

prospect bectu

# Union'26

SURVEY

Work, equality & employment rights

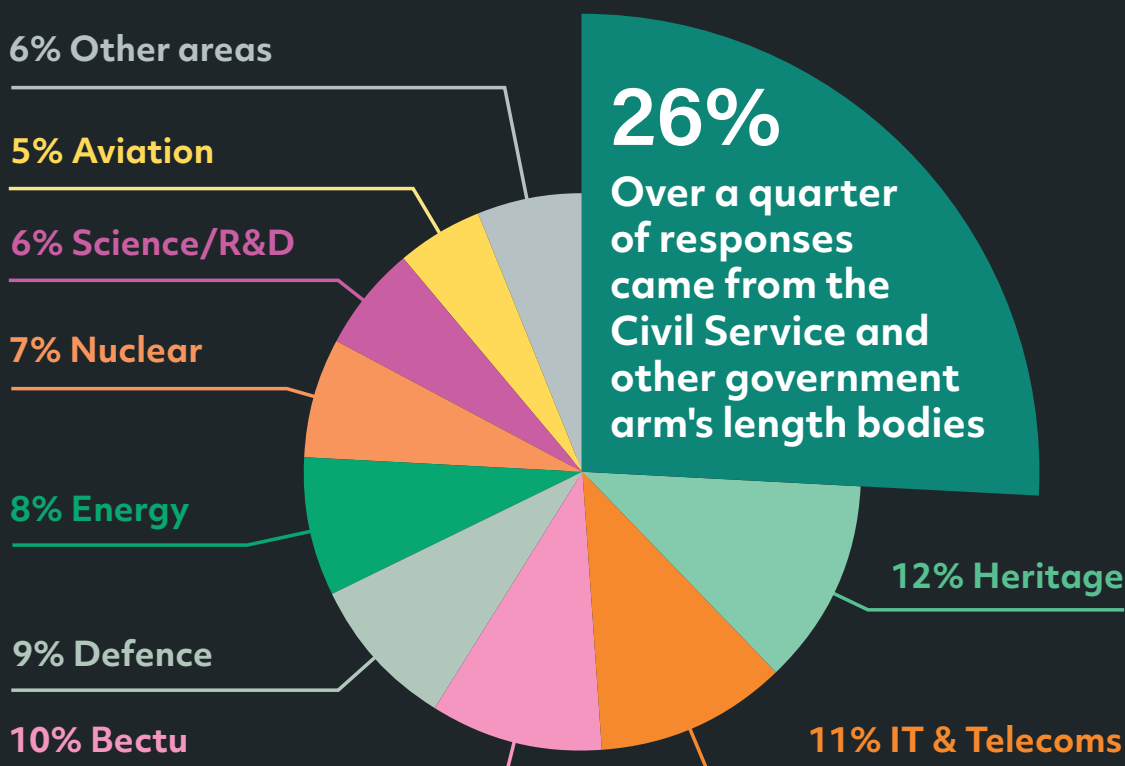


**Members' briefing**

May 2026

The annual Prospect members' survey ran from 18 February - 20 March 2026, with 5,821 responses from across Prospect's sectors. This briefing summarises the responses.

