

# **Liverpool Hope University**

## **Stress and Wellbeing Survey Report**

### **Executive Summary**

This report provides information from the Stress and Wellbeing Survey conducted during October 2023, investigating perceptions of work and wellbeing across Liverpool Hope University. The survey was sent to core University staff with responses from 240 staff participants (34% of core staff) made up of 51% academic staff and 48.9% professional services staff. 50.4% of participants were female, 34.7% were male, 14.4% preferred not to say and 0.4% preferred to self-describe.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Stress Indicator Tool (SIT) was developed to measure attitudes and perceptions of staff about aspects of work that are known to be associated with work-related stress. The SIT is part of the HSE Stress Management Standards risk assessment approach used by the University to help manage the causes of stress at work. Survey data across all industries can be found in the 2023 SIT benchmarking report (HSE, 2023a). The survey included a measure of mental health; the PHQ-4 is a brief mental health screening tool that will help to understand current levels of mental health and/or distress, enabling the University to focus on priority areas and make targeted improvements.

The scoring system used in the SIT survey is based on a complex 5-point scale as some scales and items are reverse-scored for psychometric reasons. Results have been collated into three categories: favourable, neutral and unfavourable responses, shown as percentages of participants. The neutral category contains responses that scored 3, where response options were either 'sometimes' or 'neutral'. Favourable and unfavourable categories combine the two responses at either side of the scale. For example, for the item 'I can decide when to take a break', the responses 'Often' and 'Always' are combined to produce the percentage of participants providing a favourable response, whilst responses 'Never' and 'Seldom' are combined to produce the percentage of participants providing an unfavourable response. The Relationships scores are presented as response categories rather than favourable/unfavourable. This is because if participants answer 'sometimes' to questions in this domain, it could indicate the presence of bullying or harassment, and any report of such behaviours should be considered serious by the University. Scores are presented so that a high score indicates healthy work characteristics, and a low score indicates less healthy work characteristics. A low score indicates that improvement is needed to protect the health and wellbeing of staff at the University.

## **HSE's Management Standards**

The Management Standards cover six key areas of work design that, if not properly managed, are associated with poor health, lower productivity and increased sickness absence rates. It is good organisational practice to use each standard as part of a risk assessment approach to managing stress and wellbeing at work.

**Demands** - this includes issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment. Good performance in this area is likely to have achievable deadlines, adequate demands in relation to hours of work and systems in place to respond to individual concerns.

**Control** - this refers to how much say staff have in the way they do their work. Good performance in this area is likely to encourage autonomy and initiative, with clear systems for University staff to influence their own work and work patterns.

**Support** - this includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the University, line managers and colleagues, and can be separated into two sub-domain scores for 'Management Support' and 'Peer Support'. Good performance in this area is likely to have clear systems that enable and encourage managers to support their staff and provide regular and constructive feedback. They are also likely to have helpful and compassionate teams, with systems facilitating respect and providing peer support.

**Relationships** - this includes promoting a positive work environment to avoid conflict and unacceptable behaviour. Good performance in this area is likely to promote positive working and effectively deal with conflict, bullying and unacceptable behaviour.

**Role** - whether people understand their role within the University and whether it is ensured that staff do not have conflicting roles. Good performance in this area is likely to promote clear duties, goals and responsibilities and have systems in place to address role conflict.

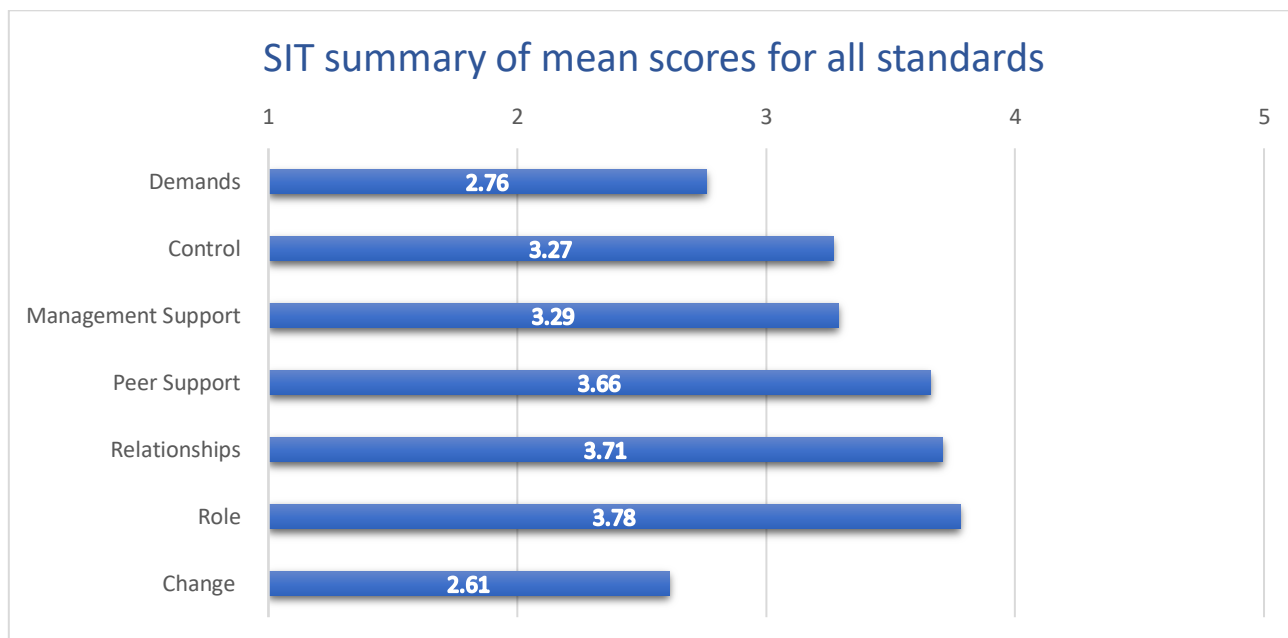
**Change** - how change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the University. Good performance in this area is likely to have effective change management systems ensuring change is appropriately consulted, thoughtfully implemented and well-communicated.

