



TERTIARY LIVES | COVID-19

Part II: A follow-up survey on the impact of COVID-19 on tertiary education staff

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Dr Charles Sedgwick
September 2020

Introduction

Te Hautū Kahurangi | Tertiary Education Union (TEU) last reported on the effects of COVID-19 in May of this year – a time when we talked of ‘hopeful recovery’ from the effects of the pandemic.¹ Three months later, after a respite of 102 days in a COVID-19-free nation, we found ourselves confronting a resurgence of the pandemic leading to the reintroduction of Level 2 for most of the nation and Level 3 for the Auckland region. Announcing the changing situation, the Prime Minister stated: “It’s being dealt with in an urgent but calm and methodical way.”² In this report we question whether this rationality has extended to the tertiary education sector over the last four months.

The purpose of this follow-up survey is to gauge whether the situation reported in the TEU’s May survey, which described a variety of problems that had emerged for both staff and institutions, had been mitigated or exacerbated in the interim. Now, as then, the key focus is to acknowledge the significance of education, both for those entering tertiary level education and those who have lost their jobs and are needing to reskill. To provide this capacity, the structural arrangements in institutions – as well as the immediate conditions of teaching and learning in departments, programmes, and schools – must be supportive and conducive to a successful outcome no matter how long the shadow of the pandemic prevails.

There were 276 respondents to this survey³ from academic and general, allied, and professional staff,⁴ (hereafter referred to as ‘general staff’) with 78.7% of responses from eight universities and 21.1% from 13 of the 16 polytechnics, plus one of the two wānanga, and one other institution. Academics from universities, polytechnics, and wānanga made up 57.9% of respondents, with general staff constituting the remaining 42.1% of those who participated. Sixty-seven percent of respondents were female, 32% male, and 1% gender diverse. Respondents were predominantly European/Pākehā (76%) with Māori constituting 10%, Pasifika 7%, Asian 4%, MELAA 1.8%,⁵ and ‘other’ 15%.⁶ Three questions provided for open-ended responses and the opportunity was readily taken up.⁷

¹ See Sedgwick (2020).

² See Godin (2020).

³ The May survey had 825 respondents (see below).

⁴ These categories of staff were not distinguished in the May survey.

⁵ MELAA refers to Middle Eastern/Latin American/African.

⁶ Totals do not add up to 100% as some respondents indicated more than one ethnicity (e.g. New Zealand European/Māori).

⁷ Q.2 = 6 no response; Q.3 = 48 no response; Q.4 = 89 no response, plus 10 ‘don’t know’ or ‘not sure.’ See Appendix One for a list of the questions included in the August survey.

The respective university response rates could be clearly ranked with one university producing 2-to-5 times more responses than two other site clusters.⁸ There were two cluster sites within the polytechnic sector, but their response rate does not exceed 3% for any one institution and just over 50% of the institutions had a 1.2% or less response rate.

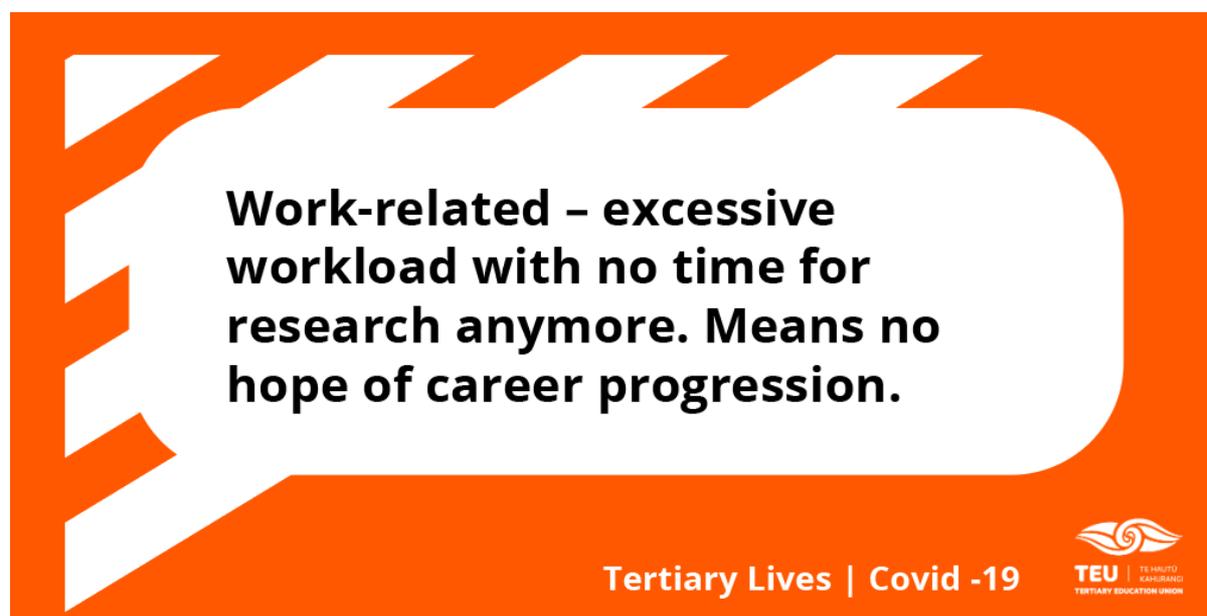
The May survey concluded by quoting an article published by Times Higher Education: “Institutions that excel in planning, communication and problem-solving are primed to respond to global challenges by improving the way they work” provided they can “[e]nsure operating models can **prioritise** student and staff requirements, focusing on what makes the most impact and has the most value.”⁹

Given three months have passed, this report considers the degree to which tertiary institutions have “improved the way they work” and whether this has been informed by prioritising student and staff requirements.

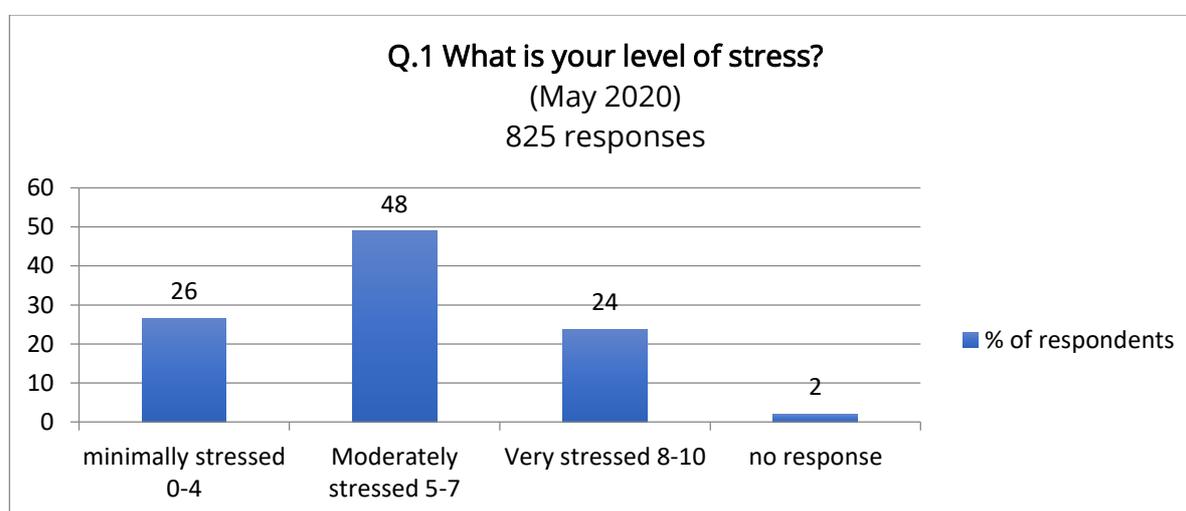
⁸ There were five major articles about one institution addressing responses from students and staff on restructuring proposals (see Wiltshire 2020a; 2020b; 2020c; 2020d; 2020e).

⁹ See Times Higher Education (2020) (emphasis in original).