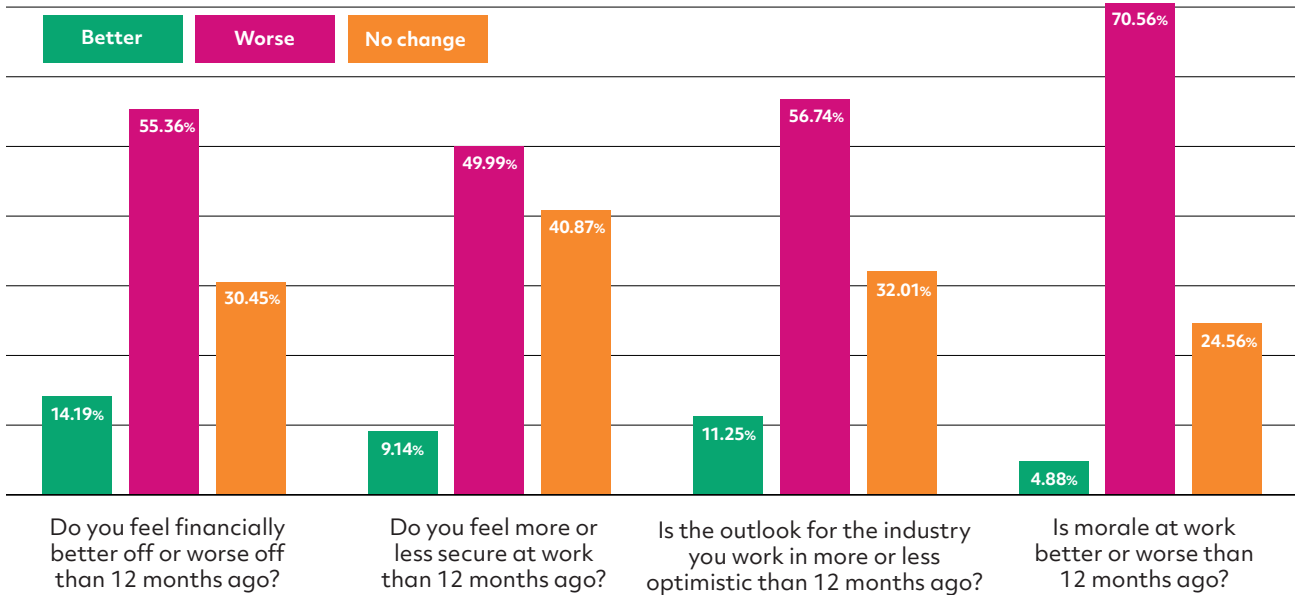
## Sector makeup



### Just over half of respondents work in the public sector



# Rising insecurity at work



Workers are experiencing a financial squeeze, as more than half of respondents (55%) say that they are worse off financially than a year ago, and 46% of respondents are finding it difficult to cope financially right now. When asked what they consider to be the most important issue facing the country at this time, half are most concerned about the cost of living (49%).

Respondents are also feeling less secure at work, rising markedly from 26% in 2024 to 50% in 2026. More than half the respondents (56%) are less optimistic about the outlook for their sector. As a result, a majority of respondents (70%) say that workforce morale is worse than 12 months ago.

In addition to feeling worse off and less secure, respondents feel like they are working harder. More than four in ten (42%) respondents work beyond their contract hours regularly (at least once a week), and almost a third (30%) have

seen a significant increase in their workload in the last 12 months.

For employees, there has been organisational change at more than half the respondents' organisations (60%) in the last year. Disruption has included recruitment freezes (41%), redundancy exercises (32.5%) or a reduction in funding (30.5%).

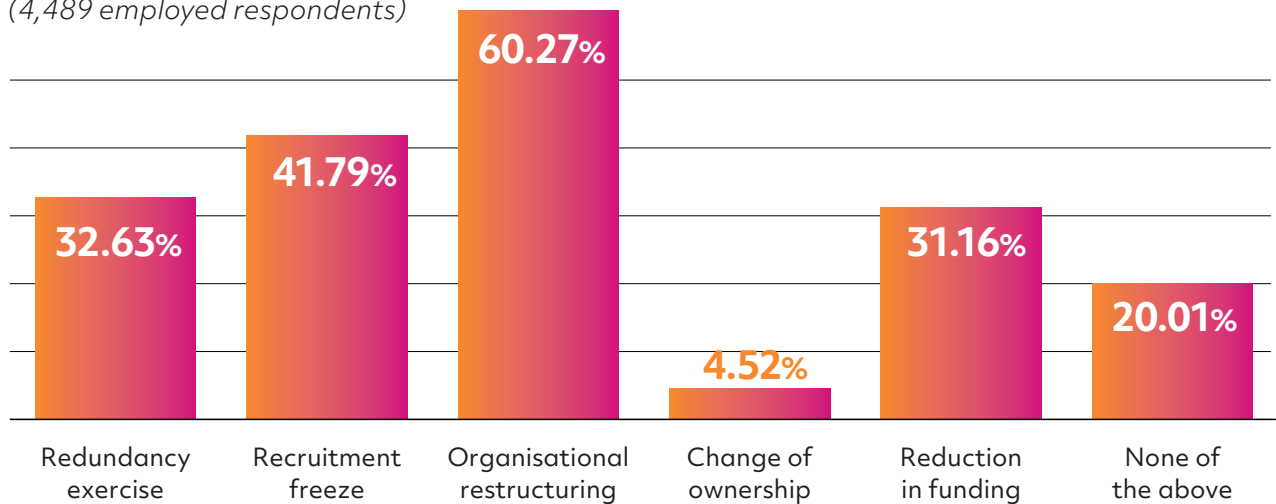
Rising insecurity has fed a deterioration in wellbeing, with widespread mental health concerns reported across all sectors. Overall, half say they are struggling with their mental wellbeing; 61% report feeling stressed at work, while four in ten (41%) report experiencing stress or anxiety in the past year. Around a quarter of members overall have experienced a hostile or toxic work environment (24.0%), rising to 31.2% in broadcasting and 27.8% in heritage.

