Well-being at Queen Mary University of London

An evidence-based review of experiences of staff work stress, work-life balance and bullying and harassment

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About Affinity Health at Work

Affinity Health at Work is a niche occupational health psychology consultancy and research group, with a focus on workplace health, well-being and engagement. The company was founded in 2006 by a multi-award winning team, Emma Donaldson-Feilder, Dr Joanna Yarker and Dr Rachel Lewis. Our aim is to make a tangible difference in the way workplaces function – to humanise the workplace by improving levels of employee health and well-being and enhancing people management and leadership skills. We work with a wide range of clients in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors, using an evidence-based approach to help employers and managers improve employee well-being, engagement and performance. We are passionate about creating outputs that are both directly applicable and useful to practitioners and are accessible to all and are unique in the profession as we sit across both academia and practice.

AHAW Acknowledgements

We are appreciative of those working within QMUL who gave up their time to participate in the interviews and focus groups and engaged in open and constructive discussions about their work at QMUL.
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1. Background and project aims

Two successive Queen Mary University of London (QMUL) staff surveys, in 2014 and 2016, have identified stress and bullying and harassment as areas requiring improvement for Queen Mary University of London. The 2014 survey provided by Capita drew from the HSE Management Standards and identified priority areas for improvement, particularly in the areas of demands and relationships (including bullying and harassment); while the 2016 survey focused on staff engagement and indicated that only a third of staff feel that there are effective policies and practices to support them if they experience stress or pressure. Academic staff reported poorer work-life balance compared to non-academic staff.

In response to the staff surveys, QMUL has taken action in two ways: i) through centrally managed activity including the introduction of well-being activities, a strategic review of leadership training, a project to focus on dignity at work among others and ii) through encouraging departments and Professional Services groups to identify action plans. To complement this activity, and with awareness that predominantly non-academic staff had participated in this years’ well-being week, QMUL were keen to develop a strategic approach to improving well-being at work.

QMUL approached Affinity Health at Work to identify the contributing factors to work stress, work-life balance, and bullying and harassment in academic and Professional Services staff. More specifically:

- To analyse and explore existing data
- To follow-up with all staff (but ensuring good representation from academic staff who have had low engagement with well-being interventions) to better understand the causes of stress and work life balance, and bullying and harassment
- To provide recommendations to help QMUL develop a strategic approach to support the management and prevention of stress, bullying and harassment and promote positive work and well-being.

2. Introduction to Well-being at work

The business case for managing well-being at work is stronger than ever before. Estimates suggest that around 15% of people at work have symptoms of an existing mental health condition and that over 0.5 million workers are currently suffering from work stress, anxiety and depression, resulting in 12.5 million lost working days (Stevenson & Farmer, 2017; HSE, 2017). The annual cost to UK employers is between £33 billion and £42 billion (with over half of this cost coming from presenteeism, when individuals are less productive due to poor mental health in work) with additional costs from sickness absence and staff turnover (Stevenson & Farmer, 2017). The analysis conducted by Deloitte in the Stevenson and Farmer report (2017) demonstrated that where investments had been made in improving mental health at work, there had been a consistently positive return on investment with one study citing the ROI to be £9.98 for each pound spent.

The challenges to managing work stress and work-life balance within UK Universities are not new. In 2004, Kinman and Jones produced a report for the AUT highlighting the impact of the changing landscape of higher education on academic and academic-related staff on staff health and well-
being. It could be said that the changes have come ever faster, and the demands placed on staff ever higher.

**Work stress**

The Health and Safety Executive (2016) defines work related stress as “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them at work.” In itself stress is not an illness, it is a state, but if stress is experienced for an extended time it can result in mental and physical illness, and can impact on behaviour. A number of theories have informed our understanding of the impact of work on health.

There is a large body of evidence to help us understand which aspects of work cause, or exacerbate, work stress. Regardless of sector and country, aspects of work have consistently been found to cause stress if poorly managed.

**Work-life balance**: Over the last three decades there has been a growing body of evidence demonstrating that work increasingly ‘spills over’ into the non-work domain. This spill over has a number of negative consequences for individuals and organisations, impacting performance due to the limited respite and recovery time. For academic staff, the open-ended nature of their work and the pursuit of contributing to new knowledge make balance particularly difficult to achieve. Importantly however, it is not only the number of hours worked that should be considered but also the nature of work that is being completed in these hours. Perceptions of imbalance are exacerbated when work hours are spent on tasks that are not core to their role. Poor work-life balance is often an outcome of a work environment where work demands are high and control over work and work scheduling is poor, and as such can be encompassed by the HSE Management Standards described below.

**Bullying and harassment** are of increasing concern in the workplace. Bullying has been defined as “workplace bullying occurs when an employee is subjected to repeated and persistent negative social acts over a period of time through which the perpetrator intends to cause harm or negatively affect the targeted employee” Samnani, Singh & Ezzedeen (2013). Bullying can be overt or manipulative and difficult to detect. An individual may be being bullied but not recognise it as such, while another individual may recognise the behaviours of others as bullying without this being the case. This complexity makes it difficult to define and often results in problems in reporting and addressing bullying in organisations. The key features of bullying and harassment are included in the HSE Management Standards described below.

The UK Health and Safety Executive’s Management Standards for Work Stress (HSE, 2016) outline six areas of work that have the potential to cause harm, if not properly managed:

- **Demands**: such as work load and work patterns
- **Control**: the influence employees have on how they do their work
- **Support**: such as resources and encouragement given to employees by line managers, colleagues and the organisation
- **Relationships**: such as bullying and conflict experienced at work
- **Change**: the communication and management of organisational change
- **Role**: role clarity and absence of role conflict
Stress at work occurs when there is disparity between the job requirements (listed above) and the resources (financial, emotional or material) and capability (skills and knowledge) of the worker to deal with the job demands (HSE, 2016).

The duty of care that organisations have to their employees for work-related stress is set out in both statutory and common law. Organisations are expected to be proactive in their approach to managing stress at work: organisations should take steps to identify significant and foreseeable risks to employee health; prevent harm that is foreseeable and caused by work; and consider any physical or mental impairment that has an impact on an employee's ability to work and make reasonable adjustments where appropriate.

There are many interventions – or activities – that organisations can put in place to ensure a comprehensive approach to managing work stress and supporting the health of their employees.

