



**Community
Legal Centres
Queensland**

Working in Community Legal Centres in Queensland

Summary Report 2023

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Queensland Inc.**

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Note about Confidentiality of this Report

This Report has been prepared by Community Legal Centres Queensland Inc (CLCQ) to support advocacy for CLCQ members. This Report is intended to be confidential to CLCQ members in order to protect the confidentiality of individuals who contributed to its content via surveys completed during 2023. As such, this Report is not to be quoted or distributed without the express permission of CLCQ.

Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

Community Legal Centres Queensland affirms that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the first inhabitants of Australia and acknowledges their unique relationship with their ancestral country. In particular, CLCQ acknowledges the Turrbal and Jaggera peoples, the traditional custodians of the land in and around Meanjin Brisbane and pay respect to their Elders past and present.

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1. Introduction

Community Legal Centres Queensland (CLCQ) is the peak membership body for the 32 independent CLCs in Queensland. In early 2023 CLCQ was asked by members to assist with understanding the workforce issues Centres were experiencing, in particular, the difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff.

As a result, CLCQ sought and received project funding from the Queensland Department of Justice and Attorney-General to develop and distribute workforce surveys to understand the profile of the CLC workforce and the attraction and retention factors for working in Queensland's CLCs. This data also supports CLCQ to: provide a basis for advocacy for funding to support, maintain and sustain the sector workforce; inform and confirm positive workforce practices, and; understand the experiences and views of the workforce across the diversity of roles, Centres and regions in the sector.

Survey aims

The aim of the workforce surveys was to develop a comprehensive workforce data set as outlined above. This would in turn, assist CLCQ and the sector to: understand the current workforce composition; the relevant factors that attract, support and sustain workers in the CLC sector; and what should inform positive recruitment strategies and the retention of workers in Queensland CLCs.

What we did

In September 2023 CLCQ distributed two surveys: an Organisational Survey which was sent to all CLC CEOs/centre managers, and an Individual Worker Survey which was provided to all current and paid CLC staff. This report provides a summary and overview of the survey results from CLCs and their workforce. Survey elements that measured composition and characteristics of CLCs, including details of the roles, conditions, hours worked, wellbeing, training and salary, provided the foundations for detailing a Queensland CLC workforce profile. The analysis of the results below are from the completed surveys only, unless stated otherwise.

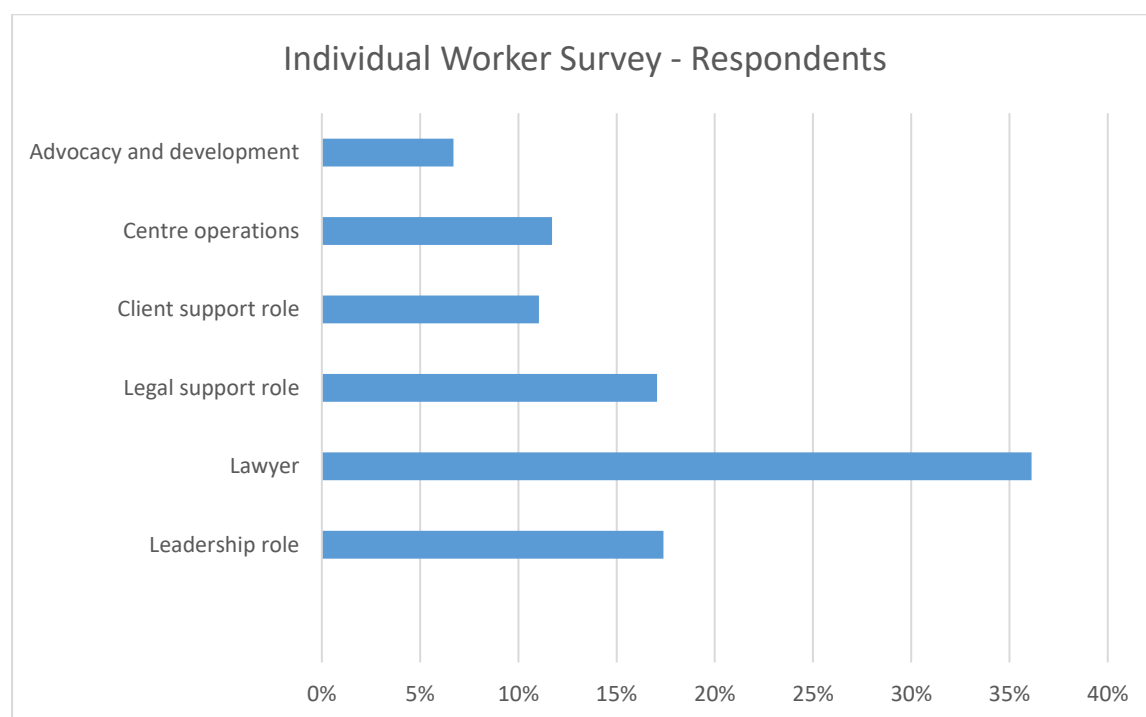
Response

Individual Worker Survey:

There were 299 responses to the Individual Worker Survey in total.

The Individual Worker Survey was voluntary and respondents could exit the survey without completing all questions. The majority of respondents completed the survey in full (92%).

Respondents to the Individual Worker Survey reported working in a broad range of roles. Over one third of survey respondents were employed as lawyers (36.12%).



Organisational Survey:

All Community Legal Centres Queensland member organisations were invited to complete the Organisational Survey. This survey was also voluntary and was completed by 25 of 32 Centres. All Centres who completed the Organisational Survey completed the survey in full.

Service area of centres:

- 32% - statewide
- 44% - regional/rural/remote
- 24% - metro Brisbane

2. Community legal centres and their workforce

Workforce size

The estimates of size of the Queensland CLC workforce have been determined from the Organisational Survey data. The Organisational Survey asked about the number of staff, the structure of roles in the organisation, and the number of full-time equivalent roles. Vacant roles were excluded from workforce size numbers and estimates.

The Organisational Survey results¹ confirmed the Queensland CLC workforce consists of:

- 545 employees
- 464.51 full-time equivalent roles

CLCQ relied upon publicly available centre documents and records, and knowledge of the sector to estimate that the total size of the Queensland Community Legal Centre sector:

- Approximately 600+ employees
- Approximately 500+ full-time equivalent roles

Vacant Roles

At the time of the survey there were 56 vacant roles in the sector and the majority of vacancies (73%) are full-time roles. Many of the Centres currently reporting the highest number of vacant roles are either based in regional/rural Queensland, or have received additional funding in the last two years to increase service capacity. Centres who did not report having vacant roles were typically smaller and had not received any significant increases in funding. CLCQ members have disclosed directly to CLCQ that the challenge to fill vacant positions has become so great that some positions have remained empty for long periods of time (up to 12 months for some roles).

Nature of employment

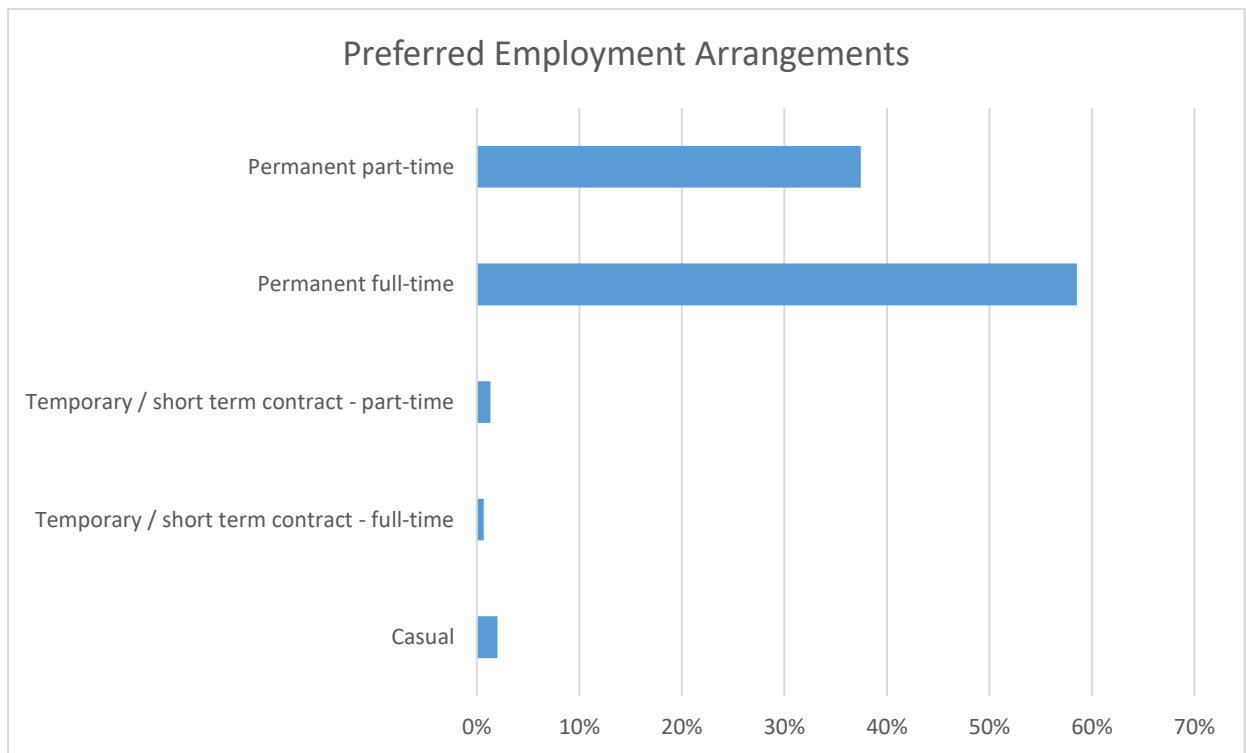
The majority (69.51%) of CLC employees have permanent employment contracts. Almost one third of CLC employees (31%) have short-term/insecure employment contracts.

