

# **Report of COVID-19 survey of members**

**UCU Scotland  
August 2021**

**This report outlines the key findings of our survey of members conducted in July 2021, and summarises the actions taken by UCU Scotland relating to each area, including links to relevant resources.**

## UCU Scotland COVID-19 survey – July 2021

Our COVID-19 survey went to all UCU members in Scotland in July 2021. We received 994 responses from all branches, roughly proportionate to branch membership, and just over ten percent of the union's membership in Scotland. The survey outputs help us understand members' views on Covid-19 and the new academic year, and are shaping and informing UCU's work in Scotland, including in representation to employers and the Scottish Government.

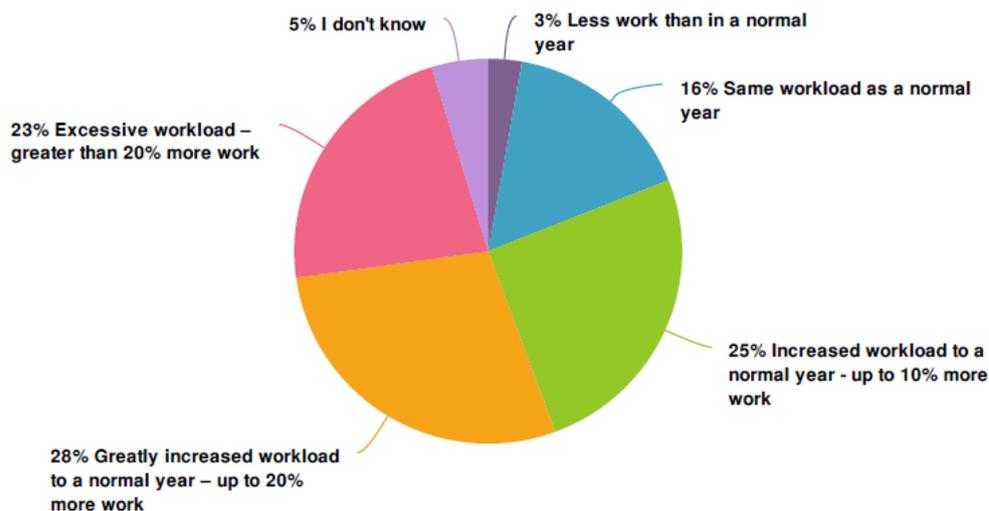
Here are the key issues:

1. [Excessive workload](#)
2. [An anxious workforce](#)
3. [Employer support for staff](#)
4. [Keeping safe on campus in the new academic year](#)
5. [The support, advice and guidance you want from UCU.](#)

### 1 Excessive workload

You told us workloads - [which were already very high](#) - have increased significantly in the past year:

- 76% of respondents have seen an increase in workload
- For 23% of respondents there was a greater than 20% increase in workload.



*Q: How would you describe your workload over the past year (Sept 2020 – July 2021)?*

Members who described their roles as “teaching and research” and “teaching only” reported increases in workload of greater than 20% at a much higher rate than members in research only roles and in academic related/professional support (ARPS) roles.

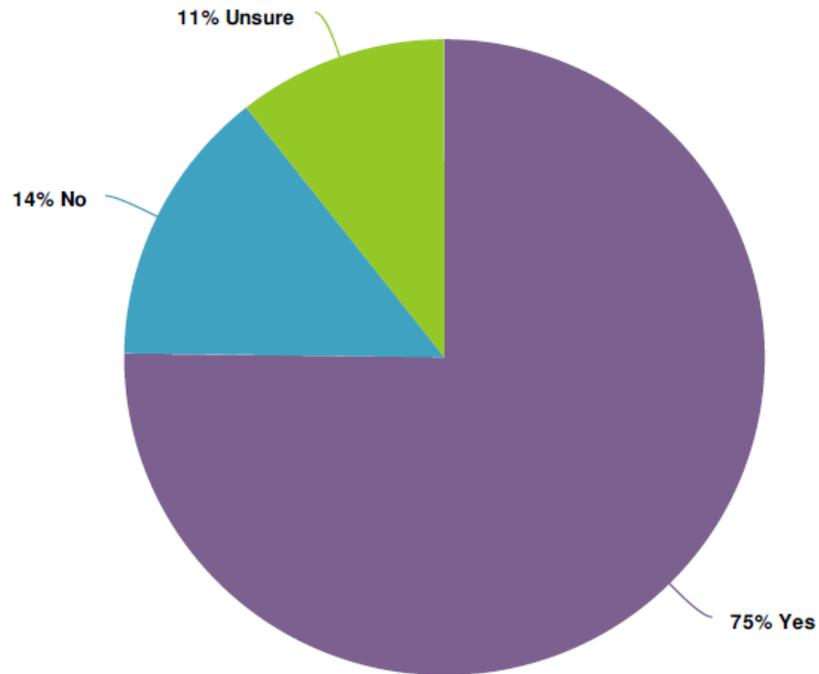
	<b>ARPS</b>	<b>Research only</b>	<b>Teaching and research</b>	<b>Teaching only</b>
<b>Excessive workload - greater than 20% more work</b>	9.8%	2.7%	29%	22.2%
<b>Greatly increased workload to a normal year - up to 20% more work</b>	22%	6.9%	30.1%	37.6%
<b>Increased workload to a normal year - up to 10% more work</b>	29.4%	23.3%	23.7%	23.5%
<b>Same workload as a normal year</b>	28.5%	43.8%	9.1%	8.7%
<b>Less work than in a normal year</b>	3.7%	11%	1.4%	2%
<b>I don't know</b>	4.2%	8.2%	4.5%	4%

