A question of talent?

A WiredGov Public Sector Survey

Contents

In association with

⊅WIRED GOV **ppma** PUBLIC SERVICE PEOPLE MANAGERS' ASSOCIATION

Introduction

The public sector relies on its workforce to deliver crucial citizen services so talent acquisition is an essential component to ensure continued business momentum. With this survey, we wanted to uncover the pain points that are inherent in this large pool and explore what can be done to alleviate these pressing concerns so that citizens never miss out.

Working with WiredGov and The Public Services People Managers Association (PPMA), we have gathered the views from across the UK public sector covering government, education, housing associations, blue light, healthcare and the third sector. What is fascinating is that the challenges are consistent across these industries despite the obvious differences in services.

Talent scarcity, budget constraints and return on investment pressures, competition from the private sector and a lengthy time to hire were consistently the top four recruitment challenges felt by recruiters across the sector. These are compounded by a lack of investment in talent attraction strategies and delays in formalities such as vetting and pre-employment checks.

Technology can help to sooth these pains and where investment allows public sector recruiters should always look to upgrade their talent for tomorrow, no matter how good it is today. Vendors like Oleeo are responsible for empowering you with Recruiting Enablement in the quest to find talent that drives business success and enables hiring for culture add, not culture fit.

When you want to employ better people than you did yesterday, you need to employ better ways to recruit now. It's time to reset existing behaviours, shed unnecessary burden and arm yourself and your team with the tools required to outperform the competition.

Through the power of Intelligent Selection, Oleeo enables companies to break the source of talent wide open – to attract, engage and hire, amazing, diverse teams, faster and more efficiently than ever before. Successful recruitment today lies in bringing together human experience and AI capabilities, creating superhumans capable of finding the best talent, fast.

Talent is not missing, it's out there waiting for you. In order to discover diverse talent, you need to explore diverse sources and unleash the potential they hold. Venturing into new sources with AI can help realise significant time & cost savings, by processing vastly more applications, yet only recommending the best fit candidates with diversity in mind and bias eliminated. Attraction need not start with pay. Strategically invest in only advertising in the sources that are actually delivering ROI with real-time automation.

Oleeo Total Talent Public can crunch thousands of data points already used in hiring activities and utilise the strongest predictors of success, to ensure improved hire quality, better conversion rates and increased performance for business longevity. It can even automate large parts of the vetting process so the gap between offer and vetting clearance is significantly shorter, thus keeping time to hire as streamlined as possible.

Shape the future by learning from real-time insights that enable continuous improvements in efficiency, compliance and effectiveness. Ultimately, a smoother talent acquisition process will deliver positive results on your bottom line, while talent quality will deliver positive results on your top line from day one and beyond.

Our sincere thanks to everyone who participated in this survey and to WiredGov for helping to crunch the data to create this insights paper.

Charles Hipps. CEO, Oleeo

Background

Oleeo, talent acquisition technology professionals passionate about helping companies recruit their best possible teams, commissioned this survey of HR professionals, recruiters and talent managers. Their survey produced a rich data set that highlights the current challenges and barriers across the sector in relation to talent acquisition.

Findings and statistics

62%
of survey respondents think talent scarcity is the biggest obstacle for public sector-wide recruiting.

55%
of recruiters see budget constraints as their major challenge in filling roles.

43%
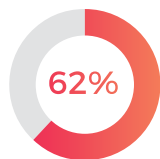*of recruiters see private sector competition as a key problem.*

## 36%
of respondents think that time to hire is still a concern.

What Oleeo's data shows us

Talent scarcity is the biggest challenge for public sector-wide recruiting with 62% considering it a problem.

62%

Budget constraints and the need to prove ROI, competition from the private sector and the length of time required to hire new personnel are also considered major challenges in filling roles sector wide.

Only 28% feel equipped to make employment in their organisation sound attractive to jobseekers because of the challenges identified.

28%
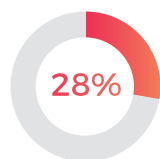
Tightened budgets mean that only 18.5% feel they can secure the talent they need; people feel a need to get better at making their organisation attractive over the increased competition.

18.5%
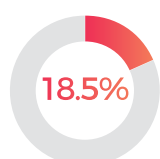
In fact, only 1.8% of respondents felt that competition had no impact on their ability to hire!

