

'Competitive salary'

What does this really mean?

2021

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1. Project Background

Knowledge is power...

For too long now, it's been almost impossible for vets to understand what their market value is. Job adverts talk about 'competitive salary' or 'benefits commensurate with experience', but it's hard to know what this actually translates to in the monthly pay packet. Too many vets have no idea whether they are being paid a 'fair' rate, or how their salary and benefits package compares with colleagues in the same building.

At Onswitch we think the time for this to change is long overdue, and so in January, February and March 2021 we undertook a nationwide salary survey with UK veterinary professionals from a wide range of regions, job types and ages.

1,224 vets at every stage of their careers answered the online survey, providing a robust set of data to start meaningful conversations about pay. This Onswitch survey is not claiming to be the definitive work on the subject (it's not our core area of expertise, and some corporate groups and practice types are not as well-represented as we'd like) but it feels like an important place to start.

We believe there needs to be far more transparency about what vets are paid, so we invite leaders and influencers in the profession to put their own numbers into the public domain. Publish salary scales and rates of pay. Provide real examples of salaries paid by your group.

Only when veterinary professionals can see published salary scales and understand how pay fits into the overall business model, will vets know that they are paid fairly for their skills and contribution. Onswitch passionately believe that remuneration rates need to be discussed openly and honestly, and that everyone in the practice team should be paid according to their skills, not the number of years that have passed since leaving university or college.

And we're not alone. Show The Salary is an initiative in the charity sector that's fast gaining traction. The PDSA are already transparent about their pay structure - in the charity sector it can be difficult to attract the best people because of a perception that employees of charities are paid less than their colleagues in the commercial world. In fact the PDSA tries hard to offer competitive rates, but with very little research and few salary benchmarks out there, it's not easy to know what constitutes a fair market rate.

Of course, the same is true for every practice and when we're open about pay, we help bring about equality and boost diversity amongst veterinary professionals. We retain good people and attract others.

We build a motivated and high-performing team.

We think it's time to talk about pay.

In sharing this information we want to start the conversation.

The last few years have been challenging for all and COVID has certainly been a catalyst for many to consider where they go next.

This period of reflection has meant considering how they wish to work as a vet and making some different career choices, including changing hours, changing employer and for some becoming the boss and opening a practice.

This period of change isn't going to go away in the short term and we hope with this information about what is a 'competitive salary' the conversations at practice level can begin.

2. Survey Demographics

Throughout January, February and March 2021, Onswitch undertook an online nationwide salary survey with UK veterinary professionals from a wide range of regions, job types and ages.

Given the large sample size of 1,224 respondents, the results are statistically significant as a proportion of the 24,442 UK-practising veterinary surgeons registered with the RCVS, represented across a spread of demographic sub-categories as follows:

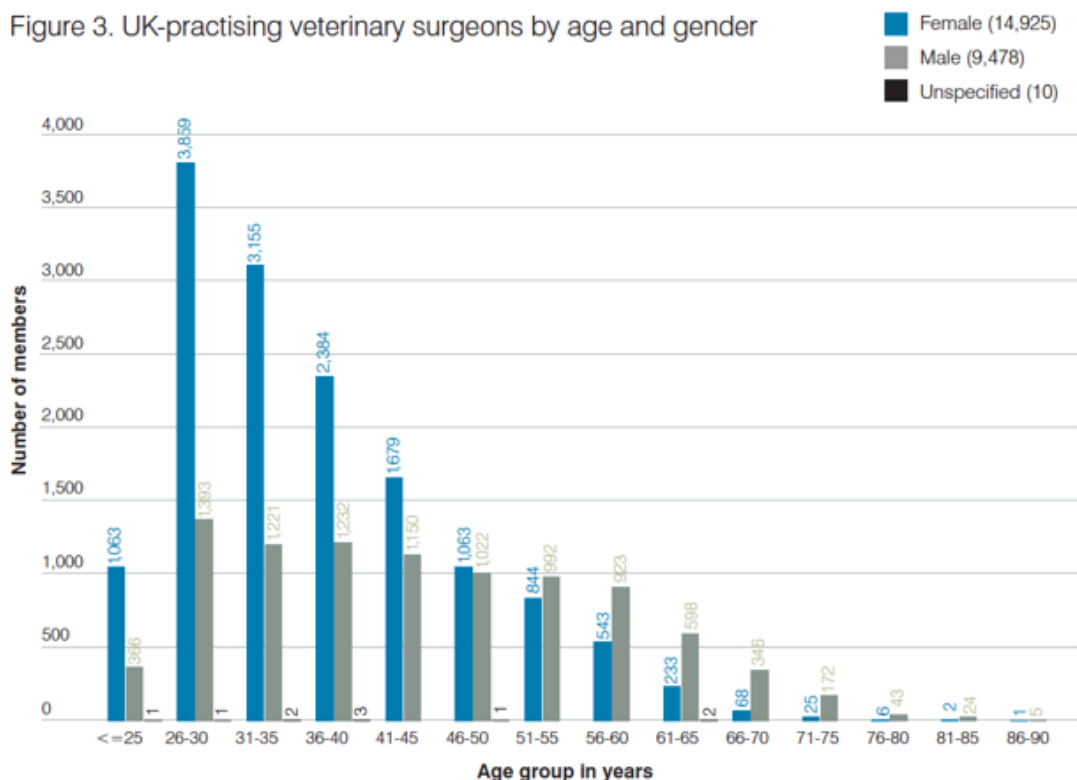
- 89% female
- Large range of experience, from vets represented in every career stage, from 1 to 30+ years post-qualifying
- Predominantly (three quarters) small animal vets
- Wide range of practice sizes represented, with on average practices having 3-4 Full Time Equivalent vets
- Good regional representation across the four UK nations
- 40% of respondents describe their practice location as 'predominantly suburban'
- 88% are employed as vets, with 12% describing themselves as a business owner or partner
- Almost two thirds of respondents are assistant veterinary surgeons, with 14% senior vets
- Just 1.5% of respondents are RCVS specialists, 80% in medicine, and 20% 'other'

3. Management Summary

The average salary for non-specialist non-managerial small animal vets is £45,033 (the female survey average is £46,187 and the male is £43,880). This average starting salary is broadly in line with previous survey findings (£46,000). A year after qualifying the average salary is £32,350, rising to £56,400 for vets qualified for over thirty years with a definite salary plateau after 10 years qualified. This plateau is a key finding as for clinicians who do not specialise or move into managerial roles, the salary stays the same regardless of years of experience.

