

EIS-FELA

**City of Glasgow College
Report on Workplace
Culture survey findings**

June 2022

Headline Findings

44% of EIS-FELA members at City of Glasgow College responded to the survey which ran over four weeks in April-May.

The results are staggering

- **76% said they are unsatisfied with the culture in the workplace**
- **With 67% believing this affects their health and wellbeing leading to stress, health complaints or absences from work**
- **Over 76% believe there is an authoritarian leadership style**
- **Around 60% said they had experienced or are aware of bullying (or other unfair treatment) in the workplace**
- **62% say they do not feel respected or valued as a lecturer within the college**
- **60% do not feel adequately supported in their role as a lecturer**
- **Although just over 50% thought the college committed to equality, diversity and inclusiveness, around 50% also said they experienced or are aware of discrimination, intimidation or harassment in the workplace**
- **Less than 20% thought the college committed to Fair Work principles**
- **Nearly 60% said they had insufficient opportunity for further training or promotion within the current organisational structure**
- **Less than 30% said they would recommend CGC as a place of work**
- **Just over 10% of respondents were in promoted posts.**

Introduction

Workplace organisations can implement strategies to support employees in reducing stress and anxiety, however, if the root cause of that stress is workplace culture, then strategies are at best sticking plasters or at worst an insulting waste of employees' time.

The data captured by this EIS-FELA Health and Wellbeing Survey starkly shows that 76% of those surveyed are unsatisfied with the culture in the workplace, with 67% believing this culture has a direct effect on their health and wellbeing leading to stress, health complaints or absences from work, moreover 76% believe there is an authoritarian leadership style.

Authoritarian cultures stifle creativity and authentic communication and the survey data clearly shows this style of management is endemic within City of Glasgow College.

This survey was launched in April, during Stress Awareness Month when City of Glasgow College promoted mindfulness, cooking, exercise and meditation as mitigations for the ill-effects of workplace stress. These can be useful techniques for coping with stress. However, as an EIS-FELA branch, we believe it is the employer's duty to look at the root causes of stress and, particularly if that stress is work-related, seek to tackle the root cause.

Figures from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) reveal 68,000 Scots endured stress, depression and anxiety related to their job last year. The City of Glasgow College Metrics Report dated 25th January 2022 stated 'Mental Health continues to be our top absence reason.' Within the FE sector, the last two years of continuous working throughout the pandemic has been exceptionally difficult for lecturers and other staff. It has also brought into focus increasing concerns about the workplace culture that exists within City of Glasgow College. Many things can influence a workplace culture including leadership, management practices and policies, and the values, expectations and experiences of employees. The purpose of this survey was to gather more information from lecturers on their opinions and experiences of the workplace culture in the college in order to inform the work of the local EIS-FELA branch going forward.

EIS-FELA branch reps note that HR had stated in 2016, that they wanted to address the culture in the workplace. However, there has been little evidence of any serious attempt to do so in the intervening period. This survey reinforces the urgent need for serious measures to be taken now to combat the woeful workplace culture in CoGC.

Findings

Respondents of the EIS survey described an 'us and them' relationship between management and lecturing staff. EIS-FELA believe this dichotomy not only impedes industrial relations, but it impacts on lecturers' health and wellbeing and job satisfaction.

Survey respondents described a workplace culture where lecturers feel stressed, overworked and undervalued and some reported that the job grew ever more stressful each year. These experiences are corroborated by the data from the Robertson Cooper survey which showed that staff employed for less than 12 months scored higher for 'positive psychological wellbeing' but as tenure increased positivity decreased, thereby establishing a negative correlation between length of service and job satisfaction.

Those in post longer had lower levels of motivation and commitment, decreased physical and psychological health, and felt more pressured by their workplace environment. These findings suggest that increased exposure to the toxic workplace culture, not only erodes lecturers' physical and psychological health but it also robs them of a sense of purpose, motivation and commitment to their jobs.

Many findings in this EIS-FELA survey were qualified, for example of the 38% of people who said they did feel respected or valued (or declined to answer), many comments made suggested that they only felt respected or valued by colleagues or a direct line manager; not by the college overall or by senior management.

"I feel respected by my curriculum team but not by senior management of the college."

"I feel respected as part of my immediate team but not in the wider context."

"I don't feel respected by management but do feel respected by other lecturers."

Although over 50% felt able and comfortable communicating ideas and suggestions on improving or changing aspects of curriculum area or area of expertise many comments stated that suggestions were not listened to and no feedback received.

"Although I feel comfortable forwarding suggestions I feel that teacher agency is being eroded and that any ideas which do not correspond with management opinions will be ignored."

"I'm happy to communicate my ideas, but they are not listened to or taken on board "

"Although I have become hesitant to do this as you then get given the execution of the idea and it becomes more on your workload."

