

The Guardian



Gender pay gap widens in the public sector

Second year of reporting the median pay gap shows women paid 14% less an hour than men

Frances Perraudin and Pamela Duncan

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The public sector has failed to narrow its gender pay gap this year, with women still paid an average of 86p for every pound paid to men.

According to latest figures, the median pay gap was 14.1% in March 2018, slightly higher than the 14% of a year earlier, though still below the national average of 17.9% across both the public and private sectors.

Since last year, organisations with more than 250 employees have been required to report their gender pay gaps at the end of the financial year. The deadline for public sector organisations to report was Saturday at midnight, while private companies have to file their figures to the government by Thursday.

Almost nine in 10 (88.5%) public sector organisations reported a median pay gap in favour of men, with more than a third paying men 20% more than women.

The median gap is the difference in hourly pay between the employee in the middle of the range of male wages and the middle employee in the range of female wages.

Of the 50 public sector bodies with the biggest differences, 44 were multi-academy trusts - organisations that run academy schools.

Wigston Academies Trust, which runs two schools in Leicestershire, had the largest gender pay gap of any public sector organisation, with women paid 69% less on average than men. Wimborne Academy Trust, which runs 11 schools in the south-west, was second, reporting a gap of 68%.

In a statement to the Guardian on Thursday, Wimborne said: "Women currently fulfil most of the support roles in the schools and a majority of our female employees are not teachers. Consequently the median paid woman in the trust is a teaching assistant.

"Only 13% of the trust's staff are male, and the majority of them are teachers. Therefore the median paid man in the trust is a teacher. The difference in pay between a teacher and teaching assistant accounts for the reported pay gap."

Loughborough University reported a gap of 36%, the highest of any university. Durham had a 28% gap, the biggest among the Russell Group of universities. Warwick reported a gap of 25% and Birmingham one of 20%.

Tonbridge and Malling borough council had a gender pay gap of 33%, and was one of 17 local authorities where the gap was more than 20%. The council said: "It would appear that women are more likely to apply for, be appointed to, and remain in lower graded posts".

Twelve councils had gaps in favour of women of more than 20%. Three Rivers district council had a gap of -50%, meaning that men were paid 50p for every £1 women were paid. The council said this was because its lowest-paid employees were manual workers, all of whom were men.

All police forces recorded gender pay gaps in favour of men. Leicestershire police had a gap of 31.5%, while Lancashire constabulary's was 31.4%. Leicestershire police said their workforce comprised police officers who have a nationally agreed pay structure, and contracted employees.

"[The] makeup of the workforce skews the total pay gaps as we are combining a higher percentage of male police officers with a higher percentage of female police staff," they said.

Charles Cotton of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development said: "This is only the second year of reporting, so it would have been unlikely that any initiatives that had been launched would have produced significant falls in 12 months.

"It's slightly disappointing that it hasn't fallen, but it also hasn't risen by much. I would hope that as organisations start implementing the plans that they've drawn up, after a number of years, their gaps will start to fall."

He added that some initiatives to close the gender pay gap could initially result in it being widened as more women were brought into organisations in entry-level roles.

Hannah Peaker, the chief of staff of the Women's Equality party, said: "Women make up around two-thirds of employees in the public sector, so it is really important that these employers take the pay gap seriously - they have the potential to have a huge impact on women's equality across the UK."

Christina McAnea, the assistant general secretary at Unison, said that public shaming appeared not to be making any difference. “Public employers have got to get serious about tackling low pay and help train and support more of their female staff to apply for higher paid jobs,” she said. “But until we as a society start placing more value on the support and caring jobs women tend to do the pay gap will remain stubbornly wide.”

Gender pay gap expert, Helene Reardon-Bond, a former head of gender and equality at the government equalities office (GEO), said it should be compulsory for organisations to produce action plans to accompany their gender pay gap reports, especially when they were making no progress in closing their gender pay gaps.

. This article was amended on 1 April 2019. The subheading of an earlier version incorrectly said that women were paid “14p less an hour than men”. That would only be true if the men were being paid £1 an hour.

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