Remuneration rates for younger vets generally do appear to have risen in recent years, and Onswitch’s survey data supports this – it is highly likely that with the profession experiencing something of a recruitment crisis of late, practices are having to offer higher wages to attract younger vets. Corporate grad schemes will also have played a role in raising salaries for vets starting out in their careers and the salary transparency from the graduate schemes has enabled recently qualified colleagues to know the 'going rate'. This is an example of how salary transparency helps remove any bias as was previously present.

RCVS Facts 2018 data highlights that there are more female vets working in the younger age groups.



Source: RCVS Facts 2018

It is good to see the closing of the pay differential for early years colleagues. However, at clinical director level, females are paid less than their male colleagues (£60,482 and £62,444 respectively). This would suggest that over time, the average female clinical director's salary should move into line with that of their male counterparts, as today's younger female vets progress through their careers.

This change in early years pay transparency will feed through to later years and the closing of the pay differential.

4. Survey Results: Small Animal Teams

"How likely is it that you would recommend your workplace to a friend or colleague?"

In addition to asking about salary the survey also asked about other key factors in the workplace such as OOH, overtime pay and hours worked. As well as these pay and conditions factors employee vets were asked how likely they were to recommend their workplace to their professional colleagues and friends.

Propensity to recommend the current workplace was low across the board for all vets, regardless of species area or level of responsibility with the national average of -6 indicating there are more folks in the detractor category.

Each of these Net Promoter Scores is disappointing, reflecting a profession where the majority of people would not actively recommend their *current* workplace. If everyone gave a score of 9 or 10 in answer to the question 'how likely are you to recommend your practice?', the NPS score would be 100. The highest level we saw in our survey was for equine vets in independent practice, with just 18. Most other categories returned negative scores.

The team NPS score is critical for anyone looking at recruiting and we do see really great workplaces scoring +50, +60, +70 on the same question so great workplaces do exist. It takes a very proactive and considered approach to create such a working environment.

Of course, feeling happy and fulfilled at work is not only about pay. In fact remuneration is about so much more than pounds in the bank. Practices who have strong NPS scores understand the importance of providing development opportunities, supporting further study, listening to (and acting on) feedback from the team, living their values every day and recruiting people who complement the practice ethos and skills of their colleagues.

A strong and stable team is made up of people who feel that they belong, enjoy autonomy and are able to use their skills every day. Engaged employees are high-performing team members, and reward for their commitment and hard work should come in many forms. Receiving a fair wage for a job well done is one important element.

Let's not be in any doubt – the NPS scores highlighted in the survey show that for many in our profession they are not going to recommend their workplace to their professional colleagues and this is a significant part of the recruitment challenge faced by many at the moment.

They illustrate why some vets are considering leaving the profession altogether, rarely staying at the same practice for any length of time or looking for more flexible working lives. Unless we fix this dissatisfaction (in part, by talking openly and honestly about salaries, paying everyone a fair wage that rewards their skills and contributions to the team) then nothing will change.

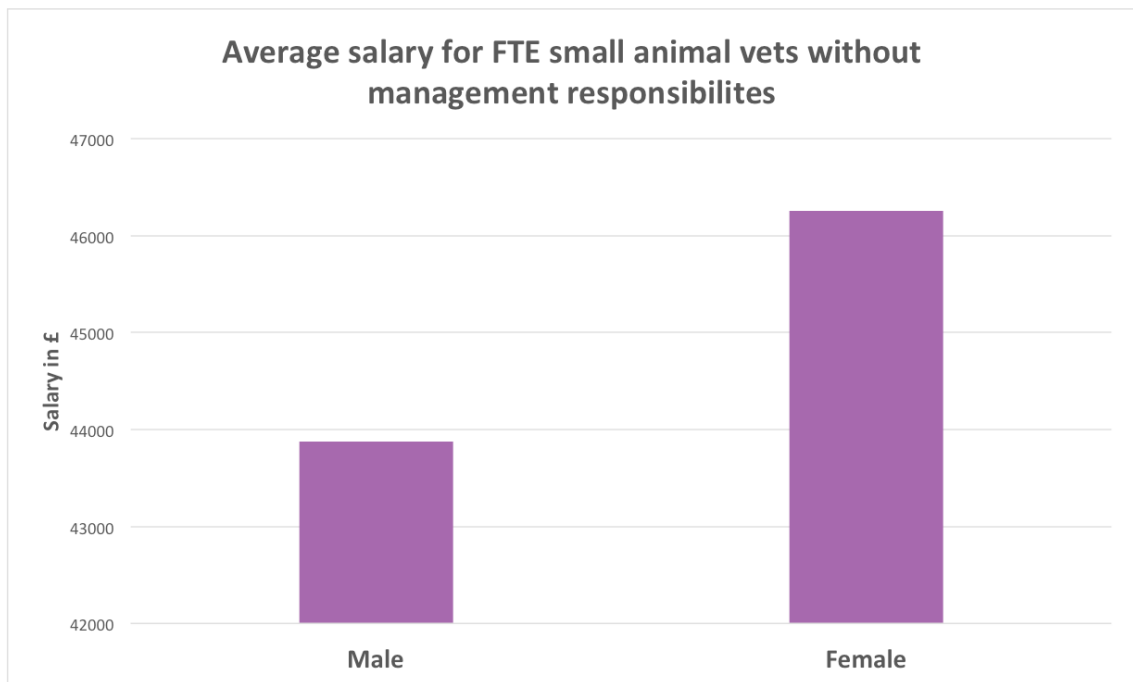
If you would like to find out what your Team Experience (TX) is then follow this link to the team track survey:

<https://onswitch.co.uk/team-track/>

Top level findings

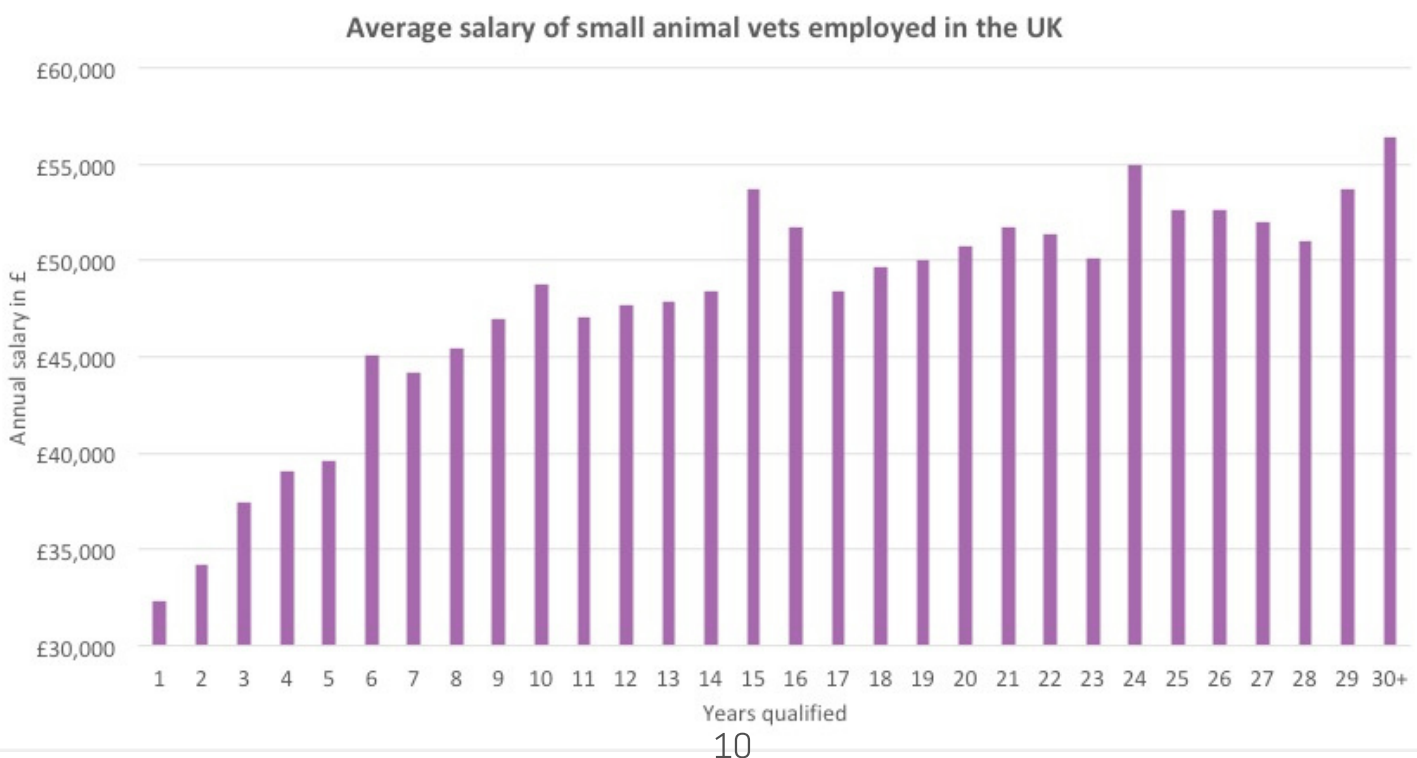
Top-level findings from the research were as follows:

- The average salary for non-specialist non-managerial small animal vets is £46,152 (the female survey average was £46,251 and the male was £43,880)



The salary plateau

- Salaries for small animal vets with no management responsibilities were recorded according to number of years qualified. The data show that the average salary a year after qualifying is £32,350, rising to £56,400 for vets qualified for over thirty years. There is a salary plateau after 10 years in the workplace.



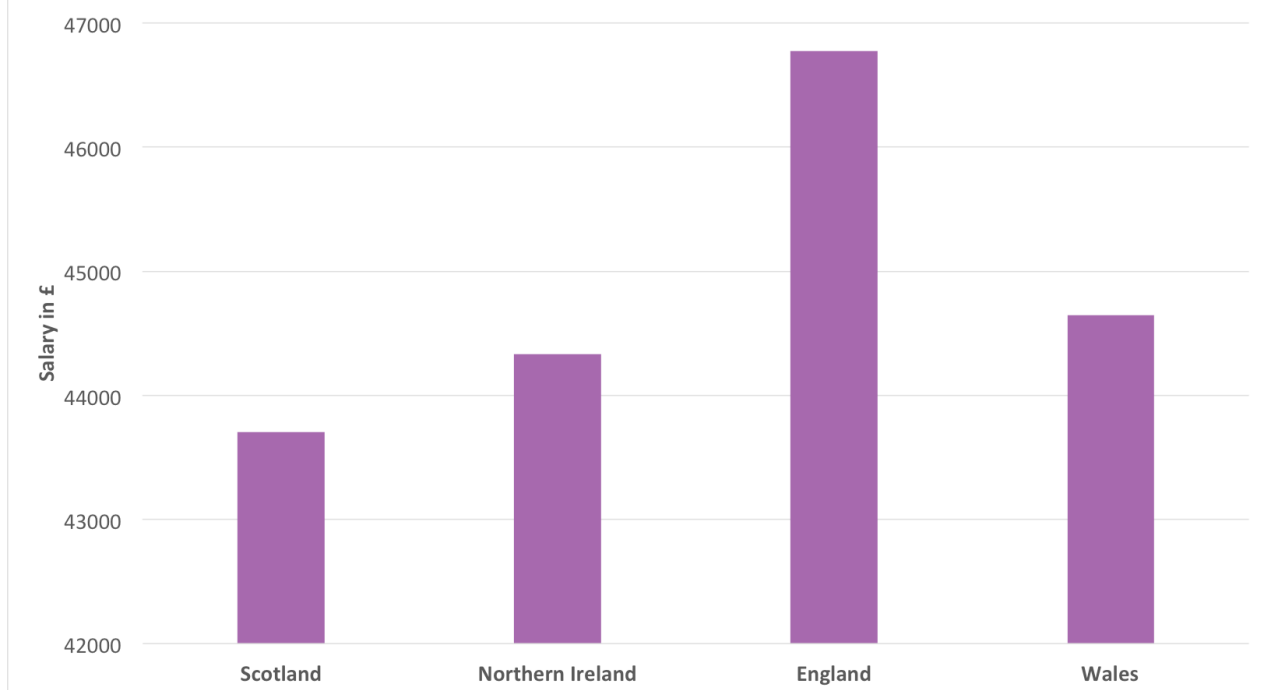
Regional variation?

- There is very little difference in average salary across the regions with only London and the South East being noticeably different however this difference is not as great as most would anticipate.

