

# Results of the Forest Research Workload Survey

## Introduction

During the latter part of 2007 a growing number of comments and concerns were voiced by some FR staff about the increase in their workloads. As a result, a survey was issued through the joint union's office to all FR staff to gauge the extent of their anxieties.

The survey ran through out December with staff from all areas of FR taking part providing a wide range of comments. Approximately 63% of Forest Research staff responded.

The results of the survey will be used to inform discussions at the FR NOC and meetings with Management.

## Summary

It should be noted that no detailed statistical analysis of the significance of the results has been undertaken.

In your opinion would you say that over the last year, your workload has:		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
More than doubled	1.4%	2
Increased by more than 75%	2.1%	3
Increased by more than 50%	13%	18
Increased by more than 25%	30.0%	42
Increased by more than 10%	30.0%	42
Remained the same	20.7%	29
Reduced by more than 10%	2.1%	3
Reduced by more than 25%	0.7%	1
Reduced by more than 50%	0.0%	0
Reduced by more than 75%	0.0%	0
answered question		<b>140</b>
skipped question		<b>32</b>

A total of 32 people (19%) chose not to respond to the question about workloads, however that aside the key findings are:

Of those who responded to this question,

- 21% said that over the last year their workload had remained the **same**,
- 3% said that over the last year their workload had **reduced** and 76% said that over the last year their workload had **increased** (with 2 people stating that their workload had doubled).

A brief analysis was undertaken of those questions which gave respondents the opportunity to comment and is as follows:

### **About Your Workload**

Two key additional themes are clear from the 'free comments' made in response to this question about workload change; (i) that workload was already high, and (ii) that the primary cause of high workloads is understaffing.

- Respondents noted that 'workload was already heavy so even a small increase has a great effect', 'it would be difficult for it to increase any more without some form of total collapse.' and 'I have been working over capacity for over 3 years now.' Some felt that staff were 'overcommitted', 'overworked' and that 'overload seems almost inevitable'.
- This substantial workload led to a significantly greater number of hours being worked beyond those paid. For example, 'I probably work an extra 5 hours a week over my 37 and I do not claim these.', and 'Workload increase led to additional unpaid hours being worked'. Whilst in some cases staff highlighted the unwillingness of managers to pay overtime, others noted that part-time hours had been increased.
- Whilst changes in funding were identified as causing some workload related issues (examples of both increasing and reducing it), an overwhelming number of respondents highlighted reduced staffing levels and slow recruitment as the primary cause of high workloads. For example; 'the human resources and management capabilities remain unchanged', '[my colleague] has retired and no replacement has been authorised', 'support' / 'junior staff [are] not replaced' and 'workload has increased due to my standing in ... after the retirement of [my colleague].'

### **Which of these do you think may have contributed to any change in your workload?**

Again, easily the most prominent factor contributing to increased workload is considered to be reduction in staff, and delays in recruitment. For example;

- 'Delay of several months in recruitment ... led to an increase in workload for other team members.'
- 'increase in workload due to staff changes as it takes far too long to get agreement to take on replacements'
- 'we are often left with a 2-4 month period where a staff member has left and a new person is not in post'
- 'officer retired and has not been replaced'
- 'The loss of Branch clerks has increased the work load.'
- 'The problem is trying to deliver the increased workload without enough staff'
- 'Less staff in work area.'
- 'Loss of TSU staff'
- 'support staff at AH is well overloaded'

Several other factors were identified as contributing to workload increases including; changes in funding, financial arrangements and the internal market, the divisional structure, the search for external money, bureaucracy, and long term uncertainty/indecision.

### **Has the increase in your workload meant that you have had to neglect some tasks in order to meet deadlines?**

Most respondents felt that tasks were neglected, although some felt that this was inevitable in any work situation and/or that they could be caught up with during quiet times. The sort of tasks postponed or abandoned were, on the whole, 'lower priority', 'less' critical' or 'non-urgent' ones, including;

- keeping up with literature / reading research thoroughly,
- searching and applying for external funding,
- managing contracts,
- processing invoices,
- training,
- Health & Safety,
- Quality Assurance,
- time sheets,
- budget preparation.

Having said that some respondents noted that some significant tasks had to be postponed, such as;

- writing papers,
- doing a thorough job,
- completing scheduled outputs,
- conducting research,
- reporting deliverables,
- their own lives (!).

### **In the past year, would you say that your work/life balance is:**

Three themes emerged clearly from the free-text answers to this question.

