

**Working for First Choice Travel:
A research report for the Transport Salaried
Staffs Association**

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Transport Salaried Staffs Association (TSSA) is a certified trade union representing workers in the transport and travel industries. The union has a growing number of members employed by First Choice Ltd. and has sought to better understand their employment conditions and concerns.

1.2 In 2001/2, the union conducted a postcard survey asking staff which three things they would change about their conditions of work. The survey responses showed that 84% (169 members of staff) were dissatisfied about their wages, 36% (72 members of staff) were concerned about their hours of work, 25% wanted improved training and educational opportunities and a further 20% (40 members of staff) were keen to have improved incentives at work.

1.3 To explore these issues in more detail, the TSSA's Travel Trade Team asked Dr Jane Wills from the University of London to assist in drawing up a fuller survey for completion during 2002. This report contains the results of this more detailed research.

1.4 The survey was fully completed by 255 members of staff. The data were analysed using SPSS and the characteristics of the sample are given in Appendix One.

2. Pay

2.1 Staff were asked about their current salary, and of the 163 who answered this question, 35% (57 members of staff) earned £8599 or less. A further 23% (38 members of staff) earned between £8600 and £10,000 a year and 31% (51 members of staff) earned between £10,001 and £14,999 year. Sixteen people (10%) earned between £15,000 and £19,999 and just one person earned more than £20,000 a year.

Table 1: Declared earnings

	Number	%
Less than £8599	57	35
£8600-£10,000	38	23
£10,001-£14,999	51	31
£15,000-£19,999	16	10
£20,000+	1	-
Total	163	100

2.2 When cross-tabulated with job title, and in light of MA trainee pay being determined by government, there is little indication of consistency in pay across the company.

Table 2: Declared earnings by job title

	<£8599	£8600-£10,000	£10,001-£14,999	£15,000+	N
MA Trainee	100%	-	-	-	17
Sales Consultant	41%	34%	23%	1%	70
FE Consultant	22%	39%	39%	-	23
Assistant Manager	-	7%	89%	4%	27
Manager	14%	9%	9%	69%	22

2.3 Staff were asked if they knew how their starting salary was determined and as many as 71% (181) said that they didn't know. Only 29% (73 members of staff) answered positively.

2.4 Of those who did feel they knew how their starting salary was determined, 60 (82%) said that it was determined by their level of experience when joining the company, 15 (21%) said that it was determined by the shop size and location and 12 (16%) said that it was determined by their shop manager when joining.

2.5 When asked about pay rises, as many as 43% of respondents (109 people) said that they didn't know if everyone in their shop got the same rate of increase. Of those that did know, only 12% (30 respondents) said that everyone in the shop got the same rise and the remainder said that pay was determined by performance. While 41% (105 people) said that sales performance was key to levels of pay increase, 20% of staff (52 people) said that pay was based on managerial assessment of performance and a further 16% of staff (41 people) said that shop performance was also important. There was little evidence of shared understanding about the systems of reward operating in First Choice.

2.6 In this context, rates of satisfaction were remarkably low. As shown in Table 3, only 17% of the sample (44 people) were satisfied with the way in which their pay was determined.

Table 3: How satisfied are you about the way your pay is determined?

	Number	%
It's fair	44	17
It could be better	130	51
It's unfair	46	18
Don't know	29	11
No answer	6	2
Total	255	100

2.7 Comments made in response to this question included:

Other staff do the same job for more money.

Other roles and responsibilities should be taken into account, not just sales performance.

I do 3 or 4 other jobs in the office that I am not recognised for.

You can earn more money working for a company that requires unskilled work.

Compared to other lines of work in customer services, our pay is awful.

New people without experience are getting a lot more than I am with one year's experience.

There is no pay structure, people doing the same job can be paid differently.

You are not appreciated for the work that you do.

2.8 As might be expected, rates of satisfaction increased slightly amongst managers and those earning more money. However, as indicated in Tables 4 and 5, only a minority of staff in each grade were found to be satisfied with the way their pay was determined and assistant managers were much less satisfied than their managerial colleagues.