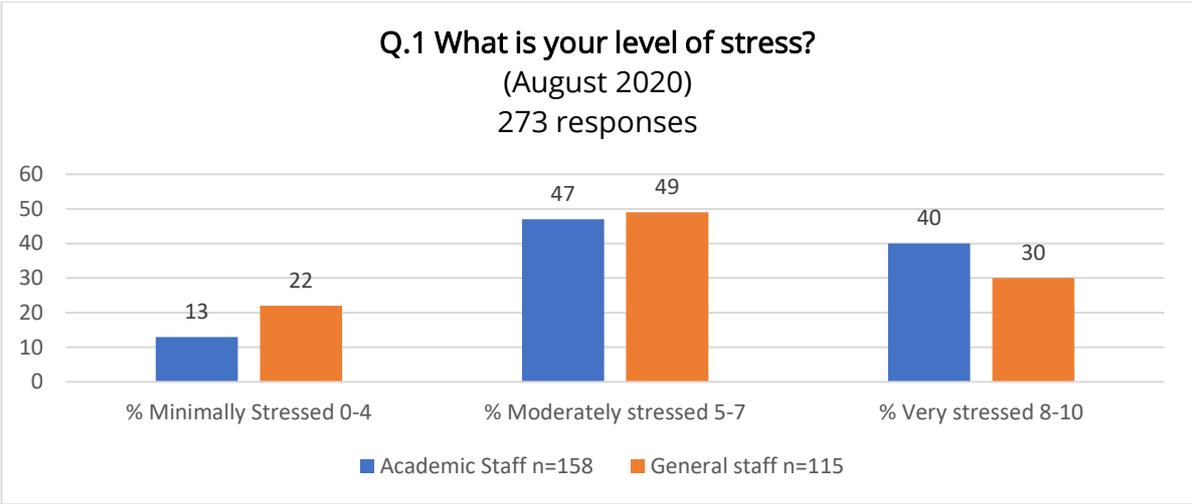
Levels of stress



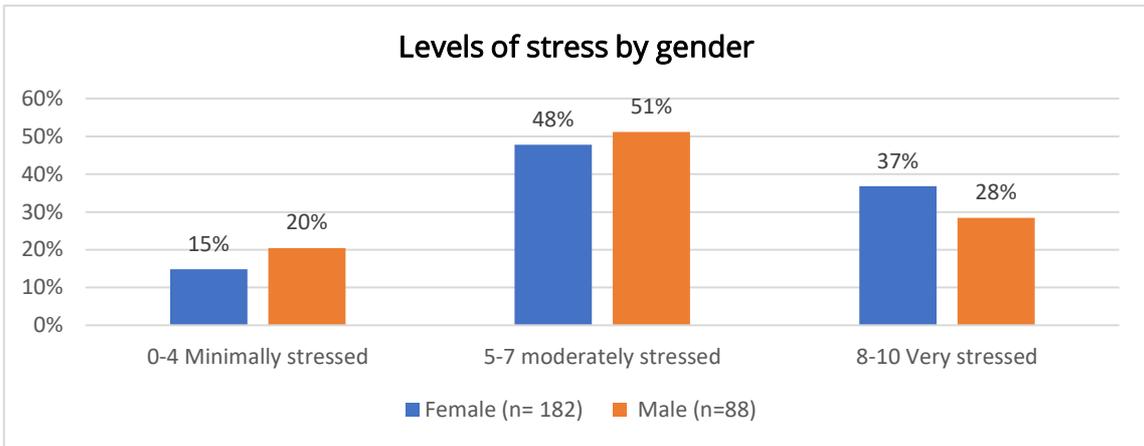
The May survey acknowledged the conditions and consequent problems resulting from COVID-19 and the Level 4 lockdown, noting, among other factors, levels and causes of stress. The following graphs indicate the levels of stress among staff in May contrasted with the current situation:¹⁰



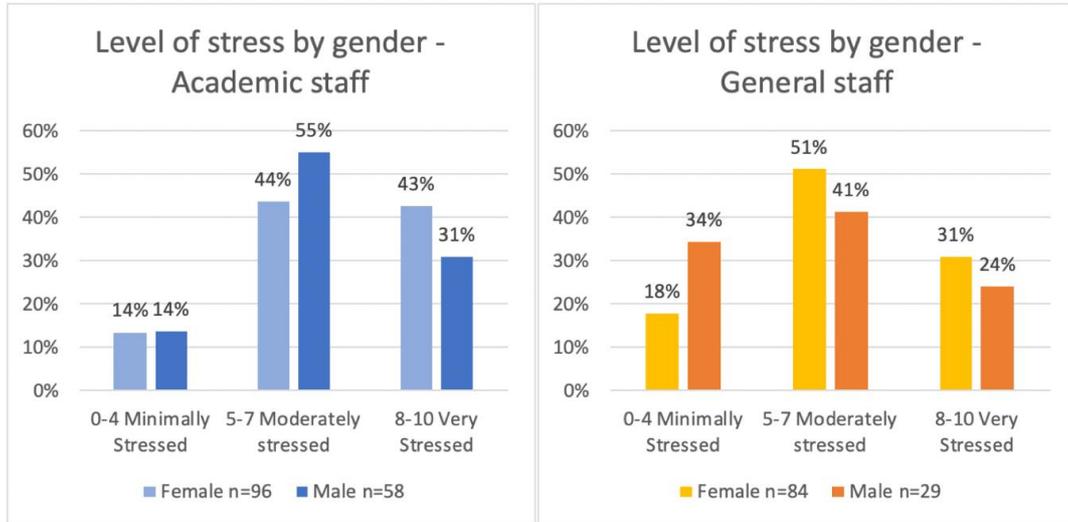
¹⁰ Three respondents did not provide their role.



If one examines the gender distribution for stress, the situation looks like this:



More women than men in the sector report moderate to high levels of stress, with female academics making up the largest proportion of those who are 'very stressed.' The experience of gender diverse respondents fell within the 'very stressed' range. The stress levels of women, however, does not necessarily coincide with their dissatisfaction levels (see page 30).



Causes of stress: academic staff

It is noted that while there are a comparable number of the 'moderately stressed' for academic and general staff between the May and August surveys, the numbers of 'very stressed' has almost doubled for these categories. Both sets of staff provided supplementary comments to explain their stress and they have been coded separately to highlight any differences in work experience.

Coding the open responses is complex as problems are interlinked and compound immediately. This was similar in the May survey with the noted differences that in May, stress and dissatisfaction were related to work, family, and home, and formed the core of the cumulative effects, whereas now it is largely the work context. From the data, it is clear that those 'moderately' or 'very dissatisfied' will also tend to see several issues interconnected with 66% naming a least two issues and often more contributing to their levels of stress. Additionally, respondents ponder the transparency of, and rationale for, managerial decisions:

Hard to know what is pandemic and what is for other reasons (university)

Regardless, the issues that may have been of general concern in May – restructuring, job insecurity, redundancy threats, pay and staff cuts, and unrealistic work expectations – now constitute the core issues that staff face. For instance, this trajectory can be seen in the following comments as we move from an institution-wide reflection – to the sense of insecure futures:

The actions of my Vice-Chancellor in threatening job losses and imposing a 'change proposal' that will de-stabilise the entire university at a time when we need to be reassured and supported with a sense of support and security, not constantly undermined by his obsession with funding. He has created this financial instability even prior to the COVID-19 situation but is using the pandemic in the way that Naomi Klein described in her book 'Shock Doctrine,' - i.e. using a crisis to push through extreme neoliberal policies at the expense of workers, families, and general society wellbeing (university)

Work-related¹¹ - making progress on teaching & research; dealing with colleagues & students; while VC & senior management team have decided to restructure the university in the middle of a pandemic (university)

The end of my fixed-term contract is coming up so work is busy trying to finish the project & at the same time I'm trying to find work so that I can continue to pay my bills. After approx. 15 years of almost constantly seeking grant funding for my position I am giving up because it is so insecure & demoralising - the research is good, but the employment situation is not (university)

Managerial attitudes and expectations, which one respondent more aptly described as 'disaster managerialism'¹² (which may have to do with anything from just exerting extra pressure to do more research and/or teaching or the arbitrary requirement to take leave) (see below):

My biggest stress is an excessive and unachievable workload. I have to take work home with me every night and weekends in order to make deadlines. When I have spoken to my manager about this I have been asked if I need guidance with time management which feels like my concerns are not being taken seriously. I am consistently exhausted but feel unable to leave my current role as there are a lack of jobs right now due to COVID-19 (institution not stated)

¹¹ Q.2: What is causing you the most stress? (is it work related; about the pandemic; to do with anxiety or worries you have with regard to the current extraordinary times; or something else). Thus, answers were often prefaced with the first option.

¹² In May, the presence of 'crisis driven management' was noted (Sedgwick 2020,19) and the situation clearly hasn't changed.

Many comments reflected concerns about large budgetary issues or micro-financial control:

Work-related – trying to keep on top of teaching on the back of not having much time between trimesters + having to adapt teaching to incorporate online dimension + imminent restructure, which is tied to constant doom discourse about the financial aspect of the university's health (university)

It is the enormous duress of an excessive workload which we had no choice about – students needed extraordinary levels of support, and although we stepped up Massey has not even recognised the huge personal and physical cost to us as academics. They just don't care and just want to talk about excessive phone bills when we spent forever on the phone counselling students – mostly on our own phones at our own cost!! (university)

The last comment highlights management's inability to comprehend or even attempt to empathise with a person's circumstances while making increased demands, results in not only contradictory demands but increasingly arbitrary expectations:

My workload is extremely high, with much of the work new since COVID, and yet expectations for performance around research productivity have not been explicitly adjusted. We are encouraged to take leave, but there is not enough time to take it. There is a lot of uncompensated work, but I am being discouraged from applying for a double salary increment (to recognise the high level of achievements this year) because the budget is tight (university)

Work related – the continuing volume of extra work, inability to get on top of it, and the inappropriate way this is being handled by my HOD (given deadlines, summoned to formal meetings, asked to provide medical certificate as to whether I have a stress-related issue impacting on my ability to work normally). I'm having very good support from TEU (university)

Notions of insensitivity and disregard are clearly illustrated in the comment from a respondent who was asked by their manager 'Do you need guidance on time

management?¹³ Instances of harassment and bullying are also exemplified in respondents' comments:

On-going harassment by head of schools that escalated under lockdown. Fear that COVID would be used as a guide to make people who don't bow and scrape to head of school (university)

My husband has cancer and my work refuses to let me have a flexible working arrangement - this has been unresolved for 5 months. (polytechnic)

Work-related due to (1) lack of support for teaching, despite implementing several new courses, colleagues receiving such support, and management brushing aside health and wellbeing concerns; and (2) being told my Head that certain colleagues were 'out to get me' (university)

There is a palpable feeling reported by staff that redundancy is always a reality – structurally determined but an available threat mechanism conveniently generating expectations:

I worry about the security of my job. I have a continuing position, but it seems that my university is looking at redundancies and it is unlikely other universities would be hiring at this time. Since my research area does not have industry links losing my job would mean the end of my career (university)