1. Some respondents feel the need to take a strong, even forceful, approach to maintaining a separation between work and home. For example;
  - 'I will not allow work to interfere with my life outside and do not either take work home or work longer hours.'
  - 'My work life balance is better now because I force it to be.'
  - 'I take steps to make sure the balance does not change!'
  - 'I'm pretty militant about getting my free time.'
2. Some respondents simply cannot take on more work as they have family commitments or live a substantial distance away from their office (reducing time available in the day).
  - 'Due to family commitments I am unable to increase my hours'
  - 'Unable to work in evenings and weekends to catch up due to family commitments.'
3. Several respondents do report feeling anxious about work when at home, for example;
  - 'I often worry about work during the evenings, sometimes at night, and at weekends.'
  - 'I find it harder to forget about work when I am at home'

### **Compared to twelve months ago, would you say that your job satisfaction is:**

This question generated the most 'free comments, with substantial variation, and in fact opposition. For example, some considered their line managers 'well organised', 'strong' and 'enthusiastic', whilst others felt them to be 'scared', overworked, and to offer no thanks for work done. It is not really possible to separate out these comments without respondent identification. Where *improvements* in Job Satisfaction are reported this seems to be due to increasing knowledge of what is expected of the worker, increased responsibility, good management (priority & target setting) and simple relief to be employed. For example;

- 'I have a better ... grasp of the job requirements, implications etc, and works a bit less 'blindly'

Where *decreases* in Job Satisfaction are reported there are four prominent contributing factors (although there is significant variety); a lack of time, a lack of staff, funding issues, and a general demoralisation and feeling that specific work areas are not valued (the last two, funding and demoralisation, being very closely and commonly linked). For example;

Lack of time;

- '[I] Very rarely have the time, ... , to finish a complete project before starting others'
- '[I] can't do the job properly because there are too many things to do in the time available'
- 'Sometimes there is no time to check work properly and errors have been found when too late to be rectified. This is unsatisfactory when I take pride in my work.'

Staffing;

- 'too much pressure on too few staff'
- 'no support staff'
- 'continual erosion of staff numbers'
- 'staff shortages'

Funding issues;

- '[The] structure of the internal market and budgeting system does make planning a work programme difficult'
- 'Things have been reduced to bargain mongering and doing your fellow colleagues in to secure some funding.'
- '... constant pressure to source external funding and to take on additional work without any consideration for what we are doing already'
- '[We] are trapped in meeting the same expectations from FC in terms of what they want delivered although funding is reduced, whilst also seeking more external funding and taking on more contract work to make up the shortfall.'
- 'Funding pressures are dreadful'
- 'I have won funding but at various times not been given permission to spend it'

Demoralisation;

- 'all but the charmed few .... are watching their back'
- 'no thanks for any job from higher than my line manager'
- 'no recognition for the work done and the effort put in it'
- 'I've lost all my funding .... It doesn't make you feel very appreciated or valued as the cuts seem random.'
- 'the financial situation in FR leaves my section unsustainable'

Those respondents that felt the situation had not changed were, in general, negative about their job satisfaction. One brief, though concise, example;

- 'I felt pressured, tired, overstretched and demoralised this time last year and I still do!'

Other general reasons for declining Job Satisfaction communicated here included; a perception that promotion was unlikely for them personally, and travel time to work had increased.

### **General Comments**

There is no real basis to categorise the comments made in response to this however, pasted below are some comments which reflect over-arching/recurring themes, and present them in an eloquent or coherent way.

As for the survey itself – two negative comments were made, one relating to the title, and one relating to 'biases in the questions.

More common responses were;

- I am very pleased to see this topic is being addressed by the Union
- I have replied because I think it is a very important issue
- Thanks for sending this survey and for the opportunity to comment.
- If this survey does highlight a feeling that we in FR are overburdened...come back to us and ask for our suggestions for solutions – I imagine you'll get some eye opening and very sensible ideas. But only do this if it's in the spirit of acting on those suggestions. This survey is very welcome and I hope the response is good; it goes without saying that if people don't feel they're being listened to then you'll lose them to apathy. Thanks for the opportunity to express an honest opinion.
- 'In addition to the increased workloads in FR the main frustration is the complete lack of strategy and process guiding decisions on the development of the Agency'

This comment actually reflects a prominent theme that occurs throughout answers to all the survey's questions – a lack of leadership and strategic direction within the agency.