## **Main Findings**

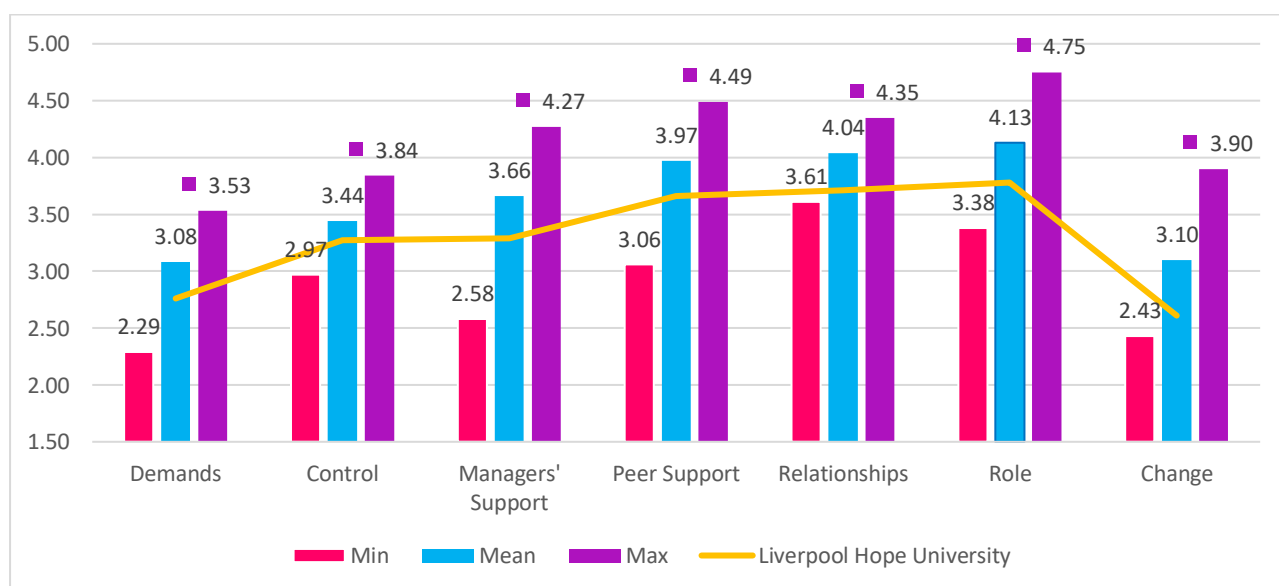
Benchmark comparison is provided against organisations using the SIT survey in 2023. Sector comparison used in this report is against 'all industries' and the 'education sector'. The education comparison group consists of fifteen assessments across nine Higher Education Universities and six schools or academy trusts. To enable a whole University approach, information presented in this report is inclusive of all University roles and demographics together.

The following charts show Liverpool Hope University's mean scores for each of the six domains covered by the Management Standards. The six areas are reported as seven factors because 'Support' is broken down into two factors: Management Support and Peer Support. The scores range from 1 (poor) to 5 (desirable).

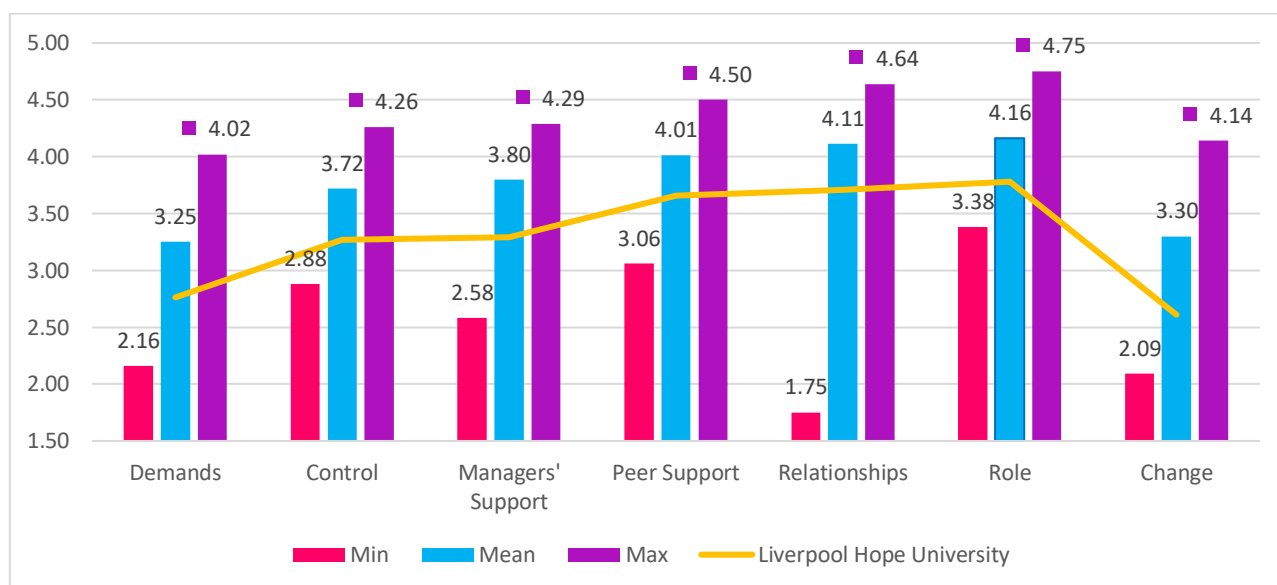
**Chart 1 – Liverpool Hope University mean scores across HSE's Management Standards - all staff**



**Chart 2 - Liverpool Hope University compared against the 'education' comparison group of 3481 participants and 15 assessments.**



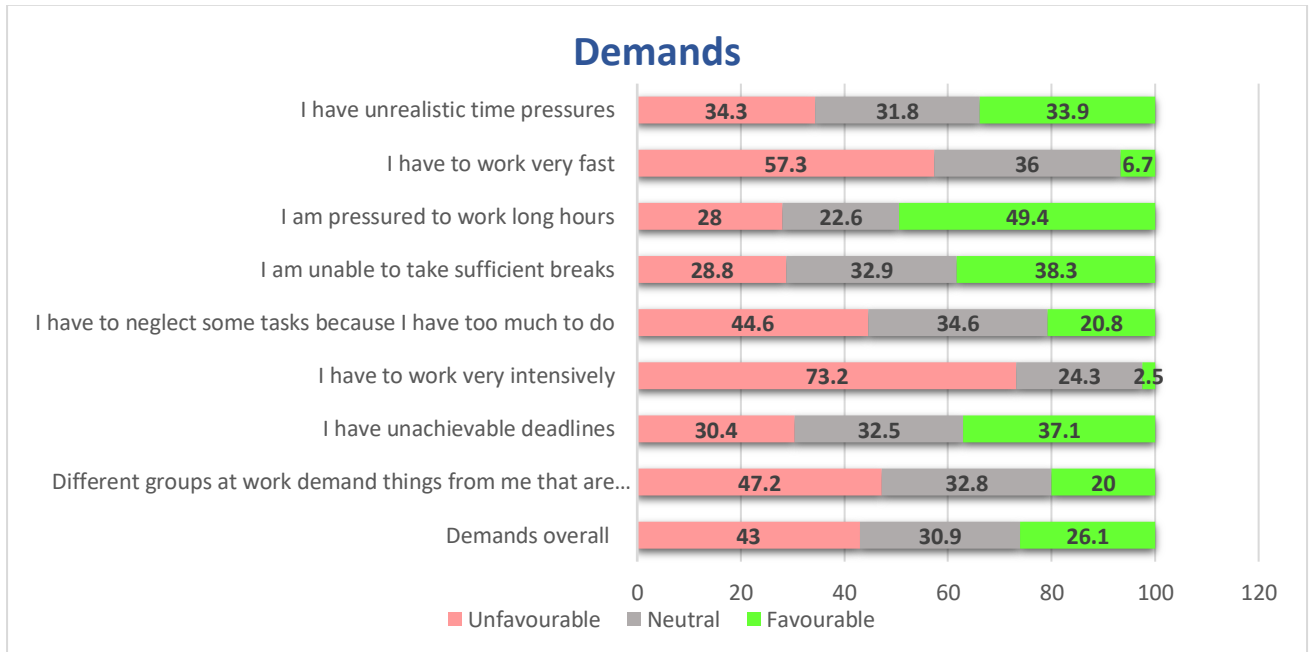
**Chart 3 – Liverpool Hope University mean scores compared against ‘all industry’ comparison of 39,484 participants and 124 assessments.**



Charts 2 and 3 show that Liverpool Hope University was below the mean score for all standards compared against the education group and all industries. A 2021 study of 2,046 participants by 'Education Support' and made up of 85.9% academic and 14.1% support staff, provides direct Higher Education benchmark data in 2021 against HSE's Management Standards (Wray and Kinman, 2021). In comparison with this study, the University was slightly above the mean in four standards, taking academic and professional services results together and three standards with academic results only. 79% of participants in the Education Support study identified as needing to work very intensively with 52% subject to unrealistic time pressures at work and 53% identifying with signs of depression. It should be noted that this survey was conducted during an extraordinary period of global pandemic, likely impacting on perceptions and as a result, the 'change' domain was not assessed.