### What is UCU doing to address excessive workloads?

- UCU continues to call for action on excessive workloads at the [UK-wide pay and conditions negotiating table](#). Workload is one of the key elements of the “four fights” campaign.
- A number of UCU branches are taking forward the ["it's your time" workload campaign](#) including UCU Glasgow branch which has had positive outcomes from its workload inspections. We'll continue to build on this work supporting branches across Scotland.
- UCU will be hosting a health and safety breakfast briefing on our Workload Campaign in October – reps and activists will be invited to this webinar in due course.
- UCU's Bargaining and Negotiations Team along with the Scotland office team supports local branches with [workloads bargaining guidance](#) and [bargaining for better workloads in higher education in response to the Covid 19 pandemic](#).
- We're continuing to raise the concerns over excessive workloads with the Higher Education Minister Jamie Hepburn MSP, and in our discussions with principals' group Universities Scotland.
- Last year we offered CPD webinars on taking care of yourself during the pandemic. We'll offer further webinars to support members this coming academic year.

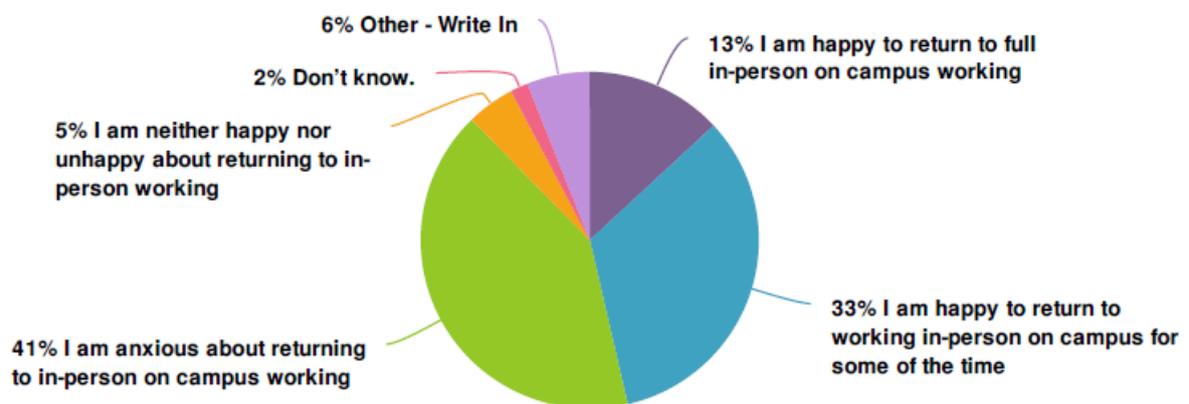
## 2 An anxious workforce

Three-quarters of you said the Covid-19 pandemic has increased your stress or anxiety.



Q: Has the COVID-19 pandemic increased your stress and anxiety?

41% of you said that you are anxious about returning to in-person on-campus working



Q: Which statement best describes your own view on workplans/arrangements for the new academic year (from Sept 2021)?

## **What is UCU doing to support wellbeing, and keeping staff and students safe?**

It is understandable that anxiety levels have increased and UCU has been ensuring that employers, government and all in the sector are aware of the need to take into account the mental health and wellbeing of staff and students at all times. We continue to support branches with health and safety advice, as well as providing support to members on wellbeing and mental health.

