Society welcomes Wellcome research culture report

Today Wellcome published its report 'What Researchers Think About the Culture They Work In', setting out the findings of its investigation into researchers' experiences of research culture and their visions for the future.

The Wellcome survey of 4267 researchers, in the UK and globally, exposes the stark pressures faced by many who work in research. It found that despite a majority agreeing they are proud to work in research, four out of five researchers believe high levels of competition are creating unkind or aggressive working conditions and nearly half feel pressured into working long hours. The survey was designed to hear experiences from across the research community and take the first step to inform our vision for how we can create a creative, inclusive and honest research culture.

The respondents were self-selecting and are not necessarily representative of the general researcher population but among the key findings were:

- 84% of researchers agreed that they were proud to work in the research community, but less than one in three felt secure pursuing a research career

- 61% have witnessed bullying or harassment, and 43% have experienced one of these behaviours themselves. But only 37% would feel comfortable speaking out about bullying or harassment

- Just over half of the respondents had sought or had wanted to seek professional help for depression or anxiety

- A third of full-time employed respondents reported working more than 50 hours per week.

- 79% of respondents in managerial roles enjoyed managing people, but less than half of managers surveyed said they had received training on managing people

- 69% of respondents agreed that rigour of results was considered an important research outcome by their workplace but one in five junior researchers and students revealed that they had felt pressured by their supervisor to produce a particular result

Whilst the findings of the report are troubling, the Society welcomes the opportunity to shine a light on problematic research culture with a view to accelerating change.

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Dr Anna Zecharia - Director, Policy & Public Affairs and the Society's senior representative on EDIS Group - said:

> *"Many of the issues raised in today's report have been echoed by our members and continue to inform the Society's work. We are concerned about a poor research culture for many reasons: because of the negative impact on individuals' mental health and wellbeing; because it is driving out under-represented groups and therefore limiting the diversity of the research community, and because it is likely having a negative impact on research integrity, creativity and innovation. We hope the findings of the report will help galvanise those in the research community towards the practical actions that can help build a consistently positive culture – and the Society looks forward to playing its part."*

The Society has raised concerns about research culture through various policy channels, for instance when responding to the 2017 Research Integrity inquiry of the Science and Technology Committee, House of Commons, we said:

> *"Research culture is such that an individual academic's success is inextricably linked to the success of their papers… Rather than rewarding [solely] the results of experiments, promotion and progression should also factor in the quality of the scientist at hand: their rigour, productivity and commitment to nurturing the next generation of scientists. Ultimately, it is a question of long-term investment over potentially short-term gains…. A shift in the reward and recognition culture in academia will be fundamental [to achieving this]"*

We also highlighted issues with an individualistic and competitive research culture in our response to the 2019 UK Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers consultation. While we recognise the Concordat has huge potential as a tool to positively shape future research culture, we noted that its success would depend on leadership from the community, including active support from funders and effective deployment of mechanisms such as REF2021 to drive behavioural change at institutions.

Although learned societies were not included as one of the groups with the responsibility to change research culture in today's report, we believe organisations like ours have a role to play. An inclusive culture – one where everyone feels valued and that they belong, irrespective of difference – is fundamental to building a thriving and diverse research community, and the Society has a responsibility to our members as part of that community.

Under our current five-year strategy, we have an objective "to remove barriers to participation and success [in pharmacology], while promoting equality and celebrating diversity, and being inclusive in all we do". As part of this, the Society's membership of sector bodies such as EDIS Group demonstrates our commitment to the view that 'everyone should have equal opportunities and access to a successful career within Science or Health, its research and its outcomes'. We have recently completed an external review of our approach to equality, diversity and inclusion and our role in creating change. We will be sharing our findings and opening up a discussion with our membership and partners in the science and health sector later this year.

We have already taken steps to set expectations for an inclusive culture at the meetings and events we organise. At our flagship annual conference, *Pharmacology 2019*, we launched participant values that highlighted both our commitment to providing a welcoming, fun, kind, respectful and inclusive environment and that was also clear about our zero tolerance for discrimination and harassment. Working with our early career members, we also held a workshop on researcher wellbeing at the meeting, with the aim of better understanding the experiences of our members and what support the Society may be able to offer to promote an inclusive and supportive research culture.

We hope that today's report stimulates reflection and discussion – and that together we can move towards a positive culture that supports individuals, diversity and creativity, whilst also driving innovative, collaborative working across disciplines and institutions.

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