

Senedd Remuneration Board Report on the Approach to Pay Benchmarking February 2025



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1. Introduction

The methodology that Beamans uses for market pay assessments follows industry practice and is based around the concept of job matching. Job matching compares those elements of a role which experience has shown impact significantly on levels of reward in the marketplace, to a benchmark job that is thought to be properly graded and rewarded.

Such elements include:

- Area (or breadth) of functional specialism.
- Nature and level of accountabilities.
- Reporting structure and organisational level.
- Essential skills, experience, competencies and qualifications.
- Geographic location.

It is important to note that benchmarking assessments are not a science that produces a ‘magic number’, they are an input to the overall consideration, they are not the sole source of measurement for setting pay levels. Organisations will routinely consider a whole range of factors in addition to benchmark figures **to inform** salaries for any particular role or groups of roles.

Additional factors often considered include:

- Other relevant market data e.g. publicly available pay information and surveys.
- The organisation’s desired pay stance in the market (e.g. ‘median’ against a chosen peer group).
- Evidence that a post requires ‘hot skills’ (e.g. difficulties encountered in recruitment).
- Staff turnover rates.
- Assessment of job weight.
- Budgetary constraints and the cost to the taxpayer (public sector) or customer (private sector).

2. Senedd Benchmarking

To assist the Senedd benchmarking process, the Remuneration Board provided access to the Brightmine (formally Cendex and Xpert HR) pay data analytics tool, a very well-regarded pay benchmarking tool. Beamans undertook desk based job weight assessments for Senedd Members support staff roles based on the draft job evaluation and grading classification framework developed (see detail below), members staff job descriptions and/or person specifications for the roles, and the knowledge and understanding that Beamans have acquired from discussions, consultations and testing with members and staff over the last 18 months. In addition to the Brightmine data itself, information was sense checked using publicly available pay surveys and job advertisements relevant to MSS roles. Pay and practices in other parliamentary jurisdictions across the UK particularly the UK and Scottish Parliaments were also fully considered.

As stated above, to support job weight assessments, the draft classification framework was used. This was developed based on the agreed outcomes of the first phase of the work with the Senedd, namely that the new framework would be based on four job families:

- Communications
- Policy & Research
- Casework
- Business Management & Administration

Additionally that grade descriptors compiled were underpinned by an appropriate and concise job classification factor plan aligned with the values and demands of MSS and Group roles. These factors were identified as:

- Knowledge & Skills
- Relationships & Influencing
- Analysis & Decision Making
- Planning and Organising
- Managing People
- Impact

Grade descriptors for each core grade level were defined in terms of their broad dimensions and job weight characteristics and the key differences highlighted between roles at the illustrated grade and the grade level below. All this information was used in market pay assessments.

3. The Brightmine Tool

The Brightmine database currently contains details of 1,440,194 individuals receiving Basic Salary from 1,144 organisations providing the data. The database is updated monthly. The information contained within Brightmine and how its algorithms work is the intellectual property of Brightmine which is owned by the FTSE 100 company Relx. All pay data houses closely guard their intellectual property from their competitors. Consequently there is no published information that provides a detailed understanding of how market rates are calculated. However it is possible to explain how the process works.

4. How to Benchmark Basic Salary.

Step 1: select the job level

Job levels define the seniority of any given role, regardless of job title or the functional area in which

the incumbent works. The Brightmine tool uses 13 different job levels ranging from routine task provider to chief executive. Detailed guidance is provided as to the expected scope and complexity of roles at each level. These levels are split over three major groups, Directors, Managerial and Staff. An important point to note is that Employees below “manager” levels may still manage, oversee or supervise other employees.

For members staff roles, the **Chief of Staff role** was considered and tested against a number of Brightmine levels. Professional Level 4 was considered the best match. The detailed attributes for this level are set out below, but when matching it should be recognised that not every attribute is relevant to the specific role considered.

Strategic scope

- Operates at a senior level.
- May be responsible for the day-to-day supervision of a team.
- Freedom to make operational decisions about the deployment of resources to achieve business targets.
- Analyses requirements and advises on scope and options for operational improvement.
- Demonstrates creativity in applying solutions.

Business Skills

- Keeps up to date with changes and new developments in their area of expertise.
- Provides advice on their area of expertise.
- Communicates soundly with colleagues and customers.
- Demonstrates leadership and mentors junior colleagues.

Complexity

- Work is often self-initiated.
- Performs complex technical, professional or financial activities.
- Undertakes work which requires the application of principles in a wide range of contexts.
- Rapidly absorbs new technical information and applies it effectively.
- Is an expert in their technical or professional area and applies this knowledge to the activities of their employer or client.

Autonomy

- Works under broad direction.
- Accountable for own technical, project or supervisory responsibilities.
- Receives tasks in the form of objectives.
- Establishes own milestones, deadlines and team objectives, and delegates responsibilities.
- Has responsibility for the work of others and the allocation of resources.

The **Band 1 role** was considered a match for Professional Level 3 in Brightmine, a role described as Senior Professional Level with the following broad attributes.

Business skills

- Selects the appropriate methods, tools and applications.
- Communicates fluently and is able to present complex technical information to a non-technical audience.
- Plans, schedules and monitors work to meet deadlines and other requirements (financial, legislative etc).
- Keeps up to date with developments in their technical or professional area of expertise.
- Responsible and takes initiative for their own personal development.