## 1. Demands

The demands factor is made up of a number of statements that explore issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment. The findings are presented below in **chart 4**:



The University's mean score for demands is **2.76** in comparison to the education group of **3.08**. The most favourable and unfavourable aspects of demands are shown below.



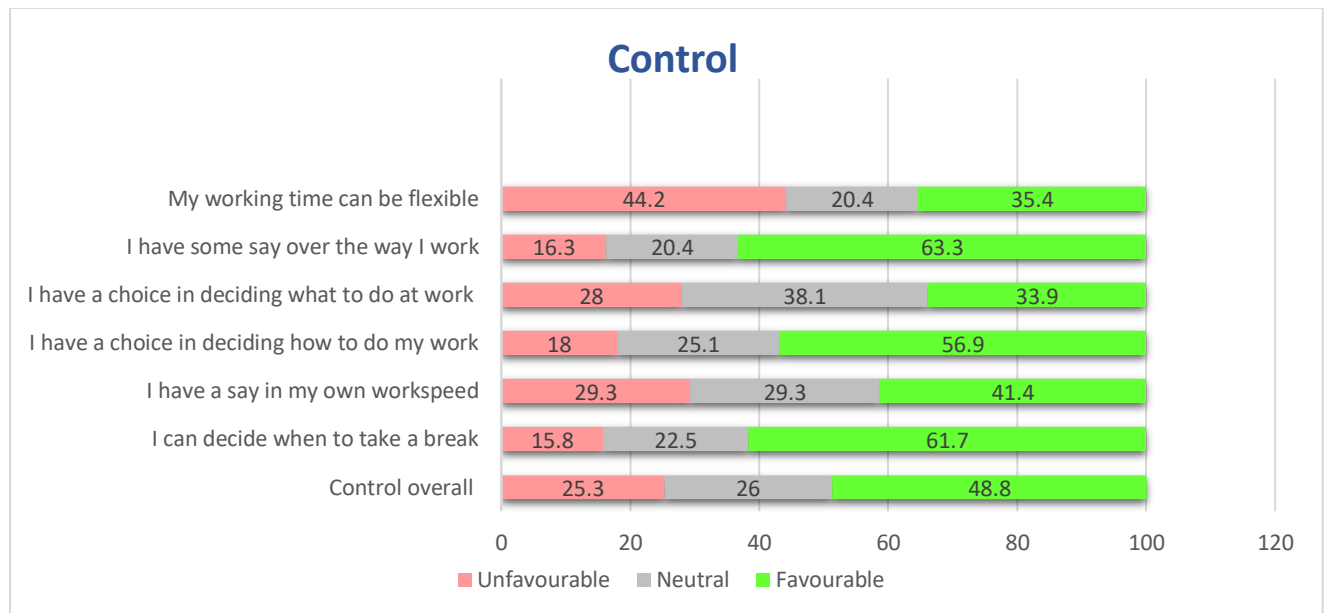
I am pressured to work long hours (49.4% favourable)



I have to work very intensively (73.2% unfavourable)

## 2. Control

The control factor is made up of a number of statements that explore how much say a person has in the way they do their work. The findings are presented below in **chart 5**:



The University's mean score for control is **3.27** in comparison to the education group of **3.44**. The most favourable and unfavourable aspects of control are shown below.



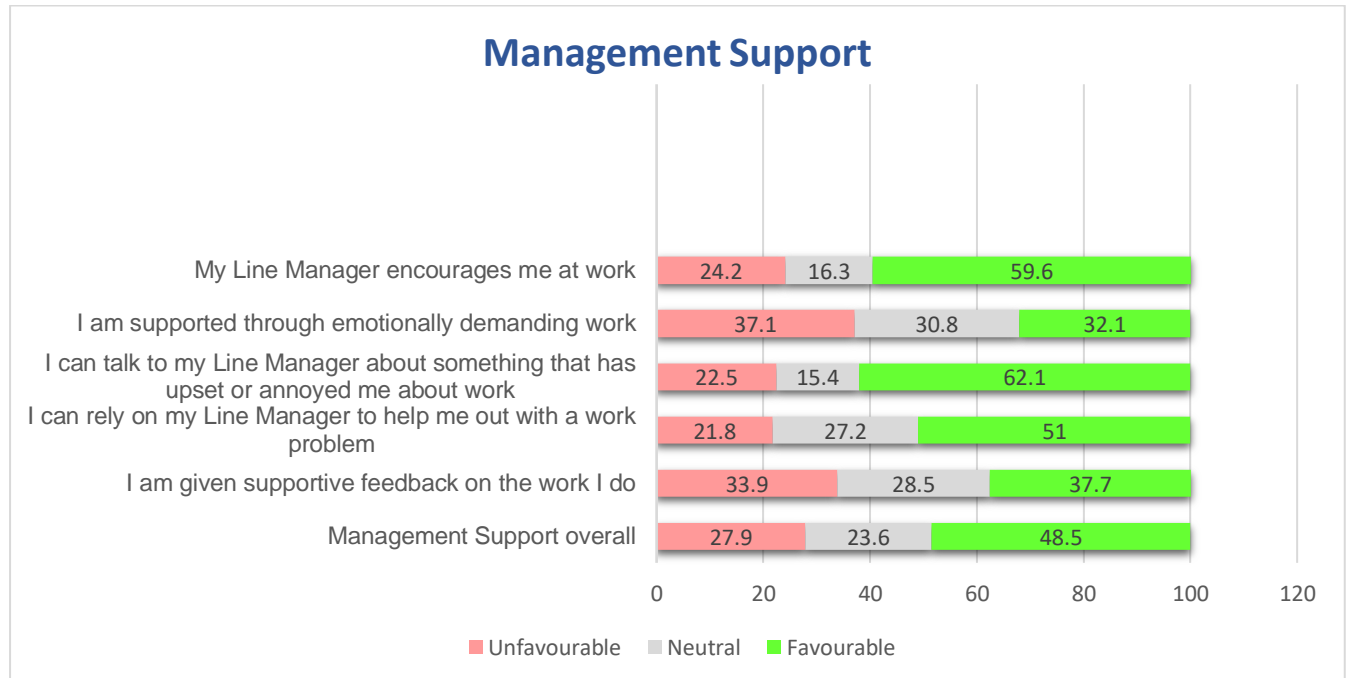
I have some say over the way I work (63.3% favourable)



My working time can be flexible (44.2% unfavourable)

### 3. Management Support

The management support factor is made up of a number of statements that explore the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the University and line management. The findings are presented below in **chart 6**.



The University's mean score for management support is **3.29** in comparison with the education group of **3.66**. The most favourable and unfavourable aspects of management support are shown below.



