

# The continuing and future impact of COVID-19 on tertiary education staff

COVID -19 Survey Part Three

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A report for Te Hautū Kahurangi | TEU  
Dr Charles Sedgwick  
September 2021



**TEU** | TE HAUTŪ  
KAHURANGI  
TERTIARY EDUCATION UNION

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Dr Charles Sedgwick  
September 2021

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## Tertiary Lives COVID-19 Survey Part Three

The continuing and future impact of COVID-19 on tertiary education staff.

This is not just an ordinary report on the effects of COVID-19 and COVID-19 generated policy. Nor just an effect and outcomes catalogue. It is a story of the undoing of Aotearoa's tertiary education system, particularly in universities, that precedes COVID-19 and is set to survive it. It is a vivid portrayal of stress, loss, frustration and sorrow not born entirely of personal grievance, but of a genuine collective concern for not only all staff (academic and general) and students, but most importantly for our civil society.

These results demand of the reader that we ask how we have let a public good, owned by all of us, be reduced to a system that thrives on self-interest, competition, autocratic demands and a relentless urge by those in control to preserve their own survival over and above the future needs of thousands of students and the civil society to which it is ultimately responsible.

The input by all who contributed to this report provides a sad reminder of all our negligence but, if we have read and heard the message, it must also produce a clarion call for collective action by all of us to redefine and preserve an education sector that belongs to all of society.

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## Overview

This is the third survey on the impact of Aotearoa's response to COVID-19. TEU commissioned a first survey in May 2020 (n=825) and the second in October 2020 (n=276). This third survey was online from 13 April until April 22 2021, and then re-opened online from 13 May until 26 May 2021 (n=1021).

All three surveys aimed to gauge the effect of the government directed response to COVID-19 on the staff of the tertiary education sector. This third survey gauges the extent to which changes put in place as crisis-response conditions remain in tertiary education institutions and have come to constitute the new 'normal' for the sector.

The key problems that have persisted for all staff from the first survey include increasing stress and workload. Adding to the stress are the parallel initiatives by administration and management to implement ongoing structural change and/or restructuring in their institutions. From their perspective, this is to cope with the pandemic and longer term fiscal and competitive environment. The results of this third report echo the feelings of respondents to the October 2020 TEU survey report:

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 (Sedgwick, 2020b, p.32)

This response from 2020 continues to be relevant for remaining staff who variously adapted, voiced concerns or considered exiting their workplace (some had already made that decision in this third COVID-19 survey).

The responses to this survey additionally contain concerns which reflect another restructuring process underway. The fiscal and structural crisis in the polytechnic sector was responded to by the Labour government in 2020 with a major restructuring of the whole sector and the creation of Te Pūkenga (NZIST) complete with an Act (The Vocational Education and Training Reform Amendment Act 2020).

This effectively amalgamates Aotearoa's 16 Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics and a number of Industry Training Organisations (ITOs) into a single network of vocational education provision.

These four processes - a major government restructuring of the ITP sector; persistent restructuring across the entire tertiary education sector due to funding inadequacy; a competitive environment; and the sector's response to a pandemic - have intertwined in their cumulative effect to produce a troubled sector.

At the forefront of TEU concerns are the experiences of academic and general/allied/professional staff as they are exposed to and respond to changing conditions of work. The question that looms large in this situation is whether or not the problems generated are interpreted and responded to as personal deficiencies or as much larger structural issues. This latter issue is much more complex and extends to the very definition and meaning of tertiary education. It effects conditions of teaching and learning, workloads, collegial relations, staff-student relations, career potential as well as structural aspects of administration, planning and communication. For the first time in this series of surveys, there are responses which clearly articulate the impact in all these areas. For this reason, this report acknowledges and forefronts their analysis, their concerns and their wishes:

The staff surveys need to be taken seriously and not washed off as stains with a soap bar. Surveys tell stories and those stories originate from reality of being in a position of either distress or success. (University general staff)

## Deteriorating working conditions

Reflecting on the conclusions from the May 2020 survey there was some optimism:

The detailed and concerned comments indicate a workforce ready and able to produce a dedicated response to the continuation of teaching and learning for all tertiary students in difficult times (Sedgwick, 2020a, p.30)

However, by October 2020 this situation had deteriorated, and it was argued that if conditions persisted:

...this would make it almost impossible for staff to help students and to effectively reproduce a genuinely constructive teaching and learning environment (Sedgwick, 2020b, p.32)

There had been a continued deterioration of the sector's workforce. This is evident in responses about stress, unresolved workload issues and the continued apprehension caused by job insecurity, redundancy and restructuring. Issues surrounding the performance of 'management' were clearly highlighted as creating increasing demands based on little or no knowledge of the work carried out in institutions. These demands were communicated in a less-than-clear, trusting, sympathetic and coherent manner (Sedgwick, 2020a, pp.10-15 and Sedgwick, 2020b, pp.5-13). Decidedly absent in the process of implementing/imposing any changes by management in the previous surveys were the possibilities of constructive and productive 'consultation' and 'discussion'.

In the May 2020 survey report it was acknowledged that concerns about management's actions were well known and emphasised in 2013, 2017 and 2019 sector studies undertaken by TEU in a pre-COVID climate.

Sadly, in 2021 and particularly in the university sector, even under a very critical pressure of a pandemic, the problems have persisted with some notable caveats. In this survey there has been:

1. *a growing convergence in the concerns and the way they are expressed between general/allied/professional staff and academic staff.*
2. *a clear distinction made between the behaviour of line management and senior leadership/management teams (SLT/SMT) and above. Line management, in the majority of cases, is presented as sympathetic and understanding but are often totally restricted in doing anything other than offering palliative care.*
3. *a recognition that SLT/SMT, either intentionally or otherwise and regardless of discussions and consultation, remain uninformed about the work of staff and do not listen or are impervious to considering what they hear from them.*
4. *a pervasive sense of disheartened frustration, and the overwhelming sense, despite their endurance and contribution under these conditions exacerbated by the pandemic, that they are obstructed in their attempts to provide the best education possible for students.*

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## The survey instrument and demographic information

There were eight open-ended questions in this survey and respondents used these to express themselves with over 3000, often detailed and thoughtful, written comments. Noticeably, the majority of comments weren't used to vent personal grievances, but more as a place for thoughtful presentation of what was wrong, why it had occurred, and the damage produced.

An overall observation is that sometimes in the quantitative questions the sheer frustration, angst, negative feeling, agreement or disagreement has been attenuated and it is only when you read the same topic discussed in an open-ended response that the gravity of the issue hits home.<sup>1</sup>

There were 1021 respondents to this survey including 615 respondents from universities, 232 from polytechnics<sup>2</sup>, 29 from wānanga and 15 from other institutions including 2 PTEs. One hundred and thirty respondents gave no institution or organisation<sup>3</sup>. Nine hundred and seventeen respondents were TEU members, 2 from TIASA, 8 who said they were not members and 94 gave no response around union membership.

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1 For example, how would one interpret a respondent's answer to a question about whether or not there are opportunities for open discussion and negotiation about workload with line management/SLT. The options are 'strongly disagree', 'disagree', 'agree' or 'strongly agree'. As noted before, relations with line management in this survey were singled out as positive in the majority of cases so the response in this question would be 'agree' for line management but 'disagree' for SLT. It is possible that there might be a case for 'agree' even in regard to the SLT, but if input to SLT had been dismissed or not listened to then the content of an 'agree' response would be qualified and this is precisely what happened in the open-ended responses. 'Yes we were consulted, but the decisions had already been made, or yes we hear you but you need to solve the problem yourself, or alternatively, your response is heard and ignored and no action results'.

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2 42% (258) of respondents came from 2 universities, 40% (245) from 3 universities and 18% (112) from the remaining 3 universities; 68% (158) responses came from 7 ITPs and 32% (74) from 9 other ITPs.

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3 The 'Other' included: Literacy Aotearoa, NZCER, Te Rito Maioho Early Childhood New Zealand, Te Pūkenga and two PTEs.

Table 1

		University	Polytechnics	Wānanga	Other	Institution type not stated	Total
Role	Academic Staff	38.2%	19.4%	1.2%	0.9%	2.5%	62.2%
	General allied, or professional staff	21.9%	3.3%	1.7%	0.5%	0.9%	28.3%
	*Role not stated	0.1%	0%	0%	0.1%	9.3%	9.5%
Gender	Female	35.4%	13.2%	2.6%	1.1%	1.9%	54.2%
	Gender Diverse	2.0%	0.5%	0.1%	0%	0.2%	2.7%
	Male	21.5%	8.8%	0.1%	0.4%	1.3%	32.1%
	* Gender not stated	1.4%	0.2%	0%	0%	9.4%	11.0%
Age	18-24	0.6%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.6%
	25-34	6.9%	1.4%	0.2%	0.2%	0%	8.6%
	35-44	11.9%	3.7%	0.4%	0.5%	1.0%	17.5%
	45-54	16.7%	7.1%	0.8%	0.3%	0.8%	25.6%
	55-64	18.8%	8.7%	1.2%	0.3%	1.0%	30.0%
	65+	3.9%	1.8%	0.3%	0.2%	0.3%	6.5%
	* Age not stated	1.5%	0.1%	0%	0%	9.7%	11.3%
<b>Total</b>		<b>60.2%</b>	<b>22.7%</b>	<b>2.8%</b>	<b>1.5%</b>	<b>12.7%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

(\*9.2% (94) respondents gave no demographic information, and some respondents gave only some demographic information.)

The majority of respondents (61%) were women and the age range was between 45 and 64 years old. The majority of the 328 male respondents (36%) were also in the 45-64 age range. In the polytechnic sector this was the case for (71%) of respondents and in the university sector more than 50% of respondents.

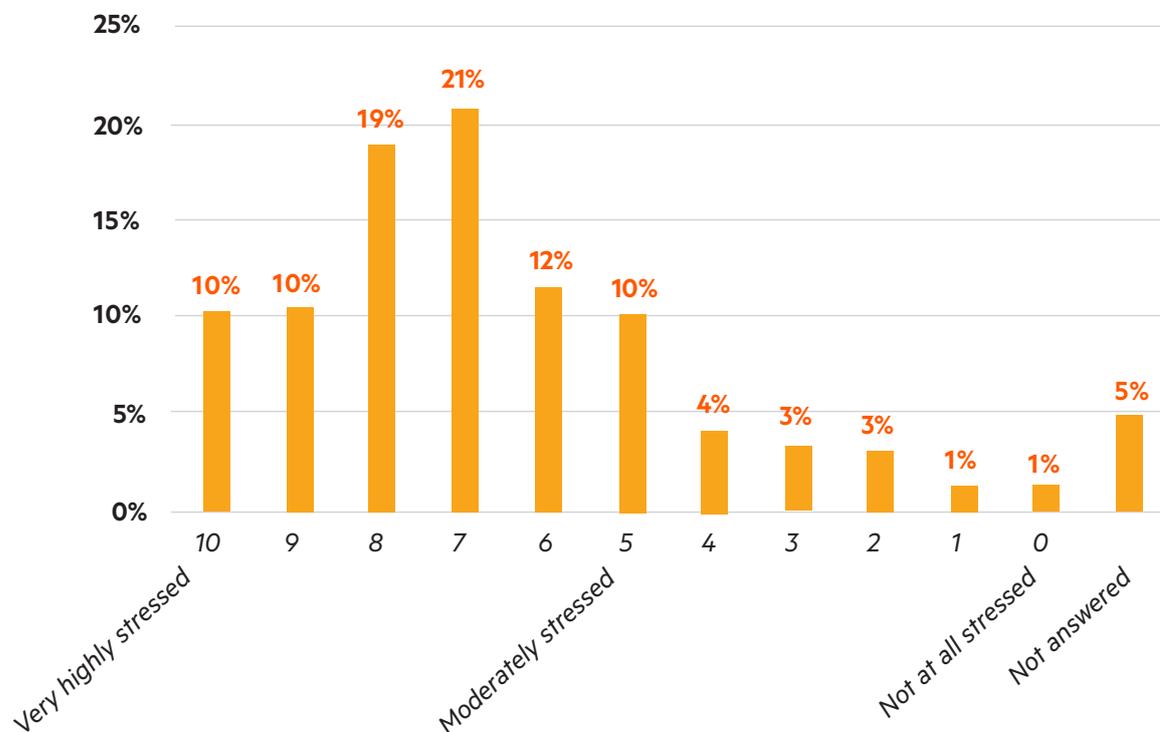
## Rising stress levels in tertiary education

Both preceding survey reports began with a discussion of stress and it is useful to repeat this in the current report.

