

CELEBRATE AND ELEVATE

One of the most important things we can do within the pay professions is to recognise and celebrate our successes, as roles within pay can be demanding at times. You're responsible for the highly sensitive and essential task of ensuring workers receive the pay they're entitled to, while constantly adapting to change and navigating new challenges which continue to shape the way you work. With this in mind, this issue provides an opportunity to reflect on the achievements and successes of those working across the profession, while looking ahead to how we can continue to raise the profile of pay and demonstrate to those outside the industry just how valuable our profession, and the people within it, truly are. Read on to explore these ideas with our panel of experts.

This issue, Lora spoke to:

Gideon Kumi, Commercial Operations Manager, Jarvis

Minhaz Moosa MCIPP, Director, Intelligent Payroll Ltd

Curtis Sharpe MCIPP, Payroll and Human Resources (HR) Shared Services manager, ITM Power

Roxanne Slevin MCIPP, CIPP Policy and Research Officer.

Q: Looking back at your career in pay and reward, what achievement are you most proud of?

Minhaz Moosa: I'm proud of what we've built at Intelligent Payroll. We started in 2018 with one client and now process more than £81 million in wages a year. But the achievement I'm most proud of isn't the revenue. It's that, for eight years, we've never lost sight of the fact that every payroll represents real people relying on us to be paid correctly and on time. Some of the moments I'm proudest of are when we've taken on a payroll and found something that had been missed. In one case, we inherited a client where all 16 employees had been duplicated onto the wrong pay as you earn scheme previously, and a taxable benefit had also previously been overlooked. We had to unpick it, reconcile everything with HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and deal with the impact on employees, some of whom had received debt letters. That's what payroll means to me. Getting the calculation right is only part of the job. Sometimes the real value is finding a problem and taking responsibility for fixing it.

Roxanne Slevin: One of my proudest moments so far came quite recently, when I had the opportunity to write the CIPP's consultation response to 'Ending one-sided flexibility: reforms of zero hours and similar contracts.' (See here to view: https://ow.ly/V1QH50ZQVOw.)

Having only joined the CIPP as a member of staff at the end of March 2026, it feels surreal that I've been trusted with such an important piece of work so early on. In what's been a relatively short time, I've learned an incredible amount, met some truly inspiring people and, most importantly, seen how I can make a meaningful contribution in my role as Policy and Research Officer.

One of the things I enjoy most about my role is connecting with CIPP members and gaining insight into what's happening in the world of pay. Our members generously give their time to complete surveys, share their experiences and take part in thought-provoking discussions through our Think Tanks. Representing the pay profession is one of the CIPP's core values, and I feel incredibly fortunate to play a part in that. Being able to support a profession that impacts millions of people is such a privilege.

Q: Looking more broadly, what achievement by the pay professions in recent years do you think deserves far more

recognition than it has received?

Gideon Kumi: I think pay professionals deserve far more recognition for the complexity they quietly absorb on behalf of businesses and employees. There's so much happening behind a payslip that most people never think about. Tax, National Insurance (NI), pensions, salary sacrifice, statutory payments and changing legislation all come together accurately and on time. What stands out for me from working with pay teams is the level of responsibility they carry. A mistake can have a huge impact on someone's life, while getting everything right is simply treated as the expectation.

MM: The work pay professionals did to deliver the coronavirus job retention scheme (CJRS) deserves far more recognition. When furlough was announced, pay teams were handed new legislation and constantly changing guidance, and had to turn it into something that worked, often within days. There was no tried-and-tested process waiting to be used. Software had to catch up, employers needed answers and employees were understandably worried about being paid. I was processing around 200 furlough claims a month myself during that period, but that was happening right across the profession. Bureaus and in-house teams worked under enormous pressure to ensure people received the support they were entitled to. When people look back at the pandemic, they remember the announcements and the headline figures. They don't necessarily think about the pay professionals who turned those announcements into accurate payments to millions of people. That was a significant achievement, and I don't think the profession was ever properly thanked for it.

RS: The resilience, adaptability and professionalism demonstrated by pay professionals over recent years. During that time, the industry has navigated an extraordinary amount of change, including annual adjustments to the national minimum wage and national living wage, increases to employer NI rates, changing statutory thresholds, the cost-of-living crisis, Covid-19 and the CJRS, huge changes to statutory sick pay, mandatory tax adviser registration and the ongoing implementation of the Employment Rights Act 2025.