1.8%
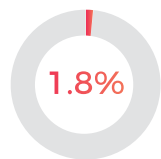
While 75% say that data is informing recruitment decisions, the extent to which recruitment processes are data-driven is mixed. Almost 46% say their processes are not as automated as they could be to help deliver business efficiencies in recruitment. This might also explain why reporting on recruitment performance is a low priority for half of respondents.

75%
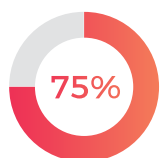
Blind screening also seems to be a low priority with 47% deeming it unimportant but 75% admitting that approaches could be improved.

Vetting and pre-employment checks are identified as a barrier to hiring times by a majority of respondents with only 18% saying it had minimal or no impact and only 23% saying the same about the time gap between offer and appointment.

Diversity remains a major issue in the public sector with 79% identifying room for improvement. Ethnic diversity is a priority for 55%; gender diversity for 40%; and other backgrounds or education status diversity for 33%.

79%
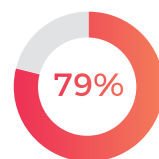
To achieve this, 44% of respondents said they are keen to spread their recruitment wider to find diverse candidates from different sources to the norm.

44%
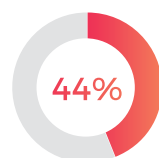
Although it is a top challenge, time to hire appears to be getting faster. Of all respondents, 56% say they are able to hire in between one and three months already. Many fall into the longer time frames of this bracket, however, and would like to make offers faster to secure talent quickly, particularly in highly competitive roles.

56%
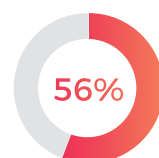
In your current position, are you directly involved with Talent Acquisition, HR, Resourcing or Recruitment?

Other (please specify)
2.99%

Not involved
14.37%

Slightly involved
10.8%

Indirectly involved
17.96%

Directly involved
54.49%
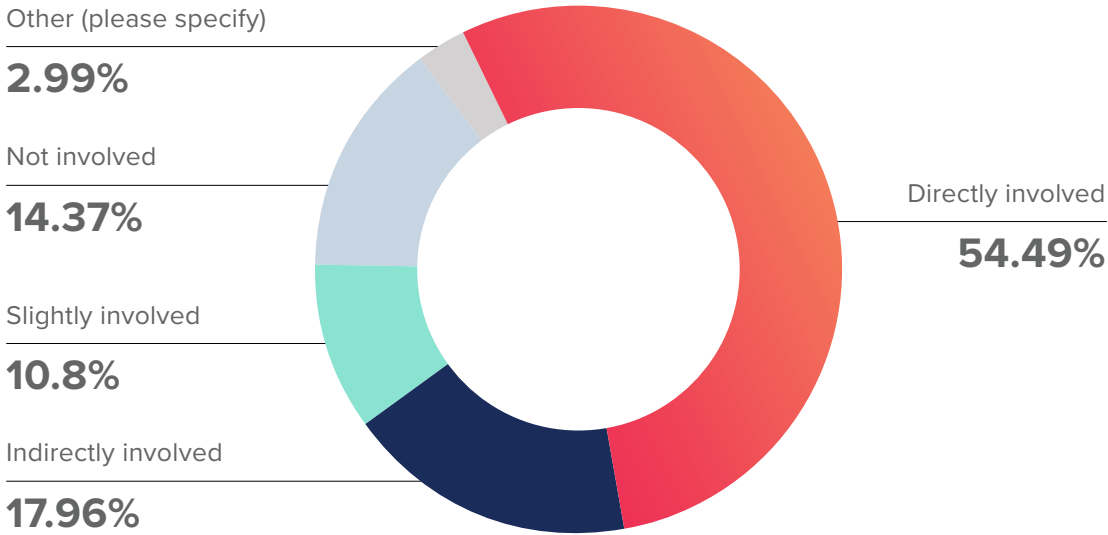
Which of these recruiting challenges do you most relate to?

Challenge	Percentage
Talent scarcity	62.28%
Competition from private sector	43.11%
Employer branding efforts needs improving	15.57%
Lengthy application forms that are left incomplete	11.38%
Time to hire is too long	36.53%
Diversity challenges	13.77%
Budget constraints/ROI pressures	55.69%
High attrition rates	14.97%
Complicated vetting and compliance processes	17.37%
Managing redeployment	4.79%
Hiring student talent including apprentices	10.78%
Not being paperless in our approaches to hiring	4.19%
Other (see over)	9.58%

From all the challenges you related to, which do you feel is the most challenging?