Since May 2020 the percentage of respondents reporting levels of stress as high to very high has increased from 24% to 40% (see Figure 1). Those moderately stressed has declined from 48% to 43%. Overall, the stress levels have increased and have been sustained through all of 2020 and into 2021. The distribution of 85% of respondents expressing moderate to high and very high stress can be seen below

Figure 1

### Levels of work stress (0-10 scale) All respondents (n=1021)



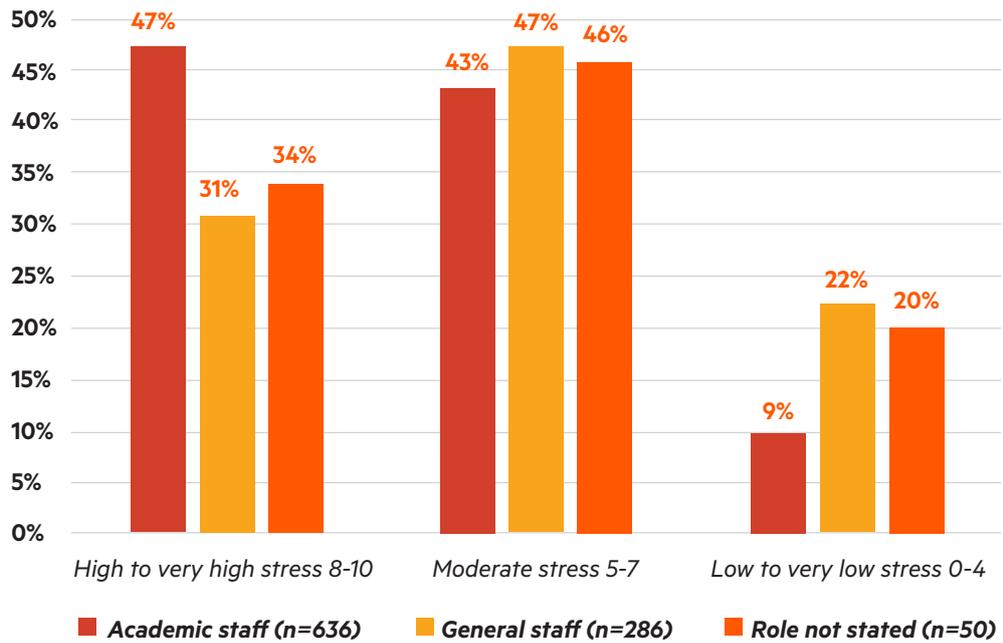
Ninety percent of academics experience levels of stress which ranges from very high to moderate, with 47% in the high and very high situation. Compared to the October survey results there has been a marked increase at the upper end and a slight reduction in those with low to very low stress levels (Sedgwick, 2020b, p. 4).

The situation for general staff remained relatively similar. Fifty respondents did not identify if they were academic or general staff.

The percentage expressing 'very high' levels of stress from (n=635) for academic staff and (n= 289) for general staff is substantial at 47% and 31% respectively. If one included even 'moderate levels of stress' the percentage experiencing stress is substantially higher for both sets of staff (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

### Q2.1 Overall level of work stress (n=972)

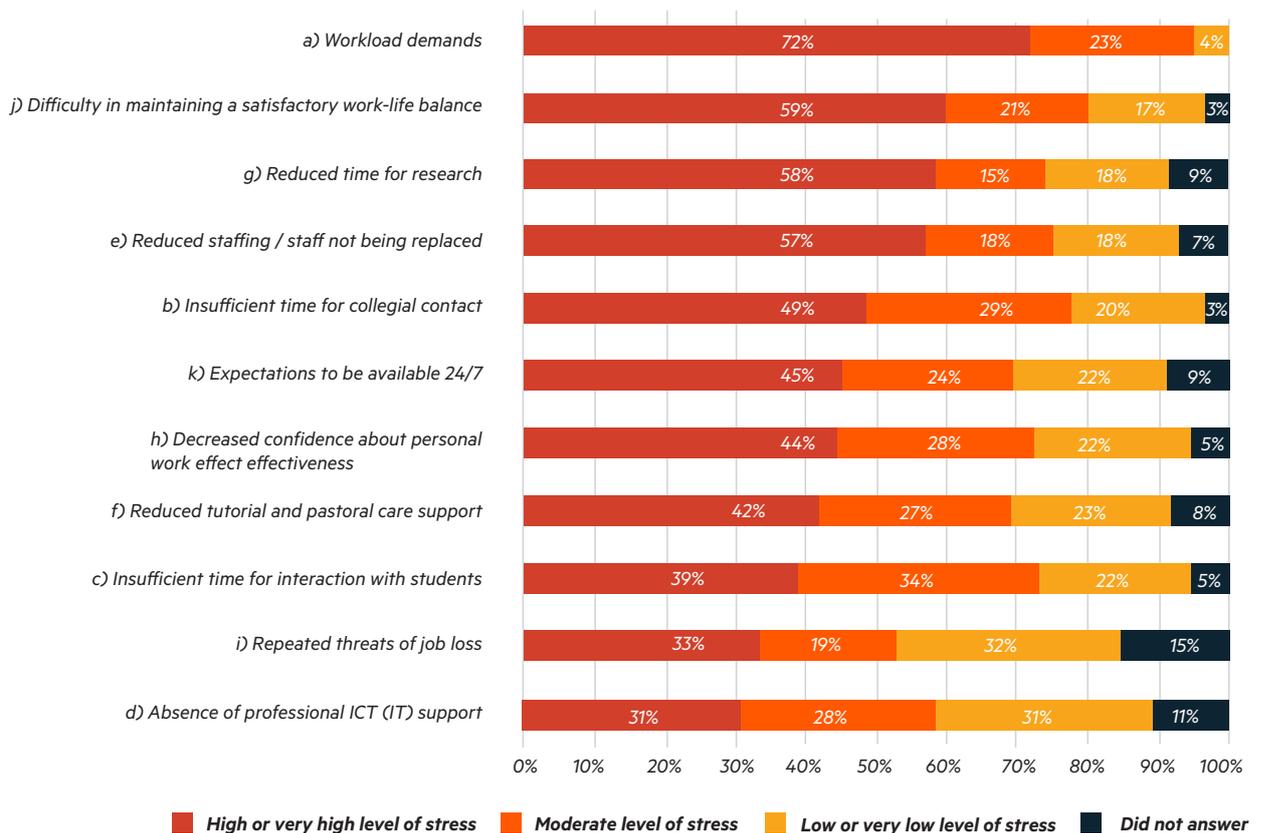


#### Contributors to high stress levels

Respondents were asked to rate the level of stress they experience from 11 factors ranging from those that impinge on one’s future employment, current workload and capacity to be satisfied with work effectiveness to relationships with colleagues and students (see Figures 3 and 4).

Figure 3

### Q2.2 Level of stress by factor - Academic staff (n=619)



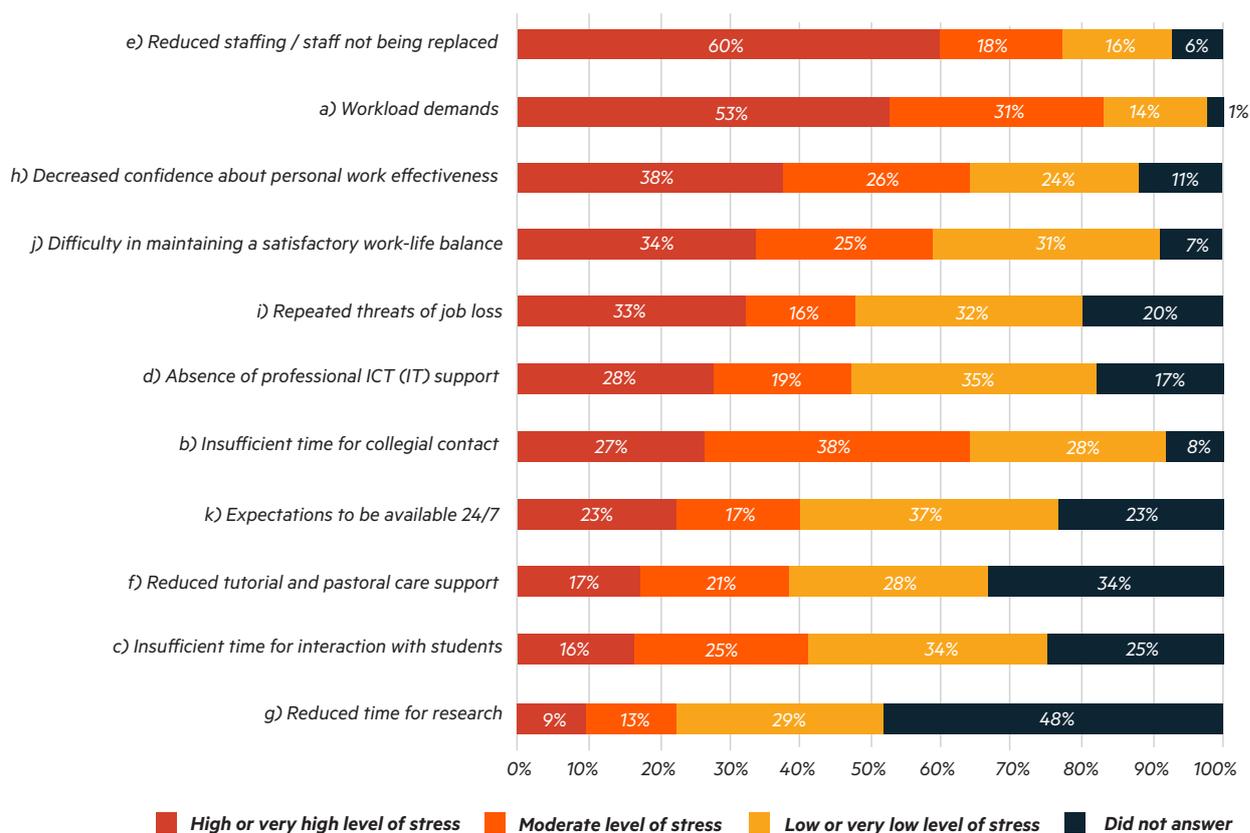
The quantitative responses are individual in nature, but the open-ended responses are much more social and contextualised. The reader soon realises however, that the structural trap in which respondents find themselves often leads to responses which are individual.

