

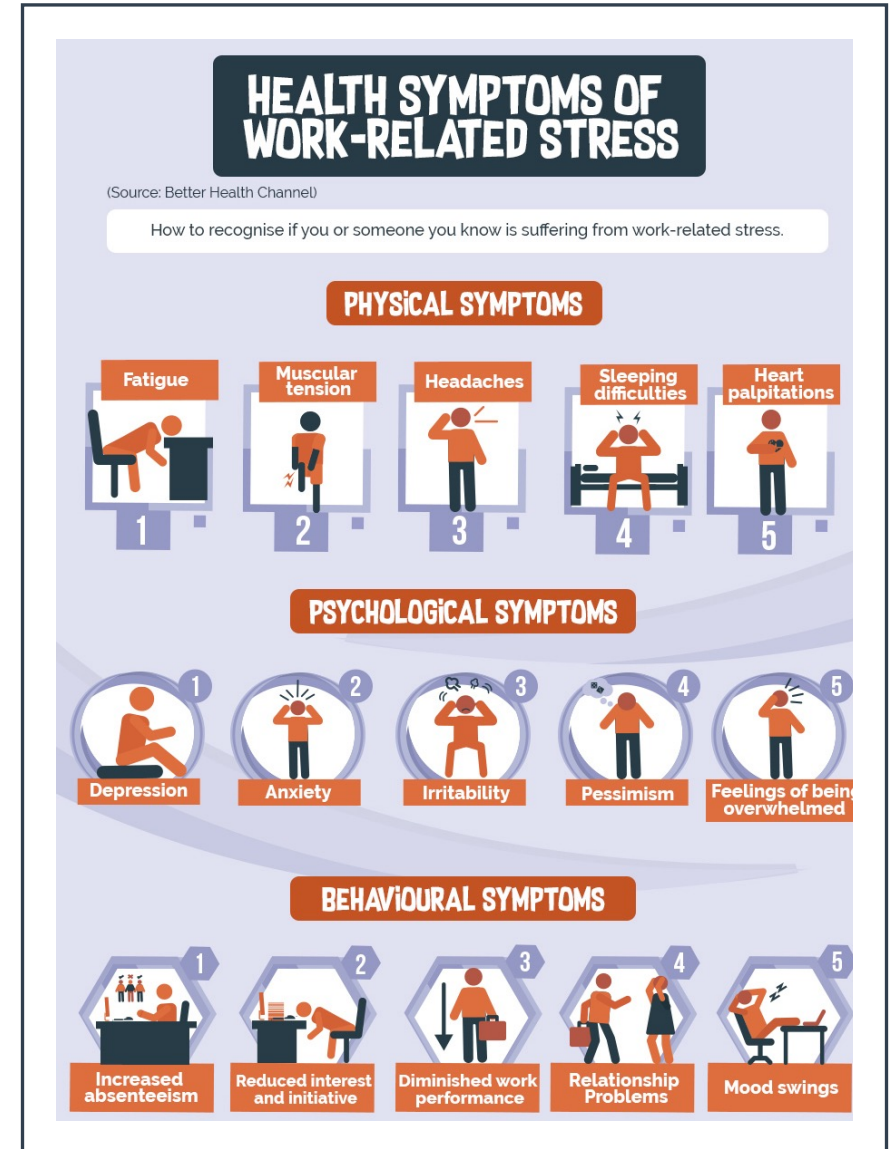


Richmond UCU Stress Survey 2021: Draft Report of Findings

Samantha Bracey and Sue Pell

Background

- Occupational stress is fast becoming “a cause of serious personal injury in the workplace”(UCU,2021).
- Evidence shows workplace stress is related to psychological and work-related harm (e.g., diminished work performance, lower job satisfaction, absenteeism, career interruptions, job loss, depression and health problems) (Kivimaki et al., 2012) plus higher risk of coronary heart disease (Kivimaki et al., 2012; Pega et al., 2021).
- Recent research by WHO and ILO found people working in excess of 54 hours a week are at major risk of dying from overwork (Pega et al., 2021).
- Stress is a health and safety issue.
- The Health & Safety Executive define stress as ‘the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them’.



Method

- Following ethical approval, an online questionnaire created in Microsoft Forms was distributed via 'All faculty' email.
- Measures consisted of approximately 50 close- and 7 open-response questions about experiences of occupational stress, adapted from a national UCU model stress survey (<https://www.ucu.org.uk/stress>) which uses the HSE measures. There are six main areas of work design that can affect stress levels which were assessed in the survey:
 - demands
 - control
 - support
 - relationships
 - role
 - change
- Scores on these scales indicate how well their workforce rate their performance in managing the risks associated with work related stress.
- Open-ended questions allowed faculty to comment on their experiences at RAIUL and their stress.
- In addition, the 10-item perceived stress scale (Cohen, Kamarik and Mermelstein, 1983) and questions relating to the changes in working due to the pandemic were included.





Participants

- Participants N = 40 (45% women, 40% men, 15% prefer not to say)
- Over 60% self-identified as white (British or other), 22.5 % preferred not to say
- 10% stated they are disabled
- Work mode: 67.5 % full-time, 25% part-time, one person stated hourly-paid and two as 'other'
- Contracts: *30 full-time, 4 fixed term, 5 zero-hours, 1 variable
- All participants signed an informed consent form before completing the survey, and their privacy and confidentiality has been respected in this report.

* In the Richmond UCU stress survey **65.9% of full-time faculty** responded, following HSE advice for a survey of this type, "...a response rate of over 50% is considered adequate; **over 60% desirable**, over 70% good and more than 80% very good. With a response rate of less than 50%, the data should be considered as indicative only."

Key preliminary findings

- The majority of faculty questioned (**92.5%**) experience **unacceptable levels of stress**, with **40%** of respondents experiencing **unacceptable levels of stress “often or always”**.
- When asked to rate their work-life balance (WLB) on a 1-9 scale (*where 1 = My work and home lives are completely separate, to 9 = There is no separation between my work and home lives*) **50%** of faculty rated between **“7-9”**. When asked for their ideal WLB rating, 38 participants rated between **“1-5”** with no one chose higher than **“6”** as their ideal (in contrast to their experienced WLB).
- Over half of faculty (52.5%) stated they worked over 40 hours per week, 11 working 50+ hours.
- 48% stated they were in work when sick, and 63% did not take all of their annual leave entitlement.



