



National Staff Survey Benchmarking Service

Summary of Findings from FE Staff Surveys

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Summary of Staff Survey Findings

RCU ref. 07.070

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Introduction

RCU has been carrying out surveys of staff in FE colleges for over 10 years and has been providing a national benchmarked survey since 2004/05, when it took over the service previously offered by LSDA. **RCU** bases its benchmarking for individual colleges on a rolling sample of 2,500 respondents. Each year we publish a summary of the key findings from surveys in the sector and explore a focus on a particular sub-set of the data. Last year's report¹ looked at differences in the response patterns for different groups of staff. This year's report explores differences in the response patterns of staff in General FE colleges and Sixth Form Colleges up to the end of the 2006/07 academic year. This issue has been raised by client colleges as one that would be of general interest.

Colleges participating in the national benchmarking service can opt for a survey compiled from a selection of tried and tested modules. The nine modules available for colleges to choose from, with each module consisting of six statements, are:

- College Culture and Values
- Leadership and Change Management
- Internal Communication
- Induction and Staff Development
- Appraisal and Individual Performance Review
- Customer Care and Responsiveness
- Support and Encouragement
- Communication within and between Teams
- Team Working and Team Performance Review

The surveys can be administered as a paper questionnaire, which the respondent completes and returns to a secure collection point at their college or college site. Alternatively the survey can be conducted on-line. The surveys use a 2 dimensional scoring system in which respondents are invited to indicate how important an aspect is and to what extent they agree that the College achieves this aspect. The survey uses a 4 point importance scale and a 4 point agreement scale – strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree.

In addition to capturing respondents' scoring of the items, the questionnaire invites participants to put forward their own views on what works well and what should be improved under each of the main headings i.e. College Culture and Values, Leadership and Change Management, Internal Communication etc. This component of the survey gives senior managers 'the staff's voice' and highlights both strengths and weaknesses which can be incorporated into dissemination events and action planning meetings following a survey. Participating colleges receive a listing of all comments made by staff. Comments are not included in this summary report, however.

¹ Available for free download at www.rcu.co.uk.



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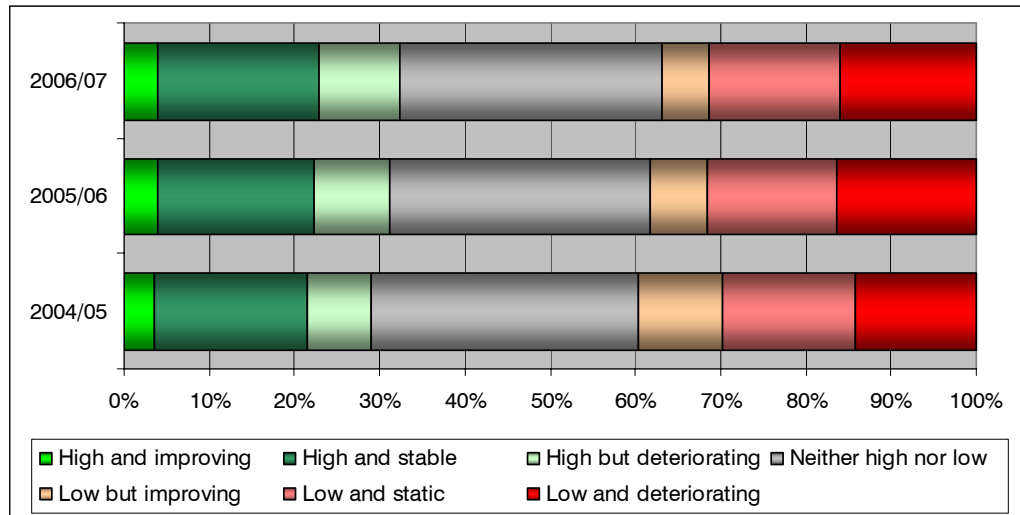
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Overall Trends in Recent Years

RCU has now completed three years of surveys since taking the National Staff Survey Benchmarking Service from LSDA. Comparisons between RCU surveys and previous LSDA results are of limited value, as the questionnaire was substantially reworked at the time of the transfer. However there are now three complete years of surveys under the new approach and it is possible to detect some trends.

For the purposes of this report we have concentrated on what has been happening to staff morale, by analysing the responses of more than 2,000 respondents from a wide range of colleges in each of the three years. All staff responding to the staff survey questionnaire give their view on both the level and direction of travel of staff morale. The figure below shows what has been happening.

Three Year Trend in Staff Morale in Colleges



Source: RCU National Staff Survey Benchmarking Service 2004/05, 2005/06 & 2006/07.

Total base: 7,584.

