

# Joint Trade Union Student Behaviour Survey Report

## 1. Introduction

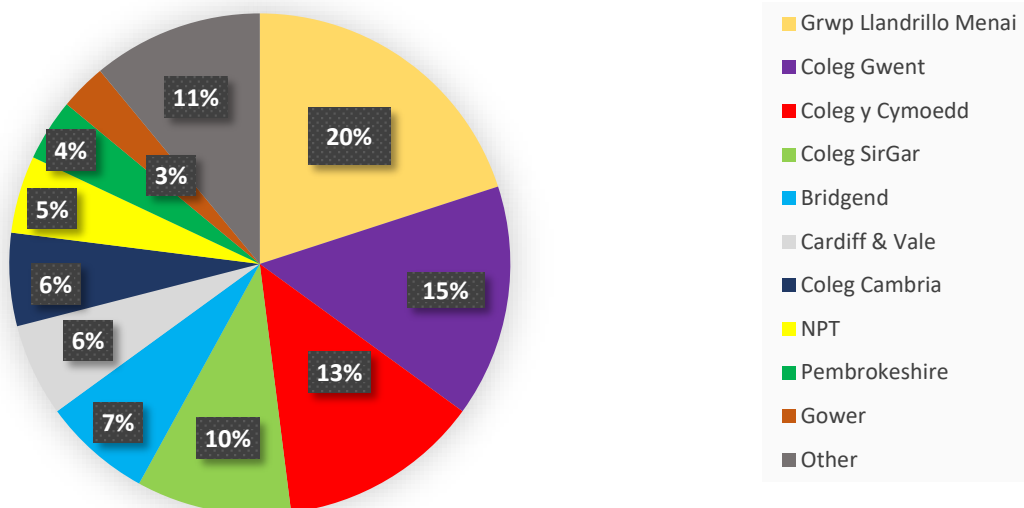
Trade Unions in Wales have experienced an increase in issues being reported by members within Further Education Institutions (FE) relating to acceptable student behaviour. In response to this trend the Wales Joint Trade Union Group agreed to undertake a survey with FE members in order to gather an evidence base on this important issue. This report presents the findings of that survey which related to the period 2018 - 2019. It begins by providing an overview of the key research findings followed by a brief discussion of the evidence collated. It concludes by proposing some next steps and future actions that seek to address the issues identified.

## 2. Survey Findings

### 2.1 Survey Respondent and Further Education College Information

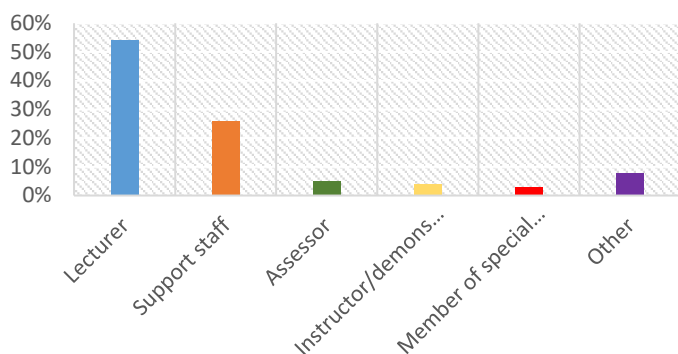
A total of 345 completed surveys were received from staff across the FE sector. *Chart 1* below details the Further Education colleges in which the survey respondents are located. It is noteworthy that the majority of responses came from six FE colleges only (Grwp Llandrillo Menai (20%); Coleg Gwent (15%); Coleg y Cymoedd (13%); Coleg Sir Gar (10%); Bridgend (7%) while other colleges are under-represented notably Neath Port Talbot, Pembrokeshire, Coleg Ceredigion.

Chart 1: FE Institutions



Survey respondents had a range of occupations (see Chart 2) with a majority being lecturers and there was also a high proportion of support staff. In comparison a minority of respondents were assessors and instructor/demonstrators and SEN/additional support for learning/ILS staff.