Challenge	Percentage
Talent scarcity	37.72%
Competition from private sector	11.98%
Employer branding efforts needs improving	3.59%
Lengthy application forms that are left incomplete	2.99%
Time to hire is too long	5.39%
Diversity challenges	3.59%
Budget constraints/ROI pressures	25.15%
High attrition rates	2.4%
Complicated vetting and compliance processes	2.4%
Managing redeployment	0.6%
Hiring student talent including apprentices	1.2%
Not being paperless in our approaches to hiring	1.2%
Other (see over)	1.2%

How would you rate the effectiveness of talent attraction that your organisation delivers to help interest top talent? (1 being none and 5 being a lot)
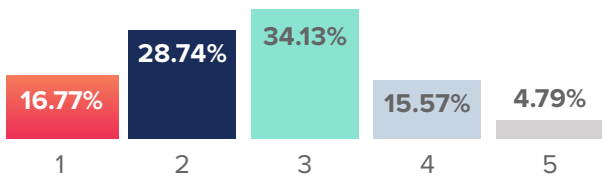
1	2	3	4	5
8.98%	19.16%	51.5%	18.56%	1.8%
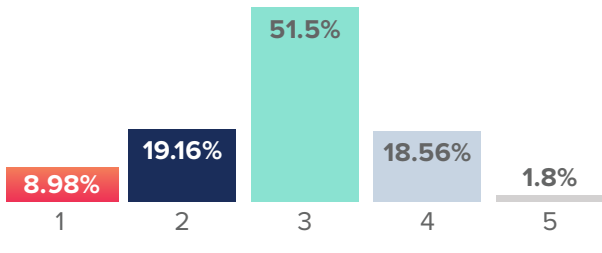
To what extent are budget constraints hindering your ability to recruit efficiently? (1 being they're not and 5 being completely)

1	2	3	4	5
5.99%	12.57%	20.36%	27.54%	33.53%
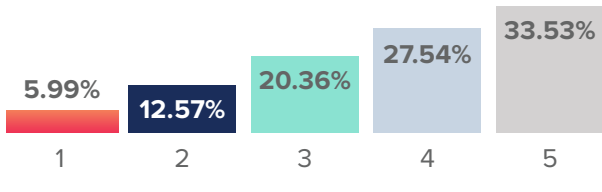
To what extent would you say that your recruitment process is data driven? (1 being not at all and 5 being a lot)

1	2	3	4	5
16.77%	28.74%	34.13%	15.57%	4.79%

## To what extent would you say that the data you do collect informs your recruitment decisions? (1 being not at all and 5 being a lot)

| 1	2	3	4	5
7.78%	16.77%	36.53%	29.94%	8.98%
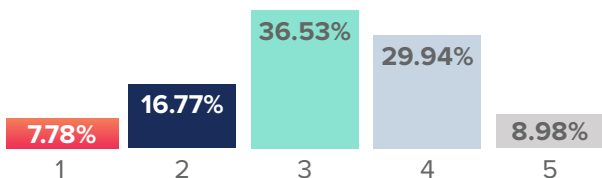
How important is blind screening to your organisation? (1 being none and 5 being a lot)

1	2	3	4	5
25.7%	20.96%	25.75%	16.77%	10.78%
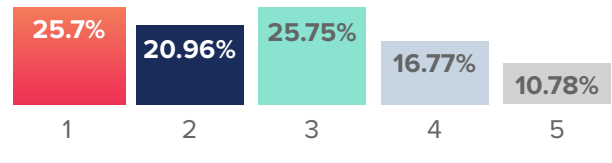
Could your blind screening approach be improved? (1 being not at all and 5 being a lot)

1	2	3	4	5
15.57%	8.98%	38.32%	22.16%	14.97%
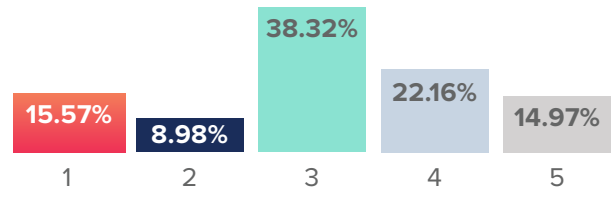
How much does vetting and pre-employment checks impact your time to hire? (1 being none and 5 being a lot)