These interventions fall into three broad categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of intervention</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preventative</td>
<td>Designed to eliminate or decrease stressors at work before the employee suffers stress at work</td>
<td>Risk assessment, clear policies and practices, work redesign, job redesign, job enrichment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Designed to give employees tools that are necessary for them to cope with the stressful conditions with the aim of ameliorating stress</td>
<td>Education and training for example in mindfulness, bullying and harassment or identifying stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary</td>
<td>Reactive – designed to treat employees who have health conditions because of work stress symptoms</td>
<td>Counselling, access to EAP, phased return to work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is good practice to have a range of interventions in place to support staff well-being to ensure that steps are taken to prevent stress where possible, ameliorate stress for those who are at risk and have reactive provisions of support for those who have been harmed. This is important in light of the duty of care for organisations – where an issue is foreseeable, reasonable steps should be made to eliminate the stressor. Where steps have not been taken to address the source of the issue, there needs to be adequate secondary and tertiary provision in place.
The need for organisations to prioritise mental health has been highlighted in the recent report ‘Thriving at Work: The Stevenson/Farmer review of mental health and employers’ (2017). Following an independent review of evidence and wide scale consultation, the report outlines six recommendations that even the smallest of employers can take forward. These steps include:

1. Produce, implement and communicate a mental health at work plan
2. Develop mental health awareness among employees
3. Encourage open conversations about mental health and the support available when employees are struggling
4. Provide your employees with good working conditions
5. Promote effective people management
6. Routinely monitor employee mental health and wellbeing.

The findings of this report, and the recommendations made, are considered in light of the established UK approach, the HSE Management Standards to Work Stress, and the emerging government focus on prioritising mental health at work.
3. **Our approach**

Informed by evidence-based practice and participatory action research, this project incorporated four stages of data collection.

**Stage 1: Understanding the existing data held by QMUL**
- Reviewed 2014 and 2016 survey results and reports
- Identified key themes across the data

**Stage 2: Interviews with key stakeholders**
- Interviewed key stakeholders in internal functions
- Interviews focused on:
  - Causes of stress, work-life balance and bullying
  - Management practices and policies
  - Barriers and facilitators to good practice

**Stage 3: Interviews with Heads of Schools and Administrative leads**
- Concerns facing staff and barriers and facilitators to wellbeing were discussed
- Any school objectives for the workshop were discussed and the best way to engage staff with regards to the workshop was identified

**Stage 4: Focus groups with academic and professional services staff**
- The following were discussed:
  - Underlying causes of work stress
  - Underlying causes of bullying and harassment
  - Drivers and barriers to engagement

At Stage 1 and 2, the perspectives from all employees across QMUL were considered. In-depth analyses were conducted on eight departments: two within each of the three academic Faculties and two within Professional Services. The eight departments were identified by HR. The selection of departments was not based on criteria related to well-being but rather with the aim of gathering a range of perspectives from across the university. It was also anticipated that each department would have aspects of good practice that could be gathered and shared. These included:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty of Science and Engineering</th>
<th>School of Biological and Chemical Sciences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School of Physics and Astronomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences</td>
<td>School of English and Drama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School of Language, Linguistics and Film</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School of Medicine and Dentistry</td>
<td>Bart’s Cancer Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Blizard Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Services</td>
<td>Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stage 1: Understanding the existing data held by QMUL.

Existing data from 2014 and 2016, resultant reports, recommendations and actions were reviewed. Policies and practices in Human Resources (HR), Occupational Health (OH) and other relevant teams, including well-being initiatives, were reviewed to identify areas of strength and development needs.

Two aspects were reviewed:

- Overarching themes across QMUL
- In depth analysis of eight of departments within QMUL. Survey and open text responses specific to each of the Schools participating in the workshops.

Considered together, and with reference to the wider stress management research and practice, this information helped to inform the design of data collection at Stages 2, 3 and 4 and subsequent recommendations.

Stage 2: Interviews with key stakeholders

Interviews with key stakeholders in internal functions provided rich information to help better understand the context within which the academic and Professional Services staff work.

Interviews were held with twelve stakeholders across QMUL including: the Head of Leadership and Professional Development, the Diversity and Inclusion Manager, the Chief Operating Officer, the Well-being Ambassador, the Director of Health and Safety, the Head of Estates Directorate Support, the HR Partner (Humanities and Social Sciences), the Head of HR Operations (Humanities and Social Sciences and Science and Engineering) and the Head of HR Operations (School of Medicine and Dentistry) and Trade Union representatives.

The interviews focused on:

- Underlying causes of work stress, work-life balance and bullying
- Existing management practices, policies and initiatives, and
- Barriers and facilitators to implementing good practice.

One researcher took detailed notes throughout the interviews. Each set of interview notes was reviewed by two researchers and themes identified, discussed and recorded. Together, the information gathered in these interviews provided a comprehensive picture of the strategy and current activities of QMUL with regard to well-being. The interviews also provided an opportunity to gain insight into the stakeholder perceptions of the causes of work stress, work-life balance and bullying and variations among employee roles.
Stage 3: Interviews with Heads of Schools and Administrative leads

Interviews were conducted with Heads of Schools and Heads of Administration in all six of the participating faculty departments to ensure that issues relevant to academic, Professional Services, and technical staff were considered. Interviews were also conducted with the Head of IT Services and the Director of Finance.

The interviews aimed to understand the local context from the perspective of leaders focusing particularly on work stress, work-life balance and bullying and harassment. The interviews aimed to:

- Understand the culture of well-being and bullying and harassment within their school
- Identify the impact of changes experienced in the last six months – systems, policies, management
- Sense-check the validity of the staff survey results and what school level actions had been taken as a result of staff survey feedback
- Elucidate the causes of work stress, work-life imbalance and bullying and harassment, and the barriers and facilitators to achieving well-being for employees
- To develop an agreed plan for the school level focus groups.

During the interviews, the issues affecting both them and their staff were discussed. To ensure buy-in to the project, and to mitigate any conflicts with existing related activities, Heads of Schools were also provided with an opportunity to identify the best way to engage staff within their school and also to identify if there was anything that they would like to achieve from the focus groups, in addition to the wider QMUL objectives. This also gave managers an opportunity to meet the facilitator and ask any questions about the process.

Stage 4: Focus groups with academic and Professional Services staff

Six focus groups were conducted, four within faculties and two within Professional Services. For the most part, schools indicated a preference to run separate focus groups for academic and Professional Services staff.

Invitations to the focus groups were framed differently dependent on the school. This was decided as an appropriate course of action to ensure that this activity did not conflict with any other ongoing activities within the departments and to ensure that where possible the focus groups could benefit the school as well as the wider well-being project.

Attendance varied between schools both in terms of participant numbers and demographics. For example within ITS, the focus group provided an opportunity to understand the manager perspective and for managers to explore solutions to improve working practices. The Blizard Institute and Bart’s Cancer Institute opened the focus group to administrative and early career academics and academic and technical staff respectively.

