

RCVS survey causes concern, despite improved findings

THE latest RCVS staff engagement survey has revealed only one in two staff members believe the college is a "great place to work".

The key findings of the 2013 Great Place to Work Survey were presented to RCVS council members by chief executive Nick Stace at a council meeting.

The survey included the statement "taking everything into account, this is a great place to work", of which 53 per cent of staff agreed, 39 per cent were unsure and eight per cent disagreed. The diversity, equality and leadership statements scored the highest relative to the "top companies" benchmark, with 73 per cent believing management is honest and ethical in its business practice.

Other areas of improvement, in comparison with results from 2012, included "management keeping staff informed about issues and change" and "leadership is approachable and easy to talk to".

However, four of the five lowest scoring statements relative to the benchmark directly concerned the RCVS council,

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including "improves the quality of decisions made by the RCVS" and "provides effective strategic direction and oversight".

Real efforts

Mr Stace said while some of the specific statements in the survey were different to the previous year, overall improvement could be found in most, but not all, areas.

"What we've tried to do is compare the survey from last year to this year, and out of all the indicators we can compare ourselves to we have improved and that is something that feels quite significant," he said.

"We made real efforts to try to engage with our staff better than we have ever done before and that is reflected in some of the positive scores.

"On the challenges, or what is maybe better to call negatives, are the fact that actually only one in two people state this

is a great place to work at the moment, so it demonstrates we've got a long way to go.

"The training and development is particularly low and we've recognised that and tried to put more resources into that area. I have to say four out of the five low scoring areas concern relations to the council. There have been some improvements, but still the relations with council are not what they need to be."

Mr Stace said last year's press headlines centred on bullying between council and staff, with 37 per cent believing bullying or harassment was an issue between staff and council members. To gain further understanding of the issue, this year's statement was more direct – "I have not personally experienced bullying and harassment from council members" – of which 83 per cent agreed.

"One of the things we want to do for this year in terms of staff engagement and the questions, is to be more specific about over the past 12 months," said Mr Stace. "We are refining this question and it may well be

that we are still picking up on legacy issues around whether people felt bullied in the past by council members.

"Any organisation that has 17 per cent of its staff feeling they have been bullied in some way by council or a governing body is not a good place to be, so there are areas to improve upon. We've vocalised the results so each department is working on an engagement plan."

Council perception

In response, council member Mark Elliot sought clarification over the definition of bullying and expressed his concern about the overall perception of council.

"Council members seem to be getting a bit of a rap on this case. Council members are trustees of the profession and it is our role to ask questions – and difficult questions – of the staff," he said.

"Our staff at the college are extremely well paid – if you compare them to surveys of the profession and the declining incomes in the profession, the staff here are relatively

insulated against the financial woes that are out there.

"Yes, I'm sure they do feel better if their salaries go up, but if you're going to take some fairly demanding positions, you also have to be expected to respond to those demands. So I dislike the word bullying in the way it seems to have been presented to council."

Council member and employment lawyer Rachel Jennings said there is no specific definition of what behaviour constitutes bullying because it is case-specific.

"I deal with bullying in my job; it probably accounts for 70 per cent of my caseload," she said. "So it is a very common experience expressed by individuals, but the most difficult thing I've found is all the individuals who say they have been bullied feel let down by their employer if their employer does not have a robust HR policy to deal with those things.

"That is where a lot of problems are developing, becoming more serious and resulting in litigation, because there isn't anyone stepping in at an early stage in the process."

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