Generally, the closer the issue gets to immediate structural demands within the sector's institutions the more likely the intensity of the stress levels increases. Reduced staffing, increased workload, the requirement for 24/7 availability and reduced time for research are all interlinked, and the open-ended responses point this out. Stress resulting from these collectively affect work-life balance and all other relations one might expect in the sector. The crucial aspect is diminishing time availability and consequent doubt about one's own capability.

Results for general/allied/professional staff can be seen in Figure 4. While the percentage expressing moderate to very high stress for general/allied/professional staff may be less, staffing reductions and increased workload occupy a similarly prominent position in the responses given.

Figure 4

## Q2.2 Level of stress by factor - General staff (n=288)



Noticeably, when respondents have an opportunity to express how work-related stress is affecting them:

- stress is contextualised;
- the social frame extends to include cause and effect beyond the respondent's experience;
- generalised others effected appeal; and,
- depth is given to what stress actually feels like as an experienced phenomenon.

This last point becomes crucial both from the perspective of staff efforts to voice their concerns and correspondingly the responses/suggestions from management. As noted in other surveys, stress in workplaces is debilitating and starts to erode a very important part of staff commitment to their vocation.

While the quantitative results indicate perhaps a lesser intensity of concern by general/allied/professional staff, the qualitative responses indicate a very similar sentiment and even a convergence in concerns with their academic colleagues.

## Unachievable workloads

There were 408 (n=1021) written responses to this question with by far the largest percentage (38%) of responses focused on workload issues and the actual aspects of work or changes in organisations causing or increasing stress. Much of the experience described related to staff shortages, increased expectations of teaching and administrative or project work for academics, tutors, and general staff. More students meant increased workloads in terms of teaching and marking, but respondents also said that students had heightened expectations of 24/7 service and answering emails in the online environment. Also, there is increased evidence of student stress requiring additional pastoral care or assistance.

Only 3% of respondents said the issue of stress was of no relevance for them. It is interesting to start with a respondent's synopsis of how stress in the sector is generated:

The job for academics is boundless. There's an expectation that we just wrap around the new expectations, we're supposed to be like sponges, mopping everything up and producing all the outcomes they want (it feels like THEY). There has been NO workload reduction; no suggestion that they expect (e.g.) less research. Instead, we're expected to DO MORE. And the students are more 'needy' (fair enough) but where is the time for that coming from. And there are constantly new and evolving tech and systems we're expected to get on top of! It's impossible and cannot be 'time-managed' away. And each day you feel more and more behind. And holidays are good (important) but for academics especially, your work just piles up while you're gone. But academics (many) are deeply committed to students, their projects, their peers that they put their own wellbeing second. Stress is endemic and deeply damaging.  
(University academic)

Reflecting on the personal/structural nexus respondent's own expectations are in conflict with managerial policy:

Since my course coordination and workload has doubled this trimester due to the departure of a colleague under an 'early leaving' incentive from the university ... I haven't been able to find a suitably qualified marker for two of the courses. Therefore, assignments in two of my courses are remaining unmarked which is totally unprofessional and unfair to our students. This is the first time in over 30 years as an academic, across three different institutions that I have been placed in this position. The lack of empathy, concern and more especially supportive actions from our SLT is horrifically glaring and leads to feelings of despondency. However, if I or any others of my colleagues were to retire to escape this awful stress, then that would only increase the workload and stress of the remaining colleagues... Furthermore, our admin team are also severely understaffed. One is working 2.5 roles at the moment, and is so very tired. She has told me she is near the end of her capacity to sustain this load. Once admin staff leave, so too does the institutional knowledge that they have, and inexperienced admin can take time to learn the ropes. Mistakes are made. (University academic)

The implications of stress as noted above, manifest in concerns ranging from non-completion of work to near total despair and wanting to exit the job.

I have resigned due to work-related stress (ITP academic)

It's all becoming too much, worn out, exhausted, burnt out (University academic)

I no longer want to be employed at my university due to the constant and ongoing stress. My school has been targeted for closure, the given reasons (financial) are not valid. We have been disowned by senior management - they all live in another city and do not care about staff. I do not recommend that people work or study here. I am just waiting to be paid the redundancy. (University academic)

As in previous surveys we note with concern the physical and mental stress being experienced in the tertiary education sector. In this survey, 29% of respondents said the stress had resulted in ill health. Many respondents expressed the fact that these were relatively new health issues (over the last year) with only a minority indicating a pre-existing condition that was getting much worse.<sup>4</sup>

The response of management to the stressors was seen as helpful by a very small number of respondents (3%). Many more respondents described a range of reactions from hostility and threats from management, to the acknowledgement of the problem but urging the staff member to get their work done anyway.

Fear to raise serious concerns in staff meetings. SLT passive-aggressive attitudes towards staff if a matter is raised. SLT does not actively seek practical ways to support teaching staff to alleviate the workload. Teachers have to sort innovative ways to help each other. The help does not come from SLT. (Role and institution not stated)

4 See also McKie (2021) and Isla Dougall et. al, (2021) for comparative UK situation of mental health in universities.

... We are in a crisis but it is hard to resolve because we are still under attack from the management. There is a complete breakdown of trust and communication, not only with senior management but at all levels as fear and division has spread throughout the institution. (University academic)

There was advice to take leave or seek help from the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP).

When I tried to voice that I am feeling stressed and anxious for my position in October 2020, I was advised to seek support from EAP - why tell me that I need a shrink when the problem is not me - my stress is caused by how [a university] intended to fire my whole department? (University academic)

There is one alarming case where the idea of work-related stress is contested by management.

The mental stress is making me feel physically tired a lot and the support from the institution is non-existent or they just say use EAP? They take no responsibility for their role in the stress of staff and defer all of this to outside entities to cope and deal with it like EAP? (ITP academic)

Establishing whether stress is work-related is an issue that is manipulated by HR. Who decides? Your local GP? Not here. HR demands a review by an "independent" doctor contracted by HR. (University academic)

.... The academy is broken and appears to be taking very little notice of the stress this is causing staff other than suggesting we work more efficiently and seek mental health support. This approach suggests the problem is 'us' rather than the institution. (University academic)

If it is suggested, you take leave then it is understood that there is an "Expectation to .... maintain same output." (University general staff)

## The threat of job cuts and the reality of precarity

Another very pervasive cause of stress is the threat of redundancy, which like stress itself – generates unease and concerns amongst colleagues and even across departments:

We are constantly being told our jobs should be redundant and that they are under threat, whilst being expected to do more than one job, whilst being told a massive restructure (SSP) will change everything and we need to get on board. There is no consideration that I can see of health and well-being of staff. (University general staff)

I haven't felt stressed until recently. I was coping fine, but it's like the longer this goes on the worse I feel. And it's all around me. Stressed colleagues are infectious! (University general staff)

I feel a lot of pressure to come into work when I am sick. Especially due to constant threats of job loss (not from my line manager!). A complete restructure is imminent and I feel pressure to be present so I can raise concerns and remain heard. (University general staff)

The insecurity of fixed term and casual appointments is also a stressor for staff:

The primary stress for me is precarity of employment--I am an ECR on a fixed term contract and there is very little information coming from leadership regarding the likelihood of being renewed. (University academic)

While on secondment, my permanent role was disestablished. This has led to a long-term stressful situation. (University general staff)

An equally important stress for many staff stems from their personal expectations surrounding their work and the concern that they are unable to fulfil demands from employers.

My role has a peak workload for a large part of the year, but I have no back-up to the role so I worry about getting sick, being sick, and the work is not done. (University general staff)

Timelines set by senior managers for completing tasks are completely divorced from reality, and strategic priorities often conflict. I don't feel like I'm achieving anything on a day-to-day basis, I'm just trudging through bureaucratic bullshit while decisions change on a daily basis, so after a while you lose all motivation, and your self-esteem dissipates. (University general staff)

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## Uncaring institutional leaders

The majority of respondents in the open-ended questions stated that institutional leaders and management couldn't care less about stress or personal expectations:

Constant stress from incessant emails, always having to process new information; constantly feeling like you're not doing your job well enough; constantly being made to feel like you are the problem - it's toxic! (No institution, Academic)

Where a few years back I took on significant levels of work-related stress, I now don't care (as much). I figure SLT and CE don't care about the consequences of the decisions they are making on teaching and learning, so maybe I shouldn't. (University academic)

Work related stress has affected every aspect of my life. Management do not seem to care. They are well aware I am job hunting, despite not wanting to leave what I do. (University academic)

Respondents commented that when sympathy or empathy is offered by management the sincerity is doubted:

SLT always talk about staff well-being as important - then introduce policies and practices which clearly reduce wellbeing (University general staff)

As much as management pretends they care, [we are] .... not being resilient enough. (University academic)

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## Reducing stress

Consistent with the issues raised in Q1.6 we find that management – in this case the SLT/SMT either directly or indirectly – were singled out as being responsible for the high levels of stress in the tertiary education sector. Respondents repeatedly pointed to them ignoring, not responding to, or saying they are unable to change the circumstances.

In the minds of respondents, the priorities of senior management resided with their orders from higher up - the need for 'profit' or economic stringency and efficiencies (do more with less).

Respondents were asked: **What would need to change to alleviate stress in your workplace for the future?** Fifty three percent of all respondents (537) articulated needed changes. In order of frequency these ranged from 38% who wanted a democratic, collaborative, communicative workplace with competent, trained, knowledgeable management capable of listening and learning as well as being supportive, honest, kind, and respectful. A more drastic demand was 6% who advocated total dismissal of all management from the chief executive/vice chancellor down. Thirty percent wanted more staff and tutors, 23% wanted a reduction in workload and serious consultation about its distribution, and 10% emphasised the need for proper forward thinking and planning, based on data, in all aspects of the organisation, rather than reactive short-term responses by management. Between 3% and 6% of respondents wanted discontinuing of the use of threats both personal (threatening job loss) and structural (threat of restructuring) by management as well as the use of dishonest messaging/misinformation about the whole system. The latter refers to both hierarchical and collegial relations:

Clear messaging to students, backed up with moral leadership from SLT, that dual delivery is NOT distance education; that they are NOT getting as good a deal as they used to in the pre-COVID era; that academics have been explicitly instructed only to do 'good enough' teaching. That ADs and other well-meaning folk in faculties should back up this messaging. That childless, single, young and idealistic academics should stop talking and tweeting about how we 'owe' it to students to 'do more': some of us literally can't [deal] with this anymore, and some of us feel betrayed by other colleagues in different life situations generalizing from their own experience to a universal demand on other academic's moral, emotional, and intellectual energy. Overall, what we 'owe' to everyone is clear, truthful messaging: everyone, students, academics, everyone is getting a raw deal from COVID-19 and it will be years before any incoming cohort is free from that burden. (University academic)

This clearly suggests the intrusion of a type of habitual behaviour into all levels of the sector reflecting and imposing the current dominant value system of the market. This generated, for respondents, the need for a very different conception of what a university should be about.

