



# Average pay on the rise

Over 700 practitioners logged on to [opticianonline.net](http://opticianonline.net) to take part in our annual salary survey, revealing not only levels of pay but also patterns of working, preference for benefits, reasons for changing jobs, desired locations and how long it took to find them. **Emma White** reports

Last year's survey unveiled an overall downturn in salary levels as well as longer working hours. The good news is that the average overall salary across all job types and working patterns is up from last year's reported £34,300 to £36,040. Dispensing opticians have also seen an average salary rise from £26,080 to £28,360. Optometrists' overall salaries fell slightly since last year from £41,500 to £39,900.

Salaries by workplace also produced encouraging results, with the average wage at multiples increasing from £28,350 to £32,570. The average working week remains between 35-39 hours for most respondents and again an encouraging 65 per cent reported being able to find new employment within a month.

Professional fees overtook staff discount as the most popular benefit, followed by training. And it appears most participants are happy where they work – the majority selecting their current geographical location as

their most desired area. The rest of this article provides a run-down of the survey highlights to help you gauge how you fare in the optical workplace.

### The sample

More women than men took part in the salary survey this year (58-42 per cent) and the average participant age was 39 years. Largest numbers of respondents were aged between 25 and 34 (34 per cent); 30 per cent were 35-44 years old and 23 per cent were 45-54 years of age. Eighty per cent of participants were white; 10 per cent Indian while the remainder ticked Chinese, Pakistani and British Indian/Asian options.

Unsurprisingly, practitioners working for independent optical practices accounted for 46 per cent of participants; 30 per cent worked at multiples and 13 per cent worked for franchises. The remaining practitioners were locums, manufacturers or worked at hospitals or supermarkets.

Sixty per cent of respondents were optometrists; 22 per cent were dispensing opticians; 8 per cent held

management positions and 6 per cent were contact lens opticians.

In our group, 67 per cent reported working full time and 33 per cent work part time. Most respondents work a normal 35-39 hour week (37 per cent); 19 per cent work 40-44 hours; 14 per cent, 30-34 hours; 11 per cent, 20-29 hours. At the lower end of the scale, 6 per cent work 45-49 hours; 5 per cent work over 50 hours, 5 per cent work 10-19 hours and 4 per cent work less.

This year's participants hailed mainly from the South East (20 per cent) followed by the Midlands (14 per cent); Greater London (13 per cent); South West (13 per cent); North West (10 per cent); Scotland (8 per cent); Yorkshire & Humberside (7 per cent); East Anglia (6 per cent) and Wales (4 per cent). The North East, Northern Ireland; outside UK in Europe and rest of world accounted for 2 per cent or less of recipients.

### Salaries

The average salary excluding age, job and practice type plus working

# Salary survey

## WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING AREAS WOULD YOU CONSIDER MOVING TO FOR A NEW JOB?

Region would consider moving to	Region currently based											
	Base	Greater London	South East	South West	East Anglia	Midlands	Yorkshire & Humberside	North East	North West	Scotland	Northern Ireland	Republic of Ireland
Base	650	84	130	83	39	91	47	16	62	49	10	3
South East	22%	32%	65%	13%	15%	3%	2%	-	3%	2%	-	33%
South West	22%	10%	23%	76%	15%	13%	11%	6%	10%	4%	-	-
Greater London	20%	87%	27%	7%	13%	2%	-	-	3%	4%	-	33%
Midlands	17%	7%	5%	5%	13%	81%	9%	6%	13%	2%	-	-
North West	12%	4%	4%	1%	5%	7%	13%	6%	77%	2%	-	-
Yorkshire & Humberside	11%	4%	2%	1%	18%	12%	79%	13%	8%	2%	-	-
Scotland	10%	5%	5%	1%	5%	2%	4%	13%	5%	88%	-	-
East Anglia	9%	6%	8%	1%	74%	8%	-	-	8%	2%	-	-
Wales	8%	4%	5%	10%	5%	5%	6%	-	6%	-	-	-
North East	6%	2%	3%	-	8%	2%	21%	75%	3%	2%	-	-
Republic of Ireland	5%	5%	3%	1%	5%	2%	-	6%	8%	2%	50%	100%
Northern Ireland	4%	5%	1%	2%	8%	-	-	19%	6%	4%	70%	33%
Outside UK - Europe	11%	13%	9%	10%	13%	13%	11%	6%	13%	6%	20%	-
Outside UK - Rest of World	19%	24%	22%	17%	15%	18%	17%	19%	18%	12%	20%	33%
None of these	8%	5%	9%	12%	5%	7%	11%	6%	11%	4%	10%	-

