

# Towards a Positive Working Environment

A summary of the report  
on the results of the  
2007 staff survey



# Vice-Chancellors foreword

At the beginning of 2007, we conducted a wide-ranging survey to find out people's views and experiences of the University as a place to work. This is a summary of the report on the results. You can find the full report and detailed results at [www.bristol.ac.uk/pwe](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/pwe)

The report is highly significant – it reveals the University's current strengths and weaknesses as a workplace; it suggests areas for future action; and it shows how far the University has come since the previous survey was conducted in 2003.

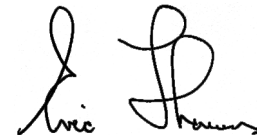
You are invited to interpret the results for yourself, but there are two conclusions it would be hard to escape: that overall, the working environment here is held in high regard by most members of staff; and that

there has been a striking improvement on virtually all measures over the past three or four years. For instance, we are communicating more successfully, sharing a stronger sense of commitment to the University and empowering people to a greater extent.

Some of the improvements are certainly due to the Positive Working Environment (PWE) process we have initiated. (You can read about PWE at [www.bristol.ac.uk/pwe](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/pwe) if this is unfamiliar territory.) The survey results are evidence that we are moving in the right direction. We also have some useful external validation, including a Business in the Community Award in June 2007 for demonstrating 'a comprehensive approach to the health and well-being of employees'. However, I would not claim

for a moment that the PWE process is complete. It never will be, because there will always be more we can do to support colleagues, consult one another, promote fairness and tackle shortcomings.

These are challenges for each of us individually, but we also have the leadership provided by the PWE Steering Group chaired by Professor David Clarke. My thanks to them, to the highly committed individuals who work directly on the PWE agenda and, most of all, to all the staff of the University for making this such a special and inspiring place to work.

The image shows a handwritten signature in black ink. The signature is stylized and appears to read 'Eric Thomas'. The first part of the signature is a large, looped 'E', and the second part is a more fluid, cursive 'Thomas'.

**Professor Eric Thomas**

# Summary of the 2007 PWE staff survey report

## Introduction

The University has been working hard on developing a positive working environment since the first whole-workforce survey in 2003, when staff took the opportunity to highlight areas where they wanted to see improvement as well as things they really liked about working at Bristol.



It was clear that staff were proud to be a part of the University and they thought their own department was efficient and good at communicating. But many were not so impressed with communication across the whole organisation, methods of establishing pay and conditions, their work-life balance and the manner in which the University was led from the top. Too many staff had experienced bullying and there was a feeling that diversity could be more highly valued.

The senior team was not satisfied with the way things were and wanted to see positive change.

A commitment was made to address the key issues that emerged from the 2003 survey. Since then, work has been under way in five main areas:

# Staff Support and Development

## Leadership and Management

## Communication

## Physical Work Environment

## Monitoring and Evaluation

Communication systems have been enhanced via improved online and print publications for staff, new appointments have been made to assist with career progression and training and development, and increased resources have been allocated to essential support services such as the Counselling Service and childcare. Significant investment has been made in improving both the physical environment and the skills of

leaders and managers throughout the organisation.

These developments have come about through a commitment to the values of PWE from the top of the organisation and the desire of all staff to achieve positive change. Action has been steered by a University committee comprising a cross-section of staff and chaired by Professor David Clarke, Pro Vice-Chancellor. PWE

is not just 'nice words'; it has led to real, tangible action to address issues raised by staff in 2003. The real test of whether or not such actions make a difference to staff lies in their opinions. The 2007 PWE survey presented the first opportunity to test these opinions.