Average salary for FTE small animal vets without management responsibilities by region

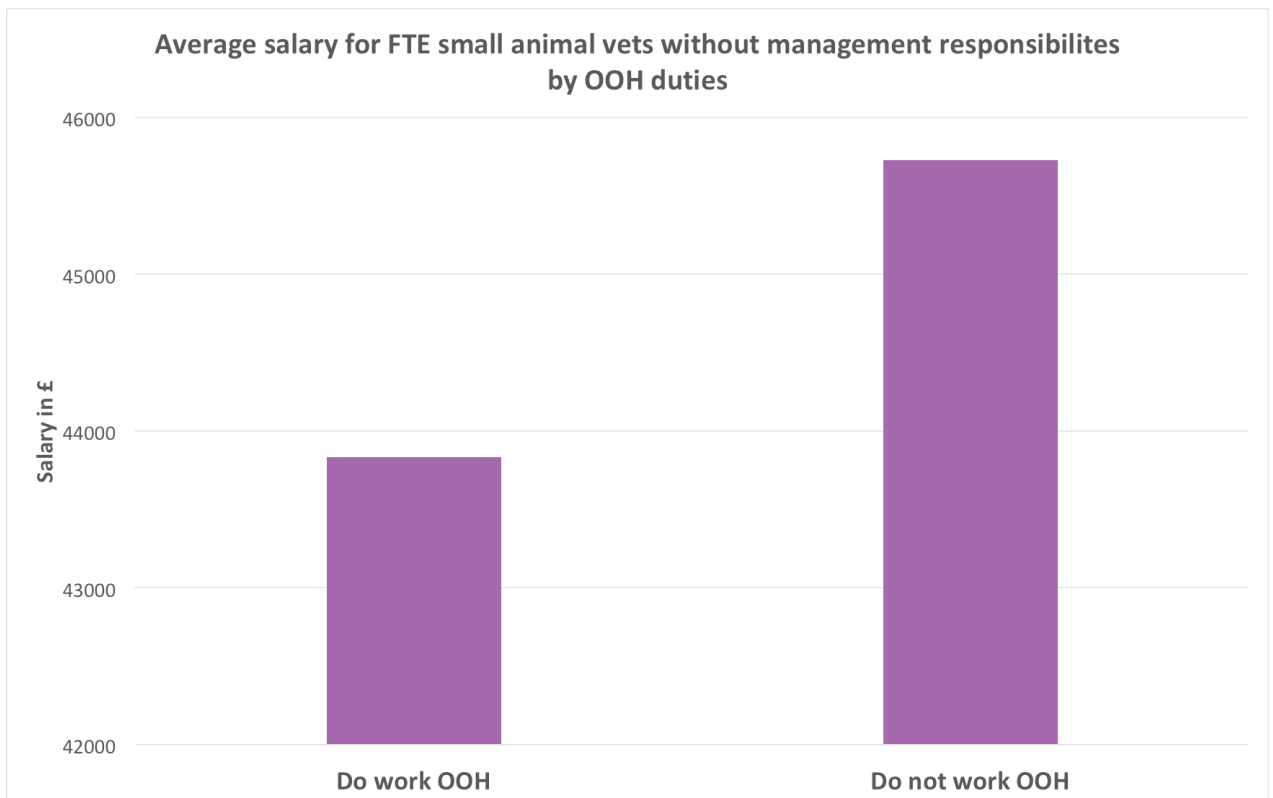


Average salary for FTE small animal vets without management responsibilities by country



OOH vs No-OOH

- 42% of respondents work some Out of Hours
- Employed small animal vet respondents who work Out Of Hours earn on average £43,833, which ironically is less than colleagues who do not work OOH (£45,726). Not what most folks would expect and shows we need to take stock for paying people appropriately for the work they do.