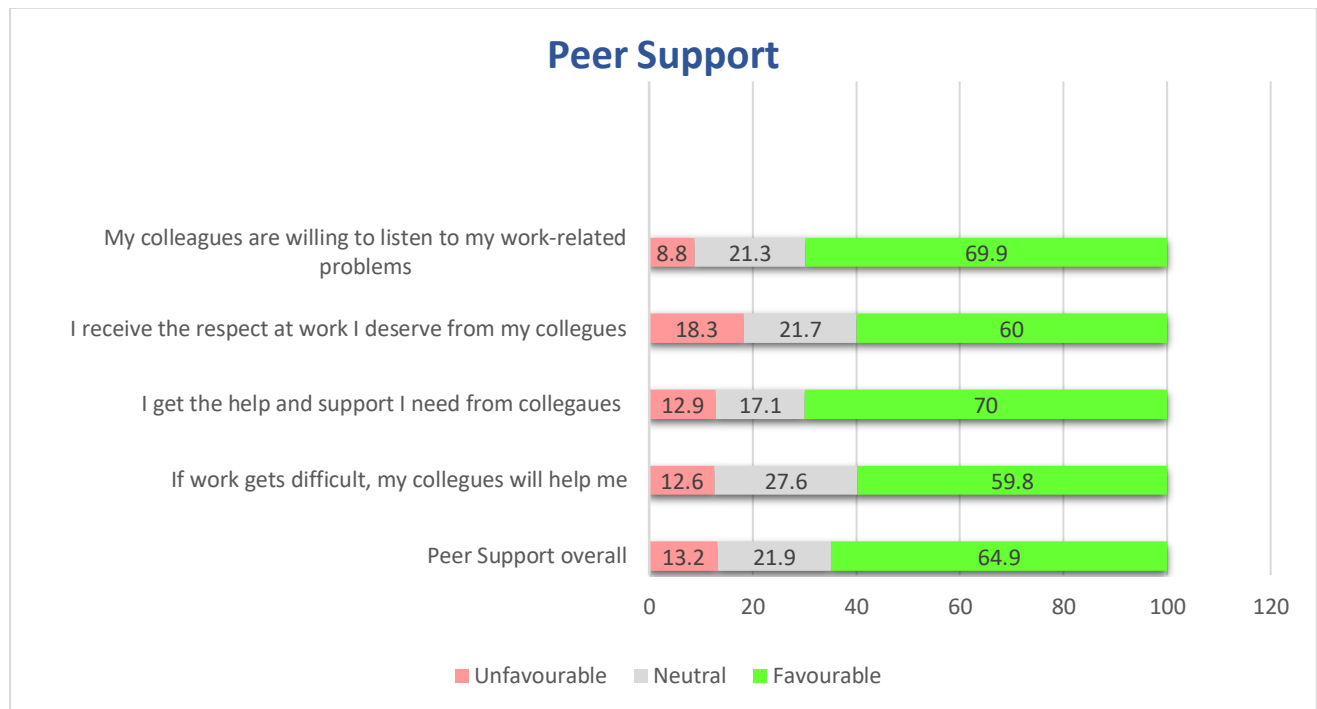
I can talk to my Line Manager about something that has upset or annoyed me about work (62.1% favourable)



I am supported through emotionally demanding work (37.1% unfavourable)

#### 4. Peer Support

The peer support factor is made up of a number of statements that explore the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by colleagues. The findings are presented below in **chart 7**.



The University's mean score for peer support is **3.66** in comparison to the education group of **3.97**. The most favourable and unfavourable aspects of peer support are shown below.



I get the help and support I need from colleagues  
(70.0% favourable)

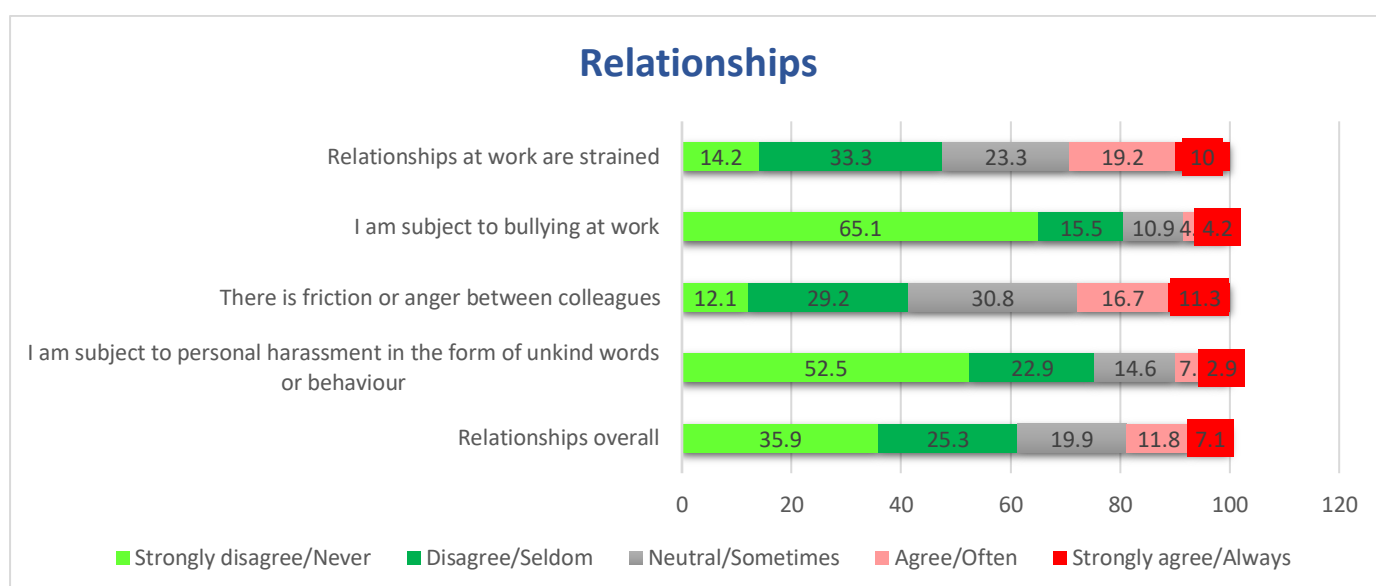


I receive the respect at work I deserve from my  
colleagues (18.3% unfavourable)

## 5. Relationships

The relationships factor is made up of a number of statements that explore and promote positive working to avoid conflict and manage unacceptable behaviour. The findings are presented below in **chart 8**.

