CHET

CENTRE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION TRANSFORMATIONS

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PANDEMIA

The Personal and Professional Costs of Universities' Response to COVID-19

Pandemia

Drawing on data from 3 major empirical studies since March 2020, consulting +7000 UK HE workers & wider international HE community

- Watermeyer, R., Crick, T, Knight, C., and Goodall, J. (2020) COVID-19 and digital disruption in UK universities: afflictions and affordances of emergency online migration. *Higher Education,* 81, 623-641.

- Shankar, K., Phelan, D., Suri, R., Watermeyer, R., Knight, C., and Crick, T. (2021) 'The COVID-19 crisis is not the core problem': Experiences, Challenges, and Concerns of Irish Academia in the Pandemic. *Irish Educational Studies*. doi: 10.1080/03323315.2021.1932550

- Hardman, J., Watermeyer, R., Crick, T., Shankar, K., Knight, C., McCaughey, F., and Suri, V.K., (2022) Does anyone even notice us?" COVID-19's impact on academics' well-being in a developing country. *South African Journal of Higher Education*.

- Watermeyer, R., Knight, C., and Crick, T. (2021) Digital disruption in the time of COVID-19: Learning technologists' accounts of cultural barriers to online learning in UK universities. *International Journal for Academic Development*. Doi: 10.1080/1360144X.2021.1990064

- McGaughey, F., Watermeyer, R., Shankar, K., Suri, V.K., Knight, C., Crick, T., Hardman, J., Phelan, D. and Chung, R. (2021) 'This can't be the new norm': academics' perspectives on the COVID-19 crisis for the Australian University Sector. *Higher Education Research and Development*. Doi: 10.1080/07294360.2021.1973384

- Watermeyer, R., Shankar, K., Crick, T., Knight, C., McGaughey, F., Hardman, J., Suri, V.R., Chung, R. and Phelan, D. (2021) 'Pandemia': A reckoning of UK universities' corporate response to COVID-19 and its academic fallout. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*. doi: 10.1080/01425692.2021.1937058

