

Summary of cultural review findings

As part of the second stage of the cultural review, The Glass Lift conducted focus groups and one-to-one interviews with 95 members of staff from across the organisation and invited past employees to complete a survey asking their views about culture of the organisation at the time that they left.

A number of key cultural themes and sub-themes have been identified and are summarised below.

Theme one

A strong command and control management style with low empowerment of staff at all but the most senior levels

Theme two

Staff feeling overstretched, undervalued and mistreated

Theme three

Dominance of wholetime (male) workforce

Theme four

Professional pride and close knit teams

Theme one - A strong command and control management style

High control/low empowerment

A strongly controlling environment permeates through the majority of the organisation. This was the predominant theme arising for all operational and Control staff roles but is experienced less often by support staff.

A dominant command and control style is apparent with staff feeling they are unable to speak up or challenge.

Staff described how messages stop when they get to the middle layer of the organisation.

Career outcomes

Control of career options was raised on 25 separate occasions and control of location or role after promotion on a further 21 occasions. This is predominantly a wholetime issue, although it was also recognised by some on-call and Control staff.

- No openness with promotion process (mainly operational).
- Some viewed the process to be objective.

Bullying

“Bullying is ingrained at a higher level. People don’t know they are doing it. They think they are being managers.”

Managers feel they are unsupported by the organisation (and the FBU) when a claim is made against them and the organisational response is seen as heavy handed.

People have also experienced bullying in the form of ostracism, being put on disciplinaries for no apparent reason, group punishments being given, too many work-related tasks to complete, side-lining and undermining.

Employees expressed a view that bullying is declining, and many of the examples provided had occurred over the past few years rather than the past few weeks or months. However, there is a clear view that bullying is still present in the organisation, and people see it as a perceived risk.

Theme two - Feeling overstretched, undervalued and mistreated

Mental and physical wellbeing

“It takes a brave person to admit that we are suffering.”

People are deeply concerned about the long term mental health impact of both the operational role and managing workplace stress.

The ‘Red Poppy’ counselling service is seen as insufficient mental health response. Whilst some people are aware of future developments coming around mental health, others are either unaware of these or sceptical about the likely impact, seeing it as a box ticking exercise rather than demonstrating true care for staff.

Lack of empathy and compassion

“They don’t know how to talk to you. An informal chat felt like a disciplinary.”

Managers appear to lack compassion with the way things are communicated.

Communication style regarding sensitive issues is viewed as inappropriate.

Poor relationships between those on station and middle managers exacerbated by frequent staff changes and overwork issues.

Pressure and overwork

All parts of the workforce are feeling the pressure of high workloads and increasing tasks and responsibilities.

There is some reference to people ‘pushing back’ or limiting their activity to manage workload, but this is not widespread, with many others feeling that they can’t say no.

Lack of praise or recognition

“People look for faults, not reasons to encourage.”

Positive feedback and praise is infrequent.

Communication is threatening in tone, rather than supportive and encouraging.

Events of significance lack celebration or recognition.

Theme three - Dominance of wholetime (male) workforce

Insular groups

“There are no new perspectives – we don’t see the bigger picture.”

Insularity is particularly experienced on wholetime stations within watches.

Isolation is likely to be impacted by the lack of transparent communication.

Control staff can feel ignored or forgotten.

On-call staff feel second class

On-call staff feel overlooked and underrepresented.

Equipment and stations are second class compared to wholetime.

Where mentioned, wholetime colleagues believed that on-call couldn’t be working to the same standard due to relative lack of time to train. They felt on-call staff were in an impossible position.

Support staff professional expertise undervalued

Support staff feel that their professionalism and hard work is sometimes ignored or underestimated.

Comparative terms and conditions (including pay) to operational employees leave some support staff feeling unvalued for their expertise and qualifications.

Operational women have to work harder to be considered equal

Operational women are perceived by men as typically needing to work harder to prove themselves.

Many women feel the need to overcome more barriers / work harder to be treated fairly.

Theme four - Professional pride and close knit teams

Despite the negative views expressed, individuals remain proud and committed to aspects of their role and colleagues.

- Teams of colleagues become close or life long friends, working closely professionally and developing camaraderie and a family-type bond.

Leavers survey results

Around half of the leavers who responded stated that they left the Service for reasons connected with the culture.

Leavers were asked what words described what it was like to work for the Service.

Positive expressions of the culture and environment included:

Enjoyment, inclusive employer, interesting, exciting, rewarding, privileged

Negative expressions included:

Frustrating, upsetting, disappointing, crushing, debilitating, embarrassing, lonely

When asked what changes could have been made to improve their working experience, responses included:

Ensure bullying is dealt with swiftly and decisively and make it easier to report.

Train managers – e.g. in how to manage appropriately, how to stand up to poor behaviours.

Listen to what employees are telling the service – and don't make a decision then pretend to consult.