The good news is that the proportion of staff who believe that morale is high has risen each year, from a starting point of 29% in 2004/05 to more than 32% in 2006/07. This has been matched by a corresponding fall in the proportion believing morale to be low, from almost 40% to just under 37%. It is still the case that staff who believe morale to be low outnumber those who believe it to be high, but the balance is gradually shifting. It is also true that the improvements are still relatively small and it may be too early to be confident of a trend. Last year's report also confirmed that the figures are strongly influenced by low morale among some key groups, principally lecturing staff.



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There is further cause for caution. Although the level of morale is rising it does not always feel that way to staff. In each of the three years the proportion of staff selecting one of the response options associated with falling morale has outweighed those detecting improving morale. This year's ratio is particularly depressing; 25.5%:9.3% in favour of the more pessimistic view.

The contrast between measured ratings for the level of morale and staff perceptions of the direction in which morale is going appears to make a good case for conducting independent surveys! Interestingly, there is a similarity between these results and the patterns of customer satisfaction in public sector surveys. These consistently show people having a high level of personal satisfaction with their experiences of public sector services while believing that overall standards are falling. One explanation of the contradiction is that a culture of negativity in public discussions of the public services leads people to believe, en masse, that their positive personal experiences are somehow abnormal.



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This Year's Theme:

General FE Colleges and Sixth Form Colleges – *La Petite Différence*

This year's theme for further investigation is the different pattern of responses in different types of college. When the responses from staff in Sixth Form Colleges (SFCs) were set alongside those from their opposite numbers in General FE Colleges (GFEs), it became clear that SFC staff are a little happier on all counts. However, it is interesting to note that the pattern of responses was broadly similar. In other words, the aspects for which staff gave the highest and lowest agreement ratings were similar, irrespective of whether the staff surveyed were in a SFC or a GFE. More research would be required to determine whether the patterns we have found relate to differences in colleges' client groups or perhaps to organisational size. For example there is some evidence of high morale in Tertiary Colleges (curriculum mix) and some specialist colleges (organisational size) taking part in the surveys.

The items which drew the highest level of agreement in SFCs are shown in the table below. The agreement ranking of each of these items for staff in GFEs is also shown.

Top 10 items for Agreement for SFC staff

Statement	SFC		GFE	
	Agreement Score	Agreement Ranking	Agreement Score	Agreement Ranking
I feel I am part of at least one team within the College	3.62	1	3.13	3
My immediate colleagues and I work effectively as a team	3.43	2	3.36	1
The College has a clear commitment to learning	3.33	3	3.10	6
I understand how my work contributes to the College's goals	3.29	4	3.11	5
My performance is reviewed in a positive and supportive way	3.25	5	2.95	12
My job role is clear and well-understood	3.24	6	3.19	2
There are good relations between teaching and support teams	3.23	7	2.79	21
My main team meets regularly to plan and discuss issues	3.19	8	3.07	8
My performance is reviewed regularly in a formal meeting	3.17	9	2.66	30
All learners are treated fairly and with respect	3.14	10	3.11	4

Respondents indicate their agreement with a statement on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). This is the agreement score. The agreement ranking is the relative level of agreement with aspects in the survey. In other words, the aspect with which staff agreed most in the survey is #1, the aspect with the second highest score is #2 and so on.



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There are nine survey modules available to colleges, each containing six statements, i.e. a total of 54 items in all on which responses are gathered. The agreement ranking is, therefore, 1st, 2nd, 3rd etc out of 54.

The table showing the Top 10 items for Agreement for GFE staff is presented below.

Top 10 items for Agreement for GFE staff

Statement	GFE		SFC	
	Agreement Score	Agreement Ranking	Agreement Score	Agreement Ranking
My immediate colleagues and I work effectively as a team	3.36	1	3.43	2
My job role is clear and well-understood	3.19	2	3.24	6
I feel I am part of at least one team within the College	3.13	3	3.62	1
All learners are treated fairly and with respect	3.11	4	3.14	10
I understand how my work contributes to the College's goals	3.11	5	3.29	4
The College has a clear commitment to learning	3.10	6	3.33	3
I enjoy my job	3.08	7	3.12	14
My main team meets regularly to plan and discuss issues	3.07	8	3.19	8
The views of learners are taken seriously	2.97	9	2.99	21
The College has a good reputation in its community(ies)	2.97	10	3.05	19

As can be seen in the two tables, *I feel I am part of at least one team within the College* was the item with which staff in SFCs agreed most. In GFEs, this was the item which elicited the third highest level of agreement.