Academic Staff: Immediate perspectives on transitioning to remote working
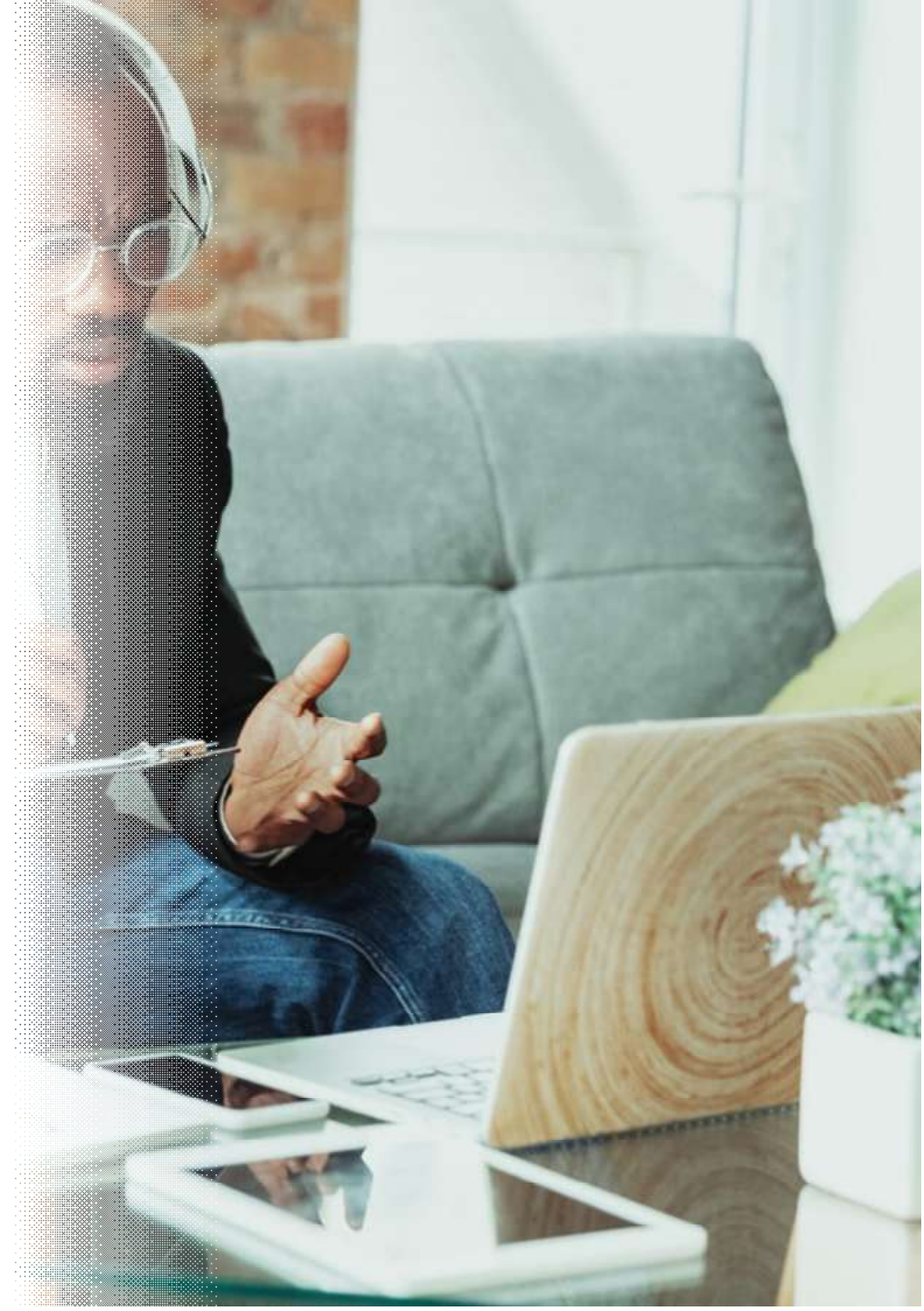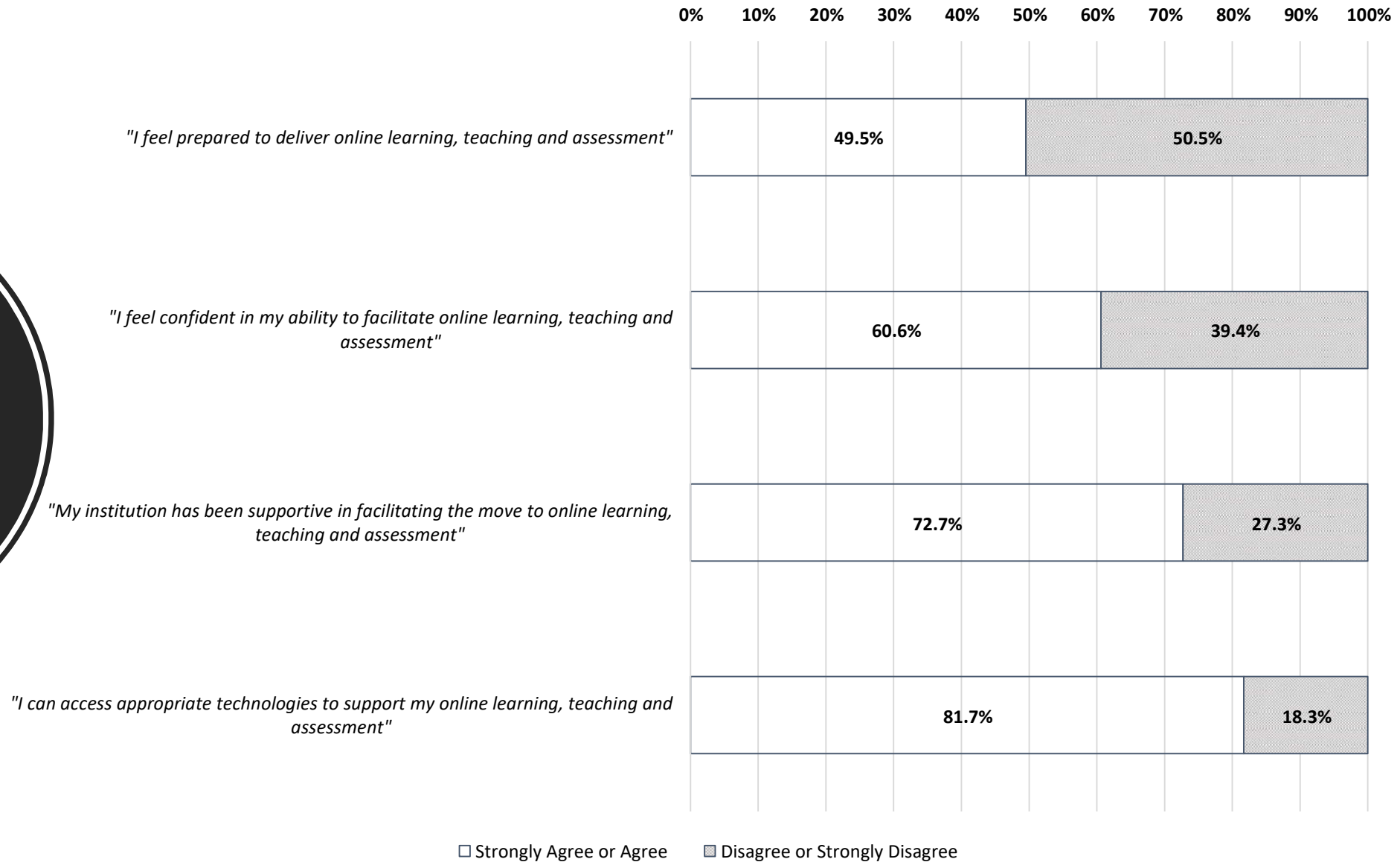
RESPONDENTS