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## Has your workforce been impacted by restructuring in the last 12 months?

(4,489 employed respondents)



## Unequal experiences

The survey results highlight engrained inequalities in workplace experiences. While there are similar figures reported in terms of organisational restructuring, redundancies etc for employees across groups, there are distinctly different experiences voiced by respondents; 56.2% of BAME respondents say they feel less secure at work than 12 months ago, compared with 48.8% of White respondents. This increases to 65.4% of Black respondents.

And women are far more likely to report experiencing stress at work in the past 12 months (68.3% women vs 55.8% men), as well as depression and anxiety (44.1% vs 36.9%), being excluded from meetings/opportunities (24.4% vs 18.1%), discrimination (14.1% vs 9.9%), hostile/toxic environments (27.1% vs 21.6%) and microaggressions (23.9% vs 16.1%).

Disabled workers report dramatically higher exposure to negative workplace experiences across every measure. Compared with nondisabled respondents, disabled respondents are nearly twice as likely to experience bullying or harassment (20.1% vs 10.6%) and almost three times as likely to experience discrimination (23.4% vs 8.5%) at work.

Disabled workers report dramatically higher exposure to negative workplace experiences across every measure



# Experiences of AI

The use of AI is currently mixed across Prospect's membership, with the greatest use of AI to generate text (36%), but in other sectors more specific uses such as to automate basic tasks in science (20%) or IT&T (31%).

However, across sectors, many workers report negative impacts arising from the use of AI at work. This includes time lost fixing AI mistakes (9.38%), unclear accountability (reflected in lack of transparency (17.91%) and unclear guidelines on when or how to use AI (22.15%) and reduced control over their work (4.19%), all of which undermine the efficiency narrative and suggests the transfer of hidden costs onto staff.

IT&T workers are also the most likely to report increased workload correcting AI errors (15.64%), lack of transparency (23.25%), misleading outputs (31.48%), privacy or data security concerns (28.60%), and unfair or shifting performance expectations (19.55%).