A change in SLT personnel would be ideal. Even better, a change in the way universities as a whole are run. Why are universities being run as businesses? And worse, being run as businesses by people with no business experience or accountability? At a minimum, I would like to see evidence that the SLT actually cares about the university and its staff - beyond adding a line or two in their latest email, or a token platitude during a speech in which they are announcing yet more reforms.

They should visit us, get to know us - at least learn the names and faces of the people in their colleges and what and how they work. I think this would go a long way in showing that there are real people on both sides of the university spectrum, and the rest (consideration for workloads and staff well-being) should naturally follow. (University academic)

As one respondent put it, it is time for:

...open communication and transparency with SLT and teaching staff. Encourage staff to engage in open forum discussion to address specific issues that concern them and the school. There should also be a regular forum or opportunities for teachers to address serious deficiencies in our school systems. To encourage strategic action and practical solutions. (No source given)

An oft repeated suggestion to facilitate the above is training for management and overall planning informed by a value system for a university:

1) The SLT, Faculty heads, and associated professional staff would receive training that clarifies just how wide ranging and time intensive normal academic roles are. 2) SLT, Faculty etc would receive training around what real agency and well-being looks like for academics and would view current evidence around the Structural Inequities - racism, sexism etc - apparent in NZ universities (referring to NZ and international research). (University academic)

Or more bluntly what is needed is:

...leadership to realise their poor planning shouldn't constitute an emergency and this kind of treatment for us - especially when they don't understand the work that goes into getting the answer/data they want or creating what they are asking for. They grossly underestimate the time it takes to complete what they are asking. (University general staff)

Actual leadership. The university is run by a bunch of self-serving individuals who have long lost touch with the fact that they are serving society and the generation of the future. (University academic)

## Workload

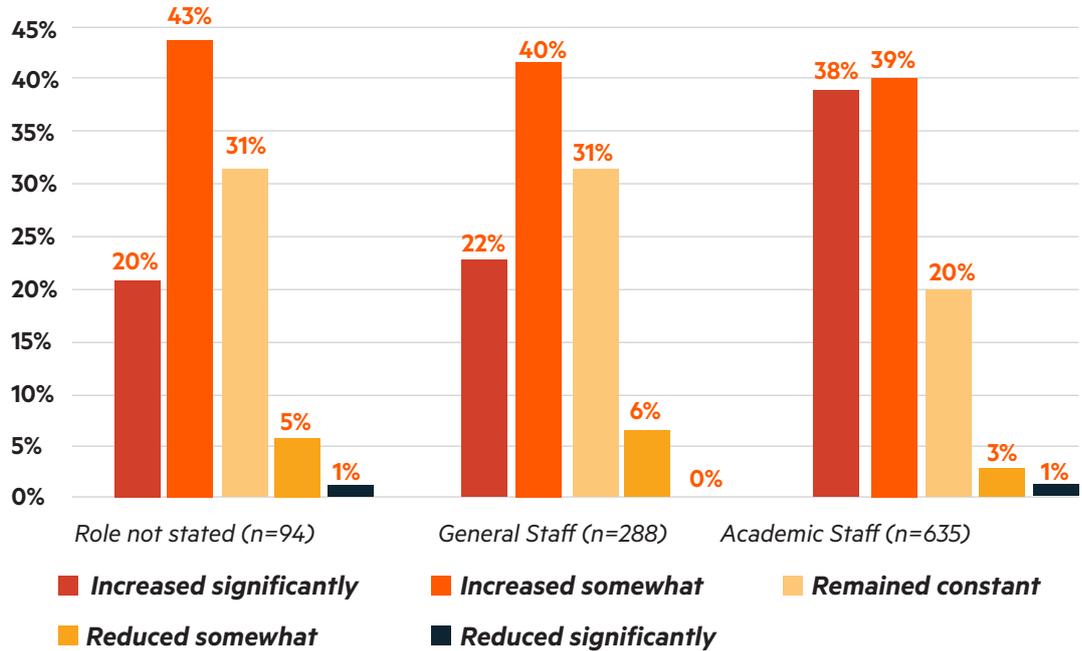
A dominant concern of all staff, even before the pandemic and definitely highlighted in previous Covid-19 surveys, is the issue of workloads. The extent and longevity of this is highlighted in the following:

Universities have consistently disregarded the well-being of academics, particularly in New Zealand in the last 12 or so years as budgets have tightened and the management class has grown used to continuing to leverage more work from academics in a way that is unsustainable. ... The work academics do is time-intensive, and we work across a very wide range of modes including teaching, administrative, service and research. Each one of these things could be a job - and indeed often is for professional staff - but academics are expected to do four jobs at once. The outcome is consistently one of overload and stress. Universities and Faculties and university 'well-being leaders' consistently address any issues raised as 'personal' when they are structural problems to do with unmanageable workload expectations generally. Covid-19 has greatly amplified overwork and stress - the ongoing structural inequities of racism and sexism that are also well documented in universities mean that inequities and costs often land on women, people of colour in general, and women of colour. The systemic issues need to be addressed at a higher Governmental level given that universities have shown no interest in making changes to improve matters over the last decade - the only changes have been worsening experience for academics with the costs paid in their health, in their family's well-being, and in their futures. (University academic).

The previous TEU commissioned COVID-19 survey results showed evidence that more than two-thirds of academics and more than 40% of general staff worked hours additional to those prescribed in their contract (Sedgwick, 2020b, p.29). When asked what their workloads had been like since September 2020 the following results emerged:

Figure 5

### Q1.1 Workload increase since Sept 2020



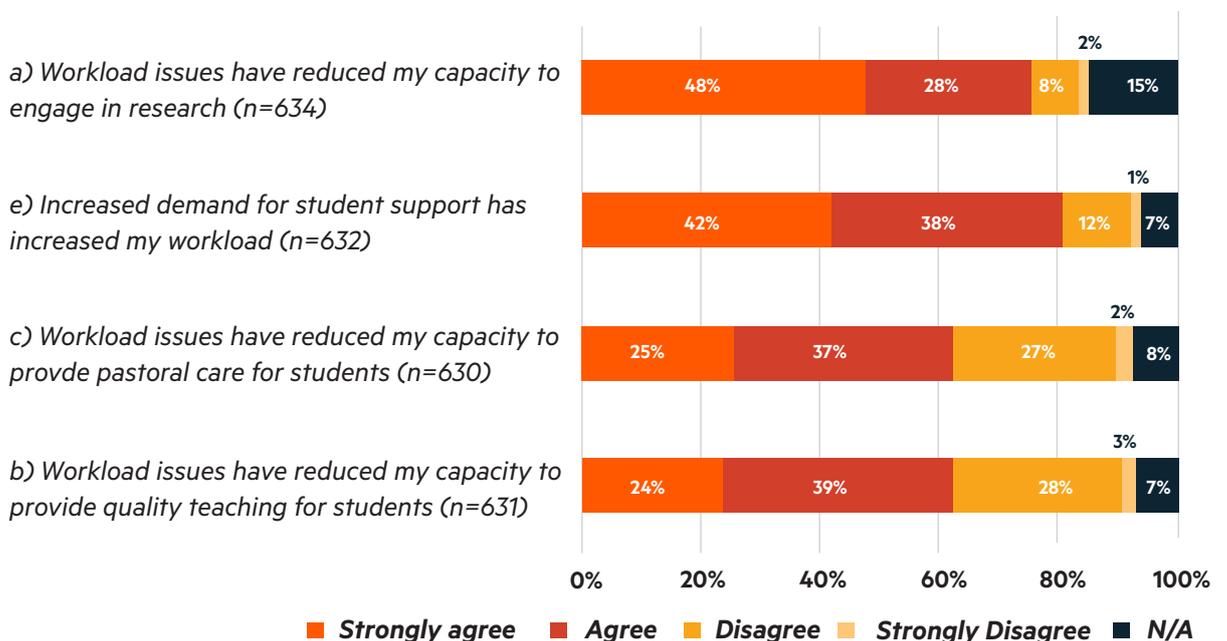
A substantial percentage of respondents (63% role not stated, 62% general staff and 77% of academic staff) said that workloads had increased. This contrasted with between 20% and 31% who said workload remained constant (see Figure 5).

Respondents were asked to unpack the effects of workload issues and what had caused them.

### Workload issues for academics

Figure 6

### Q1.2 Workload issues - Academic staff



The responses show that teaching and research are no longer jointly integral to the job but are now in competition for time. The expectation, however, of doing both effectively remains a constant requirement from management.

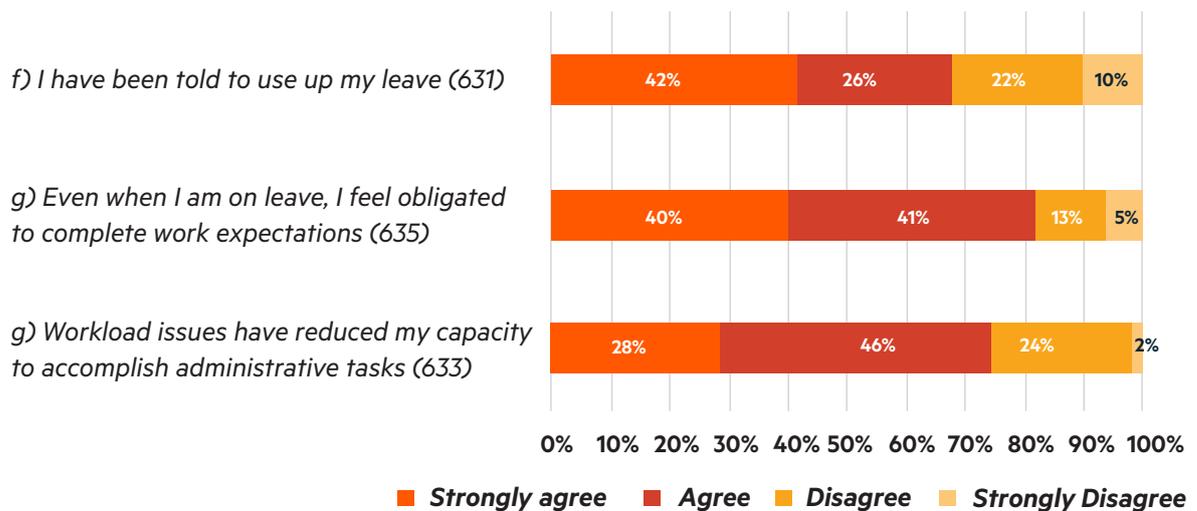
Seventy six percent of academic respondents find both the time and capacity for research have decreased. Additionally, 61% feel that the increased workload has caused them to question their own competence including the quality of their teaching and capacity to support students.

Respondents reported that students have become more demanding for information and/or support often on a 24/7 basis. Responses to (e) and (c) in Figure 6 note an increased demand for support (80%) and 62% of staff record that increasing workload means they are less able to offer pastoral care.