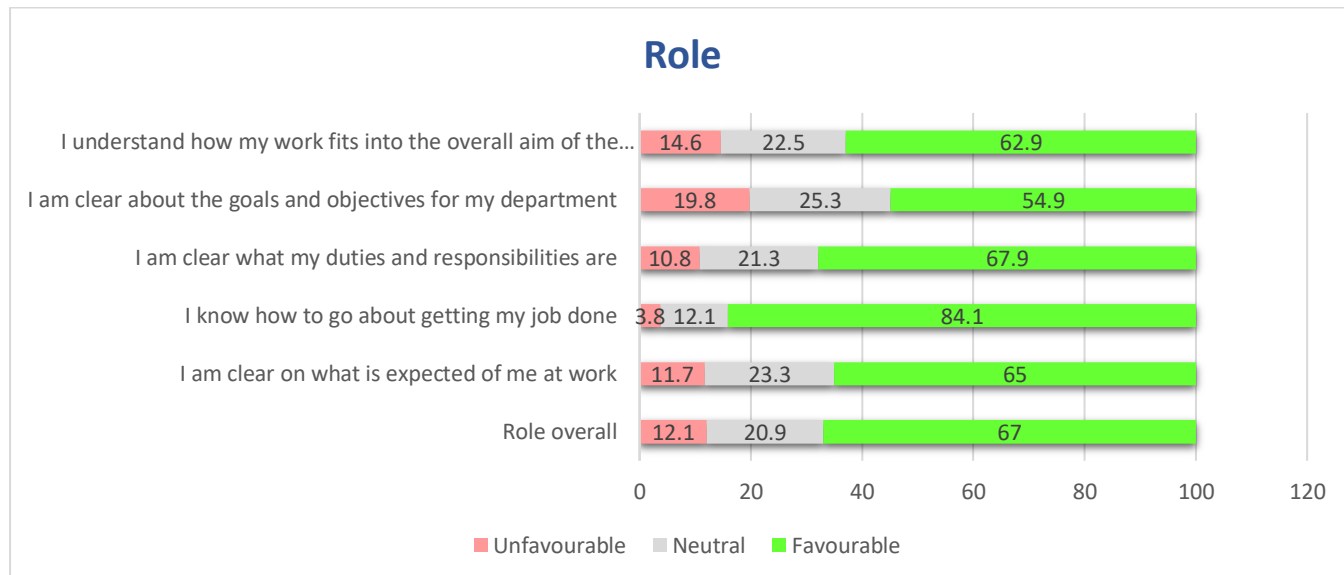
The coding approach adopted with the previous standards (Favourable / Neutral / Unfavourable) is adjusted here, to reflect HSE's view that any experience of bullying and harassment in the workplace is unacceptable, and therefore scoring other than strongly disagree/never is viewed as unfavourable and should be addressed. Below, the proportion of responses for each category are detailed to provide greater granularity of results.



The University's mean score for relationships is **3.71** in comparison to the education group of **4.04**. As this standard includes questions on bullying and harassment among staff, most favourable and unfavourable aspects have been omitted.

## 6. Role

The role factor is made up of a number of statements that explore whether people understand their role within the University and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles. The findings are presented below in **chart 9**.



The University's mean score for role is **3.78** in comparison to the education group of **4.13**. The most favourable and unfavourable aspects of role are shown below.



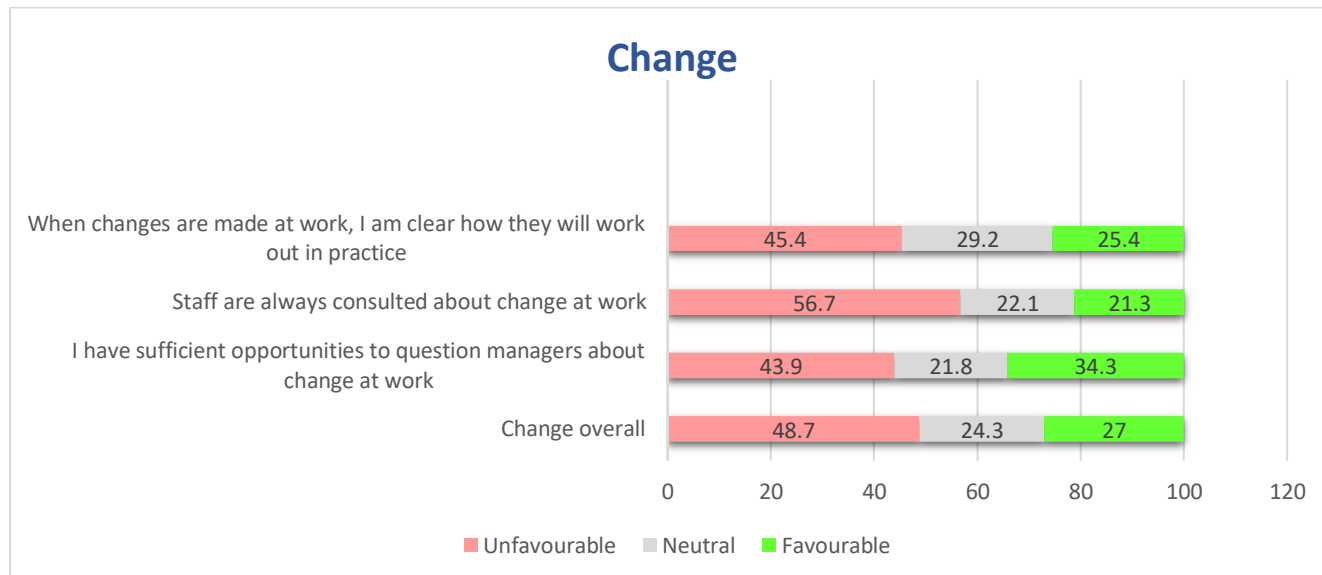
I know how to go about getting my job done  
(84.1% favourable)



I am clear about the goals and objectives for my  
department (19.8% unfavourable)

## 7. Change

The change factor is made up of a number of statements that explore how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the University. The findings are presented below in **chart 10**.



The University's mean score for change is **2.61** in comparison to the education group of **3.10**. The most favourable and unfavourable aspects of change are shown below.



I have sufficient opportunities to question managers about change at work (34.3% favourable)

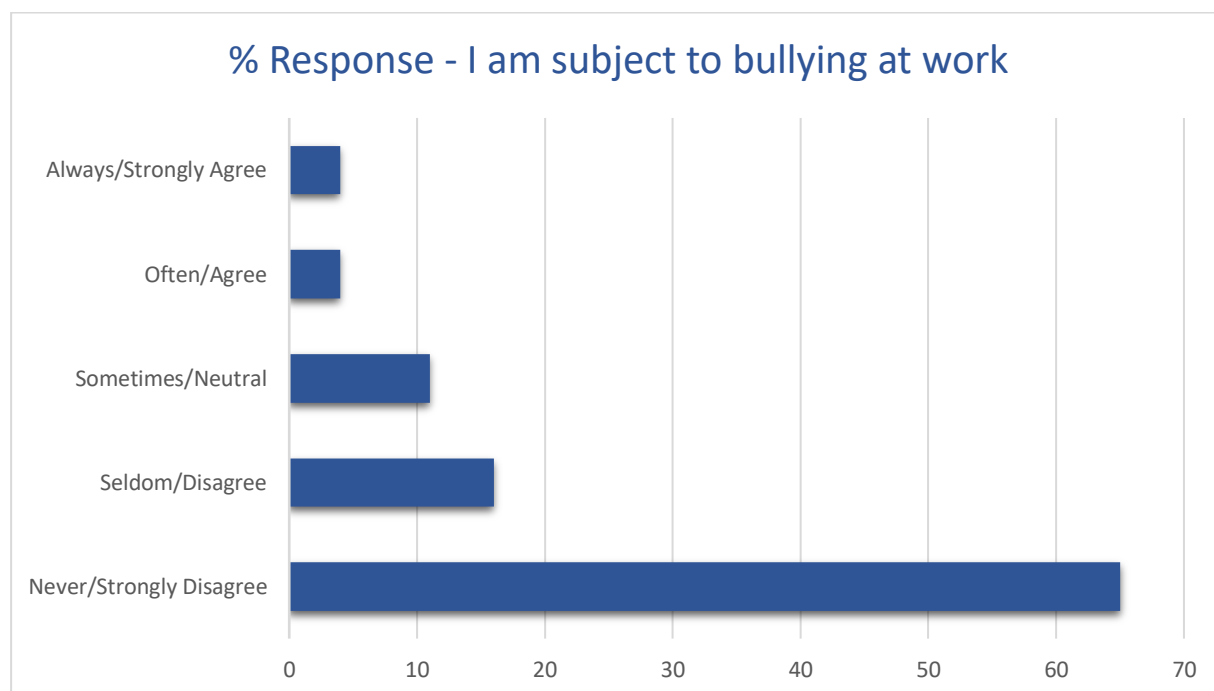


Staff are always consulted about change at work (56.7% unfavourable)