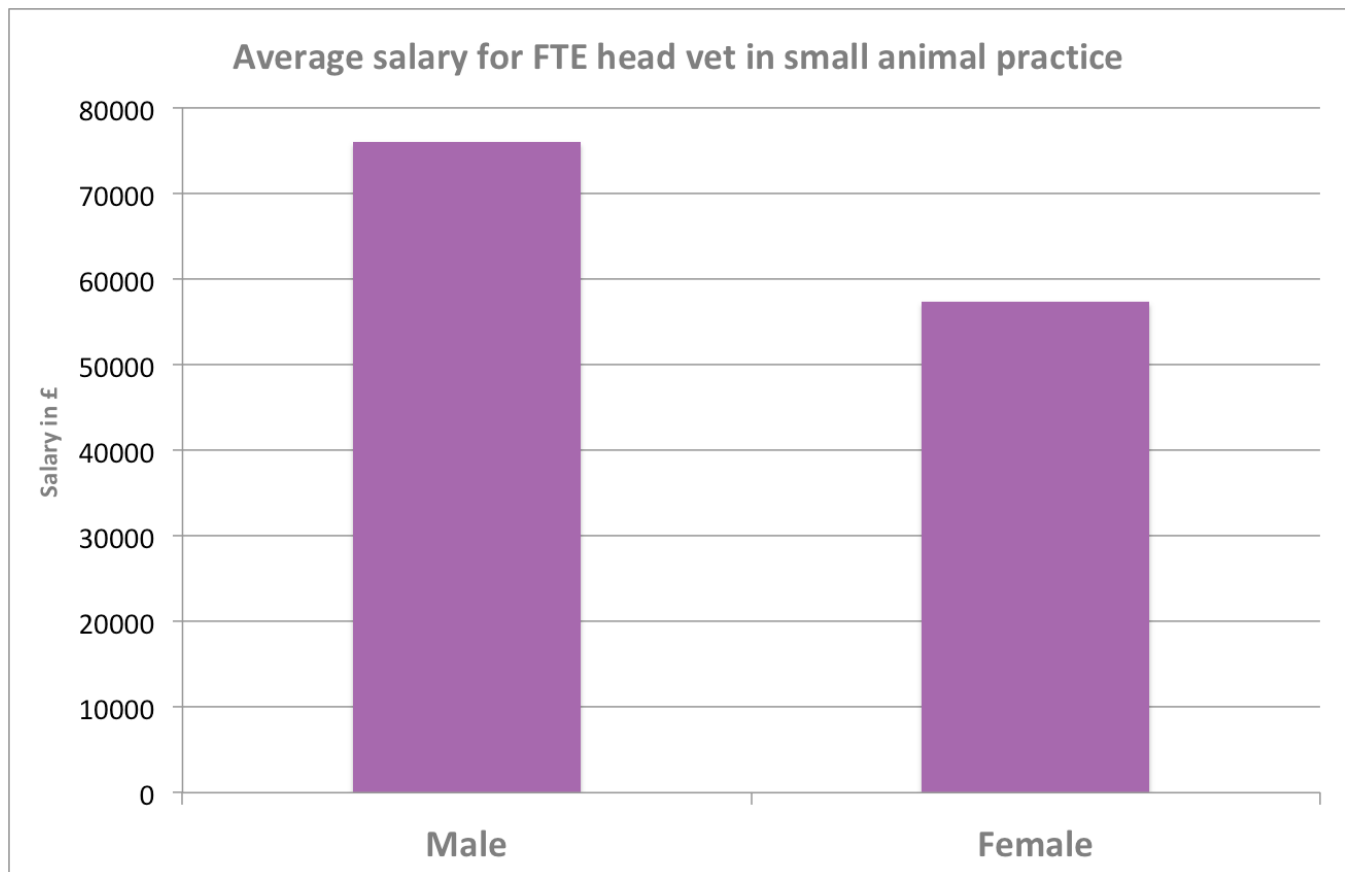


Clinical Director and Head Vets

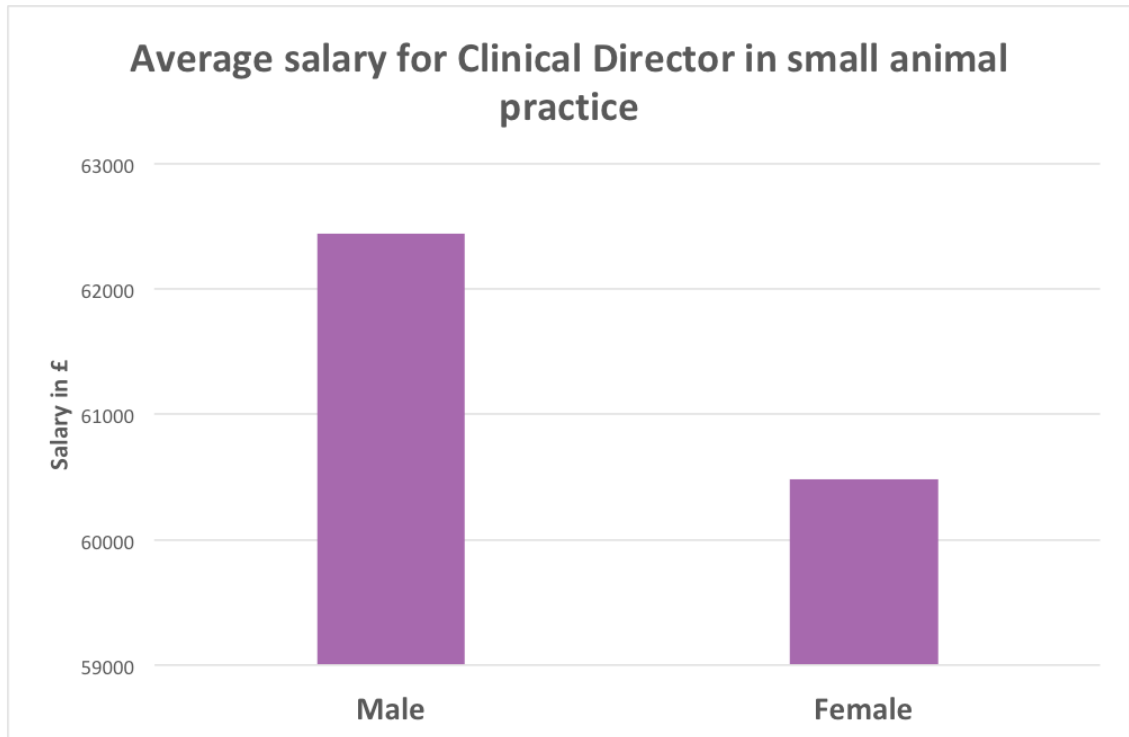
Respondents could choose to select a Clinical Director or a Head Vet as best describing their role. At this stage it is unclear what the difference is between the roles though we have assumed that a Clinical Director will have more business management responsibility and the head vet focuses on clinical matters only.

We may be incorrect in this assumption. Given the amount of roles available and advertised regularly there is a need for more clarity of job role outline and job descriptions.

- Pay for small animal head vets is £58,037 on average, although this masks a disparity between male and female averages, at £76,000 and £57,346 respectively



- The average salary for a small animal clinical director in first opinion practice is £60,670 (female average is £60,482 and male is £62,444)



