

WS

Chartered Trading Standards Institute Workforce Survey 2017

Preface

Consider the quotes on the first page from two separate reports published in 2016. Both make it clear that the important role that trading standards plays in consumer protection is being degraded by falls in resources.

This trend of resource reductions in the majority of services has been shown in previous workforce surveys.³ Yet despite this evidence, the two reports quoted on page one, and at least three other reports in the past three years, there have been no substantial steps by central government to address the erosion of trading standards as the frontline of consumer protection.

What is most striking, especially when you consider the urgency in these quotes, is that this survey shows there are now 48 fewer qualified trading standards professionals protecting the public than there were last year. With the survey showing that trading standards services have an average of 9.6 fully qualified staff, this drop is the equivalent of losing nearly five full services in a year.

The Institute's thanks goes to heads of service, managers and others in the profession who have contributed to the survey. It is crucial that we continue to work together to use this evidence to best address the collective challenges facing our profession, and by extension the consumers we protect.

Executive Summary

- There has been a further 4.3% fall in average spending on trading standards.
- Long term budget analysis confirms that there has been a 50% fall in actual trading standards spending in the last seven years.
- 43% of services report that they cannot deal with the consumer detriment in their area.
- 64% feel they cannot recruit or retain skills.
- Of the 82 services which responded to both this year's and last year's surveys, a further 48 trained professionals have left the profession.

Long term budget analysis

This being the third in a series of workforce surveys we were able to create like-for-like comparisons between the same authorities. 39 services responded with actual budget figures for 2010-11, 2013-14, 2016-17, and 2017-18.

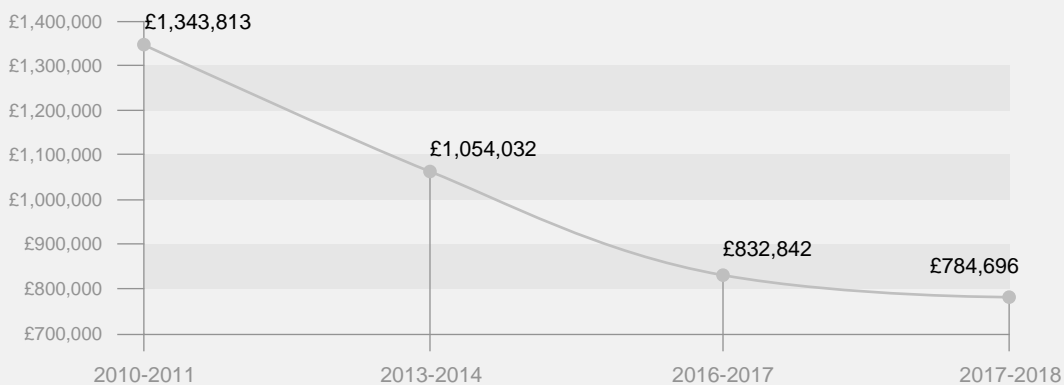


Figure 2:
Long term average budget

Figure 2 shows that, in less than a decade, the average budget for these trading standards services has nearly halved. This reinforces with far more confidence the snapshots that the previous surveys have provided: that budgets have fallen over the past seven years by around 50%.

The average budgets of the services in figure 2 are higher than the overall average in the equivalent survey year. Thus in figure 2, where the 2016-17 average spend is £832,842, the average for the whole 2016 workforce survey was £642,520. The 2017 survey average spend overall was £690,574, compared to an average spend of £784,696 in 2017-2018 in figure 2.



Figure 3:
Average budget over time
including projections

Budget per head of population

Using the 2017-2018 budget figures and population estimates for each local authority we have produced the average amount spent per person on trading standards in each administrative region.

YAHTSG

Figure 4 shows huge variations in the overall budget per head across different trading standards regions.

There were nine authorities that spend less than a pound per head (of local authority population) on trading standards, six of these being in London. Of the top 20 per-head spenders (ranging from £3.32 per head to £30 per head) in the UK, only two are from outside Scotland or Wales, and both of those are in London.⁶

In this sample, the England only spend per head was £1.69, down from £1.76 in the 2016 survey. Overall across the UK, the average spend per-head was £1.87.