¹ Note that only 25 out of 32 CLCs responded to the survey, so this number is not reflective of all workers in Queensland CLCs

Employment Arrangements

Full-time (Permanent)	40.73%
Part-time (Permanent)	28.07%
Full-time (Temporary / Contract)	11.19%
Part-time (Temporary / Contract)	15.41%
Casual	4.4%

Permanent roles were overwhelmingly the preferred employment arrangement for staff who completed the Individual Worker Survey (see Graph: Preferred Employment Arrangements).



Workforce characteristics

Diversity

The Individual Worker Survey results indicate that those employed in the Queensland CLC sector predominately identify as women. The Queensland CLC workforce is more diverse than other parts of the legal assistance sector such as Legal Aid Queensland. The Individual Worker

Survey data also demonstrates the intersectionality of workers in the sector, for example 36.73 per cent of workers with a disability identified as LGBTQIA+.

	CLC Sector	Legal Aid Queensland ²
<i>Woman</i>	84.95%	78.42%
<i>Man</i>	10.37%	21.44%
<i>Non-binary</i>	3.34%	0.14%
<i>Gender identify – ‘Prefer not to say’</i>	1.34%	-
<i>Aboriginal Peoples, Torres Strait Islander Peoples and South Sea Islander Peoples³</i>	8%	4.37%* *South Sea Islander Peoples excluded
<i>People with a disability</i>	16.39%	5.78%
<i>LGBTQIA+</i>	18.73%	-
<i>Culturally and/or linguistically diverse</i>	29.43%	_ ⁴

Age

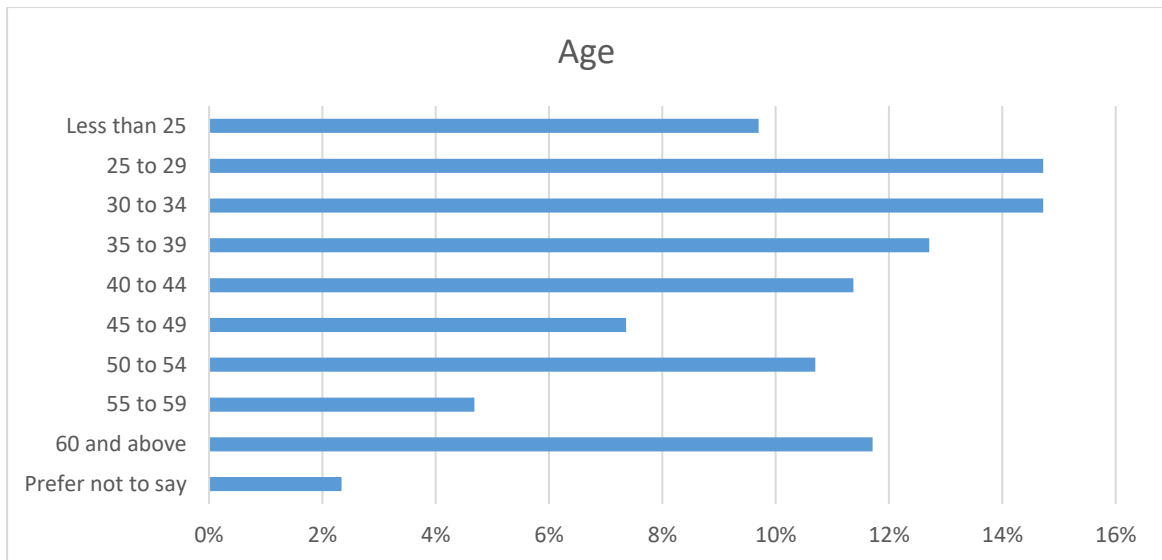
The Queensland CLC workforce has a very uneven age distribution and is dominated by younger workers. A large portion of the workforce are under the age of 35, while workers aged 35 to 49 are some of the smallest reported age brackets. The uneven distribution and drop off in mid-career age staff likely reflects the lack, or slow pace of career progression, and low salary as further data from the Individual Worker Survey indicated.

² Legal Aid Queensland, *Annual Report 2022 – 2023* (August 2023)

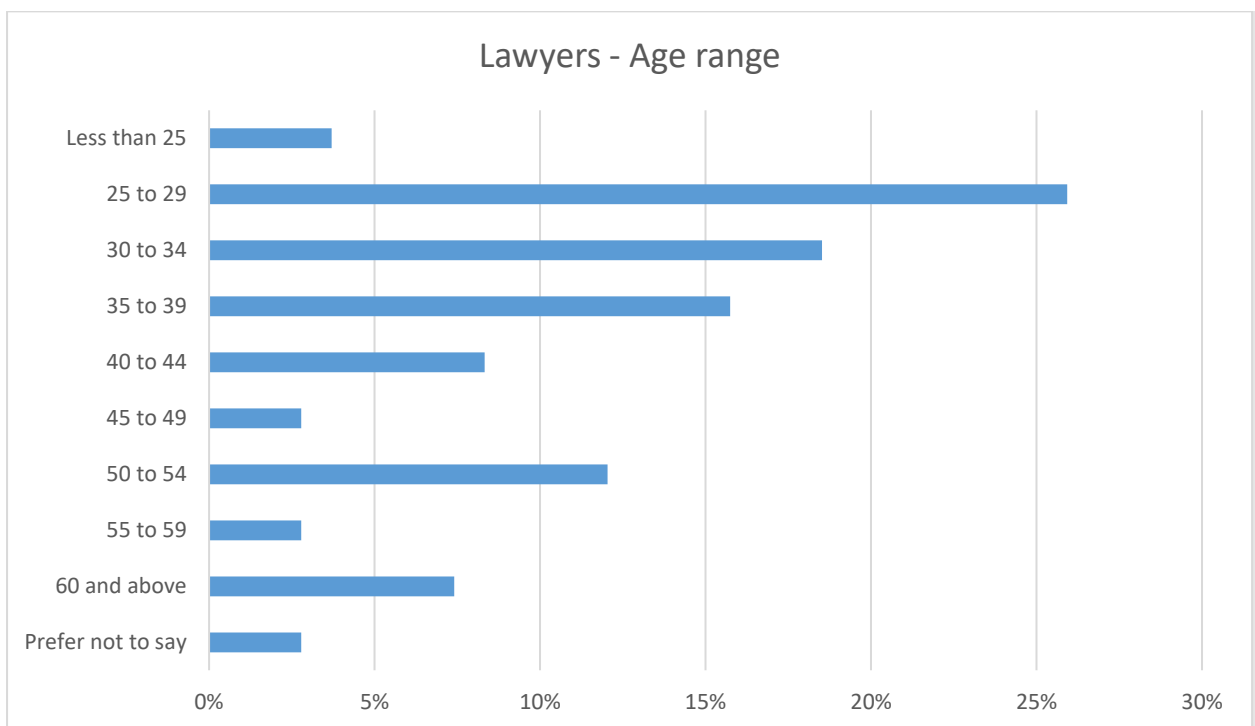
<<https://www.legalaid.qld.gov.au/files/assets/public/v/1/publications/about-us/corporate-publications/annual-reports/2023-24/legal-aid-queensland-annual-report-2023.pdf>>.

³ CLCQ's Organisational Survey screened for three Indigenous cultural groups due to Queensland's history of imported labour from the South Sea Islands. These groups are collated due to concerns of anonymity. LAQ data only outlines number of workers who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

⁴ No comparable LAQ statistic. LAQ data only outlines number of workers who speak a second language.



The age distribution of workers in the sector looks even more stark when specifically considering staff employed as lawyers. Nearly half of CLC lawyers are 34 years old or younger. While age does not necessarily indicate legal practitioner experience, it does infer that practitioners beyond a certain point in their life may not be able to afford to continue on community sector wages or lack of career progression. This may indicate a gap in the sustainability of the CLC sector, risking the loss of staff with valuable and specialist skill to alternative work options with more generous fiscal packaging or career development opportunities.