The other section of this question addresses managerial and administrative requirements as these effected workloads. The former appears as fiscal

Figure 7

### Q1.2 Workload issues - Academic staff



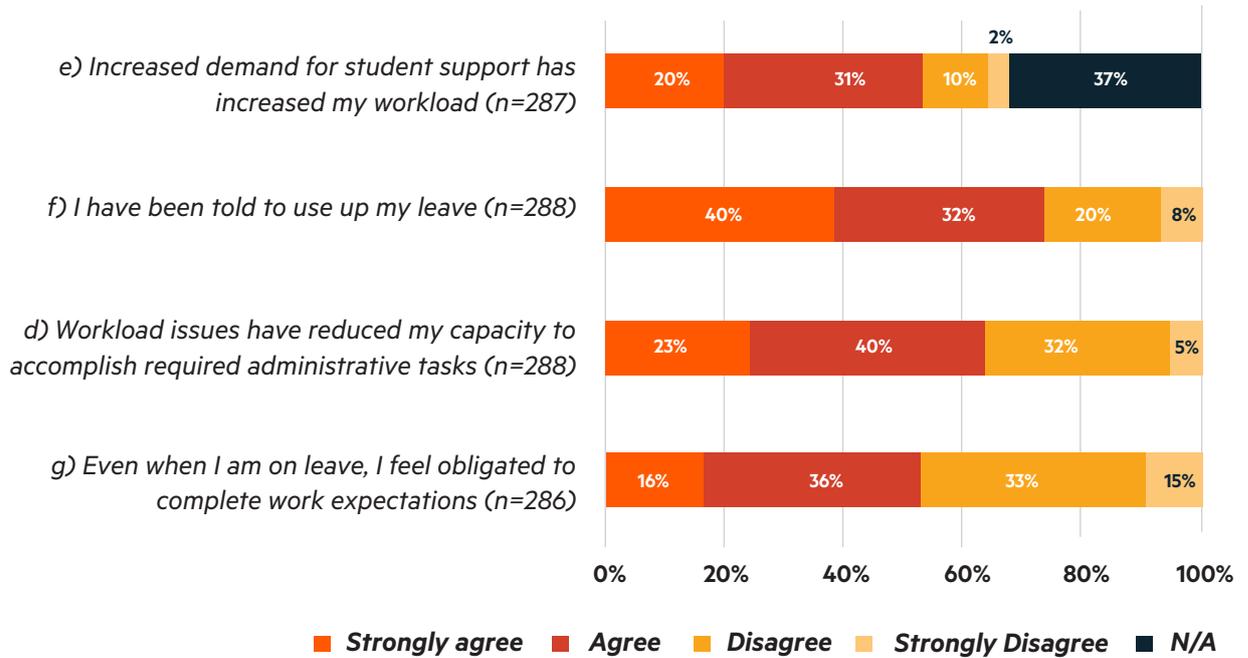
requirements imposed by management on staff. For instance, the requirement to ensure leave is used up was noted by 68% of respondents as impacting on their workloads. Increasing administrative requirements for 74% of respondents were impacting on their workloads, and 81% of respondents stated that they used their leave time for work. This situation explains why 80% of academic staff experience 'difficulty in maintaining a satisfactory work-life balance' and why this is the second highest cause of stress.

**Workloads issues for general/allied/professional staff**

The responses which are most significant for general staff, address both the demands for student support, and the issues surrounding the requirements of taking leave and the subsequent effect on workload.

**Figure 8**

**Q1.2 Workload issues - General staff**



There is a convergence of the demands affecting both academic and general staff in the area of student support. Fifty one percent of general staff (Figure 8e) and 90% of academic staff (Figure 6e) indicated that the increasing demand was impacting on their workloads.

The conclusion one draws from the quantitative reflection from staff on workload is that this is not just limited to the expectations around teaching and research but extends to include a context of shifting policy requirements on course delivery, administration and organisation as well as managerial expectations.

**Management responses to workloads**

Respondents were asked to provide comments about 'management attitudes to workload.' There were 394 responses to this question. About 10% of the respondents expressed positive comments, particularly about their immediate managers. Some of the comments noted that if there were strained or negative relations and stress, it was created by the actions of SLT negatively affecting those lower down.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Line management was in most survey responses concerning management lauded for their concern and attitude.

Two dominant themes in the responses included one where respondents set out a trajectory which unfolds the nature of and context for increasing workload (32%, n=353). The second highlights the disconnect between line/immediate management and staff and the SLT and above. The following quotes show several variations on the first theme from academic and general/academic/professional staff expressing either a personal or structural perspective:

Promised replacement for staff from two years ago has not happened. Instead, there have been more staff cuts. The increased stress and workload has made me a LOT less efficient, reduced communication between teams because we're too busy trying to do our part that we don't have time to communicate - even when communication would increase efficiency. I often find myself in a daze, moving from one task to the next without considering the urgency of individual tasks because everything has taken on the same urgency since it all needs to be done. Yesterday. While student focused interactions and jobs are still priority, the back end stuff is piling up which has a massive impact on the resources and results provided to students. There is no more consideration for the future, or planning for it, because there is too much to do in the now. It was overwhelming last year with a team already cut down, to produce quality resources and help to students during a year of COVID. Now, with even less staff, and no positive changes... it is beyond overwhelming. Everyone is over-tired. Everyone is breaking. (University general staff)

... the workload pressures in our area have centred around the loss of contracted staff and consequent increases in teaching group numbers. I feel we manage this workload, but it badly affects the quality of the delivery and therefore the qualification students receive. Perhaps as consequence, pastoral care has become a much more significant part of workload. Again, it's manageable but has consequences for what's achievable vis-a-vis teaching and learning. (University academic)

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**'You are on your own but not left alone'<sup>6</sup>**

The context of tertiary institutions is now a contradictory, unstable, unsettled and confusing environment for all staff and even students:

The psychosocial elements of working in a tertiary environment are low priority. Staff are expected to collaborate but are everywhere encouraged to compete for limited resources, research funds, promotions, awards which has the reverse effect. (University academic)

The second theme explains how workload issues are underscored by a 'disconnect' between line/immediate management and staff and SLT and above (33%, n=353). The use of 'disconnect' came from both academic and general staff and the behavioural implications reported about management were similar.

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<sup>6</sup> This phrase is borrowed from Peter Fleming (2021) who has characterised the state of academics in the current conjuncture as caught between 'two contradictory logics' on the one hand driven to individualisation and (atomisation) - in all manner of ways to realise what the system nominates as success but also 'running alongside this ..bureaucratic collectivism - the 'strong heavy handed managerial insitutional collectivism ..when you are in the midst of all this ...you have the worst of two worlds ..you have the anxiety of market individualism but then you are monitored and surveyed and bossed around as if you were in a very collective bureaucratic space': [https://www.podbean.com/media/share/pb-aighy-105ca46?utm\\_campaign=embed\\_player\\_stop&utm\\_medium=dlink&utm\\_source=embed\\_player](https://www.podbean.com/media/share/pb-aighy-105ca46?utm_campaign=embed_player_stop&utm_medium=dlink&utm_source=embed_player)

These included 'being distant' 'patronising' and not caring:

The SLT are distant and only consult on their terms. Their patronising approach means they rule by dogma rather than insight. (University academic)

They just don't seem to care. They want more work for the same cost, and if you can't do it you're seen as weak or unmotivated or non-committed. The only reason I'm hanging on is for the students' sake. (University academic)

...SLT and upper management are the issue, they don't care, don't help, and have no interest in showing any respect or appreciation to their staff. (University general staff)

Respondents noted managers were 'defensive' when questioned:

Our manager is always defensive, and it feels like our concerns are not passed on. (ITP academic)

Also that managers were treating staff like 'assets.'

They are encouraged to treat everything & everyone as an asset which impacts negatively on teaching & research. (University general staff)

According to respondents, management's policy requirements were often reactive or merely following instruction from those higher-up. Their policy amounted to ad-hoc decisions with little thought to the context in which they would be implemented or the consequences of putting them in place.

A repeated refrain from respondents was that the SLT and upper management were unwilling to find out the extent and variability of the 'real' workload or make efforts to understand what work was like at the 'coal face', resulting in:

...an astonishing disconnect between the assumptions of senior leadership about the university working environment and actual coal-face academic experiences. Nobody above the level of HoS appears to have any real grasp or interest in the way their strategic level decisions have consequences for the university's core academic functions. Budget cuts have been accompanied by open threats (even in the media) of staffing cuts so it has been very difficult to argue against increased workloads particularly stemming from a) increased tutorial and marking work (marking workload has doubled compared with last year) b) increased demands on planning and preparation due to the requirement of 'dual delivery' (which actually means in-class, synchronous online and recorded/asynchronous delivery), c) the increases in stress attributable to the logistical delays in allocating SLP budgets and arranging tutors- (I teach a large 100 level course- I was fortunate to get one tutor, and that was finalised the week before classes began), d) the practical limitations on our ability [to take] leave without compromising core teaching/ research/service tasks for which one will later be held accountable (I was directly ordered by our dean to take leave even after I pointed out that I would be unable to meet research and teaching obligations if I actually took it- but budget targets were evidently took priority over my wellbeing) and e) the massive logistical mess created by the unprecedented incompetence of IT when their script caused wholesale deletions of desktop files and staff profiles- for which nobody has been held accountable. (University academic)

The SLT and higher level (Dean's etc) staff on the workforce planning group appear not to read the information provided them and have a gobsmacking lack of understanding of our programmes and work. They seem to believe academic staff decide what to teach and when on a whim not that we are required to teach what we teach. As a conscientious staff member, I have felt grossly insulted by the processes the university has used, and by the communications from management and SLT. Our workload formulas have always borne little more than a loose connection with reality but now they are flagrantly not fitting a situation where academic staff are doing work of departed colleagues, of non-replaced administrators while the university has added dramatically to workload by expected courses to be dual mode and enrolling distance students in campus courses. The mindless requests from the centre add to what is an intolerable workload. (University academic)

The ramifications, in terms of understanding both causes and results of upper management's disconnect for some respondents centred on the fact that "Management is unable to prioritise - everything is important." (University academic). Or as another academic put it, "There is a constant expectation to just get it done, regardless of the changes to resourcing, staffing, and delivery." (ITP academic).

