

Results of the Silvan House Environment Survey

Introduction

In September 2007 the FCTU surveyed all FCTU staff based in Silvan House in order to find out their views about the office environment, with particular emphasis on the quality of the air. Approximately 56 % of staff responded.

The results of the survey will be used to inform discussions at the Silvan House Staff Council.

Summary

No detailed statistical analysis of the significance of the results has been undertaken, however the key findings are:

- Of those who responded, 50% or more said that they 'sometimes', 'often' or 'always' found the conditions **too; stuffy, draughty, dry, hot, cold or noisy**.
 - In the additional comments area, 80+ out of 161 respondents commented that they consider the air quality to be a contributory factor to the symptoms they experience at work. In this sense, the term 'Air quality' encapsulated various comments regarding the air in SH - the air conditioning, recycled air, lack of fresh air, humidity levels, draughts. Temperature is another issue. Another 20+ respondents commented that the temperature was an issue, with staff mainly being too hot.
- Of those who responded 50% or more felt that they 'sometimes', 'often' or 'always' suffered from the following complaints which they believe are caused or exacerbated by the working environment; **dry or sore throat, skin dryness, eye irritation, stuffy nose, headache, drowsiness, lethargy or backache**.
- **65%** of respondents thought that we ought to have more guidance on conduct and etiquette for working in open-plan offices.
- Finally when asked about any aspect of working in the office which they either like, dislike or have strong feelings about, there were many comments about staff ignoring open-plan etiquette, the main gripes were mobile phones going off, inconsiderate mobile phone users, office phone users speaking too loudly, and noise levels generally. Lack of privacy, relaxation space, and lack of space generally were also commented upon.

Which floor are you based on?		
answer options	Response Percent	Response Count
Ground	23%	43
First	33%	64
Third	14%	27
Fourth	30%	57
<i>answered question</i>		191
<i>skipped question</i>		0

On which wing of the floor are you mainly based?		
answer options	Response Percent	Response Count
East	50%	94
West	50%	94
Other (eg reception)	0%	0
<i>answered question</i>		188
<i>skipped question</i>		3

If you spend a significant portion of your time in a particular room (e.g. own office, print room, reception etc) then please state where:	
answer options	Response Count
	25
<i>answered question</i>	25
<i>skipped question</i>	166

Which union are you in?		
answer options	Response Percent	Response Count
PCS	50%	95
Prospect	14%	26
FDA	1%	2
Unite	0%	0
GMB	0%	0
None	35%	68
Other (please specify)	0%	0
<i>answered question</i>		191
<i>skipped question</i>		0

Do you every experience any of the following conditions in your work area?						
answer options	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always	Not Sure	Response Count
Too Stuffy	33	52	48	14	4	151
Too Draughty	44	54	40	9	2	149
Too Dry	23	41	37	37	4	142
Too Humid	80	26	8	3	6	123
Too Hot	34	63	43	5	0	145
Too Cold	29	81	41	1	1	153
Too Bright	81	31	9	4	2	127
Too Dark	76	42	11	2	1	132
Too Noisy	36	52	35	14	1	138
Too Quiet	110	11	5	1	2	129
Glare from Surfaces	71	39	13	2	5	130
Unpleasant Odours	71	52	5	1	3	132
<i>answered question</i>						175
<i>skipped question</i>						16

To you ever experience any of the following complaints, which you believe are caused or exacerbated by your working environment?						
answer options	N/A	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always	Response Count
Dry or sore throat	7	34	72	29	3	145
Skin Dryness	12	44	47	24	12	139
Skin Rashes	18	77	23	13	0	131
Eye Irritation	11	42	59	23	5	140
Contact Lens Problems	62	39	12	8	5	126
Runny Nose	15	52	50	10	2	129
Stuffy Nose	11	43	53	25	4	136
Difficulty in Breathing	18	89	9	5	2	123
Chest Tightness	20	89	9	5	1	124
Flu-like symptoms	16	62	42	6	1	127
Headache	8	36	70	20	2	136
Dizziness	17	84	18	3	0	122
Nausea	17	91	15	2	0	125
Drowsiness	10	43	59	19	1	132
Lethargy	10	39	64	16	1	130
Aches in Arms	18	79	23	4	2	126
Chest Pains	18	96	7	1	0	122
Backache	12	53	46	16	3	130
Please explain which aspect(s) of your environment you believe cause the complaint						101
<i>answered question</i>						161
<i>skipped question</i>						30