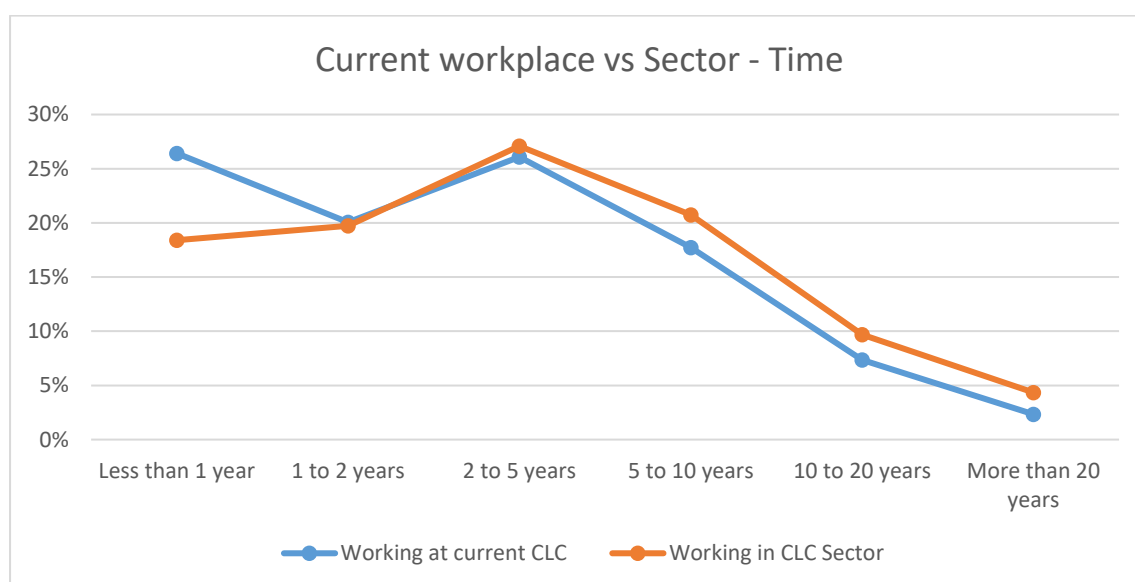
CLCs as an attractive employment opportunity

The Individual Worker Survey identified a number of features that attract staff to work and remain at CLCs.

Top reasons respondents were attracted to working in the CLC sector:

- Opportunity to enhance social justice / enhance access to justice
- Opportunity to apply skills to help others
- Shared values

Many workers who completed the Individual Worker Survey indicated they have worked in the CLC sector for a number of years across multiple centres. However, it still appears that CLCs are not a sustainable or ongoing career option: two to five years in the sector is the most common length of sector experience.



Salaries, working arrangements and benefits

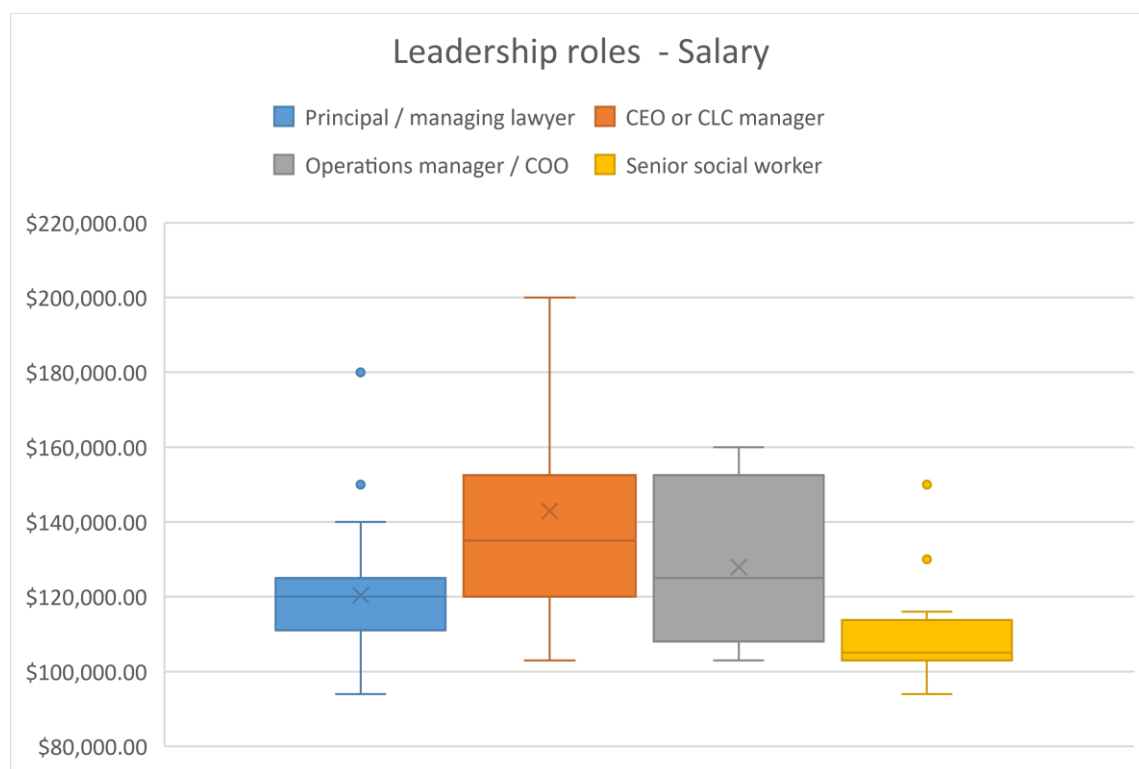
Salaries

Most CLCs who completed the Organisational Survey operate under the Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services Industry Award 2010 (SCHADS). Some CLCs utilise individual contracts in addition to the award. CLCs who stated they use a combination of individual contracts, and the Award were typically Centres who paid some workers at rates above the top level of the SCHADS Award.

Neither survey asked respondents to specify the funding source for roles. CLCQ is aware that NLAP funding represents the largest proportion of funding received by CLCs in Queensland. A limited number of CLCs receive additional funding from various State and Federal departments and/or philanthropic donations. As NLAP is the core funding source for the Queensland CLC sector, it consequently has the largest budgetary impact on the salaries and benefits CLCs can provide to employees. Responses to the Organisational Survey indicated many CLC CEOs/Managers would offer more generous salaries if funding was available to do so.

Leadership Roles - Salary

The Organisational Survey showed a wide salary range for CLC leadership roles. Due to significant differences in the sizes of Queensland CLCs it is difficult to make direct comparisons of leadership roles, job titles, and responsibilities across the sector. Some larger CLCs have a range of managerial staff, which may include a CEO, COO, a Senior Social Worker and multiple Principal Lawyers who each supervisor a number of staff. Whereas smaller CLCs have one Principal / Managing Lawyer who oversees all aspects of the Centre including the provision of legal services, supervision of staff and strategic planning. This diversity in roles makes consistency across the sector impossible, and the data below (see Graph: Leadership roles – Salary) must be reviewed in consideration of this.



Leadership role	Median Annual Salary (FTE)
Principal / managing lawyer	\$120,000
CEO or CLC manger	\$135,000
Operations manger / COO	\$125,000
Senior Social worker	\$105,000.

Lawyers – Salary

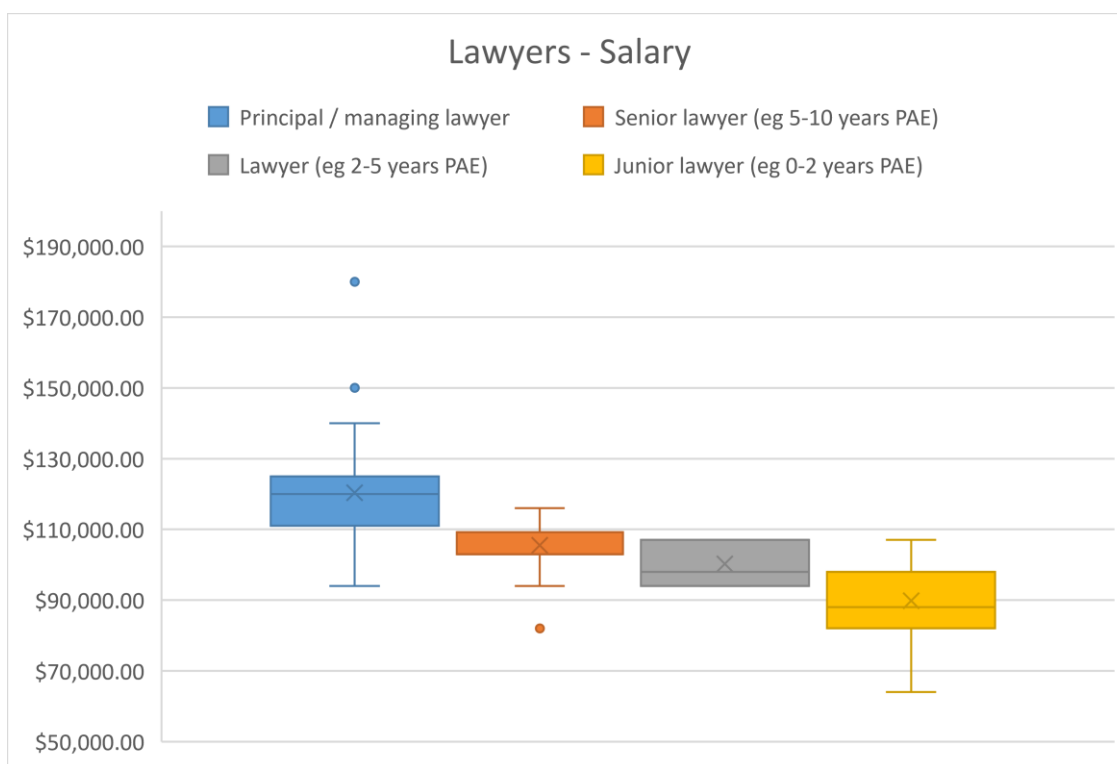
The Organisational Survey showed there is some consistency in salaries offered to lawyers at Queensland CLCs. However, as mentioned above (see Workforce Characteristics: Age) there are very limited opportunities for CLC solicitors to receive salary increases while at a CLC despite gaining greater experience, skill, and specialisation. This data is particularly significant for lawyers with two to ten years' experience. A promotion to Principal Lawyer is one of the only opportunities for a CLC lawyer to increase their salary and broaden their experience. However, the responsibilities of a Principal Lawyer also encompass management duties – so may not support a lawyer wanting to remain in direct practice to receive a salary reflective of their experience – and do vary significantly across the sector based on size, staffing requirements, and location. One Individual Worker Survey respondent stated:

