

An Analysis of the University of Sheffield Staff Survey and the UCU Stress Survey on Management Standards for Work-Related Stress: *Demands*

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Introduction

This paper describes a short project aimed at comparing the findings from the University of Sheffield's (UoS) Staff Survey and the University & College Union's (UCU) Stress Survey. It focuses on one of the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE, 2007) Management Standards for managing the causes of work-related stress, those which fall under the category of *Demands* (the other Standards are *Control, Support, Relationships, Role and Change*) (HSE, 2007, pp.9-10).

The HSE's (2007, p.9) interpretation of workplace demands

[i]ncludes issues like workload, work patterns, and the work environment. The Standard is that: employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs; and systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

In addition, four actions that should be happening (or states to be achieved) highlighted by the HSE (2007, p.9) are that;

- the organisation provides employees with adequate and achievable demands in relation to agreed hours of work;
- people's skills and abilities are matched to the job demands;
- jobs are designed to be within the capabilities of employees; and
- employees' concerns about their work environment are addressed.

The paper describes and analyses the findings from the two surveys in relation to workplace demands, provides some comparison, and makes suggestions for areas of further research and possible future UCU campaigns.

Method of analysis

This project uses secondary comparative analysis of data from the two completed surveys. Bryman (2004) points out that there are a number of advantages and disadvantages of this research method. Advantages include new interpretations of existing survey data, which this project aims to provide, and the possibility of

comparing different data sets to create new findings (Bryman, 2004, p.204). Disadvantages of this method include a lack of access to all the data collected, and knowledge of the research process undertaken, from which to draw useful inferences (Bryman, 2004, p.205). Further, quantitative data is limited in terms of explaining the meaning that concepts have for people responding to surveys, and how this data relates to their everyday life experiences (Bryman, 2004, p.79). Indeed, a recommendation of this report is that further *qualitative* research in the form of focus groups or interviews would be advantageous in order to develop deeper understanding and stronger analysis of the survey findings presented here.

Comparing data collection methods - UoS and UCU surveys

The two surveys are different in their aims and scope. The UoS Staff Survey was not originally conceived to be a survey of stress in the workplace, but has been mapped onto the six management standards by the University's Health and Safety Committee (HSC), following the administering of the survey. On the other hand, the UCU survey is focused on stress specifically, and contains questions based on the HSE's Management Standards Indicator Tool.

The method used in both surveys is a series of statements to which respondents must reply using a five-point Likert scale. For the UoS the scale was presented from positive to negative; 'strongly agree, agree, neither, disagree, strongly disagree', while for the UCU questions the scale was presented in the survey from negative to positive; 'never, seldom, sometimes, often, always'. While the UoS survey uses only positive statements, the UCU combines a range of positive and negative statements about workplace stress.

The scope of the UoS survey is bigger, with a larger population, and a wider range of data available to analyse. However, the UoS survey data available is limited to the percentages of positive responses only (the distribution between 'neither' and 'negative' responses is not available). The UCU stress survey has a much lower response rate than the UoS survey (approximately 17% and 58% respectively). Nevertheless, the data presented below has allowed for some inferences to be drawn and comparisons made. The following considers the two surveys in turn, compares these inferences, and offers some conclusions and suggestions for areas of action.

UoS Staff Survey data (mapped onto HSE's Demands)

The focus of this analysis is the survey questions relating to the *Demands* which have been mapped onto the HSE Management Standards by the University's Health and Safety Committee (HSC). These are;

Q12 I am able to cope with the demands of the job
 Q13 I feel the level of pressure in my job is reasonable
 Q8 I am satisfied with my physical working conditions
 Q9 If appropriate, I have access to adequate social space in which to relax at work (e.g. lunches) (HSC, 2012, p.6).

As mentioned above, the survey wasn't originally intended to assess the Management Standards, so the questions and Standards do not seamlessly correspond. However, Q12 clearly addresses demands in the workplace, while Q13 describes the extent to which pressures create stress. Q8 and Q9 loosely relate to the point in the Standards about 'work environment'.

The survey was conducted in April 2012 and received an overall response rate of 58% across the University (HSC, 2012, p.1). The results are summarised under the headings of '*celebrate*' (where results are very positive for the University), '*improve*' (areas which could be better), and '*investigate*' (where responses are sufficiently negative to warrant further investigation to understand why).

