

Taking its toll: rising stress levels in further education

UCU Stress Survey 2014

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Executive summary

When 2,251 UCU members working in further education were asked if they found their job stressful, almost nine out of ten (87%) agreed or strongly agreed. Almost two-thirds (64%) indicated that their general level of stress was high or very high and a similar proportion (62%) often or always experienced levels of stress they found unacceptable. Few (7%) reported that they seldom or never experienced unacceptable levels of stress at work.

This survey has found that levels of stress in the further education sector have increased in recent years, 73% of respondents to a previous survey conducted in 2012 agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'I find my job stressful' compared with 87% in the present survey.

Working hours remain high in further education with a high proportion exceeding the 44 hour maximum stipulated by the EU Working Time Directive. More than eight respondents in ten (81%) reported that they regularly worked more than 40 hours a week, and nearly one-third (32%) worked more than 50 hours a week.

The constant and fast pace of change in colleges, together with how it is handled, emerged as a key theme in the latest survey. The biggest rise in stress levels over the two-year period was in response to how change is managed and communicated. This survey also found a high level of change fatigue in further education. Seven out of ten respondents agreed (25%) or strongly agreed (45%) that too many changes had been introduced in their institution. Respondents were almost unanimous in agreeing that a period of stability was required in the sector.

For the first time, this survey considered the extent to which staff believed that they undertake unreasonable and unnecessary tasks as part of their job role. Nearly seven of every ten respondents reported performing tasks they considered unreasonable either often (42%) or frequently (26%). Only 1% believed they never undertake unnecessary tasks.

Almost nine out of every ten respondents (89%) felt pressure to come to work when they are unwell at least sometimes, while 68% experienced such pressure either often (29%) or always (39%). A considerable majority (75%) work at home while they are sick at least sometimes. Pressure of work, lack of cover and a reluctance to let down students or further burden colleagues were amongst the most frequently cited reasons for this 'presenteeism'.

The work-life balance of UCU members from further education continues to be poor. Almost half (46%) of the sample indicated that they always, or almost always, neglect their personal needs because of the demands of their work. Almost nine participants from every ten (89%) indicated that they usually felt worn out after the working day and a similar proportion (88%) find it difficult to unwind. Evidence was found that the overall level of work-life balance in the sector has worsened in the two years since the 2012 survey.

Only one in ten respondents from further education was very (9%) or extremely (1%) satisfied with their job. Satisfaction with intrinsic factors (such as fellow workers and variety) was high while the lowest sources of satisfaction were with the way the organisation is managed, promotion opportunities and industrial relations with management. The overall level of job satisfaction was considerably lower than that reported by many other professionals.

UCU urges the leaders of further education colleges to recognise that stress is continuing to rise in the sector and has already reached unacceptably high levels. This cannot continue year on year. The report sets out mid and long-term targets for colleges to alleviate stress. College leaders need to take heed of these as the first step towards bringing stress down and improving the health of the sector.

University and College Union

The University and College Union (UCU) is the largest trade union and professional association for academics, lecturers, trainers, researchers and academic-related staff working in further and higher education throughout the UK. It has more than 120,000 members.

<http://www.ucu.org.uk>

Introduction

Work-related stress can be defined as a harmful reaction to undue pressures and demands related to the job role. The most recent Labour Force Survey (LFS) reported that stress at work affected 487,000 UK employees in 2013/14, with a total of 11.3 million working days lost (HSE, 2014). Sources of stress vary according to the characteristics of the job and the organisation but, in general, workload pressure, interpersonal conflict (including bullying and harassment) and the extent and pace of change are most commonly cited as the most stressful features of work (HSE, 2014). Work-related stress can have a wide-ranging impact on the wellbeing and functioning of employees. It has been linked to physical and mental ill health, work-life conflict, increased turnover, reduced job satisfaction, motivation and commitment and impaired job performance (Schnall et al. 2009).

For some time, a higher prevalence of work-related stress has been found amongst public sector employees, with teaching and educational professionals at particular risk (Carder et al. 2013; HSE, 2014). Education is now considered a priority area for the reduction of work-related stress (Tyers et al. 2009). Several studies commissioned by the UCU over the last decade or so indicate that stress is widespread and increasing in further education (FE) and higher education (HE) institutions in the UK, with serious implications for the wellbeing of employees (Kinman, 1998; Kinman & Jones, 2004; 2008; Kinman & Wray, 2013 a,b,c,d). Moreover, recently published European research shows that British academic employees are, by a large margin, the least satisfied in Europe and the most likely to regret their choice of career (Hohle & Teichler, 2012¹). In this study, 61% of senior academics and 56% of junior academics from the UK described their job as "a considerable source of strain".

There is evidence that the rising level of stress in universities and colleges in the UK is due to the intense and wide-ranging changes experienced in the sector, which have resulted in increasingly complex, demanding and unpredictable working environments (Kinman, 2014). Working hours are also increasing with a high proportion of academic

¹ On a scale ranging from 1 = very high satisfaction to 5 = very low satisfaction, academics from the UK averaged 2.61. Differences were found between junior and senior academics.

and academic-related employees working in excess of the EU recommended maximum (HMSO, 1998). A recent study of academic employees found strong links between work intensity and long working hours with negative implications for work-life balance (Hogan et al. 2015). Research findings also demonstrate that the features that traditionally protected employees working in universities and colleges against work-related stress, such as job control and support, have gradually eroded, thus exacerbating the pressure experienced by employees (Kinman & Wray, 2013).

Several reasons could be provided for the elevated level of work-related stress reported by academic and academic-related staff. The demands experienced by employees have intensified due to a dramatic expansion in student numbers, increased requirements for efficiency and accountability from internal and external sources, and an increasingly bureaucratic management style. In universities, in particular, the student population has become more diverse in terms of their social, cultural and educational background, with an increasingly 'consumer-oriented' approach to their studies (CHERI, 2011). It has also been widely observed that HE and FE institutions have moved away from a culture that embraces consensual decision-making, co-operation and shared values towards a non-participative management paradigm, thus eroding employees' sense of autonomy (e.g. Fanghanel, 2011; Lloyd & Paynes, 2012). The job role for academic staff has also become more diversified; employees are expected to demonstrate excellence in teaching, research, administration and pastoral care, and frequently through external entrepreneurial activities. The recent Research Excellence Framework (REF) exercise also expected academic staff to provide evidence of application, impact and value of their research. The demands associated with each of these roles are likely to be onerous and have the potential to conflict, further compounding the potential for long working hours and work-related stress.

There is evidence that the work-related stress experienced by employees in HE and FE has strong potential to impair their wellbeing. A review of the occupational health needs of universities conducted by Venables and Allender (2005) showed that employees in this sector are more likely than many other occupational groups to experience mental health problems. Several studies conducted in the 1990s and early 2000s found poorer mental health in university employees compared to other occupational groups and community samples (Kinman et al. 2006; Winefield et al. 2003), but little is known about the current position amongst UCU members. Research findings also indicate that employees in HE, FE and prison and adult education frequently find that balancing the demands of their work with their home commitments is challenging and that this is a further source of strain (Kinman & Wray, 2013a,b,c,d; Kinman, 2014; Winefield et al. 2014). The findings of this research also indicated that the work demands experienced by UCU members can be exacerbated by the extremely high levels of involvement in and commitment to the work role that were found amongst participants and lead to distress and work-life conflict (Kinman & Jones, 2009).

The UCU approach to monitoring work-related stress

The UCU is committed to monitoring the work-related wellbeing of its members. Over the last ten to fifteen years, several surveys have been commissioned to identify the features of work that are considered most stressful by members, the impact on their wellbeing and the potential implications for job performance. A benchmarking approach advocated by the UK Health and Safety Executive is utilised to monitor key work-related hazards, perceived stress and working hours over time. As well as identifying trends, this approach also has the potential to inform the development of interventions to enhance wellbeing by highlighting the job characteristics and working conditions that make the strongest contributors to strain in different sectors and groups of employees. In reflection of the differences between sectors highlighted in previous waves of this survey (e.g. Kinman & Wray, 2013 a,b,c,d), individual reports are written based on the data obtained from members in HE, FE, adult and prison education. The approach utilised in the research programme is discussed in the next section and the measures used in current survey are outlined.

The HSE management standards approach

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE: the UK body responsible for policy and operational matters related to occupational health and safety) has developed a comprehensive process to help employers manage the work-related wellbeing of their staff effectively. A risk-assessment approach is advocated, whereby workplace stress is considered a serious health and safety issue and stressors are measured and managed like any other workplace hazard. The HSE process is based around a set of standards of good management practice (or benchmarks) for measuring employers' performance in preventing work-related stress from occurring at source (Mackay *et al.* 2004). This reflects a body of evidence supporting the view that primary, or organisational-led, interventions are considerably more effective than those that expect employees to be the focus of change (Donaldson-Feilder *et al.* 2011). Following extensive consultation, the HSE selected several elements of work activity (known as psychosocial hazards) that are: a) considered relevant to the majority of UK employees; and b) have a strong evidence base as the most critical predictors of employee wellbeing and organisational performance (Mackay *et al.* 2004, p. 101). The specified hazards are demands, control, social support (from managers and peers), interpersonal relationships, role clarity, and involvement in organisational change.

The HSE has developed a self-report survey instrument to help employers measure the key hazards within their organisations and compare their performance with national standards. This measure has been used in several previous surveys of UCU members. The HSE Indicator Tool (Cousins *et al.*, 2004) comprises 35 items within the seven hazard categories:

- **Demands** includes workload, pace of work and working hours;
- **Control** measures levels of autonomy over working methods, as well as pacing and

timing;

- **Peer Support** encompasses the degree of help and respect received from colleagues;
- **Managerial Support** reflects supportive behaviours from line managers and the organisation itself, such as the availability of feedback and encouragement;
- **Relationships** assesses levels of interpersonal conflict within the workplace, including bullying behaviour and harassment;
- **Role** examines levels of role clarity and the extent to which employees believe that their work fits into the aims of the department and the organisation in general;
- **Change** reflects how effectively organisational changes are managed and communicated.

The HSE risk assessment approach is widely utilised by individual organisations, occupational groups and sectors to diagnose the most stressful aspects of work. The process allows employers to assess how well they are managing the different types of hazard within their workforce, and helps them develop precisely targeted interventions to protect and enhance the wellbeing of their staff. The HSE also provides normative data from a range of occupational groups, enabling employers to compare their score for each of the hazards against these national benchmarks. Where scores are compared unfavourably, the HSE suggests interim and longer-term target scores to help organisations improve their performance over time.

The HSE approach: previous UCU surveys

HSE benchmarks

The HSE process is recommended by the University and Colleges Employers' Association as an effective way of managing work-related stress (UCEA, 2006). Many universities and colleges in the UK have adopted this process to monitor staff wellbeing. Used at a national level, the HSE approach can provide considerable insight into how working conditions change over time. In 2008, the UCU commissioned the first national survey of members using the HSE benchmarking approach (Court & Kinman, 2008 a,b,c; $n = 14,270$), with a second survey conducted in 2012 (Kinman & Wray, 2013a,b,c,d; $n = 24,030$). The findings revealed that, with very few exceptions, people working in HE, FE and prison education reported lower wellbeing than the average for the HSE's target industries, including the education sector. In particular, levels of wellbeing in relation to demands reduced markedly between 2008 and 2012 for UCU members (from 3.4 to 2.5 on a 5 point scale) and perceptions of job control and the management of change also worsened. Findings also showed that wellbeing in relation to support from managers and peers and role clarity generally remained stable over the four year period, although both were considerably lower than the HSE benchmarks.

The 2012 study highlighted some key differences between members working in FE, HE and prison education. This survey also reported the findings separately for UCU members working in adult education. The biggest 'wellbeing gaps' in HE (i.e. the discrepancy between the mean score obtained and the HSE benchmark) were in work demands,

change management, management support and role clarity. This was a similar pattern to that which emerged in the 2008 survey, but the wellbeing gap in relation to demands and management of change widened in the four-year period, highlighting particular problems in these areas. As in the 2008 survey, levels of control amongst members in HE exceeded the benchmark from the HSE's target group industries. Nonetheless, the 2012 findings showed that the perceptions of work-related control in the sector had worsened since 2008 (see Kinman & Wray, 2013c).

For members in *FE*, the biggest 'wellbeing gaps' were in change management, work demands, support from management and role clarity. This was a similar pattern to that found in the 2008 study, but the gap in relation to control, in particular, had widened indicating that this is an area where intervention is required. It should be noted that, unlike HE, the overall level of control in FE failed to meet the HSE benchmark in either 2008 or 2012. The wellbeing gap for demands and management of change in FE also increased in the four year period. Levels of wellbeing in relation to peer support and role clarity reported by UCU members in FE improved slightly in this period, but the benchmarks were still far from being met (see Kinman & Wray, 2013b).

In relation to *prison education*, the biggest 'wellbeing gaps' found in the 2012 survey were in change management, relationships, role clarity and management support. These findings are similar to those found in UCU's 2008 study of prison education, but the gap in relation to control and role widened in the four year period. Levels of wellbeing in relation to change, demands and management support improved slightly between 2008 and 2012, but these remained considerably lower than the HSE minimum standards. It should be noted that UCU members in prison education reported by far the lowest levels of wellbeing for all hazard categories and the highest level of stress overall. Nonetheless, as the number of responses was small (i.e. 2008 = 60 and 2012 = 187), the extent to which the findings are representative of the wider population of prison educators who are UCU members (currently around 1,000) could be questioned (see Kinman & Wray, 2013a).

In terms of *adult education*, UCU members reported lower wellbeing than the average for those working in the HSE target group industries. The biggest 'wellbeing gaps' related to change, role clarity, demands and support from management highlighting particular problems in this area. The level of control reported by respondents from adult education was higher than in FE, but this still failed to meet the minimum standards stipulated by the HSE (See Kinman & Wray, 2013d).

Perceptions of work-related stress

The 2008 and 2012 surveys asked UCU members to report the extent to which they found their job stressful. Comparisons of the findings demonstrated that levels of work-related stress had increased in the four-year period, showing that the increased levels of demand outlined above had been translated into longer working hours for many. Three-quarters of respondents to the 2012 survey (from all sectors) indicated that they found

their job stressful, more than half (55%) reported that their general or average level of stress was high or very high, and 41% often or always experienced levels of stress they found unacceptable. The findings of both surveys indicated that working hours are high across HE, FE, adult and prison education, with around 65% of respondents working more than 40 hours in an average week and 27% in excess of 50 hours. These findings demonstrate that a considerable proportion of UCU members regularly work in excess of the European Working Time Directive limit of 48 hours per week.

The work-home interface

Previous research commissioned by the UCU (and previously by the AUT) highlighted the strong potential for academic work to impair personal life and the potential impact on wellbeing and job performance (Kinman & Jones, 2004). The surveys conducted in 2008 and 2012 (Court & Kinman, 2008; Kinman & Wray, 2013) found high levels of work-life conflict with the majority of participants across HE, FE and prison education (as well as respondents from adult education in 2012) reporting that they did not have a healthy work-life balance. The 2012 survey introduced a new measure to assess the extent of work-life facilitation as well as conflict between the professional and personal domains. This is a process whereby experience or participation in one role increases the quality or performance in the other role. The inclusion of this scale reflects recent findings showing that work has the potential to enrich non-working life as well as impair it (Grzywacz & Demerouti, 2013). The high levels of involvement and engagement in work found in previous research in university staff (Kinman & Jones, 2009) suggested that aspects of the job role might enhance non-working life. Nonetheless, although many respondents experienced some degree of facilitation, the mean level of work-life conflict was considerably higher overall.

