

Report on Physics Wellbeing Survey, July 2020

Summary:

A survey of Physics staff and PhD/Masters students was conducted online for one week 20- 27 May 2020. The results provide a snapshot of wellbeing across the department 9 weeks after government restrictions were imposed.

The detailed analysis is below, showing how respondents from the different staff and student groups felt their wellbeing has been impacted. All groups engaged, with the largest number of responses from the PhD /Masters students. All responses were anonymous unless individuals chose to give their name.

Unsurprisingly a large proportion of respondents reported that the department closing because of Covid-19 has impacted on their mental wellbeing in some way. There were many positives (no commute, no school run, spending more time with family, more flexibility, more time for exercise and hobbies) and many negatives (impact on work/life balance, anxiety about future, lack of social interaction, lack of childcare). There is a clearly a debate to be had across the university about what a return to “normal” working will look like and how working from home could factor into this.

Increased stress, anxiety, low mood and sleep problems were reported across all groups. Feeling isolated was a common contributing factor. As was changes in workload; for some groups this is likely to have been an increase or redistribution of tasks, and with others a decrease in activity. A lack of daily structure was a common contributing factor, as was balancing work with childcare and caring responsibilities with schools, nurseries and other support structures closed. Overall PhD/Masters students reported the highest impact on mental wellbeing, suffering from more anxiety and low mood, and their comments revealed more instances of feeling isolated (in some cases living and working in a single room) and concern about completion of their studies and the impact on their future careers.

With lockdown now eased there are some factors which may now be having less of an impact, for example feeling isolated, and for experimental groups and technical staff also the opportunity to return to lab work and face to face social interaction with colleagues. However other factors are likely to be ongoing, for example staff and students continuing to work from home with only virtual interactions with colleagues (in some cases no longer local to Warwick) and a lack of childcare now and over the summer.

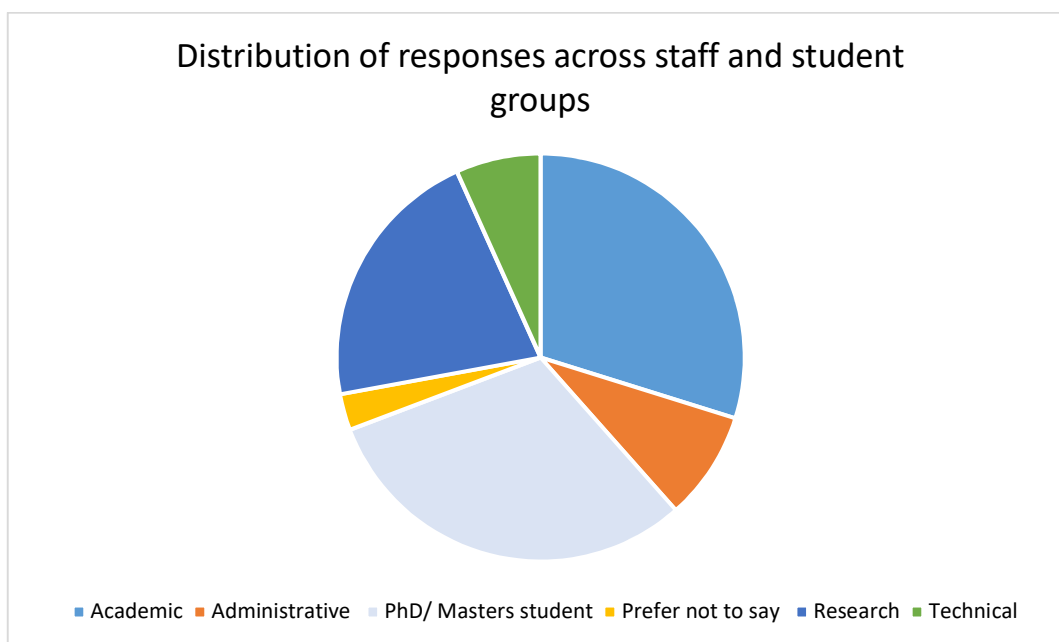
Survey analysis:

There were 104 responses to the survey, breakdown here by gender:

Staff or student group	No. of responses by gender				Total
	Female	Male	Other	Prefer not to say	
Academic	7	24			31
Administrative	7	2			9
PhD/ Masters student	10	18	2	2	32
Prefer not to say	3	0			3

Research	6	15		1	22
Technical	0	7			7
Total	33	66	2	3	104

And here by staff and student groups:



Response to Q3: Think about the changes in working practice that you have experienced since the Department closed due to the Covid-19 situation and how you feel now.