### **On workplace health and safety:**

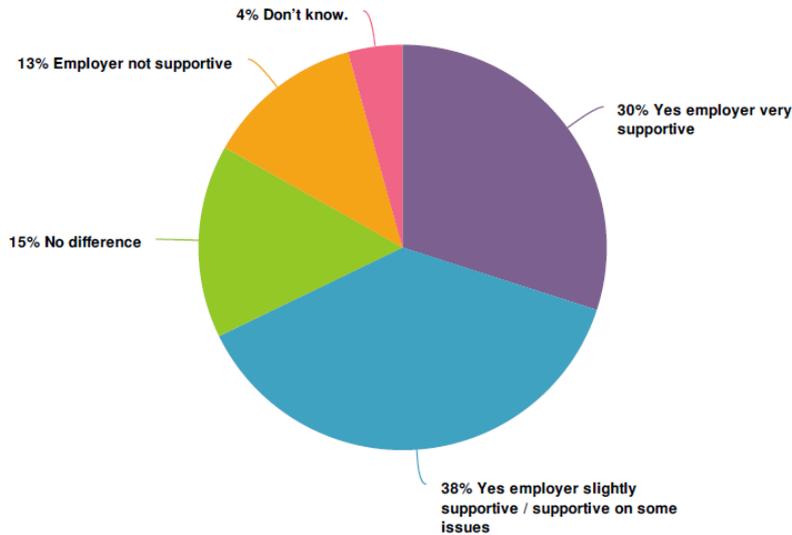
- We continue to provide advice and support to reps and members [on risk assessments](#) as a vital tool for safety on campus. Continually [risk assessing](#) work places, activities and individual circumstances is crucial to [safe returns](#) and safe working on campus.
- We're supporting reps in their [bargaining work](#) on safe returns, so as employers consider inductions, phased returns, taster sessions, along with flexible/hybrid working to support staff in the coming academic year.
- We're urging employers to address staff concerns on using public transport, avoiding crowds, and provide additional mitigations in the workplace – such as screens, high quality face masks at minimum FFP2 standard, enhanced cleaning, enhanced ventilation, and social distancing.

### **On mental health and wellbeing:**

- We've held CPD webinars over the past year to support members address anxiety, mental health and promote good wellbeing, including through collective action. We will schedule more CPD webinars on wellbeing in the new academic year.
- Use [UCU's stress toolkit and view the tackling stress in the workplace webinar](#).
- UCU shared [guidance and advice](#) on [taking care of yourself during the pandemic](#).
- UCU supports [Education Support Partnership](#), an independent confidential support service, offering 24/7 help to staff in the education sector. Our branches and reps regularly remind members of the help available through this service.
- Other support, help and advice is available via a range of organisations: [Clear your head](#), [Breathing Space](#), [Scottish Association for Mental Health](#), [Samaritans](#) and [Mind](#).
- We're discussing with employers and government how they can do more to support staff wellbeing in higher education.

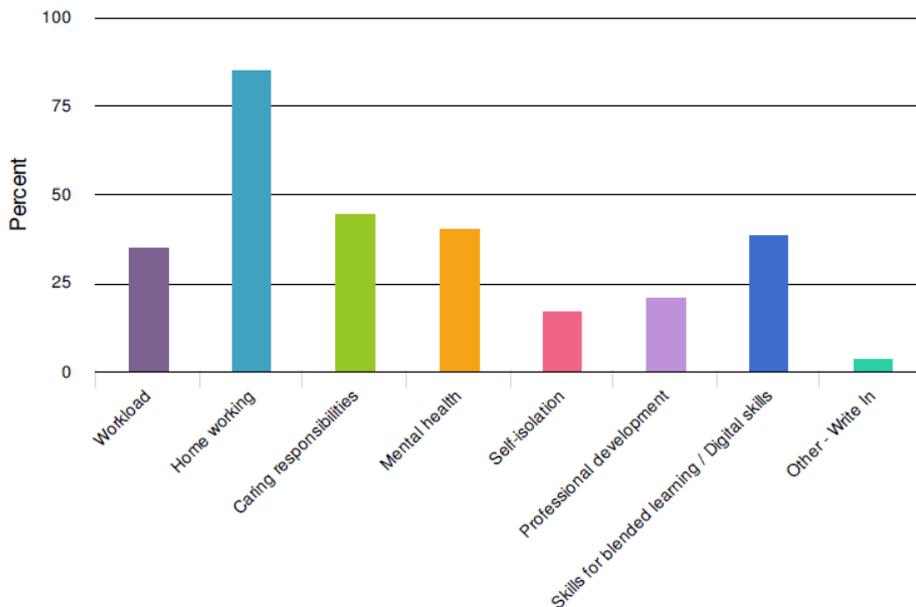
### 3 Employer support for staff

68% of you said that your employer was either somewhat supportive or very supportive of staff and the challenges faced over the past academic year (Sept 2020 – July 2021)



*Q: Was your employer supportive of staff and the challenges faced (personal, caring, mental health, workloads etc) over the past year (Sept 2020 – July 2021)?*

You told us employers were most supportive with homeworking - with 86% of those who found their employer supportive saying it was on this issue. Clearly employers are likely to have been motivated by the continued functioning of the organisation, not simply employee wellbeing.