Chart 2: Respondent Occupation



| Occupation  | %   |
|---|-----|
| Lecturer  | 54  |
| Support Staff   | 26  |
| Assessor  | 5   |
| Instructor/demonstrator   | 4   |
| Specialeducational needs /additional support for learning/ILS staff | 3   |
| Other   | 8   |
| Total   | 100 |

## 2.2 Student Misbehaviour: Prevalence, Location & Form

Chart 3 evidences that three quarters of staff respondents stated that they had experienced challenging, disruptive or violent behaviour by a student in the previous academic year.

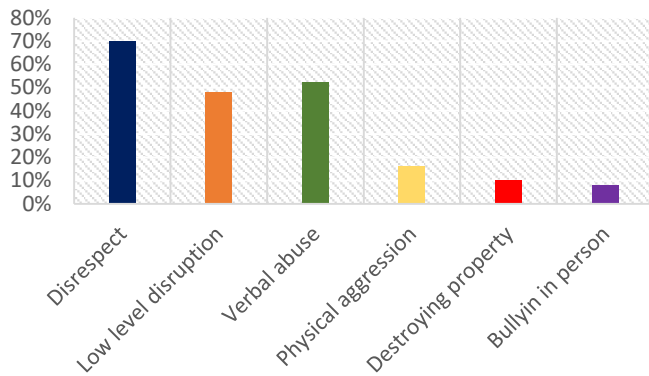
Chart 3: Staff experienced of challenging, disruptive or violent behaviour in past twelve months



The survey revealed that student misbehaviour is an issue in a range of subjects: *vocational* (33%); *BTEC* (22%); *essential skills* (20%); *junior apprenticeship* (9%); *A level* (6%); *other* (10%). These results could suggest that there is a more significant issue in vocational type subjects compared with academic qualification based courses.

The primary forms of student misbehaviour identified by staff would be described as ‘low level’ although it is extremely concerning that a significant proportion of issues related to physical aggression and destroying property. The survey also revealed that bullying continues to be a problem.

Chart 4: Form of Student Misbehaviour

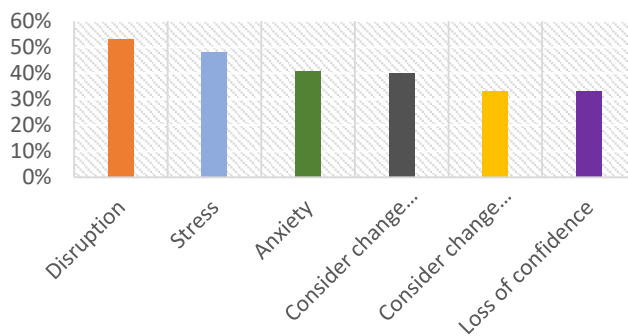


| Misbehaviour         | %  |
|----------------------|----|
| Disrespect           | 70 |
| Low level disruption | 48 |
| Verbal abuse         | 52 |
| Physical aggression  | 16 |
| Destroying property  | 10 |
| Bullying in person   | 10 |

### 2.3 Impact of Student Misbehaviour on Staff

The survey responses provided evidence about the way in which student misbehaviour impacted upon staff (Chart 5) with the most significant effect identified by staff being work disruption and a detrimental impact upon staff health and well-being. A large proportion of staff responded that their experience of student behaviour issues had led them to consider changing job/profession.