Table 4: Satisfaction with pay determination by job title

	Satisfied	Unsatisfied	Don't know/no answer	N
MA Trainee	21%	62%	17%	29
Sales Consultant	12%	74%	14%	102
FE Consultant	12%	64%	24%	33
Assistant Manager	18%	79%	3%	38
Manager	34%	61%	5%	41

Table 5: Satisfaction with pay determination by income

	Satisfied	Unsatisfied	Don't know/no answer	N
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<£8599	14%	69%	17%	57
£8600-£10,000	13%	76%	11%	38
£10,001-£14,999	14%	71%	15%	51
£15,000+	24%	65%	11%	17

2.9 Satisfaction with the way in which pay was determined fell amongst those staff who had longer service with the company (see Table 6). This suggests that more experienced staff are less contented than those joining the company for the first time. These staff are overwhelmingly concentrated in Bakers Dolphin which has been in existence for a much longer time.

Table 6: Satisfaction with pay determination, by time with First Choice

	Satisfied	Unsatisfied	Don't know/no answer	N
Less than 2 years service	16%	63%	21%	122
2-4 years service	21%	70%	9%	103
5-9 years service	5%	89%	6%	19
10+ years service	0%	100%	0%	9

3. Working hours

3.1 The second part of the questionnaire explored the issue of working hours. Staff were asked how many extra hours, beyond those contracted, they worked in an average week. Just over half those who responded, 55% (141 members of staff), worked more than 2 extra hours a week. And as indicated in Table 7, a considerable number of these, 24% (63 members of staff), worked for more than 4 additional hours a week.

Table 7: Extra hours worked in an average week

	Number	%
Less than 2 hours	95	37
2-4 hours	78	31
4-8 hours	47	18
8+ hours	16	6
No answer	19	8
Total	255	100

3.2 As might be expected, working extra hours was particularly common amongst managers, 59% of whom worked more than 4 extra hours a week (see Table 8).

Table 8: Working extra hours by job title

	< 2 hrs	2-4 hrs	4-8 hrs	8+ hrs	Don't know/no answer	N
MA Trainee	45%	10%	14%	7%	24%	29
Sales Consultant	44%	34%	12%	6%	4%	102
FE Consultant	33%	49%	15%	0%	3%	33
Assistant Manager	40%	29%	24%	3%	5%	38
Manager	12%	24%	42%	17%	5%	41

3.3 When asked about rewards for these extra hours of work, 49% of those surveyed (126 members of staff) said they were not rewarded. One in five reported getting time off in lieu and only 10% received overtime, although 11 respondents reported getting time off in lieu *and* overtime, depending on the circumstances (see Table 9).

Table 9: Rewards for extra hours of work

	Number	%
No reward	126	49
Time off in lieu	53	21
Overtime	25	10
Other	25	10
No answer	25	10
Total	255	100

3.3 As might be expected, more senior staff were less likely to be rewarded for the extra hours, even though they did the longest hours of work (see Table 10).

Table 10: Rewards for extra hours worked, by job title

	Not rewarded	N
MA Trainee	31%	29
Sales Consultant	47%	102
FE Consultant	55%	33
Assistant Manager	55%	38
Manager	63%	41

3.4 When asked about lunch breaks, almost half of those sampled were found to take their full lunch entitlement less than twice in an average week. As shown in Table 11, 40% (102 respondents) said that they had lunch only once or never during an average week. Yet as many as 1 in 3 also said that they had their full entitlement

every day during an average week, highlighting the diversity in working conditions and practices found across the company's operations in the UK.

Table 11: How often do staff take their full lunch entitlement in an average week?

	Number	%
Every day	75	29
2-4 times	76	30
Less than twice a week	54	21
Never	48	19
No answer	2	1
Total	255	100

3.5 Managers were less likely to have their full complement of lunch breaks than their more junior colleagues, as shown in Table 12.

Table 12: Taking a full complement of lunch breaks, by job title

	Lunch everyday	Lunch only once or never	N
MA Trainee	52%	24%	29
Sales Consultant	39%	28%	102
FE Consultant	18%	39%	33
Assistant Manager	5%	66%	38
Manager	12%	63%	41

3.6 Staff were also asked how long their average lunch break lasts when they take it, and as shown in Table 13, there is considerable variation across the company.

Table 13: How long is your average lunch break?

	Number	%
10 mins or less	18	7
10-20 mins	35	14
20-40 mins	88	35
40-60 mins	109	43
No answer	5	2
Total	255	100

4. Skills and training at work

4.1 The survey asked staff about their attitudes towards training and found that as many as 77% (195 members of staff) were keen to develop new skills. Moreover, a further

18% (45 people) said that they already had the opportunity to develop new skills, many of them from Bakers Dolphin in the South West. As shown in Table 14, only 13 people (5% of those surveyed) said that they did not want to develop new skills.

Table 14: Do you want to develop new skills?