Table 1: Six areas of work design (mean scores and reliability analysis)

Work design area	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha	Total mean scale score	SD
Demands	8	0.93	26.73	7.50
Control	6	0.83	20.50	3.92
Support	5	0.93	17.65	5.21
Relationships	4	0.82	6.60	2.73
Role	5	0.78	19.30	3.46
Change	3	0.90	7.95	3.03

- Each domain scale was shown to be reliable with Cronbach's alpha scores greater than .7
- Item scores range from 1-5, higher scores relate to greater experience of each area of work-related stress
- Demands of work are relatively high, however, organizational support at line management level is good, faculty are reasonably autonomous in their work and have clarity over their role and the changes at Richmond.
- Nevertheless, the quantitative findings do not explain the unacceptable levels of stress experienced by faculty

Table 2: Relationship between perceived stress, work-related stress, work-home balance variables and hours worked

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Perceived Stress	—											
2. Demands	.79 **	—										
3. Control	-.27	-.54 **	—									
4. Role	-.61 **	-.55 **	.38 *	—								
5. Support	-.42 **	-.47 **	.36 *	.52 **	—							
6. Peer	-.30	-.21	.37 *	.39 *	.27	—						
7. Relationships	.42 **	.39 *	-.13	-.46 **	-.57 **	-.31 *	—					
8. Change	-.62 **	-.58 **	.35 *	.61 **	.60 **	.49 **	-.44 **	—				
9. Work Home Balance	.79 **	.83 **	-.48 **	-.63 **	-.50 **	-.14	.39 *	-.59 **	—			
10. Stress General	.63 **	.70 **	-.40 **	-.57 **	-.48 **	-.06	.39 *	-.41 **	.73 **	—		
11. Stress Unacceptable	.82 **	.75 **	-.37 *	-.57 **	-.46 **	-.30	.44 **	-.55 **	.74 **	.73 **	—	
12. Current WHB	.57 **	.71 **	-.41 **	-.50 **	-.34 *	-.17	.30	-.59 **	.68 **	.54 **	.68 **	—
13. Hours Worked	.23	.43 **	-.13	-.11	-.41 *	.02	.38 *	-.13	.44 **	.44 **	.29	.31

*p ≤ 0.05, **p ≤ 0.001

Understanding the significance of Perceived stress, work-related stress, and work-home balance

- Pearson's product correlational analyses of the six work design domains, perceived stress, work-home balance and hours worked showed the strength and direction of relationships between these variables.

Strength of correlations:

- **Strong:** If the coefficient value lies between ± 0.50 and ± 1 ;
- **Moderate:** If the value lies between ± 0.30 and ± 0.49 , and;
- **Low:** When the value lies below $\pm .29$.

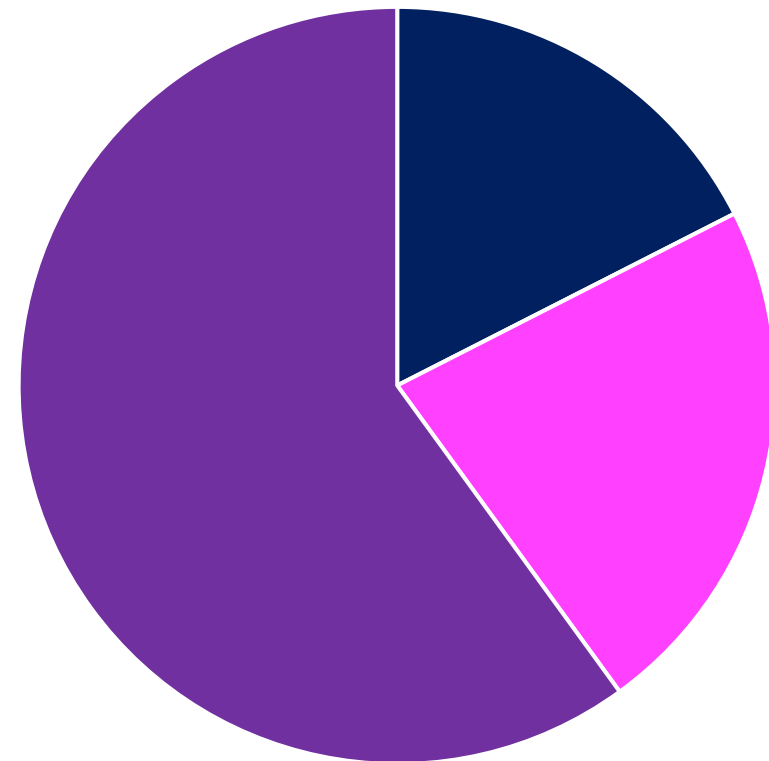
Key take home points: Areas of concern and where Richmond is doing well

- Areas of concern are high work demands, poor work-home balance, and unacceptable levels of stress. Role clarity, communications regarding change, control and support by line managers are areas where RAIUL are doing reasonably well.
- Of note are the significant (at $p \leq 0.001$) strong positive associations between demand and total work-life balance, general stress, unacceptable levels of stress, and current work-home balance.
- There are also significant strong relationships between total perceived stress and total work-home balance and unacceptable levels of stress.
- Hours worked are moderately positively related to demand, work-home balance, and general level of stress.
- Role clarity and communications regarding change are strongly negatively related to total work-life balance, general stress, unacceptable levels of stress, and current work-home balance.
- Control and support (line-manager) are moderately negatively related.

