

# **Covid-19 – Staff Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey (August 2020)**

## **Background**

Since the start of lockdown in March all FSC staff have been significantly impacted. Where they work, if they are at work or whether they have been on furlough, unfurloughed on flexi furlough, how they work, how they connect with others and what they are working on have altered, and for some staff, significantly so.

With restrictions of some kind likely until there is a vaccine, the C-opt (Covid Operational Planning Team) were tasked with find out how staff are coping with these changes and what needs to be done to keep supporting their health and wellbeing and make sure that they feel safe.

This report summarises the main points, with more detail about each question in the PowerPoint. The free text comments were insightful with really good ideas and the time that staff spent answering them is really appreciated. Because they are quite specific and sometimes personal, we feel it would not be fair to share them with everyone when we had not said this up front. They will be shared with SLT, Managers and C-19 OPT as we need this wider group to be able to respond and learn from them.

## **Caveats and Context**

### **Data caveats**

The modest sample size is not representative of the whole organisation and this should be born in mind at all times. We suspect that these comments are mostly from those that are more engaged and better informed than others either due to their role in FSC, they may have worked through the lockdown or have had minimum furlough time and been closely involved in the changes and new projects.

It is not in any way a scientific survey and therefore would not make a sound basis for any significant changes or long term plans. Our concerns relating to the difficulties of engaging those staff not at work (a key theme in the survey) have been underlined by these results and we have no way of accurately interpreting the silence of those who have not responded.

However, despite these caveats, there is still much to be learned from any engagement with staff. Almost all of the comments have been very considered, thoughtful and enlightening.

### **Context**

The context in which these changes took place, their speed and scale are extraordinary for any organisation. It is worth outlining them here as they help to place some of the comments and criticisms in context.

- The announcement of lockdown measures and the need to work from home (where possible) happened so quickly that staff had scattered, sometimes without having time to sort out equipment, communication and reporting structures.
- The furlough scheme was implemented close on the heels of the lockdown and speedily implemented for good financial reasons. With the majority of staff furloughed there were more gaps than structure and many people were missing from the usual line management system.
- Understandable concerns over the strict the government furlough conditions on staff not doing any work related activities when furloughed led to a cautious approach on the use of work emails, even to catch up with staff who were not at work.

- Staff who were not furloughed had an enormous workload. For furloughed staff, the time may have dragged. It has been hard in some cases for these two groups of staff to truly understand the frustrations of the other, although the Welcome Back meetings have helped.

## **Main points to consider from the survey**

### **Covid Security**

FSC's covid security procedures in the main have been implemented well and are understood by most staff but as it is essential that everyone complies and understands, not just the majority. There is more work to be done on this to reiterate the systems already in place, including the use of the back to work form and the Moodle training to ensure that staff feel much more confident about raising a covid security issue. One respondent stated that they were scared to be at work and this in particular will need some careful follow up as everyone need to both feel safe and be safe at work.

Some of the issues raised by staff have already been overtaken by events such as the guidance around face coverings and covid security training around Head Office which is opening up to some staff.

The additional support that staff felt they needed to help deal with visitors and Stay with Us guests who do not comply with instructions has come up as a clear issue that needs addressing.

### **Changed working patterns and places**

Some staff have through necessity taken on new roles and projects, working with new teams across the organisations and taking advantage of learning new skills at the same time. Others have shown an incredibly willingness to get stuck in and help do whatever has been needed. However, a number of comments show that this extra level of work is just not sustainable, with some really feeling the strain.

Of the staff that responded (and again it's important to emphasise the skew towards those that are not furloughed and can do their job from home) working from home has shown the usual mix of benefits including being able to concentrate, not having to commute, a degree of flexibility to fit with other commitments, and the disbenefits including missing social and work contact, access to equipment, the lack of a suitable home working space, not sharing ideas and greater difficulty in putting in proper work/home boundaries.

An interesting point to note is that on the question of productivity, the focus of the responses is on productivity being about getting through lots of work which perhaps reflects people's current experience. However other aspects of productivity (reflection, collaboration, space, consideration, idea sharing) got less of a mention. It's hard to quantify (how do you measure lost ideas?) but a couple of comments suggested that the zoom/slack meetings are so work focused that there is little time, or people feel guilty about catching up with colleagues in this way.

With working from home (for those that can) likely to feature for the next few months, the practical and emotional issues that this survey has brought up will need to be addressed and there are some good suggestions from staff on how things could improve in this regard. Some issues and problems only emerge after a number of weeks, and we will need to be mindful of this.

## **Communication**

Always a hot topic, communications has been one of the largest issues. Increased efforts to engage all staff with Mark's Weekly updates, regular zoom meetings and the ability to link up with people across the organisation has been seen as a positive and have been appreciated. Again, this survey has not generated many responses from staff not at work or currently furloughed. Engaging with these staff continues to be a challenge. Other issues such as having the correct IT equipment as not all staff have work laptops, others do not have good internet connectivity and zoom is not easy for those hard of hearing were also raised.

The communication that really suffered was that at a team, centre and regional level. We know this was severely hampered by the huge numbers of staff on furlough, and those that were left being severely stretched. Gaps and voids in the structure opened up and it was easy for staff to fall through them. There wasn't an easy to access list of who was/ was not at work and staff would have found this helpful. As staff continue to return on different hours and in flexible patterns this continues to be an issue.

## **Restructure and future Plans**

It's not surprising that issues relating to the restructure and how these interrelate with covid-19 are a huge concern to staff e.g. staffing plans for the winter, the ending of the furlough scheme. All of the comments about restructure will be collated and passed to staff reps to be collated alongside other questions.

## **Next Steps**

The responses to the issues will need the full range of quick fixes such as reminders, reinforcement and even signposting staff to key information. Others are larger issues that do need addressing as a matter of urgency. The C-opt group has also been running 'lessons learned' log since the start of the pandemic to capture those things that we would wish to do differently, and this survey can feed into that.

The data and the responses cover a wide range of issues and therefore will be taken forward as follows

1. C-19 OPT will respond to comments about Covid security and related concerns and also pick up other comments, which will be passed to specific teams to respond to.
2. HoGs & Sam (as HO lead) will respond to comments about Staff workloads, management and regional, local comms
3. The Policy Officer will respond to comments on 'All staff' comms and items for Mark's email
4. Comments about Restructure will be passed to Staff Reps to be collated alongside other questions.

These groups are asked to report back with an action plan, with practical approaches responding to the staff comments.