

2012 occupational stress survey – the Control stressor in HE

The Control stressor measures the respondent's level of stress, or well-being, relating to control at work.

This 'stressor' includes the respondent's ability to decide when to take a break, choice over how to do their work and what to do at work, and control over their speed of work.

Headlines – Control stressor results for higher education

- The lowest level of well-being, or highest level of stress, on the Control stressor – which includes the respondent's ability to decide when to take a break, choice over how to do their work and what to do at work - at a UK HEI in the 2012 UCU occupational stress survey was 3.09, on a scale where 1=lowest well-being and 5=highest well-being.
- The highest level of well-being, or lowest level of stress, at a HEI was 4.11.
- The average level of well-being on the Control stressor of UCU members in HE in the 2012 UCU occupational stress survey was 3.62, which was lower than the average well-being score of UCU members in HE in 2008, of 3.75. So stress levels for UCU members in higher education relating to Control have got slightly worse in the last four years.
- The average level of well-being on the Control stressor in the British working population, as measured by the Health and Safety Executive's 2008 study *Psychosocial Working Conditions in Britain*, was 3.52.
- In other words, UCU members at UK HEIs on average showed greater well-being – or lower stress - on the Control stressor than the British working population as a whole.

The data

The data in this survey (conducted 16 April – 4 May 2012) are based on responses by UCU members to the Health and Safety Executive's questionnaire, the Management Standards Indicator Tool. The MSIT seeks to measure the level of well-being of respondents at work on the basis of their response to statements in the questionnaire.

The MSIT contains 35 statements, which are grouped under seven 'stressors': Demands (for which there are eight statements in the MSIT), Control (6 MSIT statements), Managerial Support (5 MSIT statements), Peer Support (4 MSIT statements), Relationships (4 MSIT statements), Role (5 MSIT statements) and Change (3 MSIT statements). There are five potential responses to each statement, ranging from 'Never' through to 'Always', or from 'Strongly disagree' through to 'Strongly agree'. For example, responses to the statement, 'I can decide when to take a break', under the Control stressor, are given a numerical value, ranging from 1 for 'Never', through to 5 for 'Always'.

An individual respondent's overall score for each stressor is calculated, based on the mean average of that individual's responses to each of the statements under a particular stressor, ranging from 1, for lowest well-being, to 5, for highest well-being.

To protect respondents' anonymity and promote data quality, in reporting results from UCU's 2012 occupational stress survey, UCU has been guided by the methodology of the UK's Higher Education Statistics Agency, that:

- Percentages based on 52 or fewer individuals must be suppressed
- Averages based on 7 or fewer individuals must be suppressed

The stress survey data make use of percentages and average data. Percentages are given when reporting the responses to a single item in the questionnaire. For example, in the higher education sample, 17.6% of respondents to the statement 'Different groups at work demand things from me that are hard to combine', relating to the Demands stressor, responded 'Always', 36.7% said 'Often', and so on.

In calculating the results for a given stressor, in this example the Demands stressor, a numerical value (for example, 1 for 'Never' through to 5 for 'Always', or vice-versa, and 1 for 'Strongly disagree' through to 5 for 'Strongly agree', or vice-versa) is given to each response by an individual – for example, a response of 'Never' to the statement 'Different groups at work demand things from me that are hard to combine', relating to the Demands stressor, would be given a score of 5. The average of an individual's response scores to the questions relating to a particular stressor is then calculated. Then the average of the average responses for respondents from a particular college or university is calculated, to give the stressor value for all respondents from a particular college or university.

Although, in the HESA methodology, averages based on 7 or fewer individuals should be suppressed, in higher education, UCU has not published averages for a particular higher education institution (HEI) based on 52 or fewer individuals, in the interests of robust data. Where any individual's response to one or more of the survey questions relating to a stressor is missing, then the average stressor for that individual is not calculated.

The Control stressor – higher education

The Control stressor measures the respondent's level of stress, or well-being, relating to control at work. This 'stressor' includes the respondent's ability to decide when to take a break, choice over how to do their work and what to do at work, and control over their speed of work.

A total of 14,343 respondents to the UCU survey said they worked in the higher education sector. Of those respondents in HE who provided information about their job, 76.3% were academics (including teaching-only, research-only and teaching-and-research) and 23.7% were academic-related (including managers, administrators, librarians and computer staff).

The HEIs are grouped by score as follows:

Group A: UCU survey well-being highest 20 / stress level lowest 20

Group B: UCU survey average or above average well-being / average or below average stress level

Group C: Below UCU survey average well-being / above average stress level

Group D: UCU survey well-being lowest 20 / stress level highest 20

Stressor score range: 1.00 = lowest well-being / highest stress, 5.00 = highest well-being / lowest stress.

Control range, UCU 2012 survey: HEI highest score 4.11; lowest score 3.09. Control: 2012 UCU HE respondents' mean average: 3.62; 2008 UCU HE respondents' mean average 3.75. Health and Safety Executive 2008 mean average for British working population ¹: 3.52.

The Top and/or Bottom 20 may include more than 20 HEIs where there is a tied position.

Control – the statements

- I can decide when to take a break.
- I have a say in my own work speed.
- I have a choice in deciding how to do my work.
- I have a choice in deciding what I do at work.
- I have some say over the way I work.
- My working time can be flexible.

¹ HSE (2008) Psychosocial Working Conditions in Britain in 2008, pp 26-27. The 'not target' group.