Complexity

- Performs a wide variety of complex technical or professional work activities in a variety of contexts.
- Has defined areas of responsibility.
- Due to experience gained, may provide guidance to, and resolve issues raised by, less experienced staff.
- Produces non-standard letters or reports.
- May be responsible for a defined part of a project.
- Has a thorough understanding of their professional area and how it fits within their business.
- May lead a small project or team.
- May supervise work of others on a day-to-day basis.

Autonomy

- Operates as a competent professional with minimum supervision.
- This role has some limited autonomy, and incumbents are able to make some decisions within the scope of their role.
- Plans own work to meet given objectives.

The **Band 2 role** was considered a good match for Professional level 2 – Standard Professional, with the following broad attributes.

Business skills

- Demonstrates an analytical and methodical approach to problem solving.
- Absorbs and applies technical information.
- Has a thorough understanding of their role and how it relates to other roles and to the business of the employer.

Complexity

- Has defined areas of responsibility.
- Due to experience gained may provide guidance to more junior or less experienced staff.
- May produce non-standard letters or reports.

- May be responsible for a defined part of a project, small internal business project or a new process.
- Uses discretion in identifying and resolving complex problems.
- Performs a broad range of work, sometimes complex and non-routine, in a variety of environments.

Autonomy

- Accountable for delivering assigned tasks within broader projects.
- Operate as a competent professional with minimum supervision.
- Has limited decision-making scope on how tasks are to be fulfilled.
- Can easily determine when work should be escalated to a higher level.
- Operate as a competent professional with minimum supervision. Proficient in role with professional knowledge and expertise. Requires solving of routine problems. Completes work with a limited degree of supervision.

The **Band 3 role** was considered a good match for Professional level 1 – Junior Professional With the following attributes.

Business skills

- Demonstrates a rational and organised approach to work.
- Understands and uses appropriate methods (i.e. systems, processes).
- Learns new skills and can apply them.
- Able to effectively communicate with colleagues and/or customers.
- Absorbs and applies technical information.

Complexity

- Able to plan, schedule and monitor own work within agreed deadlines.
- Responsible for checking the quality and accuracy of own work.
- Produces routine letters, reports and other documents from standard templates.
- Performs a range of activities in a variety of structured environments.

Autonomy

- Operates within a defined role but may have some limited autonomy in how tasks are delivered.
- Can easily determine when work should be escalated to a higher level.
- Operates in a junior or assistant professional or technical role. Demonstrates a rational and organised approach to work. Resolves routine issues with supervisory guidance and approval. Operates within a defined role

This left the **Senior Advisor role** without a clear unique match, but after modelling various options it was considered that a combination of Professional Level 4 & 3 level descriptors was the best fit.

Step 2: choose a reward metric

Once the job level most appropriate for a role is identified most organisations would regard a Basic Salary that fell within a number of percentage points of the market median to be "about right" for most roles. For some organisations, a decision may be taken to set basic salaries at a higher rate - for example, at the upper quartile rate for the market. This is unusual particularly in the public sector but is very much a decision to be made internally, in line with the organisation's pay policy. Beamans looked at a range of data and provided analysis to the Remuneration Board who determined that the market median was the appropriate rate to benchmark against.

Step 3: consider if industry should be used as a filter

Industry sectors can also have a significant impact on Basic Salary depending on the job role. Beamans provided analysis to the Remuneration Board for a range of sector including various combinations of Private sector services, Public services and the Charities / not for profits sector. The Remuneration Board determined that the Public Sector was the most appropriate comparator (this provided the highest median of all the sectors considered at most job levels).

Step 4: consider if any geographical filtering should be undertaken.

Analysis was done on a range of options, including UK wide, UK excluding London and Wales only. Brightmine uses consistent geographical regions across its tools and reports. Regions, towns and counties are all derived from workplace location postcodes collected against individual employees. The Remuneration Board determined that Wales only data was the appropriate comparator (this also provided the highest public sector median). The Wales only data is defined as "all provinces within the nation of Wales".

Other potential options for filtering were considered but then discounted including company size and company annual turnover. Brightmine does permit filtering by more detailed function and a number of test report were run covering the job families in the framework, these all had minimal impact on the media. This may reflect the sample size within the Brightmine database.

Step 5: analyse and model the data.

Once all the above was considered, assessments were undertaken of base pay levels on 17 February 2025. When looking at base pay levels, it is important to remember that in most organisations actual pay levels may vary either side of the figures presented commensurate with an individual's skill, knowledge, performance and experience. To be clear and as explained above, our assessments are not intended to reflect the exact salary that members should pay individuals but rather provides data to inform the Remuneration Board as a basis to review and set an appropriate pay level/range. Using all the factors and data identified within the above approaches,

we developed and modelled various market informed pay structure for each grade level and presented these findings. This stage is referred to as pay modelling which aims to strike a balance between market alignment, affordability, and minimising the impact of roles falling above or below the proposed minima or maxima for their grade level. This process was undertaken in collaboration with the Remuneration Board's in-house project team. The Remuneration Board guided our approach by determining that the principles to be followed were that pay should be informed by the Market Median for the Public Sector in Wales Only. This obviously reduces the sample size for comparisons within Brightmine but still allows a robust comparison e.g. the sample size for Band 1 was fairly typical and covered 4492 individuals from 12 organisations.

5. Future Consideration of Market Pay.

Looking forward, it is for the Remuneration Board to consider how often it wants to undertake a full review of market pay. Typically most organisations will undertake such an exercise every 3 to 5 years, although individual roles, job families, etc may be reviewed more often and in response to changing employment markets or particular difficulties such as finding particular roles hard to fill.