*Q: On which issues was your employer supportive?*

You outlined the key issues you want employer support in the coming year are on addressing workloads (73.1%), supporting home working (59.4%), and on mental health (44.6%).

Value		Percent	Responses
Workload		73.1%	690
Home working		59.4%	561
Caring responsibilities		27.3%	258
Mental health		44.6%	421
Self isolation (where needed)		32.8%	310
Professional development		32.2%	304
Skills for blended learning / digital skills		36.8%	347
No support required		5.1%	48
Other - Write In		5.5%	52

*Q: Are there issues where you would want employer support over the coming year?*

It is heartening to know that many members did feel supported by their employers during such a challenging year and we want to build on this good record – as well as addressing the concerns 13% of you raised where the employer was not supportive.

- We will support local branch negotiators to continue to work with employers and build on the good practice that was there from last year. We'll be encouraging employers continue to show flexibility with remote working where appropriate, and more support to balance work and caring responsibilities.
- We want to build on the positive reports of employer support for mental health to get employers to do much more to support all staff across the sector, and to address excessive workloads, job insecurity and workplace stress.

## 4 Keeping safe on campus in the new academic year

You told us the range of mitigations you want to see in place on campus in the new academic year to keep everyone safe:

- 86.5% of you wanted enhanced ventilation
- 78.5% wanted face coverings to be used indoors
- Over two thirds of you supported enhanced cleaning, self isolation and reduced occupancy of buildings/rooms.

Value		Percent	Responses
Face coverings		78.5%	753
Enhanced ventilation		86.5%	830
Regular enhanced cleaning		71.2%	683
Enhanced hand hygiene /readily available hand sanitiser		74.5%	714
One way systems		43.0%	412
2 metre physical distancing		38.2%	366
1 metre physical distancing		34.0%	326
Reduced occupancy of buildings/rooms		68.6%	658
Larger classes (20+ students) delivered remotely where possible		58.8%	564
Self-isolation where individuals have been in contact with virus		72.5%	695
No mitigations		3.5%	34
Other - Write In		9.1%	87

*Q: Which mitigations do you want to see on campus for next academic year (starting Sept 2021)?*

UCU has been working hard to represent members' views to the Scottish Government, to employers and the wider public since the onset of the pandemic. Earlier in the summer we set out our [key priorities for the new academic year](#) highlighting this safety first approach. We continue to work within the Scottish Government's [Covid Recovery Group](#) for a cautious return to campus. The [current guidance for higher education](#) highlights the need for caution, good ventilation, hygiene and use of face coverings on campus. Our reps will be pushing to ensure these mitigations are taken seriously in all workplaces.

In the coming weeks UCU will be supporting branches and members:

- Hosting a health and safety breakfast briefing "improving ventilation – mitigating transmission of Covid-19" – Wednesday 8 September 2021
- Offering [Health and Safety Reps 1 training online](#) from 10 September to support reps in the workplace – please consider applying.
- Continuing to provide [up to date guidance and support](#) to reps and members
- The chance to catch up on [recent health and safety breakfast briefings](#).

## 5 The support, advice or guidance you want from UCU

- Nearly 70% of you want support from the union on health and safety and risk assessments.
- Over half of you want support on mental health and wellbeing.
- Around a third of you want support for digital skills/blended learning.

Value		Percent	Responses
Health and safety/risk assessment advice		69.1%	630
Support on mental health/wellbeing		54.9%	501
Support for digital skills/blended learning		32.7%	298
None		12.0%	109
Other - Write In		7.7%	70

*Q: Is there support, advice and guidance you would like to see from UCU in the new academic year?*

UCU will continue to provide health and safety advice, guidance and support in a range of formats:

- Up to date health and safety and risk assessment advice on the Covid section of our website: [ucu.org.uk/coronavirus](https://ucu.org.uk/coronavirus)
- [Health and safety breakfast briefing webinars](#)
- [Health and Safety Reps 1 training online](#) from 10 September to support reps in the workplace – please consider applying.
- UCU Scotland health and safety reps network – contact [scotland@ucu.org.uk](mailto:scotland@ucu.org.uk) for more information.

We'll continue to build on the [mental health and wellbeing support and signposting](#) outlined above.

We'll develop work we have begun on digital skills/ blended learning to better support members, including:

- [Hybrid working webinar](#)
- [The automatic university - a review of datafication and automation in higher education](#)
- [Branch guidance on lecture capture and data issues](#)