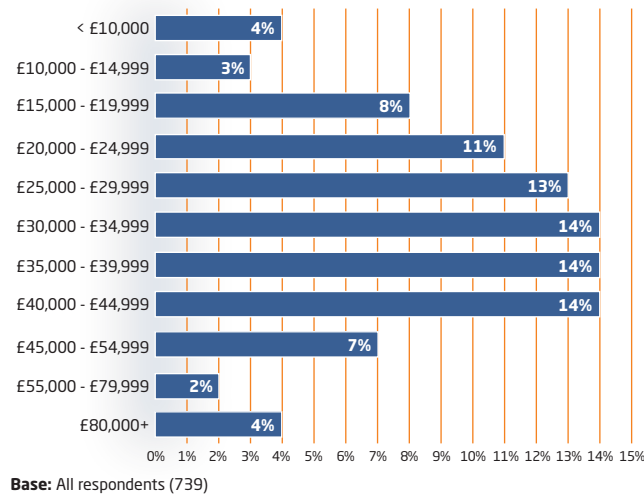
patterns is up from last year's £34,300 to £36,040. But as the table shows, salaries are widespread, with a similar number of respondents earning £20-24,999 (11 per cent); £25-29,999 (13 per cent); £30-34,999 (14 per cent), £35-39,999 (14 per cent) and £40-44,999 (14 per cent). Eight per cent earn £15-19,999, just 3 per cent earn £10-14,999 and 4 per cent less than £10k. Seven per cent and under earn over £45,000 with 4 per cent earning over £80k.

Salaries for men are on average £10,000 higher than women's, with male practitioners earning an average £41,000 and women £31,000, although this is undoubtedly impacted by the higher proportion of women working part time. Both sexes aged 45-54 earn the highest salaries, with men earning on average £45,310 and women earning £36,280 and over. Those working full time earn an average £40,090 compared to £27,350 for part-time workers.

Dispensing opticians working at franchise practices earn an average £42,560 compared to just £22,970 at multiples and £28,100 at independents, although this result may be skewed by a small dispensing optician owner sample therefore not being representative. Optometrists working at independents earn £41,700 and at franchise practices they earn £41,230, while at multiples they earn an average £36,750.

According to the survey, Greater London pays best at £39,120, while

## Salary



traditionally low income areas command higher salaries than other traditionally high-earning areas like the South East. The average salary in the North West is £36,550, North East is £35,470 and in the Midlands is £35,450, while the South East pays an average £34,580. Surprisingly, the average salary in the Republic of Ireland was £53,330 but again, this was likely to have been affected by a low number of respondents for that section of the survey.

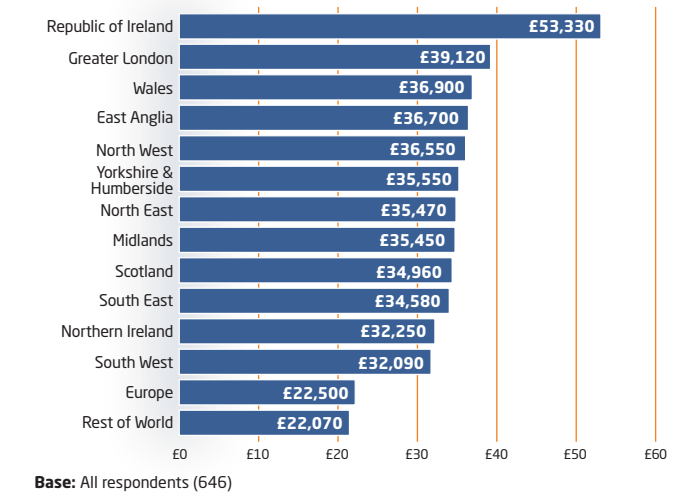
## Benefits

Practitioners receive a wide range of benefits to accompany their salaries, from payment of professional fees

(49 per cent) and staff discount (48 per cent) to training (36 per cent), performance-related bonus (33 per cent), contributory pension (30 per cent) and health plan (28 per cent). Other less frequent benefits include childcare vouchers, share option scheme, life insurance, a lap-top and gym fees. Benefits are reasonably well split between men and women although women appear to fare better with staff discounts (59 per cent) compared to men (42 per cent). Slightly more men than women also appear more likely to receive a company car/allowance (43 per cent versus 30 per cent) and mobile phone allowance (12 per cent versus 6 per cent).