Quantitative Findings

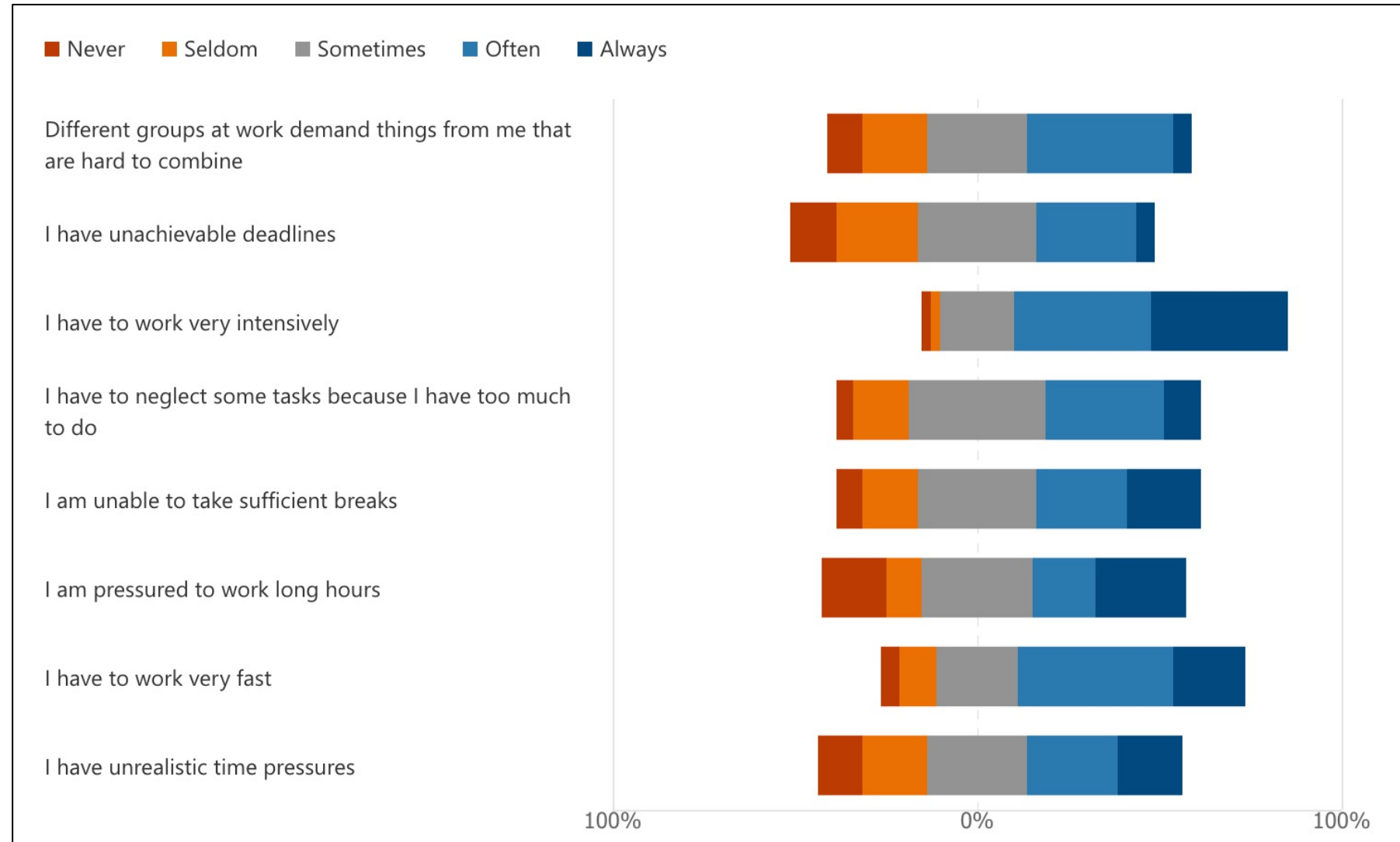
The following charts provide the proportion of responses to indicators of stress, including:

- Demands
- Control
- Role
- Support
- Relationships
- Changes
- Perceptions of stress
- Leave
- Work life balance



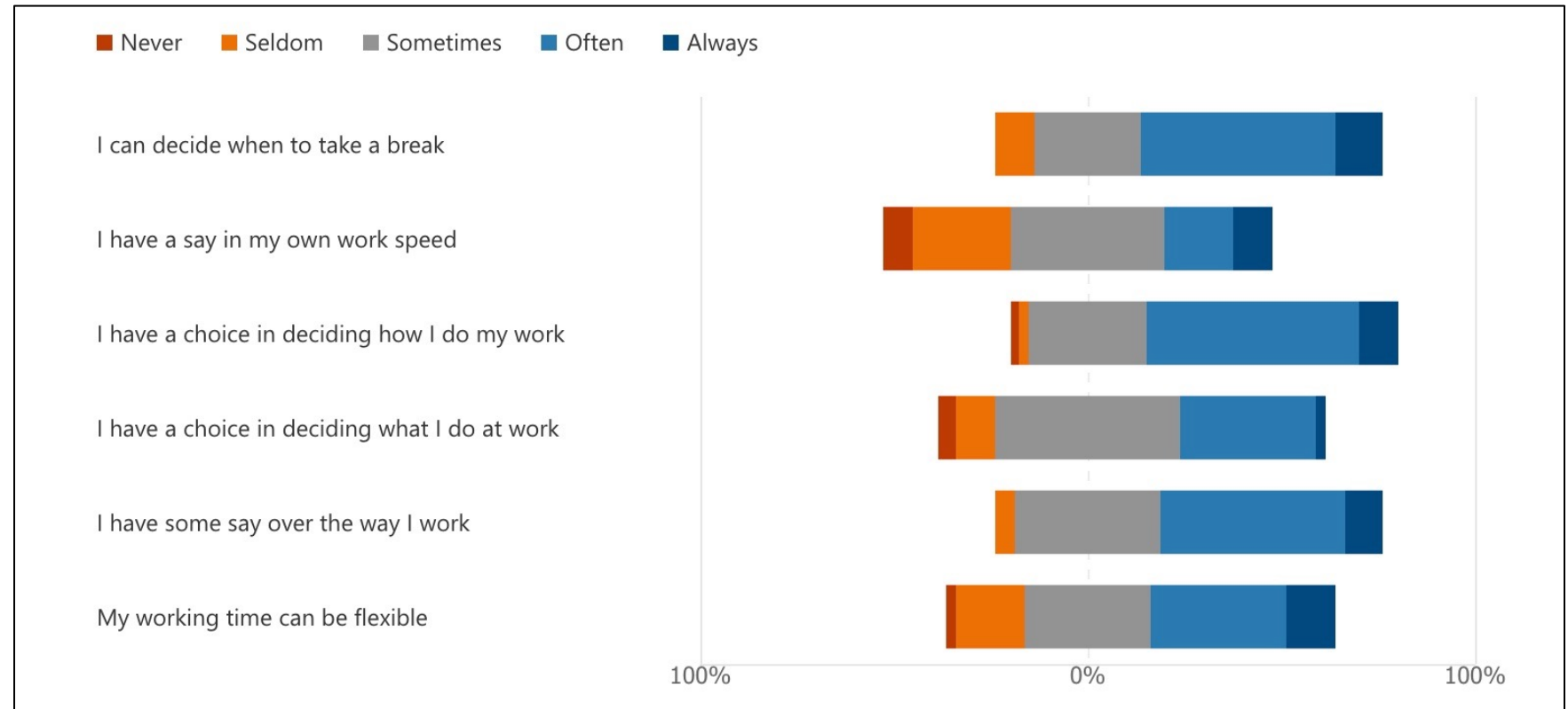
Demands

These questions ask about your perceived work-related demands - includes issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment



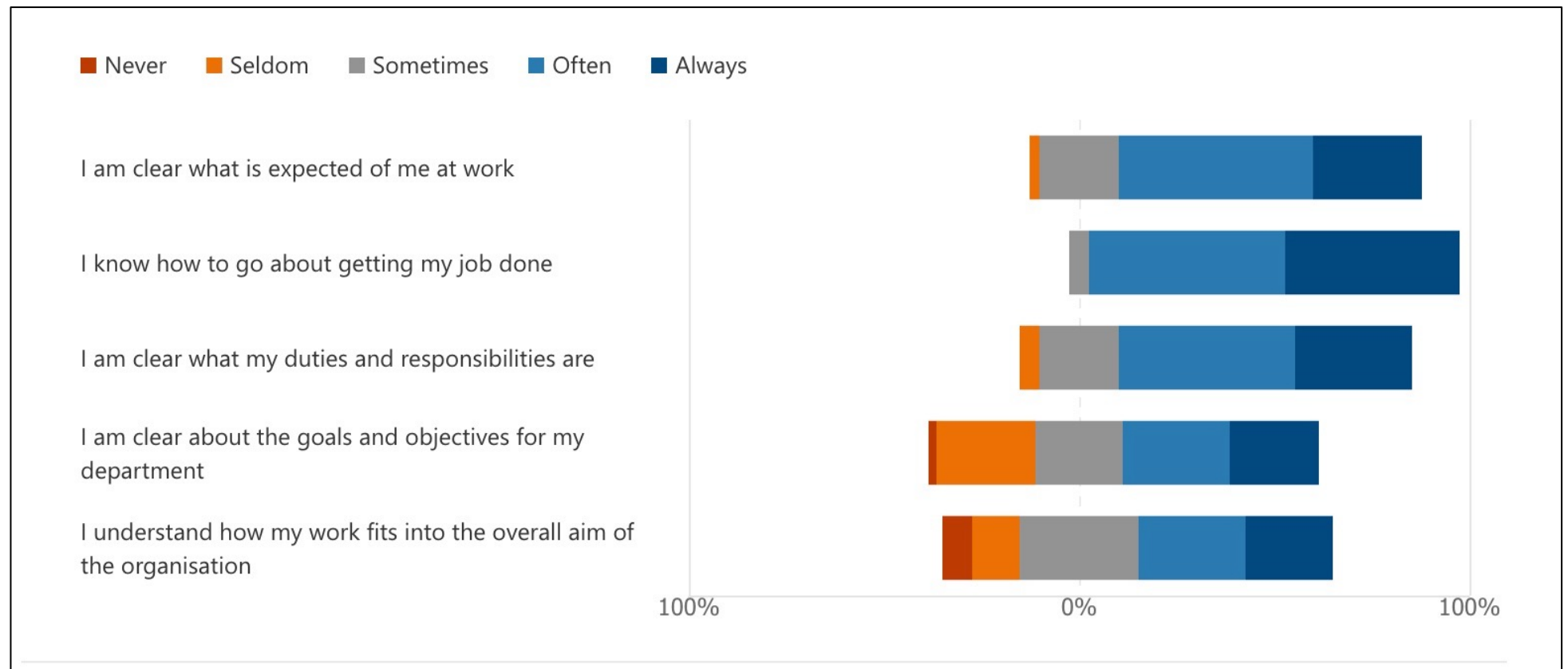
Control

These questions ask how much control you have over different aspects of your work – includes how much say people have in the way they do their work



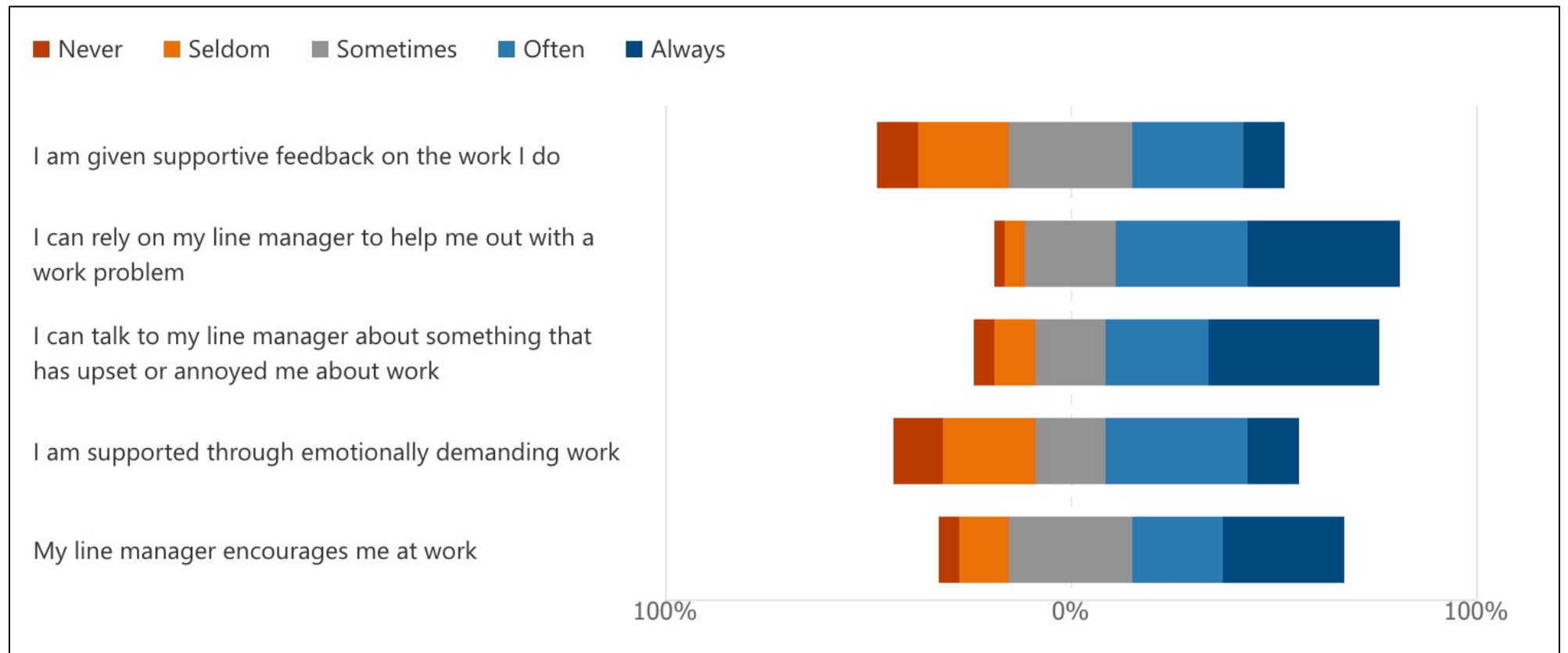
Role

These questions ask about your perceptions of role clarity, duties and responsibilities