The UCU 2014 survey of work-related stress: aims and method

Perceptions of working conditions

The survey aimed to examine the work-related wellbeing of UCU members working in universities, colleges and prison education departments in the UK. Firstly, it examined the extent to which universities and colleges were meeting the minimum standards stipulated by the HSE for the management of work-related stress. The HSE's Management Standards Indicator Tool was used to assess levels of wellbeing relating to each of the dimensions discussed above (Mackay et al. 2004). Mean scores were calculated across all seven of the hazard categories, with higher scores representing more wellbeing and lower scores denoting more distress for each dimension. Comparisons were made between the mean scores obtained in this survey for each hazard with the target industries, including education, selected by the HSE because they had the 'highest rates of work stress-related ill-health and absence' (Webster & Buckley, 2008, p. i). Where mean scores for any hazards are compared unfavourably with benchmarks, recommendations for improvement are provided in terms of: a) interim targets (over the next six to 12 month period) based on the 50th percentile figures and b)

longer term target scores obtained from the 80th percentile figures. Comparisons were also made between mean scores for each hazard obtained in the current survey with those found in the 2008 and 2012 surveys.

Perceived stress and working hours

The survey examined levels of perceived stress and the average number of hours worked per week, and compared findings with those obtained from the 2008 and 2012 surveys. The extent to which respondents worked more than their contracted hours was also examined.

The work-home interface

As in the 2012 survey, the extent of conflict and facilitation between work and personal life was examined using a questionnaire developed by Fisher et al. (2009). As previous research has highlighted the importance of maintaining boundaries between work and personal life for health and wellbeing, the 2014 survey also explored the extent to which respondents are able to 'switch off' from work-related worries and concerns. A scale developed by Querstret and Cropley (2012) was utilised to assess the extent to which respondents ruminate about work during their free time and are able to detach themselves from work issues. The ability to 'detach' oneself mentally and physically from work is vital, as the lack of opportunity to recover from work demands has serious negative implications for health and job performance.

Other measures

The 2014 survey also introduced several other measures thought to be of particular relevance to working conditions in HE, FE, adult and prison education. Some of these (i.e. the measures of psychological distress and job satisfaction) have been used extensively in studies of various occupational groups and a wide range of normative scores are available. This extends and strengthens the benchmarking approach utilised in previous surveys in the sector. The measures are described below.

Unreasonable tasks (Semmer et al. 2010). This scale assesses the extent to which participants engage in tasks that they believe are either unnecessary or do not conform to norms about what can be reasonably expected from an employee. This scale is included to capture respondents' perceptions of the tasks associated with the increased diversification of roles within HE, FE, adult and prison education.

Change fatigue (Bernerth et al. 2011). This measure assesses participants' attitudes about the extent of change introduced within their organisation and their reactions to these changes.

Job satisfaction (Warr et al. 1979). This scale explores overall job satisfaction as well as the extent to which employees are satisfied by intrinsic features (e.g. variety and opportunity for skill use) and extrinsic aspects of work (e.g. pay and promotion

opportunities). There are extensive occupational norms available whereby researchers can compare their findings with other professional groups.

Psychological distress (GHQ-12: Goldberg, 1972). This measure is widely used in occupational settings to assess depression, anxiety, insomnia and decision-making capacity. As with the measure of job satisfaction described above, extensive occupational norms are available to facilitate comparisons with other occupational groups. The GHQ-12 has been used in previous national studies of the HE sector in the UK and Australia (Kinman et al., 2006; Kinman, 2014; Winefield et al., 2003).

Burnout. There is some evidence that academic staff may experience levels of burnout comparable to 'high risk' groups such as healthcare workers (Watts & Robertson, 2011). A scale developed by Demerouti et al. (2003) measures two aspects of burnout: exhaustion and engagement. Engagement is viewed as the opposite of burnout: a positive, fulfilling, state of mind characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption.

Health. Several aspects of health were assessed. A single-item measure of perceived physical health was included. Participants were also asked to indicate the number of days they were absent from work through sickness in the previous year (if any). They were also asked to estimate the proportion of these days that were stress-related (if any). The extent of "presenteeism" in the sector was also explored, which examines the extent to which participants continue to work when they are sick.

The structure of this report

Working conditions and job characteristics differ considerably between HE, FE, prison and adult education. This is reflected in the findings of previous surveys of UCU members reported above, where the HSE hazard categories with the biggest wellbeing gaps varied. Accordingly, separate analyses have been conducted for the four groups and the findings are presented in separate reports. Where appropriate, each report has compared levels of job-related hazards and wellbeing outcomes by gender, age, contract type, and mode.

Sample

All active members of UCU were sent an email in October 2014 asking them to respond to UCU's online survey of occupational stress. Retired UCU members were excluded from the email survey.

There were 9,029 respondents to the survey after deleting non-complete responses. Of these, 6,439 were employed or principally employed in HE, 2,251 were in FE, 220 in adult education and 83 in prison education. A small number of respondents (36) did not identify the sector in which they principally worked.

1 Biographical information

Sample

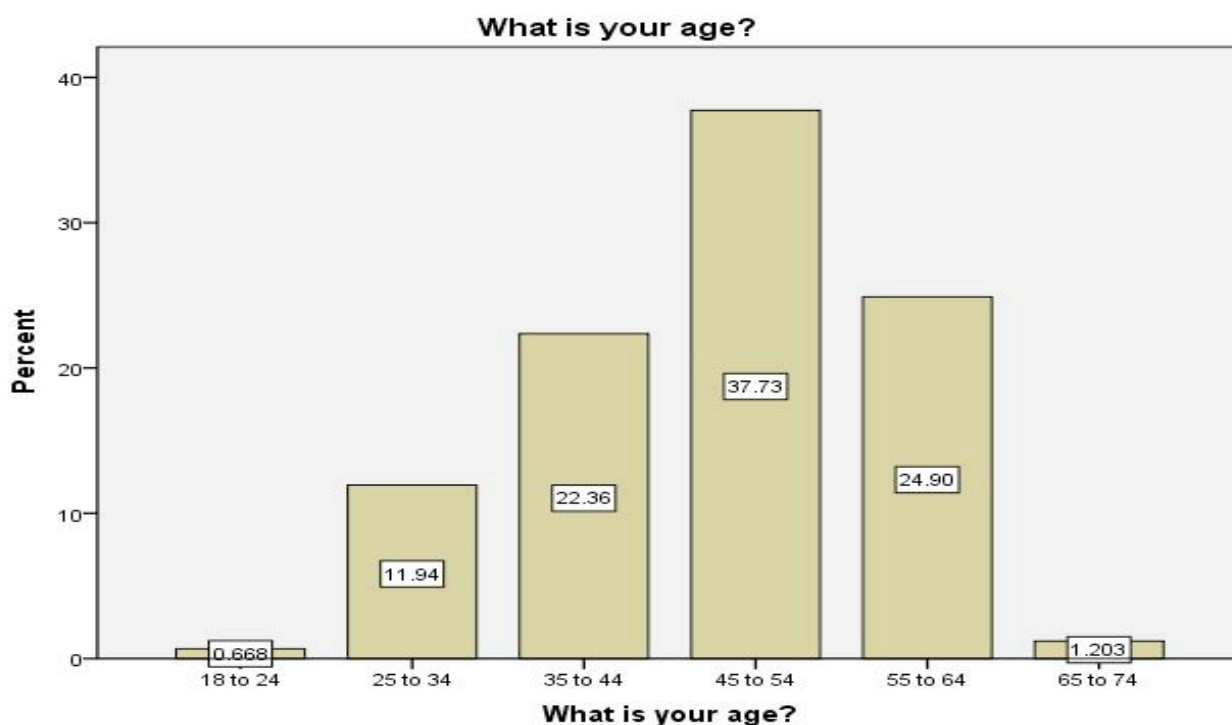
Of the 9,029 members who responded, 2,251 were employed (or principally employed) in FE.

Sex

In terms of sex, 61.8% of the sample were female, 37.3% were male and 0.9% preferred not to say.

Age

The age profile of the sample is shown in the chart below. As can be seen, the majority was in the category 45 to 54 years.



Sexuality

Regarding sexuality, 88.9% of participants were heterosexual, 2.4% gay or lesbian, 1.1% bisexual, whereas 7.6% preferred not to say.

Ethnicity

In terms of ethnicity, 0.2% were Black British, 0.5% Black British – Caribbean; 0.2% Black British – African; 0.8% Asian Indian; 0.2% Asian Pakistani; 0.1% Chinese, 0.1% Asian Bangladeshi; 0.4% of other Asian background and 1.2% of other (including mixed)

background. Eighty-six point three percent were White British and 6% other White background. Three point four percent preferred not to say.

Disability

Eighty-eight point four percent of the sample did not consider themselves disabled; 8% identified themselves as disabled and 1.7% were unsure if they were disabled. Two percent preferred not to say.

Job type

Of the 1,929 respondents from FE who identified themselves as academic employees, 93.2% worked in teaching or teaching-only positions, 0.7% in research-only and 6.1% in teaching-and-research. Of the 405 respondents who indicated they were employed in academic-related roles, 35.1% were managers, 7.2% were administrators, 5.4% were computing staff, 1% were librarians and 51.4% had other jobs².

Mode of employment

In terms of mode of employment, 68.6% of the sample worked on a full-time basis; 25.9% worked part-time; 4.4% were hourly-paid and 1% indicated 'other' modes of employment.

Terms of employment

A considerable majority, 91.2%, had a permanent contract; 0.7% an open-ended contract; 2.9% had a fixed-term contract; 1.8% had a variable hours contract; 2.7% had a zero hours contract; and 0.8% of respondents indicated 'other' terms of employment.

Hours of work

Participants were asked two questions relating to their working hours: a) how many hours they were contracted to work per week; b) how many hours they actually worked per week both on and off site. Just over one-third of participants in FE (34.6%) were contracted to work up to 30 hours per week, 12.5% between 31 and 35 hours; 51.6% between 36 hours and 40 hours and 1.3% were contracted to work in excess of 41 hours per week. In terms of actual working hours, 81% of the sample who were employed on a full-time basis worked more than 40 hours per week, with 32.1% more than 50 hours and 8% more than 60 hours.

² These categories are not mutually exclusive as some respondents identified themselves as academic and academic-related, for example as both researchers and managers.

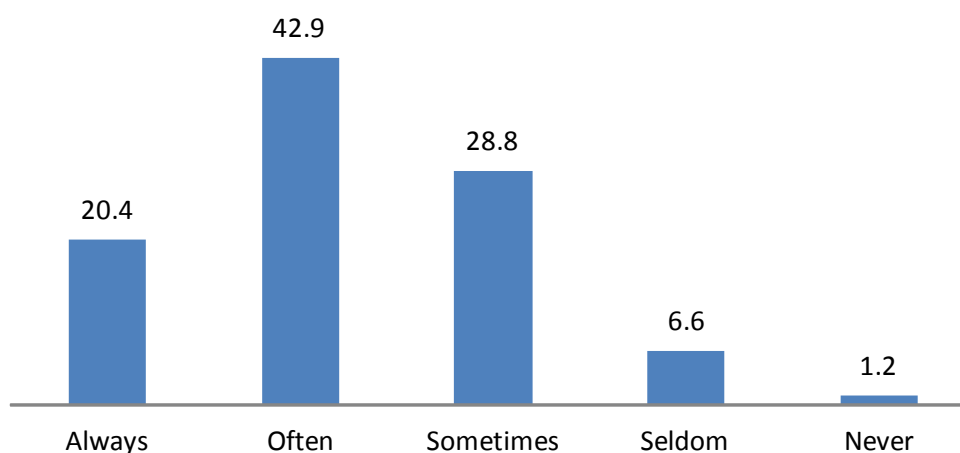
2 Responses to HSE stress questionnaire

2.1 Demands

A typical snapshot

UCU members in FE said they often had demands – from different groups at work – that were difficult to combine. They always or often had to work very quickly and very intensively, often under unrealistic time pressures. Respondents working in FE often neglected some tasks because they had too much to do and sometimes felt their deadlines to be unachievable. They often felt pressurised to work long hours, and were often unable to take sufficient breaks.

Q3: Different groups at work demand things from me that are hard to combine (n = 2,212) %



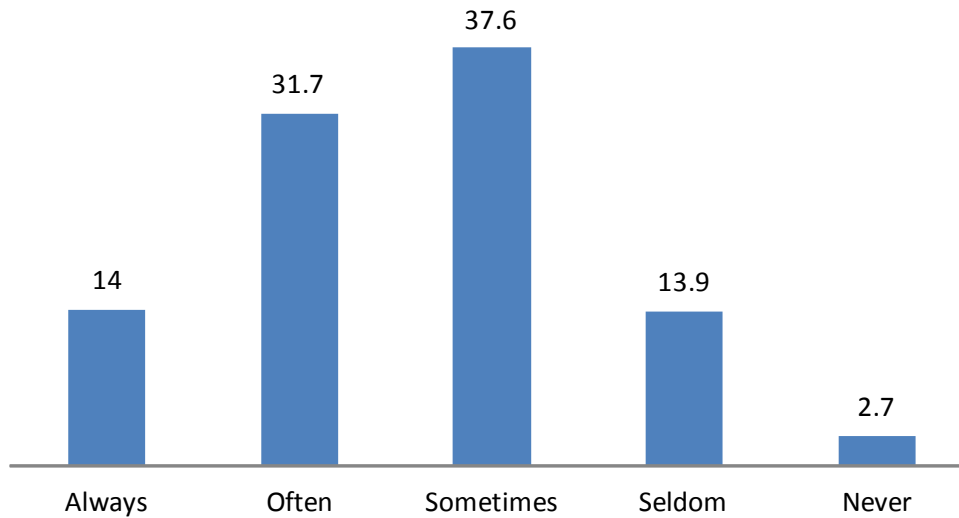
q3

HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education

2.25

Q6: I have unachievable deadlines (n = 2,212) %



HSE scale out of 5

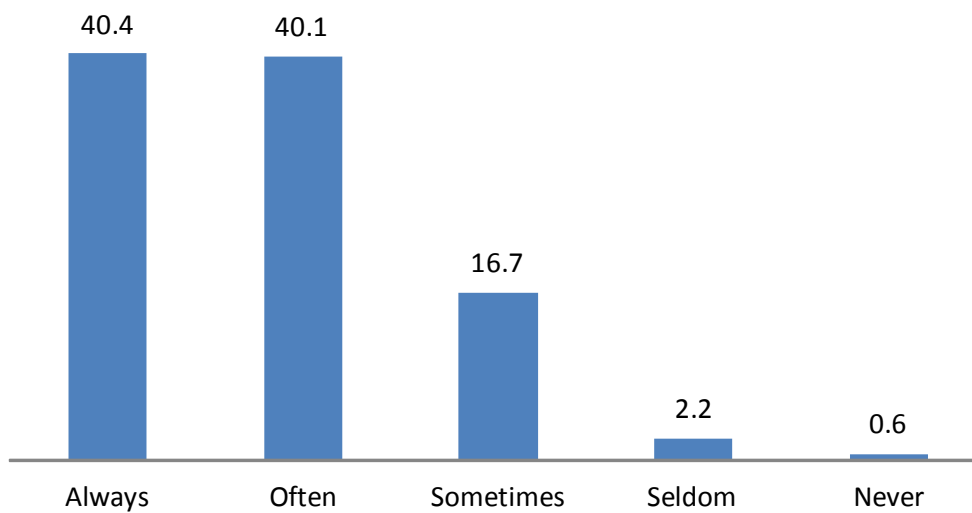
q6

1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education

2.60

Q9: I have to work very intensively (n = 2,212) %



HSE scale out of 5

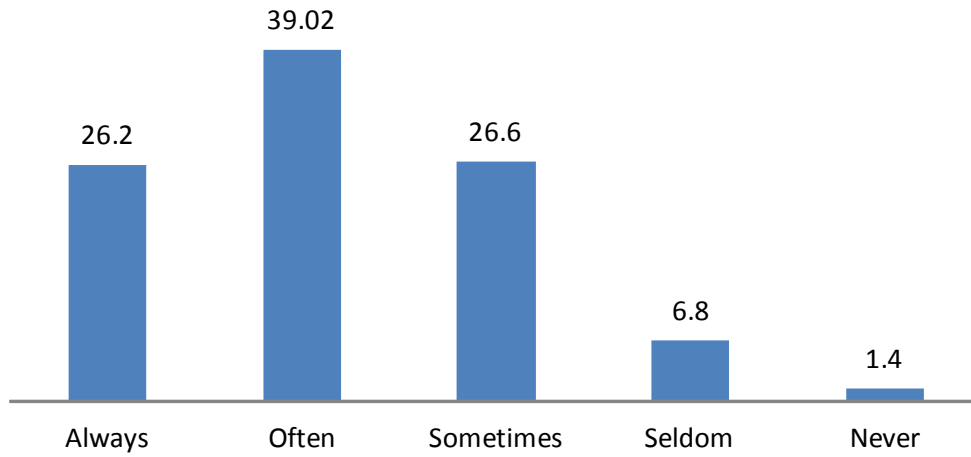
q9

1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education

1.83

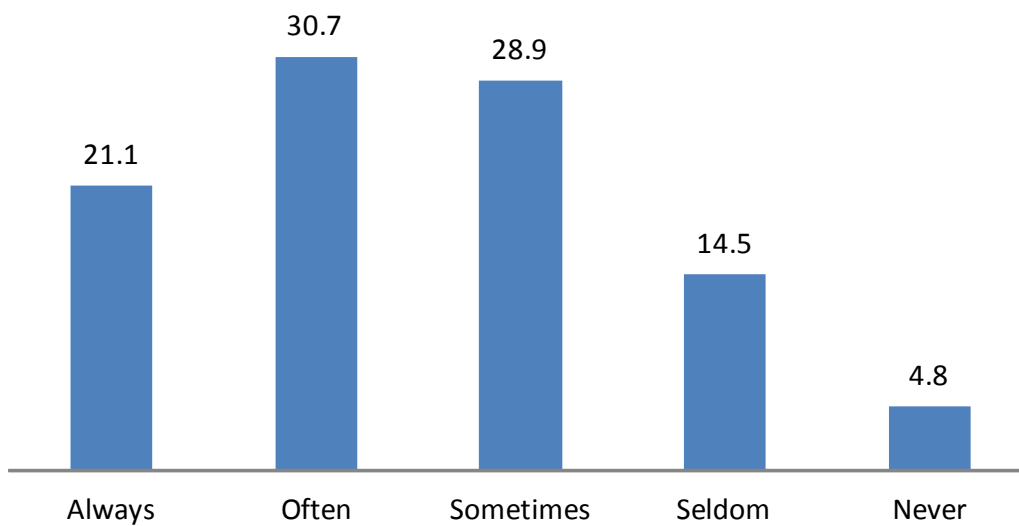
Q12: I have to neglect some tasks because I have too much to do (n = 2,212) %