“Options for career progression are fairly limited in the sector. CLCs tend to pay junior lawyers well compared with what they would be paid in private prac, but the progression from there stagnates around the 3-5 years PAE. There is almost no incentive to go into Managing/Principal lawyer roles, as the pay is often on par with a senior who has maxed out the Level 6 increments, and the responsibility is much higher. Many people who are social justice oriented are keen to join the sector early on, but leave when the workload/reward balance is thrown out around 3 years.”

Many CLCQ members have reported that hiring junior lawyers (less than two years post admission experience) can be very resource intensive due to supervision requirements, and the unique skills and knowledge required to work with CLC clients.

Additionally, some lawyers who completed the Individual Worker Survey explained the limited availability and funding for legal support staff roles in CLCs increases their workload.

“Some private practitioners erroneously see it as an 'easy retirement' but arrive in a CLC totally unprepared to do their own admin and paralegal work, or comply with the strict structures around data reporting guidelines”



Lawyers	Median Annual Salary (FTE)
Principal / managing lawyer	\$120,000
Senior lawyer (5 – 10 years PAE)	\$103,000
Lawyer (2 – 5 years PAE)	\$98,000
Junior lawyer	\$88,000

Legal Support - Salary

CLCQ is aware that many CLCs employ law students in legal support roles. Workers in legal support roles commented in the Individual Worker Survey regarding career progression in the CLC sector:

- *“Not enough graduate lawyer programs with CLCs”*
- *“I was told that once I complete my degree, there is no funding for a junior lawyer positions and I would have to continue in my paralegal role, or leave - a little disheartening but understandable”*

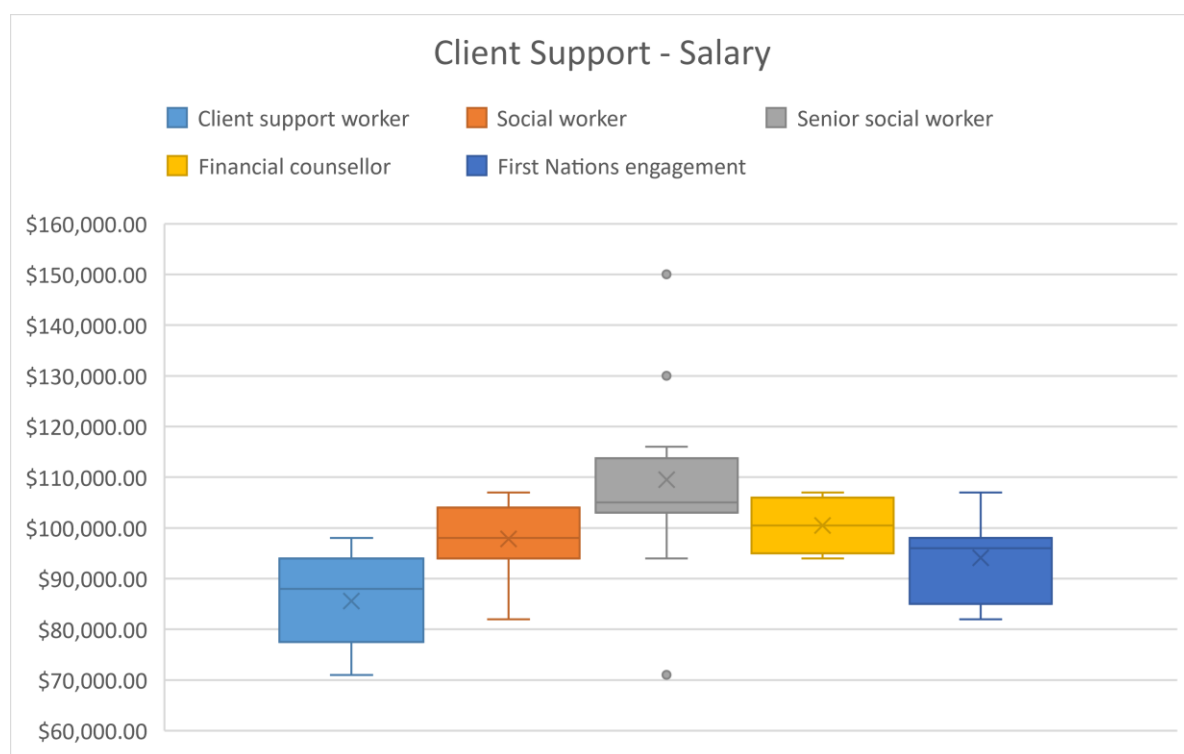
Workers in client intake roles explained in the Individual Worker Survey that the remuneration they receive does not match the complexity of the work they do as the first point of contact for clients. One worker stated:

“As an intake officer, the clients I deal with daily, both in person and on the telephones, can be mentally draining. We receive a lot of abuse which can sometimes be upsetting. I personally believe a 4 day work week would provide a work/life balance and time to recover and prepare for the following week.”



Legal Support	Median Annual Salary (FTE)
Paralegal	\$79,000
Client intake	\$73,000

Client Support - Salary



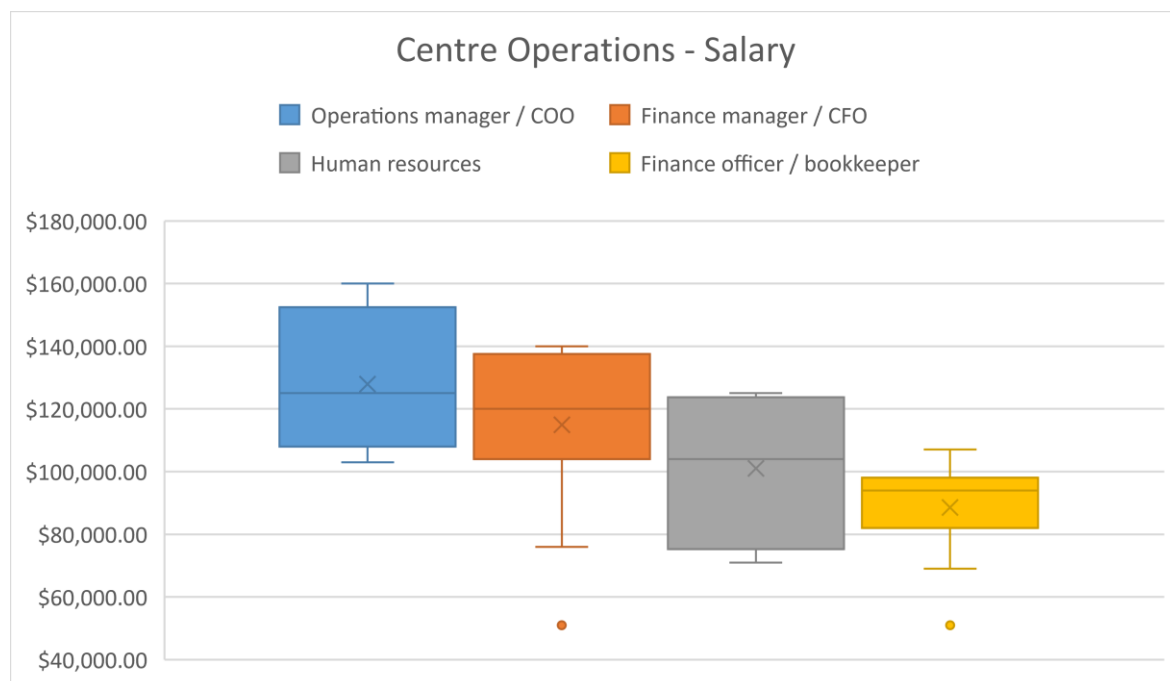
Client Support roles	Median Annual Salary (FTE)
Client support worker	\$88,000
Social Worker	\$98,000
Senior Social worker	\$105,000
Financial counsellor	\$100,500
First Nations engagement worker	\$96,000