But getting the job done can be counterproductive for staff since management assumes that task completion means all is fine:

...- the fact that we do provide distance education is seen as 'proof' that our organisation can provide online teaching. Distance education is planned and executed with extra resources - lock downs and pandemic teaching throws plans in disarray, and resourcing is always provided personally by teaching staff. (University general staff)

No consideration was given by Senior Management to the incredible increase in workload and stress caused by the lockdowns. Instead, Senior Management boasted about how good the University was about teaching online - in practice, everyone I knew was scrambling and fighting to stay afloat, same as colleagues at other universities. (University academic)

The message is just get on and do it and because we care about our learners, we do, but it's to our own detriment. (University academic)

Even when, according to respondents, concerns about workloads and pressures are recognised by the SLT, it is what doesn't happen then which is so debilitating and generates, as noted in previous surveys, the tendency to assume business as usual (BAU):

There seems to be an ongoing culture of holding meetings and acknowledging the workload issues and asking us to identify where we need support. Unfortunately, this is where it stops. Management's efficacy to action our concerns were halted by hiring freezes, waiting on student numbers, their own workload issues and possibly other unknown reasons. Meanwhile, in our overloaded situations, we are still expected to meet institute, school and programme goals and to provide effective pastoral care to contribute to student success. (ITP academic)

Again, management's interpretation of workloads complaints from staff is invariably that this is a personal trouble and not a structural problem, consequently, in their minds, this demands an individual solution.<sup>7</sup>

Universities and Faculties and university 'wellbeing leaders' consistently address any issues raised as 'personal' when they are structural problems to do with unmanageable workload expectations generally. (University general staff)

Management/SLT acknowledges that workload issues exist, but then do nothing other than encourage individuals to deal with it. (University academic)

My immediate line manager is excellent and very supportive. The SL / Dean does not seem interested in supporting us and takes the stance that our inability to manage workload is a personal issue rather than an institutional issue. (University academic)

Comments by managers, according to respondents, reinforce the expectation that overworking is the norm.

My immediate line manager said "Everyone works 60 hours or more a week - I do. It's what's expected". My PVC said that academics enjoy research, so it is not unreasonable to expect them to research when they are on annual leave. (University academic)

I was told that if I escalate my concerns about my workload and the systems that set our workload, to the Faculty dean. The dean would tell me that if I don't like the workload, I can leave (ITP academic).

## The threat of insecurity

Another aspect referred to by respondents that exacerbates the disconnect is the constant threat of, or tendency for restructuring in the sector. The implications of and conditions for providing feedback if consulted are already restricted.

Management often comment on how their restructuring work will improve workloads, and that they appreciate our hard work. We are seeing little evidence of how this will be possible ... they continue to increase our workloads by bringing out multiple discussion documents and proposals for change that request feedback with very short turnaround times. If we don't provide this feedback, then it is likely to be taken as agreement with their plans for change (which I certainly don't agree with!!). If they were serious about helping us reduce stress and workload, then they would grant our requests for extensions to these deadlines so that they don't overlap or coincide with major events in the semester timetable and public holidays. (University academic)

Like other intrusions, whether they be managerial requirements or large structural changes, staff see it is an unneeded and forced distraction from their vocation – teaching, learning, and research.

<sup>7</sup> Individualisation (see footnote 6) is then both a necessary quality for staff achievement within the institutions 'success matrices' but the individual is equally culpable for any qualities that inhibit the former whether realised or not by the staff member.

Ongoing restructuring is draining the energy out of us all; it lingers in every corner of our work lives. Responding to documents like proposals for change sucks out the mental and physical time and energy we should be having to teach and support learners at university, or support teaching staff develop their teaching skills. (University general staff)

When respondents catalogue the extent of pressures and their effect on them, one gleans the extent of damage to the vocation, collegial relations and the person:

We are being given an enormous workload to carry out our own restructure in an unreasonable timeframe. The time pressure is so impossible, I get the impression everyone is just giving up. Who knows what garbage comes out at the end of such a rushed process, but I worry for the unintended consequences for both students and staff. Probably I feel for the students the most, as I think the quality of their education is going to be quite low, and the staff are so overextended that they are unable to provide the support and guidance students need to navigate these changes and their careers more generally. I feel pressured to teach everything simultaneously online and in person, to bend to whatever student circumstances are presented. It's an enormous increase in teaching workload. I often teach everything twice, as that seems to involve less total time. The quality of online learning is low. With time it could be better, but who has that time? We are repeatedly told how we might be feeling 'unsettled' and that we should access EAP. I've used up my sessions and found it completely useless anyway. Mental health is really low right now. I'm fearful all the time for my job. I want to find an escape hatch, but it's impossible to plan anything with the pandemic going on. I'm really baffled by New Zealand universities. Having spent time elsewhere, I know that it doesn't have to be this way. (University academic)

Despite the pressure to deliver quality research and teaching outputs, we have not been given any extra support. We are also being asked to grow EFTS and programmes so we can all keep our jobs. Many senior academics have disappeared into research and are not visible at the workplace and do not participate in administration or support junior academics in their research. The workplace is toxic and the environment pits everyone against each other. PBRF is now emerging as the next demand and discussions on research levels are already circulating with all the threats that come with it. It feels like the place is full of tension and if you mention it they treat you like you are sick and it's your fault for feeling this way. SLT and Deans have a responsibility to address this and not be the propagators of a broken culture. (University academic)

An observation about management from the results of the first two surveys now becomes even more focused. In the second survey it was noted that:

...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. (Sedgwick, 2020b, p.31)

And now:

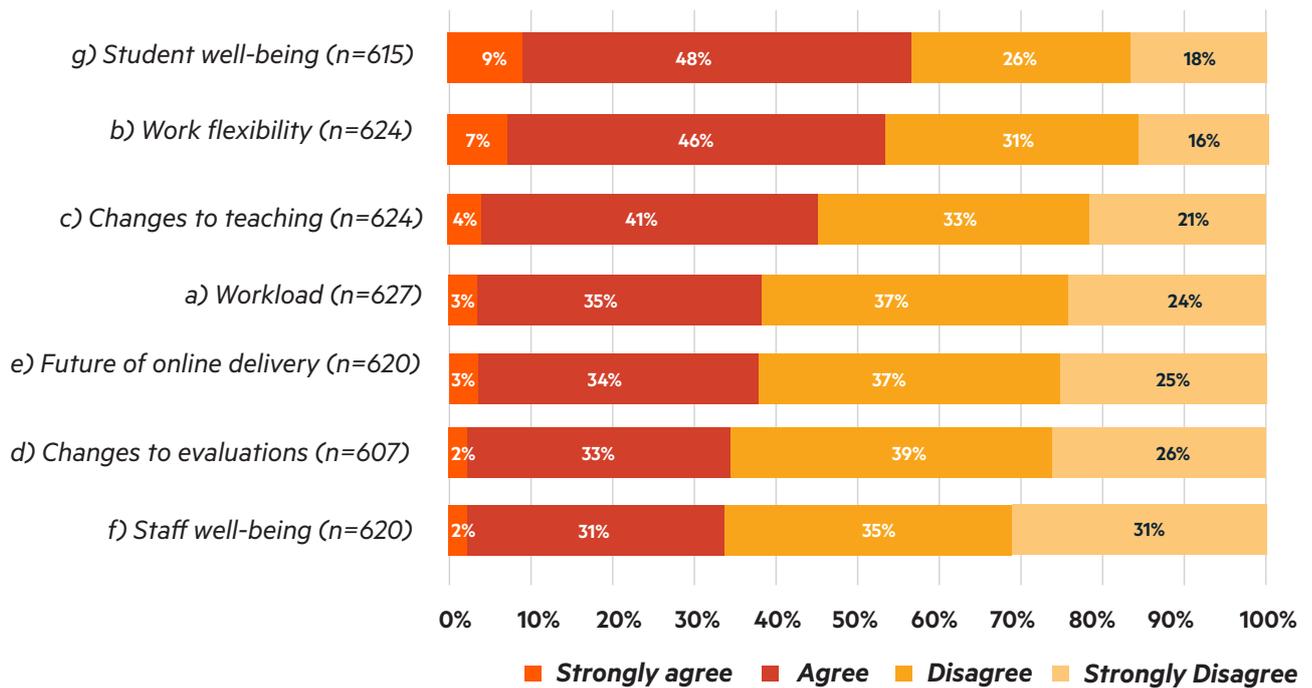
...Chaos and dysfunction has become the new normal. There is a complete vacuum of clear, strong, decisive, relevant leadership. Professionally qualified staff no longer get to have any meaningful input into decisions that impact on their roles, as senior leadership apparently think they are experts at everything, but their lack of knowledge is having disastrous consequences. Staff satisfaction and engagement has declined as a result, so I imagine productivity is probably about a third of what it was prior to Covid. (University academic)

**Unpacking the disconnect**

To try to ascertain the extent to which the ‘disconnect’ spoken of by respondents is driven by the current structure of the tertiary education sector, respondents were asked to evaluate their involvement in the decisions made in tertiary education institutions.<sup>8</sup>

Figure 9

**Q3.3 Academic staff: In my workplace there are opportunities for open discussion and negotiation with line management/SLT about:**



\*All percentages have been rounded

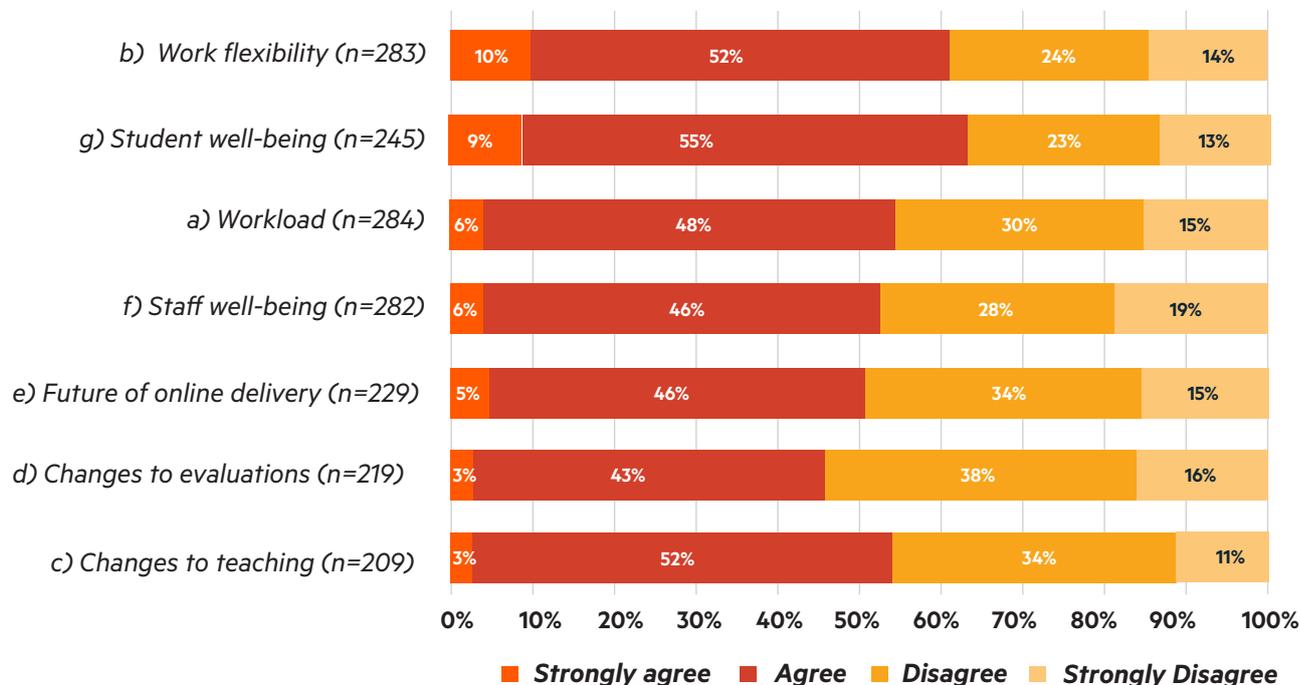
The responses indicate issues of ‘student well-being’ can be negotiated and discussed more easily than staff well-being; but overall the responses do not indicate a participatory and collegial decision-making culture.