National Trading Standards grant funding

Respondents were asked whether they receive funding from National Trading Standards (England and Wales only; Scotland does not receive this funding). 21% of English and Welsh respondents received NTS grant funding.

Of this number, most indicated that funding was for specific projects rather than ongoing local spending. Examples of this were funds for safety at ports, regional investigations teams, or feed work.

6. The notably high per-head spend in Scotland and Wales reflects similar data from 2016's survey, which we feel reflects geographic differences and sparser population density.

Year-on-year actual staff comparisons

From the 82 services which responded to our questions on qualified staff in both the 2016 and 2017 surveys, there has been a fall of 48.4 qualified trading standards professionals working within these services in a single year. The average trading standards service has 9.6 fully qualified officers, making this fall equivalent to the loss of nearly five services in a year.

This is a dramatic fall considering that these are some of the stronger services that are consistently responding to our surveys.

As figure 6 shows, there has been an increase in non-qualified staff undertaking trading standards work. This is a concern as the work of a trading standards officer, across 263 statutory duties, prosecuting criminals and advising business on their compliance, is often technical and is criticised when not delivered in a bespoke manner, reflecting the expertise of the trading standards officer.

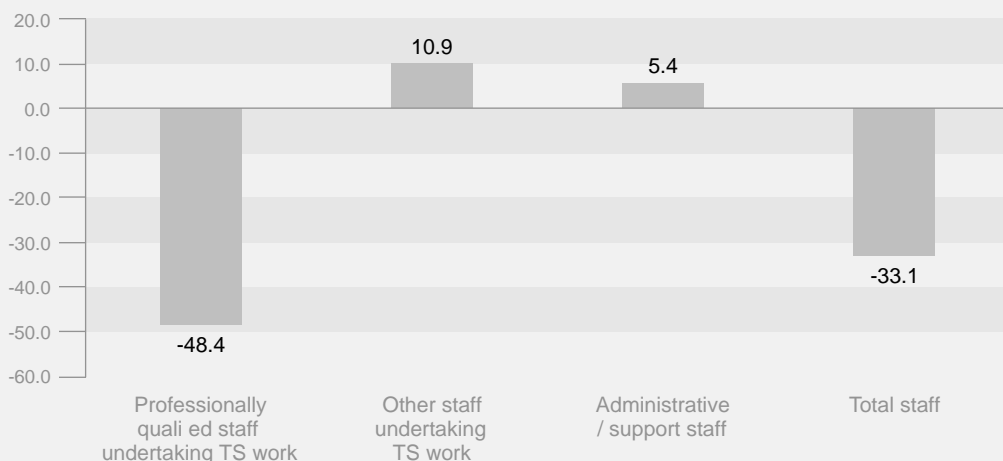
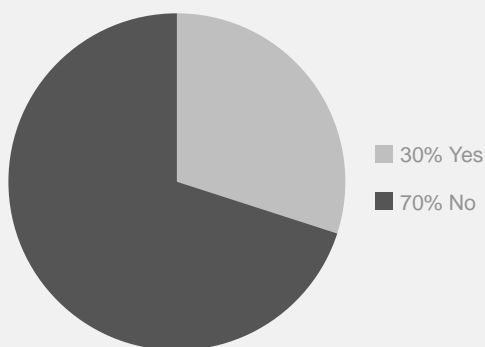


Figure 6:
Change in staffing levels
2016 to 2017



To put this fall into context, figure 7 shows that only 30% of respondents felt their staff have the expertise to cover trading standards legislation effectively. This comparison indicates the continuing disconnect between the expectations of the law and the ability of local authorities to maintain skills to reflect this.

Figure 7: Do you have the expertise to cover comprehensively the 263 statutory duties required of trading standards

Qualified staff

The survey indicated that there were a total of 1,054 qualified staff across 111 authorities in England, Scotland and Wales. This was slightly up from last year, though this can be explained by the different authorities that responded to this year's survey.

The average number of professionally qualified staff per service in the UK is 9.6 oficers, with the average total staff in each service being 14.6.