Concerns and issues compound at all levels and across all aspects of work and family life. Even programme management is not immune from stress and uncertainty. Respondents commented about the wellbeing of their families and especially their students. Staff understand that their conditions of teaching and research are those of students learning:

Too many big changes going on are making it near impossible to get any work done. As Head of programme, I'm working on yet another iteration of the teaching programme, there are so many meetings about the larger structural organizational changes; it's really hard to just keep on top of the day to day work, and now the VC is introducing all these massive changes. On top of that, there are rumours we are not going to be allowed to have

¹³ See underlined quote above.

our RSL. That's also quite stressful. I'm finding the anxiety of not knowing what's going on, and of future changes, quite hard (university)

Worrying about the university tightening its austerity measures, and for continuing to keep these as the new norm for the years to come. The worry for students who might be short-changed in this process (e.g. not having tutors). Concerns about the health and economic impacts of COVID-19 on my family overseas. Not being able to visit them. Also, the difficulty of managing the in-person and online teaching simultaneously (university)

Not being able to meet with students in person. Students want it, I want it. HOS forbid it, then has the gall to tell students that it is an individual lecturer decision!! (institution not stated)

All of this often exists within the context of family, where certain issues are also a site of stress for children and other family members who at worst may be very sick or facing redundancy themselves or worried about school work and isolation – it looks like this for an academic:

My partner is in a vulnerable group, so I feel that I need to stay home at level two and find dealing with their anxiety, as well as a bit of pressure from work to be available, is difficult. Also, the announcements of the consultation on major changes to academic structures at Te Herenga Waka is doing my head in to be honest. I am actively worried about being managed by Professors who I do not trust to be good managers, partially due to their attitude but also because they have never been trained or given time for this role (university)

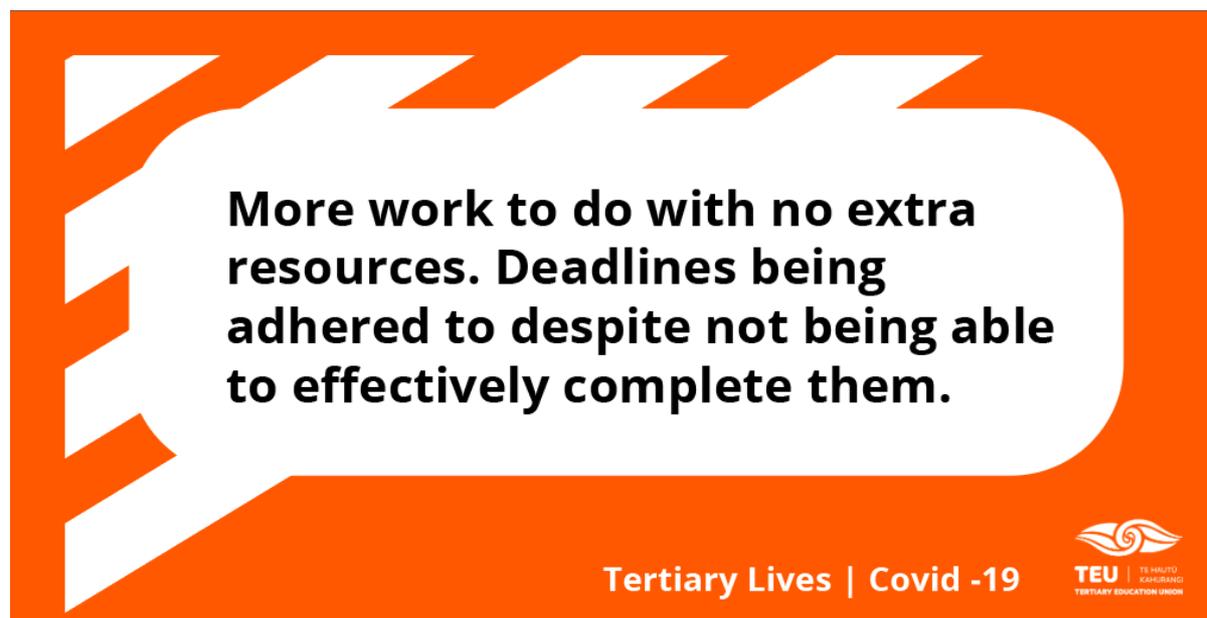
I have been diagnosed with anxiety and depression stemming from working 70-90 hours per week during the Lockdown period trying to keep my courses going while overseeing the launch of 2 new programmes. I have been ordered to use up my leave by our dean of faculty but have no realistic prospect of taking it while fulfilling my work responsibilities as have advised my HoS and dean about this for which I received a curt acknowledgement for helping with the budget targets. (university)

The trajectory of problems – workload, managerial attitude, and financial constraint – also impacts career progression, but not the extent of managerial expectations:

Work-related stress and insecurity of job due to university being restructured; pressures of teaching compounded by the way the university reorganised the semesters so that significant amounts of semester 1 marking needed to be completed while I should have been preparing for semester 2 courses and have not had time to do any research since before lockdown and archival sources needed to undertake my research are now inaccessible [i.e. in Europe](university)

Work-related – excessive workload with no time for research anymore. Means no hope of career progression (university)

Causes of stress: general staff



The situation for general staff shows a similar pattern where inevitably stressful situations are compounded for those 'moderately' or 'very' stressed. The three most prevalent issues that contribute include excessive workload, managerial behaviour, and restructuring. The first is manifested as work overload due to staffing shortages, disorganised and constantly changing workplace expectations, and budgetary constraints. These are exemplified in the following comments from respondents:

Work related – feeling overworked (short-staffed since Nov last year, worsened when another left in March this year), and undervalued (little acknowledgement from managers of the extra workload I am carrying as now a sole counsellor, 1.0, when there were 4 pt. previously with EFT of 2.0 staffing), manager expressing concerns to me about a waitlist for students, with implications of... it's my fault (polytechnic)

More work to do with no extra resources. Deadlines being adhered to despite not being able to effectively complete them (university)

Management are held responsible for, or are recognised as implicated in, all the above, operating with impunity, threats and distrust, while ignoring the implications of their actions:

Work related – my boss is nit-picking about work but isn't providing any support. The Uni is doubling this stress by threatening cut-backs. We are

also short staffed and have lost 4 experienced staff members in less than 6 months due to poor management (university)

There needs to be more foresight and an understanding that what seems like an easy change on paper for an academic can mean a LOT of extra work for a professional staff member to organise (university)

Trying to fit a year's worth of work into the remaining months of the year; feeling pressured to do extra work without complaining as we are lucky to have a job (university)

Restructuring, whether real or rumoured, adds to insecurity and worry over job retention:

Work: Constantly changing arrangements for delivering the academic programme AND rumours of restructuring at numerous levels (schools disappearing? associate dean roles disappearing? faculty offices disappearing? – not sure if there will be anyone left who knows what they're doing) (university)

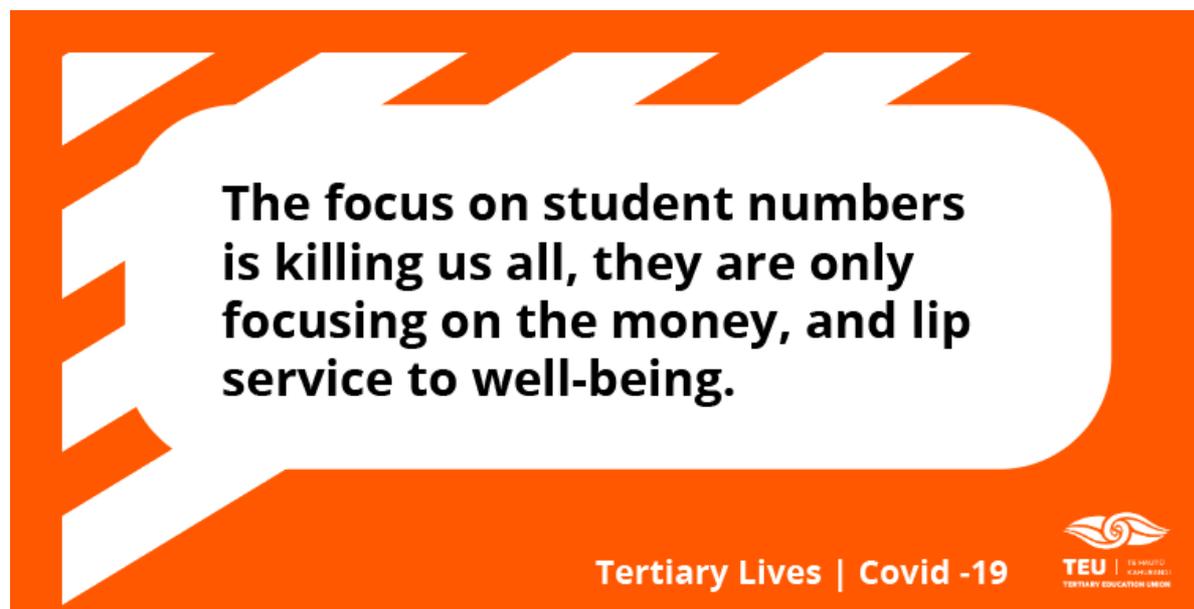
Security of employment, employment level of role under review, work required to do has been changed by Manager (without good justification of why) (university)

Partially anxiety about the pandemic (I'm in a vulnerable category, so if there's another outbreak it could have a serious impact on my health), partly general overwork (and we just lost another staff member from my department because the university would only offer them a fixed-term contract, so they've left to go somewhere they can get more secure work) (university)

Furthermore, family survival during a pandemic, is never far from staff members' minds:

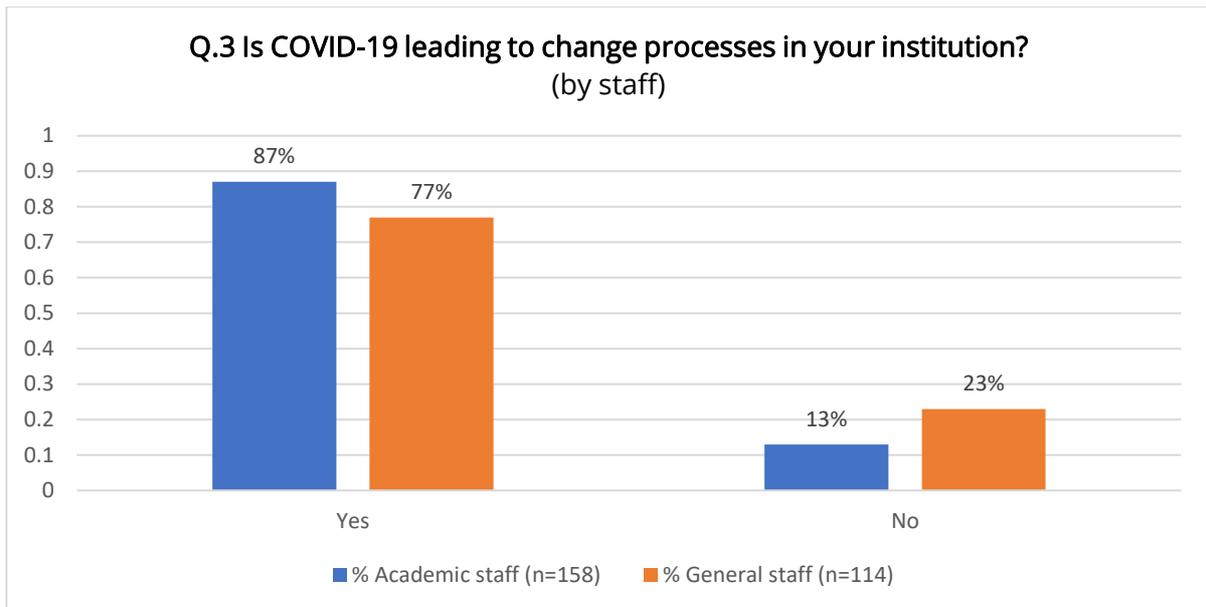
Father in law died in February due to medical misadventure; my father is now ill and under that same hospital. My children, especially my teenagers, are showing the signs of stress and anxiety related to that and to the pandemic. My teens are worried about NCEA (they're in year 11) and my younger ones are worried about another lockdown. I'm frightened that either my partner (who doesn't work in education) or I could lose our jobs and not be able to get another one (polytechnic)

Institutional changes and their impact on staff

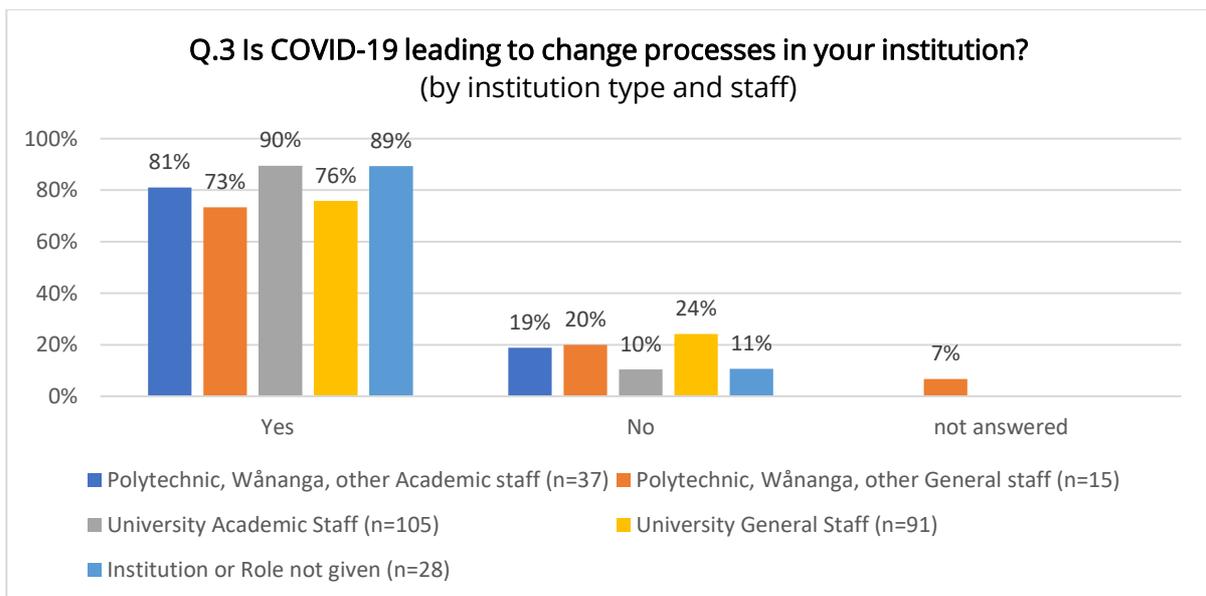


As illustrated in the graphs below, Question 3 asked participants if COVID-19 had led to change processes in their institution and, if 'yes,' participants were asked to comment on what was happening and the impact it is having. Following this, Question 4 asked if COVID-19 was resulting in a reduction of staff on fixed-term or casual agreements. Again, participants were asked to comment on the impact.

Regarding Question 3, the graph below indicates the overall 'affirmative' response – that is, there were changes – for both academic and general staff, with a slightly greater proportion of academics answering 'yes.'



If one breaks this down by institution and staff, the proportion of 'yes' responses is very similar across both variables:



As noted above there is growing scepticism among academic staff that restructuring, in any form, is connected to risk from the pandemic:

I believe that the restructure is being done to take advantage of COVID-19 (university)

Massey has used the COVID situation as an excuse to make us shift a majority of our teaching online (university)

Opportunism from SLT to make things they've always wanted to happen 'under urgency'(university)

Being used as an excuse to roll out a digital platform for all teaching it appears including online. It also has justified a reduction in teaching hours per subject with what motive I cannot say(university)

Despite the above, 136 respondents (49.3%) talked about changes, supposedly related to the pandemic and in many cases with multiple implications. Responsibility assigned to all levels of the hierarchy from the Minister of Education to CEs and the SLTs of institutions.

We are all feeling very distressed, betrayed, and a lack of trust and support as our VC has now proposed a 'change proposal' to remove all our Heads of Schools. These people play a vital role in supporting the wellbeing of academics and admin staff. They are a buffer between the dictatorship of the senior management. The latter are completely out of touch with the realities, workloads, needs, and lack of wellbeing that their actions are generating for staff, completely undermining any sense of trust or security or faith in our employer being a 'good employer' who is managing for the wellbeing of staff and students. This comes at a time when staff are already exhausted and distressed due to supporting our students through the first half of the year. It is incredibly disheartening(university)

VUW has publicly threatened redundancies, forced staff to use up leave knowing full well they cannot take it and is currently holding meetings with managers which are officially secret but entail significant structural changes which we are not permitted to know about. Everyone is worried and scared – staff are basically working under the threat of imminent structural change (read: redundancies) which seems like disaster managerialism – the use of the impact of Covid-19 on international enrolments as a pretext to force through structural changes with minimal opposition in the pretext that this is financially necessary. There is no doubt that the universities are taking a hit financially but the financial targets being imposed by senior management are opaque and seem to change every week to ensure we are constantly reminded of impending budgetary doom(university)

Management have become more belligerent; micro-management and intimidation have become increasingly normalised.

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The inclusive span of these changes leaves little untouched in the world of the academic. We see nothing in management's responses to hard work and perseverance but purposeful threats and wilful deterioration of trust in staff, and the absence of concern with well-being and morale. Additionally, removing sources of immediate support and appreciation for academic work is also in play:

Massive restructuring proposed through a process that is not transparent, is manipulative and autocratic – creating a culture of fear and disempowerment (university)

The focus on student numbers is killing us all, they are only focusing on the money, and lip service to well-being (university)

People are being pushed beyond the limit. They are being coerced into extra teaching loads because of the 'budget', but no recognition of the extra load this place on people (university)

