UNDERSTANDING THE WELLBEING OF THE POST-14 EDUCATION WORKFORCE

Findings from an online survey and focus groups conducted with members of the Society for Education and Training – Executive Summary

EDUCATION SUPPORT – 26/11/2019

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1 INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

1.1 Introduction
The Education and Training Foundation (ETF) commissioned Education Support in February 2019 to help them investigate the current levels of staff wellbeing in the post-14 workforce. The aims of the research were to identify and measure current levels of staff wellbeing in the sector; to identify specific groups of staff at different career stages who have the highest risk of poor wellbeing; and to understand the work-related and personal factors impacting on wellbeing.

1.2 Methodology
A two-stage study was conducted. The first stage was an online survey to SET members (18,000 members were invited to take part, and 1,028 responded) which took place during the period 14 April to 14 May 2019. The survey incorporated the use of the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS)[1] - a scale of 14 positively-worded items for assessing a population's mental wellbeing. By participating in the survey, respondents also had the opportunity to register their interest in taking part in the focus groups, ie the second stage of the study (240 registered for this). ETF contacted respondents and promoted the focus groups to its Local Network Groups, giving venues and times, which resulted in 60 members registering their interest to attend. Six focus groups were held in different parts of England in June 2019 (with 31 participants), five on a face-to-face basis and one remotely for those who could not attend in person.

2 FINDINGS – ONLINE SURVEY

2.1   Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) – Introduction
WEMWBS is a self-administered questionnaire where respondents are asked to read 14 items relating to their mental health in the preceding two weeks and select an answer from a 5-point Likert scale which best reflects their experience. The options for selection are 'none of the time', 'rarely', 'some of the time', 'often' and 'all of the time'. The answers are then summed to provide a single score ranging from 14-70 and aggregated to form the Index. A higher score indicates a better level of mental wellbeing.

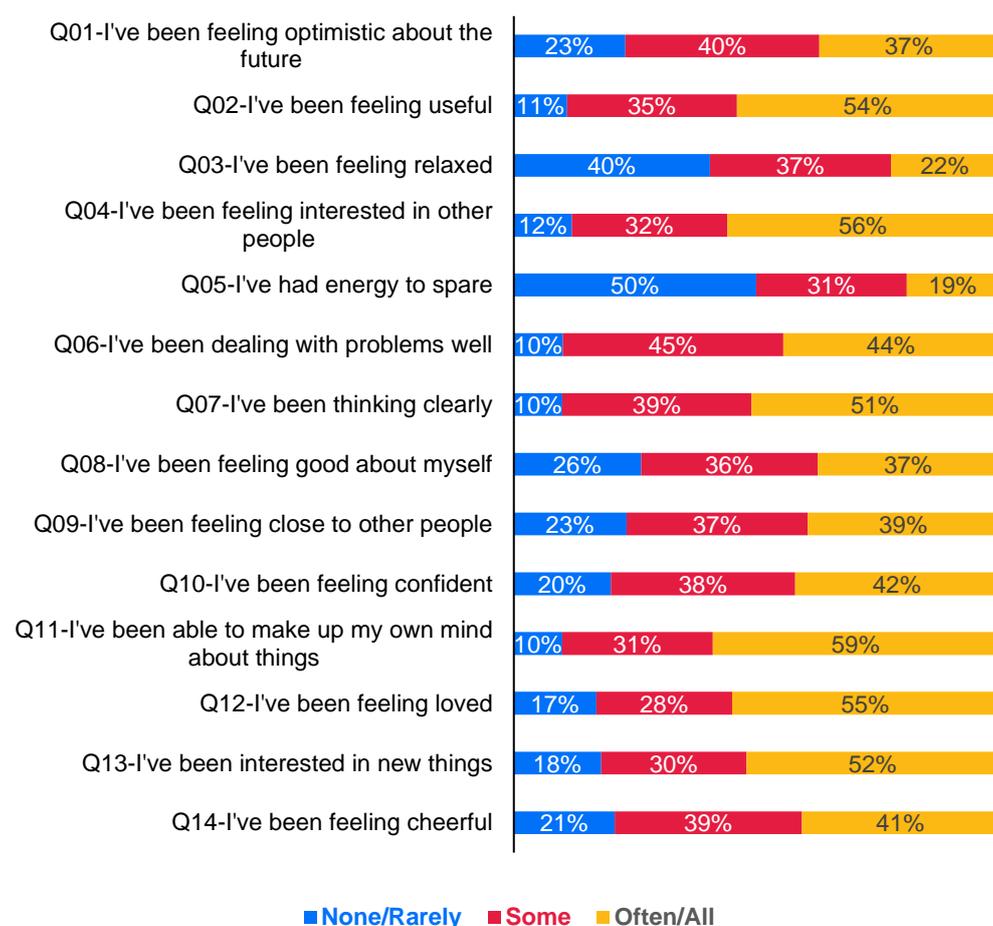## 2.2   WEMWBS findings – total sample population
The overall WEMWBS score for the post-14 staff surveyed was 46.02 which is comparable to three other studies in the education sector which have taken place, namely the Teacher Wellbeing Index