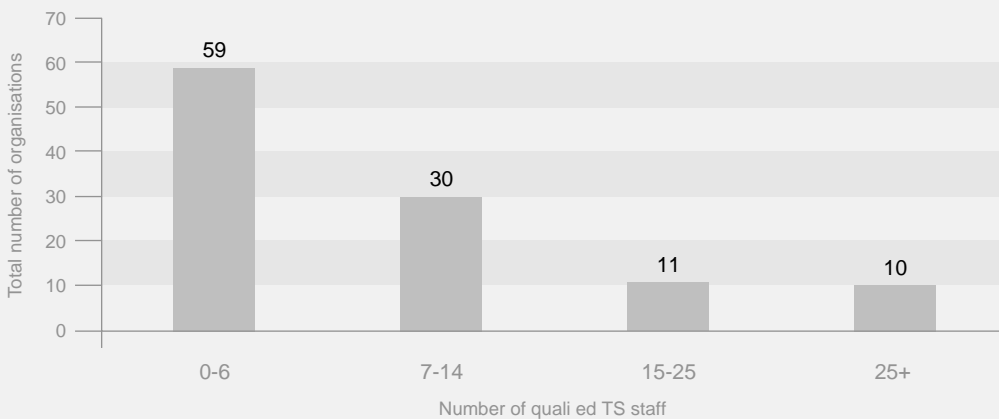


Figure 8: Qualified trading standards staff by organisation

48% of services have six members of staff or less, with 10 reporting they have two full-time officers or less. For the first time there was a service that reported it has zero qualified trading standards officers.

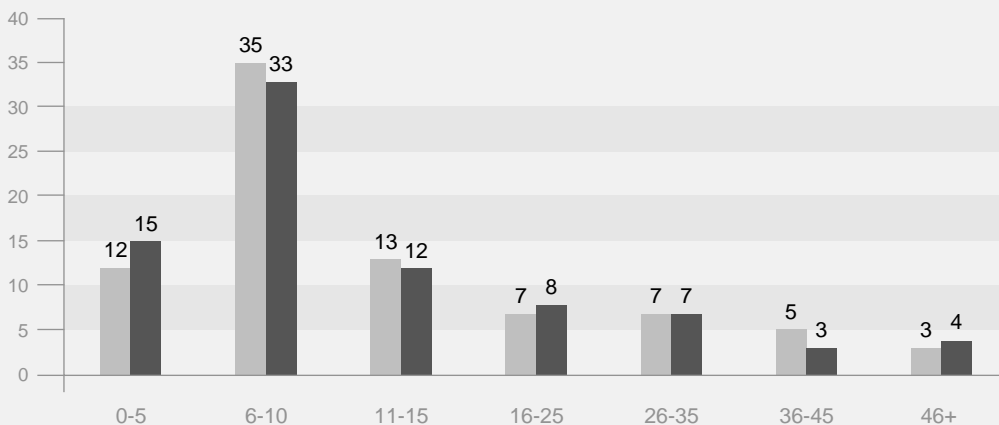


Figure 9: Total staff by organisation 2016 to 2017

The total staff (qualified, admin and unqualified) continues to show a large number of services with 10 total staff or less.

Due to the complexity of the work of trading standards, and the varying priorities between services, CTSI has avoided stating a minimum number of staff that are required to protect consumers. However, the Audit Scotland report Made to Measure, which cited that small services with fewer than eight fully trained staff are increasingly unable to provide adequate protection⁷, is a useful indication. This data (figures 8 and 9) shows that the vast majority of services who responded are either below or close to this line in both qualified staff and total staff.

Skills

Respondents were asked whether their staff had skills in a number of core trading standards areas. This is a question we have asked in each survey with limited significant changes in each sample.