No volunteers came forward from technical or administration within the School of English and Drama of the School of Physics and Astronomy; and focus groups for the School of Biological and Chemical Sciences and the School of Language, Linguistics and Film could not be arranged within the timeframes of this project.
It is important to note that focus group participants were not necessarily representative of the school, however care was taken in each session to explore the extent to which experiences were generalised to colleagues. The composition of the focus groups is outlined below in table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Roles</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School of English and Drama</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School of Physics and Astronomy</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blizard Institute</td>
<td>Admin and Early career/ post doc</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bart’s Cancer Institute</td>
<td>Academic and technical</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>Senior management</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Focus group participants

During the focus groups, the project was introduced and the focus on work stress, work-life balance and bullying and harassment was outlined. Many focus groups incorporated a short discussion on what ‘well-being’, ‘stress’ and ‘bullying’ actually mean. Attendees were asked to focus on specific questions and the discussions were facilitated around these:

1. What well-being initiatives are you aware of? What helps keep you healthy and happy at work?
2. What are the barriers that stop you from doing your job well? Specifically, what are the underlying causes/issues regarding i) work stress, ii) work-life balance and iii) bullying and harassment?
3. What recommendations should be taken forward for consideration? Participants were asked to think of recommendations in terms of three levels: to i) QMSE, ii) Management (school/department specific) and iii) Individual/team level.

During the focus groups, attendees were informed that the data would be aggregated and would only be fed back at the group level, therefore comments would not be identifiable.
Analysis and synthesis of findings

All interviews and focus groups were facilitated by one researcher, while detailed notes were taken by a second researcher. All notes were typed up and reviewed by two researchers and themes identified, discussed and recorded. Inductive thematic analysis was used to analyse the notes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is used to identify common themes in data; researchers familiarise themselves with the data, code the data and themes are then developed and revised. Inductive thematic analysis means that the codes and development of the themes are driven by the content of the data, in this case, the interview and focus group data. Thematic analysis is very flexible and enables detailed and rich analysis of the data. In this research, two researchers read the detailed interview and focus group notes and coded the data identifying key elements of the data; the codes were then examined to identify key themes within the data; to ensure there was inter-rater agreement coding was subsequently discussed and reviewed enabling common themes to be identified.

In order to maintain anonymity, themes raised during the interviews with Stakeholders and Heads of Schools/Departments are only reported where the themes were prevalent in more than two interviews. They are then reported collectively. Only where there was agreement from the majority of the focus groups participants regarding the theme has the theme been reported in the findings to avoid individual opinion or localised issues directing the research.

The four sources of information gathered in Stages 1, 2, 3 and 4 were then considered by the research team to identify common university wide themes within the data. Together, and with reference to the wider research and practice, the team identified gaps between existing policy and practice and staff well-being needs. Specifically, similarities and differences between groups were explored and case studies of good practice were identified.
4. Findings

In this section we present the findings of each of the four stages of data collection followed by a synthesis of the findings.

To understand the context of the findings, it is important to understand the structure of QMUL. The Queen Mary Senior Executive (QMSE) advises the Principal on the day to day management of the college and the long-term future, it is the academic senior management team and consists of the Principal, seven Vice-Principals, the Chief Operating Officer, Chief Strategy Officer and the Finance Director. The Senate oversees the College’s academic activity and consists of the Principal, Vice-Principals, Student Union representatives, Heads of Schools, Deans of Research and elected students and academic staff. Council is responsible for overseeing the strategic mission, directors and affairs of the university and consists of 21 members, 12 of whom are external.

4.1 Stage 1: Understanding the existing data held by QMUL.

The research team reviewed the 2014 and 2016 survey results for QMUL and the 2016 survey results for each of the participating eight departments. The amount of data was extensive and for the purposes of this report, the top three highest scoring questions and the bottom three lowest scoring questions are outlined. Two further questions are compared: “I am able to strike the right balance between my work and home life” and “Have you experienced bullying and/or harassment in the last 12 months?”

It is important to note that the findings that follow are drawn from 2016 and may not reflect the current day situation within QMUL. A number of changes have been implemented since the surveys were completed. Notably, six of the eight departments have a new Head and in March 2017 a new Principal was appointed.

The key findings from the analysis of the 2016 survey data are:

- Across QMUL employees find their work interesting, with up to 92% of respondents in some schools reporting that this is the case.
- For many, their work gives them a sense of personal accomplishment.
- Across QMUL employees felt that QMSE does not listen to or respond to their views.
- Across QMUL, employees felt that communication between different parts of QMUL is ineffective.
- For many, when changes are made, they do not feel they are for the better.
- For many, it is difficult to achieve a balance between work and home.
- Within some departments, bullying or harassment has been experienced by up to 12% of respondents.

Table 2 shows the top three rated questions from the 2016 data and indicates that there is a shared sense of purpose whereby staff feel that the work they are doing is interesting and gives a sense of accomplishment. The survey data was summarised at the beginning of the Head of School interviews and focus groups to sense check whether the findings reflected the current feelings in the department. Two issues were notable:
i) There was a strong sense within the academic faculties that when given the opportunity to do their work (i.e. research and teaching) it is interesting and rewarding, however many felt that the elements that led to personal accomplishment were conducted out of core work hours.

ii) While some themes identified in the surveys carried forward to 2017, there had been many changes – particularly at Head of School/Department level – and were not necessarily reflective of the current situation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>School of Biological and Chemical Sciences</th>
<th>School of Physics and Astronomy</th>
<th>School of English and Drama</th>
<th>School of Language, Linguistics and Film</th>
<th>Bart’s Cancer Institute</th>
<th>Blizard Institute</th>
<th>Finance</th>
<th>IT Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My work is interesting to me</td>
<td>♦</td>
<td>♦</td>
<td>♦</td>
<td>♦</td>
<td>♦</td>
<td>♦</td>
<td>♦</td>
<td>♦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My work gives me a feeling of personal accomplishment</td>
<td>♦</td>
<td>♦</td>
<td>♦</td>
<td>♦</td>
<td>♦</td>
<td>♦</td>
<td>♦</td>
<td>♦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My work makes good use of my skills and abilities</td>
<td>♦</td>
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<td>♦</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My manager/supervisor/appraiser is approachable</td>
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<td>♦</td>
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<tr>
<td>My institute/school/directorate delivers a good service to students and other service users</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>♦</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think the university respects individual differences (e.g. cultures, working styles, backgrounds, ideas, race, gender, disability, religion/belief, sexual orientation)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>♦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I see how my role contributes to the success of the University</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>♦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The people in my team are willing to help each other even if this means doing something outside their usual activities</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>♦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am clear about what I am expected to achieve in my job</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>♦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would recommend QMUL as a great place to study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>♦</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2:** The three highest scoring questions for each of the eight departments/schools from the 2016 data.
Table 3 below summarises the three lowest scoring questions from the 2016 data for each of the eight departments. This table shows that staff across QMUL feel that QMSE do not listen and respond to issues raised and that they are dissatisfied with the quality of communication across QMUL. The interview and focus group participants confirmed that this was still the case and that these aspects underpinned many of the challenges facing staff. In both the Finance and IT Services focus groups participants noted that the responses regarding department leadership would be different if the survey was distributed now given the change in leadership.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School of Biological and Chemical Sciences</th>
<th>School of Physics and Astronomy</th>
<th>School of English and Drama</th>
<th>School of Language, Linguistics and Film</th>
<th>Bart’s Cancer Institute</th>
<th>Blizard Institute</th>
<th>Finance</th>
<th>IT Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Queen Mary Senior Executive listens to and responds to the views of staff</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the whole, different parts of QMUL communicate effectively with each other</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When changes are made they are usually for the better</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
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<td>•</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe QMUL’s strategy will lead to improvements in the next 12 months</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have confidence in the leadership of my smd/faculty/Professional Services senior management team</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My institute/school/directorate leadership listens to and responds to the views of staff</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
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<td>•</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: The three lowest scoring questions for each of the eight departments/schools from the 2016 survey data.