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[1] Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) © NHS Health Scotland,
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where the WEMWBS score was 44.7; the 'Wellbeing in Secondary Education' (WISE) project[2] where the WEMWBS score was 46.81 and a different study[3], where the WEMWBS score was 47.2. All these scores are lower than the most recently published national indicators for the general population, ie in England the score was 49.85[4], Scotland 49.80[5] and in Wales 50.9[6].

The table below illustrates the findings for each question in order to identify trends relating to the total sample population. The answers of 'all of the time' and 'often' have been combined and can be compared with 'some of the time', and 'rarely' and 'none' which have also been combined.

Chart 1 - The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale – Total Population Scores (n = 1028)

Question	None/Rarely	Some	Often/All
Q01-I've been feeling optimistic about the future	23%	40%	37%
Q02-I've been feeling useful	11%	35%	54%
Q03-I've been feeling relaxed	40%	37%	22%
Q04-I've been feeling interested in other people	12%	32%	56%
Q05-I've had energy to spare	50%	31%	19%
Q06-I've been dealing with problems well	10%	45%	44%
Q07-I've been thinking clearly	10%	39%	51%
Q08-I've been feeling good about myself	26%	36%	37%
Q09-I've been feeling close to other people	23%	37%	39%
Q10-I've been feeling confident	20%	38%	42%
Q11-I've been able to make up my own mind about things	10%	31%	59%
Q12-I've been feeling loved	17%	28%	55%
Q13-I've been interested in new things	18%	30%	52%
Q14-I've been feeling cheerful	21%	39%	41%

■ **None/Rarely** ■ **Some** ■ **Often/All**

There are three categories where post-14 staff score relatively highly in terms of wellbeing because it was felt 'all the time' or 'often'. These are: 'I've been able to make up my own mind

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[2] Harding et al (2019). "Is teachers' mental health and wellbeing associated with students' mental health and wellbeing?". Journal of Affective Disorders, 242, 280-187.
https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0165032718301733
[3] Kidger, J et al (2016). "Teachers' wellbeing and depressive symptoms, and associated risk factors: A large cross-sectional study in English secondary schools". Journal of Affective Disorders, 192: 76-82.
[4] NHS Digital (2017). Health Survey for England – Wellbeing and Mental Health (2016). 13 December 2017.
http://healthsurvey.hscic.gov.uk/media/63763/HSE2016-Adult-wel-bei.pdf.
[5] Scottish Government (2018). "The Scottish Health Survey, 2017". September 2018. Volume 1, Main Report.
https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-health-survey-2017-volume-1-main-report/
[6] Welsh Government (2019). "National Survey for Wales". StatsWales. 28 June 2019.
https://gov.wales/national-survey-wales.

about things', 'I've been feeling interested in other people' and 'I've been feeling loved'. However, there are two categories which scored relatively poorly which were I've had energy to spare' and 'I've been feeling relaxed' which could suggest that overall staff are' tired and tense.

2.3   Differences in the WEMWBS Scores

Survey respondents also provided socio-demographic and workplace data using ETF's specified categories, and these can be used to look for patterns/correlations in the data relating to different groups (a breakdown of the total profile can be found in Appendix A). Each category was tested to find out how much it differed from the mean (average) by calculating the weighted average and standard deviation scores. The key wellbeing indicators for the total population were found to be:

Table 1 - Differences In WEMWBS Scores - Categories And Findings

Workplace organisation
− Staff who worked for Independent Training Providers, Employer Providers and Third Sector/Charity Training Providers were the most positive

− Staff who worked for Sixth Form Colleges were the most negative

Region
− Staff who worked in London were the most positive
− Staff who worked in the North East were the most negative (marginally)

Job role
− Staff with the job role of CEO/Director/Principal/Heads of Service and Assessors/Verifiers were the most positive

− Heads of Department/Curriculum were the most negative

Amount of time in role
− Staff who had been working in their job for less than one year, and those who had been working for between 10-15 years were the most positive