q12 HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education 2.18

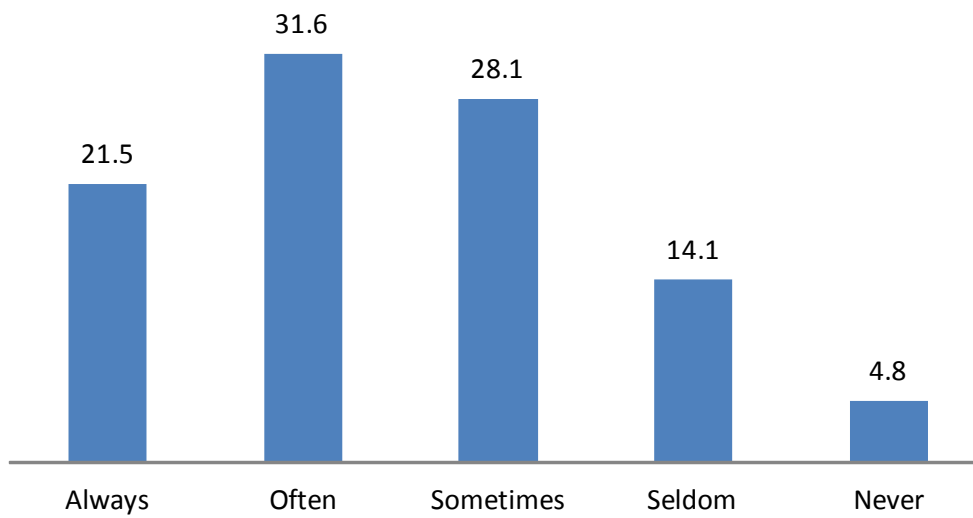
Q16: I am unable to take sufficient breaks (n = 2,212) %



q16 HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education 2.51

Q18: I am pressurised to work long hours (n = 2,212) %



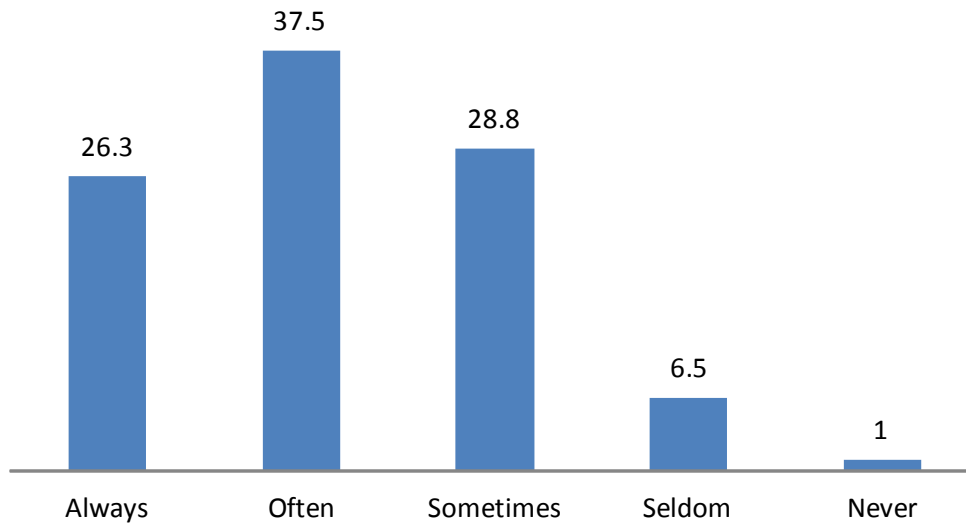
q18

HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education

2.49

Q20: I have to work very fast (n = 2,212) %



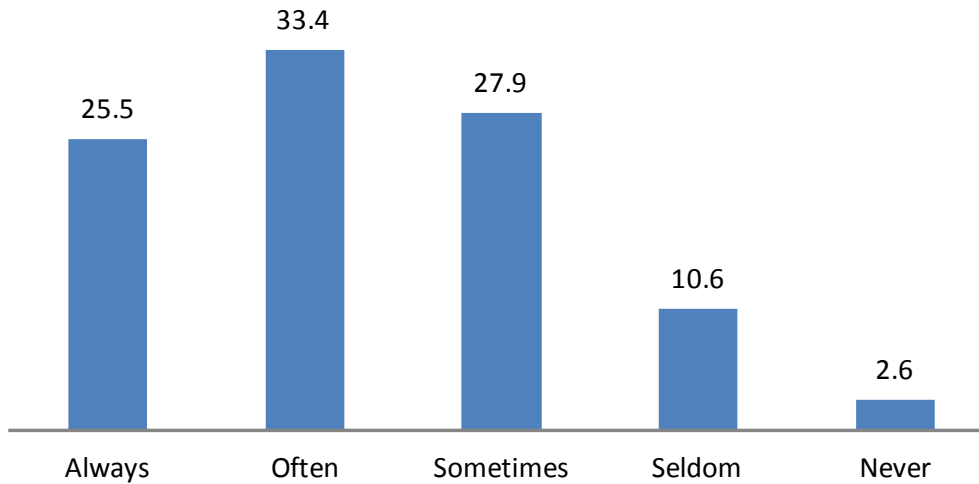
q20

HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education

2.18

Q22: I have unrealistic time pressures (n = 2,212) %



q22

HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education

2.31

Demands: summary

Comparison of the UCU data with the results of the Health and Safety Executive’s survey ‘Psychosocial Working Conditions in Britain’ indicated a considerably lower level of wellbeing in FE than the HSE target industries, including education, in relation to the demands made on employees. The overall level of wellbeing in relation to the demands placed on employees in FE has reduced since the previous survey was conducted in 2012. The most notable change was in the proportion of respondents who indicated they had unachievable deadlines and who have to work very intensively.

HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education

2.30

HSE survey target group mean average

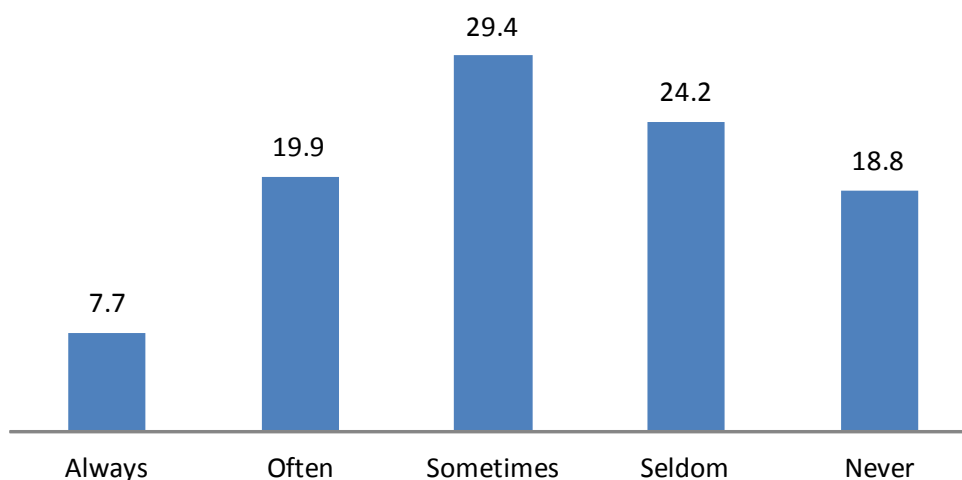
3.44

2.2 Control

A typical snapshot

UCU members in FE said they sometimes or seldom had control over their work pace, and could sometimes decide when to take a break. They sometimes had a choice in deciding what they do at work and in the way they work. Respondents from FE indicated that their working time was seldom or never flexible.