CLE and Community Development - Salary

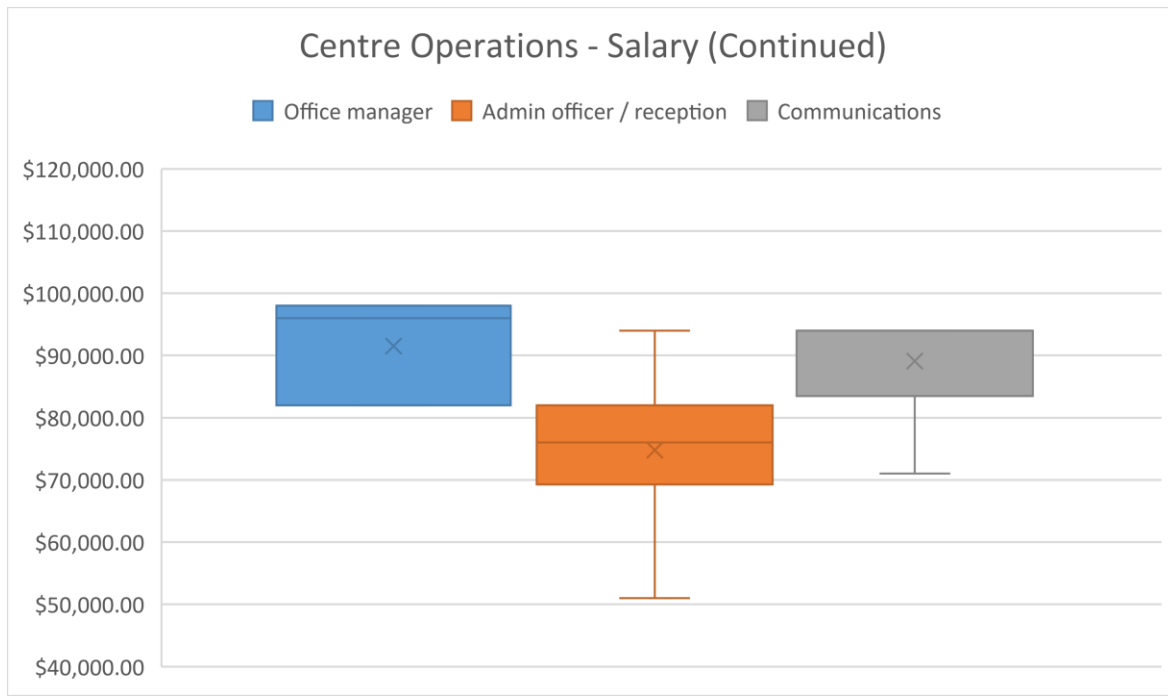


CLE and Community Development roles	Median Annual Salary
Community Legal Education	\$103,000
Community development	\$94,000

Centre Operations- Salary



Centre Operation roles	Median Annual Salary
Operations manager / COO	\$125,000
Finance manager / CFO	\$120,000
Human resources	\$104,000
Finance Officer / bookkeeper	\$94,000.



Centre Operation roles (continued)	Median Annual Salary
Office manager	\$96,000
Admin officer / reception	\$76,000
Communications	\$94,000

Working Arrangements and Benefits

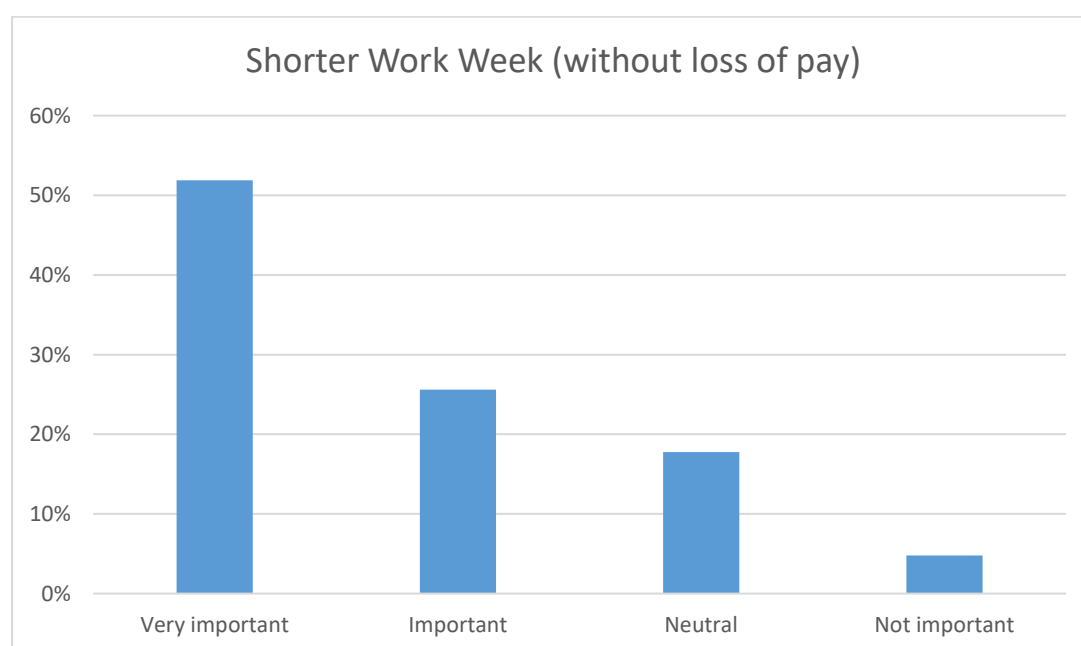
CLCs offer limited additional paid benefits to workers. The tables below outline some of the most/least common working arrangements and benefits offered to CLC staff. The tables do not include a comprehensive list of all benefits listed in the workforce surveys.

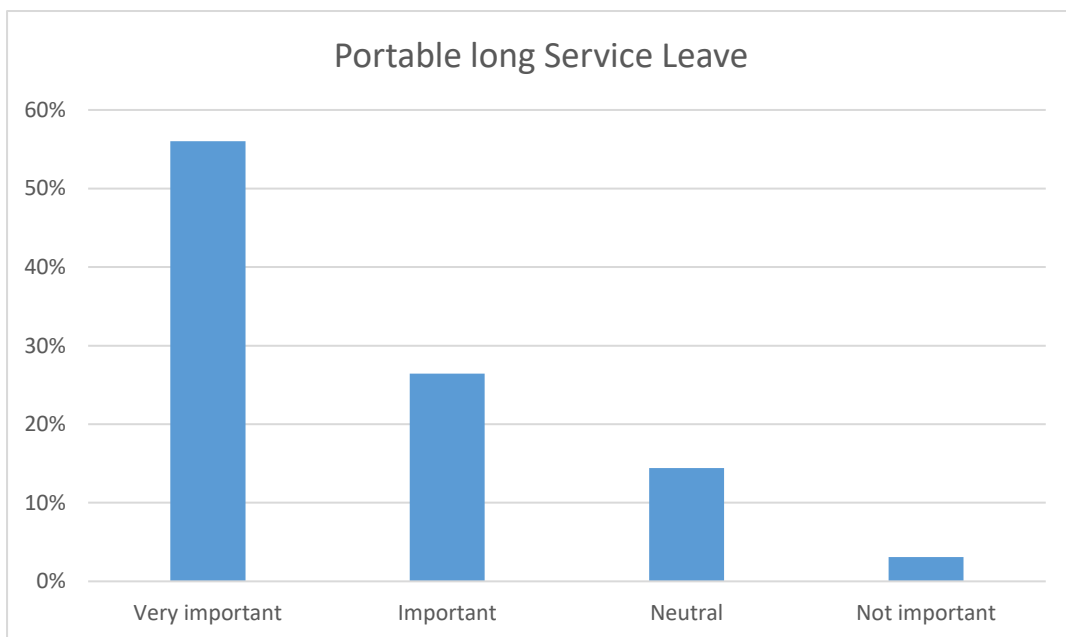
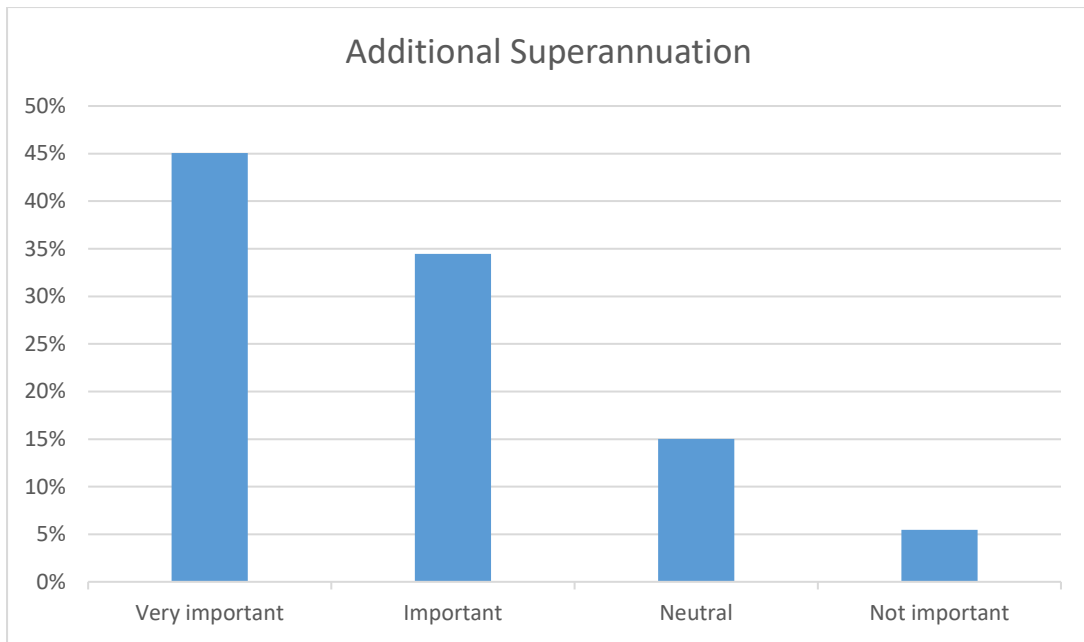
Most common working arrangement/benefits	% CLCs
Paid Practising Certificates	100%
Salary packaging	96%
Flexible working arrangements	92%
Working from home	92%