Please explain which aspect(s) of your environment you believe cause the complaint:

- The air conditioning – it's either too hot or too cold and there is rarely a happy medium.
- Too hot.
- Due to a heavy workload, I have to spend too much time staring at computer screen.
- Poor air conditioning.
- There is a lack of fresh air flowing through the building. Easily resolved by allowing some windows to be opened.
- The air is very dry due to the volume of computer equipment.
- Air is often stuffy and warm.
- There are draughts from air conditioning vents.
- Bad cooking smells from Staff Restaurant.
- No fresh air circulation.
- Likely to be the draughts coming from the air vents but it's been the same since 1975.
- Air Conditioning.
- Draft from air conditioning vents
- Dry air.
- The lack of fresh air and lack of humidity.
- Complete lack of fresh air, unable to open windows.
- In open plan offices viruses like the cold spread.
- Much depends on the climate outside - sometimes it is hot outside and then it is too cool inside and vice versa.
- The Air Conditioning.
- Air conditioning.
- Every time I leave my desk for a substantial period of time i.e. arriving in the morning, after lunch I have symptoms of sneezing, runny noses, itchy throat - like an allergic reaction which last for over an hour. I have no idea what causes it - it could be many things - dust, carpets, plants and so on.
- Not being able to open a window to obtain some fresh air.
- Backache is from sitting at workstation too long.
- Poor quality of the air. When I sat in the East Wing I was permanently cold, wearing thick jumpers and fleeces especially in summer! Now in the West Wing it is too warm and stuffy.
- The dry atmosphere and feeling of a lack of fresh air.
- Eye irritation caused by old fuzzy monitor.
- Recalculated air and no facility to let in fresh air.
- The air quality.
- Fluctuations in the air conditioning, whether it is on at all is sometimes a matter of debate.
- It is always hot and there is a lack of air. When there is any, it is usually in the form of a freezing cold draft that can go on for hours usually on the one or two days that you could do with the building being a bit warmer due to rain or dampness.
- I continuously have to have my fan on to circulate the air as I generally do feel particularly warm.
- The condition of the air and temperature is abysmal. The air never feels fresh and I am frequently too warm. I think this office has got to the point where a radical option needs to be considered - some windows in each room/floor that open, which was requested during refurbishment. Air conditioning is now looked on as 'un-green' because of the huge amount of energy it uses.