A question relating to the *Demands* received a positive score to the extent that it was included in the corporate theme of '*celebrate*' was Q12: 'I am able to cope with the demands of the job'. The 'strongly agree' and 'agree' responses combined equated to an 80% positive score, which had increased by 4 percentage points since the 2008 survey (HSC, 2012, p.2). This data can be analysed by pay grade, faculty, length of service, managerial responsibility, and disability.

The data can be stratified by pay grades. Generally speaking *Facilities* and *Clerical* jobs fit within grades one to six, *Academic* and *Research* job roles cover grades six to nine, *Management*, *Specialists*, and *Teachers* cover grades seven to nine, and *Technical* staff could cover between grades three and nine. Table 1 below shows the distribution of positive scores at each pay grade within the University.

Table 1: Positive percentages for Q12 by pay grade (from Appendix 2, HSC, 2012).

	Pay grade									
	G1	G2	G3	G4	G5	G6	G7	G8	G9	Prof
'I am able to cope with the demands of the job'	89	94	93	93	85	83	82	70	60	74

As acknowledged by the HSC (2012, p.4), there is a general decrease in positive scores as the pay grades increase, from 89% and 94% of respondents offering a positive response at grades one and two, to 70% and 60% at pay grades eight and nine, with the professorial pay grade at 74% positive responses. While the results for grades one to seven are positive for the University, this suggests less ability to cope with the greater demands that are placed upon individuals that are working at higher pay grades, especially for management, academics, specialists, teaching and technical staff working at grade nine. Though this statement must be qualified by the lack of available data distributed between ‘neither’ and ‘negative’ responses (ambivalence cannot be equated with disagreement), which would provide a more detailed picture for all of the questions considered here.

This difference across pay grades is compounded by the appearance of a different *Demands* question (Q13. ‘I feel the level of pressure in my job is reasonable’) in the findings deemed necessary for investigation by the HSC (2012, p.3). This question received a lower positive response rate of 65% on average across the University, hence its inclusion in areas to investigate (HSC, 2012, p.3). When responses are divided between the pay grades, positive responses are lower compared to Q12 at every pay grade, with grades eight, nine and professorial especially low at 54%, 42% and 51% respectively. This is displayed in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Positive percentages for Q13 by pay grade (from Appendix 2, HSC, 2012).

	Pay grade									
	G1	G2	G3	G4	G5	G6	G7	G8	G9	Prof
‘I feel the level of pressure in my job is reasonable’	77	84	79	79	71	71	69	54	42	51

While Q12 on the ability of University staff to cope with demands in the workplace as a University average is a factor to celebrate (although the burden of demands is not equally shared across pay grades), this second question, which also relates to the demands placed upon employees, as reasonable pressures in jobs, indicates a much lower percentage of staff in agreement with the statement, again especially at higher pay grades. This suggests a mixed picture; further research could gain a fuller understanding of stress in the workplace in relation to demands and pressure on employees, focusing especially on higher paid jobs. In addition, exploring the relationship between Q12 and Q13 might address whether employees view the apparent trade-off between higher wages and pressures to be fair (or inevitable) could shed more light on differences in well-being and work-related stress.

Another *Demands* question also appears in the list of areas for the HSC to investigate; Q9: ‘If appropriate, I have access to adequate social space in which to relax at work (e.g. lunches)’. This received an overall positive score of 60% (which also saw a nine percentage point increase on 2008). However, this was deemed low enough to necessitate further investigation. This fluctuating response could be related to the on-going redevelopment of the Students Union building, or related to the various spaces available in University buildings. Further investigation, as the HSC intends, could explore this with attention to different faculties. There is no noticeable trend in this data relating to pay grade, but Table 3 below shows the scores distributed across different faculties. While the percentage of positive responses is very low for Arts and Humanities (30%) and moderately low for Social Sciences (52%), Engineering (68%) and Sciences (75%) have relatively higher positive responses. This suggests a need to improve social spaces, as recommended by the HSC’s report, across the University, but especially the buildings that are used by the faculties of Arts & Humanities, Social Sciences and Professional Services.

Table 3: Positive percentages for Q9 by faculty (HSC, 2012).