Q2: I can decide when to take a break (n = 2,212) %



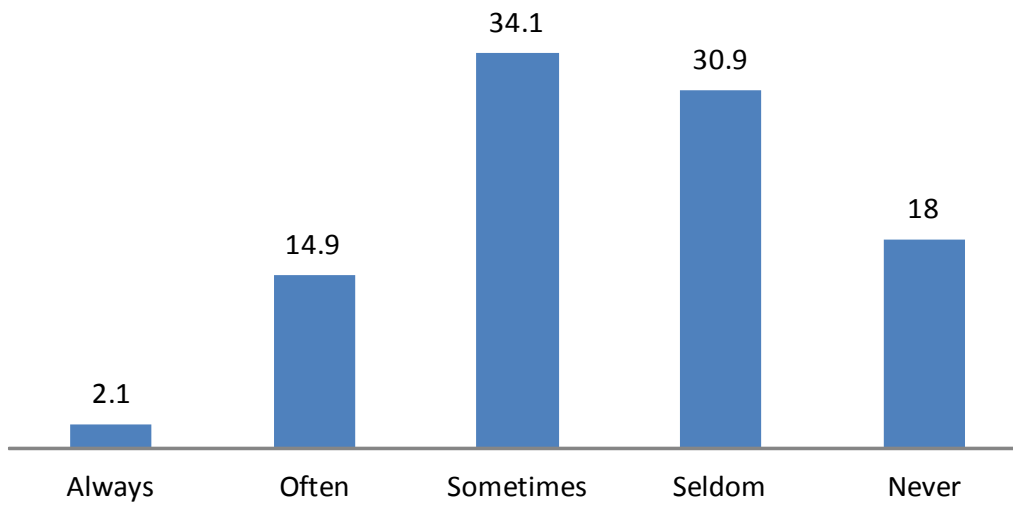
q2

HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education

2.74

Q10: I have a say in my own work speed (n = 2,212) %



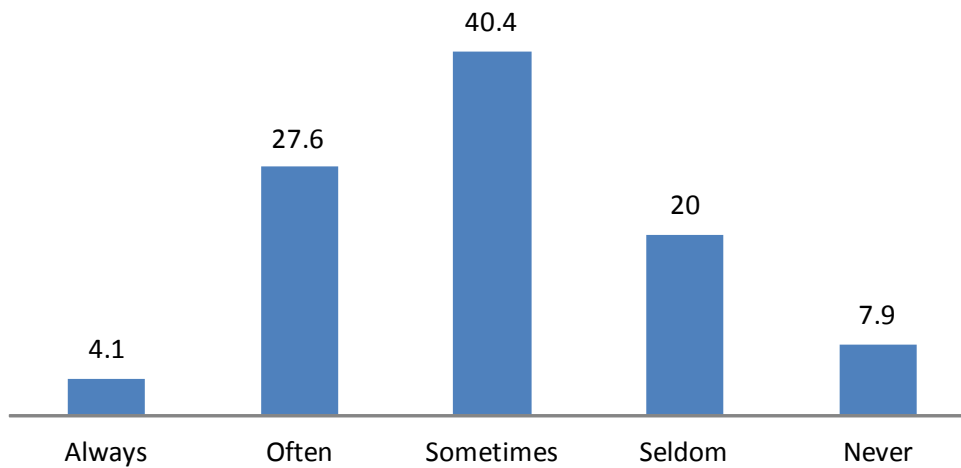
q10

HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education

2.52

**Q15: I have a choice in deciding how I do my work
(n = 2,212) %**



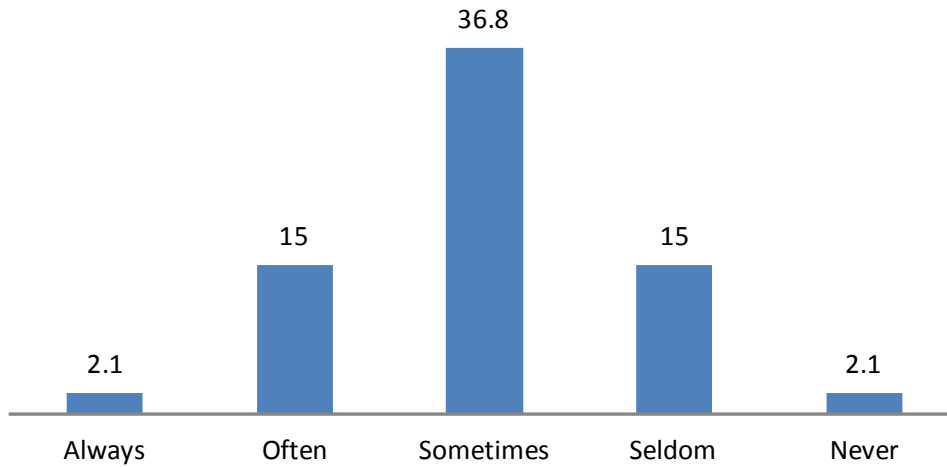
q15

HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education

3.00

Q19: I have a choice in deciding what I do at work
(n = 2,212) %



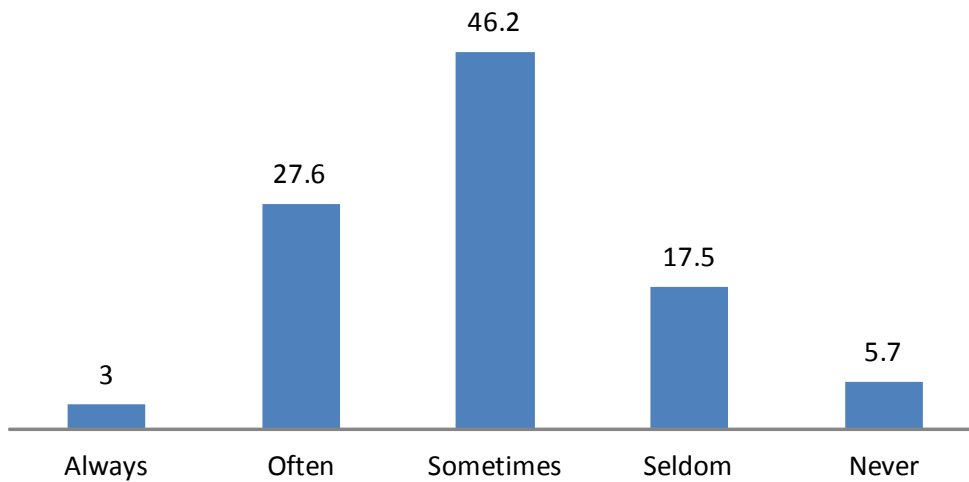
q19

HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education

2.59

Q25: I have some say over the way I work
(n = 2,212) %



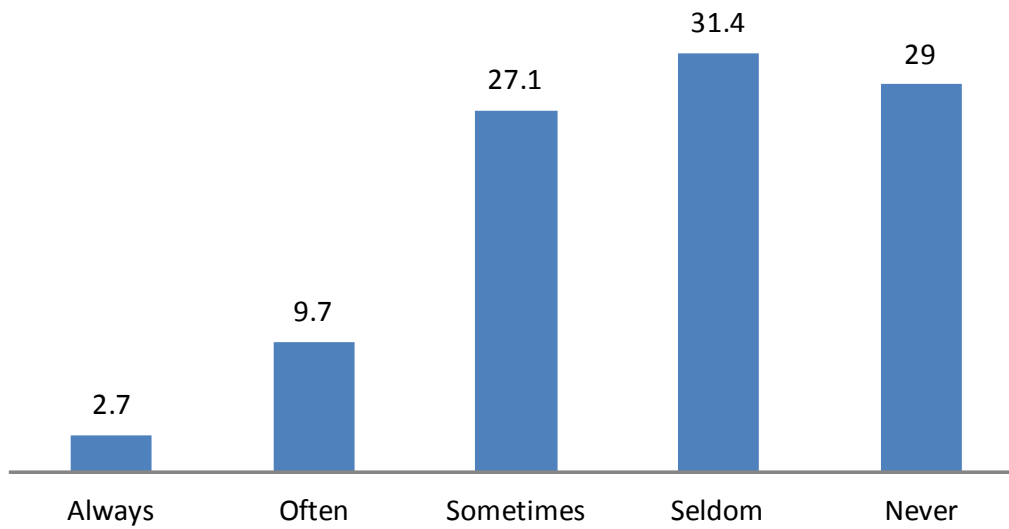
Q25

HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education

3.05

Q30: My working time can be flexible (n = 2,212) %



HSE scale out of 5

q30

1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education

2.26

Control: summary

Comparison of the UCU data alongside the results of the Health and Safety Executive’s survey ‘Psychosocial Working Conditions in Britain’ indicated UCU members in FE had a lower level of wellbeing relating to their job control than the HSE target industries, including education. The overall level of wellbeing in relation to job control perceived by employees in FE has reduced since the previous survey was conducted in 2012. The most notable changes were in the flexibility of working time and the level of influence over the way work is done.

HSE scale out of 5

1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education

2.69

HSE survey target group mean average

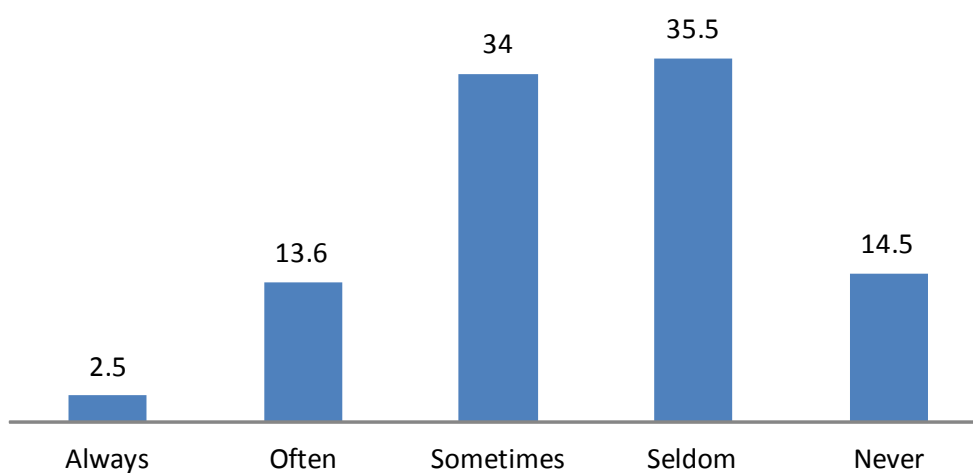
3.32

2.3 Managers' support

A typical snapshot

UCU members in FE said they were seldom or sometimes given supportive feedback on the work they did, and could only sometimes rely on their line manager to help them out with a work problem. They indicated that they could sometimes talk to their line manager about something that had upset or annoyed them about work. Respondents from FE said their line manager sometimes encouraged them at work, but they seldom felt supported through emotionally demanding work.

Q8: I am given supportive feedback on the work I do
(n = 2,212) %



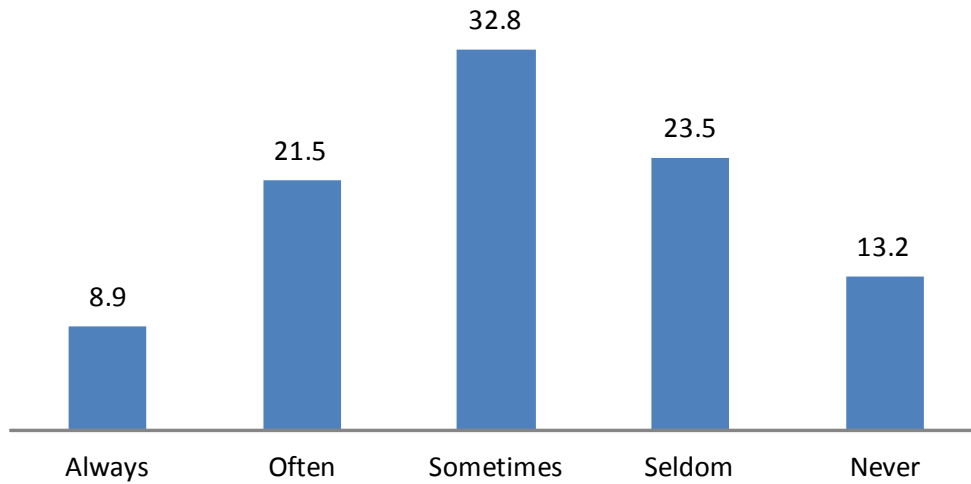
q8

HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education

2.54

Q23: I can rely on my line manager to help me out with a work problem (n = 2,212) %



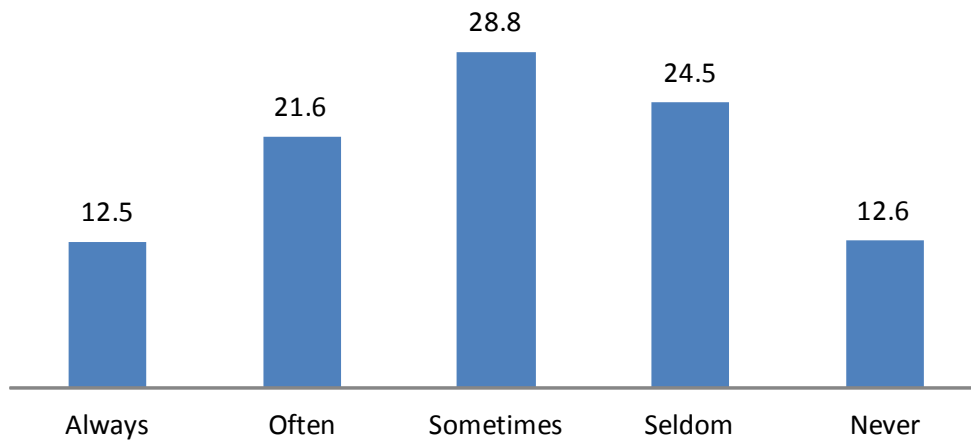
q23

HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education

2.89

Q29: I can talk to my line manager about something that has upset or annoyed me at work (n = 2,212) %



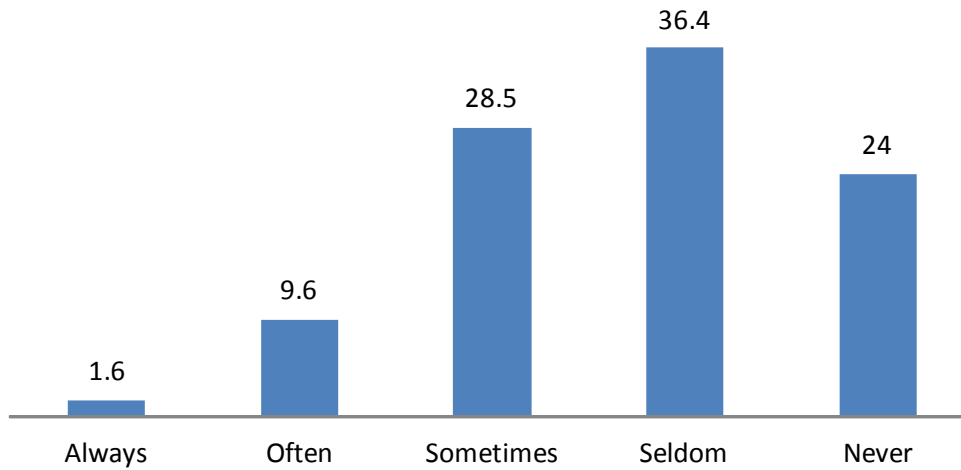
q29

HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education

2.97

Q33: I am supported through emotionally demanding work (n = 2,212) %

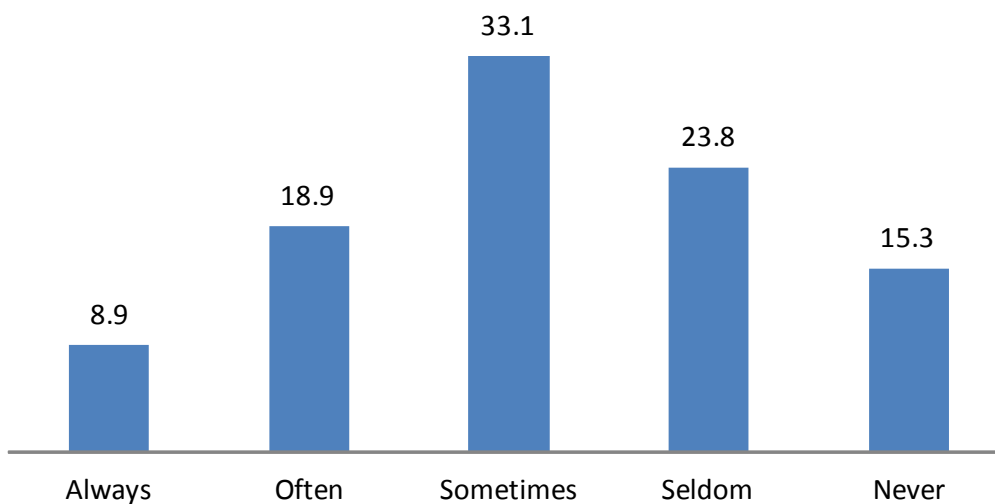


q33 HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education

2.29

Q35: My line manager encourages me at work (n = 2,212) %



q35 HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education

2.82

Managers' support: summary

Comparison of the UCU data alongside the results of the Health and Safety Executive's survey 'Psychosocial Working Conditions in Britain' indicated a considerably lower level of support from managers in FE than in the HSE target industries, including education. The level of manager support reported by employees in FE has reduced since the previous survey was conducted in 2012. The most notable changes were in the extent of support provided by managers for work problems and emotional problems and the level of encouragement from managers.

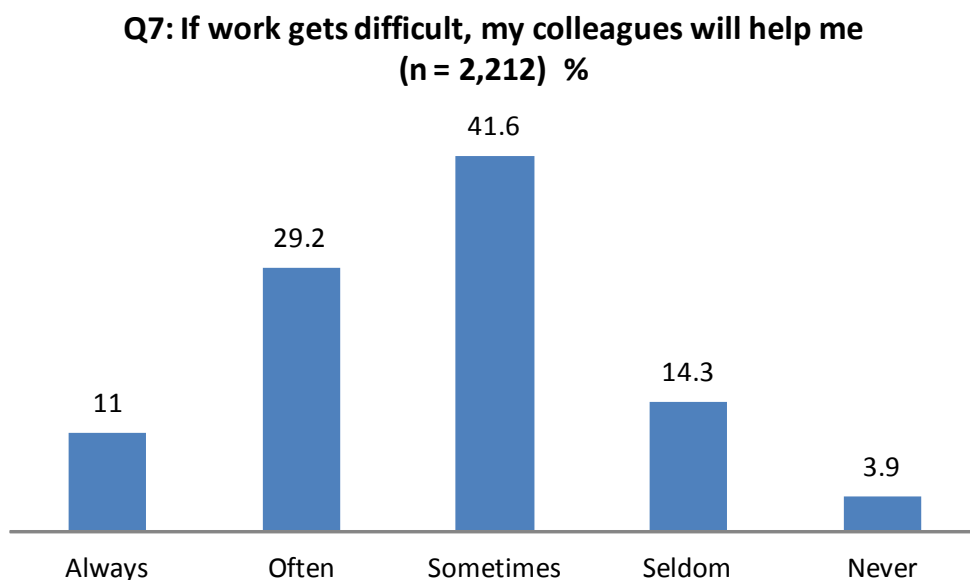
HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education	2.70
HSE survey target mean average	3.77

2.4 Peer support

A typical snapshot

UCU members in FE said their colleagues would sometimes help them if work got difficult. They indicated that they sometimes or often received the help and support they needed, and the respect they believed they deserved, from colleagues. Respondents from FE indicated that their colleagues were sometimes or often willing to listen to their work-related problems.