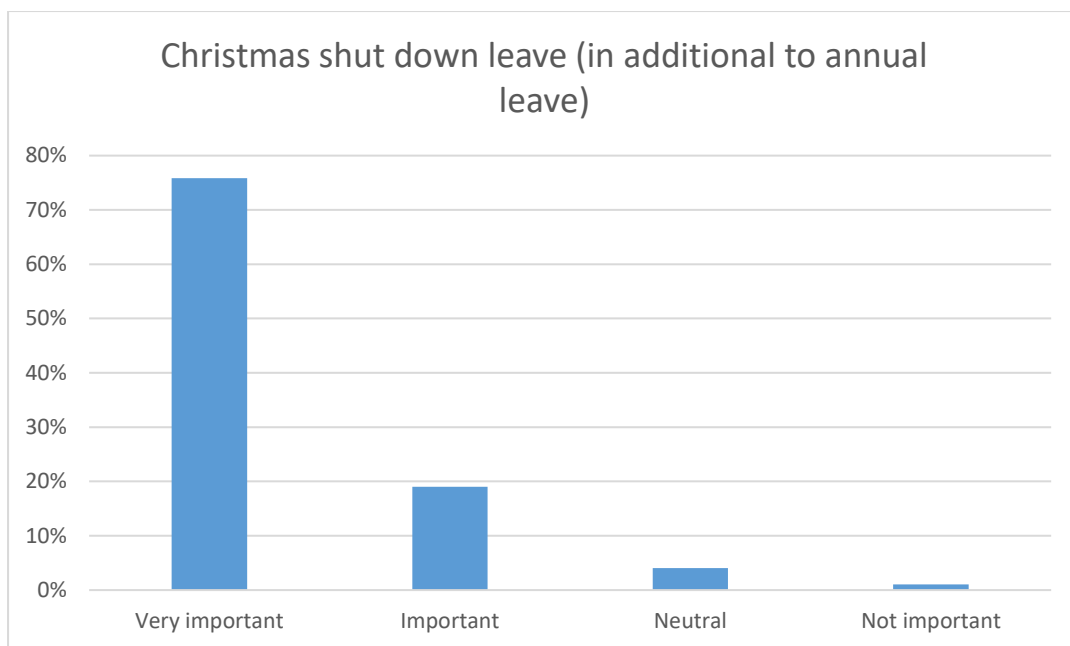
Least common working arrangement/benefits	% CLCs
Additional parental leave (above statutory entitlements)	36%
Study leave	36%
Mental health leave	16%
Early access to long service leave / additional long service leave accrual	20%
Shorter working week without loss of pay (e.g 4 day week or 35 hour week)	12%
Additional superannuation (above statutory entitlements)	4%

Arrangements and benefits of high importance to employees

The Individual Worker Survey identified the range of working arrangements and benefits that are important to staff. The graphs below provide examples of some of the working arrangements and benefits that workers reported were the most important to them.



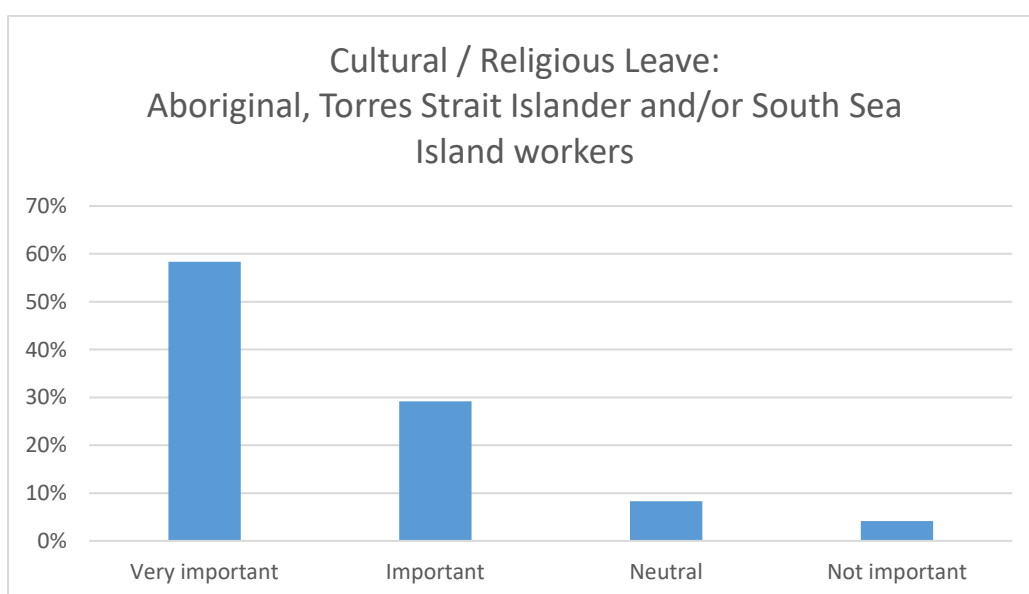




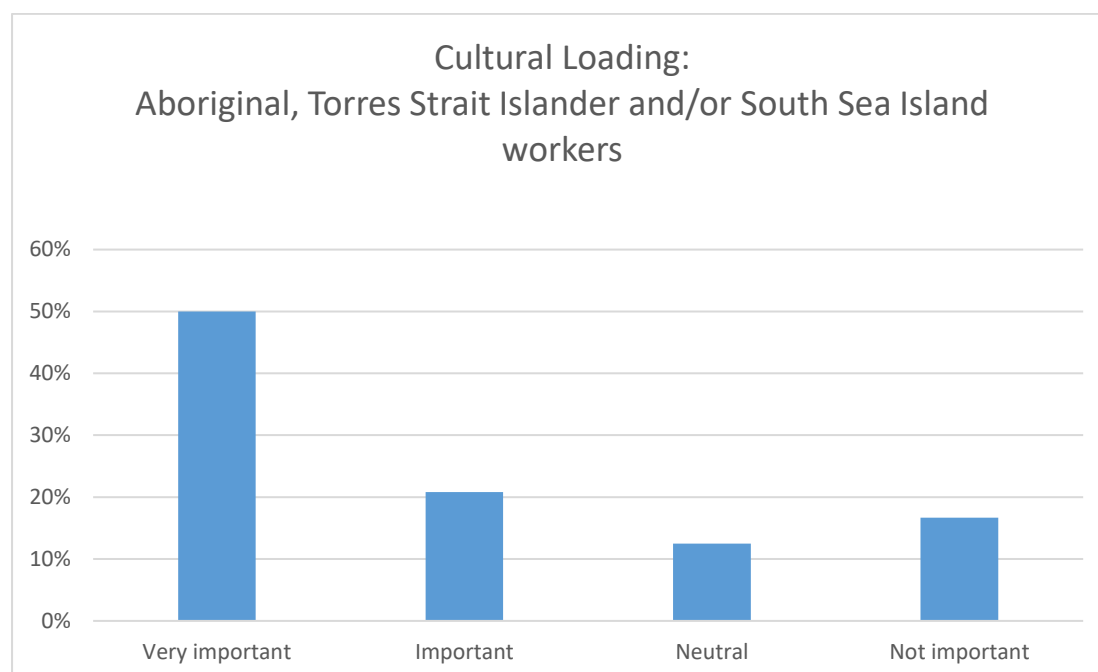
Particularised arrangements and benefits

The Individual Worker Survey showed that work arrangements and benefits that are only available to particular workers are also highly valued.

Almost 90 per cent of workers who identified as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and/or South Sea Islander reported that access to Cultural / Religious leave was 'very important' or important'.