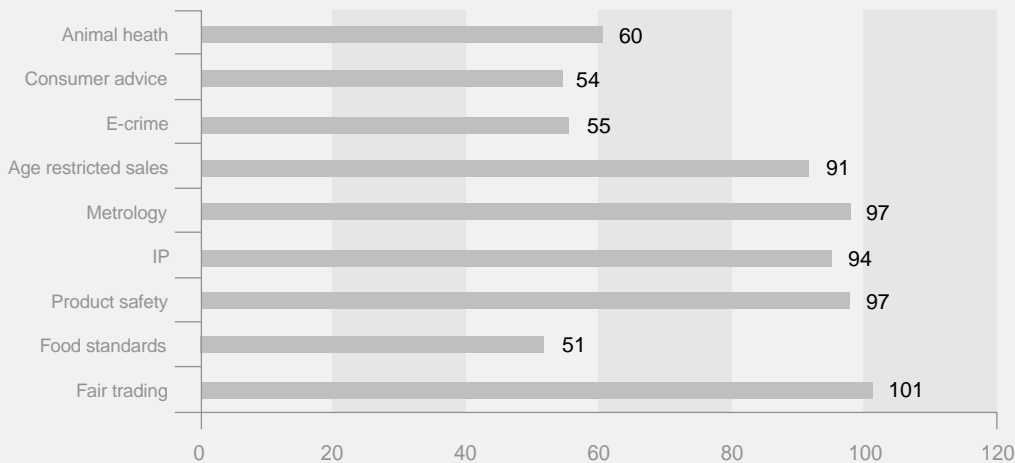


Figure 10: Specialist skills within the TS team

To become a qualified trading standards officer, an individual will have studied the majority of these competences. Thus, considering this, a service with even one qualified officer could claim they have expertise. The survey asked questions that looked at whether heads of service believed that they could apply these skills.

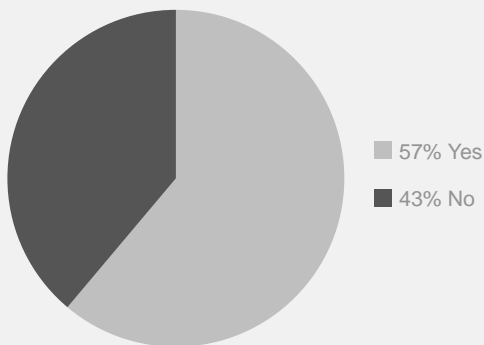


Figure 11: Do you have the expertise to deal with all the issues that impact on consumers in your local area?

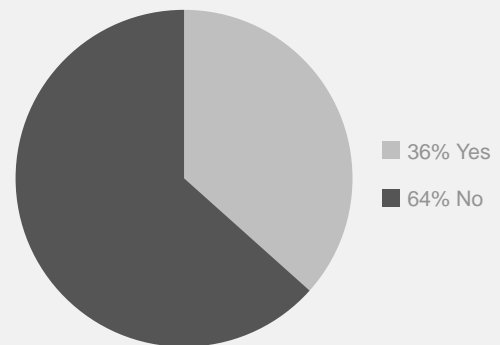


Figure 12: Do you have the ability to recruit/retain expertise to reflect local/regional/national detriment

Figures 11 and 12 both show that while they may report having the expertise there are doubts over application. That only just over 50% of services think they have the skills to protect consumers in their area is a troubling statistic in itself. Paired with the concern expressed that services cannot recruit/retain expertise – along with the evidence shown elsewhere in this survey – this indicates that cutbacks are having detrimental effects on the sustainability of some services, ultimately to the detriment of consumers.

Understanding prioritisation

Respondents were asked whether their staff had skills in a number of core trading standards areas. This is a question we have asked in each survey with limited significant changes in each sample.

‘The governance, accountability, and incentives [of trading standards] should be aligned with the delivery of outcomes at the appropriate level in line with the risks identified’.⁸

NAO Recommendation C

Priority issues

Each trading standards service will have their own locally set priorities. Due to the open nature of this question we had to group several similar responses (‘Other’ is priorities with only one response).