- 'I feel very fortunate to be working for Forest Research.'
- 'I believe strongly in maintaining the right balance for the benefit of the organisation as well as the individual. Unreasonable workloads are counterproductive in the medium term and have an adverse impact on staff. I believe that there has been a real loss of "thinking time" which is important because to move forward we need to innovate and have ideas. If we lose that opportunity then we can lose overall as a business.'
- 'When we are busy we seem to care less about each other because there is no time to spare and we would have to justify it on a time summary!'
- 'I feel that workloads could be monitored more centrally as the current system relies on the judgement of the employee and their manager alone. I know of some cases where people are "strongly encouraged" (bullied??) into working more hours than they claim on the flexi-time system to finish a piece of work that is not possible in their normal working week. It also appears to be getting more common for people who have been to weekend conferences or training courses to be told by their managers not to claim the time back as TOIL. There is a lot of pressure to perform well beyond the original job description to prove yourself suitable for promotion or to achieve a "good performer" PMS rating, for example by agreeing to include extra outputs on the FJP which are then held up as examples of "failure" if they are not achieved. Many people, particularly in the lower pay bands at FR are academically

very over-qualified for their roles but apply because they are desperate for a "foot in the door" job and believe that in a few years they will be promoted. Unfortunately I think that because it is now quite normal for scientific/project support officers to have a PhD, manager's expectations have gone up and it is now extremely hard for people in this situation to prove that they have lifted the job to a higher pay band. I think there needs to be more serious consideration of an applicant's qualifications and skills at interview and if they are seriously overqualified the future manager should either take a more suitably-qualified applicant or be more flexible in adjusting the pay band of the job accordingly'

- 'I have been at [FR some a considerable length of time] and have seen an increase in the science staff and decrease in admin/support staff which is unsustainable. If [we] want to build a good establishment how can we do it without a good foundation in his admin staff? ... It stands to reason that you can't survive with a top heavy organisation and if the lower levels shrink anymore it will topple over.'
- 'I see workload rising in almost all colleagues. The FC and FR management seem to think that they can pare the staff to the bone and elicit the same standard of work all the time. This situation can only go on for a period then standards must surely start to slip.'
- 'I can remember when it was possible, by being willing to work a few extra hours, and maybe come in on a weekend, to feel that you were able to finish a piece of work and really achieve something. This was very satisfying, and I was more than willing to do it. Recently the workload and demands have been so great that extra hours will not make much of a dent in the pile of tasks. This is demoralising in the extreme.'
- 'There have been two problems, from my perspective. First, staff changes, i.e. staff leaving our group, and the long time it took to replace them and get them up to speed. Secondly, [we have] simply taken on too much work over the last couple of years (due to high demand for our services, and unwillingness to let opportunities go). We need to start saying no to new opportunities. ... The thing that suffers most from our current unsustainable workload is time to publish, which in turn means we reduce our chances of promotion, and reduce the moral of the group.'
- 'The whole purpose of the PMS or FJP is that you should be able to manage your workload in agreement with your manager in a fully transparent way. This works really well if people actually followed the process.'
- 'Just say NO!'

There were some worrying comments, such as;

- I'm actively looking for another job
- I have thought long and hard about staying with ... FR'

A summary of all responses is detailed in the tables below. For ease of reading they have been divided into 3 headings, 'Workloads remained the same', 'Workloads decreased' and finally 'Workloads increased'.

### Workload Has Remained the Same

Which Pay Band are you?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
SSG	0.0%	0
1	3.4%	1
2	10.3%	3
3	10.3%	3
4	24.1%	7
5(Op)	10.3%	3
5	10.3%	3
6a(Op)	0.0%	0
6a	17.2%	5
6b	13.8%	4
7	0.0%	0
<i>answered question</i>		<b>29</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>0</b>

Are you based mainly at:		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Alice Holt	37.9%	11
NRS	41.4%	12
A Field Station	13.8%	4
Silvan House	0.0%	0
Other (please specify)	6.9%	2
<i>answered question</i>		<b>29</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>0</b>

Which Division of Forest Research do you work in?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Biometrics, Surveys & Statistics	10.3%	3
Ecology	27.6%	8
Environmental & Human Sciences	3.4%	1
Forest Management	17.2%	5
Tree Health	3.4%	1
Technical Services Unit	17.2%	5
Human Resources/Administration	3.4%	1
Communications	6.9%	2
Finance & IT Support	10.3%	3
<i>answered question</i>		<b>29</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>0</b>

Which of these do you think may have contributed to any change in your workload?				
Answer Options	Yes	No	Don't Know	Response Count
Change in staffing	12	11	4	27
Re-organisation of	12	9	5	26
Overall increase in	3	11	9	23
Overall decrease in	1	13	7	21
Funding pressures	11	7	6	24
Other (please specify)				12
<i>answered question</i>				29
<i>skipped question</i>				0

Do you consider your current workload to be:				
Answer Options	Yes	No	Don't know	Response Count
Reasonable	21	5	3	29
Sustainable	20	7	2	29
<i>answered question</i>				29
<i>skipped question</i>				0

Has the increase in your workload meant that you have had to neglect some tasks in order to meet deadlines?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	34.5%	10
Don't know	20.7%	6
No	44.8%	13
<i>answered question</i>		29
<i>skipped question</i>		0

In the past year, would you say that your work/life balance is:		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Better	20.7%	6
Unchanged	65.5%	19
Worse	13.8%	6
<i>answered question</i>		29
<i>skipped question</i>		0