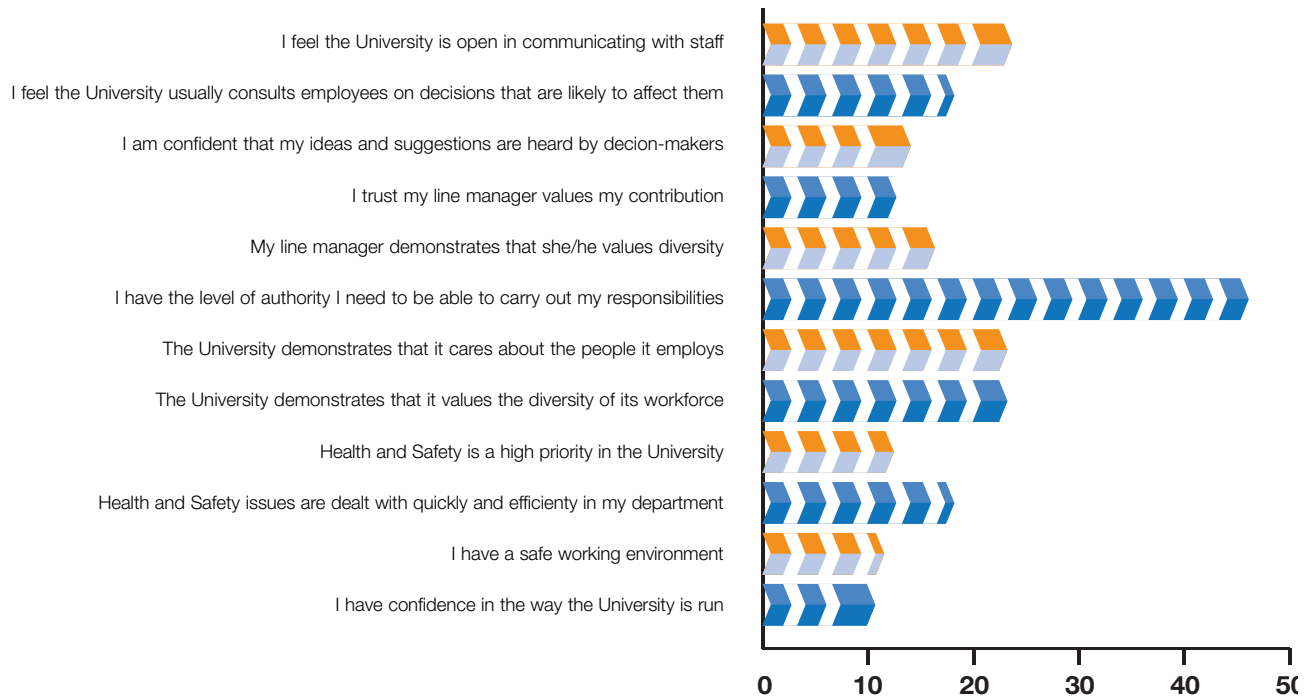
Feedback from staff in 2007 was extremely encouraging, with most areas showing many improvements, some of them dramatic. There were also a few areas where things appear not to have improved. It is clear that overall, there has been a distinct positive shift in the culture of the University since 2003. This has helped create an environment of continuous improvement, but there has been no lapse into complacency: problems that have not been successfully addressed since 2003 will be the subject of further action.

# Areas where there has been improvement

Staff wanted to see changes in many areas to make the University not only a more pleasant place to work but also a more inclusive and efficient one. It is very encouraging to see that many improvements have occurred in areas that the PWE process has concentrated on in response to staff opinions. Some of the largest improvements since 2003 are illustrated in the table right.

## Improvements since 2003

% positive change since 2003



## Areas where there has been improvement

There is a clear improvement in the overall view of the University as a place to work. In line with these improvements, a proportionately large section of the workforce feels the University values the diversity of its staff and cares about its employees. Increases in these two areas are impressive, from half of respondents in 2003 to two-thirds in 2007.

There are also very encouraging perceived – improvements in how the University communicates with its staff, together with the feeling that staff are generally involved in and consulted about decisions that may affect them. An increasing number of staff feel their opinions are being listened to and taken on board. Communication between work

colleagues continues to be positive and courteous in fact even more so than back in 2003.

There is a marked improvement in the way senior managers and University leaders are perceived on the whole. Overall confidence in how the University is run, particularly associated with trust and confidence placed by staff in University leaders, shows real signs of improvement.

Loyalty and pride in the organisation were already areas in which the University performed very well back in 2003. However, these indicators are even more encouraging in 2007.

There is a strong level of satisfaction with line managers: over 80% agree that line

managers are fair, give recognition and value the contributions of their staff. There is also a very high level of two-way trust and respect between staff and their line managers.

There has been a dramatic improvement since 2003 in the level of authority staff feel they have to undertake their job effectively. Ninety per cent of staff agree that the University is committed to training and development for all its employees.

The great majority of staff are very positive about how employees are treated. Over 90% agree that staff are treated equally regardless of race, disability, sexual orientation, religion or political conviction. Over 80% believe staff are

treated equally regardless of gender, age and socio-economic status. Performance against all of these diversity areas has improved since 2003.

There is a strong level of departmental affiliation, with over 80% of respondents recognising that they are working towards a common goal within their department. Eighty per cent of respondents feel that co-operation within their department is good, and over two-thirds of staff believe there is a strong level of inter-departmental co-operation, an area particularly criticised in 2003.