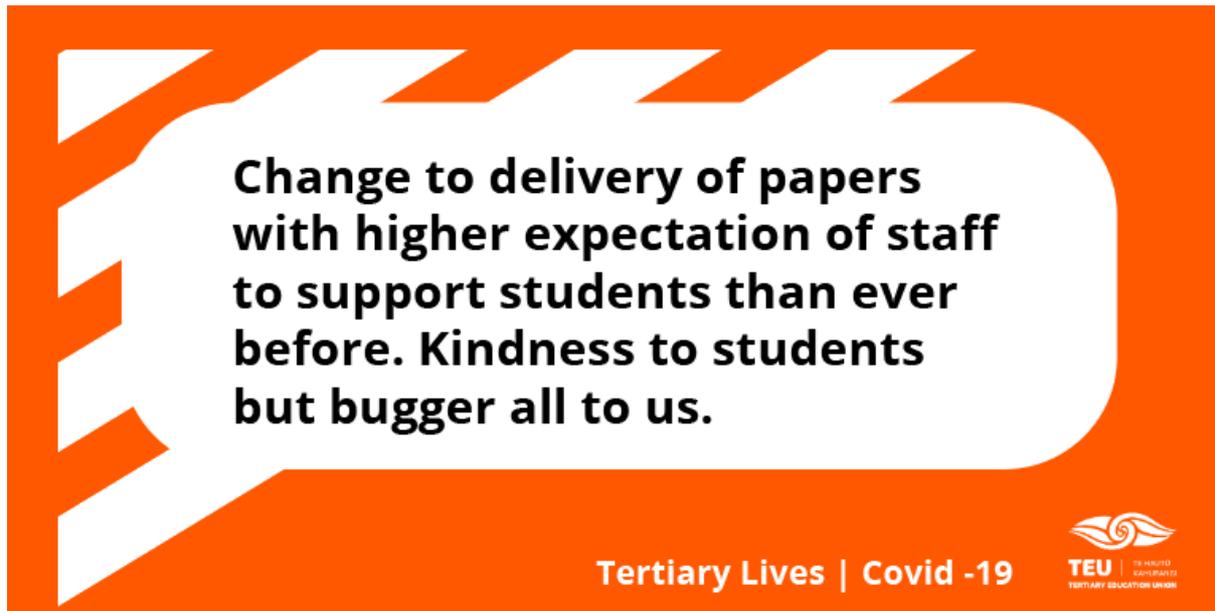
Management have become more belligerent; micro-management and intimidation have become increasingly normalised (polytechnic)

Additionally, change effects teaching and research practice:

Teaching online, and advice about this not arriving until the last minute; cutting of research funding support; restricting RSL to New Zealand and stipulating an emphasis on applied research (presumably without having consulted with the TEU); approved budgets having to undergo renewed

approval; ongoing management of change by stealth. All this is leading to severe stress and demoralisation (university)

Rearranged teaching and student clinical practice schedules – One month to redesign courses and assessments and to support students to learn on line It is difficult to say how 'satisfied' I am – I have an understanding and accommodating Head of School but the situation has taken a severe toll on my health and relationships (polytechnic)



Change to delivery of papers with higher expectation of staff to support students than ever before. Kindness to students but bugger all to us.

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As recognised in the above, timing, time availability, and frequency of change impact the online process creating numerous workload demands and required changes to one's teaching practice, all with increased expectations but without real help or professional development:

More online resources to be produced for students and not having the time to do this. Lacking the software etc to do this (polytechnic)

Teaching needs to accommodate students who are always online, always face to face, and who move back and forth, as well as students subject to China's special restrictions and students and staff in many different time zones. I regularly come in early and stay late to deal with time zone issues, but am told I am not allowed time in lieu as an academic staff member. No funding is available for conferences, but expectations for research productivity have not been relaxed (university)

.... financial pressure: less money for casual tutors, more classroom time for full-time staff, very hard to find research time, new and more onerous workload models that make no allowance for research; and on the student side – a new culture of not attending class, which clashes with the emergence of workload models emphasising more classroom time
(university)

Change to delivery of papers with higher expectation of staff to support students than ever before. Kindness to students but bugger all to us
(university)

The blatant theme of institutional budgetary requirements is either inferred or mentioned in comments specifically about staffing, RSL funding, course removal and course size. Consultation or negotiation, as noted in the previous survey (Sedgwick 2020:18) is never evident. Having said that, a few respondents commented on positive aspects of recent changes:

Open discussions about flexibility with work hours/working from home. In our School, having discussions about how to apply teaching changes/improvements long term to our distance delivery students
(polytechnic)

More flexible hours for staff and the opportunity of working from home
(polytechnic)

Positive approach to working from home and awareness of staff wellbeing
(polytechnic)

If one looks at the general staff response to Question 3¹⁴ we have a sense of the same doubts that academics have about the rationale behind changes. To these staff members it is clear there was no need for the excuse of COVID-19, but that it is just a case of 'business as usual' (BAU) or 'more of the same.'

It feels like COVID is being used as an excuse to turn everything upside down. The so-called "resilience" project seems more about long-term strategic planning and defining what a future ideal university might look like than about getting us through the current challenges and whatever else COVID may throw at us. It is diverting a huge amount of staff effort

¹⁴ Q.3: Is COVID-19 leading to change processes in your institution?

away from managing to keep things going through the uncertainty and disruption of COVID. This is NOT the time to be focussing on long-term strategy at the expense of BAU (university)

Redundancies/'discussion documents'/hiring freezes. Admittedly most were happening prior, but this has not helped (university)

They're using COVID as an excuse to cut hours to cover management's poor money management! (institution not stated)

The uncertainty driven by management is also reflected in general staff comments about the nature of changes, and their effects.

IEAs being changed to fixed term contracts, loss of hours, many staff leaving / many tutors getting no hours (institution not stated)

Changing dates mean we have less time to process (on top of having less staff) (university)

"Strategic planning", hiring freezes, termination of casual contracts, budget forecast changes, international students not present (university)

More work is now online. Processes have not been in place for this, so they are currently being designed. A lot of work has been reactionary, which has then needed to be redone (university)

It is not only the changes, but the means (including 'stealth' mentioned above) and the rationale used, that are recognised and felt:

Employer pressure to agree to contract variations and beginning to make staff redundant without following legal process (institution not stated)

Constantly being told of upcoming cuts and the spectre of redundancies (university)

Requirement to take annual leave at given times to reduce leave liability and reduce uni costs; reduced time for processes to ensure completion of tasks by end of the year as normal despite much condensed time frames; recruitment freeze (university)

In addition, the workload has increased:

Higher administrative workload to achieve same outcome. Reduced access to resources and infrastructure (university)

Extra work involved in making a safe environment for staff and students. Including the need to be ready to change practices according to the alert level (university)

... SO many iterations of documents and processes you lose track of what is happening, people being asked to do so much more with the same hours, I see messages from other staff at all hours of the night & weekends as they try to grapple with the workload (university)

What is notable in the responses of general staff is their familiarity with and concern for the conditions of tutors:

They have cut back tutor hours for tutors in a under handed way. Communication flaws being highlighted. More obvious of the corporate style of organisation we've become. Tutors do all the hard work at ground level with no support or respect and paid for the bare minimum (institution not stated)

Many casual and part time tutors have lost part or all of their hours. Many were not paid anything during the COVID lockdown despite the government's guarantee of funding. This has created unbearable stress for some and led many to leave (polytechnic)

and particularly the conditions of the student experience of learning and teaching:

Online teaching, online assessment. Students are disengaged, assessments open to plagiarism and online 'answer services' (university)

While academic staff commented on the culture of non-attendance amongst students, general staff find themselves having to offer pastoral care:

We have blended learning, which is good for the students because it means that a return to lockdown shouldn't impact them in the same way it had during level 4. Our role has become more pastoral care related and although this is rewarding for us and helpful to students, we are not

qualified to help with certain problems and issues students are having (university)

More online learning but we are supporting students more with Case Management (university)

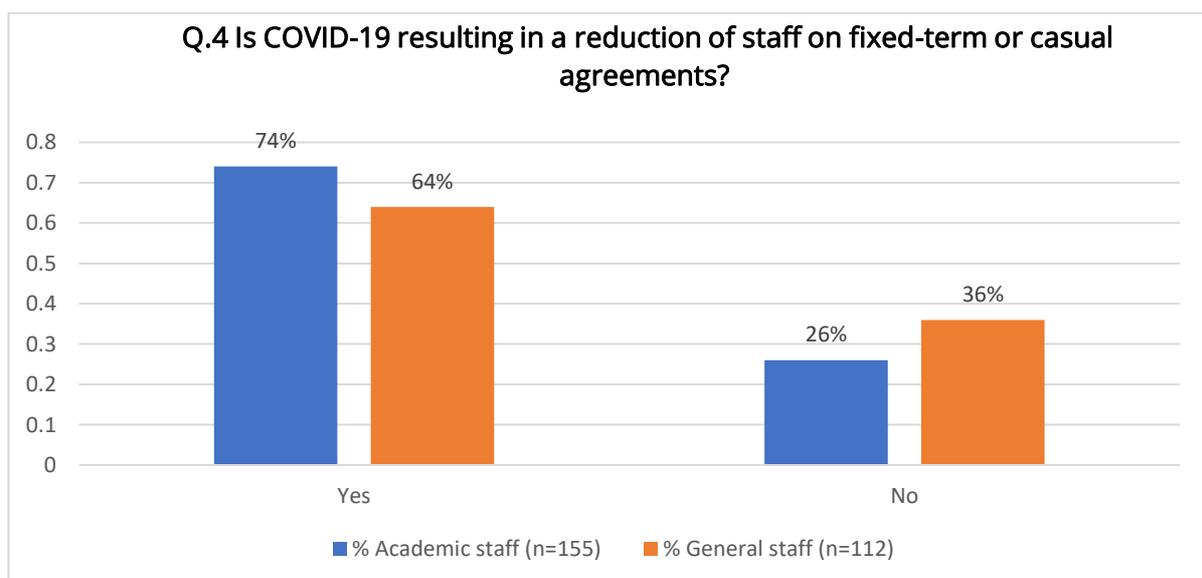
More online courses and students in need (polytechnic)

Like some of their academic counterparts, general staff have some positive responses to changes, but they seem more a response to enlightened management than driven by COVID-19.

It's forced some long needed technical changes, as well as a discussion about working from home (institution not stated)

Within my immediate unit, recognition of flexibility and need to separate/isolate. E.g. some work can be done at home, don't need to be on-site. Big reduction in pressure to work when feeling ill (different to being ill) if feeling unwell that is good enough to be away/work from home. Without (apparent) judgement (university)

Question 4¹⁵ addressed a specific outcome of restructuring; namely, the termination of fixed-term and casual employment agreements. While this tends to be a general pattern of imposed managerial change, the impact is not shared equally across the tertiary sector.