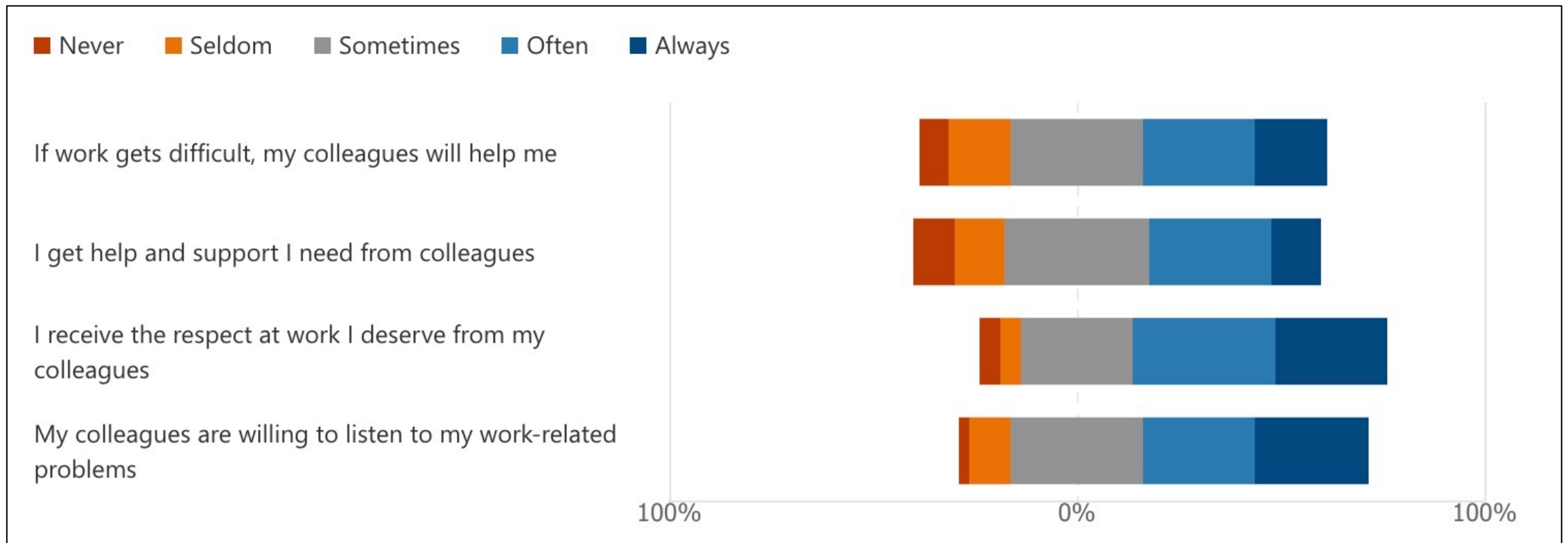
Support

These questions are concerning your perceived support from RAIUL - includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues



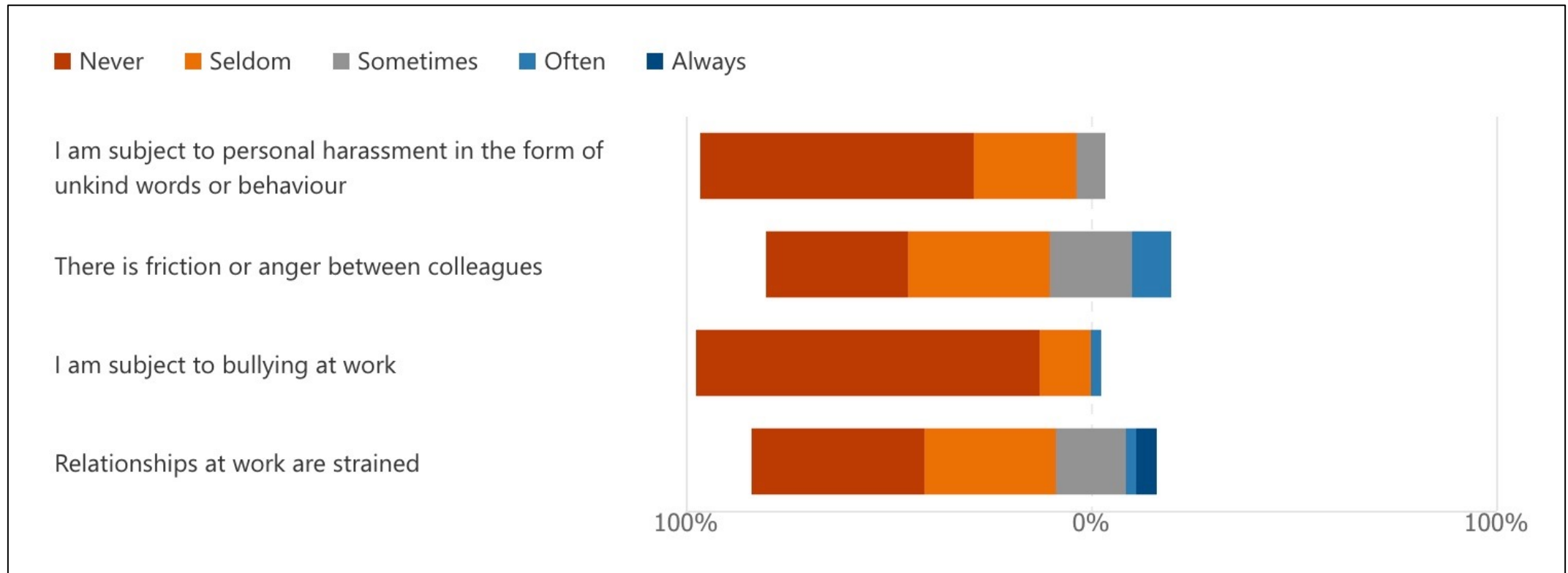
Peer Support

These questions ask about the support you receive from your colleagues- includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour



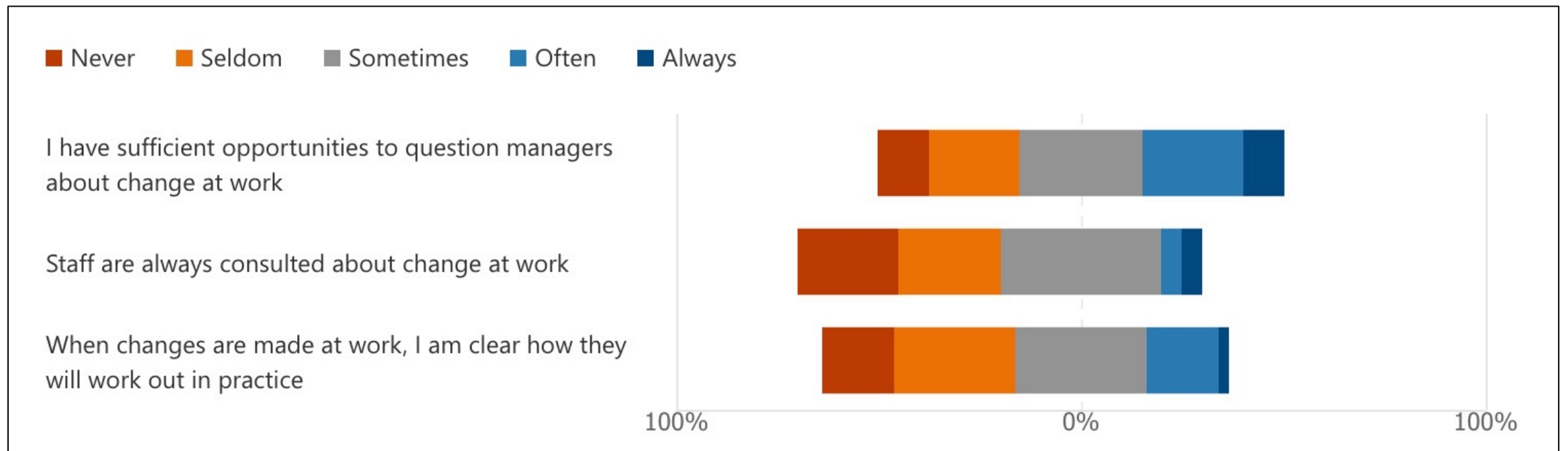
Relationships

These questions ask about workplace relationships and your work environment– includes whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles



Change

These questions ask about your impression of changes at work – includes how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation



Stress

17. How would you characterise your general or average level of stress?

● Very low	2
● Low	3
● Moderate	13
● High	13
● Very High	9

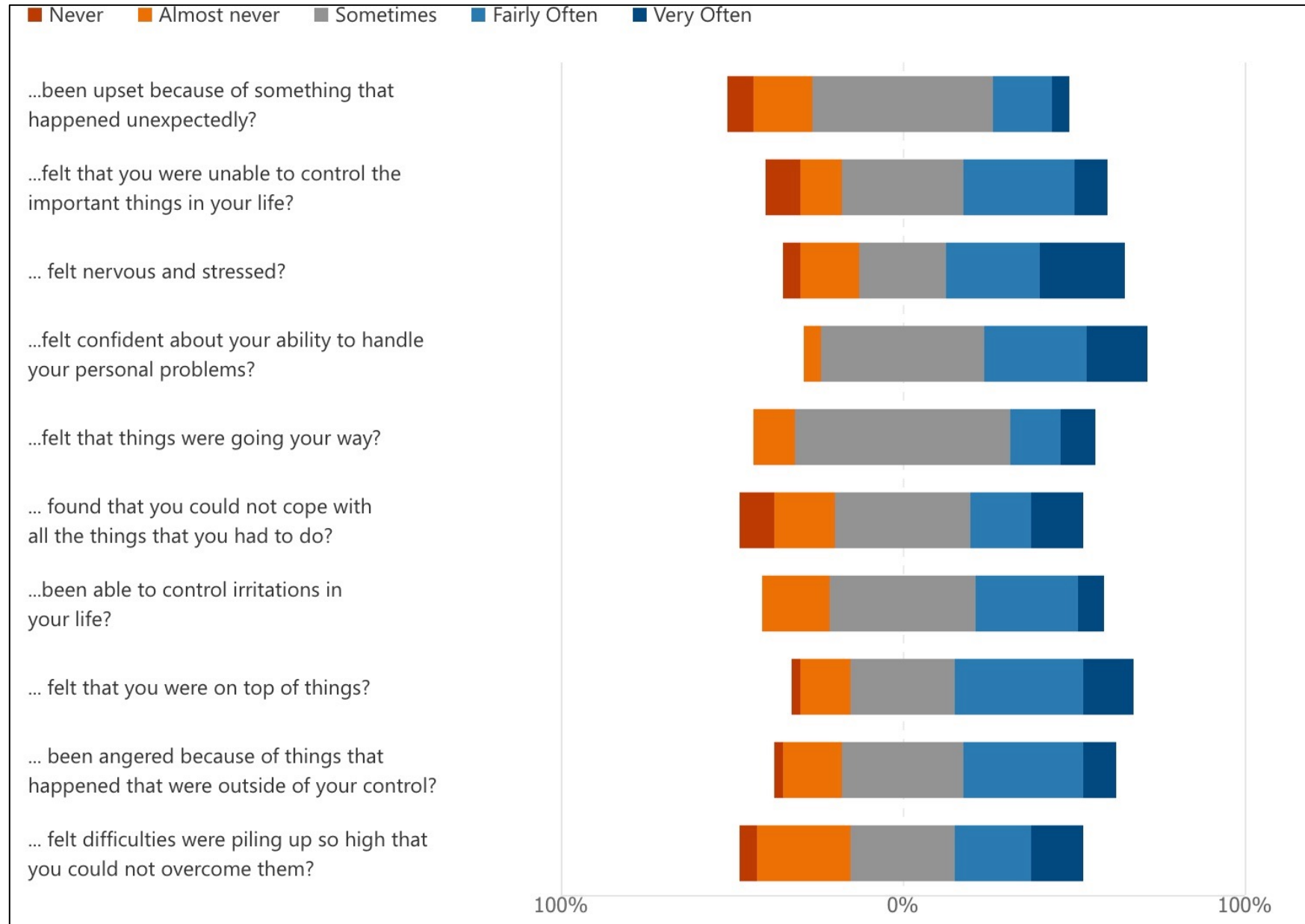


18. Do you experience levels of stress that you find unacceptable?

● Never	3
● Seldom	8
● Sometimes	13
● Often	11
● Always	5

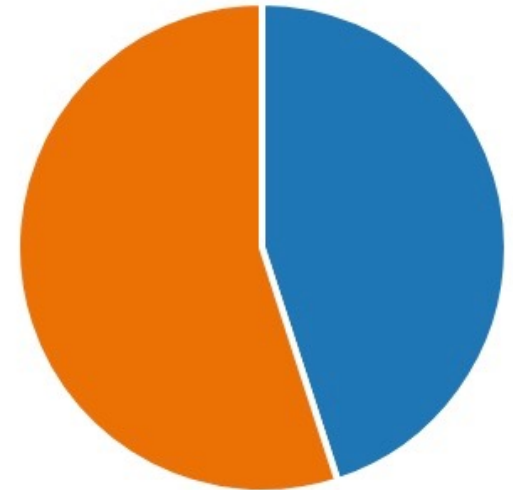


Perceived Stress



Sick Leave

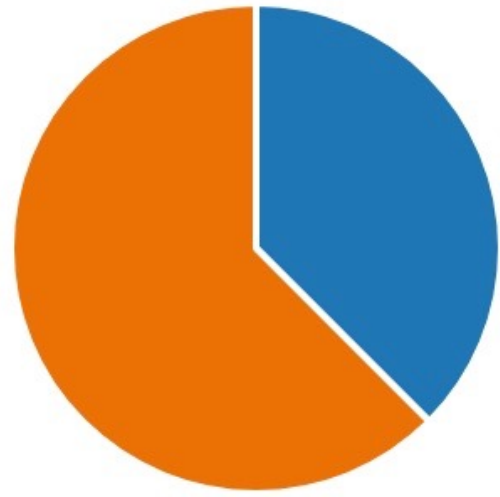
22. Were you ever in work when sick in the previous 12 months?