## Bullying and Harassment

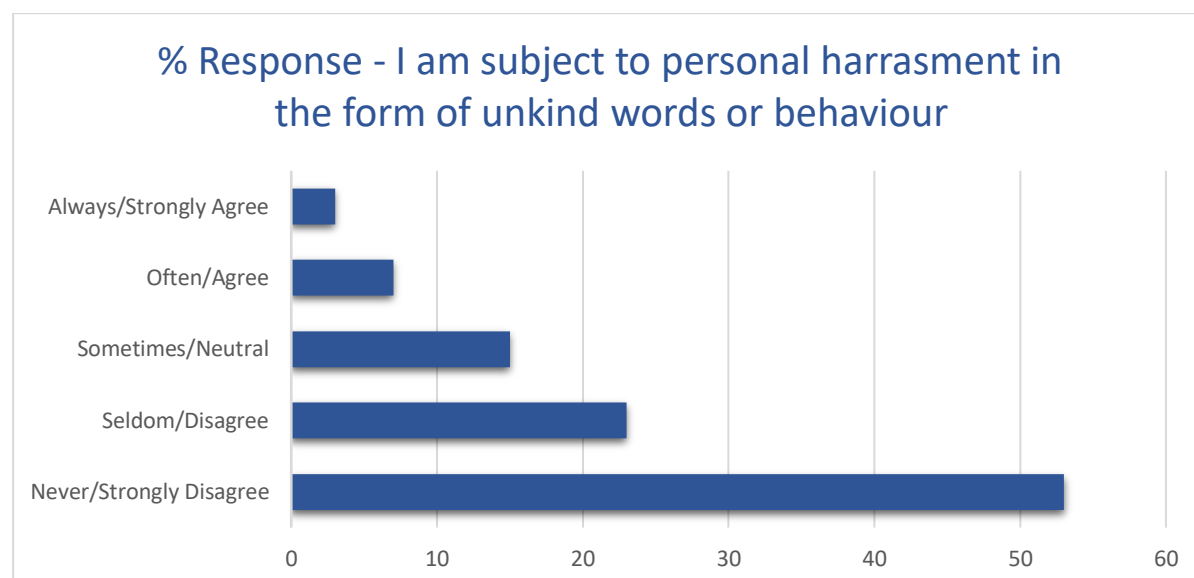
The relationships domain includes statements specifically addressing harassment or bullying in the workplace. Questions are negatively phrased so that a score of 5 (“Always/Strongly Agree”) would be very concerning, but any score of more than 1 (“Never/Strong disagree”) in this domain could also indicate issues where urgent action is required.

**Chart 11:** Responses to question ‘I am subject to bullying at work’.



- 4.2% - strongly agreed/always
- 4.2% - agree/often
- 10.9% - neutral/sometimes
- 15.5% - disagree/seldom
- 65.1% - strongly disagree/never

**Chart 12:** Responses to question 'I am subject to personal harassment in the form of unkind words or behaviour'.



- 2.9% - strongly agreed/always
- 7.1% - agree/often
- 14.6% - neutral/sometimes
- 22.9% - disagree/seldom
- 52.5% - strongly disagree/never

There is no direct HSE benchmark available for bullying and harassment at work beyond the overall 'relationships' domain with the University mean of **3.71** in comparison to the education group of **4.04**. While not current year and not Higher Education specific, a 2020 study of 2,211 participants by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) and in partnership with YouGov, provides further data related to bullying and harassment at work. 15% of participants identified as subject to bullying and 8% as subject to harassment at work. 35% of participants reported some form of workplace conflict (CIPD, 2020).

### Health outcomes report: Meaning and Interpretation

As part of the survey, 'Health Outcome' measures were included. This was in the form of a brief standardised mental health screening tool called the Patient Health Questionnaire-4 (PHQ-4). The tool consists of four items rated on a 4-point Likert scale; two items measure anxiety and two items measure depression.

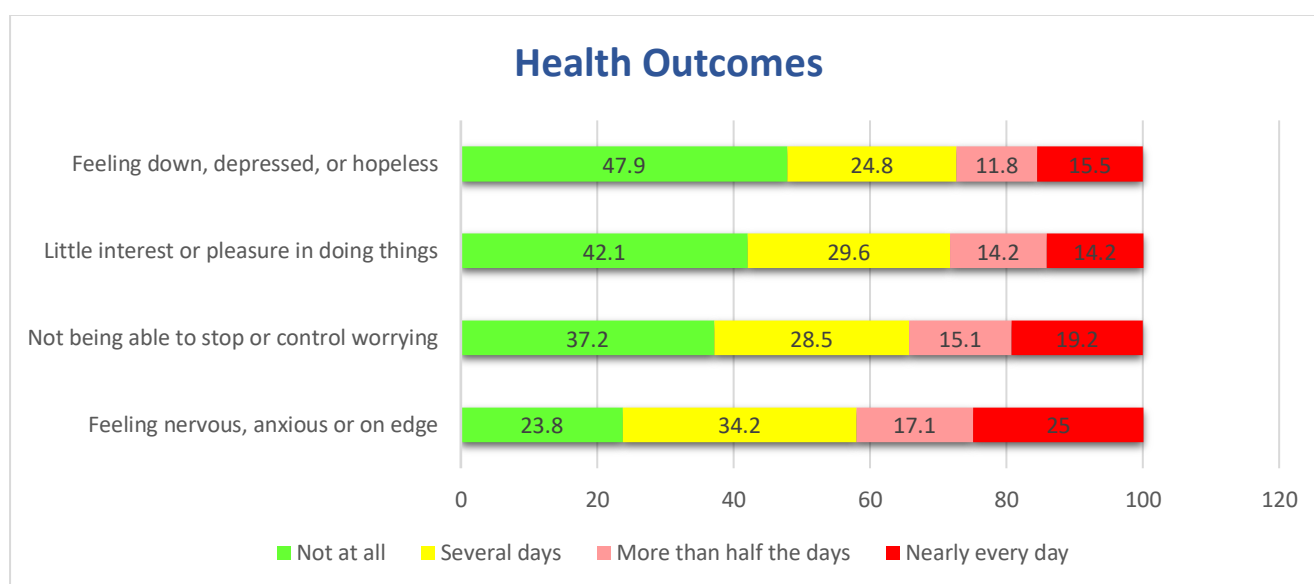
Participants were asked to respond to the following questions: Over the last two weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems?

- Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge

- Not being able to stop or control worrying
- Feeling down, depressed or hopeless
- Little interest or pleasure in doing things

Responses are based on the frequency with which participants experienced symptoms, to produce a score which categorises current levels of anxiety and/or depression as normal, mild, moderate, or severe. Together, the responses to the four items provide a very brief overall measure of mental health feeling.