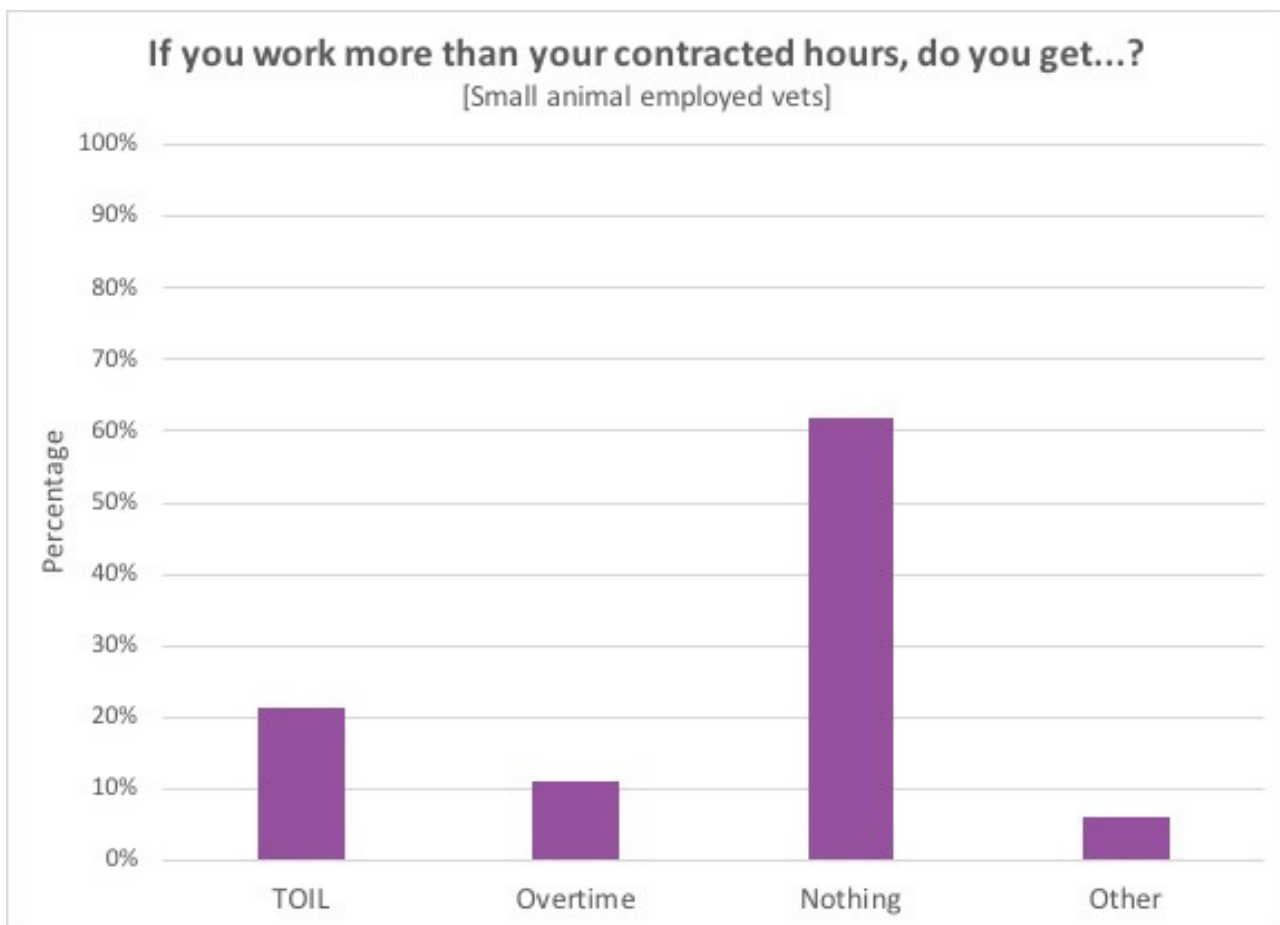
- Clinical director salaries vary between independent practice and the corporate groups and again the data shows there is a difference between these two groups. In an era where attracting and retraining good people is so important, making clear what the job role involves and the pay for it will help people make more informed choices



'Pay for work done'

With many practices struggling to recruit and retain team members at the moment, a really good place to start changing this would be to pay people for work done outside of their contracted hours. The expectation that additional hours worked are not compensated for by extra pay or time off in lieu may well be a contributing factor for many wishing to work elsewhere.

- Remuneration for extra hours worked is generally poor, almost two thirds say they get nothing in return, with a fifth receiving time off in lieu



What is the working week?

Typical full time working hours according to the UK government is 37 hours per week.

The veterinary profession still has a way to go to fully understand part time and full time working.

This survey showed that 46.84% worked 40 hours or more per week and 11.26% worked 20 hours or less.

When 'part time' is considered 30 hours a week and includes the rota for weekends this would be considered full time in any other industry.

When we think about the opportunity for flexible working, our profession has to find a way to utilise great people who can work 20 or 30 hours.

We need to revisit the relationship we have with the hours that are worked.

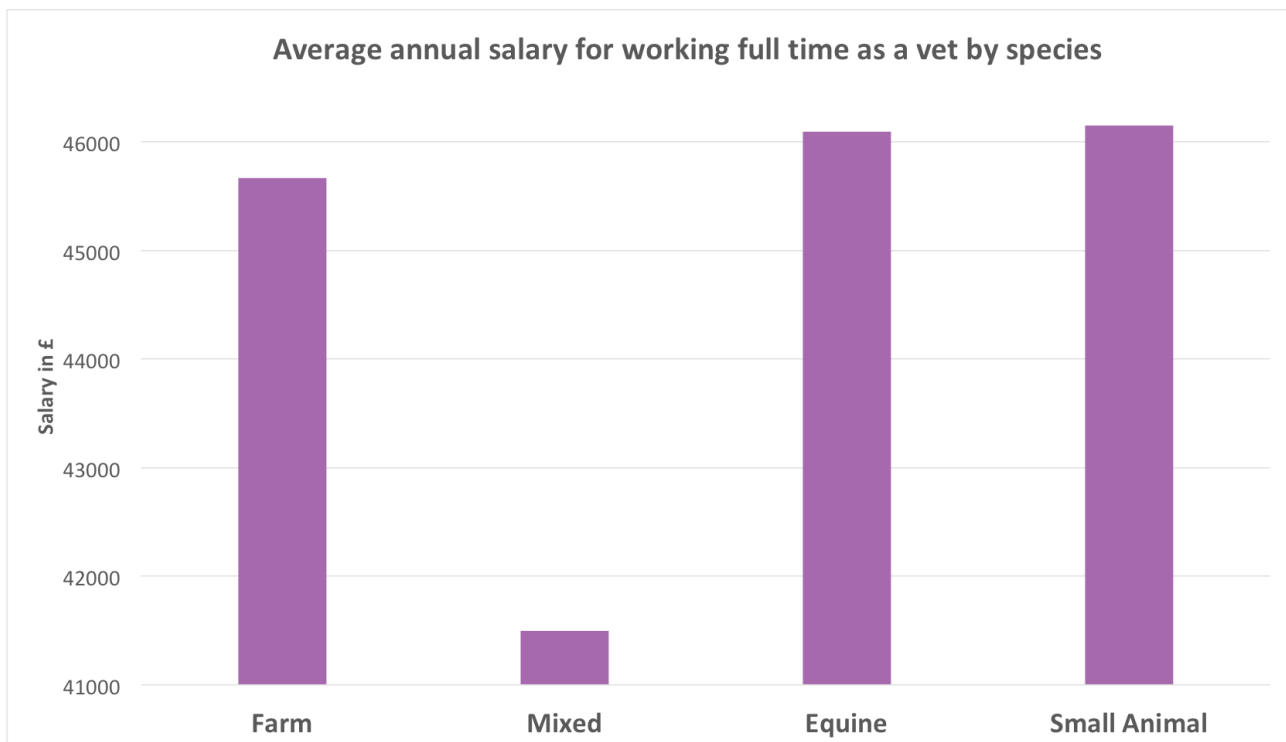
5. Survey Results: by species

Due to the smaller number of respondents there is less detailed data available. We are, however, able to record average annual salaries by species, and by gender split, as follows.

