



## APHA / Defra - Highly Commended

### **Q1. Work Conditions: supporting staff in dealing with the demands of their job**

APHA provides access to the Defra mentoring network. The network provides mentees with access to a sounding board, in a safe and confidential environment where they can ask questions and seek impartial, objective advice. Access to staff webinars on stress and wellbeing has also recently been launched to enhance resilience and wellbeing. There is an offer of yoga, Pilates and other physical activities which may help with stress in place in the London office as well as access to the Civil Service Sports Service for all staff which has a broad range of offer to varied sports and outdoors activities.

## **Q2. Balanced Workload: supporting work-life balance**

Out-of-hours rotas are in place for exotic disease outbreak, animal welfare emergencies and epidemiology. Vets in advice services will generally work out of hours between 4-6 weeks a year. There is a compulsory 30 minute break per day of 7.5 hours, and staff wellbeing guidance is in place, recommending taking breaks from the computer and standing up, taking short walks, etc. alongside the working day.

### **Q3. Relationships at Work: fostering effective working relationships**

With staff based in different locations across the country, relationships can at times be challenging. APHA has regular monthly meetings to cascade key Agency information and local issues, challenges and successes. There is an annual veterinary conference which allows vets from different regions to meet and spend time together with opportunities to discuss common issues, and get up to speed in other work areas. An annual staff survey takes place looking at staff wellbeing, and HR procedures on mediation, staff bullying and harassment are in place. There is also a recent go-to person initiative where a trained, volunteer, 'Go to Persons' listens and signpost individuals to the appropriate support available to them. A recent Defra initiative has developed and placed posters in the work place to promote go-to persons as well as inclusivity and integration of all staff, which includes APHA vets working with policy teams.

#### **Q4. Personal & Career Development: enabling staff to work effectively**

HR procedures for career development and performance are in place. A 360 degree feedback system operates in Defra and the Agency, and vets have access to the Defra mentoring network. Five days of CPD are provided as a minimum by the Agency to vets. An employee reward scheme is in place, this includes annual staff team awards as well as an individual bonus scheme to recognise and reward good performance and achievements.

## **Q5. Control at Work: enabling staff to have a say in their work**

The advice services team benefits from home working and flexi time work, although there is no automatic right to work particular hours. Reasonable effort is made to accommodate and to allow staff to maintain preferred working hours and patterns. The flexible working hours policy offers the possibility of ad hoc variations in working hours from day to day, to suit the needs and wishes of individuals, although this may not always be possible. This includes, for example, staff working compressed hours (i.e. 4 days instead of 5 a week)

## Q6. Communication at Work

We offer regular monthly meetings to cascade key Agency information and local issues, challenges and successes. Staff announcements, consultations and teleconferences or sessions with senior management are often arranged when changes take place. The Agency has an intranet which publishes weekly news items relevant to staff, updating them, for example, on organisational or operational changes.

The Chief Veterinary Officer arranges regular monthly lunchtime sessions which bring together vets from different parts of the Agency as well as other Government staff to discuss relevant topics.

## Q7. Health & Psychological Wellbeing

In addition to some of the initiatives mentioned above, including yoga or pilates offers in the London office, vets have access to The Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). This is a free confidential service available to all Defra employees – 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, every day of the year. EAP provides access to a team of trained practitioners who offer independent advice, information, coaching and counselling. The team provide practical and emotional support on a range of issues including (but not restricted to):

- Personal: relationships, bereavement, health and wellbeing, stress, anxiety and depression
- Work related: relationships, conflict, change, performance, promotion and work life balance
- Debt: budgeting, creditors and debt health check
- Legal: divorce, separation, consumer, probate, landlord and tenant

Guidance on health and wellbeing, personal, work, career and money issues is available on the EAP website.