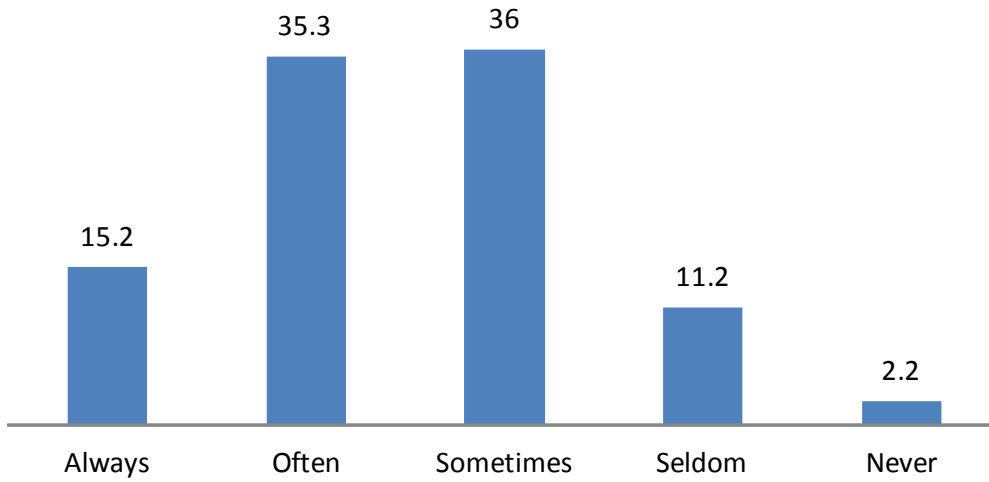
q7

HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education

3.29

**Q24: I get help and support from my colleagues
(n = 2,212) %**



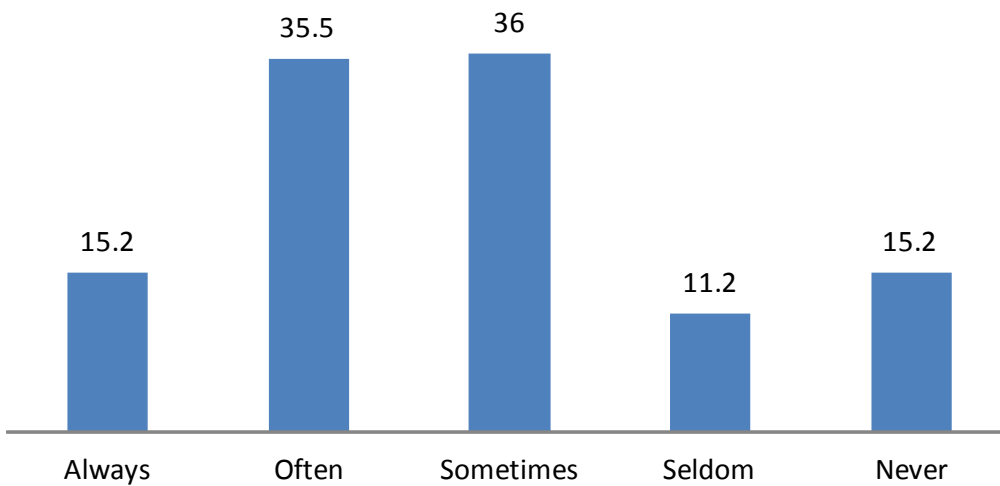
q24

HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education

3.50

**Q27: I receive the respect at work I deserve from my
colleagues (n = 2,212) %**



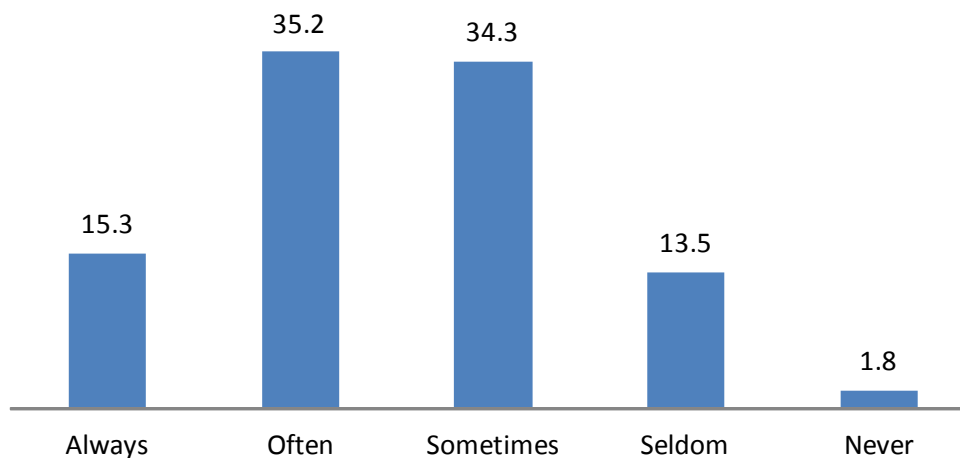
q27

HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education

3.40

Q31: My colleagues are willing to listen to my work-related problems (n = 2,212) %



q31	HSE scale out of 5 1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing
Further education	3.49

Peer support: summary

Comparison of the UCU data alongside the results of the Health and Safety Executive’s survey ‘Psychosocial Working Conditions in Britain’ indicated a lower level of wellbeing in FE than in the HSE target industries, including education, in relation to the level of peer support experienced by employees. The overall level of wellbeing regarding support from colleagues reported by employees in FE has reduced slightly since the previous survey was conducted in 2012.

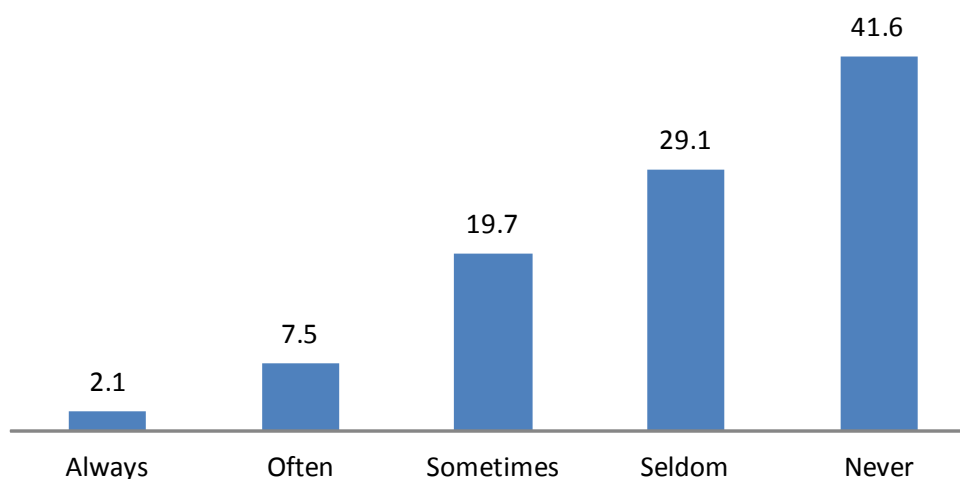
	HSE scale out of 5 1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing
Further education	3.42
HSE survey target group mean average	4.03

2.5 Relationships

A typical snapshot

Only just over four UCU members in every ten who work in FE (46%) indicated that they were never subjected to personal harassment at work. They indicated that there was sometimes friction or anger between colleagues and relationships at work were sometimes strained. Only just under half (46%) of members in HE could say they never experienced bullying at work.

Q5: I am subject to personal harassment at work
(n = 2,212) %



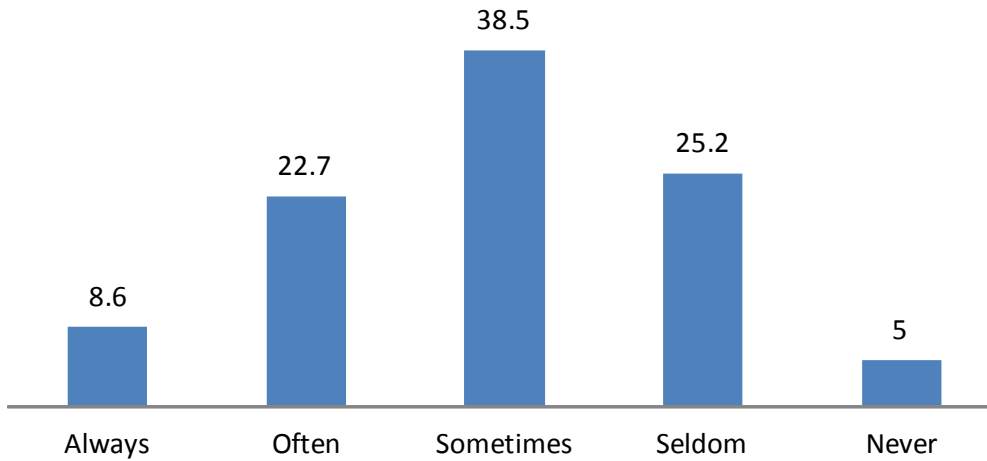
q5

HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education

4.00

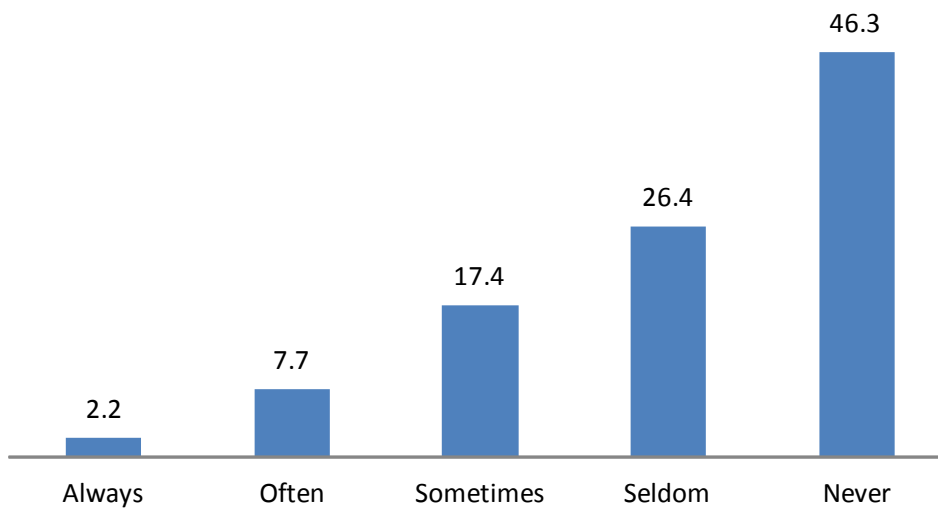
**Q14: There is friction and anger between colleagues
(n = 2,212) %**



q14 HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education **2.89**

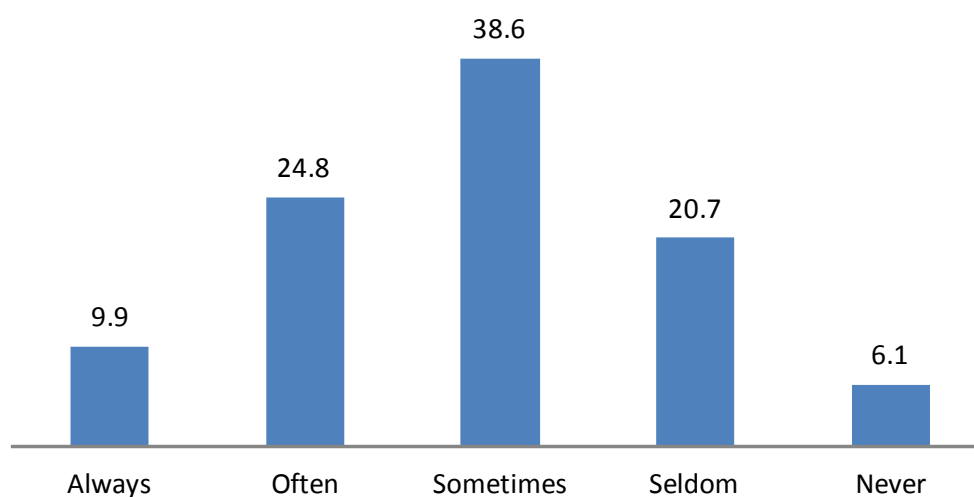
Q21: I am subject to bullying at work (n = 2,212) %



q21 HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education **4.06**

Q34: Relationships at work are strained (n = 2,212) %



q34

HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education

2.81

Relationships: summary

Comparison of the UCU data alongside the results of the Health and Safety Executive's survey 'Psychosocial Working Conditions in Britain' indicated a lower level of wellbeing relating to employees' relationships at work in FE than in the HSE target industries, including education. The overall level of wellbeing regarding relationships reported by employees in FE has reduced slightly since the previous survey was conducted in 2012.

HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education

3.43

HSE survey target group mean average

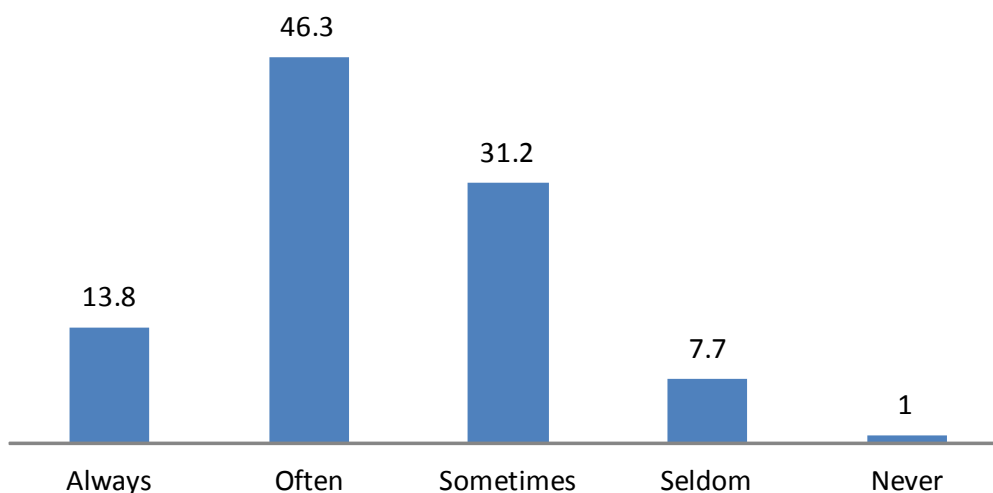
4.13

2.6 Role

A typical snapshot

UCU members in FE indicated that they often knew what was expected of them at work, and often had the information required to go about getting their job done. Respondents from FE were often clear about their personal duties and responsibilities. They often or sometimes understood how their work fitted in with the overall aim of their department and their organisation as a whole.