We have also shared the annual salary by species caseload and years qualified although as there is a smaller number of respondents and therefore some gaps.

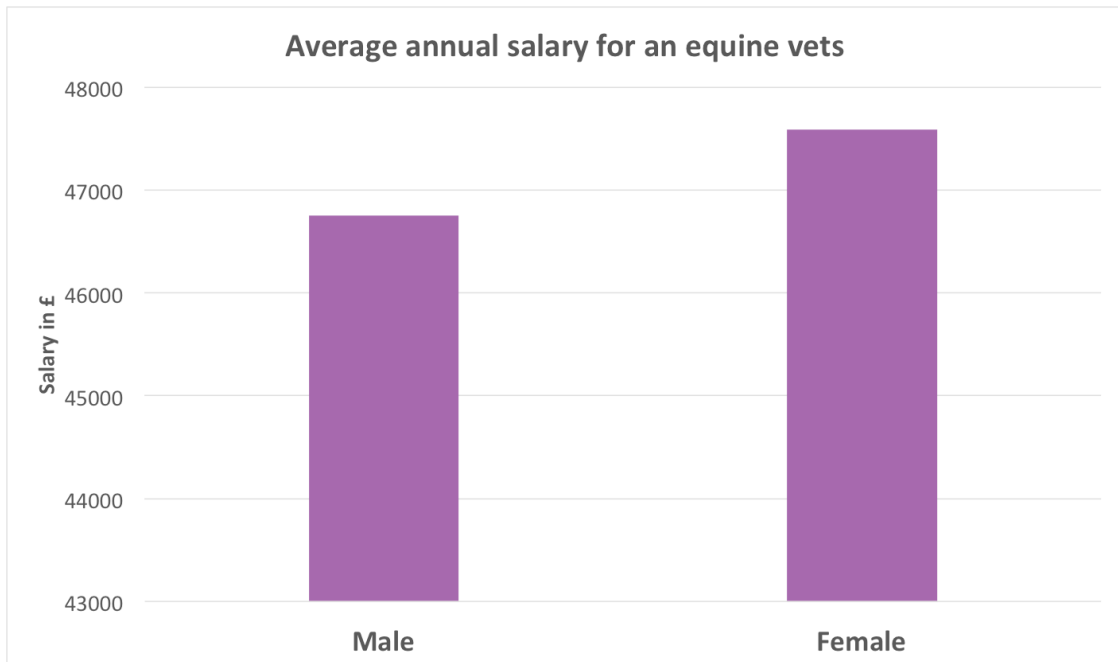
In all cases, the data are for employed vets with no management responsibilities:

- Equine vets receive a similar average salary to small animal colleagues (£46,091 and £46,151 respectively), whilst farm vets' average salary is £45,667 and in mixed practice it's £41,500:

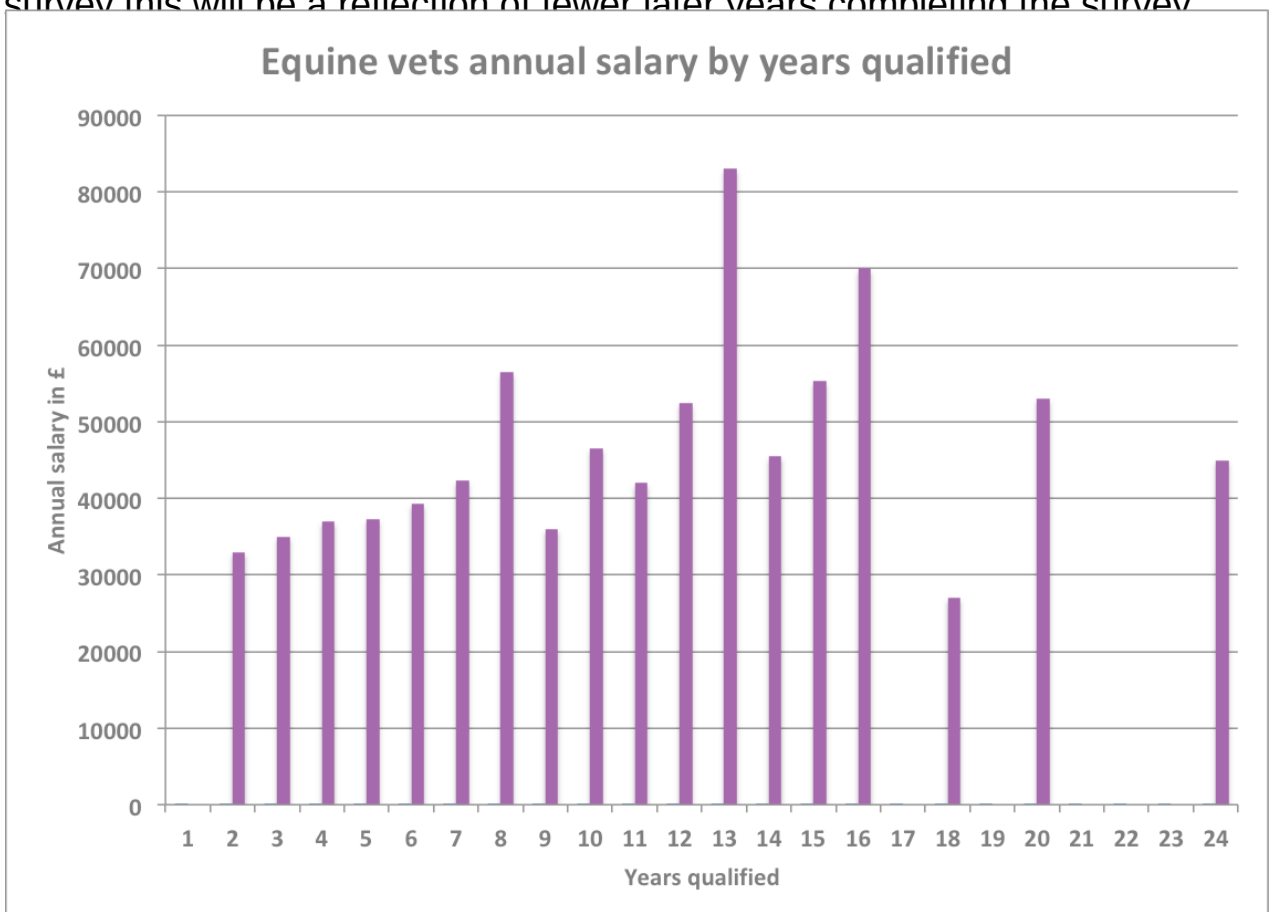


Equine

- Equine vets have relative pay parity, regardless of gender. Females are paid slightly higher than male colleagues, with averages of £47,591 and £46,750 respectively:

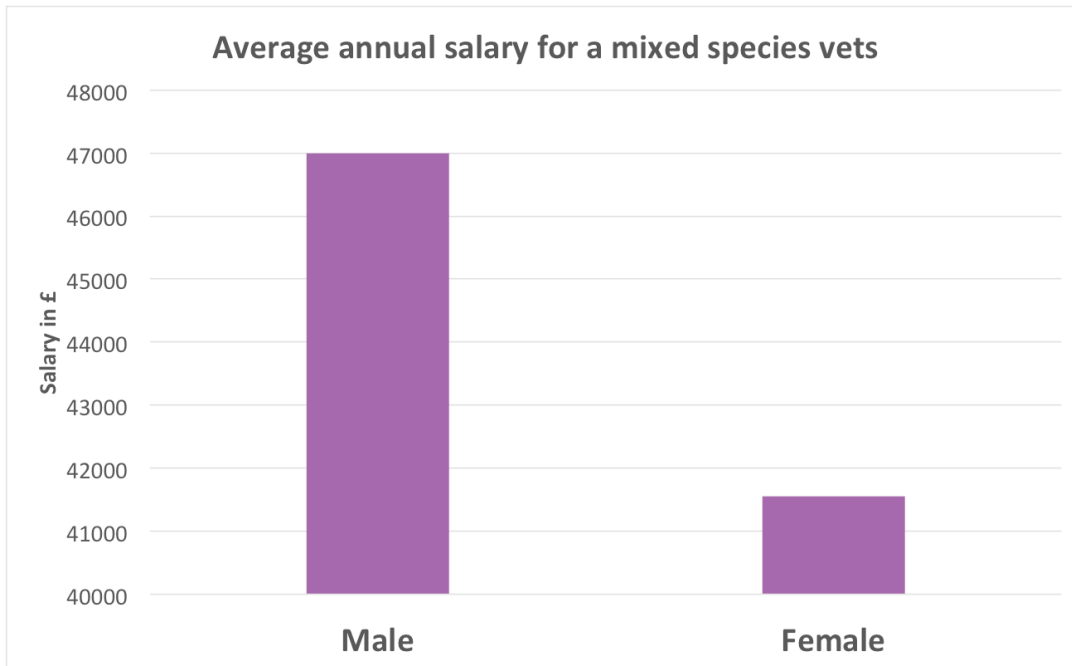


- With equine vets we notice a similar early years progression to the 10 year mark which is good to see. The years thereafter are quite choppy and in this survey this will be a reflection of fewer later years completing the survey



Mixed Species

- However, both mixed and farm vets had men being paid more. Male mixed vets are paid £47,000 on average, whilst female average salary is £41,548

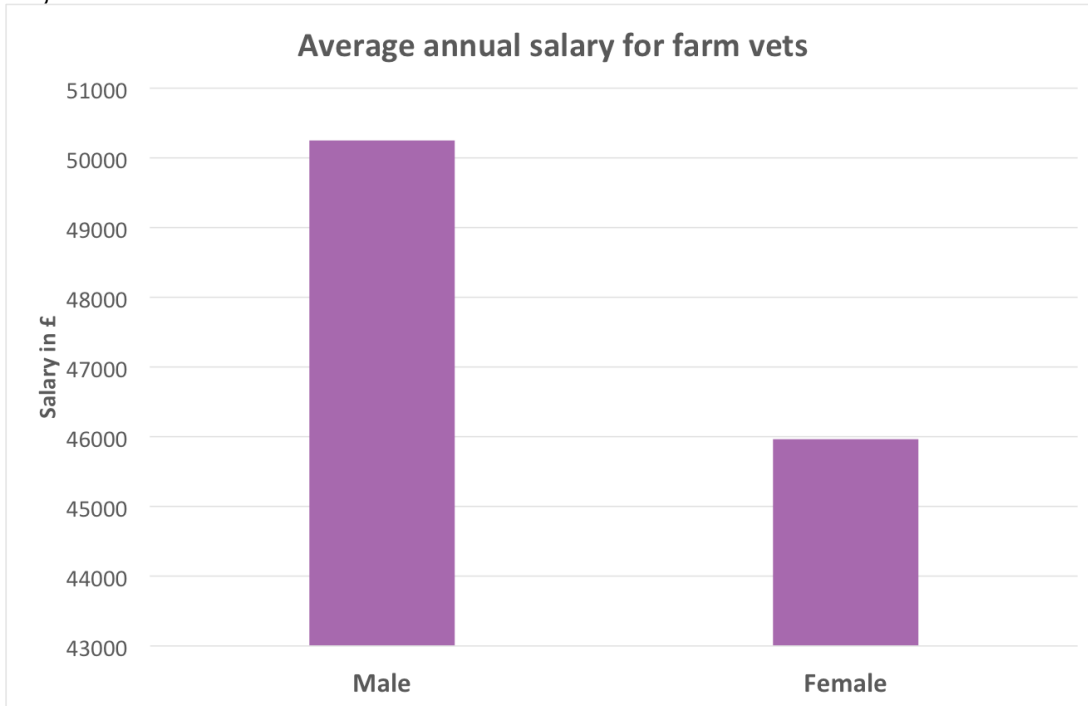


- The early years for mixed vets doesn't show a pattern of progression but by 10 years the plateau is present again. A larger dataset would be required to get a better view of true mixed practice salary packages.



Farm

- In farm, the male average is £50,250, whilst the female average annual salary is £45,966



- Again there is a pattern of progression in the early years leading to the familiar plateau at 10 years qualified. Again further data to fill out the gaps would be useful however the early years pattern is clear.



Summary

Thank you to everybody who took the time to fill in this survey.

This survey was deliberately short and focused on the salary people are paid. The reason for focusing on the core salary is because this is the majority of the remuneration package and this is rarely talked about.

The intention of the survey is to start the debate about what people are paid and create an open and transparent discussion about this topic.

We appreciate this is just a snapshot of the profession for this moment in time and further regular open and transparent surveys are required.

We change the world when we change what we do, so lets be more open about pay and conditions for our colleagues.

So it is over to you now to make changes in your practice.