	Faculty						Uni av.
	Arts & Hums.	Engineering	Med., Dentistry & Health	Profes. Services	Science	Social Sciences	
‘If appropriate, I have access to adequate social space in which to relax at work (e.g. lunches)’	30	68	60	58	75	52	60

The final *Demands* question considered by the UoS survey is Q8: ‘I am satisfied with my physical working conditions’. This question has not been highlighted in any of the three corporate themes and has an overall positive response rate of 69% (HSE, 2012, p.7). Further, the distribution by pay grade is broadly the same across all grades in Table 4 below, with only grade one (77%) and the professorial grade (74%) scoring significantly above the University-wide average, while grade nine reports the lowest level of positive scores at 66%, suggesting a broad level of parity between pay grades in relation to physical working conditions.

Table 4: Positive percentages for Q8 by pay grade (from Appendix 2, HSC, 2012).

	Pay grade									
	G1	G2	G3	G4	G5	G6	G7	G8	G9	Prof
'I am satisfied with my physical working conditions'	77	67	69	69	67	69	67	70	66	74

The *Demands* can also be analysed by length of service, primary job focus, managerial responsibility, and disability. Table 5 shows the data for length of service, focusing on Q12 and Q13. For both questions a negative correlation between length of service and the percentage of positive responses is apparent. For the statement 'I am able to cope with the demands of the job' there is a decrease from 90% positive responses for employees of less than one year to 75% for those employed for over twenty years. Regarding the statement 'I feel the level of pressure in my job is reasonable', there is a similar decrease from 83% positive for those employed under one year to 57% for those employed for over twenty years. This data for Q12 and Q13 is appears to corroborate the findings above regarding pay grade, as length of service is likely to correlate with increases in pay. Further, Table 5 reflects the generally lower level of positive responses for reasonable pressures in work, compared with ability to cope, which is consistent with the pay grade data.

Table 5: +ve % Q12 and Q13 by length of service (from Appendix 2, HSC, 2012).

	Length of Service						Overall University average
	Less than one year	1 - 3 years	3 - 5 years	5 - 10 years	10 - 20 years	20 + years	
Q12: 'I am able to cope with the demands of the job'	90	82	83	78	76	75	80
Q13: 'I feel the level of pressure in my job is reasonable'	83	72	67	61	58	57	65

Table 6 below shows the differences in positive responses in relation to the primary job focus of the survey respondents. These are divided into the areas of *Academic, Clerical, Facilities, Management, Research, Specialists, Teaching, and Technical*. Table 6 focuses on Q12, Q13 and Q9. The data shows that academic staff report the lowest positive response percentages for all three questions, which are some way below the University average. Conversely, research staff provide significantly above the University average for positive responses for all three questions. Finally, clerical and facilities staff provide above average responses for the statements ‘I am able to cope with the demands of the job’ (Q12) and ‘I feel the level of pressure in my job is reasonable’ (Q13), but below the average for access to social space (Q9). This again suggests a complex picture for demands and pressures as both Q12 and Q13 are more positive for some, and less positive for other University staff, usually the higher paid, and in this case, academic staff especially.

Table 6: Positive percentages for Q12, Q13, and Q9 by primary job focus (from Appendix 2, HMC, 2012).

	Primary job focus								Uni av.
	Acad.	Clerical	Facs.	Mgmt.	Res.	Special.	Teach.	Tech.	
Q12: ‘I am able to cope with the demands of the job’	64	87	90	82	85	80	74	77	80
Q13: ‘I feel the level of pressure in my job is reasonable’	44	75	72	67	71	65	61	62	65
Q9: ‘If appropriate, I have access to adequate social space in which to relax at work (e.g. lunches)’	54	49	44	60	69	60	58	69	60

Q12 and Q13 can also be analysed by managerial responsibility and, as Table 7 below shows, relatively less positive responses are reported by those with

managerial responsibility. For managerial staff reasonable pressure (Q13 - 55%) again comes out less positive than ability to cope (Q12 - 73%). This suggests again a link between pay grade, length of service, and managerial responsibility that is likely to be reflected in less positive statements about ability to cope with workplace demands, but especially with levels of pressure experienced by employees.