Compared to twelve months ago, would you say that your job satisfaction is:		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Better	20.7%	6
Unchanged	58.6%	17
Worse	20.7%	6
<i>answered question</i>		29
<i>skipped question</i>		0

## Workload Has Reduced

Which Pay Band are you?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
SSG	0.0%	0
1	0.0%	0
2	0.0%	0
3	0.0%	0
4	0.0%	0
5(Op)	25.0%	1
5	25.0%	1
6a(Op)	0.0%	0
6a	50.0%	2
6b	0.0%	0
7	0.0%	0
<i>answered question</i>		<b>4</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>0</b>

Are you based mainly at:		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Alice Holt	25.0%	1
NRS	0.0%	0
A Field Station	75.0%	3
Silvan House	0.0%	0
Other (please specify)	0.0%	0
<i>answered question</i>		<b>4</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>0</b>

Which Division of Forest Research do you work in?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Biometrics, Surveys & Statistics	0.0%	0
Ecology	0.0%	0
Environmental & Human Sciences	25.0%	1
Forest Management	0.0%	0
Tree Health	0.0%	0
Technical Services Unit	75.0%	3
Human Resources/Administration	0.0%	0
Communications	0.0%	0
Finance & IT Support	0.0%	0
<i>answered question</i>		<b>4</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>0</b>

Which of these do you think may have contributed to any change in your workload?				
Answer Options	Yes	No	Don't Know	Response Count
Change in staffing	2	0	1	3
Re-organisation of work	2	1	1	4
Overall increase in work	1	1	2	4
Overall decrease in	1	0	2	3
Funding pressures	3	0	1	4
Other (please specify)				2
<i>answered question</i>				4
<i>skipped question</i>				0

Has the increase in your workload meant that you have had to neglect some tasks in order to meet deadlines?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	50.0%	2
Don't know	0.0%	0
No	50.0%	2
<i>answered question</i>		4
<i>skipped question</i>		0

In the past year, would you say that your work/life balance is:		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Better	50.0%	2
Unchanged	25.0%	1
Worse	25.0%	1
<i>answered question</i>		4
<i>skipped question</i>		0

Compared to twelve months ago, would you say that your job satisfaction is:		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Better	25.0%	1
Unchanged	25.0%	1
Worse	50.0%	2
<i>answered question</i>		4
<i>skipped question</i>		0

## Workload Has Increased

Which Pay Band are you?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
SSG	0.0%	0
1	1.0%	1
2	6.7%	7
3	17.3%	18
4	24.0%	25
5(Op)	8.7%	9
5	17.3%	18
6a(Op)	0.0%	0
6a	19.2%	20
6b	4.8%	5
7	1.0%	1
<i>answered question</i>		104
<i>skipped question</i>		0

Are you based mainly at:		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Alice Holt	45.8%	49
NRS	29.9%	32
A Field Station	16.8%	18
Silvan House	0.0%	0
Other (please specify)	7.5%	8
<i>answered question</i>		107
<i>skipped question</i>		0

Which Division of Forest Research do you work in?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Biometrics, Surveys & Statistics	14.0%	15
Ecology	7.5%	8
Environmental & Human Sciences	15.0%	16
Forest Management	19.6%	21
Tree Health	11.2%	12
Technical Services Unit	22.4%	24
Human Resources/Administration	5.6%	6
Communications	2.8%	3
Finance & IT Support	1.9%	2
<i>answered question</i>		107
<i>skipped question</i>		0

Which of these do you think may have contributed to any change in your workload?				
Answer Options	Yes	No	Don't Know	Response Count
Change in staffing levels	64	20	4	88
Re-organisation of work	53	12	5	70
Overall increase in work	77	8	4	89
Overall decrease in work	3	38	5	46
Funding pressures	67	8	4	79
Other (please specify)				25
<i>answered question</i>				<b>107</b>
<i>skipped question</i>				<b>0</b>

Do you consider your current workload to be:				
Answer Options	Yes	No	Don't know	Response Count
Reasonable	50	49	8	107
Sustainable	32	56	19	107
<i>answered question</i>				<b>107</b>
<i>skipped question</i>				<b>0</b>

Has the increase in your workload meant that you have had to neglect some tasks in order to meet deadlines?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	81.3%	87
Don't know	3.7%	4
No	15.0%	16
<i>answered question</i>		<b>107</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>0</b>

In the past year, would you say that your work/life balance is:		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Better	1.9%	2
Unchanged	48.6%	52
Worse	49.5%	53
<i>answered question</i>		<b>107</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>0</b>

Compared to twelve months ago, would you say that your job satisfaction is:		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Better	20.6%	22
Unchanged	39.3%	42
Worse	40.2%	43
<i>answered question</i>		<b>107</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>0</b>