General staff responses to the same set of questions are more positive. As noted in earlier surveys this difference may indicate a different set of expectations with regard to autonomy and influence.

8 There is a problem in this question since line management are included with the SLT and from discussions already it will be noted that ‘discussion and negotiation’ with line management is much more likely with a much more positive outlook than that with the SLT.

Figure 10

### Q3.3 General staff: In my workplace there are opportunities for open discussion and negotiation with line management/SLT about:



The responses in Q3.4 present an even clearer picture of the frustration felt by respondents with regard to the direction of tertiary education. Respondents were asked **What changes would need to be put in place to provide opportunities for open discussion and negotiation between staff and the different levels of management?** Forty four percent (n=342) of respondents to this question thought there was little hope that the current system could be changed.

Management appear to listen to concerns, but nothing ever changes.  
(University academic)

As budgets are reduced, more staff are employed on insecure job contracts, which tend to stifle comments and encourage staff to “keep their heads down”. (University general staff)

Even with some inkling of hope for what could be, the experience of previous action leaves respondents sceptical:

People need to feel they are safe to have these discussions. With restructures (which we all fear are used to get rid of difficult personalities or those who with low work output) no-one wants to put their head up to start a conversation for fear of being difficult, ungrateful for a job they love, or disloyal. The discussions we do have seem to be a general presentation with graphs and budgets about “this is the way the world is now” your challenge is to fit into it. (University general staff)

When there was hope expressed, it was under the same provisos expressed in other parts of the survey - upper management must change their attitude and listen to staff about stress, workload, online learning, and manifest trusting real democratic leadership in the process. Even then there was always the backdrop of the ‘inevitable fiscal compromise.’ (University academic)

Line management received positive comments from respondents but with a note of caution:

Your question is ‘discussion and negotiation’ - while line managers will listen, usually, they revert to “it’s out of our hands, its institution policy/ procedure”. So, line managers have pressure on them from us and from their line managers. All managers need to put people first and that is not happening. I understand the need to streamline costs, but not at the expense of people’s health. (ITP academic)

In short:

Senior leadership needs to act to restore faith in the process of consultation, discussion, negotiation. Currently it feels pointless. They can talk all they like about being transparent or open to suggestion, but this needs to be proven with actions, consistently and repeatedly. (University general staff)

... there needs to be a culture shift on the part of upper management from an infantilising and punitive model to one which is respectful and collaborative. Such a model would then enable open discussion rather than the one-way model that is the norm now where ‘consultation’ is a tick-box process necessary to allow management decisions or actions to proceed. (University academic)

But:

The culture is so ingrained that universities will not make these changes themselves. Because of the level of stress academics are under I think a national enquiry and remediation process is warranted, oriented around an idea changing punitive cultures into wellbeing led cultures. (University academic)

### Communication breakdown

The issues highlighted in previous surveys including the absence of the ‘clarity and helpfulness of communications’ about pandemic policy, restructuring, redundancies, pay cuts or delivery mode changes are still here. If there was any doubt about the claims around shortcomings in communication, the responses to Q 3.1 make matters very clear. In this survey respondents were asked whether they received **clear and detailed information** about the following:

Figure 11

### Q3.1 Academic staff: We receive clear and detailed information about:

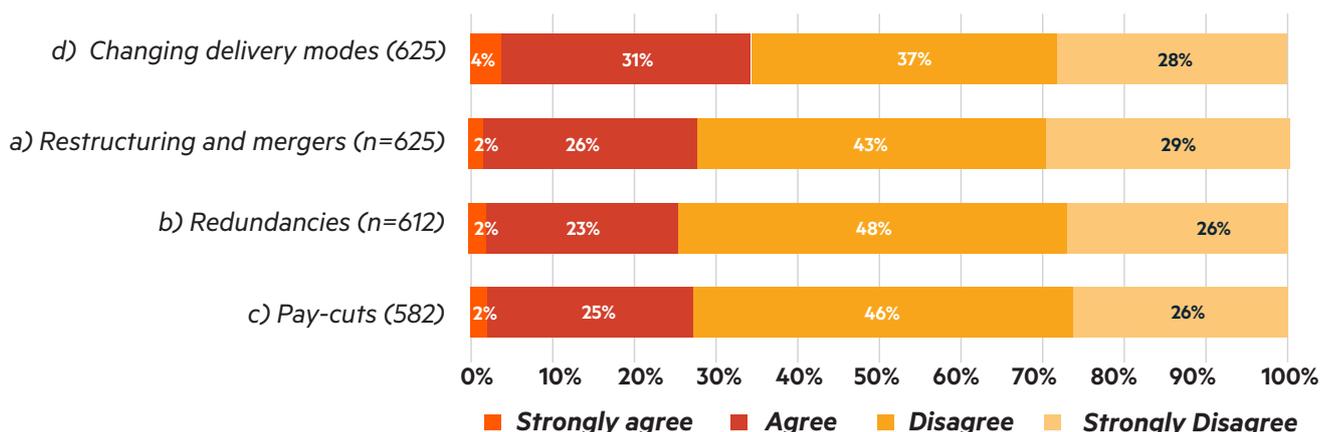
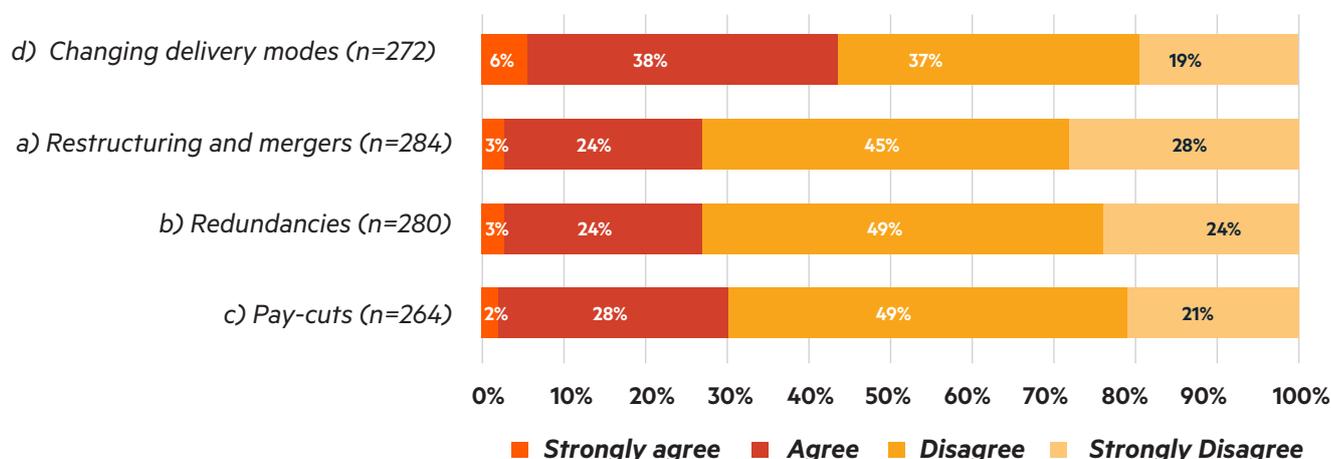


Figure 12

### Q3.1 General staff: We receive clear and detailed information about:



The clear message from both general and academic staff is that there are serious problems with communication; clear and detailed information is not available on key issues, which seriously impact workload and the future of staff employment.

Clearly there was some type or form of communication; however, in their comments respondents describe these as 'directives' or 'dictates'. Communications are described by respondents as: **'vague', 'incomprehensible', 'misleading', 'uninformed', 'woeful', 'untimely', 'late', 'confusing', 'last minute', 'filtered', sporadic, inconsistent', 'contradictory', 'inaccurate', 'copious', or 'ambiguous'**. For instance, redundancies and restructuring are communicated as necessary efficiencies and often hidden in the jargon of a 'work project'. However, in reality, they turn out to be about saving money, then the communication becomes a deception, inaccurate and misleading or described by some of the other terms above.

Responses to questions 1.6 and 2.4 raised questions about how knowledgeable SLT or upper management are with regard to areas communication addresses, including the consequences of policy implementation.

No one at the head table has ever taught online/via distance. Their assumptions with respect to preparations, ongoing operations, and teaching and learning needs demonstrate this total lack of knowledge. Any concerns are just our 'private objections'. (University academic)

There is, in other words, a disconnect between what is said and what the receiver hears and interprets and in fact, what is supposedly to be done. There can be a disconnect in the message content itself. For instance, a communication to students from a vice chancellor about dual delivery is different to the information about the same topic communicated to staff.

Sometimes it's not just getting too little communication - sometimes too much is the problem. Management are not good at coming up with a good plan, articulating it clearly, and sticking to it. So, lots of wasted time feeling confused and uncertain what we're supposed to be doing. (No institution, Academic)

They claim it's a 'consultation process' but we all know they've made up their minds and are just ticking boxes and nothing will change from their plans. (University general staff)

Dictates from on high stress me out no matter how clearly communicated they may be. I guess this sounds arrogant but I deeply resent the rule of my moral and intellectual inferiors. (University academic)

Plans to cut jobs and disciplines/research specialties are cloaked in obfuscating language about 'flexibility' and 'meeting market needs'. I'm fed up with the dishonesty and attempts to deflect. I find it particularly vexing that when my university's issues are reported in the media, changes are always attributed to some anonymous 'University spokesperson' and the VC can't even front up in person and own their own plans. (University academic)

### Promotion and Progression

An area of clear disruption under Covid-19 has been the potential for promotion and progression to be affected. These issues, while not specific to any one question from the previous two surveys, feature in the open-ended responses. For instance, in response to causes of stress and the worst thing that employers have done in the 2020 surveys:

excessive workload with no time for research anymore. Means no hope of career progression. (Respondent from Sedgwick, 2020b, p.10)

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.... There is a lot of uncompensated work, but I am being discouraged from applying for a double salary increment .... because the budget is tight. (Respondent from Sedgwick, 2020b, p.7)

Keep telling us we must continue to deliver excellence in all aspects. Not communicating clearly if/how the pandemic will impact our progression, confirmation and overall career trajectory. (Respondent from Sedgwick, 2020a, p.24)

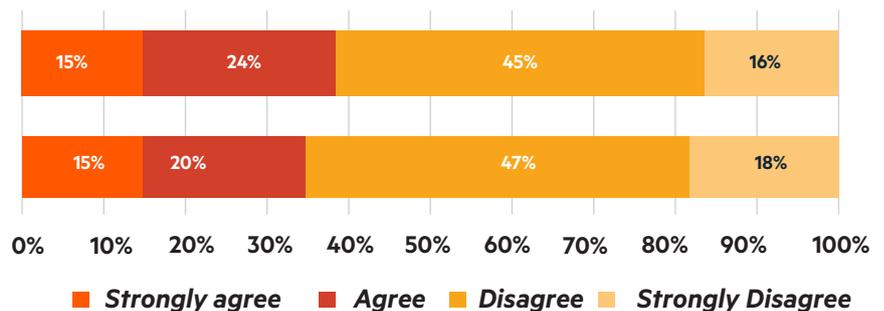
In this study respondents were asked specifically whether they had been **'dissuaded from applying for promotion or a pay increment'**.