¹⁵ Q.4: Is COVID-19 resulting in a reduction of staff on fixed term or casual agreements?

The clear consensus from both groups of staff, however, is that the pattern of reducing staff (fixed-term or casual) in conjunction with not replacing retiring or resigning staff has used COVID-19 as an excuse for the forced re-allocation of workload and changes in programmes.

In the case of academic staff, workload has increased with greater enrolment in their courses as offerings by staff who have resigned, retired, or been dropped as fixed-term employee contracts are not renewed. Deletion of course offering by forced attrition of staff is not long-term strategic planning, but avoids having causality attributed to managerial intent. As already noted, neither point is lost to staff. The situation and outcomes of distrust from management clearly generates a reciprocal response from staff, in addition to elevated levels of stress, fear, and uncertainty, if not anger. Therefore, this situation can be considered as a continuation of similar concerns in the May survey results – albeit now more specifically focused on restructuring – but clearly affecting staff workload, security, and the capacity to keep teaching and learning at the forefront of their minds.

The analysis of Question 4 clearly shows this, even when we distinguish between university, polytechnic, and wānanga staff responses. Academic staff reported either knowing directly about staffing and budget cuts, active or pending, or have experienced the effects.

This survey shows that university general staff (35%) and academics (52%) know about and/or experienced a 'staffing freeze' (non-replacement of permanent staff). Additional changes, possible for management gleaned from the survey open responses, include non-renewal of fixed-term or contract/casual/temporary staffing arrangements and reduction or termination of tutoring, teaching, laboratory demonstrator, or research assistant positions.

For general staff, the issues also relate to hiring freezes and the loss of student and administrative helpers. The obvious implications, noted by respondents, in both academic and general staff work areas is that incumbents will have to increase their workload to compensate without negotiation or compensation.

In the case of university academics:

We are simply told that there is no chance for new employees where there is growth evident so more work is expected from present staff (university)

Fixed-term and casual staff cannot be employed to do essential teaching, which will result both in reduced course offerings and increased workload for permanent staff(university)

Staff who resigned at Christmas have not been replaced so I have been forced to increase my teaching load by 50% in areas in which I have no expertise or experience (university)

We have been forced to pick up extra teaching, tutoring and marking because MBS doesn't allow any 'casual' contracts. They have no concern for the impact this is having on tenured staff(university)

Not hiring of PTFs for 2021; probably reduced GTAs; hiring freeze for academic staff despite retirements, leading to understaffing(university)

All staff on fixed-term contracts will cease work when the contract concludes and won't be rehired. There will be no permanent hires for the foreseeable future. This means the load for research and study leave and parental leave must be borne by stretched and overloaded permanent staff(university)

Some respondents revisit the effect of these managerial decisions and, again, the effect is compounded, never timely, and never shared equally – there are staff cuts but inevitably managerial and administrative staff retention:

Imminent non-renewal of fixed-term contracts for valued colleagues creates an uneasy atmosphere of 'haves and have-nots' amongst permanent and fixed term staff in our department. Permanent staff are also anxious about an explosion of workload coming down the line next year when they have to take over their colleagues' courses (university)

However, we apparently still require the same number of senior administrators and 'managers'. Fixed-term positions are not being renewed, increasing workloads. Staff who retire/depart are not being replaced, and hence greater workloads. Fixed-term contracting for tutors has become micromanaged at senior levels, causing more paperwork and workload(university)

With the retention of management, the concentration of power and its role within the institution is solidified:

Any new hires whether for teaching support (i.e. tutors) or research assistants (even with external funding) requires special dispensation – more paperwork, negotiations, less security in ability to perform core functions (university)

VCs permission required to hire; many few tutors (grads & grads hired); switching to automated marking (more work for academic staff); restructuring and planned mass redundancies (university)

There is a hiring freeze across the board and casual contracts which used to be rolled over automatically (including tutoring) now need high level approval (university)

Academic staff in the polytechnic area offered far fewer open responses to Question 4, 30% said 'No', and one wonders whether the effect of repeated restructuring and staff losses over the last few years has already had the effect now imposed on universities. According to the Tertiary Education Union's National Industrial Officer over 360 persons have been made redundant in the ITP sector over the last two years. Of those responding in the affirmative, comments were similar to those from university academic staff reflecting concerns about workload:

Yes, they are giving us more teaching so do not have to employ staff (polytechnic)

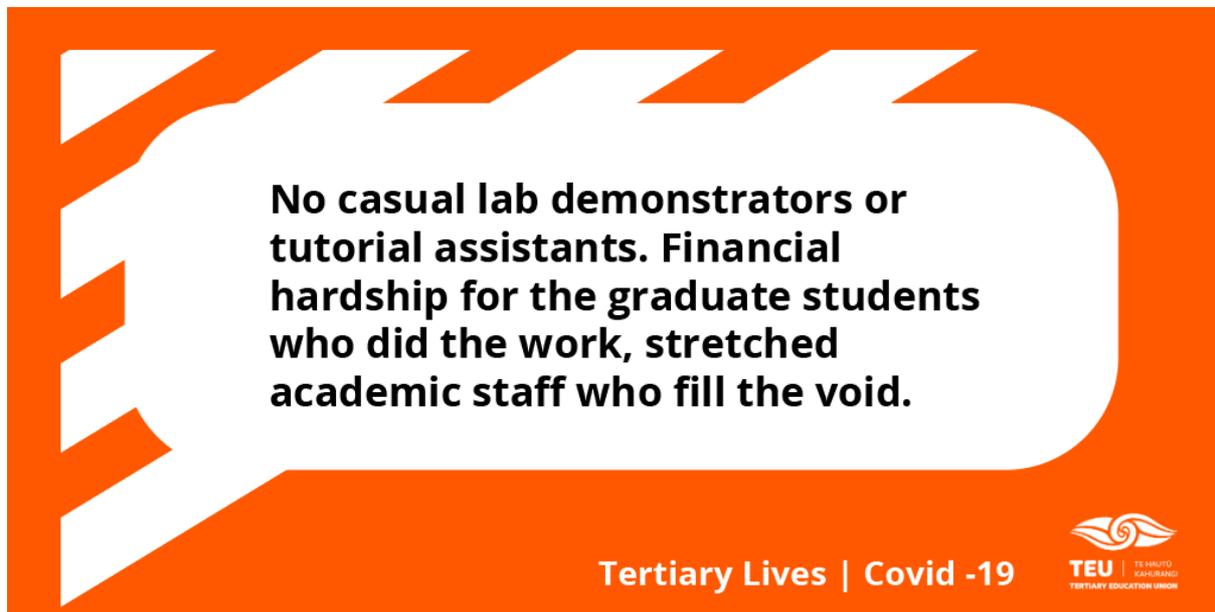
Teaching staff are being asked to do more to cover the shortfall i.e. teach more classes, teach multiple programmes, teaching in areas they are not qualified or experienced in, managers teaching, last minute appointments impacting on quality and consistency for students (polytechnic)

Workloads are being managed within teams as not willing to hire more staff, initially all contract staff were to finish but staffing has been re-arranged, fairly or not, to keep the needed staff but workloads high, especially in online programmes (polytechnic)

Permanent Staff are also picking up extra duties (polytechnic)

Likewise, general staff in universities were subject to conditions of austerity with increased workload. Like academic staff, the absence of any staff – temporary or otherwise – increased workload expectations and hindered the timely completion of

required administrative tasks during enrolment and exam periods. It was clearly obvious to them that academic colleagues and students were equally affected.



No casual lab demonstrators or tutorial assistants. Financial hardship for the graduate students who did the work, stretched academic staff who fill the void.

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Fixed term staff are not having their employment extended and the work they were doing is either dropped (not a sound medium and longer-term option) or is picked up spasmodically by existing staff when they can. In my area this has meant important but not urgent work is shelved for periods of time and this does have implications for future change readiness and improved understanding of our user community's needs (university)

We are not getting any casual staff for our busy period, normally we get 12 (and a further, shorter-term, 15). Normally that isn't enough but now we will have none. This is causing anxiety among staff as we will not be able to get through the work (university)

No casual lab demonstrators or tutorial assistants. Financial hardship for the graduate students who did the work, stretched academic staff who fill the void (university)

Far less tutors for classes, technicians are being asked to teach as tutors pulling the jobs away from the casual students and putting added workload on some techs due to others absence (university)

Management, it seems, operates unilaterally with no communicated strategic plan for the future, nor anticipation or remedying of current hardships. The consequences for staff

are unpleasant and hardly constitute an environment of a 'good employer.'¹⁶ All tertiary education institutions are bound by the State Sector Act provisions which are often specified in staff contracts.