- England
- Scotland
- Wales
- Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland 2%
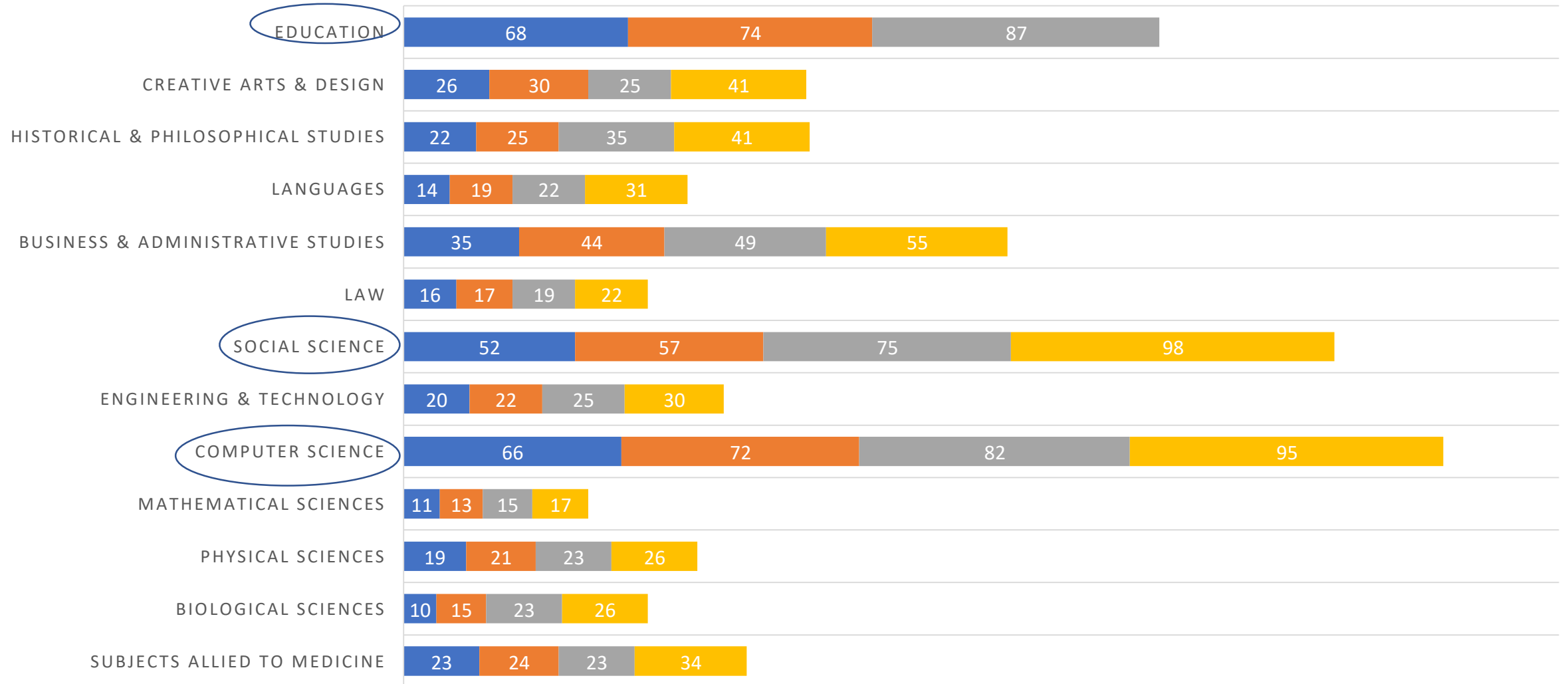
Wales 9%

Scotland 10%
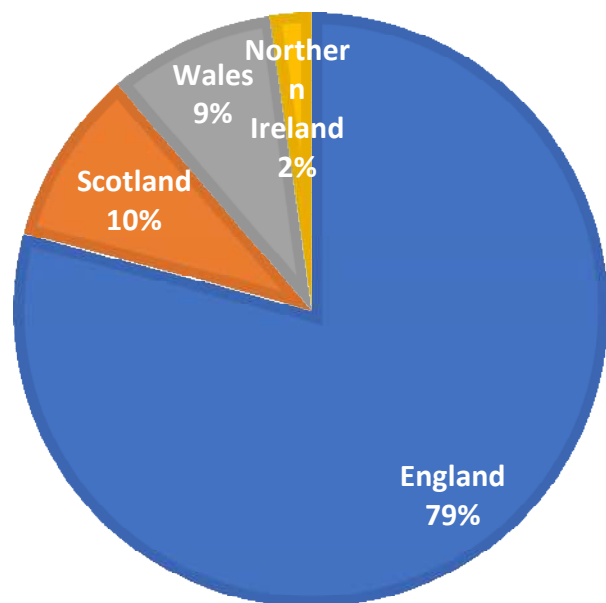
England 79%

OVERVIEW

- Online attitudinal survey of educators (worldwide/across sectors), generating almost N=3000 responses

- Distributed through professional networks

- N=1,148 responses academics working in UK universities: England n=907; Wales n=110; Scotland n=104; Northern Ireland N=25

- Respondents representing all disciplinary fields & career hierarchy

- Gender split: 58% female, 39% male, 1% prefer to self-describe, 2% prefer not to say

- Employment status:
  - 79% Full-Time
  - 83% Open-Ended Contracts

Headline findings

"I feel prepared to deliver online learning, teaching and assessment" — 49.5% / 50.5%

"I feel confident in my ability to facilitate online learning, teaching and assessment" — 60.6% / 39.4%

"My institution has been supportive in facilitating the move to online learning, teaching and assessment" — 72.7% / 27.3%

"I can access appropriate technologies to support my online learning, teaching and assessment" — 81.7% / 18.3%

☐ Strongly Agree or Agree   ☐ Disagree or Strongly Disagree

PREPAREDNESS, CONFIDENCE, SUPPORT AND ACCESS BY DISCIPLINE

Legend: Preparedness, Confidence, Support, Access

Discipline	Preparedness	Confidence	Support	Access
EDUCATION	68	74	87	
CREATIVE ARTS & DESIGN	26	30	25	41
HISTORICAL & PHILOSOPHICAL STUDIES	22	25	35	41
LANGUAGES	14	19	22	31
BUSINESS & ADMINISTRATIVE STUDIES	35	44	49	55
LAW	16	17	19	22
SOCIAL SCIENCE	52	57	75	98
ENGINEERING & TECHNOLOGY	20	22	25	30
COMPUTER SCIENCE	66	72	82	95
MATHEMATICAL SCIENCES	11	13	15	17
PHYSICAL SCIENCES	19	21	23	26
BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES	10	15	23	26
SUBJECTS ALLIED TO MEDICINE	23	24	23	34

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NEWS · 9 APRIL 2020

Forced shift to online teaching in pandemic unleashes educators' deepest job fears

'Culture-change moment' for higher education.