1	2	3	4	5
5.99%	11.98%	29.34%	25.75%	26.95%
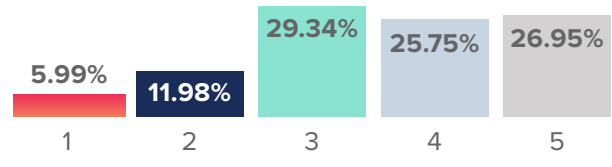
How much does competition affect your ability to hire? (1 being none and 5 being a lot)

1	2	3	4	5
1.8%	11.38%	25.75%	28.14%	32.93%

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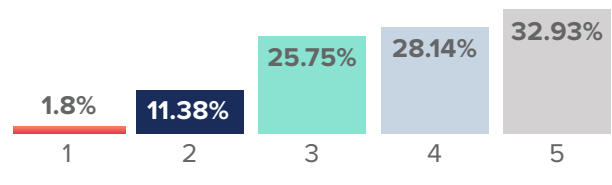
Diversity is a big issue for many organisations, which of the following are you trying to tackle at the moment? (Tick all that apply)

44.31%
Spreading our net wider so we look for candidates from greater diversity of places

54.49%
Improving the ethnic diversity of our workforce

Improving the gender diversity of our workforce
39.52%

32.93%
Improving the diversity of our workforce in terms of their backgrounds and education

Getting more women into senior roles
32.93%

None of the above
20.96%
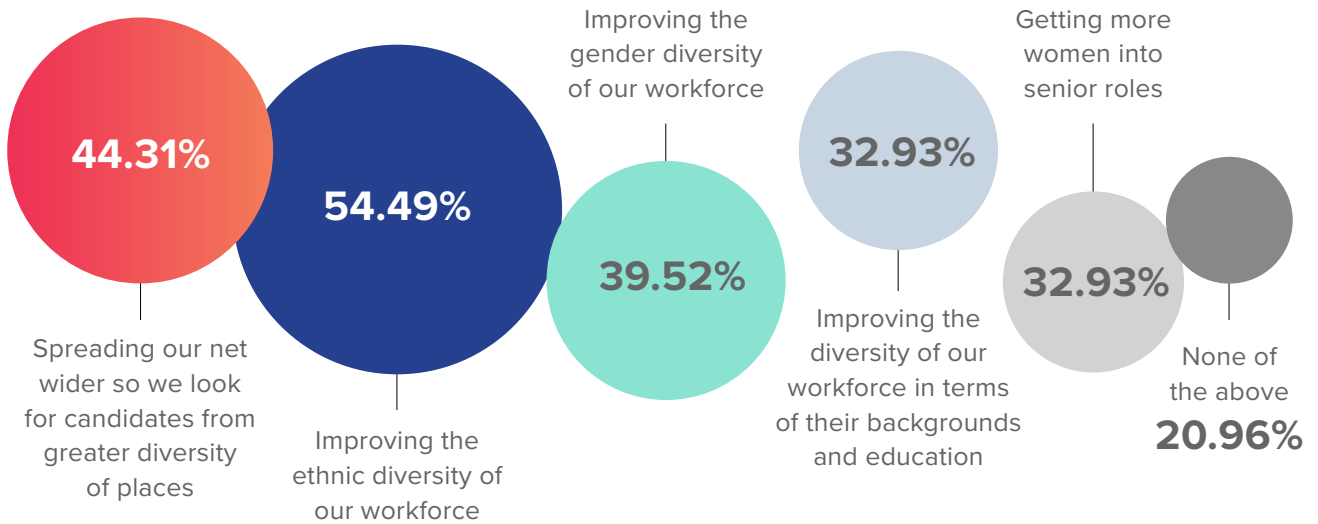
How much does vetting and compliance tend to affect your average time to hire? (1 being none and 5 being a lot)