Table 4 overleaf shows that the percentage of staff achieving the right balance between work and home life varies greatly between departments. Note, this does not necessarily reflect the total number of hours worked but rather whether they believe the balance is right. There is a trend however towards a poor work-life balance across the schools and departments. There is a lack of awareness around any policies/practices that are in place to help employees if they are experiencing stress. Furthermore, survey responses indicated that bullying and harassment is an issue across QMUL. It is important to note that this data is now over two years old and discussions within focus groups suggest that unacceptable behaviour is widespread across QMUL.
I am able to strike the right balance between my work and home life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School of Biological and Chemical Sciences</th>
<th>School of Physics and Astronomy</th>
<th>School of English and Drama</th>
<th>School of Language, Linguistics and Film</th>
<th>Bart’s Cancer Institute</th>
<th>Blizard Institute</th>
<th>Finance</th>
<th>IT Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am able to strike the right balance between my work and home life</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are effective policies/practices in place to support me if I experience stress or pressure</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you personally experienced bullying and/or harassment at work in the last 12 months (Yes)</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you experienced bullying and/or harassment in the last 12 months (Prefer not to say)</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4: Work-life balance and bullying and harassment data from the 2016 survey data**

**Analysis of open text:**

Open text comments drawn from the staff surveys were also analysed. No open text comments were provided for the School of Physics and Astronomy and Finance because the number of responses were too low to maintain anonymity.

Five themes were identified in response to the question *What is the one thing that QMUL needs to change to make this a better place to work?*:

i) **Managing change – Consultation and participation in decision making:** A large number of open text responses from those employed within the schools noted a frustration with the way that change is managed at QMUL. This is in stark contrast to Central Services where few open text comments related to managing change. Academic staff reported that central initiatives are implemented with minimal consultation. It was felt by some that decisions are imposed by the leadership team with little or no opportunity for discussion and with a lack of regard for professional expertise.

ii) **Managing change – Communication:** The pace of change is fast and more open and widespread communication would be welcomed. This includes communication between different departments/institutes, between departments and Professional Services, and vertically between senior management, school management and staff.
iii) Lack of prioritisation: A number of comments pointed to increased, often conflicting priorities. Increasing demands (for more publications, greater research income, higher student numbers) were not seen to be prioritised by senior staff nor considered in light of the additional resources required (time, skillset, teaching space). There is a sense of being told to do more.

iv) Line Management: Some open text comments highlighted the lack of effective communication from direct line managers and heads of schools. Examples of bullying or unproductive behaviour from line managers were also described.

v) Estates: The quality and size of some teaching rooms and offices were not considered fit for purpose. Two issues in particular can be seen in the open text: a lack of parity across the campuses and, the frustration felt by the pressure to recruit more students without adequate space to teach them.

4.2 Stage 2: Interviews with key stakeholders

There was a high degree of overlap between themes identified in key stakeholder interviews and other sources of data collected. These themes are reported as part of the synthesised findings to save repetition.

Two themes emerged from the stakeholder interviews that were not identified in other stages of data collection and underpin a number of the issues described by staff at all levels throughout this report:

Absence of a health and well-being strategy: There was consensus that well-being is not seen as a priority for QMSE. QMSE has not taken the results from previous staff surveys seriously enough and this has eroded trust in how effective any intervention will be. It was felt that there is a general preference to sweep negative messages – such as poor work-life balance or high incidence of bullying and harassment – under the carpet and hope that they will go away.

Many within the stakeholder group were aware of the well-being week held once a year and the Employee Assistance Programme available to staff. However, there was also recognition that these measures are not enough. Preventative action is required – through the management of demands and resources in particular - to address the source of stress.

Managerial skills across QMUL were thought to be poor, both within Professional Services and academic faculties, with limited training opportunities available to equip managers with the skills to manage teams. The new role of Leadership and Professional Development will go some way towards supporting management training and development, but only if this is well resourced and modelled from the top.

Central to this issue however is the lack of ownership. There is no one department or individual that has taken ownership of staff health and well-being. Occupational Health now sits within HR to manage absence cases and referrals but the focus is on supporting those who are returning to work, rather than preventing absence; HR lead the well-being week and a number of associated activities; while the legal obligations for monitoring and preventing work stress lie with the Health
and Safety team. A working group with membership of H&S, OH and HR was formed but this last met on 26th July 2017. There is no clear lead department or individual responsible. It was felt that this lack of ownership has meant that no clear strategy has been developed and there is no coherence to the activities that have been put in place to address staff health and well-being.

It was also reported that three cases of work-related stress were investigated by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) last year. While the HSE were satisfied that reasonable action had been taken, the lack of a preventative strategy places the organisation at risk for future investigations.

For those who were aware of the introduction of the Wellbeing Ambassador role at VP level, this came as a clear signal that staff health and well-being is moving up the agenda. However this role needs to be supported by internal Professional Services and representation within each of the Professional Services departments and faculties if the role is to have the desired impact. There is also a need to consider the skills sets of those who support this work. The lack of focus on health and well-being within QMUL thus far, and the interviews with stakeholders suggests that knowledge and understanding of psychological and social factors that are important at work is limited. There may be need to up-skill existing staff, or bring in outside advice, to help develop the knowledge and skills of those working in Occupational Health, Health and Safety and Human Resources to take this work forward.

Key stakeholders not part of QMSE decision making process: A number of interviewees indicated that those responsible for delivering the Professional Services are not part of the QMSE decision making process. While they are responsible for delivering the solution, they have limited opportunities to present their case and are not party to many of the discussions that lead to the final decision. Since the start of this project, the Director of Finance has also joined QMSE.

4.3 Stage 3: Interviews with Heads of Schools and Administrative leads

There was a high degree of overlap between themes identified in Head of School/ Department interviews and other sources of data collected. Again, these themes are reported as part of the synthesised findings to save repetition. No themes were unique to Heads of Schools/ Departments and Administrative leads.

Interestingly however, a number of themes were reported across the focus groups and stakeholder interviews but not by Heads of Schools/ Departments and administrative leads.