	Wales	Outside UK - Europe	Outside UK - Rest of World
	25	4	7
	8%	-	43%
	20%	-	29%
	8%	-	14%
	12%	-	14%
	16%	-	14%
	4%	-	14%
	-	-	14%
	4%	-	14%
	88%	-	14%
	-	-	14%
	8%	-	14%
	4%	-	14%
	8%	50%	29%
	8%	-	86%
	4%	50%	14%

## Average salary by region



Unsurprisingly, those in full-time employment receive greater benefits than those carrying out part-time work, although not as much as might be thought. Approximately 10 per cent of full-time workers received more benefits than part-time workers. The only notable contrast concerned health plans, with over double the numbers of full-time workers receiving this benefit over their part-time counterparts (34 per cent versus 15 per cent).

Benefits also vary for different age groups, with higher numbers of younger workers receiving benefits such as training/education courses, staff discount, performance-related bonus. While the middle-aged groups were more likely to receive longer-term benefits such as a profit share.

Of particular interest is the difference in benefits offered to practitioners working for different practice types.

While multiples pay the least, they also offer the best benefits across the board. At multiples, 71 per cent of employees receive a staff discount compared to 39 per cent at independents and 47 per cent at franchise practices. Sixty eight per cent of multiple workers receive a performance related bonus compared to 15 per cent of independent workers and 31 per cent of franchise practitioners. In addition, multiples offer 53 per cent of workers a contributory pension compared to 16 per cent at independents and 15 per cent at franchises.

Geographically the benefits do not vary considerably. Professional fees are paid at 46 per cent of practices in the South, 56 per cent of practices in the Midlands and 52 per cent of practices in the North. And staff discounts are offered to 50 per cent of practices in the South, 57 per cent of practices in the North and 51 per cent of practices in the Midlands.

### Location

As always, geography is a major consideration for optical professionals, and employers in some locations are likely to have difficulties finding staff – unless an enticing pay packet is on offer.

When asked which areas they would consider moving to for a new job, the vast majority of professionals listed the area in which they currently worked. For example, 87 per cent of professionals currently working in Greater London said they wished to stay put, as did 81 per cent of professionals working in the Midlands. Welsh and Scottish practitioners were possibly the most content, with 88 per cent of these saying they wished to continue practising there.

The desire to move away was greatest among those working in the South East – many of whom had their sights set on Greater London. Interestingly, nearly one-third of practitioners working in Greater London said they would consider a move to the South East.

Within the UK, the South East and

the South West were the two areas that professionals would be most likely to consider moving to for a new job – these areas each held appeal for 22 per cent of all practitioners surveyed. Greater London was the third most popular destination. The areas with the least appeal were Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland and the North East.

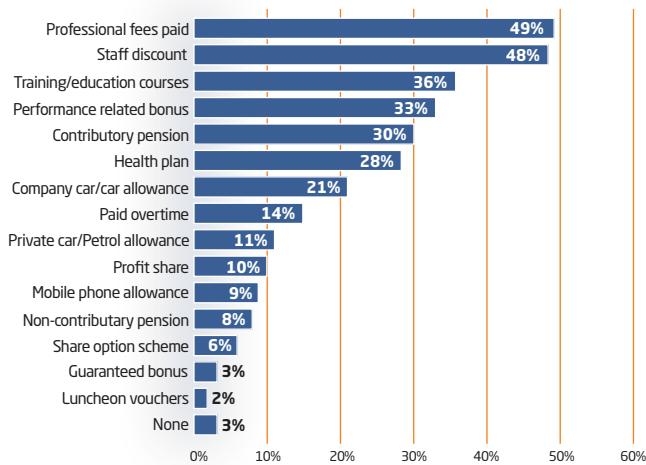
Many practitioners also said they would consider moving much further afield – 11 per cent said they would move to Europe, while 19 per cent said they would move beyond the continent. However, 8 per cent of practitioners said they would not consider moving at all.