− There were no discernible negative groups

Age
− Staff aged 65-69 were the most positive
− Staff aged 20-24 and 30-34 were the most negative (NB 51% of the population was aged 45-59)

Gender
− Males were marginally more positive than females

Sexual orientation

− Staff identifying as gay or lesbian (men and women) gave more positive responses (NB 88% of the population were heterosexual/straight)

Ethnicity

− Staff from the Black African, Black Caribbean and British Asian groups were the most positive

Physical and mental health problems

− 14% of respondents were deaf, disabled or had physical or mental health problems.
− Staff with all types of issues were the most negative
− Staff with mental health or long-term illnesses were the most negative

Table 1 – Differences in WEMWBS Scores

2.4 The single change education staff would like to make to their working life which would positively impact their wellbeing

Survey respondents were asked "If you could make one change to your working life which would have the greatest positive impact on your wellbeing, what would this be?" This resulted in 1,180 open response comments, which were organised into 45 areas of potential change and are displayed in the word cloud below (the text size relates to the frequency of occurrence).

Word Cloud 1 - Single change which would impact positively on wellbeing

Management issues were clearly identified and fall into two parts - the more strategic and operational aspects of leading and managing an organisation, and the soft skills which management uses in dealing with its staff. Time was also an important feature, with respondents simply not having enough time in the day to complete the tasks required of them which often led to the need to work outside of normal hours. Administration/bureaucracy/paperwork/email was

viewed as detracting from the core business of teaching and learning. Also, there was the wish for management to consider the possibility of giving opportunities to staff to work on a part-time or flexible basis to help their work/life balance.

3 FINDINGS – FOCUS GROUPS

Staff taking part had a variety of job roles, including specific roles related to wellbeing (such as Emotional Wellbeing Service Co-ordinator and SEN Specialist in Mental Health), teachers and lecturers (including a Teaching Professor and a Student Teacher) and those in management roles (including a Faculty Director and Head of Teaching and Learning). The average length of a focus group was 97 minutes.

3.1 Wellbeing can be a difficult concept to define

All focus groups attempted to come to a consensus about the meaning of the word 'wellbeing'. There was a consensus to it being understood as a descriptive/'umbrella' term which consisted of a combination of factors which were often linked to different areas of people's lives. It was conceptualised, and often drawn, in different ways. What was agreed was that it was understood in terms of a balance and that everyone is unique (ie what might affect one person negatively might not be viewed as a problem by someone else).

> "A set of factors - psychological, emotional, social and spiritual – which affect a person's life, the importance of which can rise and fall depending on their career and life experiences".
> (*Compilation of agreed definitions*)

3.2   Work-related factors which impact on staff wellbeing

The focus groups explored the work-related factors which impact on wellbeing. These were conceptualised as impacting on wellbeing in either a positive or negative way – the key difference being that a positive factor would be seen to have increased the sense of wellbeing, whereas a negative factor would reduce the sense of wellbeing. There were eight positive factors and 22 negative factors identified which are shown below in order of the number of times discussed.

Table 2 - Work-related factors which impact on staff wellbeing

POSITIVE IMPACT (ALL)	NEGATIVE IMPACT (TOP 8 ONLY)
a) Good working relationships with colleagues/team working	
b) The development of own skills and progression	a) Graded lesson observations
	b) Lack of autonomy/trust
c) Student success	c) Lack of flexible working opportunities
d) Being recognised and appreciated	d) Enrolment issues
e) Autonomy and being trusted	e) Poor decision-making/practice by management
f) Having a supportive organisation/structures and individual connectedness	f) Employment issues, including pay
	g) CPD issues
g) Having a good manager	h) Workload/taking steps to manage workload
h) Opportunities for creative thinking	

Good working relationships with colleagues/working in teams was the most important, which was seen as motivating, a chance to share best practice and thoughts, and to offload in a supportive, honest and open environment. It was seen as both a formal and informal community of practice. Staff also wanted opportunities to develop, expand their own knowledge and progress – in exactly the same way as they want to help their students.

Graded lesson observations evoked the most emotional response because of the sense of judgement they deliver relating to 'who you are' in a very short space of time which could then carry over into all situations. The sense of autonomy and of being trusted were both highly valued where it existed (in supportive organisations with good management practices), and most wished-for where it did not. In general, there was much similarity discovered between the factors which negatively impact on wellbeing and the wished-for changes shown in the word cloud above.