	Number	%
Yes	195	77
I feel that these opportunities already exist for me	45	18
No	13	5
No answer	2	1
Total	255	100

4.2 When asked about the skills they would like to develop, considerable numbers felt that people management, IT and product knowledge would be interesting and useful to them (see Table 15).

Table 15: Skills staff would like to develop

	Number	%
People Management	96	38
Coaching/leadership skills	95	38
IT/Computer skills	94	37
Product knowledge	85	33
Selling techniques	74	29
Customer relations	56	22
Health and safety	55	22

4.3 As many as 183 respondents (72% of those sampled) felt that such training would enhance their performance and one in four (28%, 70 people) said that a lack of training had held them back in their career. There was clear enthusiasm for training amongst staff, and a common belief that this would improve staff performance at work.

5. Working with the TSSA

5.1 In the final section of the questionnaire survey, staff were asked if they were interested in finding out more about the TSSA. As many as 72% (184 people) affirmed that they were, and the same number said that they would like the union to work with management to improve conditions for staff working in the company. Significantly, managers were more likely to want to see the union talking to the company than more junior staff (see Table 16).

Table 16: Would like to see the TSSA working to improve conditions for staff in your company, by job title

	Yes	N
MA Trainee	62%	29
Sales Consultant	72%	102
FE Consultant	70%	33
Assistant Manager	82%	38
Manager	73%	41

5.2 Staff were also asked if they would like to make any comments about working for the company at the end of the form and the following are a selection of the comments they made:

I enjoy this industry, however the long hours, lack of recognition, stress and low pay are now encouraging me to leave. I can work 39 hours in a bar and take the same salary home.

I have since quit Travel Choice and subsequently the travel industry to go back into further education studying different subjects as I feel that there is not much money behind the travel industry and no fairness!

There are two new girls just started in our other branch, they have been put on £9500 and it has taken me 3 years to get that. But I am not supposed to know their wage!

We are overworked and underpaid.

6. Summary

6.1 This report has summarised the responses of 255 staff employed by First Choice Retail Ltd to a survey designed and implemented by the TSSA.

6.2 A remarkably large number of those who answered the question about current salary (35%) were found to be earning less than the national minimum wage for adults in full time work. This is explained by the part time staff and the MA trainees included in the survey. However, only 10% of the staff who responded were found to earn

more than £15,000 a year, indicating that the vast majority of employees are earning well below national average levels of pay.

6.3 As many as 71% of those sampled did not know how their starting salary was determined.

6.4 Only 17% of the sample were satisfied with the way their pay was determined.

6.5 Of those surveyed, 53% were found to work more than two extra hours, and 24% worked more than 4 extra hours, in an average week. More than 50% of managers worked at least 4 extra hours a week, and as many as 17% were working more than 8 extra hours a week.

6.6 Half of those surveyed were not rewarded for their extra hours of work. However, MA trainees were twice as likely to be rewarded as managers, 63% of whom received no reward for this work.

6.7 40% of those sampled took their lunch break once or never during an average week. However, one in three reported having a lunch break every day, highlighting the diversity in practice across the UK.

6.8 Only 5% of respondents were not keen to develop new skills, many (72%) arguing that training would enhance their performance.

6.9 72% of those samples said that they would like the TSSA to work with managers at First Choice Retail to improve conditions of work.

In summary, this survey has illustrated that staff have poor knowledge about pay determination, that many work extra hours beyond those contracted (often unrewarded) and that there is considerable dissatisfaction with the systems in place. The TSSA will use this information to try and secure meaningful talks with the company, seeking to secure union recognition to improve conditions for the long-term.

Appendix One: The sample population

1. Job Title

Job Title	Number	%
MA Trainee	29	11
Sales Consultant	102	40
FE Consultant	33	13
Assistant Manager	38	15
Manager	41	16
No answer	12	5
Total	255	100

2. Full/Part Time

	Number	%
Full time	228	89
Part time	26	10
No answer	1	-
Total	255	100

3. Gender

	Number	%
Women	198	78
Men	32	13
No answer	25	10
Total	255	100

4. Age

	Number	%
20 or younger	71	28
21-30	106	42
31-50	72	28
51-65	6	2
Total	255	100

5. Time with the company

	Number	%
Less than 2 years	122	48
2-4 years	103	40
5-9 years	19	7
10+ years	9	4
No Answer	2	1
Total	255	100

6. Time in the industry

	Number	%
Less than 2 years	68	27
2-4 years	82	32
5-9 years	50	20
10+ years	50	20
No Answer	5	2
Total	255	100