- 1: **5.99%**
- 2: **17.37%**
- 3: **33.53%**
- 4: **23.95%**
- 5: **19.16%**
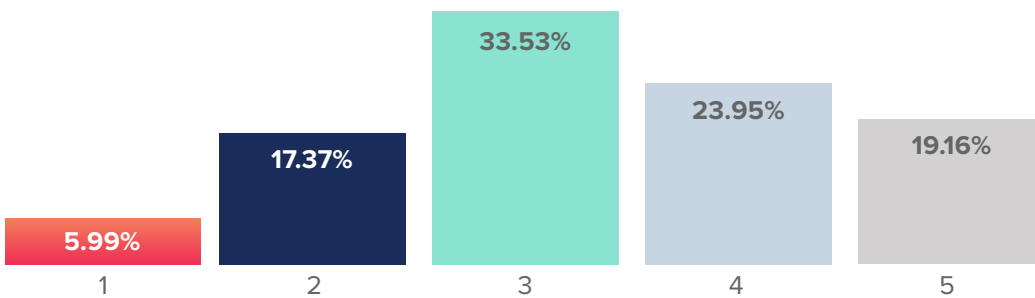
What your average time to fill a post is? Estimate this based on end-to-end experience from application closing date to a job being offer being extended.

9 months and over
1.8%

6-9 months
3.59%

3-6 months
38.92%

1-3 months
55.69%

How often do you need to report on the status of your recruitment campaigns with data intelligence/ statistics (1 being not at all and 5 very often)

- 1: 29.34%
- 2: 20.95%
- 3: 35.33%
- 4: 8.38%
- 5: 5.99%
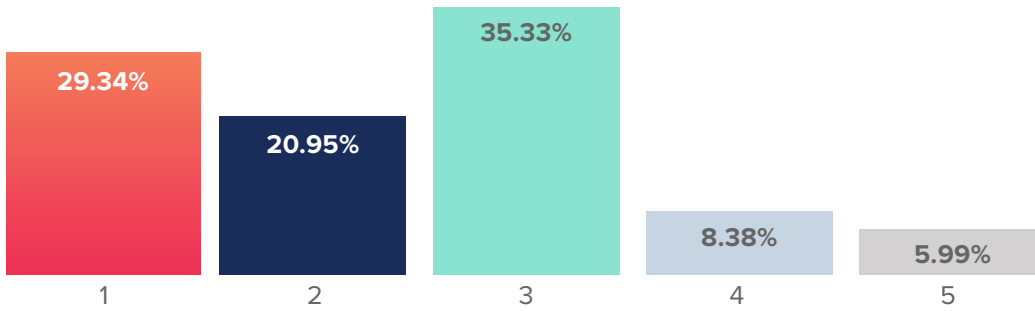
An industry professional's view

Leatham Green, Executive Director, The Public Services People Managers Association (PPMA)

It is no surprise to read that talent scarcity (62%), budget constraints (55%), private sector competition (43%) and the length of time it takes to actually hire new personnel (36%) are today's key recruitment challenges.

What is surprising is the apparent lack of change in the strategies used to tackle these issues.

Certainly, talent scarcity existed back in the 1980's and in the School Meals Service, which offered low hours, low pay and less favourable terms and conditions than the majority in the sector.

A powerful and successful incentive, as well as a brilliant recruitment and retention strategy, was to amplify the contribution each person made to the success of every child in their school. It's a strategy that remains under-used. While people need appropriate payment, we know money isn't the sole motivator. Millennials and the digital gen in particular need to feel they are making a difference and have a common purpose. We need to maximise this powerful strategy!

Branding is often dismissed by public sector leaders as irrelevant in the public sector context, but its unique offering should be celebrated and actively promoted, or we miss a critical opportunity. There are many areas capitalising on this tactic, as evidenced in such case studies as London Borough of Camden and Bracknell Forest Council, along with national recruitment drives for teachers and social workers. Every day, thousands of public servants make a difference; and their powerful stories, branded 'This is my reality', show just how potent a tool for good branding can be.

The effectiveness of talent attraction

Respondents to Oleeo's survey clearly know that there is plenty of room for improvement in the way organisations tackle the challenges of talent attraction with around 51% rating average whilst 25% feel current approaches are somewhat or not at all effective. It is interesting that public perception is rated as a barrier, but the benefits derived from the digital revolution are beginning to shine through: one respondent states that after simplifying the recruitment process, improvements were made in the time to hire. Social media is also helping to showcase different talent pools.

Unexpectedly, Brexit hardly features as a key barrier to talent attraction; unsurprisingly, however, uncompetitive salaries and budget constraints feature regularly.

Is data driving decision making?

As we know, strategic workforce planning and therefore meaningful, timely and relevant workforce data are essential to understand and respond to the challenges of talent attraction and retention. Oleeo's survey highlights a key finding: only 20% of respondents proactively use data to drive decision-making and associated strategies. More positively, however, over a third of respondents use data to inform recruitment decisions. There is clearly scope for major improvement, and the development of digital technologies and Artificial Intelligence will give us important assistance here.