3.3   Identifying career points (or 'pinch-points) which impact on work-related wellbeing

Two points in the careers of staff were found to have an impact on their wellbeing:

− When starting out as a Newly-Qualified Teacher (NQT) – where the priorities were to find out how to make the workload manageable and to be supported in the early stages of their career development
− When experiencing a change of role – where the impact on wellbeing at the time can go unrecognised

Although not directly about their careers, there were points in those careers where staff considered their wellbeing was affected by other circumstances, namely:

− Line management changes and its impact on others
− College mergers impacting on job roles
− Teachers taking on additional responsibilities to fill gaps in staff availability without additional support
− Career evaluation/re-evaluation when lack of succession planning caused a lack of opportunities
− Teachers being asked by management to compulsorily increase pass rates

3.4 Personal factors which impact on staff wellbeing

The personal factors which impact on wellbeing were found to be (shown in order of number of times discussed):

Table 3 – Personal factors which impact on staff wellbeing

POSITIVE IMPACT (ALL)	NEGATIVE IMPACT (ALL)
a) The need to have time and space for yourself b) Supportive home relationships c) Changing jobs brings new challenges d) Knowing about different types of wellbeing therapies e) Having access to an Employee Assistance Programme	a) Not being able to take holidays when needed/short holidays b) Coping with bereavement c) Teachers in the FE sector feeling undervalued compared to the school sector d) Being diagnosed with poor health e) Coping with teenage children living at home f) Guilt over prioritising work over families g) Coping with divorce

Staff need to ensure they create a 'space' for themselves in their lives, which would benefit them personally but would build a level of life satisfaction. Examples of this related to physical space (eg going to the gym), mental space (time to think and reflect), learning space (to learn something new) and a natural space (simply going for a walk in the fresh air). The major negative factor was not being able to take holidays when wanted/needed or that there was a maximum restriction placed on the amount of holiday which could be taken at any one time.

3.5 Other factors which impact on staff wellbeing

Five other factors impact on wellbeing, namely:

a)   The appropriate use of social media (eg students expecting prompt replies to emails sent outside working hours, and the difficulty staff feel in trying to manage situations caused by social media outside the classroom)

b)   The minimum number of students in a teaching group to make it viable

c)   The impact of ineffective colleagues causing stress on other members of staff

d)   The comparison of wellbeing in FE with the construction industry

e)   Devolution

3.6 Recommendations for how to positively impact wellbeing

Each focus group was asked to reach agreement on two recommendations which would positively impact on participants' wellbeing, one work-related and one personal. In the end, two work-related recommendations were agreed, and these were:

− The need for professional-type supervision for teachers to share experiences, student engagement and help work/life balance. This was particularly important for teachers dealing with students who have difficult backgrounds and sessional tutors. Such supervision could be offered every 6 weeks, in a similar way to the NHS.
− Senior management to review workload content to reduce the number of hours needed to fulfil the job role and agree strategies with staff to effect this (eg decrease the ratio of teaching to other work being 1:3, not working at weekends etc). Such review would address the lack of time felt by staff in balancing the different components of their job roles.

The main personal recommendation was for employers to offer flexible working opportunities, especially being able to work at home during half-term holiday periods when there is no interaction with students and on 'admin days'.

4 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Staff wellbeing in post-14 education was found to be similar to the findings of other research studies in the wider education sector using the same approach. The wellbeing of staff working in the education sector as a whole was lower than that of the general population. The key differences in staff wellbeing between different groups has been highlighted. Two points (or pinch-points) in staff careers have been identified as impacting on work-related wellbeing, namely when starting out as a Newly-Qualified Teacher and when experiencing a change of role, both of which bring challenges in terms of the support offered to members of staff and to their personal growth as an individual.

To conclude, there are three work-related areas which, if addressed, could benefit post-14 educators by enhancing their wellbeing:

Collegial and effective management/leadership practice

Staff highly value the collegial working relationships they have with their colleagues. Staff also highly value having a supportive line manager and benefit from working in an organisation where its management displays good leadership, decision-making and 'soft skills', as all these factors have a positive impact on staff wellbeing. More needs to be done to ensure that staff in leadership and management positions in post-14 education develop a supportive working environment, and communicate more effectively across their organisations, in order to create a positive workplace culture.

Autonomy and trust

Education staff value opportunities for creative thinking at work, they understand their learners' needs and what and how their learners can achieve. When staff felt they had the freedom (autonomy) to decide how to carry out their work and felt trusted (as opposed to experiencing 'micro-management' of their duties), this was considered to have a positive impact on their mental wellbeing. Managers need to consider how best to encourage such autonomy, and to build a sense of trust, in order to help their staff to flourish in their roles.