Richard Watermeyer et al.*

Themes from open-text responses

- destabilisation of student marketplace
  - issues of recruitment and retention; threat from private HE providers and edtech sector
- economic impact not only in terms of decreased revenue from tuition fees but other university services and by extension to local economies/national GDP
- deprofessionalisation, dumbing-down
- precarisation, jobs obsolescence, job cuts
- work intensification, gender inequality
- cessation of research
  - impact on academic labour market
- limited identification with digital affordances

Academic Staff: impact on welfare, health and wellbeing

"Pandemia"

Overview

International survey of n=2649 academics; n=1099 UK (65% female; 61% open-ended contracts; 66% from "research intensive" universities

Key themes

- Crisis-management = creep of undemocratic forms of institutional governance; cost-cutting (disaster management); deprioritisation of research
- Impaired trust in university leadership
- Increase in labour casualization; job insecurity
- Rise in work exploitation and work-based inequalities

Key stats

84%: corporate response of universities has contributed to work related stress

85%: suffering from digital fatigue

77%: feeling demotivated

81%: major damage to the job prospects of ECRs

92%: changes to academics' working lives as a consequence of institutional responses to COVID-19 have resulted in long-lasting impacts to health and wellbeing

Health and wellbeing of academics during COVID-19 (x4 country edition surveys)

- **Work intensification**
- **Job precarity and scarcity**
- **Erosion of trust**
- **Deterioration of mental health**
- **Exacerbation of existing inequalities**

'This can't be the new norm'

_____

- "The impacts of COVID-19 appear magnified by government apathy towards sustaining a university workforce. New policy directions are required that revisit the government's *laissez-faire* approach to the sector and universities' reliance on international students."

Existing government policies and lack of sufficient support for higher education have led to increasing corporatisation of the sector and universities have responded through increased marketisation. These political and sectoral conditions, combined with the pandemic, created the perfect storm, the effects of which have impacted the wellbeing of staff.

We find staff's autonomy, competence, and relatedness to be undermined by COVID-19 and university responses to it. Overall, respondents report work-related stress, digital fatigue, negative impacts on work-life balance, and concerns over potential longer-term changes to academic work and the sector. We note the need for university leaders to acknowledge and address the impact of COVID-19

On the **+** side

- Many respondents articulated the positive aspects of remote working, in particular greater flexibility, less travel (and carbon footprint) for commuting and conferences, and more time for research as a result of reduced travel.

- Prospect of increased autonomy on an ongoing basis if supported by universities

- the pandemic as part of a 'crisis trajectory' that has been going on since post-2009

- intensification of more than a decade of higher education policies based on neo-liberal logics and intensified managerialism. Irish academics reported work related stress, digital fatigue and adverse impact on their work-life balance. The pandemic has simply amplified and illuminated the negative impact of these adverse policies.

- These accounts offer little respite from a view that the response of universities around the world including Ireland to COVID-19 has worsened the long-established norms of academic employment and has contributed, much as in other spheres of the labour market, to the contraction of job and career opportunities in academia.

- The ongoing organisational reform of Irish higher education around market principles has failed to account for staff welfare, health and wellbeing; the global health crisis has brought these trends into even more stark relief. Higher education policies must be re-calibrated to mitigate their negative impact on the academic community as much as possible. In the short term, universities need to prioritise a 'human-centric' model of productivity and academic labour that accounts for the ongoing toll the pandemic has been taking on staff, students, and all citizens.

- + pivot to online delivery, would result in a fuller and sustained utilisation of digital pedagogies, opportunities for pedagogical experimentation, innovative assessment, and reflexive practice

'The COVID-19 crisis is not the core problem'

- South Africa is acknowledged as the most unequal country on earth

- 80.5 per cent of South Africa's population is either in severe poverty or struggling with food poverty

- Connectivity and access to technology for teaching/learning is challenging. Notwithstanding 36 million people in the country use mobile phones (GSMA 2020).

- Teaching online in South Africa very often refers to teaching through and with mobile phones, rather than tablets or personal computers & devices often have to be shared among family members

- Electricity supply is not guaranteed
  - the failing power grid in South Africa often leads to electricity outages for up to 6 hours a day

"Does anyone even notice us?"

- Increased workplace inequality; increased managerialism

- Deteriorating prospects for early career academics

- Institutional legitimization of cost-cutting initiatives contributing to labour exploitation

- While not unique to South Africa, the colonial and apartheid past require serious deconstruction if all race groups are to flourish. However, the pandemic has only hardened a neoliberal focus on technological advancement, where the push for a digital economy threatens to weaken any attempts to include indigenous knowledge into the academy

HOWEVER

- Emergence of positive, caring relationships between colleagues is reported as a significant outcome of the COVID-19 enforced move to online teaching.

-

Ubuntu

- Bonhomie amidst crisis – necessary for building resilience as a prop to well-being (Corbera et al. 2020).

