

# Employee Think Tank Survey 2021



For a second year Smart Thinking has surveyed UK think tank employees to get a sense of what is happening in the sector and provide some overall analysis for those working in think tanks on the general working environment. In the survey we repeated some of the questions from the previous year as well as adding some new items to take into account any new issues we thought would be of interest.

This short briefing summarises our findings.

The good news is that 89% of those surveyed would recommend their workplace to a friend which is a big leap up from last year where just 72% said the same.



# Salary

Respondents were asked ‘when looking for a job what do you look at most’. Unsurprisingly the answer that was ranked first was salary, closely followed by opportunities for advancement. We ran some further analysis from data on our jobs pages to see what salaries think tank employees at various stages of their career could expect. We looked at the range of salaries think tanks offer potential employees and cross referenced that with the job titles and function.

Those with Director or Head in their job title typically command an annual salary of £59k. This is broadly the same whether you work in research, communications or operations so it would appear that at the top levels of think tanks there is broad pay parity across the different areas.

This is not the case when looking below director level. Out of the main functions of research, communication and operations, fundraising and events research appears to be the highest paid. On average an employee with Senior in their title commanded a salary of £43k but this was £45k for those in research, £36k for communications and £26k for events (with much fewer jobs at this level in the latter two categories).

Someone with manager in their title could expect an average £39k salary but for research and operations this is £43k and £42k respectively. If you work in communications it drops significantly to approximately £31k.

Finally, for those at the more junior level of a think tank with a title such as researcher or officer, on average you can expect a salary of around £30k. This is higher if you are in research (at £34k) but £26k and £25k for those in communications and operations/events/fundraising.



# Job stability

87% of employees in this sector are on permanent contracts, a small increase on last year's 84%. Rather interestingly, whereas last year it was those working in research that were more likely to be on a permanent contract (90%) this year it is the non-research functions who appear to have more security with 90% of non-research staff on permanent contract compared to 82% in research.

Happily, when asked how secure they felt in their job most of those surveyed answered in the affirmative (see below) and stated that this had not changed since covid 19.

## I feel secure in my job



# Formal structures at work

96% of respondents had a formal appraisal process in place at their work which has increased from 83% last year. Overall, 85% also had professional development opportunities offered to them which was a big leap from last year's 68%. Once again, however, you are more likely to be offered in professional development opportunities if you work in research than the other functions (94% to 80%).

This year the question on bullying was widened to include whether people had experienced or witnessed any bullying at their workplace. This year 32% reported that they had either experienced or witnessed bullying. Last year 16% reported that they themselves had been bullied at work. On a more positive note, 80% of those surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that they would feel comfortable reporting the issue to senior management or HR.