- Re-cycling filtered air around the office(s). Surfaces accumulate a lot of dust which must be from the ventilation air-flows carrying particles.
- Poor air quality.
- Poor desk set up.
- Stress of open plan.
- Poor light quality - either too bright or too dingy.
- Air too dry or perhaps there are chemicals in the air?
- Not enough fresh air coming into the building. It is my understanding that only 10% of the air is fresh, the remainder is recycled.
- The lack of fresh air is a factor, but the overall factor is, the building is far too dry.
- It's an absolute disgrace and only a matter of time before someone successfully nails the commission for being a 'sick' building.
- When the air is too dry it causes sore throats, eye irritations, stuffy nose and dry skin.
- Too dry and humid at times. No fresh air.
- Stuffiness.
- My job involves standing a lot, which causes backache.
- Ill colleagues and poor air conditioning.
- Dry air, no fresh air and bugs spread easily due to the poor air conditioning.
- Invariably too warm. Ridiculous that people expect to be able to work in short sleeves in the winter. Reduce our carbon footprint and also makes people healthier.
- Probably when the atmosphere feels very dry and warm
- Dry air-conditioning causes sore and dry eyes.
- Air Conditioning.
- Poor control of the temperature in the building - i.e. always too warm.
- Air conditioning and having to sit occasionally for a long time to meet deadlines.
- Low humidity - I have consulted my GP over this and received prescriptions.
- The heat.
- I often suffer from conjunctivitis, which the doctor believes is due to my office environment. I sit below one of the AC vents and my eyes become very dry because of this. This makes it easier for any infections to take hold.
- Always sneeze in office but nowhere else.
- It is too dry, hot and stuffy.
- Dry and too warm.
- Air Conditioning.
- Air Conditioning.
- It is frequently too hot on the east wing of the first floor, particularly nearer the south facing windows.
- I do have a concern about the reliability of our air conditioning system. There have been many water leaks that have gone undetected for long periods of time. Warm water puddles in an enclosed air system pose a serious health risk. (Legionnaires)
- The air in Silvan House is very dry. The original response to this problem was to introduce a few plants. This has had no effect on the very dry air.
- Heat builds up from all the machines on in the office is not diffused due to poor air circulation. This causes dry air in the office and affects eyes, noses and throats.
- I think the general humidity levels in the office are quite low which I consider leads to problems with contact lens wear.
- My arm and back problems are probably down to desk ergonomics but could easily be rectified and not indicative of the general office environment.

- The relative humidity is rarely within the acceptable levels designated by the Health and Safety Executive (amongst others). It reaches acceptable levels only between June and September, and even then registers only at the bottom of the acceptable scale, and not all the time. This exacerbates many things including dust levels which are also unacceptable.
- Air vents above workstation.
- Poor temperature and humidity control.
- Dry atmosphere
- Air conditioning system
- Conditions from 5 above and backache from sitting at PC for 8 hours a day.
- It's right stuffy!
- Extremely low humidity. The Health and Safety Executive recommend levels of between 40% and 70%. The lower level is rarely reached here and in winter levels can get as low as 15% or 16% relative humidity. I regard this situation as a scandalous disregard for the health of the people who work in this building, especially since management have been aware of the situation since the building was refurbished.
- On occasion the work environment can be very stuffy. I sense that the Air-con is particularly responsive to sunshine and while it may well be dull and humid outside, the Air-con seems to be on a very low setting making the office feel very airless. Similarly it may be bright - but cold - outside and the A/C will be pumping cold air into the room making it feel cold and draughty.
- The air conditioning and the lighting.
- Air conditioning and lack of fresh air.
- Reflection of windows/light in computer monitor.
- Computers and machines running - have some effect on the quality of the air.
- The air can get quite dry which seems to aggravate my asthma
- Concentrating in noisy open plan format with stuffy atmosphere.
- I think the building is very dry and lacks humidity. I have severe eye problems with dryness and I am spending a fortune on eye lubricants to compensate. Also, neck pain is a complaint I suffer from often-although not in your list. I have visited my doctor and been referred to a physiotherapist who concluded it was my work regime that was causing the issue-too many hours stuck in front of a PC.
- I have been diagnosed with repetitive strain injury in my back and right arm. Almost certainly related to long hours working at a computer.
- Poor lighting and ventilation.
- Air quality seems to be the nub of the issue. The air is too dry by far and lacks 'freshness'. Working in the office makes me feel drained at the end of the day compared to working in other office environments. I am sure this must effect overall staff productivity and I am pleased to see this survey in presumably an attempt to rectify these issues.
- Air conditioning.
- Probably something to do air circulation and dryness.
- Poor natural ventilation.
- Poor chair
- General poor air quality in the building.
- Air conditioning.
- Lack of fresh air.
- Air conditioning system.
- Backache due to certain items of furniture being not fit for purpose now, many of the office chairs are almost 20 years old.
- Air conditioning