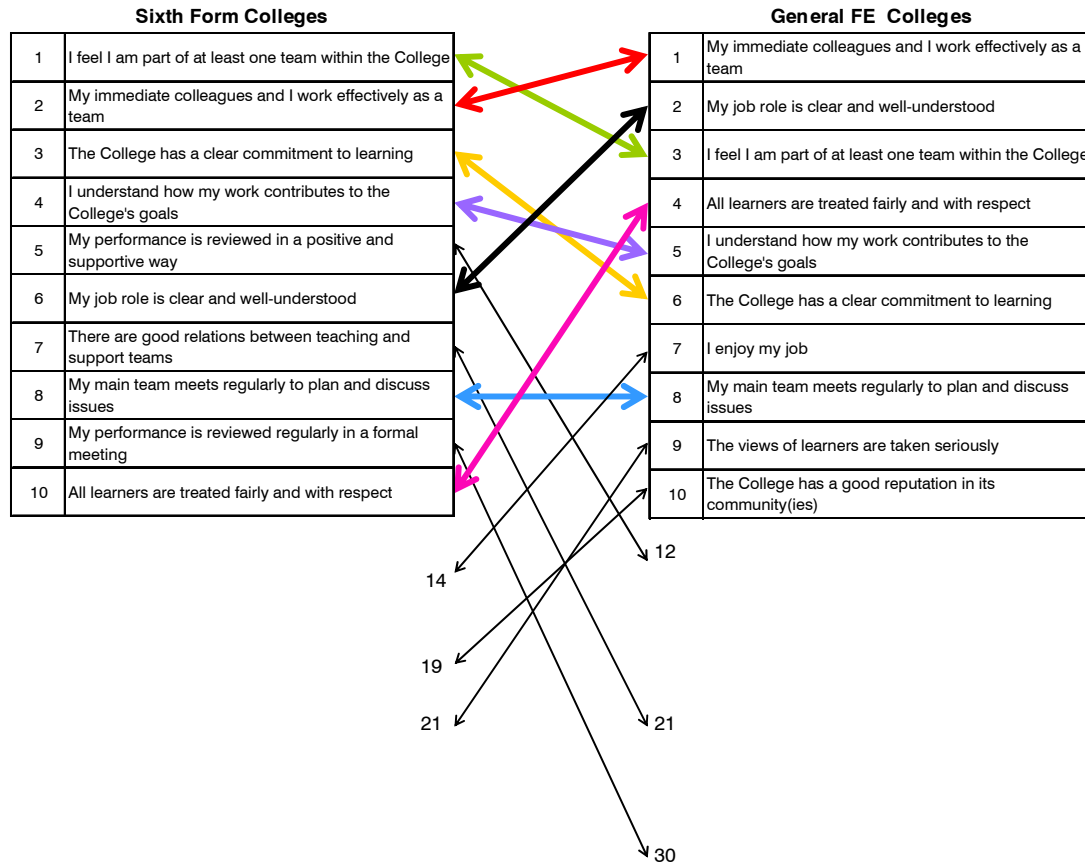


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Comparison of SFC and GFE agreement rankings



As can be seen, the overall impression is of relatively close alignment between the two parts of the sector in the items about which staff agree strongly. The main differences are in the levels agreement with *my performance is reviewed regularly in a formal meeting*; *there are good relations between teaching and support teams* and *the views of learners are taken seriously*.

Staff in GFEs were less convinced than their colleagues in SFCs that their performance is reviewed regularly in a formal meeting nor that there are good relations between staff in teaching and support roles. By contrast, GFE staff were more positive that *the views of learners are taken seriously* than staff working in SFCs. This could have significance for the Framework for Excellence and the development of Learner Involvement Strategies.



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The most important thing

Survey respondents score each item in the survey in terms of its importance for them. Once again, comparison of responses from the two types of college showed a largely similar pattern. The tables below show the top 10 items for SFC and GFE staff respectively.

Top 10 items for Importance to SFC staff

Statement	SFC		GFE	
	Importance Score	Importance Ranking	Importance Score	Importance Ranking
All learners are treated fairly and with respect	3.77	1	3.71	3
The College gives its customers a good quality service	3.75	2	3.71	2
I feel I am part of at least one team within the College	3.64	3	3.58	20
All staff are treated fairly and with respect	3.61	4	3.67	6
The College has a good reputation in its community(ies)	3.61	5	3.60	16
New staff to the College are supported effectively	3.60	6	3.62	12
The views of learners are taken seriously	3.59	7	3.62	10
Staff receive appropriate training to do their job effectively	3.59	8	3.62	11
The College has a clear commitment to learning	3.59	9	3.67	5
My job role is clear and well-understood	3.58	10	3.63	8

The table showing the Top 10 items for importance to GFE staff is presented on the following page.