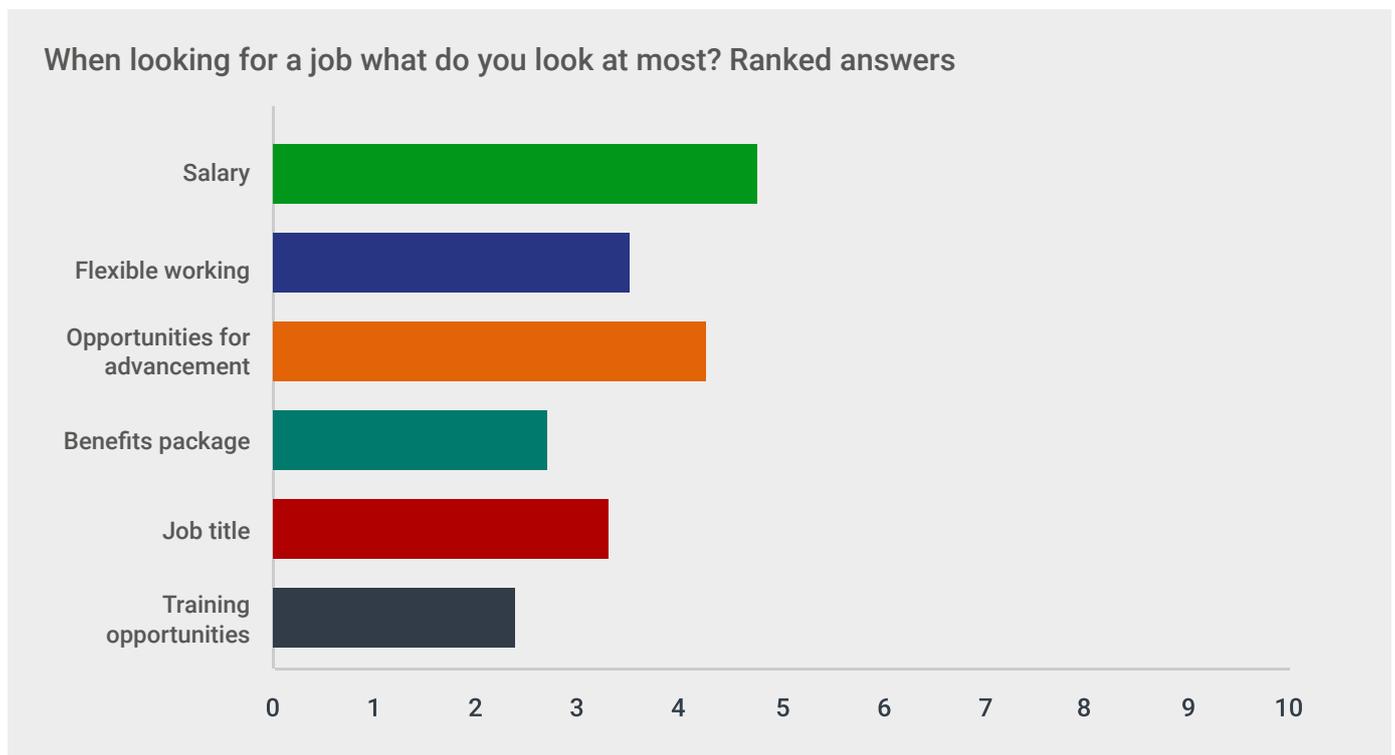
**96%**  
had a formal  
appraisal process  
in place



**32%**  
have experienced or  
witnessed bullying  
in their workplace

# Other job benefits

Alongside salary and career progression, flexible working and job title were also considered important for employees when looking for a new role. Other incentives for joining an organisation listed were the mission or purpose of the organisation, the chance to make a difference and the different policy areas they could work on.



What attracts you to a new job:



# Flexible working

Ranked as the third most important thing to look at when assessing a job, flexible working has become increasingly important since the pandemic. All the think tanks surveyed worked from home during the various lockdowns and so we asked how many had been asked to return to work, even if just on a part-time basis. 63% are back in the office as of September 2021 but nearly 19% said it had not yet been decided if they would return. 65% agree or strongly agree with the statement 'I am happy to be returning to the office'.

Are you happy to return to the office?



# Why work for a think tank?

Given that the vast majority of those surveyed would recommend their workplace to a friend we asked what they thought was the best thing about working in a think tank. Answers below!

**Developing the ideas to help push society in a better direction**  
**Encourages critical thought**  
**The people, the networking, the events**  
**Making an impact**  
 The best of both worlds; academia and politics  
**Fast-pace and interesting issues**  
 Lots of smart people  
**Doing something that matters**  
 Progressive ideas and values  
**Responsibility**  
**Never a dull day**  
**Interesting, challenging work**  
**Freedom to define projects and plan your own work**  
**No day is the same**  
 Responding to relevant political issues and policy debates  
**Freedom of expression**  
 The varied nature of the work  
**Flexible**  
**Learn about the world**  
 The drive and shared purpose  
 Being at the heart of policy and political debate  
**Creating change**  
**Enriching**  
**Groundbreaking research**

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Since it was founded in 2017, Smart Thinking has built a network across the UK's leading think tanks. As the first organisation to aggregate all the different content from the sector, Smart Thinking works closely with them to promote their work and help disseminate their research and ideas to a wider audience. Smart Thinking provides a strictly non-partisan, non-political platform with the latest opinions, research and events from a broad range of institutions and organisations and across many different policy areas.

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