- Stuffiness and dryness affect my skin badly and I suffer frequent migraines.
- The atmosphere is stuffy, dry and hot. My job has lots of computer use and these contribute to dry skin and eyes.
- Dry atmosphere and lack of fresh air.
- Air conditioning.
- Colds etc are more likely to be passed on from colleagues. Air-con system might help to spread germs.
- No fresh air.
- The air conditioning although better than the previous setup is still too slow to respond to daily variations in the outside environment, likewise the computer aided lighting is also slow and not very user friendly.
- I believe the atmosphere to be too dry: main effect is on my sinuses and I have had to use gel tears from time to time following investigation by my GP and a consultant.
- Lack of fresh air.
- dry air
- I believe the sore throat, headache, runny and stuffy nose are caused by the air-conditioning environment as it changes throughout the day and I can be either too hot/cold. The backache is from sitting at a computer for a long number of hours - even although breaks are taken.
- Air conditioning system, no fresh air.
- Air conditioning, and lack of access to the outside air.
- Occasional draughts.
- Poor air quality - dry and stuffy.

How much control do you feel you have over the following?					
answer options	None	Not Enough	Adequate	Plenty	Response Count
Temperature	138	23	10	2	173
Ventilation	138	19	11	3	171
Humidity	139	15	10	2	166
Lighting	89	37	37	6	169
Noise	113	22	31	3	169
<i>answered question</i>					174
<i>skipped question</i>					17

Do you think we should have more guidance on conduct and etiquette for working in open plan offices (such as on the use of mobile phones etc)?		
answer options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	65%	110
No	35%	59
<i>answered question</i>		169
<i>skipped question</i>		22

Please tell us about any other aspect of working in the office which you either like, dislike or have strong feelings about.

answer options	Response Count
	79
<i>answered question</i>	79
<i>skipped question</i>	112

- Office is clean and modern but there is no privacy for staff as the vast majority of staff are working in open plan offices. Guidance on conduct and etiquette will only work if management take a strong line. The FC are not known for strong management!
- There is nowhere set aside for staff to sit and read at lunchtime (apart from the canteen)
- Toilets are no better than pub toilets. At least pub toilets are checked every hour.
- Lack of good old-fashioned coffee lounges.
- One of the best working environments I have worked with.
- The gents toilets are absurdly un-environmental. We must be wasting gallons of water every day through flushing!
- When Silvan was refurbished we were promised some gym facilities. Wither promises? The staircase is a poor proxy for a decent gym.
- When Silvan House was refurbished, we were told that the walkway to the south would be adopted and adapted with benches for folk to enjoy some outside environment at lunchtime. OK, this summer has been awful but what happened to this idea?
- People with very loud voices (either on the phone or talking to colleagues) when you are trying to concentrate
- Main issue for me is noise. Two break-out tables in earshot from my desk. Frequent meetings there, together with constant general chat in office means there is a constant sound of voices. General noise levels in office make it difficult for me to keep concentration.
- No break out areas to get away from your desk and have a breather - all a bit crowded.
- I like the view - not that I stare out of window for long periods!
- I think there should be periodic 'spring clean' days.
- The venetian blinds don't get cleaned properly and dust builds up which eventually leads to sneezing and coughing.
- Generally I have few complaints, mainly praise. Minor issues include the ventilation in the office being quite noisy at times and the air seems dry.
- In FCS we have no proper breakout area, which I think is important - apart from that I think the current working environment is okay.
- There is no guidance on the use of personal mobile phones, which can sometimes be obtrusive.
- Overcrowding.
- Not enough tall cabinets to section off individuals/sections.
- Deskjet printers - Why do we still have them?
- 2 day old rolls in the staff restaurant.
- Stale rolls in the staff restaurant.
- Portable desk fans should be made available.
- The lack of space. We are regularly moved about and each time the available space to work in is reduced, making it harder to do your job properly. The worrying thing is that there is seldom a justifiable reason for the moves and although clearing out is good for the soul, there comes a point where it is impractical and silly to do so.