Annual Leave

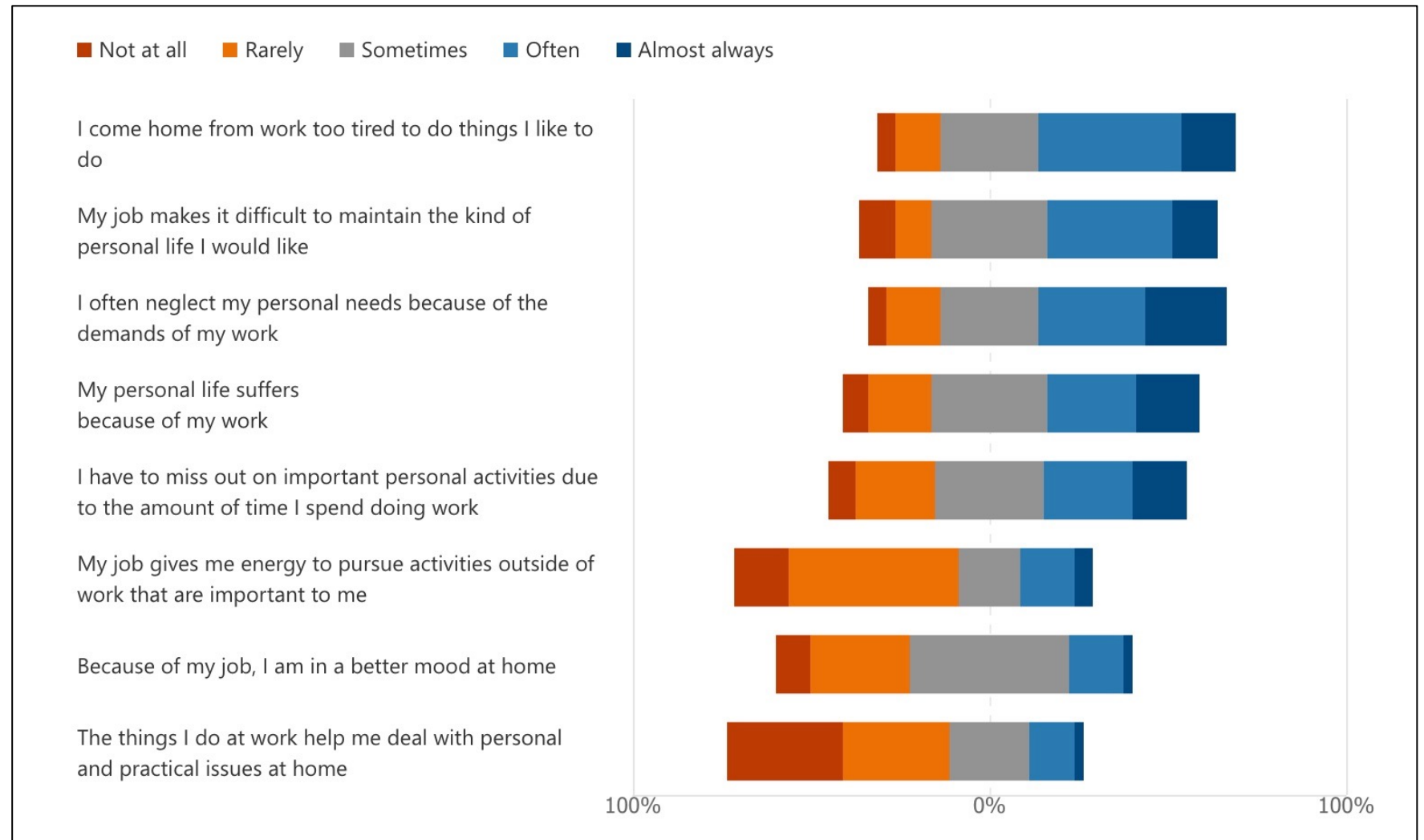
25. Did you take all of your annual leave last year?

- Yes 15
- No 25



Work Life Balance

These questions ask about the effect your work life has on your personal life



Separation of Work and Life

29. Please rate your current position on the following scale:
1 = My work and home lives are completely separate, to;
9 = There is no separation between my work and home lives

40

Responses

6.2

Average Number

30. Please rate how ideally you would like to be using the same scale:
1 = My work and home lives are completely separate, to;
9 = There is no separation between my work and home lives

40

Responses

3.3

Average Number

Stress

Themes:

- increased workload
- feeling of being without a future due to lack of professional development
- unrealistic expectations on the part of SM
- increase in multiple duties
- feeling of uncertainty, especially for those on precarious contracts
- lack of trust in the university
- not feeling valued
- inequality and unfairness between schools and those on different contracts

I teach eight different courses per year, this requires a considerable amount of time to ensure quality of education is maintained. This teaching load is burdensome and dilutes knowledge and expertise. There is no time left in a normal working week for research or other personal development. I feel trapped by my job, I worry about my future, I also feel the students deserve more from the University and this makes me feel stressed.

I am concerned about my future and employability, and receive little indication from management this is considered or addressed.

An inordinate number of meetings and extensive bureaucracy impede on my ability to do my job; I feel I have to take shortcuts and so I feel unprofessional and a bit of a fraud. Follow up is also a big problem adding to the stress: people who don't respond to emails and work is held up.

Demands

Themes:

- increased teaching load
- new demands added
- shift to remote teaching increased workload
- faculty not feeling valued
- overworked

Working at Richmond is like being on a permanent and fast treadmill. ...I often finish the teaching semester ill with exhaustion.

Students' time is valued, mine isn't .