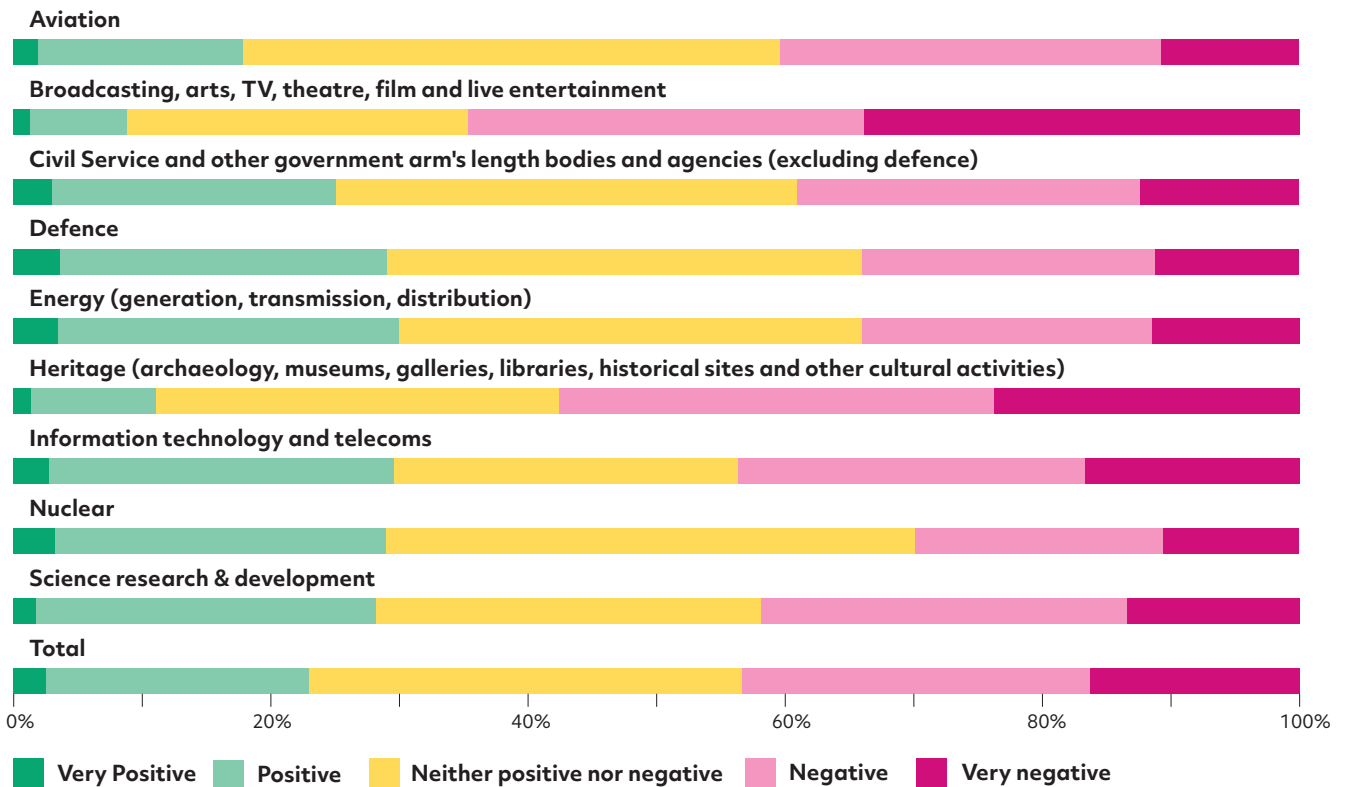
There is also a notable gender split, with male respondents more likely to be using AI technologies in different ways (both male and female are using AI to generate text at similar rates), despite female respondents more likely to have been trained in using AI at work and to have been given guidance on AI use by their employer.

The least engaged with AI technologies are, understandably,

those who feel the greatest threat from AI technologies, in the creative, heritage and cultural industries. But that also reflects how these sectors are among the least supported by their employers and engagers in using AI.

The sectors most likely to receive guidance on how AI should be used at work are in the Civil Service (72%), IT&T (71%), science (62.5%), and defence (59%). Training is most likely in the Civil Service (47%) and IT&T (41%). However, one in five respondents do not feel that guidance is clear on when or how to use AI.

## How positively or negatively do you feel about the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on the industry you work in, over the next five years?



## The Employment Rights Act will introduce new rights at work. How important do you believe the following new rights at work are?

A duty on your employer to inform you of your right to join a trade union



Improving trade union access to your workplace to recruit new members



Improvements in parental leave and pay



Making it easier for people to have flexibility in their patterns or hours of work



Provide guaranteed regular work patterns on zero hours contracts



# The Employment Rights Act

Across the union, members are strongly behind the new rights in the Employment Rights Act 2025. The strongest mandate is for increased flexibility in patterns or hours of work (91% important/very important), alongside a new duty on employers to inform staff of their right to join a trade union (89%). There is also robust support for improving trade union access to workplaces to recruit members (85%).

For every measure asked about, clear majorities in every sector say the change is important or very important. In heritage, support is especially high, with large “very important” shares for the duty to

inform (65%) and flexibility (64%), and strong backing for predictable work patterns on zero-hours contracts (58% “very important”). Science and R&D also show high enthusiasm for flexibility (63% “very important”) and parental leave improvements (58% “very important”). Meanwhile, IT & telecoms stands out for flexibility too (66% “very important”).