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Top 10 items for importance to GFE staff

Statement	GFE		SFC	
	Importance Score	Importance Ranking	Importance Score	Importance Ranking
My immediate colleagues and I work effectively as a team	3.75	1	3.54	15
The College gives its customers a good quality service	3.71	2	3.75	2
All learners are treated fairly and with respect	3.71	3	3.77	1
I enjoy my job	3.69	4	3.56	11
The College has a clear commitment to learning	3.67	5	3.59	9
All staff are treated fairly and with respect	3.67	6	3.61	4
My manager(s) respond(s) appropriately when I raise issues	3.65	7	3.54	14
My job role is clear and well-understood	3.63	8	3.58	10
There are good relations between teaching and support teams	3.62	9	3.56	12
The views of learners are taken seriously	3.62	10	3.59	7

All learners are treated fairly and with respect was the most important item in the survey for SFC staff. In GFEs, this item ranked 3rd most important. It was seen earlier that SFCs ranked this 10th for agreement, whilst in GFEs the agreement ranking was 4th out of 54. *The College gives its customers a good quality service* was the 2nd most important item in both types of college. This was rated 11th for agreement in SFCs and 13th for agreement in GFEs.

The difference between the importance which staff attach to an item and the level of agreement they indicate is a pointer to where their institution is falling short of their expectations. SFCs may need to consider how they ensure that learners are treated with the respect their staff think appropriate and GFEs need to recognise that they are not yet fully providing the quality of service their staff think they should.

In both cases, the process of change will be eased by the common ground between all staff groups which is the shared ambition for learners' experience in college. College management teams do not need to 'win hearts and minds' on these issues. They need to harness the staff aspiration to provide a quality service and ensure that staff at all levels are listened to when areas for further improvement are discussed.

All staff are treated fairly and with respect was the 4th most important item in SFCs and the 6th in GFEs, but only 45th and 49th respectively out of 54 for agreement, indicating a significant shortfall between staff's expectations and their daily experience.



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Commonly perceived problems

The previous sections have shown the relatively close alignment of staff in both types of institution regarding what is important to them and what they perceive to be happening. The similarity between SFCs and GFEs extends into areas of dissatisfaction for staff in the sector.

The following tables show the items which received the lowest agreement rankings in SFCs and in GFEs. As can be seen, there are widespread similarities. These are areas of common grievance for staff in both SFCs and GFEs.

Bottom 10 for Agreement for SFC staff

Statement	Agreement Ranking
Staff are given effective support when improvement is needed	45
The College has effective systems for sharing good practice	46
Staff from different College sections work effectively together	47
The views of staff at all levels are treated with respect	48
Communication is effective in this College	49
When change is necessary it is managed effectively	50
I have opportunities to progress within the College	51
Decision-making is fair and transparent	52
My salary/remuneration level is a fair reward for the work I do	53
Managers consult staff effectively when changes are needed	54



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Bottom 10 for Agreement for GFE staff

Statement	Agreement Ranking
Staff are briefed fully & honestly about major issues	45
Staff are encouraged to try new ideas without fear of failure	46
The College has effective systems for sharing good practice	47
I have opportunities to progress within the College	48
Decision-making is fair and transparent	49
The views of staff at all levels are treated with respect	50
When change is necessary it is managed effectively	51
Communication is effective in this College	52
Managers consult staff effectively when changes are needed	53
My salary/remuneration level is a fair reward for the work I do	54

My salary/remuneration level is a fair reward for the work I do was the survey item with which GFE staff disagreed the most strongly (it ranked 54th out of 54 items in the survey). SFC staff had similar views and ranked it 53rd out of 54. The views of staff in both parts of the sector are also very similar with regard to *managers consult staff effectively when changes are needed*; *when change is necessary it is managed effectively*; *decision-making is fair and transparent* and *the College has effective systems for sharing good practice*.

When considering these low levels of agreement with management practice in both parts of the sector, it is important to remember that staff attached considerable importance to *the College gives its customers a good quality service*. The achievement of the level of service which staff would like to offer depends on successful change management. Fulfilling staff's aspirations about quality of service and dealing with the higher levels of service required by the government agenda of increased fee contribution and demand-led funding from individuals, via Skills Accounts, and employers, via Train2Gain, is, according to these results, going to be a challenge to management. Based on staff responses to the surveys, the problem is the management of the change process rather than staff's attitude towards change in providing a high quality service in which learners are firmly at the centre of operations.

At the time of writing, Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK), the Sector Skills Council for the lifelong learning sector, is commissioning research to identify subject areas with hard-to-fill vacancies. LLUK has recognised recruitment as an issue. What happens after staff have been recruited may also be a cause for concern according to these staff survey responses.



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