Richmond has a culture of asking/requiring new work and tasks to be done at the last minute. This culture has been getting worse over the past few years.

workload has increased exponentially through online delivery

Control

Themes:

- flexible work but too much overall
- false choice in control over work – have choice when to work but there is too much work to do

I feel I have a degree of autonomy but this may mean choosing to work at weekends to ease the pressure of the working week the following week.

Up to a point, there is zero shared decision-making sharing at RAIUL, last-minute changes, poor communication and a total lack of genuine concern for employees

The choice that I may have at work is often a false choice. An academic teaching in higher education cannot choose not to do research. This is the part of an academic career path and essential for career development and employability. An academic who is not engaged in producing research is unemployable.

There is a great deal of flexibility in working time, yet often urgent departmental tasks can emerge which will need to be completed in quite a short turnout around (putting other projects to one side to do so).

Support

Themes:

- support from line managers, but inconsistent across schools and between different types of faculty (e.g. adjunct not supported)
- limited ability of line manager to be supportive, as they are also under pressure
- unsupported by SM and not valued

While this is starting to change, I have rarely felt supported at RAIUL. I feel unappreciated and unrecognized in the work that I do.

My line manager has no support or enough time to do their job (like me)

The feeling I have is that Richmond will squeeze out of me every little ounce of energy I have and will dispose of me as soon as I am no longer useful and able to do all the impossible (and often not very interesting) tasks I am asked to do.

My immediate line manager is supportive but this support is restricted. They are also under pressure and there is a tendency to support work that helps meet department KPIs, if personal development does not directly impact these goals, then the verbal support is there but not backed up by action.

Relationships

Themes:

- bullying by management
- isolations experienced by adjunct faculty
- lack of trust in HR

I had been subject to bullying for years. My manager stalled my progress, refused to support me, damaged my reputation by talking behind my back etc. I also experienced bullying from the HR.

This was resolved with the change of management a couple of years ago.

Attempts at micromanagement, divide and rule and lack of transparency between departments are all apparent -- most of this comes down to a lack of leadership and poor management

I was subject to bullying by my line manager for a number of years; so much so that I used to think that a good day at work was a day where I didn't have to cross paths or exchange words with said individual. Thankfully, he's gone.

...being an adjunct is very isolated so I rarely get to see or speak to colleagues.

Role

Themes:

- poor communication, especially from SMT
- students a priority over faculty wellbeing
- permanent revolution
- lack of role clarity and increasing number of duties

There are a lot of extra duties that result from the vagueness of contracts

There is no role clarity, I feel I am expected to be all things to everyone! Teacher, administrator, researcher, counsellor...the students are at the centre of what I do, which is as it should be but I often feel student needs, student well-being is prioritised over faculty needs and well-being.

Lack of clear communication is constant -- senior managers simply do not seem to know how to communicate, to listen or to take advice or support the only asset the university has, its employees

There continues to be a disconnect between the decisions made by committees and SMT and faculty and staff. Input is at best minimal, and even then often ignored.

Change

Theme:

-these are imposed by SMT

Duties and responsibilities keep changing and sometimes they are understood only after the fact

It feels that changes are imposed, even when there is consultation this feels like a tick box exercise without meaning. In other words, change is going to happen, consult faculty, ignore what faculty say and dress it up as though faculty had real input into the decision-making process.

The approach to change has been very heavy handed with many consultations but little is reflected when changes are implemented.

Secretive, defensive and done at the last minute. If I treated students in the same way faculty are treated I would be sacked, and quite rightly

As the university has been in a state of permanent revolution ... Added to this, communication from the top about the nature and purpose of changes is often quite poor.

Adjunct Faculty Concerns

Themes across the survey responses include:

- insecure contracts
- isolation
- under-valued
- lack of autonomy
- inequality

Reduced schedule of work as an adjunct created financial burden on me, hence additional stress level. University refused to furlough me, although I believe I have been entitled to based on my fraction of work in the last 10 years.

There is a vast imbalance between Adjunct and Full time faculty.

Adjuncts should have better work conditions and security. Their classes get cancelled without any remunerations and no structure of progress up till now.

Stress comes mainly from uncertainty and the use of the zero-hour contract system for part-timers. We are expected to remain available with no guarantee of continued employment and no hope of any severance or redundancy pay when we are not required any more (even when you have been at Richmond solidly with 6 or 7 courses a year for 26 years.)

I am not allowed to take sick days because I am an adjunct professor! I do not have the benefits that you permanent professors enjoy.

Conclusions and Recommendations

- Unacceptable stress at Richmond is a health and safety issue that the University and senior management team (SMT) must address.
- The stress risk to faculty must be actively mitigated in future and adequate support should be in place.
- Evidence presented shows unacceptable levels of stress are a product of unreasonable workloads and inequalities in the workplace, which must be resolved by the FPPW, not reinforced.
- It is our position that all workload, promotion, and progression models must ensure faculty's health and safety resolve stress levels through a fair, transparent, and reasonable workload.

Conclusions and Recommendations

- The University has a statutory responsibility to employees. Therefore, in line with HSE recommendations, a stress risk assessment needs to be conducted as soon as possible, in order to design a stress policy for the university to promote a system of continuous improvement.
- Levels of stress must be a key measure to evaluate the FPPW and the fairness, transparency, and equality of faculty's workload allocation.
- Sick leave and annual leave of faculty must be closely monitored by the University to ensure that workload is not preventing faculty from taking their annual leave or forcing them to work while they are sick.
- Unacceptable levels of stress need to be monitored by the Health and Safety Committee at the University and actions taken to address it.
- Adjunct faculty should be given permanent contracts to both alleviate unacceptable levels of stress and to reduce stress-inducing workloads and insecurity.

References

Health and Safety Executive. (n.d.). *Stress at work - Work-related stress and how to tackle it*. Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Retrieved July 4, 2021, from <https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/what-to-do.htm>.

Kivimäki, M., Nyberg, S.T., Batty, G.D., Fransson, E.I., Heikkilä, K., Alfredsson, L., ... & Theorell, T. for the IPD-Work Consortium (2012), Jobstrain as a risk factor for coronary heart disease: a collaborative meta-analysis of individual participant data, *Lancet*, 380 (9852), pp. 1491-1497.

Pega, F., Náfrádi, B., Momen, N. C., Ujita, Y., Streicher, K. N., Prüss-Üstün, A. M., ... & Woodruff, T. J. (2021). Global, regional, and national burdens of ischemic heart disease and stroke attributable to exposure to long working hours for 194 countries, 2000–2016: A systematic analysis from the WHO/ILO Joint Estimates of the Work-related Burden of Disease and Injury. *Environment International*, 154, 106595.

UCU, (2021). “Stressed? What you can do about it” *Stress Toolkit*. Available at: <https://www.ucu.org.uk/stress>.