The university told staff that it is easier to not continue the employment of those on these agreements than to make the permanent staff redundant (university)

Staff starting to leave voluntarily or being disestablished (university)

Unfortunately, there was less input from general staff in the polytechnic and wānanga sites. Those that have responded with 'yes' noted the following:

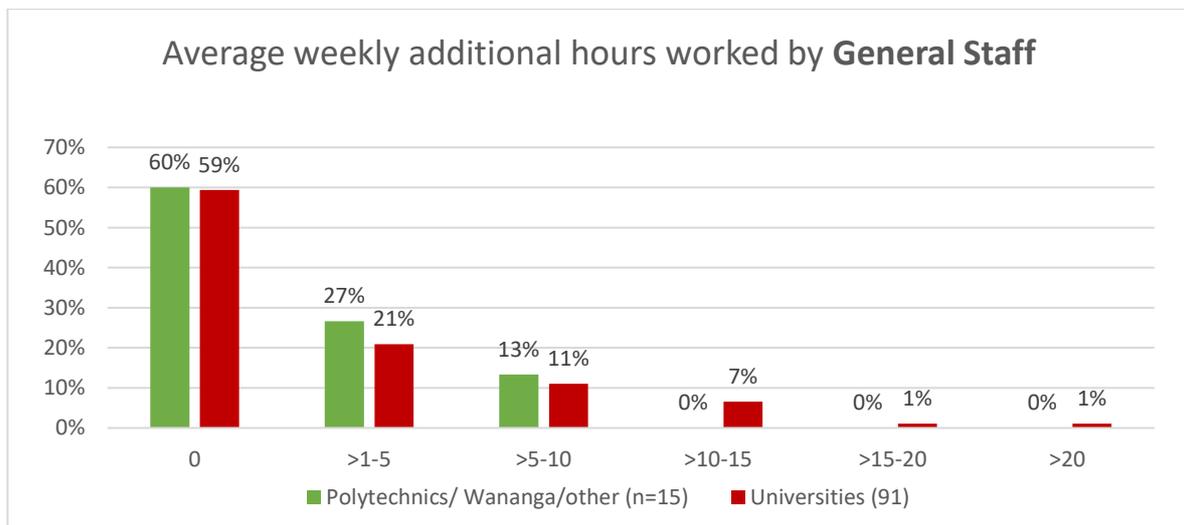
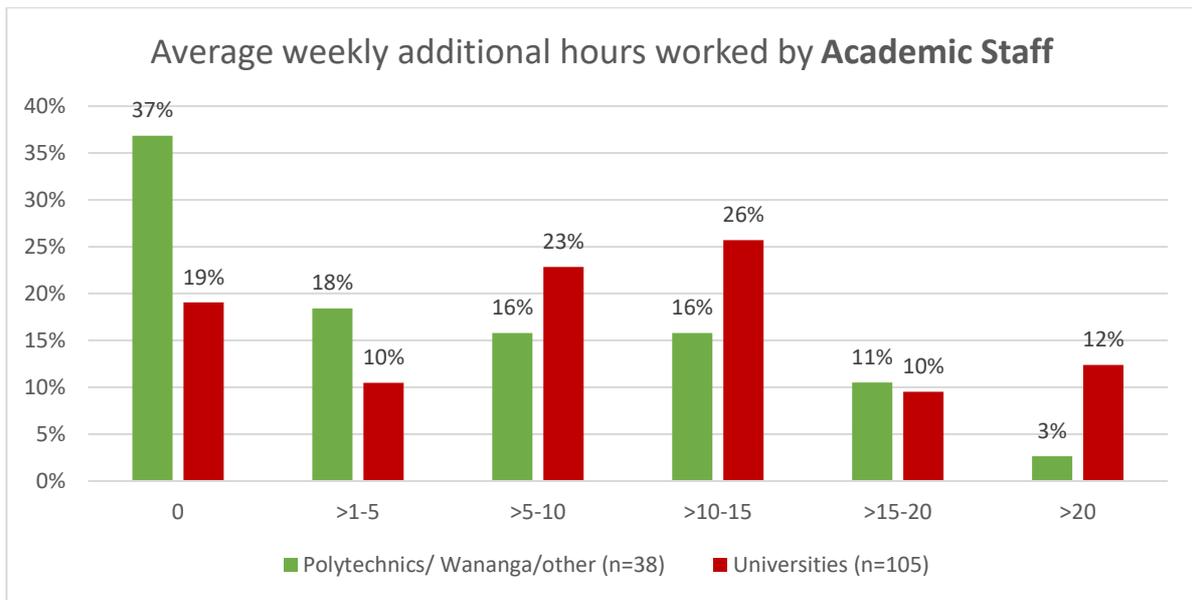
Staff are losing positions. causing stress and insecurity (polytechnic)

Many casual and part time tutors have lost part or all of their hours. Many were not paid anything during the COVID lockdown despite the government's guarantee of funding. This has created unbearable stress for some and led many to leave (polytechnic)

¹⁶ The New Zealand Human Rights Commission has a very clear series of statements on the nature of a 'good employer,' noting its position as an accepted 'principle' in the State Sector Act 1988 and the Crown Entities Act 2004. See ['What is a 'good employer?'](#), accessed 07 September 2020.

Workload: unpaid labour and job satisfaction levels

While the preceding discussion has looked at the effects and probable causes of stress, changes in the workplace, and workload increase, Questions 5¹⁷ and 6¹⁸ provide the opportunity for respondents to show this in substantive terms through the level of unpaid labour contributed to their job. The 249 usable responses for both questions allowed calculation of the additional hours contributed. The following graphs provide the results for academic and general staff by types of institutions.

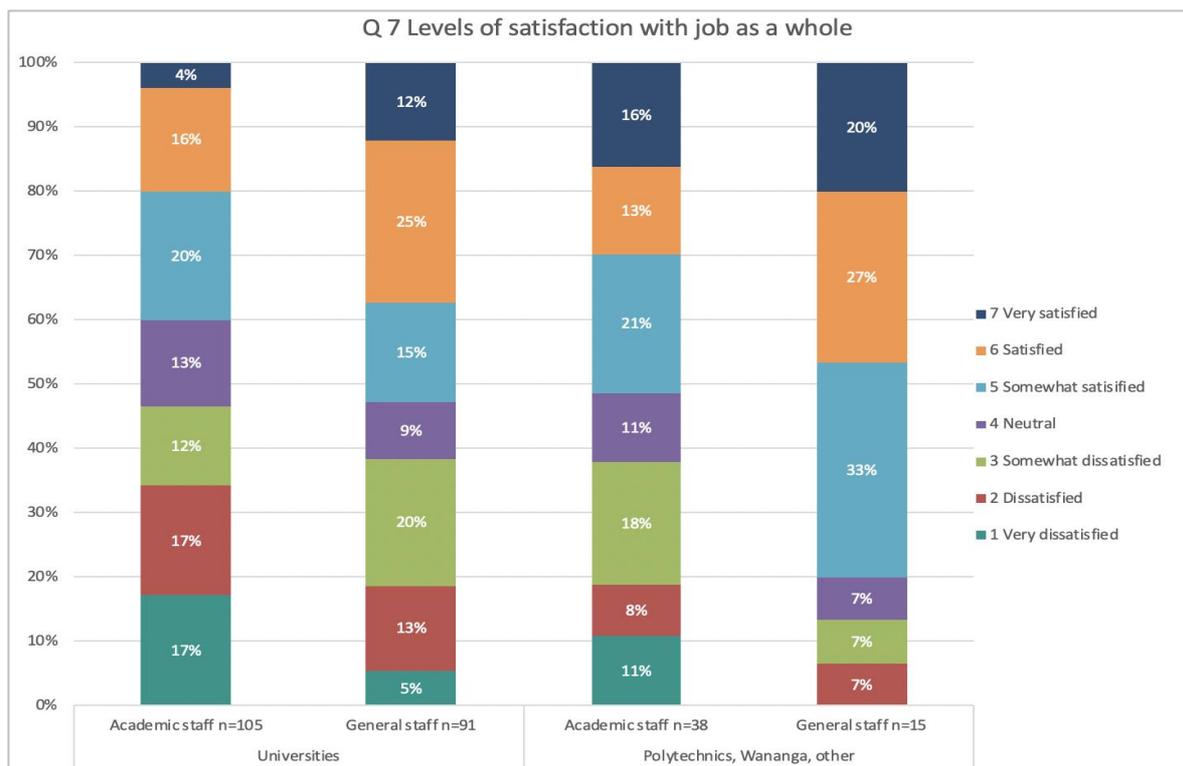


¹⁷ Q.5: How many hours per week are you employed for by your institution as stated in your employment agreement/s? (Please specify in numbers e.g. 37.5)

¹⁸ Q.6: In an average week during the last month, how many HOURS have you spent on paid work overall? (Please specify in numbers e.g. 37.5)

Thirty seven percent (37%) and 19% of academic respondents from polytechnics and universities respectively, and over half (60% and 59%) of general staff, worked no additional hours. In contrast, 64% and 81% of academics and 40% and 41% of general staff worked additional hours to those prescribed in their contracts. This highlights the fact that more than a third of ITPs and almost half of university academics are working 25% more hours at the moment.

Question 7¹⁹ asked respondents to reflect on their level of job satisfaction. The graph below illustrates the responses.

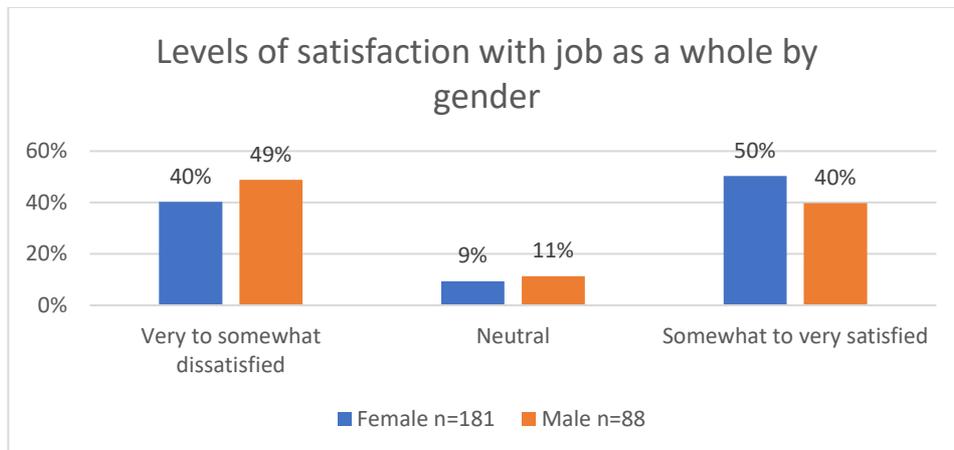


While the 'n' is small for the polytechnic and wānanga sectors, there are notably lower levels of dissatisfaction: 37% for academic staff; 14% for general staff. It is a distinct possibility that the low 'n' is attributable to 'survey fatigue' or a certain reluctance with the ongoing significant changes reforms in the sector and the creation of NZIST.