**Chart 13:** PHQ-4 health outcome questions

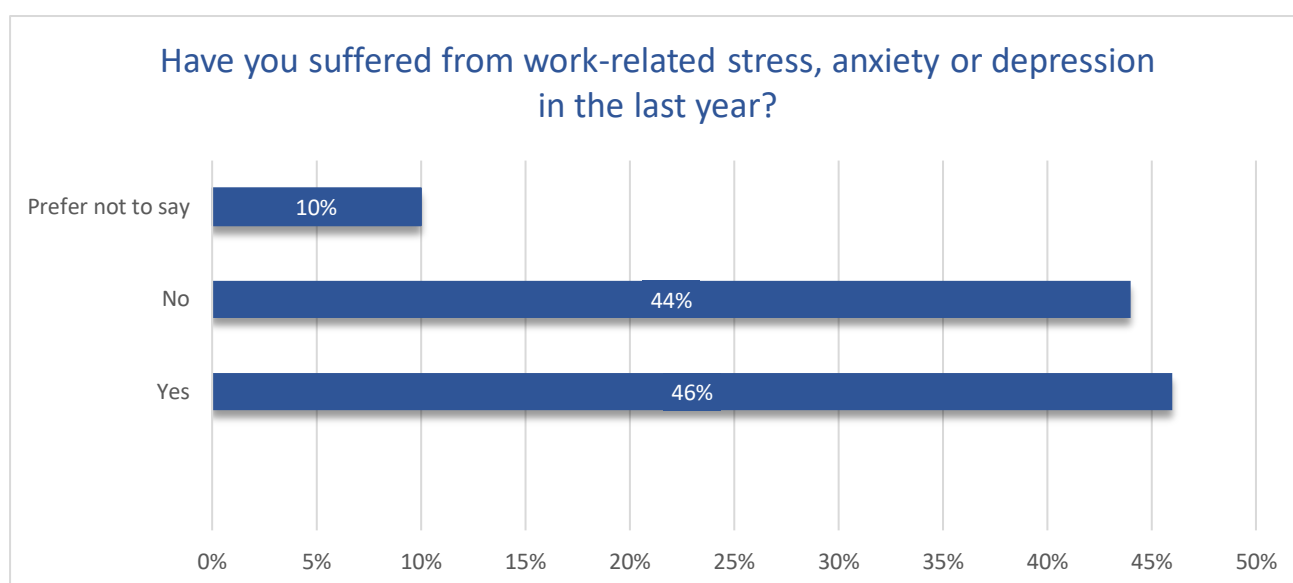


The above statistics taken together show that current organisational levels of reported anxiety and/or depression are 41.3% as normal levels, 22.5%, mild anxiety and/or depression, 17.5% moderate anxiety and/or depression and 18.8% as severe anxiety and/or depression.

### HSE Statistics: UK work-related stress, depression or anxiety 2022/23

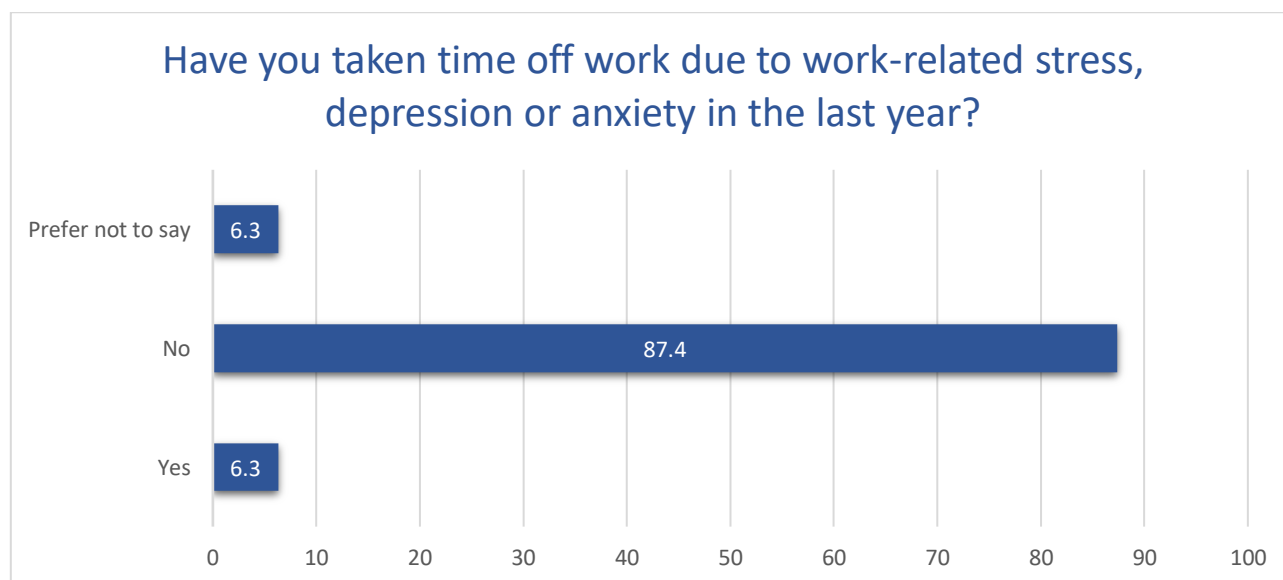
In 2022/23, 875,000 UK workers across all industries reported as suffering from work-related stress, depression or anxiety (new and long-standing), a prevalence rate of 2,590 per 100,000 workers. 17.1 million working days were lost due to work-related stress, depression or anxiety. Stress, depression or anxiety accounted for 49% of all work-related ill health and 54% of all working days lost. The main work factors cited as causing work-related stress, depression or anxiety were workload pressures (including tight deadlines and too much responsibility) and a lack of managerial support (HSE, 2023b). While not including Higher Education, the Teacher Wellbeing Index 2023, provides stress at work data from early years to Further Education, with 78% of teaching and support staff subject to work-related stress, rising to 89% among senior leaders and 95% among headteachers (Education Support, 2023).

**Chart 14:** Stress, anxiety and depression reported in the last year.



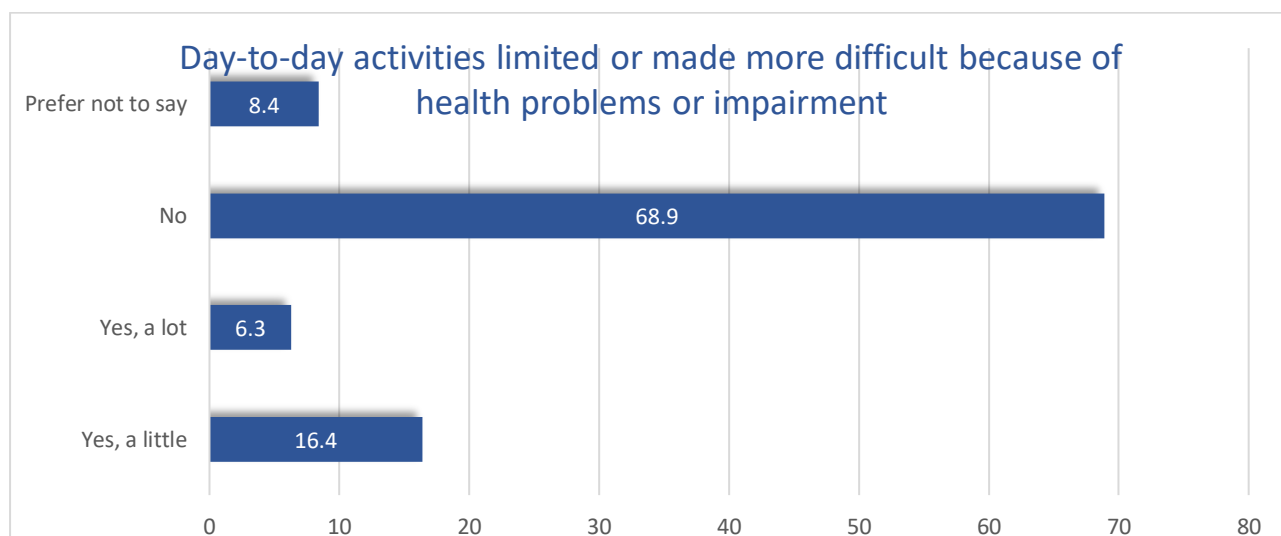
The above statistics show that at least 110 staff identified as subject to work-related stress, anxiety or depression in the last year, 25 preferred not to say, and 105 staff identified as not subject to work related stress, anxiety or depression with a rate of at least 46% of 240 participants identifying as subject to work-related stress, anxiety or depression in the last year.