Additional support for newly-qualified teachers and post-14 professionals undergoing a change of role

As noted above, two key 'pinch-points' in professionals' careers have been discovered when their sense of mental wellbeing is more likely to be at risk:

- Newly-qualified teachers – when starting out in their careers
- Post-14 professionals undergoing a change of role

Consideration needs to be given about how best to offer additional support to these two groups at these key points in their careers, as this will have a positive impact on their lives at times of great change and increase the likelihood that they will continue to work in the sector in the future.

APPENDIX A

Profile of respondents to the online survey

CATEGORY	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Workplace organisations		
General Further Education College	338	33%
Sixth Form College	56	5%
Specialist Designated College	17	2%
Agriculture and Horticulture College	19	2%
Art, Design and Performing Arts College	2	0%
National Specialist College	7	1%
Independent Training Provider	105	10%
Third Sector/Charity Training Provider	22	2%
Local Authority Training Provider	25	2%
Group Training Association	4	0%
Employer Provider	20	2%
Adult (19+) Education Provider	69	7%
Higher Education Institute	28	3%
School	203	20%
Information Advice and Guidance National Careers Service	3	0%
Offender Learning Provider	17	2%
Other	93	9%
Regions where worked		
East of England	99	10%
East Midlands	95	9%
London	164	16%
North East England	64	6%
North West England	106	10%
South East England	177	17%
South West England	113	11%
West Midlands	121	12%
Yorkshire and Humberside	89	9%
Current role		
Administrator	0	0%
Assessor/Verifier	35	3%
CEO/Director/Principal/Head of Service	28	3%
Governor/Non-Executive Director	0	0%
Head of Department/Curriculum	100	10%
Manager	57	6%
Support Worker/Staff	27	3%
Teacher/Tutor/Trainer/Lecturer	688	67%

Technician/Technical Staff	3	0%
Trainee Teacher/Student Teacher	38	4%
Other	46	4%
Prefer not to say	6	1%

Length of time working in current role

Less than 1 year	169	16%
1 year or more, but less than 3 years	222	22%
3 years or more, but less than 5 years	175	17%
5 years or more, but less than 10 years	196	19%
10 years or more, but less than 15 years	146	14%
15 years or more, but less than 20 years	82	8%
More than 20 years	38	4%

Gender

Female (including male to female trans women)	691	67%
Male (including female to male trans men)	323	32%
Other	0	0%
Prefer not to say	14	1%

Age

14-19	1	0%
20-24	11	1%
25-29	64	6%
30-34	81	8%
35-39	96	9%
40-44	115	11%
45-49	160	16%
50-54	191	19%
55-59	161	16%
60-64	95	9%
65-69	30	3%
70-74	8	1%
75+	0	0%
Prefer not to say	15	1%

Sexual orientation

Bisexual	19	2%
Gay man	13	1%
Gay woman/lesbian	13	1%
Heterosexual/straight	904	88%
Undecided	4	1%

Other	3	0%
Prefer not to say	72	7%

Ethnicity

White - English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	785	76%
White – Irish	10	1%
White - Gypsy or Irish Traveller	3	0%
White - Any other	67	7%
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups - White and Black Caribbean	5	0%
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups - White and Black African	2	0%
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups - White and Asian	4	0%
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups - Any other	6	1%
Asian/Asian British - Indian	16	2%
Asian/Asian British - Pakistani	8	1%
Asian/Asian British - Bangladeshi	4	0%
Asian/Asian British - Chinese	0	0%
Asian/Asian British - Any other	7	1%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British - African	38	4%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British - Caribbean	29	3%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British - Any other	4	0%
Other ethnic group – Arab	5	0%
Other ethnic group - Any other	6	1%
Prefer not to say	29	3%

Deaf, Disabled, Physical or Mental Health problems

Yes	143	14%
No	852	83%
Prefer not to say	33	3%

Specific problems

Deaf	7	3%
Blind/partially sighted	1	0%
Facial disfigurement	0	0%
Hard of hearing	13	6%
Learning difficulties	13	6%
Long-term illness/medical condition	55	27%
Manual dexterity difficulties	5	2%
Mental health problems	58	28%
Mobility difficulties	34	17%
Progressive medical condition	7	3%
Speech difficulty	2	1%
Other	7	3%

Prefer not to say	3	1%

(Note: occasionally percentages do not total 100 due to rounding)