Figure 13

### Q4.1 Academic staff

*I have been dissuaded from applying for a pay increment (n=602)*

*I have been dissuaded from applying for a promotion (n=608)*



Thirty-nine percent of academic staff were dissuaded from applying for a pay increment and 35% from applying for promotion. When respondents were asked **'What explanations or reasons were offered?'** for this situation 34% of the respondents to the survey provided comments. Thirty-three percent of those comments noted that respondents were told institutions couldn't afford promotions or increments, were told "No" with no explanation, or that things have changed.

No money, so don't ask. (No institution, Academic)

Increments were frozen last year so there was no ability to apply for one. I don't know if there was any explicit rationale given - just an assumption that the unit needed to tighten the purse strings. (University academic)

'We just can't afford to pay anyone more right now because of the student enrolment issues' (loss of international students, though we have more students than ever because of higher domestic enrolments). (University academic)

University is broke- apply for promotion but we won't pay you for at least a year. (University academic)

....- there are no pay increments this year, and the VC tried very hard to guilt us all into voluntarily taking pay cuts. (University academic)

.... screaming at us every ten minutes that they have no money, that staff will have to be cut to balance the budget -- they make it clear that if you get a pay rise, someone else will have to lose their job. (University academic)

Things are tight do you want a job? (ITP academic)

We have no money because of the pandemic, you are lucky to even have this job at all. If you don't want this job, someone else will be happy to take it for less than you are currently earning. (University academic)

One respondent articulates the overall feeling the experience generated:

Multiple hurdles are in place to prevent promotion, and we are made to feel as if we are recalcitrant children for even thinking we might be worthy of promotion. (University academic)

What became evident in these comments, is that the elusive criteria of promotion were just that, and more often unattainable:

I'm at the top of the pay scale for my pay grade and can't get an increase unless my performance is considered outstanding (which is impossible under current workload/expectations), but have also been told it is impossible to get an 'outstanding' performance. No incentive to go above and beyond. (University general staff)

My incredibly generic job description (which encompasses staff roles on three or four different teams) mean that I will never be performing all of the tasks/responsibilities included. As I have now been in my job for six years, I will no longer be eligible for any pay increases unless I am deemed 'excellent' in every category - which unless I am performing every single task on my JD, I won't be! (University general staff)

General discouragement and lack of time and support to complete application. Negative feelings from SLT .... and a sense of never being recognised, no matter how much you achieve or deliver there is never ever any recognition from SLT only discouragement. (University academic)

There is an additional concern about promotion suggesting that the attempt to better yourself could in fact leave you vulnerable. With a managerial ethos firmly fixed on cost cutting and savings it was made apparent to several respondents that self-improvement is a risk and might not be a good idea:

While I have never been actively dissuaded from applying for promotion or a pay increment, I am nervous to do so given the future forced redundancies that are planned. Will a higher salary ear-mark me as someone too expensive to keep around? (University academic)

Was implied that trying to negotiate a higher salary would put me at a personal disadvantage (piss off management). Other members of my team were told similar things, or advised they could try and negotiate salary later down the line (this hasn't happened). We have been told there is no opportunity for pay increases if we stay in the current role (with exception of annual 2%). (University general)

The final question for respondents in this section asks whether their career progression has **been affected by any changes in relations to the COVID crisis?** Thirty-five percent of the respondents answered this question. Sixty percent of those respondents said 'yes' the pandemic changes in the institution had affected their career progression. The range of explanations for this included an uncertain fixed term contract, shortage of research funds, workload impacted time for research often caused by staff shortages, administrative and other job requirements, restructuring/redeployment and the effect of Covid-19 on families and health.

Twenty eight percent replied that the crisis changes hadn't affected their career progression and 7% said that changes hindering their progression were already in place and active before the crisis and offered the following:

My career has stalled .... I think it is due more to the way in which the institution operates at senior and executive levels, and a continued lack of leadership. Not due to COVID-19 alone, although it may have exacerbated this situation. (No institution, Academic)

... the constant constraints on progression and promotion had already been well and truly engrained (ITP academic)

My Senior manager has stated that the changes are not COVID related and that the restructure proposal was in the works before the lockdown last year. But in the same meetings they have stated that contracts will not be renewed and staff who have left will not be replaced. So how can the two not be linked? (University general staff)

## What is needed for the future?

Respondents were asked to look ahead in Q5.1: **What conditions do you think are necessary for the future organisation of your institution to meet the needs of staff and students, as well as the core aims of tertiary education in Aotearoa New Zealand?**

Fifty seven percent (n= 577) of respondents made comments including 265 academics and 113 general staff from universities and 121 academics and 17 general staff from the polytechnics.

The core of their statements was directed specifically at 'management' including SLT/SMT, Vice Chancellors (CEs) or Councils, while others appended the managerial reference to other required changes. Forty percent of university academic staff respondents (n=265) and 21 % of polytechnic academic staff respondents (n=121) specifically mentioned management (upper, senior, SLT/SMT). General staff were less conclusive with 28% of university general staff and 18% of polytechnic general staff answering in the same vein.

One series of responses from Universities particularly, was the clear idea that there is something drastically wrong with the status quo and we need to redefine, rethink or seriously change the sector specifically stating - what it is and what it is for.

It's almost like we need a complete reset: a total pause and a re-consideration of what is possible in academia, research, teaching and service-wise, what we need, and want, and value, and what we don't. And then how to do we do it without breaking so many people. (University academic)

I believe Universities have lost sight of who they should be and what their purpose/aim is. I think we are too far in unsustainable corporate bullshit to get out of it without a major shake-up. Some academics also need to learn that one of the main purposes for them is educating our future generations and it is important to do that well. (University general staff)

There are two very clear problems noted by respondents. Firstly, the issue of a management which has already been discussed at length and whose position in the university system appears to be conveniently unassailable, insulated by the use of a disconnect already discussed.

We need to stop universities being run like a business and we need to get rid of HR departments. They are an utter waste of \$\$\$ as is the proliferation of senior managers, the only echelon that doesn't ever seem to get cut. (University academic)

Real consultation. Reinvest in student support. Reinvest in people: we need higher levels of professional staffing so prof. staff aren't burning out and are able to support teaching/research staff at levels that enable them to deliver teaching and research. (University academic)

1) To treat staff with respect and dignity 2) To be transparent with staff on finances and directions of future development 3) To reassure staff job cuts isn't the first line of action in a crisis 4) To communicate openly and honestly with staff and listen to their genuine concerns and grievances 5) To be more compassionate in times such as now and reach out with better strategies to enhance staff well-being. (University academic).

Secondly, staff see specific deficiencies in the system that must be changed, including the provision of funding, staffing, safe working conditions and reasonable workloads:

I'm afraid that without adequate funding from the government there will be no improvement for tertiary education. The level of funding is just not adequate anymore. Running universities on a business model does not work in Covid-19 environment. (No institution, Academic)

Proper government funding of tertiary education. Major changes ... in the relationships between SLT, line management, & staff - including senior managers to support[ing] and back[ing] staff when asked. Greater devolution of decision-making rather than increasing centralisation & bureaucracy Safe working environments, especially around adequate staffing levels [and] More realistic workload expectations. (University academic)

Some respondents clearly think that the system is beyond reform and advocate the re-establishment of democratically run tertiary organisations.

The education act needs to change. We need more democracy, less neoliberal management. We actually need the government to step in and finally pay some attention to Tertiary Education in Universities. The system is broken. (University academic)

I think there is no hope for the university - that is why I have resigned. It will continue the descent in a self-destructive spiral. This was already happening pre Covid-19 - this has just accelerated the process. (University academic)

And behind all of this sits a genuine sense of what a university should be like, what it should represent and what it should do:

Not turning universities into degree factories. Less autocracy and more genuine democracy. Greater levels of trust. Spending less on marketing, branding, senior management and flash new buildings, and spending more on the people who actually teach and research. (University academic)

Uni needs to decide to educate and research, not make money. Then its decisions could be based on pedagogy, not dollars. This would allow it to better serve the long-term needs of NZ. (University academic)

....it starts with the minister, the ministry and TEC. We need to remove the neoliberal fixation with profit and competition and get back to producing quality educated students and research outputs. We are living in the stupidity of unintended consequences and reductionism. Educated students contribute to all aspects of society, .... (University academic)

.... More funding into people, additional staff support resource and better management from those with the level of care, understanding and expertise to create a sustainable level of progress and go forward without the high attrition rates, overt corporatisation and push for ever increasing efficiencies at the cost of proper well run institutions that put education and well-being at the centre. (University general staff)

The University actually needs to value teaching and those who teaching rather than pay lip service to both. It is quite clear that my role as a teacher at this University has no value to SLT because it does not attract PBRF funding or look good on Scholarly Journal rankings.

The University is full of people who dedicate their entire careers to being great in the classroom and to giving their students the best possible outcomes. But we are consistently and deliberately held down by a system that rewards research and only research related effort. .... (University academic)

The gravity of the situation which occupies the conditions of teaching and learning for all staff in the sector is disturbing. The introductory comments in an interview about Professor Peter Fleming's latest book, [*Dark Academia: How Universities Die*] (2021)<sup>9</sup> assert that:

Academia was once thought of as the best job in the world - a career that fosters autonomy, craft, intrinsic job satisfaction and vocational zeal. .... You would be hard-pressed to find a lecturer who believes that now. Indeed, there's a strong correlation between the marketisation and commercialisation of higher education over the last 30 years and the psychological hell now endured by its staff and students.

As one respondent in this survey said:

In any education sector .... we need to know if our staff is able to deliver value to the organisation. To make sure of that, we need to take care of our staff's well-being. .... When we truly abide by our organisational values .... we fulfil core aims of being an honest and valuable educational institute to the society and to those who will emerge as future employees/leaders of other organisations or similar entities. We impart education, but we also impart values to build those minds for successful careers. We empower them to lead by example (University general staff)

If there is any resounding message from the results of this survey it is that the possibility, even capacity for all staff to impart education in a sense that subscribes to the values of what these institutions ought to be, has been severely tested, if not destroyed. And the analysis that unpacks the causes has been laid bare. It is also clear that changes which have tested the possibility of genuine democracy, adequate staffing and delivery modes, whether set in motion prior to or during the pandemic, are set to continue and consequently the effect on staff morale, wellbeing and dedication to teaching and learning continues to be tested and/or thwarted. Concern over the conditions of students' wellbeing and learning continues to be of concern for staff.

One must agree with this respondent on behalf of all those who work in the sector.

The staff surveys need to be taken seriously and not washed off as stains with a soap bar. Surveys tell stories and those stories originate from reality of being in a position of either distress or success. (University General staff)

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.podbean.com/media/share/pb-aighy-105ca46?utm\\_campaign=embed\\_player\\_stop&utm\\_medium=dlink&utm\\_source=embed\\_player](https://www.podbean.com/media/share/pb-aighy-105ca46?utm_campaign=embed_player_stop&utm_medium=dlink&utm_source=embed_player)

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