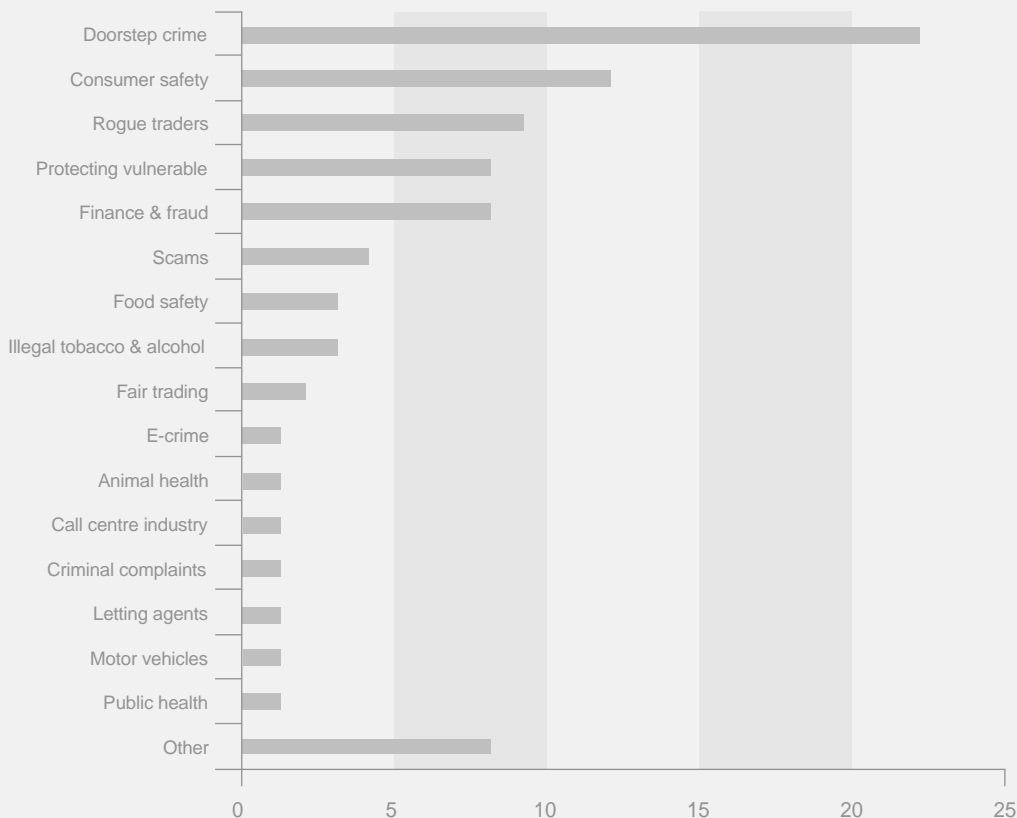


Figure 13:
Top formal priority issues

What figure 13 shows is that priorities tend to align with place-based issues such as doorstep crime, whereas issues with less localised detriment, such as fair trading or e-crime, are lower in these priorities.