**Chart 15:** Time off work as a result of work-related stress, depression or anxiety in the last year.



The above statistics show that 15 staff identified as having taken time off due to work-related stress, depression or anxiety in the last year, 15 preferred not to say, and 208 staff identified as not with a rate of at least 6.3% of 240 participants having taken time off due to work-related stress, depression or anxiety in the last year.

**Chart 16:** Are your day-to-day activities limited or made more difficult because of a health problem or an impairment which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?



The above statistics show that 39 staff identified as day-to-day activities a little limited or made more difficult because of health problems and impairment, 15 identified as limited a lot, 20 preferred not to say, and 164 staff identified as not limited with a rate of at least 22.7% of 240 participants with day-to-day activities limited or made more difficult because of health problems or impairment.

### Priorities for improvement based on the survey findings

The statements with the lowest mean scores were:

- 1: Demands - I have to work very intensively (1.97)
- 1: Demands - I have to work very fast (2.28)
- 7: Change - Staff are always consulted about change at work (2.41)

This survey provides detailed insight into how staff feel about and perceive their work environment. Survey responses identified many staff as feeling stressed, anxious or depressed about their work and others identifying as subject to bullying and harassment from which proactive action is needed. The survey also identified a need for focused improvement across all six domains of HSE's Management Standards. Staff wellbeing is now embedded in the University strategic plan with the purpose of influencing University culture for collective commitment towards positive shared values about stress and wellbeing. While findings focus on areas in much need of improvement, it is important to move forward positively with actions for a healthier and supportive work environment. The University committed to HSE's stress indicator tool to begin this process and now has a benchmark standard as a measure from which to build continuous efforts for meaningful improvement.

## What we want to achieve

The below aims and subsequent actions have been developed using guidance set out by the Health and Safety Executive and World Health Organisation.

- **Prevent** work-related mental health conditions through policy, continuous risk management and interventions to reshape working conditions, culture and working relationships.
- **Promote** mental health awareness at work through training and interventions that improve mental health literacy, to recognise and act on stress and mental health conditions and to empower staff to routinely talk about mental health and seek support.
- **Support** staff with mental health conditions to participate in work through reasonable accommodations and supported initiatives.
- **Create an enabling environment** with actions to improve mental health at work, reduce stigma and negative attitudes, and promote confidentiality and protection of staff.

## What are the next steps?

The University will ensure that actions for a positive work environment are held as key organisational values. In an ever-evolving society and Higher Education environment, change will be a continuous challenge necessitating a degree of flexibility. Effective change and influencing how people feel will take time, and require continuous commitment and resources, beginning with the below core actions in consultation with staff and representatives.

1. Revise strategy and policy consistent with best evidence and guidance. Review roles and responsibilities within faculties and departments to provide accountability and promote regular communication through staff meetings, forums, committees, and governance meetings. Develop specific stress and wellbeing performance indicators for academic school and professional services departmental benchmarking.
2. Provide suitable and sufficient assessment of psychosocial risks in consultation with staff and representatives and focus on actions identified in the survey across all six domains of HSE's Management Standards. Seek to manage change effectively, while acknowledging ongoing societal and Higher Education Sector changes are inevitable. Assess and review psychosocial risks as a continuous process.
3. Introduce and promote effective bullying and harassment e-reporting procedures with confidentiality, equal dignity and fairness for all staff.

4. Seek to understand 'why' in areas in need of most improvement and develop actions for specific improvement in University schools and departments identified in the survey.
5. Provide information and training on mental health to staff at all levels.
  - Training for managers on stress management, mental health literacy and bullying and harassment at work.
  - Training for all staff in mental health literacy and awareness.
  - Access to cognitive self-help information on wellness and stress management.
  - Use of smart applications to supplement intervention and support.
  - An updated wellbeing webpage to provide quality sources of information and access to staff resources, such as 'Together All' and the HSE's 'Workings Minds'.
6. Develop and promote wellbeing champions across the University. Bring people together as a staff voice for regular focused discussion and information provision to help shape procedures, reduce stress related risk and improve wellbeing.
7. Provide continued use of the stress indicator tool survey across the University as a whole but also made available to individual departments, schools and faculties for use as mini targeted surveys.
8. Continue to provide wellbeing initiatives, counselling services, occupational health services, mental health specialists and access to physical and leisure activities to improve mental health. Monitor and ensure that services provided follow best evidence and data.
9. Continue to provide effective reasonable adjustments and accommodation for staff subject to psychosocial and mental health illness. Provide support to absent staff and those returning to work with access to occupational health practitioners, intervention services and initiatives. Monitor and ensure that services provided follow best evidence and data.
10. Provide close monitoring of the academic workload model introduced in September 2023 with detailed review at the end of the academic year.

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University Health and Safety Advisor.

## References

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Qualitative Responses

#### Qualitative Responses – Main summarised themes

##### **Cultural Change**

A need for positive cultural shift within the University, including transparent communication, consideration of staff opinions in decision-making, and for academic empowerment in shaping their work.

##### **A Supportive Environment**

A need to eliminate workplace bullying and harassment, with effective personnel interventions. Support for staff wellbeing, including addressing health issues and stress-related issues, improved team collaboration, recognition of diversity within departments and a more supportive approach from senior managers.

##### **Improved Communication and a Staff Voice**

A need for more consultation and acknowledgment of the staff's voice in decision-making processes that impact workload and planning. A need for timely, clear and transparent communication and effective timetabling. Staff requested acknowledgment and respect from managers, and a more inclusive working environment where their work contributions are valued.

##### **Training and Development**

Requests for training and staff development opportunities for both academic and professional services staff. Staff asked for training for their managers focusing on, wellbeing, stress, management and leadership skills and understanding the impact that day-to-day decisions have on staff wellbeing.

##### **Resources and Staffing**

A need for improved staff resources, both in academic and professional services roles, and an understanding of the impact on demands and workload this has. Staff requested fair workloads, improved resources, adequate administrative support and quality IT systems to facilitate efficient working.

##### **University Aspects Encouraging Wellbeing at Work**

Staff were encouraged by the use of the SIT survey, which is seen as providing a positive starting point and direction for managing and promoting positive wellbeing at the University. Well-being

days, health check sessions, meditation sessions, team-building activities, walking groups, craft groups and specific initiatives were appreciated and enjoyed. The beautiful campus and gardens, Hope Park Sports discounted gym membership, exercise classes and children's summer camps were all positively mentioned by many staff. Positive comments included a collegiate culture, community feel and team spirit with supportive and good relationships among colleagues. Positive experiences with line managers and support services were noted. Recent agile working options were seen as a positive change towards a flexible work-life balance. The new Vice Chancellor was seen as taking a positive approach.