Blind Screening – is it important?

Blind screening: removing personal information – such as names, faces, ethnicity, gender, age, and educational background – from hiring managers during the initial hiring stages with the aim of eliminating bias and discrimination during the selection process. Research demonstrates that it can have a positive impact, increasing the chances of women and ethnic minority applicants being offered a first-round job interview. However, the concept is not without its flaws.

Once a candidate reaches the face-to-face interview stage, there is no way to mask such personal data. Consequently, employers are faced with the same diversity challenges. Ultimately, the only organisations who experience true diversity are those willing to see beyond their 'cultural norms', who hire and positively support candidates who will add something they don't yet possess.

Oleeo's survey reveals that there is some confusion about what this term means and how it is applied in the workplace. However, around 50% of respondents do state that some form of blind screening is used in their recruitment process, with 75% of respondents identifying an existing opportunity for improving its use.

Time to Hire – a barrier to talent attraction?

It goes without saying that it is vital to ensure that any appointment is effectively checked and vetted in accordance with legislation and statutory guidelines, and this will often increase the length of the hiring process. However, Oleeo's data shows that there's great variability in time to hire across organisations. There is much to gain through considering best practice, so that hiring is more proactively managed. It is also concerning to see that vetting and pre-employment screening impacts adversely to some degree on the time to hire for over 80% of respondents. 55% of respondents state the average time to hire is 1-3 months, with 35% taking 3-6 months: there are clear cost implications here, in all sorts of ways.

About Leatham Green

Multi-award-winning Executive Director of the The Public Services People Managers Association (PPMA), which was established over 40 years ago as the voice of HR across the public services, and Founder of The Mindful HR Centre, Leatham Green is widely recognised in the field of HR as a thought leader. He is passionate about public services public, having worked within the sector for many years. He's well-known for his dynamic and original approach and his ability to lead transformational change in the UK. He doesn't just "talk the talk", he "walks the walk"!

Conclusions

The public sector unquestionably needs to be both liberated from its traditional confines and nurtured so it will thrive and flourish as we journey onwards towards a successful, dynamic future.

It's a significant challenge. We need to:

- Improve costs and efficiency within the recruitment process, using meaningful data to drive decisions
- Seek talent from wider and more varied pools, including home-grown sources
- Hire the right people and enable them to be more productive, more quickly
- Establish integrated solutions to address the challenge of pay and reward rather than pit organisations and services against each other
- Consider the external labour market as a customer to be served and delighted – make people want to join our community.

The world of talent attraction in the public sector is still significantly paper-based, with bureaucratic systems and a lack of meaningful automation. The experience for new applicants, even with on-line application forms can feel inefficient, longwinded, and poor.

The significance of Strategic Workforce Planning is still under-used across the sector. Without taking a holistic approach to talent attraction, organisations will flounder. Such an approach does enable organisations to identify current and future skill shortages: to identify the right people for opportunities; to establish where top candidates come from; to evaluate how strong a talent pipeline is; to consider return on investment etc.

Innovations in technology as shared earlier have already improved the recruitment process, with chatbots and VR software helping candidates experience an employer brand in a much more engaging way. But future recruitment trends are not just shaped by technology. Diversity and flexible work are starting to become the norm for senior candidates looking for organisations with an authentic interest in employee wellbeing – and this is something the public can respond to positively.

About Oleeo

Oleeo, formerly WCN, is an award-winning provider of innovative talent acquisition technology known as Recruiting Enablement. Built using intelligent automation and machine learning, Oleeo's platform helps companies discover unlimited sourcing potential to attract, engage and hire amazing, diverse teams that change the world for the better. Our mission is to help recruiters do that faster and more efficiently than ever before – www.oleeo.com

About PPMA

The Public Services People Managers Association (PPMA) is the first choice association for people professionals across public services.

For more than 40 years we have been a collective voice for a highly qualified, passionate, committed and diverse public services Human Resources (HR) and Organisation Development (OD) community. We play a critical role in influencing key decision-makers and stakeholders involved in people management and workforce issues – www.ppma.org.uk

About Wired Gov

All research and findings contained within this report has been conducted by WiredGov, with all survey respondents being registered users to the UK's number one government and public sector news alerting service – www.wired-gov.net

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