Chart 5: Impact of Student Misbehaviour on Staff



| Student Misbehaviour Impact on Staff | %  |
|--------------------------------------|----|
| Disruption                           | 53 |
| Stress                               | 48 |
| Anxiety                              | 41 |
| Consider change of job               | 40 |
| Consider change of profession        | 33 |
| Loss of confidence                   | 33 |

These quantitative findings are reflected in the qualitative data which revealed the detrimental impact that student misbehaviour has upon staff well-being and morale as evidenced by the quotes below. The qualitative data also shed some light on the negative impact that student misbehaviour can have upon the quality of education with some respondents commenting that they no longer challenged this type of behaviour because they saw little point in doing so due to what they believed was an institutional failure to respond to the problems staff experience. This is evidenced by the following quotes:

*"I have experienced female colleagues emotional upset and crying as a result of student behaviour."*

*"Staff morale on this issue is at an all-time low and is why I am a union member."*

*"Many staff will walk past smokers, bad behaviour and wash their hands of trying to instil discipline once their lessons are finished."*

#### **2.4 Staff support and training**

The qualitative data in the survey which focussed upon the support provision offered by the institution to staff who had experienced student misbehaviour is a cause for concern. A majority of respondents stated that the support provided was either non-existent or very limited. A number of respondents felt that there was an inconsistency in the support provided and where support systems existed there was a failure by the institution to act upon or implement these. These concerns are reflected in the following comments by staff:

*" No practical support given"*

*"Staff are occasionally supported by managers, but this is sporadic and inconsistent"*

*"Systems are in place to support staff, but this is merely a paper trail process"*

A large proportion of respondents commented that there was an expectation by the institution that staff would address student misbehaviour and a number of respondents felt that there existed a blame culture within their institutions whereby staff are seen to be at fault rather than the student. These issues are compounded by the fact that a majority of respondents believed that support for students took precedence over staff:

*"We are told it is part of the job and that we need to grow a thicker skin"*

*"They do not support staff at all. Any staff who raise it are blamed for failing to manage it. Students are never disciplined"*

*"There are policies in place that offer support, however, staff feel this is directed more towards the learner than the staff. In many cases staff feel as though their needs are ignored and this can be very deflating. We are aware there is a duty of care to ALL, however, this is rarely displayed in staff support"*

*"College does not support staff. The style of management is one to assume staff are wrong. Management adopt a blame culture. Students are aware that staff are helpless. College policy leaves staff vulnerable and open to abuse"*

Notwithstanding these criticisms, a minority of staff did feel supported and made reference to a number of good practice support systems and processes in existence including CDP, a staff support helpline, mentoring and counselling services:

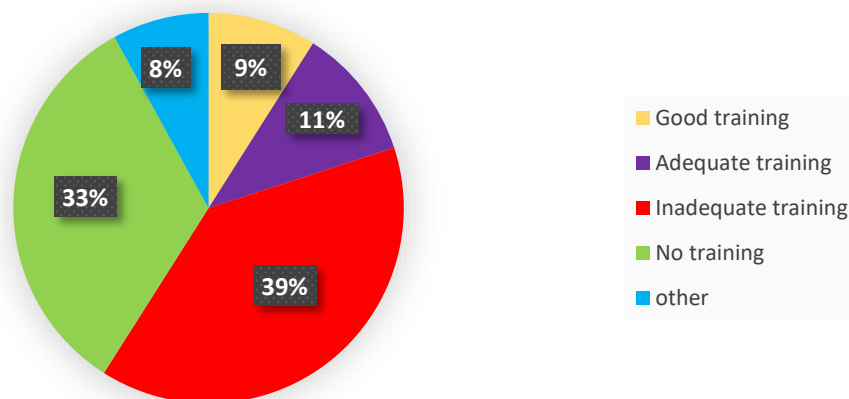
*“Providing a colleague mentor to help improve classroom management skills. Encouraging use of endorsed counselling services”*

*“Management have offered more support in the class. I have been informed there is a parish person who visits if I want to talk”*

*“This year better support from management in relation to disciplinaries”*

With regards Continued Professional Development (CDP) relating to managing student misbehaviour it is noteworthy that only a small proportion of respondents felt that they received good training compared with 39% of respondents stating that the training was inadequate. More concerning is the fact that a third of respondents stated that they did not receive any CDP training to manage student misbehaviour. These responses reflect and reinforce the findings of the qualitative data regarding the lack of support that respondents had.