Northern practitioners appeared to be among the choosiest in terms of areas they would work. Practitioners from the North East refused to work in Greater London, the South East, East Anglia or Wales. Only 10 practitioners from Northern Ireland took part in this exercise – so it is unclear how well the views of the majority are reflected – however all indicated a reluctance to work anywhere else in the UK.

Another significant factor for practitioners taking on a new role is the type of workplace. Independent optical practices were by far and away the most popular work environment, with 49 per cent of practitioners saying they would prefer to work here. Indeed the popularity of these workplaces appears to be growing – as in the *Optician* salary survey of 2005, just 42 per cent indicated independent optical practices as their

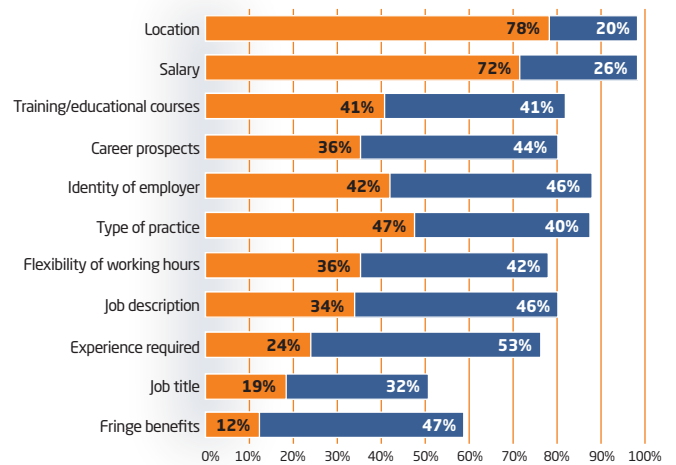
# Salary survey

## Benefits



Base: All respondents (743)

## Importance of factors when choosing a new job



preference. One in five practitioners said they had no preference in terms of workplace. Eleven per cent said they preferred to work in franchises, 8 per cent in multiples, 4 per cent in hospitals and 2 per cent in a teaching environment. Fewer than 1 per cent of those surveyed said they would work as a locum, in a laser clinic or in universities.

### Changing jobs

The reasons for employees choosing to change jobs are varied and widespread, with no particular trends, according to our survey. Change of location was the most popular reason at 10 per cent, followed by pay (9 per cent), poor management (6 per cent) and redundancy (6 per cent). Thereafter reasons range from too much travelling, inflexible hours and lack

of benefits to poor customer service, boredom and retirement.

When looking for new employment, the survey showed that 40 per cent of respondents said that having their professional fees paid is extremely important followed by training (34 per cent), staff discount (28 per cent), paid overtime (22 per cent) and performance related bonus (20 per cent).

Nineteen per cent of participants also classed contributory pension as extremely important, while 15 per cent each said a guaranteed bonus and health plan are extremely important. Lunch vouchers, mobile phone, share option and subsidised mortgage were viewed as least important. Forty-eight per cent would seek employment with their current employer; 37 per cent would choose another employer

while the rest said they would be either retiring, self-employed or locuming.

The majority of participants said they were able to find new employment within a month (65 per cent); 10 per cent between one and two months; 7 per cent between two and four months and 2 per cent between four and six months. The remaining respondents had never changed jobs, were in their first job, self-employed, a locum or were headhunted.

Most of our readers said they plan to retire between 56 and 60 (29 per cent). Twenty-eight per cent said they aimed to retire between 61 and 65 years of age, 15 per cent between 50 and 55 years, 7 per cent before 50 and 6 per cent between 66 and 70. Three per cent were already retired and 2 per cent said between 71 and 75, while 9 per cent didn't specify an age. ●

# ASTIGMATISM

Keep it simple.  
Keep it ACUVUE®

Offer ACUVUE® Brand Contact Lenses for Astigmatism.



ACUVUE®, ACUVUE® ADVANCE™, HYDRACLEAR™ and THE DIFFERENCE IS REAL™ are all trademarks of Johnson & Johnson Vision Care. ©JJVC 2007, a division of Johnson & Johnson Medical Ltd, UK.