Local, regional, or national issues

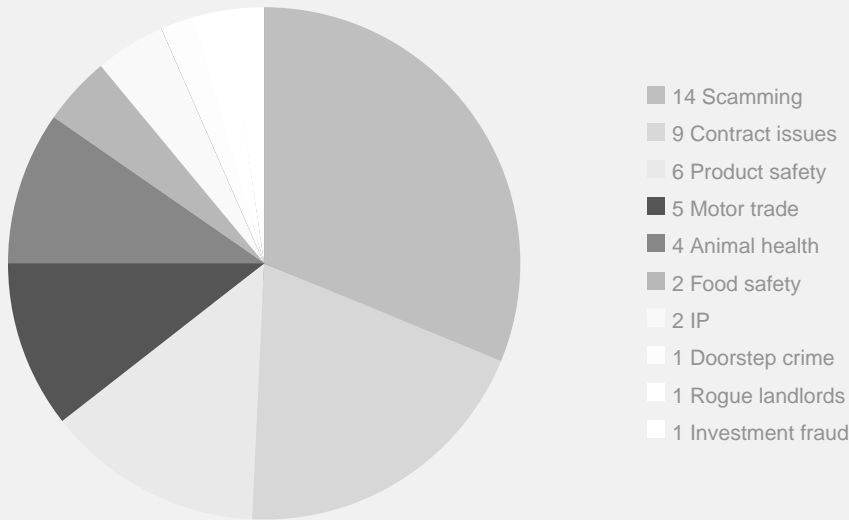


Figure 14 – 15 respondents: Issues considered to be local only

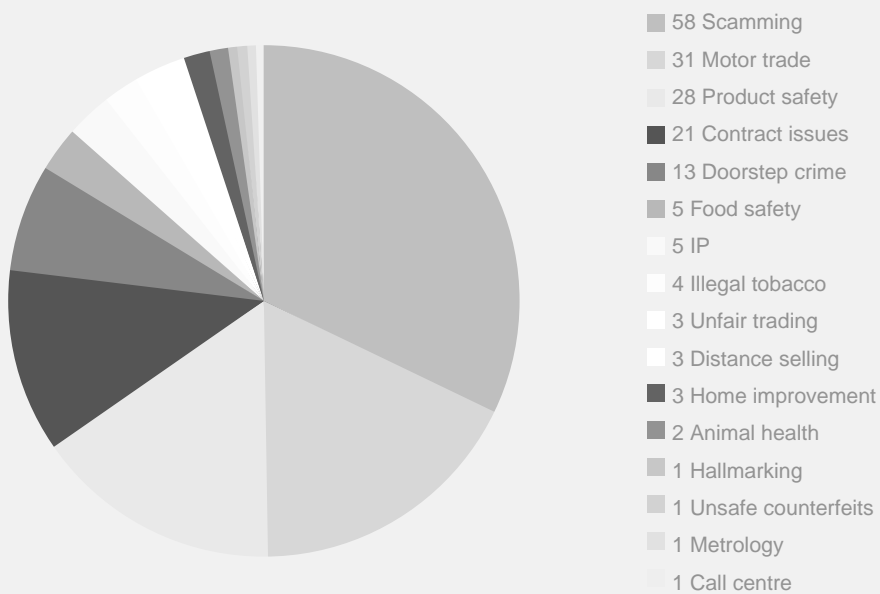


Figure 15 – 64 respondents: Issues considered to be national

The inconclusive nature of the data recovered by these questions highlights that there is little consistent understanding between trading standards services on where an issue has its greatest impact, and thus where enforcement is best placed.

Service arrangements

The survey asked whether the local head of trading standards also managed another department or service. 49% of respondents confirmed that they, as a head of trading standards, also have responsibility for other services.

Many of these departments are named similarly. 'Regulatory services' continued to be a common department title as it did in the 2016 survey. 'Environmental health and Trading standards' or 'Trading Standards and Licencing' were also common titles.

The survey showed the breadth of responsibilities that different departments have. Fire and rescue, environmental health, licencing, domestic abuse services, dog warden service, and coroner service are all examples cited.

Formal shared-service arrangements

The survey asked whether councils were looking to formally combine their trading standards services.

In 2015, CTSI published a vision for the future of trading standards,⁹ which advocated services moving into larger units to make them sustainable as well as reflect larger issues. While there is disagreement on the route to this, the LGA similarly agree that: 'Services managed at scale offer the most sustainable future for local trading standards services'.¹⁰



The data in our survey continues to show that, despite a wide acceptance of the challenges facing lone council services, there remains a large majority of services that are not looking to combine their services – 73% who are not planning on combining or who have looked at this option and decided against it.

Figure 16

Management structures

We asked which tier of management the head of service was at, where 1 is CEO.

The majority of heads of service remain at either a level 4 or 5 within their council hierarchy, indicating that the fall in seniority seen between the 2014 and 2016 workforce surveys has stabilised. However, this continues to show that the influence of trading standards services has diminished.

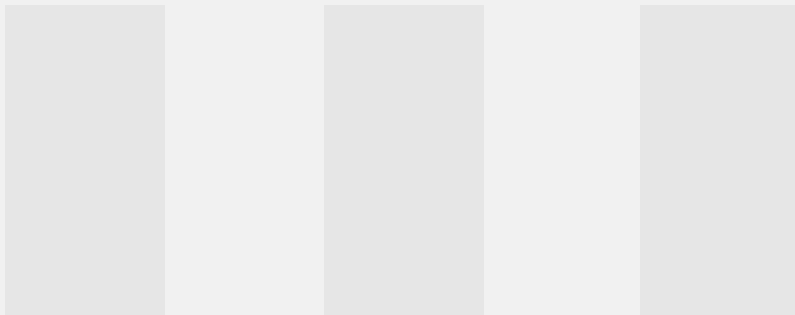


Figure 17:
Tier of management the head
of service sits at

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