Table 7: Positive percentages for Q12 and Q13 by managerial responsibility (from Appendix 2, HSC, 2012).

	Managerial responsibility		University average
	Manage others	Do not manage others	
Q12: 'I am able to cope with the demands of the job'	73	84	80
Q13: 'I feel the level of pressure in my job is reasonable'	55	71	65

The HSC report has also stratified the responses to the *Demands* questions by respondents answering 'yes', 'no', or 'prefer not to say' to whether they have a disability. This data is shown in Table 8. For those that state that they have a disability, Q8 (56%) and Q9 (51%) show responses lower than the University-wide average (69% and 60% respectively), while all other responses broadly correlate with the University average. However, there are significantly less positive responses for those that 'prefer not to say' whether they have a disability or not, to Q13, Q9 and Q8 in particular. This suggests that more research is needed to examine why some employees would not want to state that they have a disability, especially as part of measures to reduce work-related stress.

Table 8 Positive percentages for Demands questions by disability (from Appendix 2, HSC, 2012).

	Disability			University average
	Yes	No	Prefer not to say	
Q12: 'I am able to cope with the demands of the job'	80	80	74	80
Q13: 'I feel the level of pressure in my job is reasonable'	62	65	53	65
Q8: 'I am satisfied with my physical working conditions'	56	70	54	69
Q9: 'If appropriate, I have access to adequate social space in which to relax at work (e.g. lunches)'	51	61	48	60

Summary

In the data analysed above, a number of themes emerge. The first is that there is a disparity between pay grades in both ability to cope with the demands of the job (Q12) and reasonable pressures in jobs (Q13). While positive responses are generally higher for Q12 than Q13, both show a similar trend of decreasing positive responses as pay grades increase (Tables 1 and 2). Further, a similar trend is detected for Q12 and Q13 for length of service (Table 5), and those with managerial responsibility (Table 7) also report lower positive responses for these questions. A possible link between pay grade, length of service and managerial responsibility could be reasonably suggested, but further research would be necessary to explore whether there is a fair trade off seen by employees between higher pay and more pressure.

Regarding Q12 and Q13 in the data on length of service, a similar trend of more positive responses to Q12, compared with Q13 can be observed. It could be argued

that while people responding to an internal survey may feel more confident in pointing out that the level of pressures in their job are not reasonable, they are less likely to admit to not being able to cope with the demands of the job for fear of being seen as 'not up to the job'. Nevertheless, with the data at hand this can only be a tentative indication, which requires further research to support such a claim.

Q9 on access to adequate social spaces (Table 3) showed significant disparity between faculties, with the Social Sciences and Arts & Humanities having relatively low positive responses, while the Sciences and Engineering were much higher. This suggests that more could be done to improve social spaces in certain faculty buildings. Meanwhile, the disparity between especially academic staff and research staff with regards to the relative percentages of positive responses to Q12, Q13 and Q9 could be explored further. This may highlight a perception of an unbalanced level of demands and pressures across different job roles (even at similar pay grades). Finally, further investigation, as highlighted in the HSC report, could explore the reasons why some respondents 'prefer not to say' whether they have a disability or not, with reference to ensuring appropriate demands are made of employees with disabilities and support is in place to manage possible work-related stress that results from this.

UCU Stress Survey data

The UCU Stress Survey, as the name suggests, was designed specifically to address stress in the workplace. However, the Union membership is a smaller cross-section of the wider University and the survey of Union members had a lower response rate of around 17%. In addition, the UCU data only applies to Union members at grade six and above. UCU Survey data relating to the demands section of the Management Standards guide is shown in Tables 9 and 10 below. Data for eight questions from the survey were supplied to the researcher and can be related to the demands placed upon UCU members. These can be mapped onto the themes of 'workplace demands' and 'workplace pressures', which may broadly compare with Q12 and Q13 in the UoS survey. The statements highlighted here are:

Q3: 'Different groups at work demand things from me that are hard to combine' (*workplace demands*)

Q16: 'I am unable to take sufficient breaks' (*demands*)

Q20: 'I have to work very fast' (*demands*)

Q6: 'I have unachievable deadlines' (*demands*)

Q9: 'I have to work intensively' (*workplace pressures*)

Q12: 'I have to neglect some tasks because I have too much to do' (*pressures*)

Q18: 'I am pressured to work long hours' (*pressures*)

Q22: 'I have unrealistic time pressures' (*pressures*)

While the data available for the UoS survey is based on positive statements, the data provided by the UCU is based on negative statements (hence 'never' or 'seldom' are considered to be positive statements and 'often' or 'always' are considered to be negative statements in Tables 9 and 10). Table 9 below shows the breakdown of responses to questions relating to workplace demands.