- lack of decision making authority, accountability or empowerment
- the high turnover of Professional Services staff
- the communication between departments

These findings suggest that Head of Schools may be somewhat shielded from the day to day frustrations that more junior faculty staff experience in these areas.
4.4 Stage 4 Focus groups with academic and Professional Services staff

There was a high degree of overlap between themes identified in the focus groups and other sources of data collected. These themes are reported as part of the synthesised findings to save repetition.

However, themes emerged from the focus groups that were not raised by stakeholders or Head of Schools/Departments:

**Perceived lack of parity between faculties and departments re: facilities, work practices:** All focus groups discussions compared the resources, workload, training opportunities, facilities and/or management styles within their department to other departments – each feeling that they were being disadvantaged as compared to wider QMUL.

**Communication between departments (e.g. HR and finance):** The lack of a joined up approach between Professional Services, and the expectation that the introduction of new systems would facilitate this, caused on-going frustration for many. The need to complete multiple forms with the same information for different purposes e.g. recruiting was seen to take up a lot of time unnecessarily.

**HR – Reporting processes and support for bullying and harassment:** There was agreement that the processes and support available for those being bullied or harassed were not clear. A number of focus group participants indicated that they would not know what to do or who to turn to, and there were a number of personal or observed examples where approaches were made to either line managers or HR but where no further support was given. There was a lack of confidence in HR’s ability to offer effective support for bullying and harassment. The approach was perceived to be one of ‘register a formal complaint and we will start the process, or put up with it’.

**Tone of communication:** Many focus group participants reported that the tone of communications across QMUL was often inappropriate, lacking a human element. This was particularly the case for emails.

**Admin creep:** Many staff, particularly academics noted that the amount of administration required has increased over the last two years in particular. Documentation and processes have been standardised across the QMUL and this has led to a number of layers of paperwork, some of which is not deemed to be relevant to their discipline. Interestingly, this was not recognised in the manager or stakeholder interviews. Academics are required to complete an increasing number of tasks that do not require professional academic judgement and this has an impact on workload and their satisfaction in the role. There is a sense that the amount of administration required has crept up and consumes many academics with no ability to push back or request a review of the bigger picture.

**Volume of lower skilled work:** Aligned with the additional administrative tasks, the majority of focus group participants – across academic and Professional Services departments - indicated that they were increasingly doing work that could be completed by administrators or more sophisticated IT systems and did not use their skill set appropriately.
Insecurity for contract staff: Many departments rely on contract staff to support teaching and research. Supporting contract staff has long been an issue within HEI however it was felt that departments are increasingly reliant on contract staff to help deliver growing courses offering little reward or security in return. With fewer FTE positions being advertised there was a feeling of unease that these staff are not being treated fairly.

Pockets of work stress requiring priority action: The composition of the focus groups within each of the Schools/ Department was different. However it is important to also reflect in this report that there were a number of occasions within the School focus groups that staff mentioned that they, or others they knew, were at breaking point. There was a sense of a strong commitment to QMUL, and to their job of teaching and research, but that actions to address the sources of work stress need to be taken. The high demands placed on them, and the increasing lack of control over work, were at the core. This reflects the wider need to address the key sources of stress reported here, as well as improve the support offered to those who are suffering but not yet absent from work due to work stress.
5. Combined findings

In this section, the findings from across the four data collection stages are combined and presented in a quick view format. Major themes are discussed and where appropriate, differences between Stakeholder, Head of School and Employee focus group perspectives are highlighted.

5.1 Positive aspects of work that protect and foster well-being

Interviews and focus groups identified a number of positive aspects of work. There are many good practices that could be shared across departments that have been reported to boost employee satisfaction with work, and could help to buffer some of the sources of work stress felt by staff. These are presented in Table 5. More specifically:

**Good relationships with colleagues**: There was an over-riding sense of strong collegiate relationships within each of the departments. There was a high level of regard for professional expertise within each of the departments. In the focus groups, it was agreed that these relationships were often what helped them manage the challenges faced at work.

**Athena Swan and flexible work practices**: The introduction of Athena Swan and flexible work practices were seen by many as helpful and allowed individuals to manage home commitments, for example, allowing staff to pick up children from school. While the ability to work flexibly was positive feature, two issues were identified:

i) Alone, this does not address issue of work-life balance. For many, while flexible working allowed them to fulfil home duties, they then needed to work late into the night or at weekends to complete their work.

ii) It was recognised that access to flexible work was very much at the discretion of the line manager and that it is always initiated by the employee. To maximise benefits to work-life balance and to be a route to demonstrate care for employees, it was felt that this should be something that is led by the line manager.

**Consultative approach**: A good example of a consultative approach was discussed in the Blizard focus group. In response to the need to grow student numbers, course academics were asked to consider what solutions they could suggest and resources they would need to deliver these, and write the appropriate job descriptions. In this way it was felt that staff had input and ownership over the solutions.

**Visibility and approachability of senior leaders**: The approachability of senior leaders was found to be important for those working in the Blizard Institute and Bart’s Cancer Institute. Staff reported that where Senior Managers were present and visible in the building, walking around to talk to staff and inviting staff to meetings, these were seen as positive actions.

**Social committee**: Participants in the Bart’s Cancer Institute spoke highly of the benefits of the staff social committee and the events that were organised. Staff led, with small amounts of funds provided by the Institute, events allowed staff to meet in an informal setting and forge strong relationships. The early career academics in the Blizard Institute had also recently introduced regular events and indicated that these had been both helpful for morale but also for furthering knowledge outside their core area of study.
Clear roles and responsibilities: Where staff indicated that they had a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities, and that there was agreement of these with their manager, this was seen as a positive feature of work.

Specific well-being initiatives: A number of well-being initiatives were discussed by stakeholders, however there was less clarity about what was available to staff within the faculties. While there was awareness within the groups that some events were available (e.g. mindfulness, well-being week) academic staff did not feel that they had time to attend, whereas those outside Mile End highlighted that there was a need to bring events to different campuses to encourage uptake and parity of opportunity. Importantly, within the faculty focus groups the need to address the design of work and management i.e. Issues of workload and systems that are difficult to work with, rather than the need for further training or “sticking plaster” events.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder interviews</th>
<th>School of Biological and Chemical Sciences</th>
<th>School of English and Drama</th>
<th>School of Language, Linguistics and Film</th>
<th>Bart’s Cancer Institute</th>
<th>Blizard Institute</th>
<th>Finance</th>
<th>IT Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good relationships with colleagues</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Athena swan, flexible work</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<td>Social committee, Staff dinners, social events</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear roles, messages to staff</td>
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<td>Visibility of leadership</td>
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<td>1 hour open door drop in with HoD</td>
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<td>Absence managed weekly by line manager</td>
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<td>Institute intranet page with key messages</td>
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<td>Biscuits, catering</td>
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</table>

Table 5: Positive aspects of work
5.2 Aspects of work contributing to work stress, work-life balance and bullying and harassment

Three overarching themes were identified from the focus groups and interviews: Strategic and Cultural; Professional Services; and Department specific. Within each of these three themes, sub-themes were identified. Throughout this section, they are presented below with information relating to whether they were raised in the focus groups, during Head of Department interviews, Stakeholder interviews and whether they were present in the survey data.