**Chart 6: training on dealing with student misbehaviour**

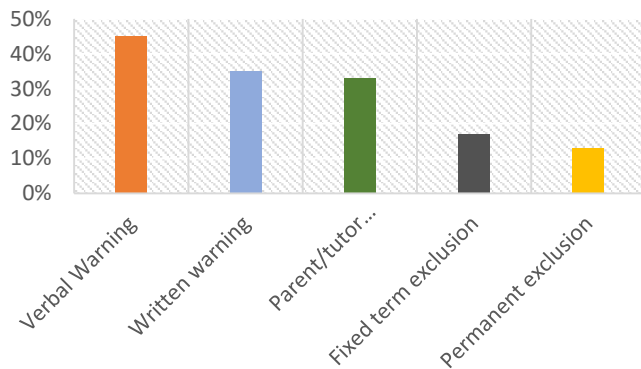


**2.5 Institutional Processes for Addressing Student Misbehaviour**

94% of staff confirmed that their institution does have a policy to deal with student behaviour. The qualitative data revealed two principal ways in which staff report issues with their institution (i) Using some form of online reporting system including VITAL, EDRAC, Ontrack, EBS; (ii) Report matter to Senior Management.

In terms of sanctions, the respondents highlighted a number of different responses by the institution as outlined in Chart 7. While written and verbal warnings are the most common sanctions it is concerning that almost a third (30%) of respondents reported that their institutions continue to use fixed term or permanent exclusions.

Chart 7: Institutional Sanctions for Student Misbehaviour



| Institutional Sanctions for Student Misbehaviour | %  |
|--|----|
| Verbal Warning                                   | 45 |
| Written warning                                  | 35 |
| Parent/tutor meeting                             | 33 |
| Fixed term exclusion                             | 17 |
| Permanent exclusion                              | 13 |

The qualitative survey data provides extremely important contextual information with regards institutional processes for dealing with student misbehaviour with a large proportion of respondents highlighting what they regard are inadequacies in the processes and in particular failure of institutions to follow through and implement their procedures. Many respondents stated that the reason for these failures was driven by financial considerations with the overriding objective being to secure the financial viability of the institution. A primary way of achieving this is by retaining and building student numbers but it could be argued that this is to the detriment to student and staff well-being as well as the quality of education.

*“We have a four stage disciplinary process....members of management do not want to fully adopt the process. Because it will be detrimental to student numbers, statistics, and college income if students are withdrawn”*

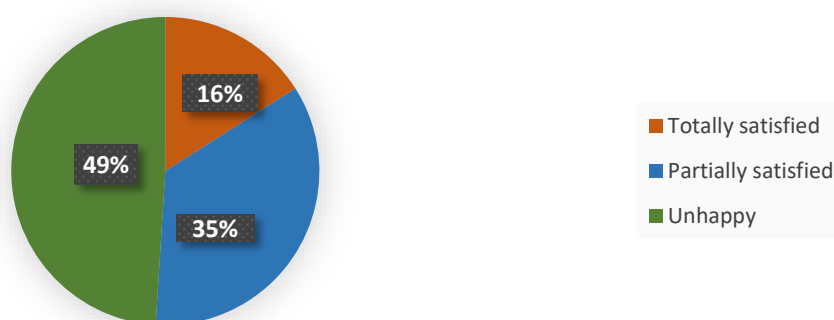
*“..the disciplinary process is too slow, disjointed and pretty ineffective. If management took the role of disciplinarian I can build relationships and get results.....Being a source of guidance and support I feel is my role not the ‘big bad wolf’”.*

*“poorly disciplinary process too long ,too many warnings. Policies are in place but are not implemented effectively. Action is very slow.”*

*“rarely are sanctions put in place by senior staff members giving the students a feeling of invincibility when it comes to low level disruption and sometimes abusive behaviour as well. From my perspective the attitude from leadership seems to be funding from students i.e. retaining them at all costs is more important than challenging unacceptable behaviour.”*

Almost half (49%) of respondents were unhappy with their institutions response to student misbehaviour which is unsurprising given the qualitative data evidence above. A further 35% were partially satisfied and only 16% of staff were totally happy with the institutions response.