Table 9: Workplace demands data from UCU survey

UCU survey (workplace demands)	Response scale		
	Never or Seldom (Positive responses)	Sometimes	Often or always (Negative responses)
Q3: 'Different groups at work demand things from me that are hard to combine'	15.4%	36.9%	47.7%
Q16: 'I am unable to take sufficient breaks'	41%	32%	27.1%
Q20: 'I have to work very fast'	9.5%	47.7%	71.2%
Q6: 'I have unachievable deadlines'	33.8%	39.6%	26.6%

From the data categorised as relating to demands on Union employees above, almost half of respondents (47.7%) report that they often or always are subject to demands that are 'hard to combine' (Q3), with only 15.4% indicating positively that this 'never' or 'seldom' happens. In addition, 71.2% indicate that they often or always have to work very fast (Q20), compared with 9.5% that never or seldom do. On the other hand, the response to Q16 regarding breaks is more positive - 41% of respondents indicate that they are never or seldom unable to take sufficient breaks (compared with 32% stating 'sometimes' and 27.1% often or always unable to take breaks). Q6: 'I have unachievable deadlines' is slightly less positive, with

33.8% indicating that this is ‘never’ or ‘seldom’ the case, while 26.6% indicate that this is ‘often’ or ‘always’ the case.

This shows a more mixed picture amongst UCU members than the broad data for the UoS survey and is discussed in the following section. Table 10 on workplace pressures is displayed below.

Table 10: Workplace pressures from UCU stress survey

UCU survey (workplace pressures)	Response scale		
	Never or Seldom (Positive responses)	Sometimes	Often or always (Negative responses)
Q9: ‘I have to work intensively’	1.8%	26.9%	71.3%
Q12: ‘I have to neglect some tasks because I have too much to do’	12.7%	36.5%	50.9%
Q18: ‘I am pressured to work long hours’	33.8%	24.8%	41.4%
Q22: ‘I have unrealistic time pressures’	24.8%	35.6	39.6%

The table shows that the most common response to all questions is ‘often’ or ‘always’, which can be interpreted as ‘negative’ responses. For Q9: ‘I have to work intensively’, this is most acute; 71.3% state ‘often’ or ‘always’, while only 1.8% answer that they ‘never’ or ‘seldom’ have to work intensively. For Q12: ‘I have to neglect some tasks because I have too much to do’, the distribution is 50.9% for ‘often’ and ‘always’ compared with 12.7% stating ‘never’ or ‘seldom’. The relative differences between the responses for Q18 and Q22 are less prominent, but still loaded towards ‘negative’ responses. 41.4% state that they are pressured to work long hours ‘often’ or ‘always’, compared with 33.8% stating

‘never’ or ‘seldom’. Similarly, 39.6% ‘often’ or ‘always’ have unrealistic time pressures, compared with a relatively lower 24.8% stating ‘never’ or ‘seldom’.

The UCU Stress Survey indicates that there are relatively more ‘negative’ responses than ‘positive’ for Q3, Q9, Q12, Q18, Q20 and Q22, while Q9 on achievable deadlines and Q16 on the ability to take sufficient breaks drew more positive responses. Table 9 suggests a higher percentage of stress related to demands made by groups that are hard to combine and having to work very fast. Meanwhile Table 10 suggests that working intensively, neglecting tasks due to too much work to do, pressure to work long hours, and unrealistic time pressures might be related to stress for a higher percentage of respondents.

However, some data, including especially Q9; ‘I have to work intensively’ may require further exploration to ensure that the link between the data and work-related stress is clear. While working intensively might be an indicator of stress, on the other hand, it could be argued that some may desire to do intensive work, as this can be interpreted as an aspect of satisfying work. Again, qualitative research including interviews and focus groups may build on the survey data to give a clearer and more detailed understanding of work-related stress.

