectors to identify whether sectoral differences are real; and do more research to “determine if there are real gender related issues affecting the level of pay, benefits and working conditions in the literacy field” and to “see what people are being attracted to the literacy field and if [hiring] practices are keeping people motivated...or if [Board] are having trouble attracting and maintaining people.” The report also recommended that the literacy field should:

Investigate other caring labour professions (i.e. focus on nurses, teachers, etc.) to compare levels of pay and benefits and effect of unionization on the profession. Attempt to answer questions such as, ‘Is it true that all caring professions have poor working conditions? If so, how come?’ and, ‘What would it take to change this?’ ■

SOURCE:

Falcigno, Kim (2002). *The Level of Pay, Benefits, and Working Conditions of Literacy Employees of the Anglophone Community in Ontario, 2001*. Toronto: Ontario Literacy Coalition. Available online at www.on.literacy.ca/pubs/pay/cover.htm.