Support for the Employment Rights Act is also notably stronger among women, particularly for rights linked to caring responsibilities and work-life balance. Women are significantly more likely than men to rate flexibility in patterns or hours of work as “very important” (70.3%

of women compared with 52.0% of men), alongside improvements to parental leave and pay (57.2% vs 45.0%). There is also a clear gender gap in support for guaranteed regular work patterns on zero-hours contracts, with 53.8% of women rating this as very important compared with 42.3% of men. This highlights how the reforms speak directly to longstanding gendered inequalities in access to secure, flexible work.

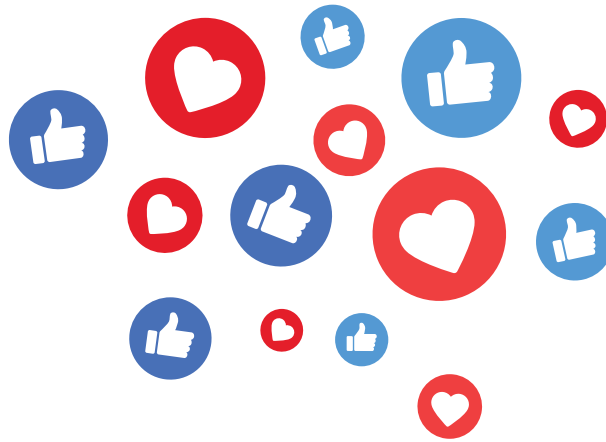
Members see the Employment Rights Act as a concrete route to better work, and they want its measures delivered.

# Member engagement

Members are clearly positive about the union's impact in the workplace. Over two-thirds (68.4%) say Prospect/Bectu makes a difference where they work, including 22.6% who say it makes a big difference and a further 45.8% who say it makes some difference.

While this positive view is shared across sectors, three quarters of members in heritage (75.7%), science and R&D (75.4%) and nuclear (76.3%), and nearly three in four in the Civil Service (73.4%), say the union makes a difference at work.

Around a third of members also recognise the union's wider influence, with 34.2% saying it makes a difference in influencing policy and 43.8% saying it makes a difference in influencing their industry. Among Bectu members, perceptions of industry impact are particularly strong. In broadcasting,



arts, film, TV, theatre and live entertainment, 59.2% say the union makes a difference in influencing their industry, including 12.3% who say it makes a big difference.

We asked members how likely they would be to recommend the union, using a standard 0–10 scale. From this we calculated a Net Promoter Score (NPS), a widely used measure of confidence and advocacy.

Overall, the union's Net Promoter

Members are clearly positive about the union's impact in the workplace. Over two-thirds (68.4%) say Prospect/Bectu makes a difference where they work.

Score is +11. This means that, across all respondents, there are more members who would actively recommend their union than those who would not.

## Next steps

Member insights are extremely valuable to help inform and shape Prospect's campaigning and lobbying activity.

The survey results will be shared with the National Executive Committee and sector committees to help shape the union's work.

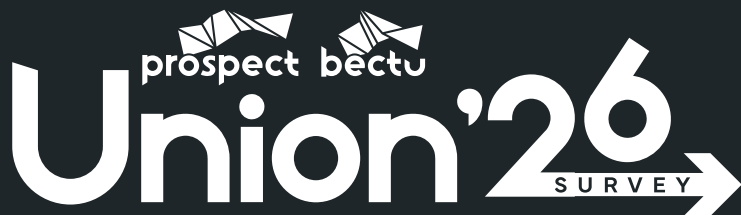
The survey has highlighted the centrality of the cost of living and insecurity at work as common features across all sectors that Prospect represents. Prospect has been working to address these challenges at a national and sectoral level, including:

- Pressing for reforms in the Civil Service pay remit to unlock progression and boost specialist pay
- Highlighting the impact of cuts in grant in aid funding on the heritage sector and workforce
- Highlighting the need for an increase in defence funding to secure future work and resist poorly implemented defence reform plans
- Bectu has been central to the launch of an All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG)

for Freelancers, which will provide a forum for helping address the unique challenges facing freelancers.

To better address inequalities at work the union is strengthening our network of equality reps through a new programme of training, to help prepare reps for new rights under the Employment Rights Act 2025.

Building on the above work and using these member insights, we will work with branches on the priorities that members want to see the union acting on.



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