- I like the open plan aspect and the huge bank of windows on either side, letting us experience the world outside. I feel that the climate control in the office is quite inefficient, it is often stuffy and this makes me very lethargic. Often I don't realise it's the atmosphere until I get out into the fresh air and suddenly liven up!
- I think mobile phones should be made to put onto silent mode.
- I think that smokers should key out when taking smoking breaks.
- SYKES workers in particular have a habit of hanging around the back door smoking and should be made to adhere to the same rules as FC staff.
- I have reached the point where I would seriously consider taking a lower paid job to get a better working environment elsewhere. All the money being spent on flexible benefits could have been better used on improving things that matter for people - such as their office environment. The main thing I want is a window near me that opens.
- It would be nice to be able to open a window on a nice warm sunny day, the fresh air and more importantly the circulation of "fresh" air I am sure would be very welcome and add to the working environment.
- Variability of temperature in different areas of building is too great.
- Shared fridge that isn't cleared of out of date produce often enough.
- Temperature/draughts vary greatly within a small area.
- Lack of social areas, breakout areas, or places to go to get away from desk.
- We don't need guidance, we need noise screens.
- Break out areas being used for meetings can be very disruptive for those not involved. I would like to see a strong policy on the use of mobiles as quite often they ring loudly and are left unattended for long periods of time. I also think that in an open plan environment we should be more sensitive to the needs of others. For example coughing, sneezing without due regard to others.
- People standing in doorway and passages talking and won't move unless you ask them.
- I think Bill and Vic do a sterling job in keeping this office as best they can and trying to please everyone.
- Temperature changes through the course of the day can be very variable, so if someone does complain about the local conditions, they could have changed by the time that the complaint is investigated.
- My only real gripe is the heating system which is invariable too hot. In winter it should be the norm for staff to wear a jumper - not the exception.
- Dislike open plan.
- People meeting in boardrooms appear to think that it is acceptable to step outside the door and shout down their mobile phone to the annoyance of all outside the room. Meeting organisers should be encouraged to inform all attendees that it is only permitted to use a mobile phone outside the security doors.
- The set up of our desks means that movement and noise constantly distract us.
- We have rules on conduct but these need to be repeated and ensured to prevent these problems.
- Due to the open plan environment there is no control over noise pollution. There is constant foot traffic all day and because we have the most commonly used meeting rooms there are often guests who congregate in the hallway using mobile phones and causing disruption.
- Nowhere to sit in comfy chairs - for short break or very informal meeting. Would be great to have such an area on every floor.
- Open plan which was imposed requires more tolerance not more rules. Some areas are like morgues, very unwelcoming as a 'visitor' and I find quite depressing to be in.
- Everyone, when in the office should have their mobile phones on vibrate and the sound off or off completely. Invariably these people are at meetings but have not unfortunately taken their mobiles with them.

- More efficient hot water machines - an awful lot of unnecessary time is wasted trying to get the hot water up to top temperature, which is needed if having tea.
- Distractions while working from people talking loudly on the telephone or holding personal conversations - the provision of breakout areas would help with the latter.
- I think the standard of work environment and conditions are excellent.
- Don't think open plan is always suitable. I think the grade/room is an absolute disgrace and nonsense!
- No privacy when needed.
- We are being squeezed into a smaller and smaller space. Where do we draw the line?
- Open plan is good for raising managerial awareness on what is happening within their department.
- I don't like being in an office with no windows to open for fresh air - the Portacabins we used during the refurbishment were much more pleasant to work in. I don't like the untidiness that the open plan offices create - cabinets all over the place, clutter on top of the cabinets due to lack of space.
- Generally very happy.
- I accept that many staff require mobile phones as part of their job but I do feel that occasionally a lack of consideration for other staff in the office is demonstrated. Particularly when mobile phone users may be away from their desk for meetings/lunch, whatever - either take it with you, or switch it to silent mode if you must leave it at your desk.
- The occupation levels are increasing all the time to accommodate the letting of space. The desks groupings do not include any baffle boards or individual spaces (to help with noise and other disruption).
- The 'Animal Farm' mentality of all are equal (staff in open-plan) but some are more equal than others (those allocated individual offices).
- The relative proportion of space allocated to individual offices (excessive) compared to that allocated to open-plan (insufficient).
- The denial that professional interior space planners could organise our working environment to staff benefit, especially utilising baffle boards and other systems to reduce noise levels and provide a degree of privacy.
- FC Scotland have issued an etiquette guide.
- Noise levels affect concentration, which affects outputs. More sound barriers should be in place e.g. baffle boards.
- Can't understand why we are not allowed to open the windows in the stairwell landings - it would be a luxury to be able to breathe some fresh air for a time without needing to go outside. Why were the windows fitted enabled to open when opening was not to be allowed?
- Mobile phones with very silly with very loud ring tones, which are left on desks while their owners are elsewhere.
- Far too many mobile phones going off, horrendously loud ring tones.
- Plants are good. Smell from the canteen can be strong at times although is usually OK.
- I dislike the fact that people passing through my workspace do not have the manners to either keep their voices lowered, when having a conversation with an individual or whilst using a mobile phone!
- I dislike strong smelling food, which is eaten at desks.
- I find the ringing of mobile phones extremely rude. They could at least put it on vibrate.
- I most of all hate staff not putting their office phones on voicemail when they leave their desk at lunch times or at night!
- FCS prepared an "Etiquette" code, but lack of meeting rooms with ready access at short notice and need for others to use pc's with colleagues means this cannot always be followed.