Q1: I am clear about what is expected of me at work
(n = 6,439) %



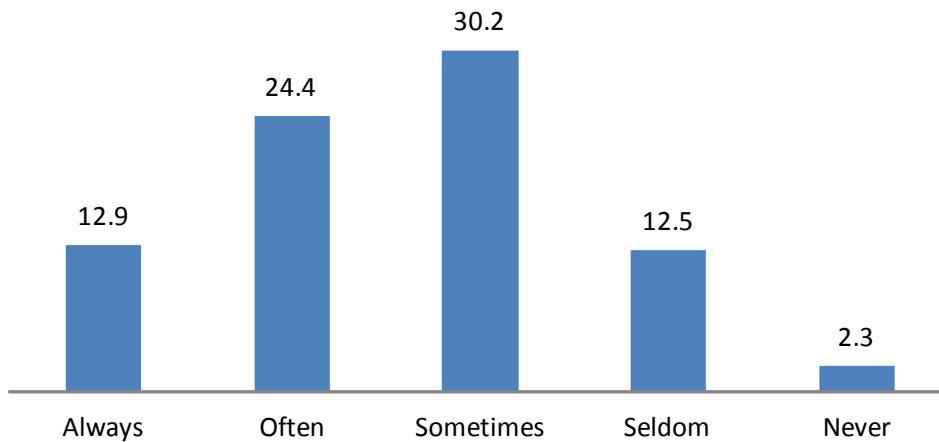
q1

HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education

3.64

Q4: I know how to go about getting my job done
(n = 2,212) %



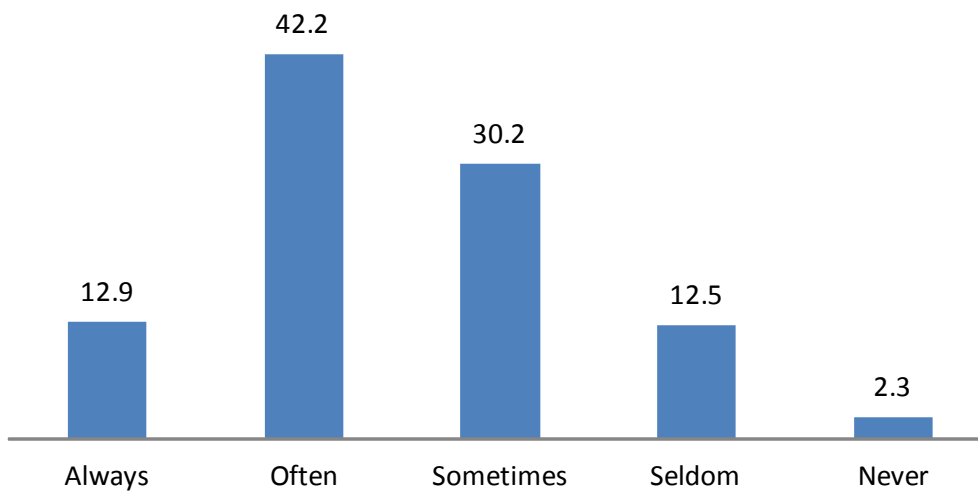
q4

HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education

3.51

Q11: I am clear what my duties and responsibilities are
(n = 2,212) %



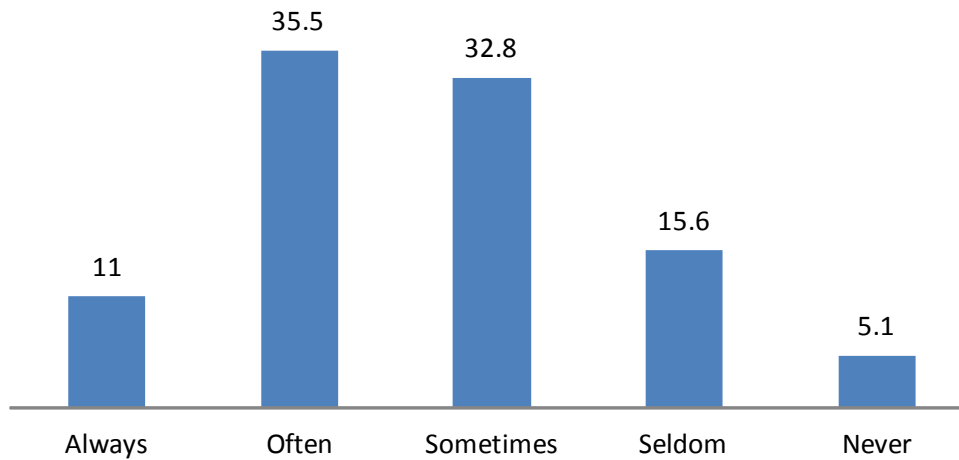
q11

HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education

3.51

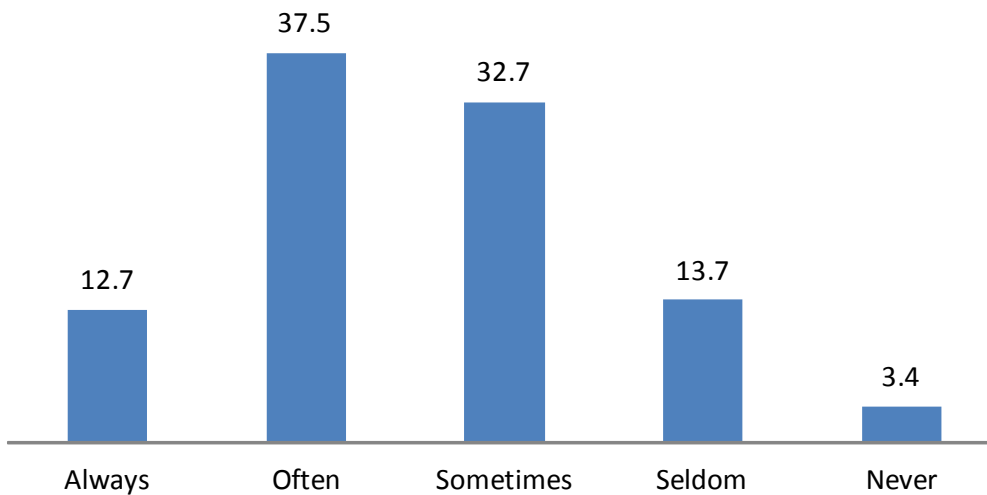
Q13: I am clear about the goals and objectives for my department (n = 2,212) %



q13 HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education 3.32

Q17: I understand how my work fits into the overall aim of the organisation (n = 2,212) %



q17 HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education 3.42

Role: summary

Comparison of the UCU data alongside the results of the Health and Safety Executive's survey 'Psychosocial Working Conditions in Britain' indicated a lower level of wellbeing in FE than in the HSE target industries, including education, regarding employees' understand of their role at work. The overall level of wellbeing in relation to role in FE has reduced since the previous survey was conducted in 2012. The most notable changes were in the extent to which respondents know how to get their job done.

HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

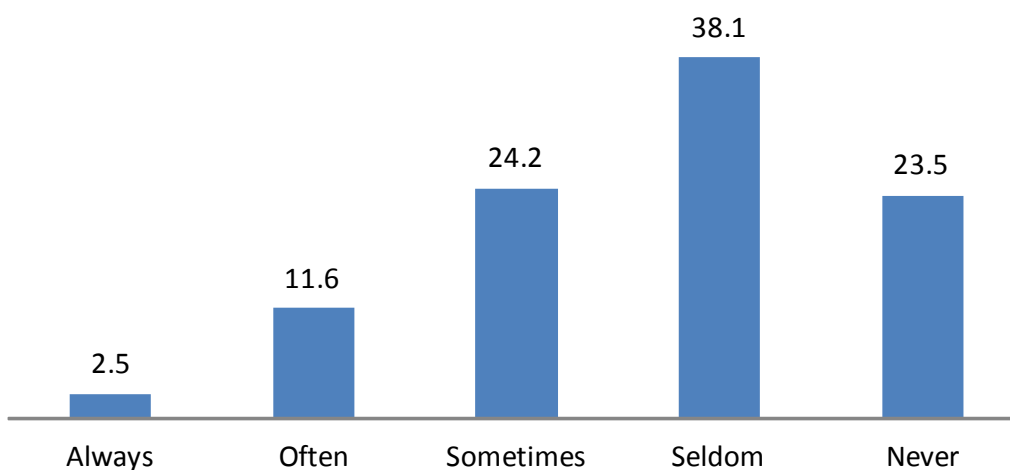
Further education	3.48
HSE survey target group mean average	4.61

2.7 Change

A typical snapshot

UCU members in FE indicated that they seldom had the opportunity to question managers about change at work and were seldom consulted about changes and how they would work out in practice.

Q26: I have sufficient opportunities to question managers about change at work (n = 2,212) %



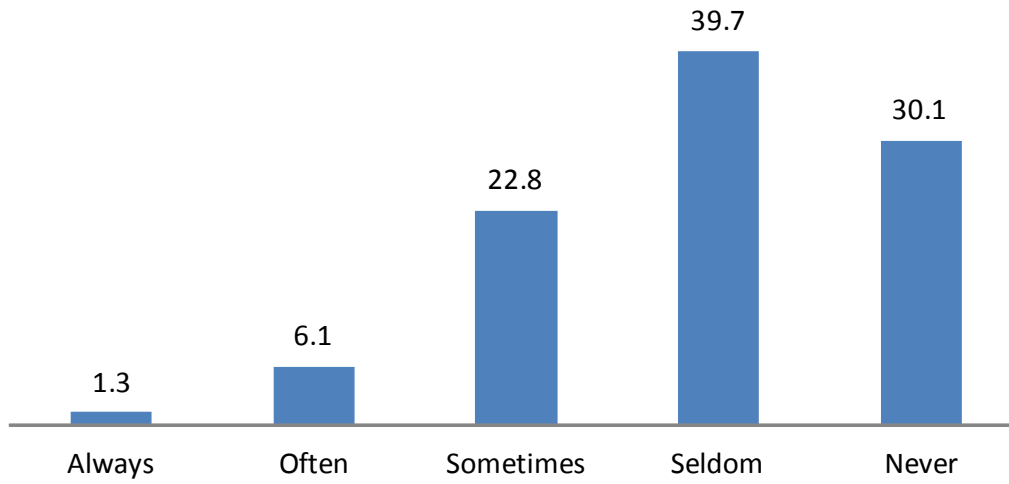
q26

HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education

2.32

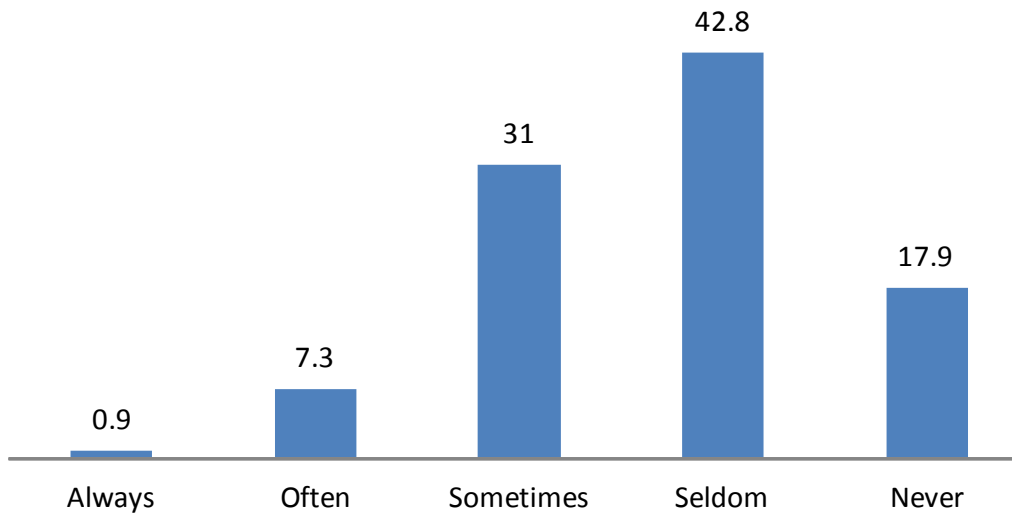
**Q28: Staff are always consulted about change at work
(n = 2,212) %**



q28 HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education 2.09

**Q32: When changes are made at work, I am clear about
how they will work out in practice (n = 2,212) %**



q32 HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education 2.30

Change: summary

Comparison of the UCU data alongside the results of the Health and Safety Executive's survey 'Psychosocial Working Conditions in Britain' indicated a lower level of wellbeing in FE than in the HSE target industries, including education, regarding the way change is handled at work. The overall level of wellbeing in relation to how change is communicated and managed has reduced slightly since the previous survey was conducted in 2012, most notably in the opportunities available to question managers about change.

HSE scale out of 5
1=low wellbeing ; 5=high wellbeing

Further education	2.24
HSE survey target group mean average	3.54

3 Overall perception of stress

Three questions in the survey investigated the extent to which respondents considered their work to be stressful. There was a high level of agreement among respondents in FE with the statement 'I find my job stressful' whereas almost nine out of every ten respondents strongly agreed (45%) or agreed (42%) with the statement. Only 3% strongly disagreed.

More than six out of every ten respondents from FE (64%) indicated that the level of stress they generally experienced was high (43%) or very high (21%). Almost one-third (31%) stated that they experienced moderate stress, whereas 5% saw their overall stress level as low or very low. A similar proportion (7%) reported that they seldom or never experienced unacceptable levels of stress. Nonetheless, almost half of the sample (48%) often experienced levels of stress they found unacceptable and 14% indicated that this was always the case. The proportion of UCU members from FE who endorsed each response category for the three questions is shown below, together with the data from HE for the purposes of comparison³.

q36a

I find my job stressful	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	%	%	%	%	%
Higher education	33.0	46.3	11.8	6.0	2.9
Further education	45.2	41.6	7.6	2.3	3.2

q36b

How would you characterise your general or average level of stress?	Very high	High	Moderate	Low	Very low
Higher education	16.4	36.3	37.3	9.0	1.0
Further education	21.3	43.1	31.0	3.8	0.8

q37

Do you experience levels of stress that you find unacceptable?	Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
	%	%	%	%	%
Higher education	8.6	39.6	36.9	13.5	1.4
Further education	13.7	48.3	31.0	6.2	0.7

³ Due to the small number of respondents from adult and prison education, they have been included in the general category of further education for comparative purposes

Comparisons with previous surveys

The findings of the present survey suggest that the overall level of stress in FE is increasing. Comparative data is provided below from UCU surveys of the FE sector conducted in 2008, 2012 and the current survey (2014). As can be seen, the proportion of respondents who strongly agreed that their job is stressful increased considerably between 2008 and 2012 and has increased further. In the present survey, 87% of respondents from FE agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I find my job stressful" compared with 73% in the previous survey. The proportion of respondents who strongly disagree or disagree with this statement has generally remained stable.

I find my job stressful	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
	%	%	%	%	%
Further education 2008 (n=3190)*	2.5	7.6	15.9	49.4	24.5
Further education 2012 (n=7110)**	1.8	4.8	14.9	37.5	40.9
Further education 2014 (n=2251)	2.9	6.0	11.8	46.3	33.0

Totals may differ due to rounding

* Stephen Court & Gail Kinman, Tackling Stress in Further Education, UCU: London 2008

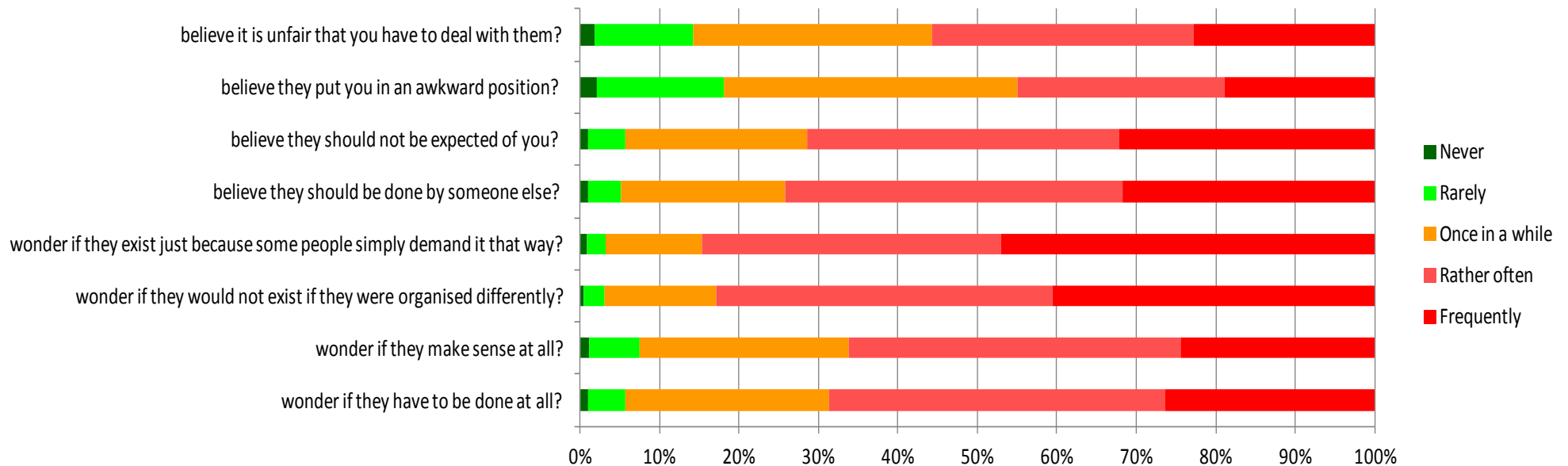
** Gail Kinman and Siobhan Wray, Further Stress, UCU: London 2012

http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/3/0/FE_stress_report_July_2013.pdf

4 Unreasonable tasks and change fatigue

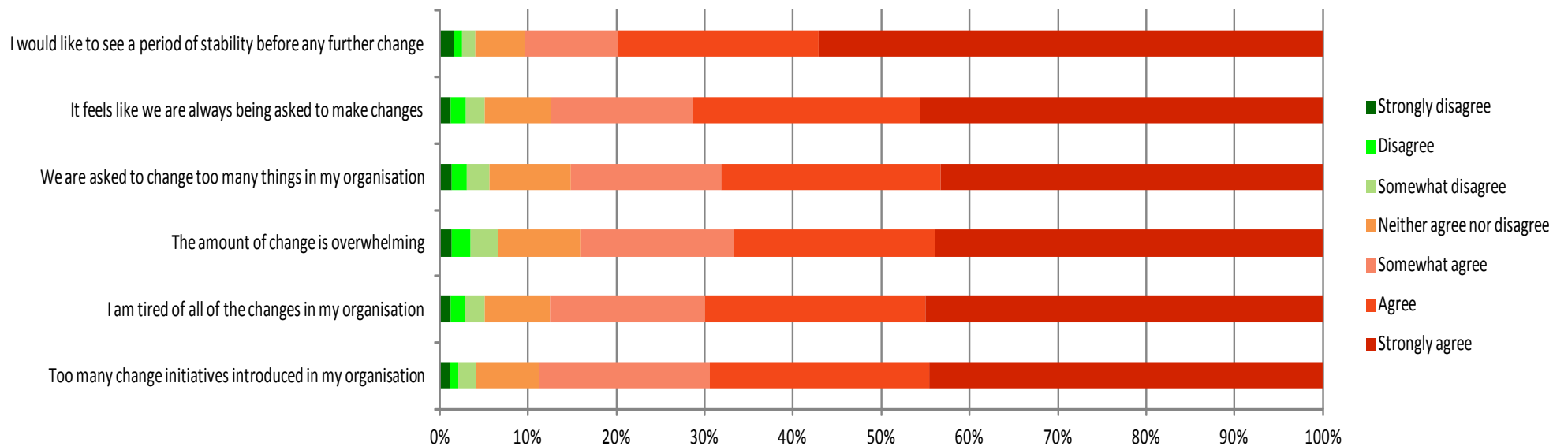
The extent to which respondents believed that they engage in tasks that are either illegitimate (i.e. they should not be done by them), or unnecessary (i.e. they should not be done at all) was explored. The chart below highlights the proportion of the sample from FE who responded on a five-point scale where 1 = never and 5 = frequently. Nearly seven respondents from every ten reported that they perform unnecessary tasks at work either rather often (42%) or frequently (26%). Only 1% believed that they never undertake unnecessary tasks. Three-quarters of respondents from FE expressed the belief that the tasks they do at work should be done by somebody else rather often (43%) or frequently (32%). The strongest level of agreement overall, however, was with the performance of tasks that would not exist (or could be done with less effort) if they were organised differently, and tasks that exist because some people simply demand it this way. These questions achieved mean scores of 4.2 and 4.3 respectively on a 5-point scale.