- "The growth of more positive relationships amongst peers, in fact, would seem to have mitigated at least some of the negative impact on academics' well-being. From an African psychological viewpoint, this finding points towards the development of an ethics of care amongst colleagues grounded in a philosophy of *ubuntu*

- a movement of academics and students focusing on collective well- being, rather than individual well-being. This speaks to the development of an ethics of care that focuses on the collective rather than the personal

Professional Services Staff:

work experiences under COVID-19

Sample

Number of completed surveys:
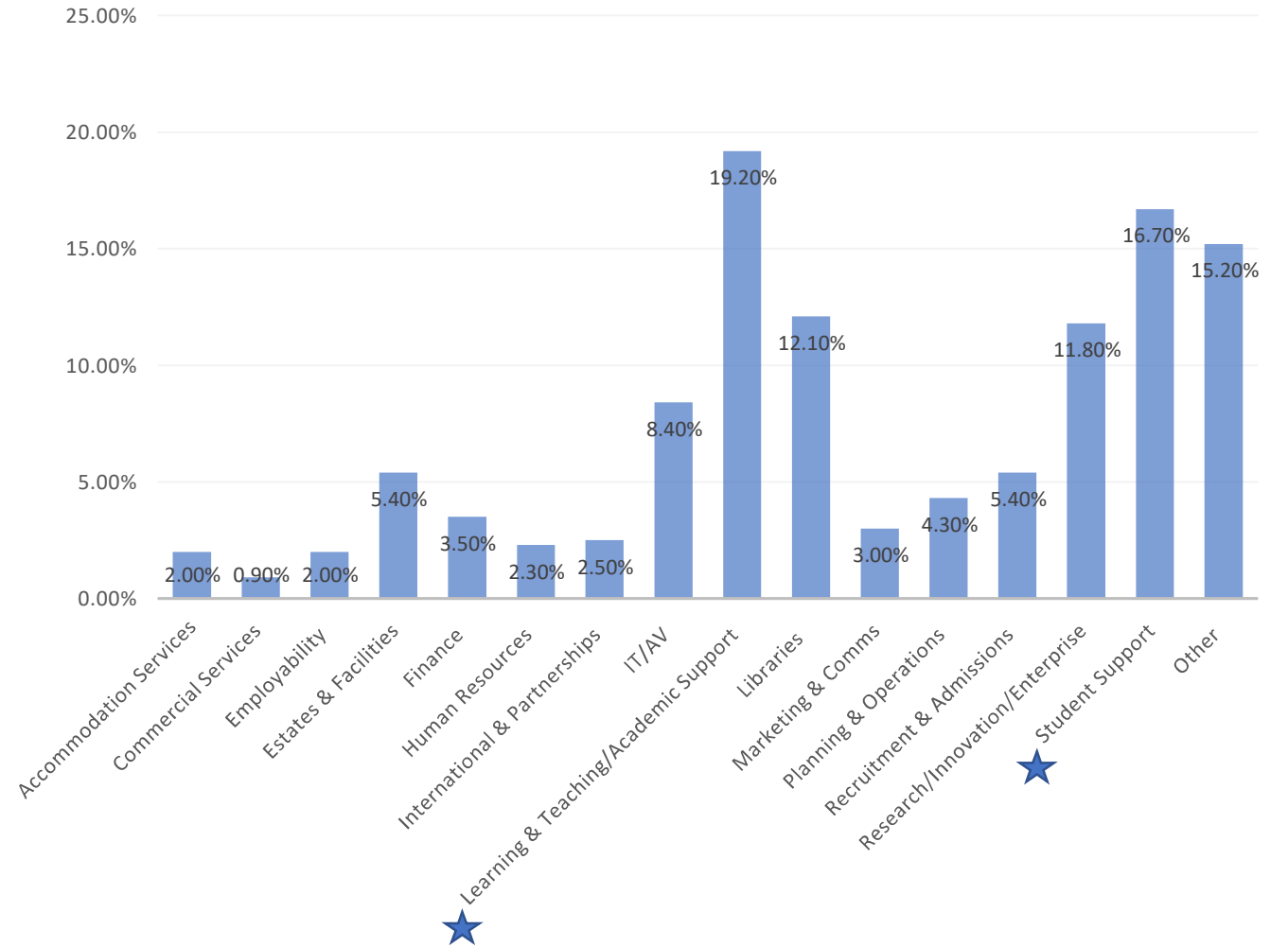n=4801

Gender
Male
28%
Female 71%
Prefer to self-describe 1%

Employment status
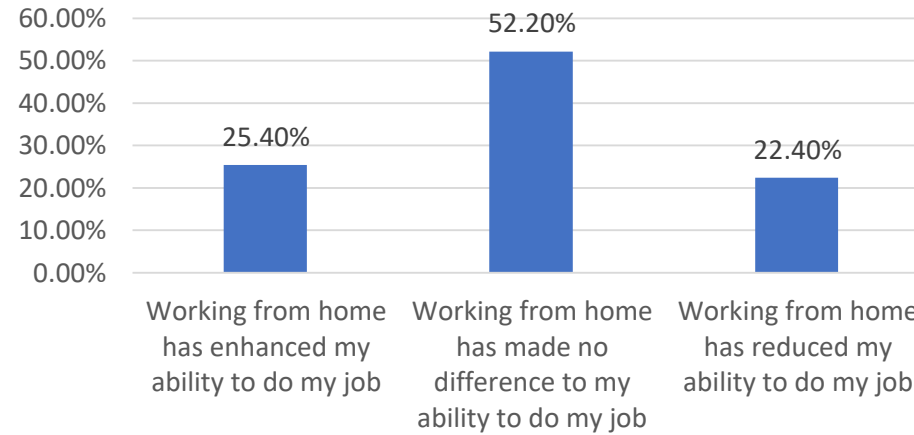*Part-time* 22%

Full-time 78%

Type of institution
Pre-1992 64%

Post-1992 28%
Not sure 8%
