

## Stress, Well-being and Quality of Working Life Benchmarks: Summary of QoWL 2007/8 Survey for University VC's

### Introduction

This summary provides an overview of the results and key findings from QoWL Ltd's 2007/2008 benchmarking survey of Stress, Well-being and Quality of Working Life in the HE sector. A representative sample of 10% of UK universities completed the full QoWL Survey in 2007/2008 with data obtained from approximately 6,000 staff covering all occupational roles. Universities taking part used the QoWL HE sector benchmark data to compare their organisation as a whole and reported planning to use the QoWL scores from each department and organisational area as key performance indicators to evaluate the effectiveness of their well-being and related programmes.

### Work-Related Quality of Life (WRQoL) Core Scale: Results from 2007/2008 surveys

Work-Related Quality of Life factors and overall satisfaction rating	07/08 UK Uni B'mark %Agree	Lowest Scoring Uni %Agree	Highest Scoring Uni %Agree
General Well-being	55	44	61
Home-Work Interface	57	49	66
Job & Career Satisfaction	56	47	60
Control at Work	54	46	56
Working Conditions	66	50	74
Stress at Work*	45	53	41
Overall Quality of Working Life	60	46	68

Notes: % Agree = % of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing they were satisfied with this factor.

\*Negatively phrased factor, where higher agreement indicates less satisfaction.

### HSE Work-Related Stress Scale: Results from 2007/2008 surveys

HSE Stress Factor	07/08 UK Uni B'mark %Agree	Lowest Scoring Uni %Agree	Highest Scoring Uni %Agree	HSE B'mark %Agree
Role	78	71	81	82
Peer Support	68	62	74	68
Relationships*	69	59	77	55
Managerial Support	53	43	56	52
Demands*	36	31	43	32
Control	70	62	81	52
Change	39	32	43	36

Notes: %Agree. The percentage of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed (or replied 'always' or 'often') to this factor.\*The questions in the questionnaire for this factor are negatively phrased, but to help compare across the other factors in this table the scores been reversed so that a higher agreement in the table indicates less stress at work.

## **Key Findings from QoWL's Stress and Well-being research in HE 2007/8**

### **Academics are the most stressed group in HE and the main reason is Change**

- Academic staff report significantly higher stress, lower job satisfaction, lower satisfaction with the home-work interface, and lower satisfaction with working conditions than other occupational groups.
- The HSE results indicated that the main predictor of higher stress in academic staff was dissatisfaction with organisational change.

### **Stress and Well-being vary significantly between HE institutions**

- There was a wide variation between high and low scoring universities and differences were highly significant. Levels of stress varied less than evaluations of other work life factors such as general well-being, the home-work interface and working conditions.
- Factor Profiles placed Universities into 3 broad groups: high-, middle- and low-scoring. High scoring Institutions tended to have much more consistent factor profiles. Staff in high-scoring Institutions reported much higher satisfaction with their working conditions.
- Analysis showed that factors such as working conditions, general well-being and the home-work interface were better than stress at predicting overall quality of working life.

### **HE institutions have good relationships and control**

- Results from the HSE Stress Scale indicate that distinctive aspects of work life in HE relate to relationships and control.
- Generally, Universities have much better working relationships, with lower levels of conflict and bullying than those found in the wider working population. University staff also have much higher levels of control over aspects such as work pace, choice and when to take a break.

### **Older, long-serving, male staff are more vulnerable**

- Apart from the increased risk of stress in Academics, QoWL's research found biographical differences that indicated increased stress in groups of: male staff, older staff, longer serving staff, full-time staff; staff reporting working very long hours; staff reporting more sickness absence.

### **Organisational Flexibility and Trust may be important constituent factors of a culture that enhances Well-being and quality of working life**

- Qualitative analysis of open question responses to the question "How could the quality of working life be improved in your University?" indicated that organisational flexibility and trust may be important components of an organisational culture that enhances well-being and quality of working Life.
- Where employees saw their University as genuinely flexible and promoting work-life balance, results indicated that staff were happier, less stressed, more satisfied and more productive.
- Comments appeared to demonstrate that such organisational flexibility and trust was reciprocated on the part of the employee. Those organisations where employees felt trusted with regards to flexible working were also those with far fewer staff reporting taking more than 5 sick days per year.

## **Benchmarking Quality of Working Life in HE: How to Take Part in the 2008/2009 Survey**

- In 2007/8 more than 10% of all UK Universities were surveyed. [Source: Universities UK]
- Universities used the QoWL HE sector data to compare their organisation as a whole and plan to use the QoWL scores they produced for each organisational area as key performance indicators to evaluate the effectiveness of their well-being and related programmes.
- The research so far had provided a real understanding of the factors affecting Quality of Working Life in UK Universities and has been widely quoted in publication such as THE.
- Our aim is to sample one third of all HE institutions each year. To this end, QoWL will set up and run a QoWL survey and provide a free summary report to all universities taking part for first time in 2008/2009.
- The QoWL Survey summary report typically summarises the results for the Work-Related Quality of Life (WRQoL) factors, HSE's Stress Management Standards' factors and a range of workplace well-being outcomes.
- A Full reporting service, enabling a range of more detailed analyses and breakdowns, are available to all participating universities.
- For more information, go to [www.qowl.co.uk](http://www.qowl.co.uk), or phone Alan Bradshaw, Director, QoWL Ltd on 08454 75 76 95
- Please email us at [alan.bradshaw@qowl.co.uk](mailto:alan.bradshaw@qowl.co.uk) if you are interested in taking part in the 2008/2009 survey.

## **Brief Background**

### **About QoWL Ltd**

QoWL Ltd is a university spin out company and research unit that provides surveys and expert consultancy services designed to improve quality of working life for employees. Research has shown that improved quality of working life results in enhanced wellbeing, greater motivation and better retention.

### **What is Quality of Working Life?**

'Quality of Working Life' is defined as a measure of how good your work is for you. It's more than just job satisfaction or work happiness, but the widest context in which an employee would evaluate their work environment.

### **How is Quality of Working Life Assessed?**

Quality of working life is assessed using the Work-Related Quality of Life (WRQoL™) scale, a comprehensive and valid measure of employee quality of working life developed by Chartered Psychologists at the University of Portsmouth. QoWL™ and WRQoL™ are trademarks of QoWL Ltd.