All of this has taken place alongside increasing compliance obligations and heightened scrutiny. And the establishment of the Fair Work Agency has further strengthened enforcement, placing even greater responsibility on pay teams to ensure accuracy and compliance.

Yet, despite these challenges, employees have continued to be paid accurately and on time, often without them ever realising the complexity and expertise going on behind the scenes. This has led to the growing influence of the profession. Pay professionals are increasingly sharing operational expertise with key stakeholders, who work alongside policymakers to shape legislation, guidance and policy discussions.

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Q: What's the biggest misconception people have about payroll and pay professionals, and how can we change that perception?

GK: That payroll is just another administrative function which calculates what somebody should be paid. In reality, payroll sits at the centre of finance, HR, pensions, compliance and technology. The people working within it have an enormous amount of specialist knowledge and responsibility, yet I don't think we always recognise them in that way.

For me, elevating payroll starts with changing that perception. We should be backing pay professionals as experts, giving them a stronger voice and recognising the value of the knowledge they already have. Too often, technology, benefits or operational processes are designed elsewhere, and payroll is brought in at the end to make everything work in practice. I'd like to see that reversed. These are the people closest to many of the problems we're trying to solve. Give them the platform, involve them earlier and trust their expertise. There's so much more pay professionals could influence.

MM: The biggest misconception is that payroll is basically data entry. You put the numbers in, press a button and the software does the rest. It really isn't like that.

Payroll deals with tax, employment law, pensions, NI and compliance, and there's a human side that's easily overlooked. If payroll gets something wrong, it isn't just a number on a spreadsheet. Someone might not be able to pay their rent, or they might suddenly face a tax problem they weren't expecting. A good pay professional is constantly interpreting changes, questioning information, spotting inconsistencies and making judgment calls about how something should be treated.

We change this perception by talking more openly about that expertise. If we keep describing ourselves as the people who 'just run payroll', that's how others will see us. We should be comfortable saying that we advise, challenge and prevent problems. That isn't administrative work. That's professional judgment.

Curtis Sharpe: The biggest misconception about pay professionals, and one that frustrates many of us, is that our role is simply pressing a button and paying employees once a month. Payroll actually touches every stage of the employee life cycle. From pay, benefits, pensions and share plans to international mobility, technology and analytics, much of the work happens long before a payslip is produced. We spend significant time validating data, managing risk, interpreting legislation, analysing trends and collaborating with internal and external partners to ensure employees are paid accurately and the organisation remains compliant.

To change this perception, we need to showcase the value we bring and make valuable noise. Payroll leaders should build relationships with senior leadership teams, contribute to strategic discussions and demonstrate how payroll insights support business decisions. Modern pay professionals are no longer just processors of pay data. We're compliance experts, risk managers, transformation leaders, technology specialists and trusted advisers.

An early manager once told me, "Payroll should remain quiet and unknown." Although I understood the sentiment, that was the moment I realised I saw the profession differently. If payroll remains invisible, so does its value. The future of payroll isn't simply processing pay, it's helping shape business strategy and organisational success.

RS: That payroll is easy. It's just a push of a button, and voilà, people get paid. Nope! Pay professionals are heroes, but most people will only see the output, or specifically, the writing on their payslip and the money in their bank account. Many people are completely unaware of the expertise behind it. But the pay profession is essential, it's highly technical and deeply impactful. Just misunderstood.

We can change that perception by positioning payroll as a people-first profession; to shift people's thinking away from the administrative work and focus on the impact

payroll has on people's lives. The function allows people to pay their rent, childcare fees, and mortgages, and enables them to go on summer holidays. The more we advocate for our profession, the more visibility we have. And hopefully with that, a much better understanding of the importance of the roles we perform.

Q: What development or change do you think will have the biggest impact on payroll over the next five to ten years?

GK: The obvious one is, of course, artificial intelligence (AI) and automation. But I think equally important will be better connectivity between payroll and the wider ecosystem around it. There are still too many processes where information can get lost as it moves between payroll, pension providers, HR systems and other platforms through files, portals and manual intervention. I think we'll increasingly see these systems communicate directly through application programming interfaces or 'APIs', with much of the administration and reconciliation happening automatically.