Comparison between UoS findings and UCU findings

The two surveys use different survey questions and the UoS survey is much more extensive. However, a picture emerges from the UoS data of the staff most susceptible to work-related stress, particularly in terms of work pressures being deemed unreasonable; highly paid (especially those at grade nine), academic-based, long serving, and those with managerial responsibility. In addition, the responses of those with disabilities highlight physical working conditions and access to social space as areas for action, along with identifying if there are any significant problems experienced by those that ‘prefer not to say’ if they have a disability. On the other hand, those at lower pay grades, including researchers, clerical and facilities staff, especially within the first few years of their career at the University and without managerial responsibility tend to indicate that they are more likely to cope with the demands of the job.

In comparison, the UCU data (although from a significantly smaller subset of the University population) shows a relatively more negative picture. Nevertheless, because the UCU data only applies to employees on grade six and above, it could be argued that the UCU data further supports the analysis above; that UoS respondents who are on higher pay grades, especially in academia (and longer serving), are subject to more demands and pressures. Table 11 below highlights broadly comparable data from the two surveys, citing only the positive responses. It is not possible to make an easy comparison as the demands and pressures

questions only partially map, as do the population data, so the following is far from conclusive. Nevertheless, Table 11 gives a broad indication of the disparity between the findings of the UoS and UCU surveys (and between employees overall and those on pay grades six to nine). While for the UoS demands question on coping, the percentage of the positive responses across the University is 80%, compared with 15.4% of positive responses from UCU members regarding demands for ‘things that are hard to combine’. With regards to pressures, 65% of University staff report that pressure in the job is reasonable, while only 24.8% of UCU members respond that they have realistic time pressures.

Table 11: Comparison of demands and pressures data from UoS and UCU surveys

	Survey	
	UoS	UCU
Demands	Q12 ‘I am able to cope with the demands of the job’	Q3: ‘Different groups at work demand things from me that are hard to combine’
	80%	15.4%
Pressures	Q13 ‘I feel the level of pressure in my job is reasonable’	Q22: ‘I have unrealistic time pressures’
	65%	24.8%

Final suggestions

The discussion in this report has necessarily been tentative. In many ways, this is a reflection of the limits of the survey method and secondary comparative analysis of survey data, as different surveys, asking different questions, and with different populations and response rates, do not entail a straightforward comparison of responses. Therefore, with this qualification, the data does indicate a disparity of views recorded by employees of the University. Overall, while the UoS survey has generally recorded more positive responses (even though some have been highlighted by the HSC as necessary for investigation) the UCU data indicates a less positive picture. However, given that the less positive responses in the UoS data are skewed towards those in higher pay grades, this suggests that there is some common ground between the UoS findings and the UCU findings for those on pay grade six and above, which suggests areas for action.

One suggestion arising from this report is for further research to gain a clearer understanding of work-related stress. For example in different departments, job roles and pay grades. Focus groups and interviews could build a more in-depth understanding of the initial survey results. For example, in-depth interviews could explore whether the apparent trade-off between higher pay rates and less ability to cope with the demands and pressures of higher paid jobs recorded in the UoS

survey is seen as a fair deal in relation to well-being and work-related stress. Possible outcomes could be better support for stressful jobs within the University which could improve both quality of working life and productivity.

The UoS survey findings suggest that areas for future UCU campaigns could address workplace demands and work-related stress in especially the higher paid, managerial, academic, specialist, teaching, and technical staff roles, long serving staff, and those with disabilities. However, the UCU data suggests the need for a broader campaign on behalf of its membership, given the relatively lower positive responses recorded overall in this survey. Further, it is expedient to also recognise that this paper does not suggest a deviation away from the need to protect pay, workplace rights, and working conditions for all University staff, as the cause of work-related stress for all staff that experience it is not higher wages, but rather the demands and pressures of the workplace.

Further suggestions for future UCU research on this topic include:

- Modelling future surveys on the questions used in the UoS staff survey in order to provide more directly comparable results.
- Improving the response rate to enhance the explanatory power of the findings.
- Including in data analysis a more in-depth breakdown of Union membership vis-à-vis different roles in the University and so on. This again would enhance the explanatory power of any future analysis.

References

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