### 5.2.1 Strategy and culture for the attention of QMSE

| Lack of clear strategic priorities - everything is the priority | Interviews with Heads of Schools/Departments | Interviews with Stakeholders | Present in Survey | School of Physics and Astronomy | School of English and Drama | Bart’s Cancer Institute | Blizard Institute | Finance | IT Services |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Change and communication | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | °
The Strategic and Cultural aspects of work identified in this study are presented in table 6. The following issues are prioritised given the prevalence across the stages of data collection. These include:

**Lack of clear strategic priorities:** There was general consensus that the strategic priorities of the university were not clear. Everything is important, all of the time: Research funding and publications; Teaching, student pastoral support and satisfaction; Student recruitment and external reach and impact. While it was recognised that there are many challenges facing QMUL, as with other HEIs, two key issues need to be considered alongside the setting of (multiple) priorities: First, these priorities demand different skill-sets in order to be delivered and are very often passed down throughout all levels to junior staff. The knock on effect is that many people are over-stretched and feel they are failing in all areas. Second, the resources and facilities available to achieve the strategic aims need to be available.

**Change and communication:** The number of changes within the university, particularly relating to the systems across Professional Services functions, and the communication of these changes was found to be challenging for many. Consideration of the frequency with which the changes occur, the systems that are implemented, and the co-ordination of communication would better help staff identify salient points and reduce daily distractions. It was also noted that the communications typically reflect top-down decisions rather than achievements of staff or positive messages.

**Lack of decision making authority, accountability or empowerment:** Throughout the focus groups and stakeholder interviews, the lack of decision making authority of staff was identified as a key underlying feature that exacerbated work stress, and had a knock on effect on work-life balance. Across the board – whether it was about expenditure, recruitment, invitations of expert speakers, student issues, changes to teaching – staff reported that they did not feel they had the authority to make decisions that could resolve the situation. Rather, lengthy processes requiring paperwork and multiple signatories are required. This leads to a lack of accountability as all decisions are funnelled up to senior management and resolution is delayed; and staff do not feel they are able to exercise their professional judgement and do the job they were recruited to do. Interestingly, this was only raised by one of the Heads of Department suggesting that there are blockages between faculty/department staff and those in senior leadership either due to process or leadership style.

**Lack of effective performance management:** The absence of an effective performance management system was noted in all focus groups and interviews. The system is seen as not fit for purpose, managerial staff are ill-equipped to manage the conversations in a productive way. Currently, annual appraisals are seen as a tick box exercise. The absence of a performance management framework and line manager skills in discussing performance, means that it is difficult for staff to identify priorities and for managers to manage poor performance where it occurs.

**Lack of confidence that action would be taken as a result of this exercise:** In all but Head of Department interviews, the lack of confidence was noted. There was a high degree of scepticism within the focus groups and for many, it feels that QMUL is aware of the issues facing staff, that they collect ‘endless’ data but do not do anything meaningful about it. The pressures facing staff, particularly in academic roles, stays the same. There was a strong hope that as this project brings together different sources of information that actions will be taken.
5.2.2 Professional Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Services v academic disconnect</th>
<th>Interviews with Heads of Schools/Departments</th>
<th>Interviews with Stakeholders</th>
<th>Present in Survey</th>
<th>School of Physics and Astronomy</th>
<th>School of English and Drama</th>
<th>Bart's Cancer Institute</th>
<th>Blizard Institute</th>
<th>Finance</th>
<th>IT Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High turn over of Professional Services staff</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT - infrastructure</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estates – quality of facilities</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>❌</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR - Confidence in HR support for difficult issues</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>❌</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>❌</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance - Procedures</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>❌</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>❌</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication between departments (e.g. HR and finance)</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>❌</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>❌</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR – Reporting processes and support for bullying and harassment</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>❌</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>❌</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR - Recruitment processes</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>❌</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Aspects of work relating to Professional Services

The aspects of work relating to Professional Services raised across the stages of data collection are summarised in table 7. Specifically these included:

**Professional Service and academic disconnect:** Across the focus groups and interviews it was clear that there was a disconnect between Professional Services and academic functions. While individual value and expertise was recognised when individual relationships are formed, there is an underlying disrespect of each others’ contribution and role. This is likely to be exacerbated by the high staff turnover in Professional Services teams as individual relationships have become more transient. Within stakeholder interviews and focus groups, there were occasions where academics were described as arrogant, disrespectful of rules and difficult. The majority of Professional Services staff felt that policies and procedures are all clear and available online and should be followed. Where these were not followed, Professional Services saw the reason to be deliberate, or due to arrogance. There were many occasions where academics felt that Professional Services functions had a tendency to ‘tell the academics what to do all the time’, with little respect for their professional opinion or expertise. There was a general feeling from academics that they are on the front line, bringing in the income and delivering the purpose, and therefore they should be telling Professional Services what they need and what to do. There is a fundamental lack of understanding of roles and professional expertise that needs to be addressed in order to improve communications.
High turnover of Professional Services staff: The flow of staff has been unsettling for many. This has eroded personal relationships within and across faculties and departments. Within Professional Services it was noted that this often led to increased workload and exacerbated fire-fighting as they are operating with fewer staff. Where staff are replaced there is often a delay which means that there is no effective handover leading to a loss of knowledge. For academic staff, the high turnover of Professional Services staff exacerbated the disconnect mentioned above as it is seen to be representative of a lack of loyalty to QMUL.

Communication between departments: Within the focus groups it was noted that the communication between various Professional Services departments was not good. This was particularly an issue for those within faculties where it was thought that communication with one department should automatically trigger action by another – for example between HR and finance when recruiting new staff or setting up a new module/course, or between the research office and finance when starting a new project.

IT infrastructure: A number of systems were not seen to be fit for purpose and the lack of systems sharing information was seen to be problematic. Many academics reported using variations of similar systems in previous organisations where they had worked better while those in Professional Services noted that they would benefit from more sophisticated IT to support their work and free up resource to do more skilled work. An example of this is in HR, where stakeholders and School heads recognised that HR business partners were unable to support more complex people focused issues because they were spending time on setting up HPL contracts and running payroll. The ITS focus group demonstrated that senior managers are both aware of the frustrations and are putting in place actions to develop the service provided. A key issue discussed in the ITS focus group, was the need to improve project governance in order to budget and plan for post-release support.

