

Summary of the 2021 staff survey

We would like to thank all those that took the time to complete the 2021 staff survey.

The staff survey was launched at the middle of October for a period of four weeks but was extended for two more weeks as the completion rate was quite slow. The survey was run alongside the annual review process, but this did not increase the completion rate. At the close we had 62 responses from staff (32 f, 30 m) and 12 responses from students and the completion rate for the 2022 staff survey was 63.9%, down on last year's completion rate (74.5%), and well below our target for completion of 75%. At a gender level, the number of responses from women constituted 59% of women on the staff list. The number of responses from men constituted 90% of men on the staff list and 10% of all respondents preferred not to indicate gender identity. Regarding Senior Management (SM) commitment to Athena Swan we noticed that only 3 professors responded to the survey.

We note that there were quite a lot of 'prefer not to answer' responses and would take this opportunity to remind staff that survey responses are anonymous. What this means practically is that answers to every single question are recorded separately by the online survey software and are not linked together in any way. This means that there is no way for anyone to be able to link a response from someone responding as a grade 9 professor to a subsequent response that "the management structure at the Institute is poor", or to a comment that "my line manager never speaks to me"! We are aware that staff continue to have concerns that comments or responses can be linked back to specific grades of individuals – this is NOT the case. Hopefully this clarification may improve the completion rate in the future.

This summary report does not include any of the free text comments (to maintain anonymity). However, these comments have all been read, highlighted to SM and are being addressed as required.

Athena Swan at the Rowett: We are pleased to report that 85% of respondents were aware of the Athena Swan commitment at the Rowett and 95% of these understood what Athena Swan is trying to achieve in the Institute (both up from last year). 48% of respondents had taken the time to view the Institute's Athena Swan webpage containing the business cycle, annual report and survey summaries. The newsletter as a method of EDT communication continues to be well received, with 84% respondents feeling this promotes AS values.

Work load and flexible working: 30% of respondents were not happy with their workload and 20% felt they were under employer driven pressure to work long hours (up from 20 and 14% last year). Teaching and administration are elements that are likely to contribute to the workload pressure, with 13% of staff feeling their workload involved too much of either of these aspects (up from 9% last year).

Recognition of workloads is important for staff, and although most staff (59%) agreed that they were recognised for their contributions in research, 14% disagreed, with 18% responding neutral. 18% and 18% of staff disagreed that they were recognised for contributions in Administration and Teaching with only 25% and 18% agreeing, respectively. All these numbers are slight improvements on last year. 16% and 33% of respondents respectively answered that this question was not applicable to their role.

62% of staff agreed that successes and achievements were celebrated, with only 9% disagreeing and 26% responding as neutral which is an improvement on last year.

A reassuringly large number of staff responded that the Rowett has a supportive attitude to Flexible working (84% agree), and 61% of staff have a flexible working arrangement.

Communications to and from Management: In every staff survey, communication always appears to be received variably and this survey was no different. 46% of staff feel that communication from management is always effective, 43% only sometimes and 10% never. Similarly, communication between staff and management with 41% feeling that it is effective, 39% sometimes and 13% not at all.

84% of staff agreed that meetings during the COVID pandemic been held regularly, using an appropriate forum, and at times that make it possible to attend.

80% of respondents were aware that the Rowett has family support advisors, but no feedback/comments were received on this subject.

Annual review process: Only 77% of respondents had a review in last 12 months, a further 11% in the last 24 months. All respondents (7%) who had never had an annual review had all started work less than 12 months ago. Career progression was usefully discussed by 54% of respondents but not by 25% and workload was usefully discussed by 75% and not by 11%.