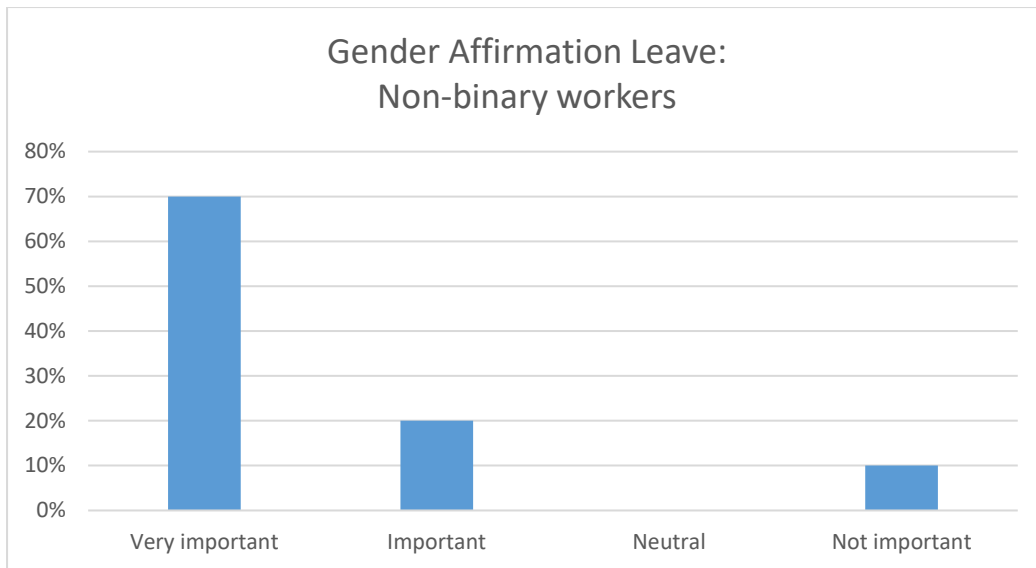
71 per cent of workers who identified as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and/or South Sea Islander further reported that access to cultural loading was 'Very Important' or 'Important' for them.⁵



90 per cent of workers who identified as non-binary reported that access to gender affirmation leave was 'very important' or 'important' for them.⁶

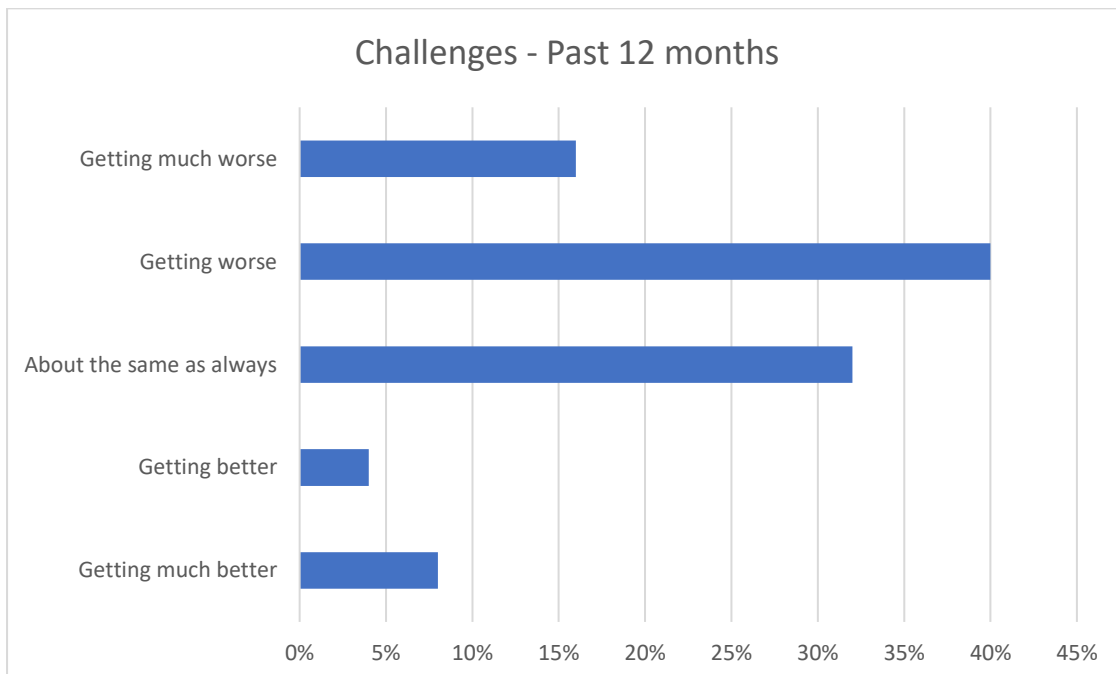
⁵ An example of cultural loading was provided in the Individual Worker Survey as *'First Nations employees paid an additional rate on top of the base salary in recognition of cultural load'*.

⁶ Due to limitations of the survey, it was not possible to include the views of non-cisgendered workers who identify as 'male' or 'female'. It is acknowledged that gender affirmation leave may be accessed and valued by a broader group of workers than people who identify as non-binary.



Challenges and Pressures - Organisations

The majority of Queensland CLCs (56%) reported in the Organisational Survey that over the past two months the challenges and pressures faced by their centre and staff were either 'getting worse' or already 'worse'. Very few Centres reported an improvement.



The top operational challenges reported by CLCs in the Organisational Survey were (in order):

1. Funding and resources
2. Staff recruitment
3. Managing staff WHS and wellbeing
4. Accommodation and premises

Almost all CLCs (92%) reported that 'capacity of the service to meet client needs' was one of top service delivery challenges.

"Due to the difficulty in recruitment there is often positions vacant which leads to a longer wait time for client appointments. This leads to an increase in "no shows" which then impacts on being able to meet service targets. There is also the added pressure put on to existing staff to have additional appointments which then impacts on staff wellbeing."

"We know what to do and we know how to do it, we just don't have enough money or enough staff. If we had more money, we could easily recruit more staff. And if we had more staff, we would meet the clients"

Recruitment

72 per cent of Queensland CLCs responded in the Organisational Survey that it was 'very difficult' or 'difficult' to find suitably qualified paid employees when recruiting. A number of Centres reported receiving low numbers of applications when advertising roles.

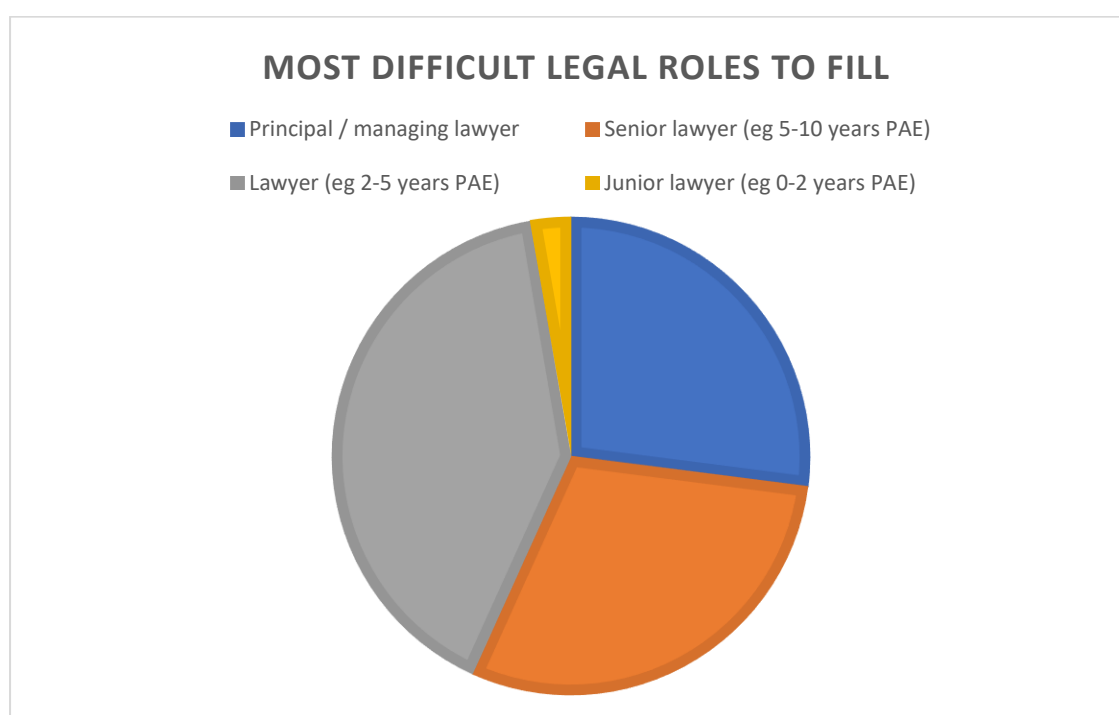


Responses to the Organisational Survey attributed recruitment difficulties to:

- Low pay rates which are not competitive with other employers in the legal sector (including private practice);
- Limited applicants with required experience;
- Being located in a regional, rural or remote area.

One Organisational Survey response stated, “*remuneration competition with LAQ and private practice has made it difficult to recruit people with more than 5 years post admission experience*”.

Lawyers (with two to five years post admission experience) and Senior lawyers (with five to ten years post admission experience) were reported as the most difficult legal roles to fill.



