



healthy working animals
for the world's poorest communities



NCVO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Good employment practice case study

Using staff surveys at your organisation

Karen Philips, Head of HR for the Brooke told us about the staff survey the charity completed as part of its staff engagement strategy.

The Brooke is the UK's leading overseas working equine welfare charity, dedicated to improving the lives of horses, donkeys and mules working in some of the poorest communities in the world. On average six or more people depend on the income generated through the work of each animal and so by improving animal welfare, the lives of poor people in the developing world are improved.

How did this come about – what brought the issue to light?

“There have been a number of changes recently at the Brooke and we were keen to find out what people think about working here and how we could improve our working practices. We've been doing staff surveys for two years using a standard survey provider. We decided this year to move to a more in-depth survey.”

The Brooke completed its first staff engagement survey in 2008 using a standard survey provider. In 2010, the organisation wanted to complete the process using a questionnaire tailored to their needs.

Who was involved in the process?

The HR team, the Senior Management Team (SMT) and all staff, through the staff consultation group, were involved in designing the survey with Agenda Consulting.

How long did it take?

The whole process took from early June to September 2010, with survey responses being collected for three weeks in July.

What did that process involve?

- **Selecting a consultant to work with.** The Brooke shortlisted two providers and chose to work with Agenda Consulting. *“We were really impressed by Agenda. They are well-known and it was good too because they work with People in Aid. The staff survey became part of our work towards People in Aid accreditation.”*
- **Consulting on questions.** The HR and Learning & Development team proposed a set of questions. They then consulted with the senior management team and the staff consultation group. *“Through the staff consultation group, we found that staff wanted to include questions around the strategic plan, flexi time and the appraisal process and SMT wanted questions around the current reward package and internal communications. Some of these issues may not have come up if we hadn’t consulted.”*
- **Finalising the questions.** These were 93 multiple choice questions plus 3 open questions.
- **Launching the survey.** *“A staff meeting was held to present actions from last year’s survey and then this year’s survey was launched. We told the staff what we had done since last year’s survey to encourage them to take part and to show that their views really do make a difference. The Chief Executive started and ended the meeting. She emphasised the importance of the process.”*
- **Collecting responses.** *“In the first week, 77% of staff had responded.”* By the end of the collection, 98.5% of staff had taken part, exceeding the target response rate of 90%.
- **Presenting the findings and proposed action plan.** *“Agenda provided us with a report which highlights issues through a “traffic light” system so that you can easily identify weaknesses and strengths within the organisation. In the first three weeks, I put the report together to present to SMT. We then presented the findings and our proposed HR and organisational action plan to the Managers Group and the rest of the staff.”*
- **Reporting on progress.** *“We feed back every quarter to the Manager’s Group and to the Staff Consultation Group – looking at our actions against the feedback. We also take into account feedback that we have received through exit interviews and appraisals, as well as the survey.”*

What has been the big impact of these changes?

Karen is looking forward to the results of next year’s survey to find out the overall impact.

“I’ve never worked with such a focus on formal feedback. It’s much more proactive and validates everything that HR does. You can sit in meetings and feel “we’re adding something”. It makes it more real.”

What was key to the success of the survey?

- **Communication.** *“In addition to the launch meeting, there were posters around the office before the launch with signs saying “one week to go” and then we added bright stickers when the survey had gone live. We also put up information on the intranet and plenty of reminders. Communication is important - consistent and persistent communication.”*

- **Confidentiality.** *“Agenda was completely off-site and we emphasised that no-one within the organisation would be able to see individual responses – that was important. We considered running an in house survey but that idea was thrown out. People would be wary and the answers would not be as truthful.”*
- **Consultation.** *“The fact that we involved staff in developing the questions – they could feed back on issues important to them.”*

What are the main challenges?

- **Staff buy-in.** It can be a real challenge if staff are concerned that the survey is not totally confidential.
- **Taking and presenting criticism.** *“You do feel open to criticism. It’s quite stressful sometimes – you’re very much in the public eye.”*
- **Making the connection.** *“Staff don’t always link something we do to the feedback they gave. If we tell people then at least they can feel HR might do something. It’s important to highlight changes that are made following a staff survey”*

Is there anything that would have been done differently?

“I don’t think there’s much I would do differently looking back. It was possible to do this kind of exercise with Agenda Consultancy and our SMT very much on-board.”

Are there any future developments in the pipeline?

“The Brooke’s goal is to increase the number of working animals we reach from 800,000 every year to 2 million by 2016. It’s an ambitious goal so we’re really keen to make positive developments in the workplace to keep our staff motivated. After three months, we’ve done or booked in a great deal of what we committed to do.”

The HR team are revamping the salary structure, reviewing the flexible working and TOIL procedures and are also looking at buying/selling annual leave. They have also put together a very comprehensive organisational learning and development plan to address organisational weaknesses.

The Brooke is also proud to have just received its first People in Aid accreditation mark.

Any advice for organisations looking to introduce staff surveys?

“You need commitment from the very top – 100% commitment so they can say that this is important. From HR, you need the capacity to follow through on actions - otherwise what’s the point?”

About the Brooke’s workforce

How many staff do you have?

67 staff based in the UK

How many trustees do you have?

13 trustees

How many volunteers do you have?

This varies from week to week, but generally just 1 or 2 who work in the office and we also work with many community fundraising groups who give up lots of their time to helping the Brooke raise funds.