Promotions: 54% said promotion and how this works was usefully discussed (within Annual Review) and 25% said not. Opportunities for staff development, including mentoring were usefully discussed in annual review by 61% of staff and not by 25%. The number of staff with an understanding of the promotion process has increased since the Introduction of a seminar on this, with only 10% of staff stating they require training although 8% of staff disagreed that they understood the process. 75% of staff were aware of both promotion pathways but 21% were unaware that there were two pathways (regrading for technical staff). Still only 20% of staff agreed that the promotion process was transparent and the large number of comments on this will be considered and fed onto HR. 75% of staff have not applied for promotion in the past 5 years and line-manager training on promotion opportunities for their staff is built into the new AS action plan. The perceived barriers to promotion were lack of confidence and lack of support (20 and 16% of respondents) and again will be passed onto HR where appropriate. Feedback on promotions applications was received by 15% of respondents, but only 3% found it of some use. This has been fed back to the university senior management who are currently reviewing the promotions procedures.

Equality and Diversity: Reassuringly the vast majority (67%) of respondents felt there were no gender differences within the Rowett for promotion or career development (81%), or in access to lab or office space (90%) and administrative support (90%). 91% of people thought that the University promotes a positive culture in relation to Equality and Diversity, with no one disagreeing. This was also true within the Rowett although a slightly reduced number agreed (81%) and 7% had a neutral view (the same as with respect to the University). Although no one disagreed that the University promoted a positive culture, within the Rowett 5% did.

9% of staff felt they had a disability or health challenges. Of those there was an equal feeling of being supported and not (40% in each category).

39% of respondents have daily caring responsibilities, for children or parents. Although most people decided that these responsibilities could be managed alongside their work, 8% commented that they were sometimes or often difficult to manage. These responsibilities obviously changed with the onset of COVID and children being at home for long periods. Although the enforced onset of home working has been appreciated by many, others found it isolating.

The role of the family support advisor to support needs of staff caring for older parents was expanded after last year's survey and 57% of staff agreed that this supported staff better with only 2% disagreeing.

Impact of Athena Swan Policies Resulting from Survey Feedback: 84% of respondents agreed that Athena Swan news in the fortnightly newsletter promoted the values of Athena Swan in the Institute and 83% felt the newsletter highlighted social activities and provided additional notification of staff development opportunities. The majority of people 64% haven't looked any further to the Athena Swan pages and the additional resources there. Comments were made about the lack of resources there for technicians with the focus more on ECR who found these resources useful.

46% agreed the STEM seminars helped promote the equality culture of the Institute but 67% said they had not helped them think about their own career development.

It was generally agreed (by 74% of staff) that the Rowett policy to keep administrative meetings between 10am and 4pm helped accommodate flexible working hours. Some staff working on volunteer studies which started very early found the 3-4pm meeting times not so useful. The University policy to avoid holding meetings between 12 and 2pm in the winter was not felt to improve the work/life balance by 43% of staff as opposed to 36% who did.

39% agreed that the introduction of £250 to pay for caring costs to facilitate attendance at conferences helped to improve the equality culture of our Institute.

COVID-specific issues: This section was added to the survey to try and capture the impact of COVID on staff's work. As expected, there were a variety of opinions although most staff reported some delay in their research. 57% of staff also reported that their workload had increased, particularly in respect to teaching and administration.

34% of staff stated that their caring responsibilities had increased, with more men than women feeling this impacted on their work. 32% had home schooling responsibilities also. A significant number of staff felt this would impact on publications and grant applications.

Most staff thought that the support for health and wellbeing had been good/OK. Communication from University management was mainly perceived as very good/excellent (47%) or good (33%) with 13% and 3% perceiving this as OK or poor respectively. Communication from Rowett Management was felt to be slightly worse – very good/excellent (9%), good (34%), OK (22%), poor (7%), very poor (5%). It is interesting that some of the online communication/training initiatives were perceived to be improvements.

It is clear that there are a range of opinions on the impact of COVID not just on work but also the impact of COVID on staff health and wellbeing, with a large number of open comments posted. While some people feel that COVID has increased their workload there were also comments that some staff (presumably those normally very active in labwork) do not feel they have enough to do. There was also the suggestion that we should introduce a health and wellbeing mentor, and this will be moved forward and included in the new action plan.

The majority of staff who have returned to the building have found it positive, reporting finding it welcoming, supportive, inclusive and happy.

You can look at all the detailed results of the survey in the RESULTS file.