The priority given to Health and Safety and the speed of response to potential hazards also show a good improvement since 2003. Physical activity and health was not an area

included in the original 2003 survey.

However, this is clearly an important aspect of the overall PWE agenda and so new questions were asked in 2007.

A very encouraging 78% of staff report that the University currently provides exercise activities they would like to take part in.

Overall, respondents feel there is a high level of support from line managers (71%) and colleagues (77%) for exercise during working hours. This is very positive and indicates awareness across departments of the benefits associated with an active workforce and a commitment by line managers to facilitating such positive behaviour.

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# Areas of development

PWE is a process of continuous improvement and a number of areas require additional attention:

- While the overall figures around diversity are encouraging, with no area performing worse than in 2003, some still require further work. The three areas that warrant more investigation in terms of perceived equality of treatment are a person's 'job type' in the organisation, their contract of employment (e.g., fixed term as opposed to permanent), and whether or not they have caring responsibilities outside the University.
- Opinion was generally good in terms of line management ability, with a number of areas improving since 2003, such as fair treatment, respect, support and recognition for the job done. However, managers' ability to tackle poor performance attracted criticism from staff. There was also room for improvement in line managers' ability to set out standards, give direction and motivate staff.
- While a sense of common goals is very clear within departments, this opinion weakens progressively at the level of faculty/division and University, with a worrying 38% feeling that they do not contribute to University goals.
- Comparatively high numbers of staff (48%) feel that their views do not count and close to one-third are fearful of saying what they think. Thus while communication has seen much improvement on the whole over the past three years, these areas need to be addressed in further PWE work.

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- Improvements could be made to the quality of University induction processes and this merits a more detailed review.
- Bullying and harrasment are still experienced by too many staff (242 in the last year). It is very encouraging to see that action is taken in two-thirds of the cases, but less than half result in a satisfactory outcome.
- Close to a third of the University's staff do not take part in the Staff Review and Development process, which is disappointing in the light of the fact that the 65% of staff who do take part feel that it is a worthwhile exercise.
- Around 20% of staff appear to lack training or development that is relevant to their job, and a high number (40%) do not see long-term career opportunities at the University.
- While notable improvments are apparent in the Health and Safety indicators, 22% feel that it could be given a higher priority.
- While 81% of staff know about the University's flexible working policy and many staff benefit from it, some feel they lack the support of their managers in this regard. There has been an overall improvement in satisfaction with work-life balance, but workloads are higher in 2007 than in 2003.
- While 78% of staff feel the University already provides exercise facilities they would like to take part in, 62% of respondents want to be more physically active. Barriers to exercise warrant further analysis.



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## Highlights of areas where the University performs well and where further work is needed