That doesn't make pay professionals less important. It does the opposite. Their value will increasingly come from their judgment, knowledge of the underlying rules, ability to interpret data and influence over how these systems are designed.

MM: AI will have a significant impact, but probably not in the way people initially imagine. I don't think it will remove the need for pay professionals, but it will change what we spend our time doing. There's a lot of repetitive work in payroll: answering the same questions, checking information, identifying anomalies, routine calculations. If technology takes more of that away, it frees professionals to focus on things that require experience and judgment. But there's a big responsibility that comes with it. Payroll holds extremely sensitive personal information, so adopting AI simply because it's available would be a mistake. We need proper controls around data, reliable sources and human oversight.

The other major change is the continued move towards real-time reporting and away from traditional year-end processes, with benefits in kind providing a good example of the direction of travel. Ultimately, the profession is becoming less about processing information and more about interpreting it. That's a real opportunity, but it means we must keep developing our technical knowledge rather than assuming the software will always decide for us.

CS: In my view, the pay professions will experience more change in the next decade than they have in the last 20 years. Advances in automation, digital agents and increasing pressure to reduce operating costs will fundamentally reshape how payroll services are delivered. Much of the transactional work we perform today will become automated or outsourced. That raises an interesting question: will the traditional payroll roles still exist in their current form, or will they evolve into something very different?

Pay professionals have an opportunity to shape that future, right now. The next generation of payroll leaders will need to be far more than technical payroll experts. We'll be expected to understand workforce data, reward, benefits, technology and business strategy. In many ways, we'll need to become part payroll professional, part data scientist and part technology designer. And we'll need to strategically evolve to make that happen.

RS: AI will have the biggest impact on payroll over the next few years. Having attended several payroll events in the past six months, I've seen just a glimpse of what's to come, and it's exciting. AI has the potential to transform payroll operations by automating routine tasks, streamlining processes and identifying anomalies before they become issues. It can also support employees by facilitating annual leave requests, answering payslip queries and directing people to additional information and resources when they need it.

AI presents both opportunities and challenges. While the benefits are clear, organisations will also need to navigate emerging risks, particularly around data security, governance and increasingly complex cyber threats. The pace of change means it can be difficult to predict exactly where the technology will take us. We're also seeing this reflected at Government level. HMRC is exploring how AI can improve access to guidance and help identify risks within the tax system, while recent announcements have highlighted intentions of implementing AI action plans to simplify customer interactions, increase productivity and support revenue collection for our public services.

Q: What opportunities does payroll have to become a more influential and strategic profession over the next decade, and what can pay professionals do to seize them?

GK: Data provides one of the biggest opportunities. It's often said that data is the new oil, and the rise of AI in an increasingly digital world is only accelerating its importance.

Payroll has one of the most valuable pictures of an organisation and its workforce. As technology removes more of the administrative burden, there's an opportunity for pay professionals to spend more time interpreting that information and contributing to wider conversations around workforce strategy, benefits and employee financial wellbeing.

Pay professionals should also have a stronger voice in how products and processes are designed. They understand where things break because they deal with the consequences every day. That's how payroll becomes more influential: not simply by processing what the business has already decided, but using its knowledge, data and experience to help shape those decisions.

MM: Payroll has a real opportunity, because we sit on a combination of information very few other functions have. We know what employees are paid, what that costs the business, where changes are happening and where compliance or operational risks may be emerging. And we see it every pay period.

Pay professionals have sometimes been too modest about the value of that knowledge. We shouldn't wait to be invited into the strategic conversation. This doesn't mean that every pay professional needs to become a business strategist. It means understanding the business you work for and being able to explain the consequences of payroll decisions in business terms. If an employer changes its reward structure, introduces a benefit, expands overseas or changes its workforce model, payroll needs to be in that conversation early, not brought in at the end to process the outcome. The profession already has the expertise. The next step is placing ourselves into those conversations rather than waiting to be asked and having the confidence to challenge when something doesn't look right.



Lora Murphy MCIPPdip

CIPP
Content Editor