How often do you have to carry out tasks where you %



A further scale examined the extent to which UCU members in FE were experiencing change fatigue. Responses to a series of statements ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. The chart below shows the responses to each of the statements. Seven participants out of every ten agreed (25%) or strongly agreed (45%) that too many change initiatives had been introduced in their organisation, whereas 2% disagreed (1%) or strongly disagreed (1%). Seventy percent indicated that they were tired of all of the changes that had occurred (categorised as agree or strongly agree), and a similar proportion (68%) found them to be overwhelming. A considerable majority (90%) agreed at least "somewhat" that a period of stability without further changes being introduced was required, with more than half of the sample (57%) expressing strong agreement. This statement had the highest level of agreement overall, with a mean score of 6.2 on a 7-point scale.

Change fatigue %

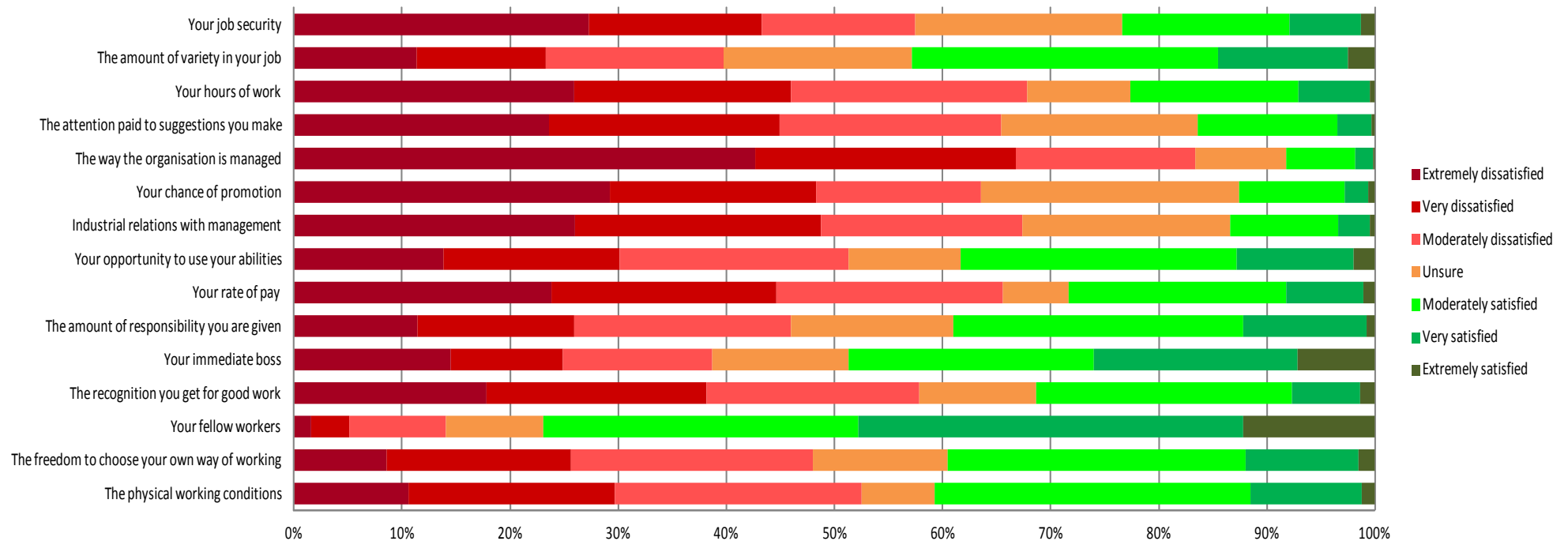


5 Job satisfaction and wellbeing

The overall level of job satisfaction was assessed together with two separate components: intrinsic satisfaction (i.e. reactions to features of the job itself, such as variety, control and the opportunity to use skills) and extrinsic satisfaction (features external to the job such as pay and the way the organisation is managed). Job satisfaction was rated on a seven-point scale with 1 = "extremely dissatisfied" and 7 = "extremely satisfied". The level of satisfaction with the job in general varied considerably among participants from FE. Only one in ten were very (9%) or extremely (1%) satisfied.

Satisfaction with specific job characteristics and working conditions were also investigated. UCU members in FE tended to be more satisfied with intrinsic than extrinsic aspects of their work. As can be seen from the chart below, by far the highest level of satisfaction was with fellow workers, with 77% of respondents being at least moderately satisfied, 36% indicating that they were very satisfied and 12% extremely satisfied with this aspect of their work. The second highest level of satisfaction reported was with line managers. In accordance with responses to the questions in the HSE scale reported above, satisfaction with the amount of variety in the work and freedom to choose how to do the job were also typically high. As can be seen below, however, the lowest ratings overall by respondents from FE were with the way the organisation is managed, promotion opportunities and industrial relations with management. Nonetheless, it should be emphasised that the level of satisfaction with line managers reported here was considerably higher than with senior managers. This is illustrated by the finding that only 2% of participants from FE were very or extremely satisfied with the way their organisation was managed. The overall level of job satisfaction reported by UCU members from FE (i.e. 3.38 on a 7 point scale) compares unfavourably with studies of other occupational groups, for example, a police force (4.53), an NHS Trust (4.68) and Social Work (4.74) (Stride et al., 2007).

Job satisfaction %



Psychological wellbeing was measured in two ways: a) psychological distress, which assesses elements of depression, anxiety, insomnia and impaired decision-making; and b) job-related burnout, which encompasses exhaustion and disengagement

The measure of psychological distress explores the extent to which the respondent's current level of wellbeing differs from their usual state. Each of the questions has a "better/healthier than usual", a "same as usual", a "worse than usual" and a "much worse than usual" option. There are two ways of scoring the measure: a) the "Likert" method (which assesses severity of symptoms); and b) the 'GHQ' method where threshold scores are used to assess 'caseness' levels of distress (where some degree of medical intervention is recommended).

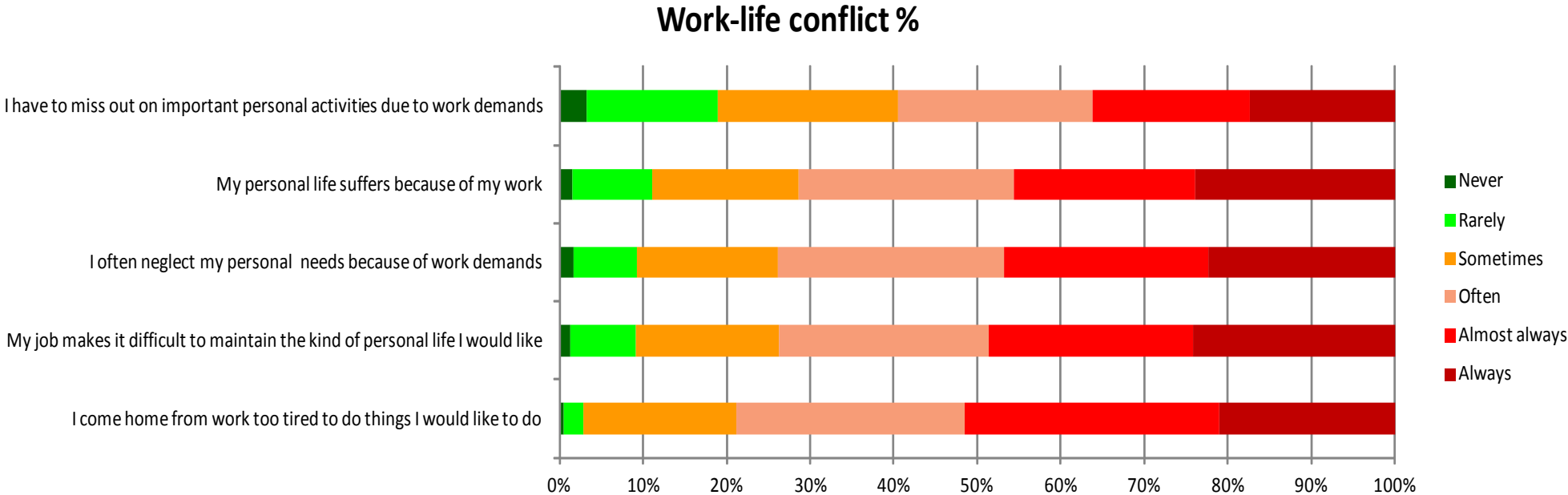
Just under four respondents in every ten (39%) reported that they were feeling reasonably happy all things considered, but the remainder was feeling less happy (40%) or much less happy (21%) than usual. Well over half of the sample (62%) indicated that they had been feeling unhappy and depressed either more (40%) or much more (22%) than usual, and a similar proportion (i.e. 57%) were less (44%) or much less (13%) able to enjoy their normal day-to-day activities. In relation to insomnia, 42% disclosed that they were losing sleep over worry "rather more than usual" and 25% "much more than usual". While 2% of respondents reported that they felt under strain "not at all" and 22% "no more than usual", more than seven out of every ten disclosed that they did so "rather more than usual" (45%) or "much more than usual" (31%). Almost half of the sample (49%) felt capable of making decisions about things, but just over half also indicated that they felt "rather less decisive" (39%) or "much less decisive" (12%) than usual.

A high level of caseness was found in that 69% of the sample scored at the cut-off point of 4 or above, 64% scored above 5, 54% above 7 and 28% above 9. More than four respondents from every ten (41%) scored 10 or above and 20% of the sample achieved the maximum score of 12. This suggests that a very high proportion of UCU members from FE require intervention to help improve their psychological health. The caseness rate found in this sample of UCU members working in HE (i.e. 69%) should be compared to the proportion scoring at or above 4 found in studies of other occupational groups: for example, Local Authority employees (42%), Social Workers (37%) and a Police Force = (47%) (Stride et al. 2007). It also compares unfavourably with previous studies of the university sector, whereby Kinman & Jones (2009) found a caseness rate of 49% in a sample of academic and academic-related staff working in UK universities and Winefield et al. (2003) reported rates of 43% in Australian university employees.

In terms of burnout, the levels of exhaustion and disengagement reported by UCU members in FE were fairly high (the mean scores were 3.1 and 2.8 respectively on a 4-point scale). Almost nine participants from every ten agreed (43%) or strongly agreed (46%) that they usually felt worn out after the working day, and a similar proportion (98%) disclosed that they took longer to recover from the demands of their job than in the past. Many seem to find their work emotionally as well as physically challenging; this was evidenced by 89% of the sample agreeing that their job made them feel emotionally drained. Responses to the questions assessing levels of engagement were subject to greater variation than those measuring exhaustion. For example, while more than eight respondents in every ten agreed that they tend to discuss their job in negative terms, six respondents in every ten reported that they could always find new and interesting aspects in their work, 42% saw their job as a positive challenge and a similar proportion (40%) indicated that this was the only type of work they could imagine themselves doing.

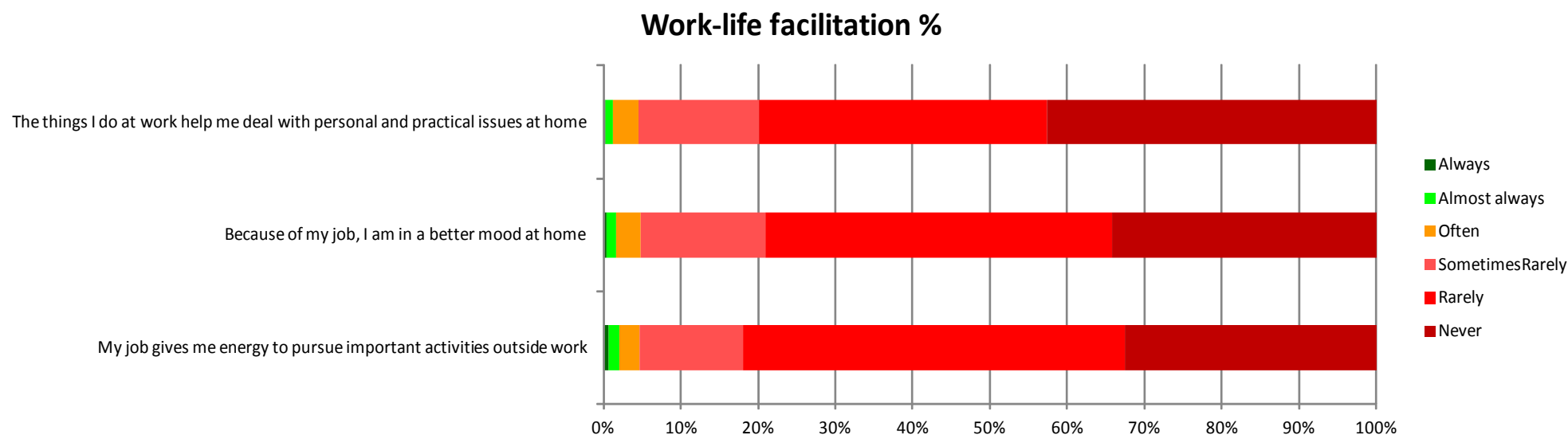
6 Work-life balance

As can be seen from the chart below, the work-life balance of UCU members in FE is generally poor. Reflecting the findings relating to levels of exhaustion discussed in the previous section, more than three-quarters of the sample reported that they come home from work too tired to do the things they would like to do like either often (27%), almost always (31%) or always (21%). Of particular concern is the finding that almost half of respondents from FE (46%) almost always or always neglect their personal life because their work is so demanding. Only just over one respondent in every ten maintained that their personal life never (1%) or rarely (10%) suffers because of their work.



Evidence was found that the overall level of work-life conflict in FE has increased in the two years since the 2012 survey; the mean score for the scale as a whole rose from 3.66 in 2012 to 4.27 in the present survey, with particular increases found in the extent to respondents neglect their personal needs and return from work too tired to meet their personal responsibilities. In the current survey,

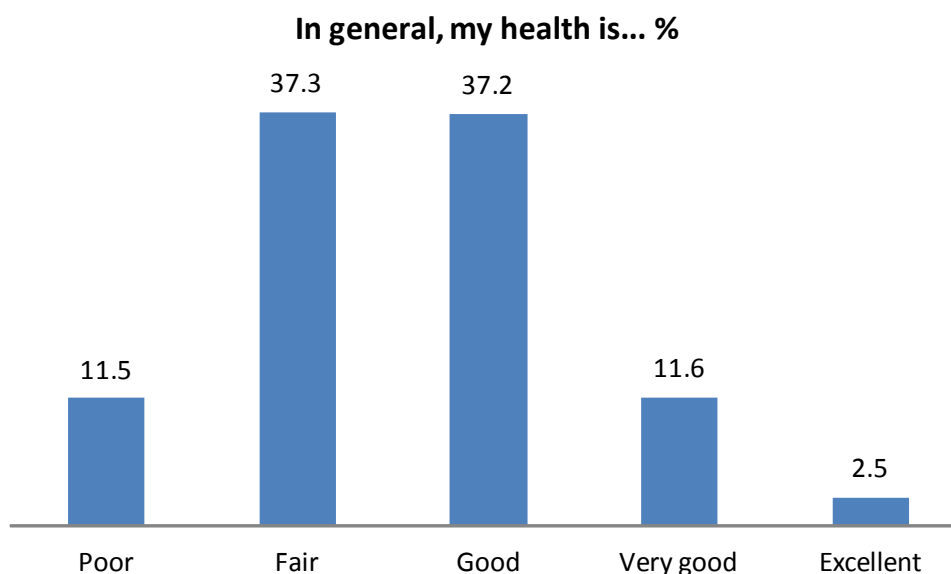
additional questions were asked relating to the extent to which employees ruminate about work-related worries and how they feel about this. More than three-quarters of respondents from FE disagreed (42%) or strongly disagreed (36%) that they are able to leave work issues behind when they leave. Similarly, only 12% of respondents indicated that they find it easy to unwind after work. A considerable majority reported that they become tense (83%), fatigued (79%) and irritated (81%) when they think about work issues in their free time.