**Staff satisfaction with institutional response to student misbehaviour**



### 3. Next Steps & Action Points

While limited research has been undertaken on this topic to date, the evidence that does exist suggests that student misbehaviour in the FE sector is an issue that requires action (Reeves, 1995<sup>1</sup>; Wallace, 2014<sup>2</sup>). The findings of this JTU survey reflect this broader picture and provides new evidence that student misbehaviour is an issue within the FE sector in Wales which manifests in an array of ways. Of particular note and concern is the finding that a significant proportion of issues related to physical aggression and destroying property. These issues are having a detrimental effect upon staff well-being and their ability to fulfil their role which in turn will have a negative impact upon the quality of teaching.

The continued use of learner exclusions is a particular cause for concern. There exists a substantial body of evidence that shows the negative impact of exclusions on the learner and society more broadly (Evans, 2010<sup>3</sup>; Ford et al, 2017<sup>4</sup>). We have as a nation a moral and statutory responsibility to ensure that the educational and training needs of all young people are met. Many young people at risk of becoming NEET through disengagement of the education system still have the potential to become skilled and successful members of the labour market and society. Unless these issues are tackled, the young person will remain at risk of becoming NEET and be further at risk of poorer outcomes increasing costs to the individual, their community and the state.

<sup>1</sup> Reeves, F., 1995. The modernity of further education. Bilston and Ticknall: Bilston College Publications.

<sup>2</sup> Wallace.C, 2014. When you're smiling: exploring how teachers motivate and engage learners in the further education sector, *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, Volume 34, Issue 3, pp 346 - 360

<sup>3</sup> Evans.J, 2010. Not present and not correct: Understanding and preventing school exclusion. Essex: Barnardos

<sup>44</sup> Ford.T et al 2017. The relationship between exclusion from school and mental health: a secondary analysis of the British Child and Adolescent Mental Health Surveys 2004 and 2007,. *Journal of Psychological Medicine*, 48 (4), pp 629-641

The survey results highlight the absence of sufficient and quality staff support and training to be a real issue that requires addressing. Despite the existence of student behaviour policies within FE institutions, the survey results indicate that these are not being properly or consistently implemented with a high level of staff dissatisfaction with the institutions response which appear to be driven by financial considerations and a desire to secure the competitiveness and sustainability of the institution at the expense of meeting the needs of its staff and students. These findings reflect existing research and the national picture regarding the FE sector which has experienced significant funding cuts while at the same time moving towards a more competitive and marketised sector, albeit to a lesser extent than in England (BBC, 2018<sup>5</sup>; Fuller & Macfadyen, 2012<sup>6</sup>).

We conclude by providing some proposed next steps for consideration by the JTU, as follows:

- i. Provide FE institutions with a summary of the report raising concerns on:
  - institutional processes
  - sanctions used
  - staff training & support (NB: including the content of the curriculum PGCE(FE) & other related instruction courses)
- ii. Write to FE Principals requesting copies of their institutional policies and procedures on:
  - Dealing with student behaviour issues
  - Support and training for staff on student misbehaviour
- iii. Submit FOI request to FE institutions for statistics on student misbehaviour (e.g. number of cases annually, type of cases, sanctions used etc).
- iv. Undertake additional research focussing upon gaps in our current research evidence base such as:
  - Additional Demographic information
  - Under-represented FE institutions & courses
  - Root causes of student misbehaviour (NB: Student experience)

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-politics-46297391>

<sup>6</sup> Fuller, C. and Macfadyen, T., 2012. 'What with your grades?' Students' motivation for and experiences of vocational courses in further education. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 64 (1), 87-101.