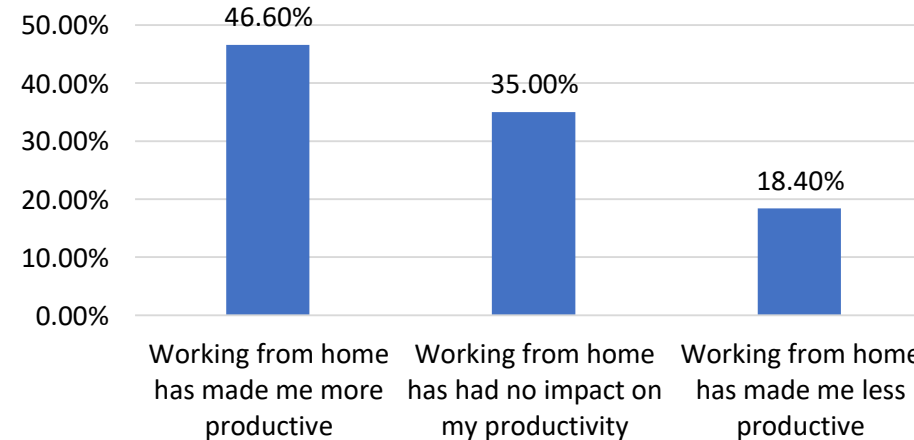
Branch of professional services

Branch	Percentage
Accommodation Services	2.00%
Commercial Services	0.90%
Employability	2.00%
Estates & Facilities	5.40%
Finance	3.50%
Human Resources	2.30%
International & Partnerships	2.50%
IT/AV	8.40%
Learning & Teaching/Academic Support	19.20%
Libraries	12.10%
Marketing & Comms	3.00%
Planning & Operations	4.30%
Recruitment & Admissions	5.40%
Research/Innovation/Enterprise	11.80%
Student Support	16.70%
Other	15.20%

Impact on work ability and work productivity

How has working from home affected your ability to do your job?
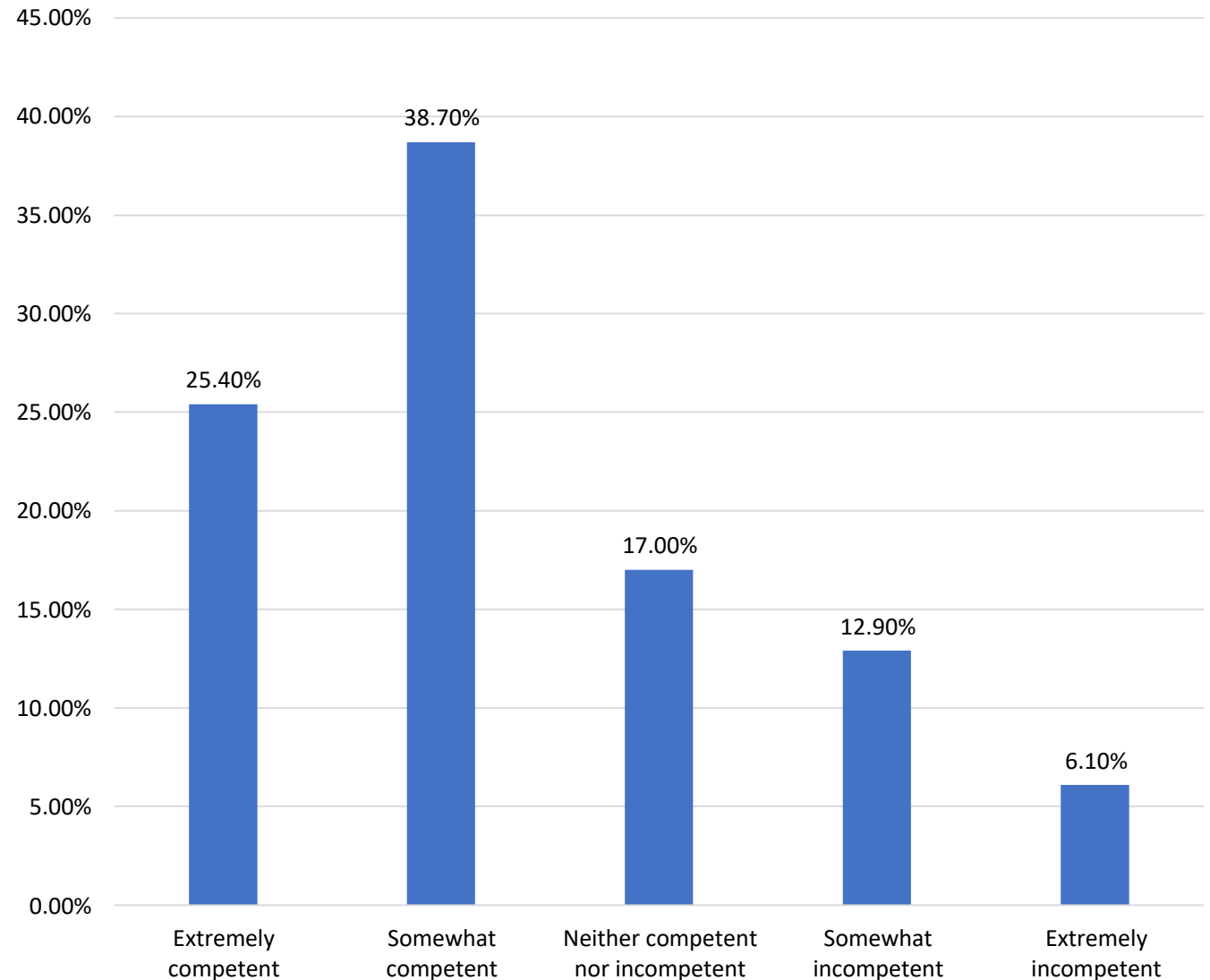

- Working from home has enhanced my ability to do my job: 25.40%
- Working from home has made no difference to my ability to do my job: 52.20%
- Working from home has reduced my ability to do my job: 22.40%

How has working from home affected your productivity ?