Estates: The facilities were reported to be variable across the university with teaching rooms and research/junior offices often not fit for purpose. There was also a sense that issues are ‘patched up’ rather than resolved at the source and the turn over means that it is a different trades person that attends to the same problem each time e.g. mould on windows, toilets not flushing. Despite the strong emphasis on growing student numbers, many lecturers reported that the size of lecture theatres was not appropriate and many reported students standing or having to collect additional chairs from adjacent rooms in order to join the lecture.

HR: The interviews and focus groups highlighted that HR has little visibility within the Schools and departments. The role of HR Business Partners seems to vary across Schools and Heads of Schools largely reported that while there were good individual relationships, they were not able to draw on HR to support complex or difficult issues due to a combination of the HR Business Partners’ availability and confidence in their ability to make a difference to the situation i.e. in the cases of bullying or performance management. The recruitment of staff (largely referring to research staff) was seen to be cumbersome and slow, requiring too many sign off points for expenditure that has already been allocated.

Finance: Policies and procedures related to finance, and systems used, were reported to be very process orientated rather than solution focused. It was also reported that there were too many points of sign off even for simple expenditures, often by those so senior and distal that they would not have insight into what they were signing for, that delayed the process. Often decisions are
deferred to others, elongating the time for decisions to be made. Within the Finance focus group, participants indicated that there are many occasions where requests are rejected as they have not followed due process but these are then escalated from the source to Head of School to senior finance and over-ridden. This makes people reluctant to make decisions and therefore they defer upwards.

**Bullying and harassment:** When issues of bullying and harassment were discussed four distinct themes arose:

- Heads of Departments were aware of issues but largely perceived that the issues were misunderstandings that had escalated, and often as a result of the introduction of performance management or because of the absence of a robust performance management process.
- Faculty staff focus groups across departments indicated that they i) did not know where to go or what to do if it were them, ii) they did not have confidence in HR to support them effectively if they did approach them and iii) many had experienced a case being poorly managed due to lack of awareness or manager skill.
- Professional Services staff focus groups and Stakeholder interviews identified that unacceptable behaviour was tolerated when it originates from people who bring in money – behaviour that people ‘just wouldn’t get away with in business no matter how senior’.
- Stakeholders were keenly aware of the prevalence of the issue and the need to equip managers with the skills necessary to performance manage their staff and to better understand and communicate what constitutes bullying and harassment.
- All groups however noted that there is currently no middle ground – if you are not prepared to put in a grievance and make a formal complaint then you do not get any support to manage the issue. This in itself escalates the issue.
## 5.2.3 School and Department level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lack of management training of core skills</th>
<th>Heads of Schools/Departments</th>
<th>Stakeholders</th>
<th>Present in survey</th>
<th>School of Physics and Astronomy</th>
<th>School of English and Drama</th>
<th>Bart’s Cancer Institute</th>
<th>Blizard Institute</th>
<th>Finance</th>
<th>IT Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Toleration of unacceptable behaviour</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tone of communication</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin creep</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Volume of low quality work</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Insecurity for contract staff and post-doc</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Barriers to flexible work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of workload model/transparency of teaching/role allocation</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>CHSQ: All support structures are at Mile End</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tutorial system and pastoral care requirements – ill equipped to manage mental health issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of consultation with staff on departmental issues</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: Aspects of work at the departmental level

The issues raised at the departmental level are presented in table 8. The toleration of unacceptable behaviour is noted here as it is rife within the departments however it is integrated into the section above to reinforce the need for a robust approach to addressing bullying and harassment.

**Lack of management training of core skills**: There was agreement across focus groups and interviews that managers were ill-equipped to support the health and wellbeing of their staff. There was recognition from managers that many managers had grown in to the role due to their technical and professional expertise, and teams had grown under them, without any training in people management skills. This has a direct impact on how performance is managed, the day-to-day communications with individuals, how workload is distributed and the ability to manage upwards and relay successes and concerns to senior management.
6. Conclusions and recommendations

In this section, the findings are synthesised to identify priority actions and present recommendations. Across QMUL there are pockets of excellent practice, and individuals with significant and valued expertise. At the core, the majority of staff find their work interesting and this gives them a sense of accomplishment. There is also optimism and positivity about the changes being made in Finance and ITS as a result of the new leadership. Importantly, there is a hope that, with a refreshed direction under the new Principal and having gone through so much change, as a result of this strategic review taking account of four data sources, that QMUL will take actions to address staff health and well-being.

6.1 Prioritising action

To address work stress, work-life balance and bullying and harassment, there is need to consider the underlying causes. A review of the data, considering all four stages of data collection and analysis, suggests that there are a number of priority areas that require consideration. If these are addressed effectively, it is likely that the prevalence and impact of the remaining issues will lessen. The themes identified across the data are presented below. The themes highlighted in dark blue are seen to be the priority issues. If these are addressed, many of the other issues raised will be resolved or their impact lessened.

There is no point addressing the secondary issues if the priority issues are not addressed first.
6.2 Priorities

Together the findings highlight the need to:

1. Develop a comprehensive health and well-being strategy and build a culture where staff health and well-being is prioritised
2. Set and communicate clear strategic priorities with full consideration of the resource requirements associated
3. Embed a behavioural culture change across the University
4. Empower schools and departments to make decisions
5. Address communication and change management practices
6. Improve decision making authority, accountability and empowerment of staff
7. Develop and implement a robust performance management system that is supported by appropriately skilled staff
8. Address the disconnect between Professional Services functions and academic faculties
9. Provide comprehensive management training for all those with line management responsibility
10. Develop a robust bullying and harassment policy, supported by appropriately skilled staff.

6.3 Considering the research on organisational interventions for health and well-being

What does research tell us about taking action?

Research in to the efficacy of organisational interventions to address health and well-being at work highlights a number of issues that warrant consideration before moving forward:

- There is no one best intervention – a combination of interventions is likely to have the best impact (Montano et al., 2014).
- Change that has strong support from the top and from trade unions has consistently been found to be more effective (e.g. Tregaskis et al., 2013).
- There is growing qualitative evidence that a shared perception of the issues and solutions between leaders and employees is important for interventions to lead to successful outcomes (Hasson et al., 2016). While the findings indicate a high level of agreement between management, stakeholders and employees for a number of issues, consideration should be given to reconciling views prior to taking action where there is a lack of agreement.
- There is need to monitor and evaluate the impact of the activity in greater depth than annual engagement surveys allow. Ongoing evaluation of what is working, and for whom, can help to ensure that changes are made for the better or adapted where they are not working (Nielsen and Miraglia, 2017).
6.4 Recommended actions

This section outlines recommended actions to address the priorities highlighted from the research. These are based on suggestions drawn from the research, good practice observed through our own work with other organisations, and research.