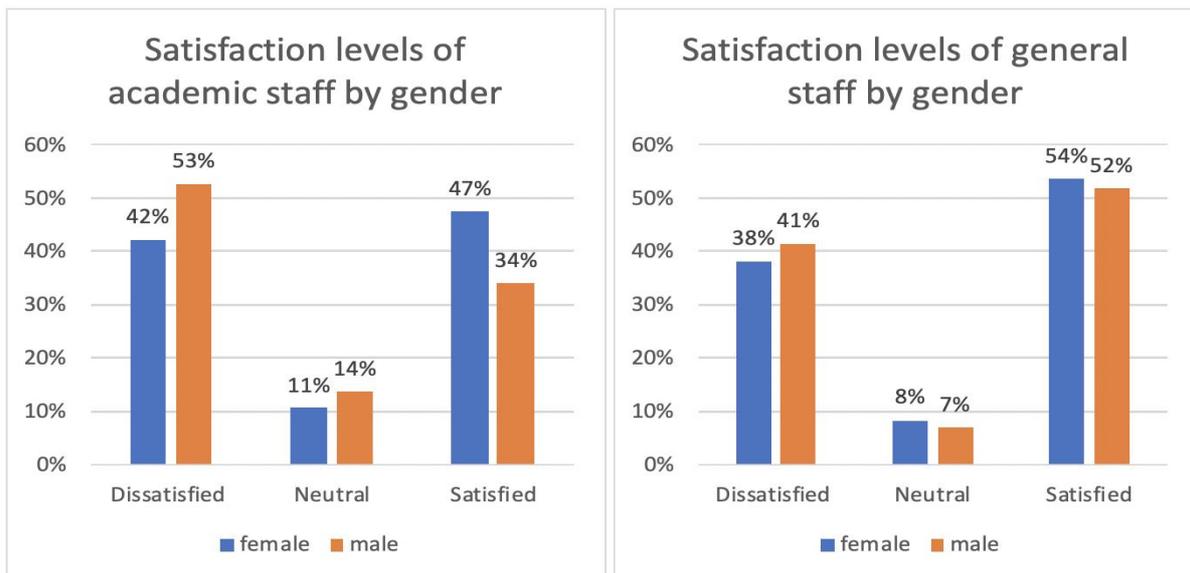
The university sector gives a different picture with general staff and academic staff in a worse position than their Polytechnic colleagues. 38% of general staff and 46% their academic counterparts expressed degrees of dissatisfaction.

¹⁹ Q.7: Taking everything into consideration, how satisfied do you feel with your job as a whole? Note: this question was not asked in the May survey.

The following graph examines the responses to levels of satisfaction with the job by gender:²⁰



Women across the sector tend to be marginally less dissatisfied and equally more satisfied than males with a 10% difference either way. Similar proportions of males and females reported neutral levels of satisfaction. Referring back to the graph on levels of stress by gender, women tend to be at the higher end of the stress continuum 8-10, with a percentage point difference of 9%. Similar results prevail for satisfaction levels in the sector (see graphs below) differentiated by gender and role. Amongst academic and general staff women tend to be both less dissatisfied and more satisfied than their male colleagues while similar percentages of academics and general staff remain neutral.



²⁰ Two respondents identified as 'gender diverse' and four did not state their gender. One female did not answer this question - these are not included in the graphs.

Concluding comments

This is the second survey undertaken by TEU in response to COVID-19 and its attendant effects on the tertiary education system. This survey, in line with the last one, is to determine the current state of the sector including problems emerging from stress and levels of structural changes due to staffing and workload changes, as well as the levels of satisfaction expressed by staff.

The substantial drop in response, particularly from the ITP sector and some universities, is evident, but this does not detract from the intensity of the alarm bells in these results that compound those in the May survey results. We concluded the last survey with the idea that “planning, communication, and problem-solving” with “student and staff requirements” at the forefront was a minimal requirement for meeting the challenges of a pandemic. Then, the pandemic is the major natural distraction forcing a change in the world of teaching and learning. Evident in these survey results is how this has been captured by management to hatch another serious distraction for staff in the tertiary education system. If the first distraction was not enough to unsettle aspects of teaching and learning for staff, the use or abuse of this situation by administration and management to restructure everything that surrounds teaching and learning certainly has.

Those ‘very stressed’ have increased substantially and while teaching and learning in an online environment without professional development for any staff, tutors, or students contributed to this, it is now clearly restructuring of staff numbers, roles, and expectations under duress which occupies the mind. The fact that the administration and management can turn their wishes into threats – loading staff with expectations of not only greater workloads, but publishing and research requirements as well – is entirely problematic.

This managerialism which masquerades as academic leadership, especially in the university sector, is devoid of planning and communication, much less empathy, and readily employs demands on the conditions of employment of all staff. Sadly, institutions recognise this and ignore it.

Throughout the results of this survey, there have been a number of responses that explicitly address the negative impact of managers using the COVID-19 pandemic as a means to implement ill-thought-through changes. Reflecting on the case of Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington as an early mover in restructure proposals gives

us a glimpse at some of the difficulties that are likely to unfold across the tertiary education sector.

Victoria University conducted a Staff Check-In Survey (Victoria University Wellington 2020) in July which received 1737 completed responses out of 6000 employees, with 56% describing their condition as 'surviving,' 'getting fatigued,' or 'fatigued.' It noted that if people see themselves in the last two categories they may "require significant support to allow them to recover, stay well and operate effectively." The survey reporting on 'feedback themes' in the 'free text comments' identified leadership as a key issue.²¹

Many staff comments mentioned a disconnection between decision making from the higher levels of the University and the impact of those decisions at a local level. Many comments mentioned frustration and disappointment arising from messages considered to be inconsistent and unclear, rapidly changing demands with limited notice and the lack of clear direction and prioritisation.

The institutions' response to such problems is to suggest staff "review the support resources and discuss with their manager" and this would "allow them [staff] to recover, stay well and operate effectively."

All problems identified in the VUW survey report are constructed as personal failures and the only statement about any structural problems with the university blame staff for not seeing the "lack of clarity and the dynamic nature of the requirements imposed on the University by the Government."

If this attitude prevails across tertiary education institutions – and there is evidence in the TEU survey that it does – this would make it almost impossible for staff to help students and to effectively reproduce a genuinely constructive teaching and learning environment. This means that job satisfaction – if it exists – must be entirely generated by staff perseverance in the absence of administrative support.

Changes noted in this survey's results – either in the forms of threat or in practice – have not mitigated problems in the sector, but in many cases have served only to intensify stress, workload, and distrust from staff. If the performance of the institutions highlighted on page one, and footnote 8, above form an exemplar for tertiary management

²¹ While a majority of respondents (1151) in the Victoria University survey designated 'leadership' as the most useful support that could be provided, there was no suggestion by the institution that this would or should be addressed.

behaviour in the sector, this neither meets the requirements of a 'good employer' nor the optimal conditions needed for effective teaching and learning.

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Appendix One: COVID-19 Pulse Survey August 2020

Thanks for taking time to fill in this survey.

The impact of the response to COVID-19 is still being felt across the tertiary education sector.

We are repeating a question on stress as this provides time series data going back to the first State of the Sector Survey commissioned by TEU in 2014. In this short survey we are also seeking information on the impact of COVID-19 on staffing levels and security of work.

As with the previous survey, results will be shared with Vice-chancellors and Chief Executives across the sector, and with the Tertiary Education Commission and Ministry of Education to help in decision-making processes around the ongoing response to COVID-19.

All responses will be aggregated to ensure anonymity. Participants can request a summary of the results at the end of this survey.

Please feel free to share the link with others in your workplace; we are keen to hear from anyone working in the tertiary education sector.

- **Q.1:** What is your level of stress? 0 being no stress at all; 10 being completely stressed.
- **Q.2:** What is causing you the most stress? (is it: work related; about the pandemic; to do with anxiety or worries you have with regard to the current extraordinary times; or something else)
- **Q.3:** Is COVID-19 leading to change processes in your institution?
- **Q.4:** Is COVID-19 resulting in a reduction of staff on fixed term or casual agreements?
- **Q.5:** How many hours per week are you employed for by your institution as stated in your employment agreement/s? (Please specify in numbers e.g. 37.5)
- **Q.6:** In an average week during the last month, how many HOURS have you spent on paid work overall? (Please specify in numbers e.g. 37.5)
- **Q.7:** Taking everything into consideration, how satisfied do you feel with your job as a whole?

- **Q.8:** Which institution do you work at?
- **Q.9:** What Staff Sector group do you come from?
- **Q.10:** What is your gender?
- **Q.11:** What is your age group?
- **Q.12:** What is your ethnicity? (select all that apply)
- **Q.13:** Please provide your email address if you would like a copy of the results of this survey