- Working from home has made me more productive: 46.60%
- Working from home has had no impact on my productivity: 35.00%
- Working from home has made me less productive: 18.40%

Impact on mental and physical health and wellbeing
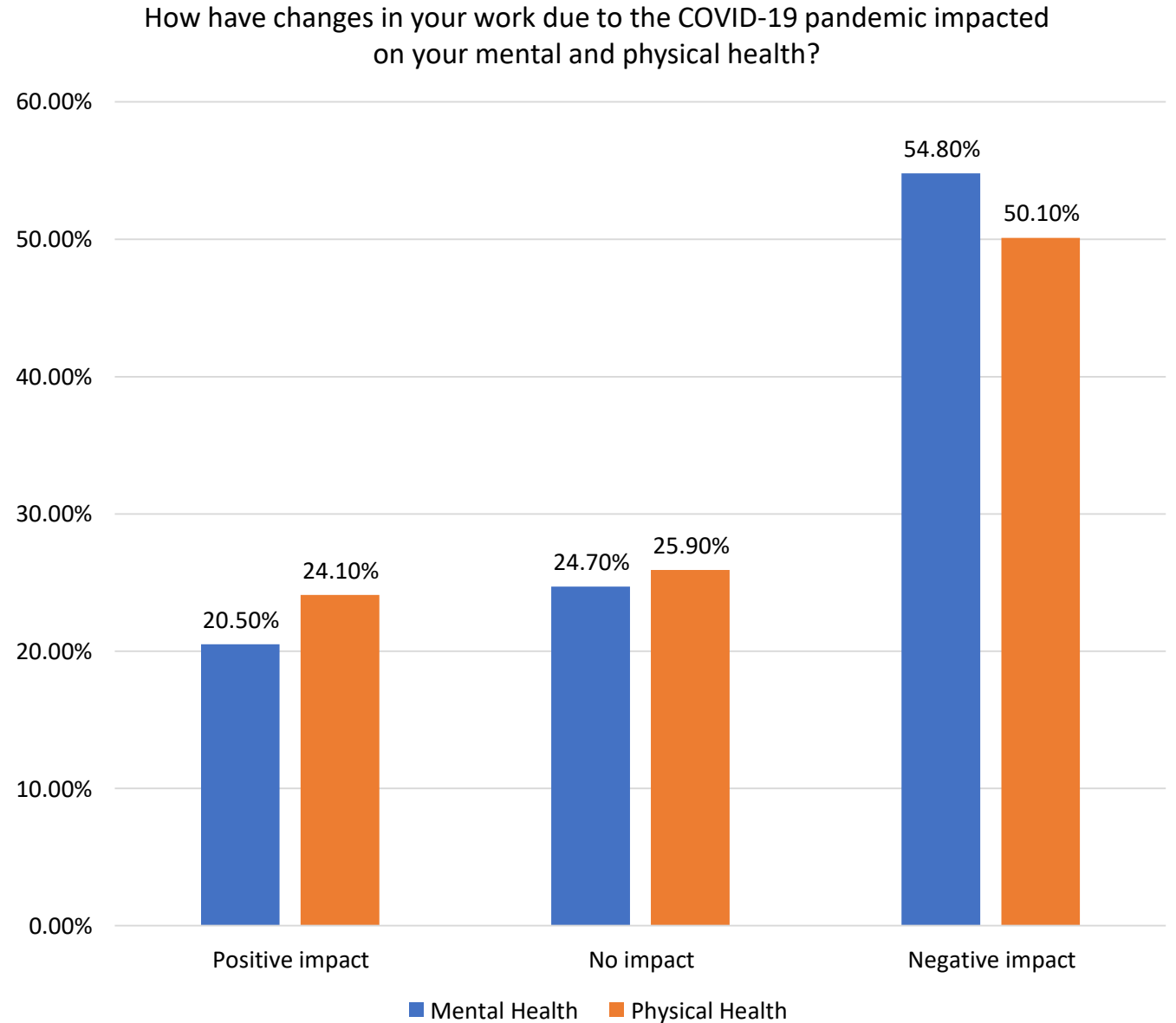
How have changes in your work due to the COVID-19 pandemic impacted on your mental and physical health?

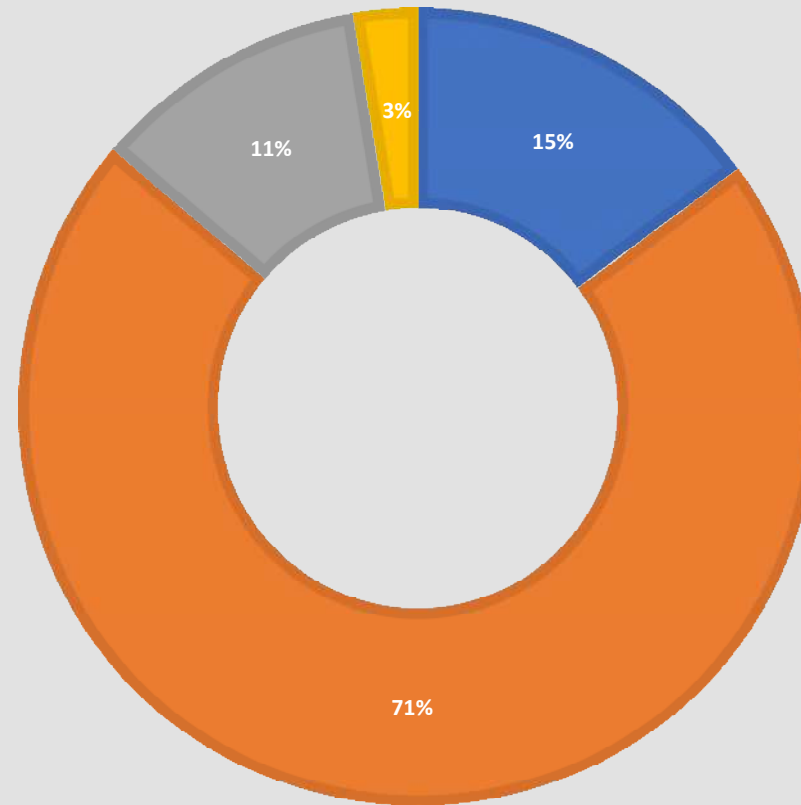|	Positive impact	No impact	Negative impact
Mental Health	20.50%	24.70%	54.80%
Physical Health	24.10%	25.90%	50.10%