CONTROL STRESSOR – Higher Education	
69 HEI scores for the Control stressor out of a total of 94 were above the HSE 2008 average of 3.52.	
UCU HE 2012 average = 3.624 (N=14,343)	
1.00 = lowest well-being (or highest stress), 5.00 = highest well-being (or lowest stress). Within each group, HEIs are ranked alphabetically.	
N= number of respondents. Averages are not shown where there were fewer than 53 respondents at a HEI.	
N	
Group A: UCU survey well-being highest 20 / stress level lowest 20 (Range of averages 3.767 to 4.111, including 2 HEIs tied at 20th position)	
Bath, The University of	88
Birkbeck College	76
Bristol, The University of	185
Cambridge, The University of	148
Cranfield University	88
Edinburgh, The University of	274
Heriot-Watt University	85
Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine	82
Institute of Education	67
Leeds, The University of	412
Leicester, The University of	163
London School of Economics and Political Science	144
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine	63
Manchester, The University of	457
Newcastle-upon-Tyne, The University of	246
Open University	361
Oxford, The University of	228
Royal Holloway and Bedford New College	99
Southampton, The University of	198
University College London	272
York, The University of	146
Group B: UCU survey average or above average well-being / average or below average stress level (range of averages: 3.625 to 3.765)	
Aberdeen, The University of	149
Aberystwyth University	135
Aston University	53
Bangor University	66
Bradford, The University of	107
Brighton, The University of	99

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	N
Cardiff University	170
Durham, University of	159
East Anglia, The University of	110
Essex, The University of	100
Goldsmiths College	59
Hertfordshire, University of	80
Kent, The University of	184
King's College London	165
Lancaster, The University of	137
Liverpool, The University of	277
Loughborough University	159
Nottingham, The University of	215
Queen Mary and Westfield College	139
Reading, The University of	113
Sheffield, The University of	220
St Andrews, The University of	75
Stirling, The University of	85
Strathclyde, The University of	164
Surrey, The University of	102
Sussex, The University of	172
Swansea University	115
Warwick, The University of	213
York St John University	67
Group C: Below UCU survey average well-being / above average stress level (range of averages: 3.476 to 3.619)	
Birmingham, The University of	209
Bournemouth University	93
Brunel University	99
Canterbury Christ Church University	71
Cumbria, University of	67
Dundee, The University of	119
Exeter, The University of	167

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	N
Glamorgan, University of	80
Glasgow, The University of	226
Hull, The University of	88
Keele, The University of	78
Kingston University	81
Lincoln, The University of	64
Northampton, The University of	79
Oxford Brookes University	67
Plymouth, The University of	143
Portsmouth, The University of	107
Queen's University of Belfast	231
Sheffield Hallam University	150
Sunderland, The University of	74
Teesside, The University of	83
Westminster, The University of	78
Wolverhampton, The University of	129
Group D: UCU survey well-being lowest 20 / stress level highest 20 (range of averages: 3.086 to 3.471)	
Birmingham City University	87
Central Lancashire, The University of	135
City University	108
Coventry University	57
De Montfort University	123
Derby, University of	81
East London, The University of	88
Greenwich, The University of	89
Leeds Metropolitan University	144
Liverpool John Moores University	123
London Metropolitan University	123
London South Bank University	95
Manchester Metropolitan University	141
Northumbria at Newcastle, The University of	121

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	N
Nottingham Trent University	204
Salford, The University of	184
Staffordshire University	64
Ulster, University of	168
University of the Arts, London	97
University of the West England, Bristol	117

Source: UCU 2012 occupational stress survey

Data for Anglia Ruskin University (73 respondents) were excluded from this table because of on-going negotiations at the university.

Data from the following HEIs were not used in this report because there were 52 or fewer respondents from them:

HEI	Number of respondents
Abertay Dundee, University of	42
Arts University College at Bournemouth	13
Bath Spa University	28
Bedfordshire, University of	46
Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln	10
Bolton, The University of	44
Buckingham, The University of	1
Buckinghamshire New University	44
Central School of Speech and Drama	13
Chester, University of	41
Chichester, The University of	19
Conservatoire for Dance and Drama	1
Courtauld Institute of Art	4
Edge Hill University	41
Edinburgh College of Art	2
Edinburgh Napier University	2
Glasgow Caledonian University	45
Glasgow School of Art	11
Gloucestershire, University of	44
Glyndwr University	46
Harper Adams University College	21
Heythrop College	4
Huddersfield, The University of	49
Institute of Cancer Research	1
Leeds College of Music	2
Leeds Trinity University College	37
Liverpool Hope University	35
Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts	16
Middlesex University	46
Newman University College	26
Norwich University College of the Arts	5
Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh	47
Ravensbourne	5
Robert Gordon University	19
Roehampton University	47
Rose Bruford College	9
Royal Academy of Music	2

HEI	Number of respondents
Royal College of Art	7
Royal College of Music	1
Royal Northern College of Music	3
Royal Veterinary College	9
School of Oriental and African Studies	52
School of Pharmacy	3
Southampton Solent University	43
St George's Hospital Medical School	10
St Mary's University College	9
St Mary's University College, Twickenham	12
Stranmillis University College	3
Swansea Metropolitan University	20
Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance	8
Trinity University College	2
UHI Millennium Institute	8
University Campus Suffolk	32
University College Birmingham	17
University College Falmouth	24
University College Plymouth St Mark and St John	18
University for the Creative Arts	43
University of London (Institutes and activities)	24
University of Wales Institute, Cardiff	34
University of West London	28
Wales (central functions), The University of	15
Wales, Lampeter, The University of	9
Wales, Newport, The University of	23
West of Scotland, The University of the	4
Winchester, The University of	23
Worcester, The University of	39
Writtle College	25

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