1. **Develop a comprehensive health and well-being strategy and build a culture where staff health and well-being is prioritised.**

   - Identify a lead – this should be someone senior in Occupational Health, Human Resources or Health and Safety who has day-to-day oversight for all activities related to staff health and well-being. This role should report directly to the Health and Wellbeing Ambassador to enable representation at QMSE. It is important that the person in this role has the appropriate skills and knowledge to lead this strategy. This includes an understanding of the impact of work on psychological and social health and well-being and the HSE Management Standards for work stress, and has the personal skills to bring together the respective contributions of HR, OH, and H&S. It is vital that the person in this role is confident to spearhead the new direction and this may require up-skilling of an existing member of staff, or a new member of staff, to take this forward.

   - Refresh and revisit the function and membership of the well-being working group to support the lead. Membership should represent Occupational Health, Human Resources, Health and Safety as well as staff representatives from faculties and departments. It is important to consider the skills and knowledge represented in this group and ensure that there is sufficient expertise in health and wellbeing at work, and the HSE Management Standards for work stress. Furthermore, actions should be spread across the group to ensure a collaborative, multi-disciplinary approach.

   - Measure the impact of activities through multiple avenues including absence and turnover data, pulse surveys during departmental meetings, EAP uptake, engagement survey data.

   - Quarterly reports from the working group to QMSE.

   - Staff representatives across QMUL and sitting in faculties to help cascade information and develop a culture where health and well-being is prioritised and responsibility for it is distributed.

   - The strategy should specify preventative, secondary and tertiary actions that are available and planned to support and promote staff health and well-being. The London Healthy Workplace Charter may be useful when developing the strategy.

   - As part of this strategy, put in place the six steps recommend by the Stevenson/Farmer report:

     1. Produce, implement and communicate a mental health at work plan
     2. Develop mental health awareness among employees
     3. Encourage open conversations about mental health and the support available when employees are struggling
     4. Provide your employees with good working conditions
     5. Promote effective people management
     6. Routinely monitor employee mental health and wellbeing
2. **Set and communicate clear strategic priorities with full consideration of resource requirements associated.**
   - Make explicit the strategic priorities and demonstrate the resource requirements considered to deliver these.
   - Increase visibility of Senior Staff to facilitate informal discussions about priorities – including walk arounds, attending faculty or department meetings, across campuses, taking messages outside the Queens Building.
   - For Heads of Schools and Departments to be supported in articulating these priorities to staff, and providing resources to deliver them.

3. **Embed a behavioural culture change across the University**
   - While there are many examples of good behaviour across the University, many of the issues faced can be rooted in the dominance of an authoritarian leadership style ‘Do this, this way...’ as opposed to ‘This is the problem, can we work together to find a solution’. There is a well developed body of research that highlights the benefits of inclusive leadership styles. This approach is important not only for those in line manager roles, but for every day interactions within and between teams.
   - Develop framework for positive behaviour and communication – there are many existing approaches that can be used.
   - Ensure that this framework is embedded in all performance management, training and related activities (i.e. there should be a good fit with the dignity at work initiative).
   - Provide training to senior leadership so that the behaviours can be modelled from the top – this may include a session on recognising individual differences.
   - Provide training to all managers in positive behaviours so that they can role-model within their departments/teams. This needs to include interactive elements to support the development of soft skills, beyond knowledge.
   - Introduce a programme of education and awareness raising of how behaviour impacts on health, well-being, engagement and productivity.

4. **Empower schools and departments to make decisions**
   - Increase consultation with Heads of Schools and Departments
   - Increase consultation within Schools such that Department meetings are not reporting events but events where staff voice is shared.

5. **Address communication and change management practices**
   - To co-ordinate communications from Professional Services so that the timing and communication of changes and requirements from staff are considered in full.
   - To appropriately resource all change management projects (e.g. IT system implementation, Dignity at Work) to incorporate post-launch support and allow for adjustments to be made once released in order to capitalise on benefits.
   - To review the intranet and organisation of information available to staff regarding key policies and contact points.
6. **Improve decision making authority, accountability and empowerment of staff**
   - Empower staff to make decisions and feel supported in their decision. There is a culture of ‘passing on’ actions to other departments or those with more authority which needs to be addressed.
   - Within Professional Services functions, specify who is accountable for what and enable those with the expertise to exercise their professional judgement.
   - For each department and faculty to regularly review their processes and consider where road-blocks can be removed to streamline processes. Working groups comprised of all staff across schools and departments may support this.
   - Consider re-instating named School/ Department contacts for key functions to help build personal relationships and expedite processes.

7. **Develop and implement a robust performance management system that is supported by appropriately skilled staff**
   - Increase the value placed on teaching and student pastoral support in performance appraisals given the increasing student numbers and teaching loads.
   - Consider how conflicting priorities and different skills sets of staff are recognised and valued in the process.
   - Consider implementing an on-going, flexible system that is not fixed to one annual time point and static objectives. This can exacerbate box ticking as objectives and priorities can change over the year.
   - Provide explicit examples of reasonable objectives for staff.
   - Provide training in performance appraisal to increase the value of the conversations and process.
   - Provide Schools and Departments with a range of non-financial rewards that can be leveraged to increase buy-in to the process.
   - Provide clear actions and relevant support for staff who are identified as under-performing.

8. **Address the disconnect between Professional Services functions and academic faculties**
   - Clarification of the roles and responsibilities of academic and Professional Services staff
   - Encourage personal relationships through reaching out to academics through walk-arounds, presence at department meetings, telephone rather than email contact.
   - Professional Services staff to attend departmental/team meetings so that they can build an understanding of the day to day problems and demands facing academics.
   - Encouraging staff to state the rationale behind the request/decision as well as the request or decision itself.
• Summarising roles and responsibilities on email signatures in the short term to raise awareness and help individuals take ownership of their jobs.

9. **Provide management training for all those with line management responsibility**
   • A modular programme that helps build people management skills and can be selected depending on managers’ needs including: project management and managing work plans, developing positive manager behaviours, leading difficult conversations and specific training around mental health and bullying and harassment.

10. **Develop a robust bullying and harassment policy, supported by appropriately skilled staff**
    • Ensure the effective implementation of the Dignity at Work initiative with a clear no tolerance policy of bullying and harassment and clear pathways to address and manage bullying and harassment.
    • Resource school/department level workshops to discuss the new statements and agree ways of working to build confidence that staff can support each other, as well as access support from within HR, so that the Dignity at Work initiative can be fully embedded within QMUL.
    • Review and make explicit the pathways to support.
    • Members of QMSE to make explicit their support of the new initiative.
7. For further information:

For curated information summarising leading research, white papers and practical tools to address work stress, please visit http://affinityhealthhub.co.uk/explore-evidence-and-tools/stress


London Healthy Workplace Charter: https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/health/healthy-workplace-charter

Health and Safety Executive ‘s approach to Stress: http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/

References