A move away from campuses?
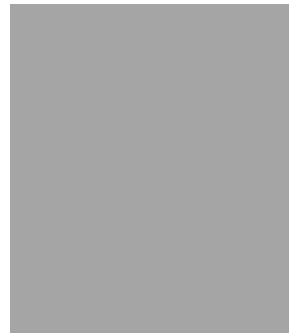
IN THE FUTURE WHAT WOULD BE YOUR PREFERRED MODE OF WORK?

- Exclusively home-based
- Blended
- Exclusively campus-based
- Other

3%

11%

15%

71%

In overview

- Hyper-competitive labour market – surplus of (doctoral) talent
- Staff precarization and casualization
- Workforce inequality (cf. gender pathways/ceilings/unequal burden)
- Mental health crisis exacerbated by 'pandemia' - long-COVID
- Breakdown of trust accentuated by 'pandemia' and a turn towards crisis management
- Blended working, blended/hybridized pedagogy
- A hostile policy environment
- Sector contraction & increased stratification?
- Major workforce attrition – and diaspora of UK academics to other international settings – UK academia's fading allure
- SET AGAINST
- Prestige economy and value dominated by competitive accountability
- The promise/threat of EdTech – platformised futures, datafication, assetization
- Is the monopolization by universities of the HE value chain weakening? A great reset or replacement?

A new value proposition for HE?
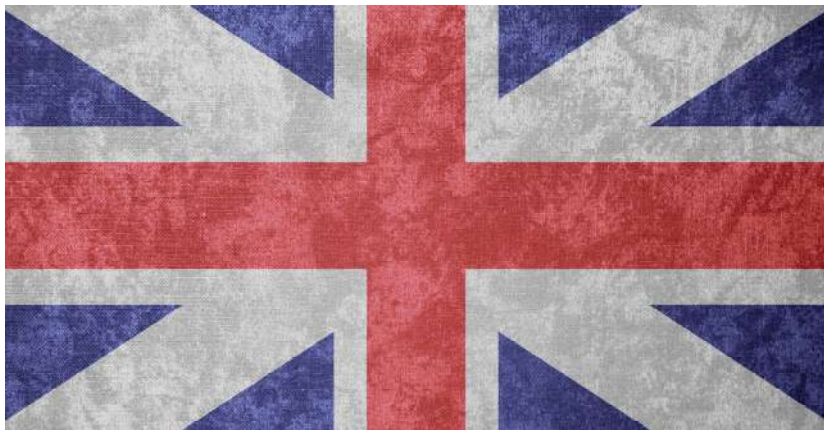
A different kind of leadership?

Authentic: Values based
Compassionate/empathetic
Willing to stand up to a hostile policy environment
Digitally literate and risk-ready: Willing to embrace the
affordances of digitalisation
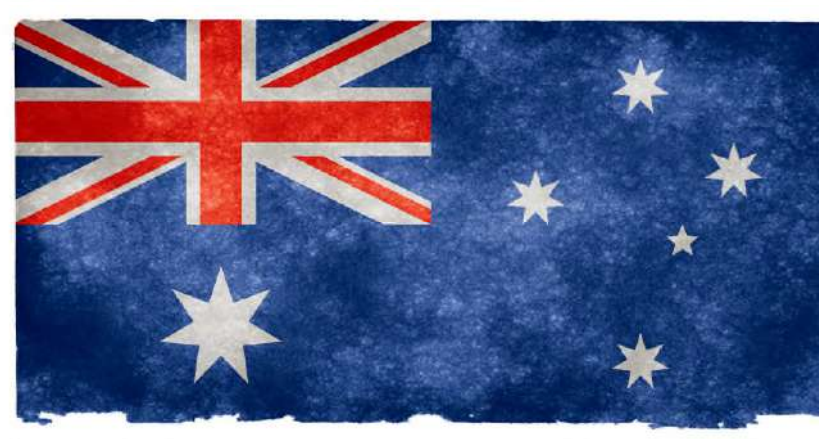Consultative/shared/collective leadership

The challenge of the digital divide

Finally

VOICES OF PANDEMIA

(longCOVID)

Project Team

- Professor Richard Watermeyer (PI) University of Bristol
- Professor Tom Crick, Swansea University
- Professor Kalpana Shankar, University College Dublin, Ireland
- Dr Cathryn Knight, University of Swansea
- Dr Joanne Hardman, University of Cape Town, South Africa
- Dr Fiona McGaughey, University of Western Australia
- Professor Angelique Tinik, University of Maastricht
- Professor Lisa Given, RMIT, Australia
- Professor Heidi Julien, University at Buffalo, USA
- Professor Ellen Inceachair, University of Waterloo
- Dr Marie Davies and Dr Kim Allen, University of Leeds
- Dr Kirsten Locke, University of Auckland, New Zealand
- Dr Lilian Chen, University

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Thank you so much for listening

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