Please state one change that you feel has had a positive impact on your mental wellbeing and one change that has had a negative impact on your mental wellbeing.

The most common answers are **highlighted**.

Change that has had a positive impact	Change that has had a negative impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No commute • No school run • More time to think • More time with family • More time outside • More flexibility to do hobbies, sport and other activities around working • Able to make more time for exercise • Less competitive than in the office • More involvement in home schooling/learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No separation between home and work • Missing social interaction • Balancing work and caring responsibilities, in particular child care • Uncertainty about the future, including job prospects • Working hours around other commitments mean early/late working • Loss of daily structure • Not being able to implement new ideas • Worrying about colleagues/ students

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More relaxed environment with supervisor/ line manager • More frequent structured contact with supervisor/ line manager • Improved working environment (in particular more natural light) • Able to take a proper lunch break • Opportunity to learn new ways of working and learning • None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of face to face meetings • Lack of informal interactions • Stressful to receive emails at all hours/days because of different working patterns are being adopted • No access to labs, unable to implement new research ideas • Missing family and friends • Not able to travel • Less work related stimulus • Poor desk/PC set up • More time sat in front of computer screen • Lack of motivation • Feeling under pressure to be productive all the time
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Response to Q4: Have you been experiencing the following more or less than usual since the Department closed due to the Covid-19 situation?

	No. of hits	% of total	Academic	Admin	PhDs	Research	Tech
A little or a lot more stress than usual	63	61%	68%	56%	69%	50%	57%
A little or a lot more anxiety than usual	62	60%	55%	67%	72%	45%	86%
A little or a lot more low mood than usual	53	51%	32%	56%	72%	55%	43%
A little or a lot more sleep problems	45	43%	16%	56%	69%	36%	71%

All groups reported that the situation had impacted on their wellbeing. Responses where over 50% of a group answered with “a little more” or “a lot more” are highlighted.

Response to Q4a: 4a. If you have answered “a little more than usual” or “much more than usual” above, how much do you agree that any of the following changes in your working practice are contributing to you experiencing any increased anxiety, stress, low mood or sleep problems?

(note the form did not stop anyone from answering this question even if they had not answered “a little more than usual” or “a lot more than usual” to any part of Q4)

	No. of hits	% of total	Academic	Admin	PhDs	Research	Tech
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Change in workload is a contributing factor	46	44%	55%	67%	34%	32%	71%
Balancing work with homeschooling/caring responsibilities	37	36%	42%	56%	22%	36%	57%
Feeling isolated/ lack of social contact with colleagues	68	65%	71%	67%	84%	36%	71%
Worries about job security	45	43%	48%	56%	34%	50%	43%
Concerns about other team members/ colleagues	49	47%	58%	56%	53%	27%	43%
Lack of daily structure	52	50%	32%	67%	75%	32%	71%
Technological/administrative issues	36	35%	45%	44%	34%	18%	43%
Some other reason	24	23%	13%	33%	34%	18%	29%

Response to Q5: Have you contacted the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) or Wellbeing Services whilst the restrictions have been in place?

Four respondents (all PhD students) reported contacting wellbeing services and rated the service good or very good.

Response to Q6: Do you have any other comments about changes in your working practice?

Comments generally related to how much many staff and students enjoyed working from home. Others have found it very isolating and lonely. Some have found it extremely difficult without childcare. Many worries about work/life balance and motivation/productivity levels. Many concerns in particular from staff on fixed term contracts and PhD students on future job prospects and next steps. And general questions raised about planning and the return to campus and to labs.