Little evidence was found that UCU members working in FE experience work-life facilitation. Only 5% reported that their job gave them energy to pursue important activities more frequently than sometimes. Similarly, only just under one respondent in every twenty reported that their job helped improve their mood when they returned home often (3%) almost always (1%) or always (0.4%), whereas more than three-quarters of respondents (79%) indicated that this rarely (45%) or never (34%) occurred. Unlike work-life conflict reported above, which had increased considerably in the four-year period, the overall level of work-life facilitation reported by respondents working in FE remained fairly stable.

7 Health, sickness absence and “presenteeism”

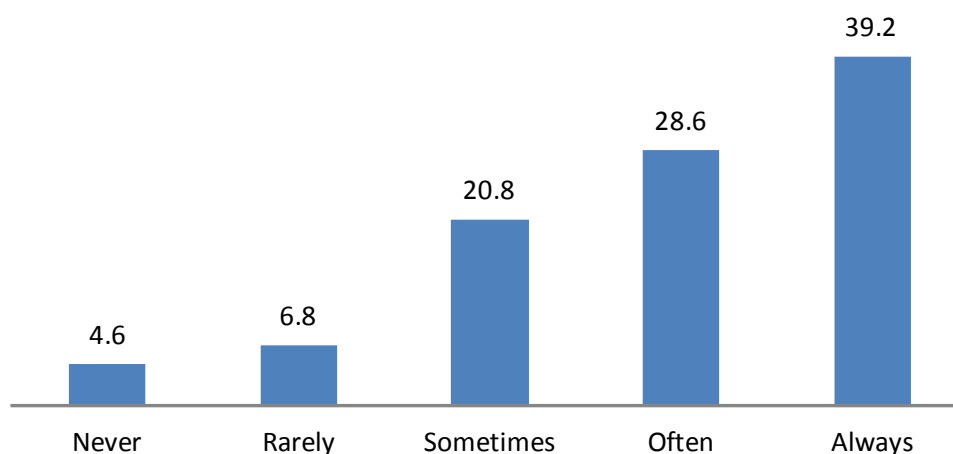
As can be seen from the chart below, the majority of UCU members from FE (88%) were in at least fair health, whereas 14% reported that their health was very good or excellent.



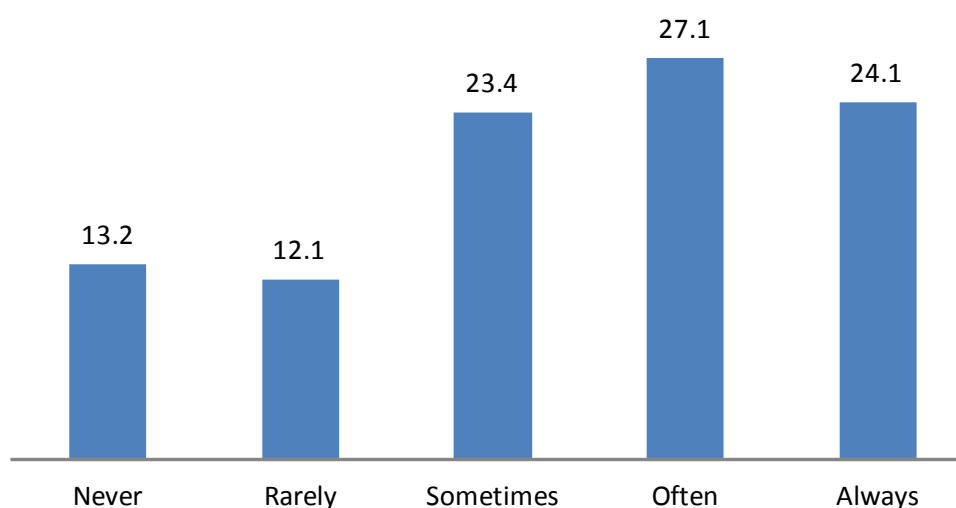
Nearly seven out of every 10 respondents from FE (68%) reported that they had taken sick leave in the 12 months prior to the survey being conducted. This represents a slight reduction to the proportion found in the 2012 survey (i.e. 70%). The number of sick days taken over the last year ranged from 1 to 365, with a mean of 8.1 (SD = 22.3). Of the people who had taken time off sick, almost half (49%) indicated that a proportion of this time had been due to stress-related illness, with 17% reporting taking more than five days and 11% more than 10 days off for this reason. When interpreting these findings, however, it is important to recognise the ‘healthy worker effect’, whereby employees who have chronic health problems are likely to have retired or changed occupations.

The two charts below show the proportion of UCU members from FE who indicated that they work while they are sick. Almost nine out of every ten respondents (89%) feel pressure to come to work when they are unwell at least sometimes, while 68% experience such pressure either often (29%) or always (39%). Few (i.e. 13%) never work at home when they are unwell, whereas a considerable majority (75%) do so at least sometimes and almost one quarter of the sample always do so.

Do you feel under pressure to come into work when you are unwell? %



Do you work at home when you are unwell? %



Respondents who indicated that they continued to work while they were sick were asked to provide the reasons for this. The explanations provided varied considerably; some were concerned about falling behind in their work which would increase the pressure on them when they returned, while others did not want to let their students or their colleagues down. Many indicated that rescheduling classes, assessments and meetings was difficult, which meant that they felt obliged to go into work. Respondents commonly remarked upon a lack of cover which meant that if they did not do their work it would remain undone. The potential adverse impact on institutional and national student surveys of staff taking time off sick was also highlighted, especially where classes had to be cancelled.

Relationships between the working environment and wellbeing

UCU members in FE who experienced more demands at work, less control and support from managers and colleagues, poorer quality relationships, less role clarity and less effective management of change typically reported more stress, burnout, psychological distress and less job satisfaction. Similarly, those who believed that a higher proportion of the tasks they performed were unreasonable and who experienced more change fatigue were more likely to be psychologically distressed, exhausted and disengaged and dissatisfied with their job. Work-related demands, role ambiguity and poor quality relationships were particularly powerful predictors of distress. Respondents from FE who experienced more work-life conflict also tended to report that their mental health was poorer than those with a better work-life balance; a particular risk factor was an inability to switch off from the job and a tendency to worry about work problems during free time. The work-related factors that were the strongest predictors of wellbeing will be discussed further in the conclusion section later in this report.

8 Differences between groups

This survey explored whether there were any job-related or demographic differences in the extent of stressors and strains reported by respondents.

Academic and academic-related staff. In general, respondents employed in academic roles reported higher levels of demands and less control, they also typically performed more tasks they considered to be illegitimate and unreasonable. The academic grades also tended to experience more change fatigue, job-related stress and emotional exhaustion and less job satisfaction. In terms of the work-home interface, respondents from academic grades in FE typically reported more work-life conflict, had greater problems disengaging from work and experienced less work-life facilitation.

Sex. Women working in FE reported slightly poorer wellbeing in relation to demands than their male colleagues and more work-life conflict. Interestingly, however, men tended to report more problems disengaging from work concerns after the working day. Female respondents also typically perceived gaining more support from colleagues, as well as experiencing better quality relationships at work, more role clarity and greater job satisfaction.

Disability. Respondents who identified themselves as disabled, or who were unsure if they were disabled, reported less wellbeing in relation to support from managers and peers and poorer quality working relationships in general. They also tended to report less job satisfaction, higher levels of work-related stress and work-life conflict and more emotional exhaustion and psychological distress.

Age. Older respondents tended to report experiencing poorer quality relationships in work and more change fatigue. Nonetheless, they typically experienced less emotional exhaustion and work-life conflict than their younger counterparts and had fewer problems disengaging from work concerns. Working hours also tended to reduce with age.

Mode of employment. FE staff employed on a full-time basis typically reported performing more tasks they considered unreasonable than those on part-time and hourly-paid contracts. They also tended to perceive a higher level of work-life conflict

Terms of employment. Respondents who were employed on a permanent contract tended to report a higher level of demand than those who had fixed-term, variable hours or zero hours contracts.

Sector. Comparisons were also made between the levels of work-related stressors, perceptions of working conditions and other variables reported by UCU members from HE

and FE. ⁴ On average, employees in FE worked fewer hours, but they tended to report poorer wellbeing in relation to demands, relationships and change and slightly less support from managers than those working in the HE sector. The difference observed in levels of job control was particularly marked, with FE employees perceiving considerably less autonomy than those in HE. Nonetheless, respondents working in FE typically felt that they gained more support from colleagues. In terms of other work-related variables, FE respondents generally performed more tasks they considered unreasonable and experienced more change fatigue than those working in HE. Work-life conflict, rumination, burnout and psychological distress were all higher in FE, and the overall level of job satisfaction was also lower.

⁴ Please note that data from UCU members working in adult and prison education has been included with that from further education due to the small number of respondents.

9 Conclusion

Although a degree of stress is to be expected in any professional role, this survey of UCU members indicates that it remains a serious cause for concern in FE. The high level of stress found in the 2012 survey has not been alleviated; in fact, the proportion of members from FE who agree or strongly agree that their job is stressful has increased 14% (i.e. from 73% to 87%) in the two years since the previous survey, and a higher proportion (62%) reported that they often or always experienced levels of stress they found unacceptable (45% in 2012 which, in turn, represented an increase from the 40% reported in the 2008 survey). These findings should be contrasted with those reported in 2010 by the HSE, where the proportion of UK employees in general who consider their job to be very or extremely stressful was 15%. In the current survey, demands were by far the most powerful predictor of job-related stress, followed by poor interpersonal relationships and illegitimate tasks.

On all of the HSE stressor categories, UCU members in FE reported lower wellbeing than the average for those working in the target group industries, including education. The biggest 'wellbeing gaps', in order of magnitude, were with change management, job demands, role and support from managers. This is a similar pattern to that which emerged in the 2012 study, but the wellbeing gap in relation to all hazard categories, particularly role, change management and support from managers and peers, has widened, highlighting particular problems in these areas. These findings should be contrasted with those reported by the HSE for the UK workforce in general. Although demand, control, peer support, role and relationship scores have changed little among all British employees since 2004, some improvements in levels of wellbeing in relation to change and managerial support have been documented (HSE, 2010). As can be seen below, there continues to be a considerable shortfall between the mean scores for each of the hazard categories and the HSE recommendations and this is widening over time.

			Managerial	Peer			
1=low wellbeing							
5=high wellbeing	Demands	Control	support	support	Relationships	Role	Change
HSE target group mean average	3.44	3.32	3.77	4.03	4.13	4.61	3.54
UCU members working in FE 2014	2.30	2.70	2.70	3.42	3.43	3.48	2.24
'Wellbeing gap' for UCU members in FE 2014	-1.14	-0.62	-1.07	-0.61	-0.70	-1.13	-1.30
UCU members working in FE 2012	2.43	2.92	2.97	3.59	3.51	3.74	2.35
'Wellbeing gap' for UCU members in HE 2012	-0.99	-0.40	-0.80	-0.44	-0.62	-0.87	-1.19
UCU members working in FE 2008	2.52	3.05	2.98	3.56	3.52	3.71	2.38
'Wellbeing gap' for UCU members in FE 2008	-0.92	-0.27	-0.79	-0.47	-0.61	-0.90	-1.16
HSE interim target	3.50	3.50	3.80	4.00	4.25	5.00	3.67
HSE long term target	4.25	4.33	4.60	4.75	4.75	5.00	4.00

Evidence has been found that UCU members in FE continue to have problems achieving a

healthy balance between work and their personal life. Despite growing evidence that work can facilitate and enrich non-working life (Grzywacz & Demerouti, 2011), little support for such positive effects in FE employees emerged. Only just over one respondent in every ten maintained that their personal life rarely or never suffers because of their work. The overall level of work-life conflict found in the present survey is considerably higher than that reported in the 2012 survey. The findings indicate that demands, working hours, and to a lesser extent lack of control and poor quality relationships at work, were the most powerful predictors of work-life conflict in FE. Nonetheless, change fatigue, performing unreasonable tasks and rumination about work-related worries and concerns also made a significant contribution. Conversely, respondents who reported experiencing more work-life facilitation tended to have more wellbeing in relation to demands, control, support, relationships, role and change and have a firmer boundary between their work and home life.

This survey introduced several new variables thought to be of particular relevance to current working conditions in FE. The findings indicated that almost three-quarters of the sample often/frequently engage in tasks they consider unnecessary. Only 1% of respondents believed that they never undertake such tasks. Moreover, a particularly high level of change fatigue was revealed, which was well illustrated by the majority (seven out of every ten) indicating that too many changes had been introduced in their institution. Respondents were almost unanimous in their belief that a period of stability was required in the sector.

This survey also included measures of health, 'presenteeism', psychological distress and job satisfaction. The majority of respondents from FE appear to find their work physically and emotionally exhausting. The finding that UCU members in FE commonly continue to work when they are sick raises serious concerns for their continued wellbeing. In FE, presenteeism does not necessarily mean that employees come into work while sick, three-quarters of the sample work at home when they are unwell at least sometimes, with almost one quarter always doing so. Pressure of work, feelings of guilt, lack of cover, a reluctance to let down students and further burden colleagues, job insecurity and knowing that work will remain undone were amongst the most frequently cited reasons for this presenteeism.

The extent of psychological distress and burnout found in this survey are high. Evidence has been provided that UCU members from FE are in poorer psychological health and experience less job satisfaction than many other occupational groups. Almost seven out of every ten respondents from this sector of education achieved 'caseness' levels of distress, where some degree of intervention is recommended. As outlined above, the extent of caseness found in the current survey is considerably higher than that found in other professional groups. It also compares unfavourably with previous studies of the university sector in the UK and Australia (Kinman et al. 2009; Winefield et al., 2003). The findings of this survey suggest that wellbeing might be increased if attention were given to reducing demands, increasing role clarity and improving the quality of working

relationships as they were the strongest predictors of psychological distress.

Only just over one in ten respondents from FE were very or extremely satisfied with their job whereas almost one half were dissatisfied. Nonetheless, six respondents in every ten reported that they could always find new and interesting aspects in their work and more than four in ten saw their job as a positive challenge and indicated that this was the only type of work they could imagine themselves doing. Satisfaction with intrinsic factors, such as fellow workers and the amount of variety in the job, was typically high. The lowest level of satisfaction was with the way the organisation is managed, promotion opportunities and industrial relations with management. The strongest predictors of overall job satisfaction were support from managers, demands, positive interpersonal relationships at work and effective management of change. Unreasonable tasks and change fatigue were also negatively related to job satisfaction. These findings highlight potentially fruitful areas for intervention which should enhance job satisfaction in the sector.

Endnote: Tackling occupational stress

This survey of occupational stress was undertaken by UCU with the intention of gathering data leading to recommendations to inform local and national negotiations. UCU provides support at a national and local level to inform members of the nature of occupational stress, and of their employer's responsibility to ensure that workloads and working hours do not become a source of stress-related illness. UCU has produced a stress toolkit, which is available at: <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2562>. The toolkit has guidelines for UCU officers on how to help members deal with stress in general and how best to support individual cases. It also highlights the importance of universities and colleges treating occupational stress as a health and safety issue, undertaking regular risk assessments (the findings of which should be fully communicated to all employees) and monitoring hours of work. UCU has also produced a model questionnaire for local use. UCU's website also provides links to other organisations, such as the advice, aid and counselling organisation Recourse, which is supported by UCU, and the Health and Safety Executive. UCU also works together with employer bodies, such as the Association of Colleges and the Universities and Colleges Employers Association, to tackle the problem of occupational stress in the sector.

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