Goldsmiths UNISON

HSE Stress Management Standards Survey

1. Background

UNISON supports its members in a variety of ways including assisting members during conflict in the workplace. One of the most frequent issue that has arisen through the branch's casework is stress within the workplace.

Stress is a factor in daily life, but its impacts can have serious negative consequences on staff which are detrimental not only to the staff member, but also to the employer due to a loss of productivity, so as well as protecting the wellbeing of staff, there is also a clear business rationale for the reduction of stress within the workplace.

All employers have a duty under the law to tackle stress under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1990 and under the Health and Safety at Work etc 1974. The HSE expects employers to carry out suitable risk assessments for stress, and to tackle any problems identified by that risk assessment.

UNISON wanted to ascertain the issues our members face with regards to stress. After completing some research, we found the Health and Safety Executives stress management toolkit. It contains a questionnaire with 36 questions which are designed to analyse certain factors that cause stress. These Factors are: **Demands, Control, Managers' Support, Peer Support, Relationships, Role,** and **Change.** In addition to these questions, our members were also given the opportunity to comment on their experience of working at Goldsmiths.

2. Results

UNISON members were surveyed on 36 questions set by the HSE. A total of 47 of our members participated in the survey. Questions were analysed using the HSE tool kit. The toolkit instructions are included on pages 1-4 of the appendix. Pages 5-8 of the appendix contain the tables and graphs referenced in the results.

Participants were required to select one of five possible answers for each question. Each answer carried a score of 1 – 5, with 1 relating to 'Never' or 'Strongly disagree' and 5 relating to 'Always' or 'strongly agree'

Table 1 details the 36 questions, the total number of responses for each possible answer, and the % responses for each answer. The figure highlighted in red indicates

the largest response for a '1', and the figure in green indicates the largest response for a 5'".

Tables 2-8 collate questions around the factors described earlier. Again the lowest percentage score for a '1' score is highlighted for each, along with the highest percentage for a '5'.

Graph 1 is a summary of the results, providing an average score for each factor, again 1 being the lowest score, 3 the average and 5 being the highest. An error bar is included indicating the spread of data.

3. Findings

Analysis of the results has raised a number of findings. These are summarised below

- The two questions that received the largest negative responses were '*I am subject to bullying at work*' (91.3% of participants answered occasionally, sometimes or always) and '*I am subject to personal harassment in the form of unkind words or behaviour*' (87.24% of participants answered occasionally, sometimes or always)
  As mentioned in the introduction, this response mirrors issues raised by our members.

- Overall the analysis shows a mixed picture, with the response to certain stress factors being positive. One such area is **role** as detailed in table 7. The responses to this series of questions were overwhelmingly positive which suggests our members understand their roles and responsibilities well. Table 3 which analysed **control** indicates staff feel as if they have control over how they are allowed to work.

- **Peer support** was another factor which had a more favourable response (table 5). This suggests there are good peer support networks between colleagues, and staff are generally willing to help each other and feel supported by one another. Table 6 however does indicate that some **relationships** within the workplace are strained and as mentioned above a significant number of respondents indicated they have been subject to bullying and harassment within the workplace.

- One area of concern is highlighted in table 2, **demands.** Responses in this section were less favourable, and includes question 18 '*I am pressurised to work long hours*' where 87.23% of participants responded negatively. Another area for

concern is **change** as described in table 8, where participants responded negatively to questions posed regarding organisational change which suggests the uncertainty from change management situations which are not managed adequately can cause stress.

- Graph 1 summarises and compares the average response for each factor, and again shows the worst scoring stress factor was **relationships** whilst the best scoring factor was our members **roles**.

4. Conclusions

The analysis has demonstrated there are certain areas that cause stress for our members who work at Goldsmiths, with the most significant of these stemming from working relationships and the perception of bullying and harassment within the workplace, the demands on staff workloads, and issues arising from organisational change within the workplace.

This tool is useful at capturing and highlighting the issues raised within the workplace, however it cannot mitigate against these issues. UNISON recognises Goldsmiths has a range of support services for staff who are dealing with issues including stress at work, however these usually aim to deal with effects of stress through means of counselling, or occupational health referrals.

As described in the introduction of this report, employers have a duty to implement measures which can tackle the causes of stress which would help prevent stress happening in the first place. Using this tool is a good way of identifying problem areas so measures to tackle these can be developed. The tool also provides the ability to statistically map the change from year to year which would indicate if measures to reduce stress are successful.

Such measures could include improved bullying and harassment policies, and training on these policies. These policies could also include guidance on communications (including electronic communications such as email which Goldsmiths is currently lacking), as miscommunications and misunderstandings are often the source of conflict resulting in claims of bullying and harassment.

Better communications and closer working relationships between unions, staff and Goldsmiths during periods of change management will help to alleviate stress by minimising uncertainty for staff during a challenging time.

Staff working patterns should be clearly defined and workloads closely monitored by line managers. No member of staff should feel unduly pressurised to work additional hours, especially if the member of staff has not opted out of the European working time directive.