Whilst over 61% feel confident and supported in making professional decisions relating to teaching and learning within their curriculum area and subject specialism, again there are a number of qualifications to this level of confidence.

“I feel confident making decisions but I know that these will be dismissed/over-ruled if they do not correspond with management decisions/opinions.”

“I do - but as mentioned above, there is a lack of practical support for innovation and change. Professional decisions can also be undermined by the decontextualised focus on KPI's and the pressure to pass all students regardless of the level of their work and ability.”

As well as a respectable return rate^[2], EIS-FELA respondents engaged fully with the survey by providing high levels of qualitative data via elaboration and comment on each question, including 83 comments at the end of the survey.

There were 180 suggestions for positively influencing change in the culture at City of Glasgow College.

Some suggestions include:

“Reduce the number of management roles and perhaps introduce a role (Team Leader?) which really supports and encourages Lecturers.”

“Change the leadership style from Top-down Authoritarian to almost any other style.”

“Encourage teacher agency, discussion and participation; make time for this and really listen and act on ideas. Often, Lecturers are creative and innovative in spite of management, not because of any encouragement from them.”

“Transformational change ie leaders exist to energise teams and sell a vision using a mix of empathy, enthusiasm, and praise, they encourage workers to explore new ideas and improve their outcomes).”

“Allow lecturers to teach their specialisms.”

“The management structure has to change from the top down. The current management structure is very detrimental to the college's core values.”

“Bring back senior lecturers.”

“The layers of management keep increasing and this in turn pushes the lecturer role down the organisation's structure.”

Despite less than 20% of lecturers saying they were satisfied with the workplace culture, the overall college satisfaction rate for City of Glasgow students in 2020-21 was 87%^[1] This shows that, regardless of their own feelings and experiences, lecturers are going above and beyond to provide quality educational provision for students.

A redacted (to protect anonymity) copy of the survey data can be requested from EIS-FELA reps.

Conclusion

City of Glasgow College management have accepted that their employees are experiencing overwhelm from data captured in a previous wellbeing survey carried out by a third-party organisation - the Robertson Cooper Wellbeing Survey of October 2021 .

Management responded not by opening a dialogue with those employees as to what they thought could be changed for the better but by dictating that a whole department team should participate in mandatory wellbeing training. Nonetheless, this EIS-FELA survey, bears out the findings of the Robertson Cooper Wellbeing Survey in October 2021 showing that deep inequalities exist between college management and academic staff.

The Robertson Cooper survey clearly identified a systemic problem but, instead of addressing this, college management chose to circumnavigate it by shifting the responsibility for solving workplace problems on to individual lecturers through the provision of an online self-help portal where staff access free counselling sessions, watch videos about managing stress and read a booklet about developing resilience in the workplace.

The Wellbeing toolkit and PAM Assist counselling service act as little more than flimsy sticking plasters to try to stem the flow of workplace stress, ill health and what are described by management as the ‘co-related themes’ of absence, grievance, team conflict and dispute’ (CoGC Board of Management Wellbeing Survey Analysis, August 2021).

From the Robertson Cooper survey it also became abundantly clear that City of Glasgow College management - the Executive Office and Corporate Development – enjoy far greater levels of job satisfaction and wellbeing than that of any other college faculty.

Management scored highest for having a balanced workload, good work relationships, positive psychological wellbeing, motivation, purpose, commitment and a ‘good day at work’. In contrast, academic staff across all faculties reported poorer health and wellbeing, less sense of purpose, less commitment to the organisation and far fewer ‘good days at work’.

This EIS-FELA survey suggests little has improved in the aftermath of Robertson Cooper for unpromoted lecturers, and in fact the gulf between management and staff has only widened with many respondents citing examples of authoritarian leadership and a toxic workplace culture.

It is vital CoGC now address the many issues highlighted in this and previous surveys. In particular, the often toxic workplace culture that many employed in CoGC feels permeates their working day causing difficulties for emotional and physical health and wellbeing. Previous failures to adequately address the problems highlighted by the Robertson Cooper survey, among others, cannot be repeated.

We urge CoGC to meet with EIS-FELA reps to discuss measures to be taken to address and deal with the many disturbing issues raised by CoGC employees/EIS-FELA members in this and previous surveys.

“I started here in the college full of enthusiasm and excitement for helping young people to get on in life. While I still love teaching students the institution is toxic and doesn’t support and encourage staff. It’s actually very sad. The facade is super college but once you break through the inside is rotten.”

[1]<https://www.cityofglasgowcollege.ac.uk/sites/default/files/210209%20LTC3-G%20My%20Student%20Experience%20Survey.pdf>

[2] 44% is higher response rate than SFC’s Student Satisfaction Survey, November 2021



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