Retention

Pay rates and limited opportunities for career progression were indicated in Organisational Survey responses as two of the factors making it difficult to retain employees. Lawyers with two to five years post admission experience were identified as the legal role with the quickest turn over. Responses to the Organisational Survey also showed the compounding challenges for retention, as well as the mitigating factors they can offer to encourage staff to stay:

- “[We are a] “small centre with limited opportunities for promotion/higher salary so most have left for promotional opportunities elsewhere - past 4 employees who have departed left to take up Principal Lawyer roles”.
- “We practice in a highly compelling and engaging area of law, with limited 'competition' from the LAQ or private sector. We also have a very strong organisational focus on valuing staff. The 2 key factors that impact on our retention are - funding (we lose staff when we don't have the funding to offer them further work with us) and the emotional toll of the work.”
- “although we pay above award it is still not comparable to others”

Challenges and Pressures - Workers

CLC staff experience a range of challenges and pressures in their role, many of which appear to be associated with limited service funding and increasing inequity in society. An overwhelming majority of workers reported in the Individual Worker Survey that their work is becoming more complex and challenging.

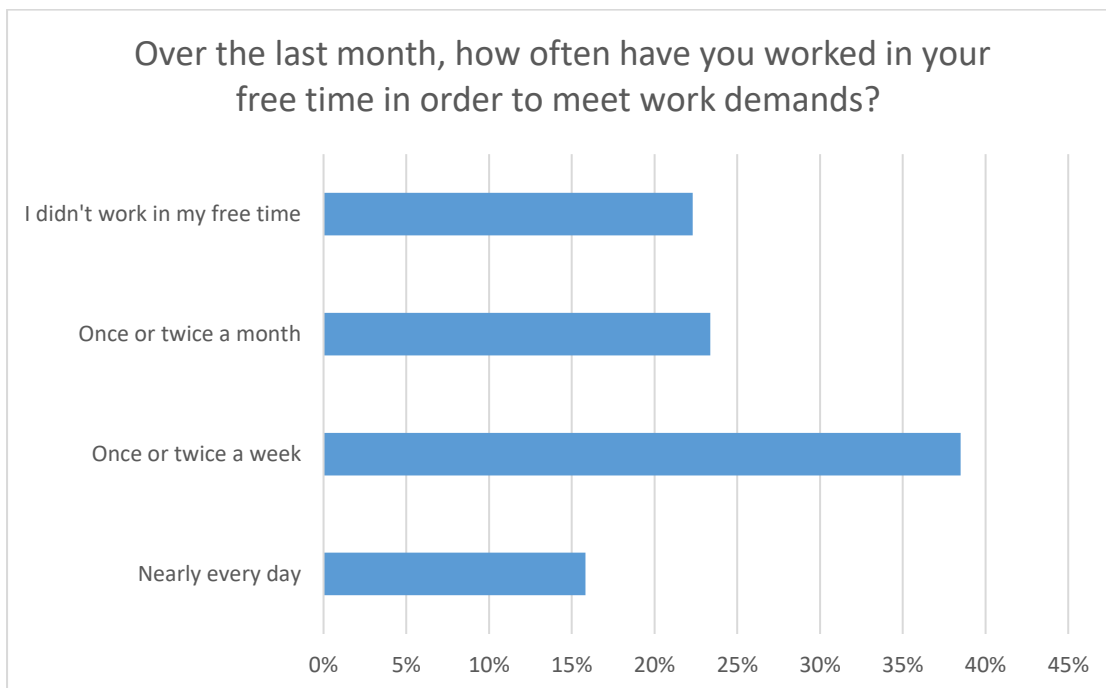
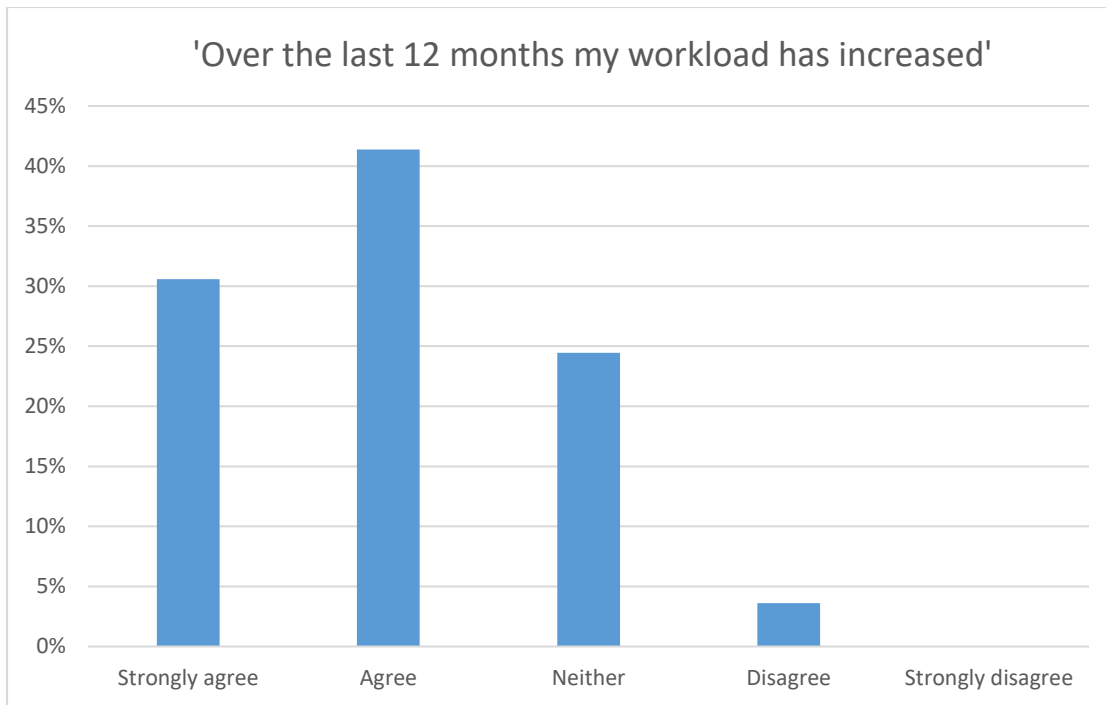


The tables below outline the most and least common challenges and pressures indicated in the Individual Worker Survey. Respondents were asked about the challenges and pressures they experienced in the client work related and non-client related aspects of their roles.

Most common challenges and pressures - Direct client work	% workers
Clients with complex needs, both legal and non-legal	84.12%
Clients with complex and/or serious legal matters	68.95%
Abusive, aggressive, threatening, or difficult client presentation/behaviour	65.70%
Insufficient resources to provide the assistance that clients need	63.54%
Not enough staff to meet client demand	63.54%

Most common challenges and pressures – non-client work	% workers
Vacant positions / short staffed	51.76%
Insufficient resourcing to cover staff leave	51.37%
Workload demands	49.02%
Limited career pathways or progression	48.24%

Over three quarters (79.95%) of Queensland CLC workers reported their workload has increased over the last 12 months. Concerningly, as a result of the workload increase the vast majority (77.7%) of workers also reported to working in their free (unpaid) time to meet CLC work demands.



Leaving jobs

Almost half of CLC workers (45.12%) indicated in the Individual Worker Survey that they are either thinking about looking for another job, or are actively looking for and/or applying for alternative work. 18.41 per cent of CLC workers reported they are actively taking steps to seek alternative employment.

Why are they leaving

The table below lists the most common reasons CLC workers stated they were considering and/or looking for another job.

Reasons CLC workers are seeking other employment	% survey respondents
Better pay	58.97%
Advance career opportunities or prospects	51.92%
Better working conditions or entitlements	37.17%
The cost of living has exceeded my CLC income	29.48%

Many workers provided comments in the Individual Worker Survey about their pay and opportunities for career advancement, such as:

- *“Salary's [sic] need to be higher. I could not stay in this job financially if I did not have a partner who earns a middle-high income”*
- *“Pay does not adequately reflect workload or level.”*
- *“Work is very emotionally challenging and draining, it takes a toll on the worker which is not reflected in remuneration received”*
- *“... the pay levels are well below what is applied in government or private practice roles. The work is complex and requires significant knowledge of societal impacts upon the person and good navigation of the system to benefit the client”*
- *“Whilst remuneration is better than it used to be, the current cost of living crisis is making a CLC salary almost inadequate. It is also sometimes difficult to see the upwards trajectory of a career in a CLC”*
- *“The difference in salary as compared to similar private or government roles for the same experience is significant. This will affect long term employment.”*

Where do they want to work?

For CLC workers considering leaving their current workplace, the top place they are seeking employment with is *another* community legal centre. This emphasises the commitment many workers have to the sector, as well as the attraction the CLC sector holds for many workers. Unfortunately, the current funding restrictions that limit wages and benefits across all Queensland CLCs mean it is unlikely a new job within the sector will meet the identified needs for better pay and working conditions.

Top places CLC workers are looking for jobs (in order):

- Another CLC
- Government Organisation or agency
- Non-government organisation or agency
- Legal Aid Queensland

3. Conclusion

This report is an initial analysis of the Organisational Survey and Individual Worker Survey results. CLCQ will be undertaking further analysis in order to best inform CLCQ's advocacy for, and support of, the Queensland CLC sector and needs.