



research summary

Perceptions of the LGE

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Introduction

Local Government Employers (LGE) was created by the Local Government Association (LGA) in April 2006. The aim of LGE is to work with local authorities, regional employers and other bodies to lead and create solutions on pay, pensions and the employment contract, to ensure the provision of excellent and affordable local services.

LGE is committed to maintaining and enhancing the quality and range of services provided and, having been established now for over a year, commissioned NFER to undertake a programme of stakeholder consultations to find out how the organisation is perceived and where attention might best be directed in the future. This information will be used to inform the strategic direction and organisation planning over the next two to three years. The aim of the research was to explore how and why local authorities, partner organisations and representative organisations use the services of LGE and how well LGE is currently meeting their needs.

LGE's response to the findings and its action plan can be found in *Do they mean us? Response to the LGE perceptions audit* (LGE, July 2007).

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Key findings

The research indicated that overall attitudes towards LGE are positive and there is widespread recognition that improvements have been made since it was set up in April 2006.

LGE is best known for its negotiating role on pay and also for the guidance and advice provided on a range of employment issues.



There are varying levels of interaction with LGE, ranging from a passive receipt of documentation that is sent, to active soliciting of advice and/or involvement in working groups and committees. The variation in levels of engagement is due to a number of factors including:

- varying levels of understanding as to the focus or remit of LGE
- lack of clarity regarding the service offered by LGE
- confusion between the role of LGE and the regional employer organisations
- lack of understanding of the division of responsibility between LGE and the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA)
- differences in resources and/or support available internally within councils.

For many local authorities, their expectation of LGE was that it would continue the work previously done by the Employers Organisation. Respondents are typically grateful to have had continuity, and in many cases, what is perceived to be improvement.

The strong leadership that has been in place at LGE since 2006 is welcomed, and efforts to consult, communicate and engage have been welcomed. Respondents would, however, welcome greater consultation and involvement with LGE, and concern was expressed that those outside of London should not be marginalised.

While it is recognised that it is still 'early days', there is some debate about the role of LGE in relation to 'single status' and perhaps an expectation that LGE might play a stronger role offering more direction .

Unsurprisingly, stakeholder organisations representing employees say that LGE represents employer interests but are nonetheless positive in their comments on LGE.

When making suggestions relating to future action by LGE, there was consistency in the underlying themes of a need for greater visibility, clarification of role, increased engagement and dialogue, and potentially delivering stronger guidance and direction.

Conclusions and recommendations

The level of cooperation from stakeholders in conducting this research exercise reflected the overall positive regard in which LGE is held. While some of the issues arising in discussions are specific to the individual respondent organisation, and perceptions of the role of LGE are somewhat variable, a consistent pattern did arise in terms of attitudes towards LGE, expectations in terms of future development and suggestions for improvement.

The research indicated that while the overall perception of LGE is a positive one, there are certain areas where improvement would lead to an enhanced profile and result in more positive attitudes towards the organisation.

A clarification of the range of activities and services offered by LGE would ensure that there is an appreciation of the wider spheres of activity beyond the negotiating and advisory roles with which the organisation is most often associated.

While it is the prerogative of each stakeholder to engage with LGE to a greater or lesser extent according to their needs, improved communication and the building of closer relationships would encourage more pro-active involvement and make it less likely that participants such as local authorities would question the role of the central organisation, and ensure that they feel their needs can also be met by their regional employer's organisation.

The *national* role of LGE is clearly one of the distinguishing features and so emphasis should be placed on this aspect. Future communications should clarify the role of LGE vis-à-vis the regional employer organisations while particular efforts must be made to solicit participation and involvement of local authorities across all regions. The recently established sounding board will contribute to this aim.

Local authorities and stakeholders alike struggle to delineate the role of LGE from IDeA – or even in some cases from LGA. Typical questions include: Is a lobbying role within the remit of LGE? What should be expected of LGE or referred to IDeA? This confusion detracts from the strength of identity for LGE when constituents are unclear as to the role. Some clarification is necessary in this regard.

The research indicates that a general review of communications would be beneficial, in terms of the key messages, the vehicles or channels for communication and also in terms of the target audience. Experience at present is somewhat patchy and it is not evident that material is reaching those for whom it is intended. A cohesive policy should be developed for all parts of the organisation.

The website is a natural port of call for information relating to LGE and feedback was mainly positive about this. However, a number of suggestions were made regarding the type of content expected and so a review of potential improvements would ensure that the website continues to play an important role in information dissemination.

There are discernible benefits to be gained in participation, support and positive perceptions where there has been some direct/personal contact with senior staff from LGE. Thus, efforts to consult, communicate and engage should be continued. Emphasis should be placed on development of contacts within local authorities in particular but also among all stakeholders. There is scope to raise the profile of LGE among stakeholder organisations that may be familiar with only a specific part of the organisation, such as providing the Secretariat for all Joint Negotiating Groups. Even though many of the services are not directed at the whole range of our stakeholders, awareness of the breadth of services offered by LGE will enhance the way in which it is viewed. This will, in turn, lead to a strengthening of perceptions of the role and support provided to local authorities and of the expertise held by LGE.

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London Borough of Brent





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The overriding conclusion from the research is the need to raise the profile of the organisation overall. This was a common theme either mentioned explicitly or alluded to by the majority of respondents. Action on this would serve to clarify the range of services offered, reduce confusion regarding the role of the organisation in relation to others and ensure that LGE is receiving recognition and credit for its many achievements.

About the study

The main fieldwork consisted of in-depth telephone interviews with 15 human resources directors in local authorities together with 17 from stakeholder organisations. The local authorities interviewed were balanced by region and by political affiliation. The stakeholders included both *partner* organisations such as other regional employer organisations or government departments and *representative* organisations such as trade unions and others representing the interests of employees. The research was conducted during April 2007.

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LGE
Local Government Employers

pay, pensions
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solutions



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