- There are no “private” areas to break away from your desk to have any quiet time to relax or to get a break from colleagues even for two minutes. I feel constantly in goldfish bowl and feel obliged to be sociable for 8 hours a day with no respite or me time.
- Lack of informal spaces where one can talk without disturbing colleagues.
- The man who invented the open plan arrangement in the 1970's now says that it is not a good idea, I would think it is a bit of a fashion and like all fashions will fade, especially since most people do not like it. Personal experience leads me to believe some people can concentrate well in an open plan environment, but many others are significantly affected by the distracting effect it brings, with both visual and auditory distraction. It is also difficult to keep secrets or be discreet about sensitive management issues in open plan.
- Generally it's fine, but a reminder of etiquette to everyone might be good, e.g. how far voices carry.
- Can be noisy and difficult to concentrate with lots of people - there doesn't seem to be a 'quiet time' when you can actually work
- General layout of desks since recent reorganisation to accommodate more staff has increased noise etc.
- Pleasant most of the time but could do with a staff lounge area. Staff restaurant not very welcoming for staff just wanting a quiet area to sit and have coffee or eat lunch.
- There is adequate guidance on open plan etiquette, but it's not so easy to enforce!
- Regular workstation assessments would be good.
- A usable electronic filing system would help remove paperwork from desks. However, some papers and books are necessary for work.
- Frequent frustration as a result of others who appear to be unaware of (or don't care about) the impact of their own behaviour. Specifically, the noise levels with people talking, standing up while on the phone, mobile phones going off and meetings being held at desk when should be done in a meeting room.
- Although we do have an “ etiquette” notice, it loses credibility because senior staff (i.e. PB3 and above) often ignore it.
- We need more signage to direct visitors around the building, especially in 3rd floor west.
- Being squashed up and working far too close to colleagues especially when they are coughing and spluttering all over my desk.
- Not enough plants around to try and help the environment.
- Conference rooms do not have enough control of the environmental factors to make for a good working environment in these rooms. They can get very stuffy very quickly with no control over being able to change the environment in them.
- Given the increased population density in the open plan structure, more attention should be given to noise reduction. Some of this is education (move closer to the person you want to speak to, rather than speak loudly across the space) and one could be addressed by use of acoustic screening. Filing cabinets and the like do not work!
- Not keen on open plan. I think there is a requirement for at least some walling/baffle boards so as to reduce noise and visual distraction.
- Being open planned I feel that it can be quite noisy with phones, voices, photocopiers etc going on around me which can affect concentration.
- National Office Scotland already has an open plan etiquette which covers use of mobiles - not adhered to 100% but in the main it is followed although perhaps a general FC open plan etiquette would still be helpful?
- Lack of support from new managers.
- Lack of baffle boards between desks to reduce noise from colleagues.