### Doing well

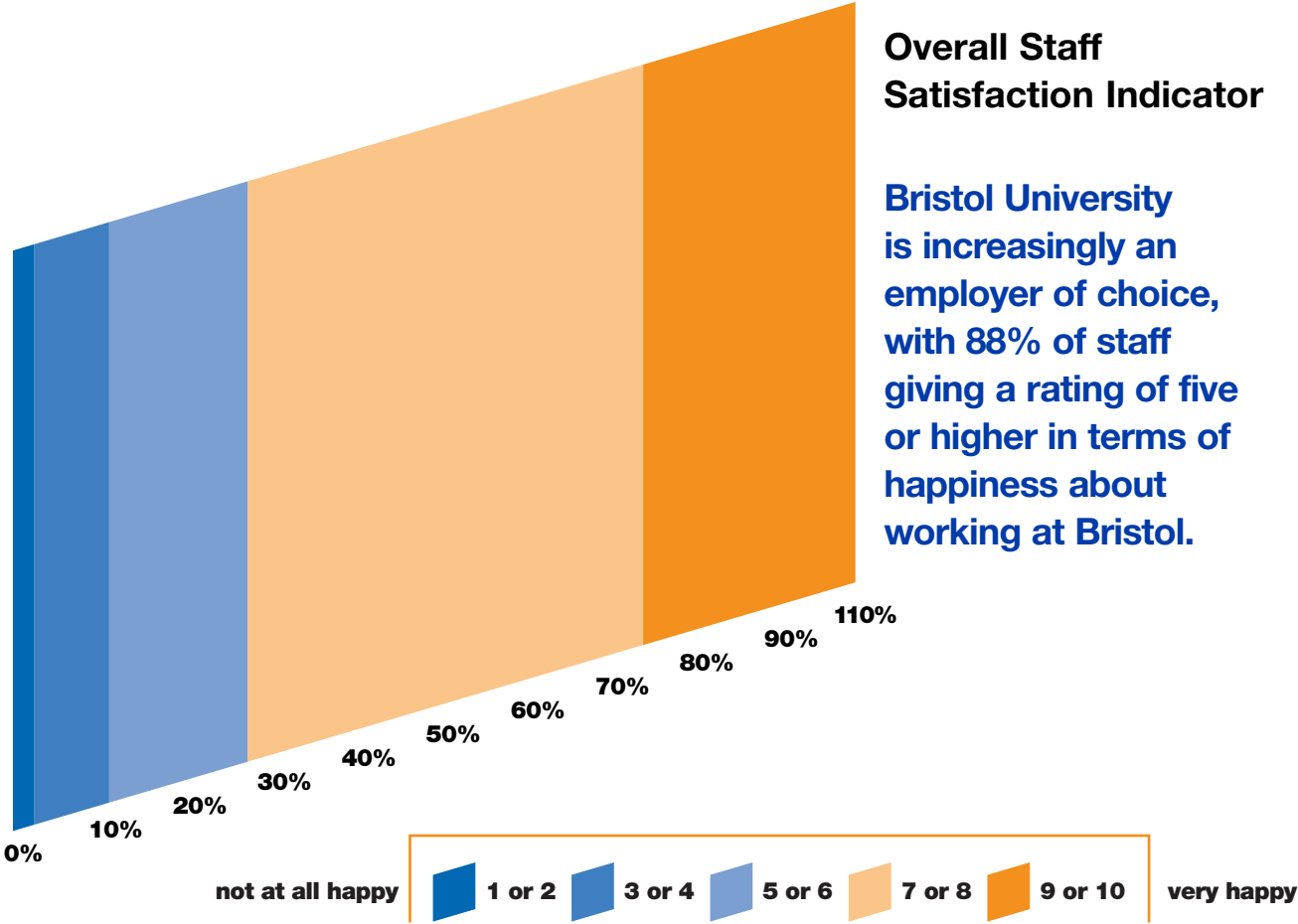
- A good place to work
- Caring attitude towards staff
- High value placed on diversity
- Confidence and trust in the way the University is run
- Sense of loyalty and pride in the University
- Strong two-way trust and respect working with line managers
- Freedom to use initiative at work and authority to get jobs done
- Training and development
- Consultation with staff
- University-wide communication
- Priority given to Health and Safety

### Area for further development

- Sense of common goals within the faculty/division and University
- Management skills in performance management, setting standards, providing direction and motivation
- Freedom to express views
- Equality in terms of role, contract status and caring responsibilities
- Levels of bullying and harassment
- Workload levels and flexible work
- Induction and staff review processes
- Long-term career opportunities
- Barriers to physical exercise

# Overall Staff Satisfaction Indicator

**Bristol University is increasingly an employer of choice, with 88% of staff giving a rating of five or higher in terms of happiness about working at Bristol.**





## What will happen next?

Further projects will stem from the 2007 PWE survey and the University-wide report in order to provide a firm foundation for action. These will include:

- Faculty-specific and, where possible, departmental results
- Further University-wide analysis examining specific topics requiring development

- Production of a second set of PWE commitments to issue to all staff
- Third PWE whole-workforce survey in early 2010.

A research officer has already been employed to work on data analysis in order to produce faculty-specific reports of PWE data. Using these data, a central bank of

good practice will be established to allow deans and heads of department to share effective methods of working. Deans and heads of department will also be able to access the skills of other specialists within the University such as staff development and personnel managers in order to devise local plans to address issues identified for improvement.

Further analysis, for example examining how role or gender may influence staff opinion, will take place against the areas highlighted in the survey report, as well as detailed analysis of flexible working practice (including exercise and health) and bullying and harassment, both of which were identified as areas for development by the 2003 survey.

Data from the whole-staff survey and the departmental and faculty reports, together with the more detailed investigation of areas highlighted above, will all be used by the PWE Steering Group to develop actions covering the period 2007/08 to 2009/10. Actions will be communicated to all staff via the production of a second 'PWE Commitments' document in early

2008. PWE actions will form part of the University People Strategy, which helps drive forward the University Plan. Responsibility for monitoring and evaluation will rest with the PWE Steering Group reporting to the Personnel and Staff Development Committee.

### Action Timeline

