LAS ADVISERS AND THE CHANGING IDENTITY OF THE WORKPLACE: THEIR SOURCES OF STRESS AND THE STRATEGIES THEY USE TO COPE

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Research on stress in the workplace reveals that work related stressors are complex and include inter-relating factors such as: restructuring of the workplace, management issues, changing work profiles, job security, workloads, working conditions, relationships at work, home-work interface, career development, and individual personalities. From a questionnaire, LAS advisers were asked to identify the key stressors associated with the changing identity of their workplace and to indicate some of the strategies they use to manage their work related stress. Factors contributing to LAS advisers' stress relate to: institutional changes; a perceived lack of commitment by managers to the work of LAS advisers; attempting to

provide an equitable level of service within a context of shrinking resources; the conflict and ambiguities inherent in the LAS support role while trying to meet the needs of teaching staff and students; the lack of time for research; and the high number of student contact hours. Strategies frequently used by LAS staff to manage workplace stress include: ensuring that they take lunch breaks, spending time with colleagues and liaising with teaching staff. In the questionnaire LAS advisers were asked to nominate changes in the workplace that they believe would lessen stress. The most commonly desired change was for an increase in resources for LAS work.

Introduction

From the late 1980s much research has been done to investigate the relationship between employees' well-being and their work environment (Schaufeli & Buunk, 1996, p.313). In many countries occupational stress has become a major concern of governments, business and individuals (Di Martino, 1992, p.3). More specifically, there are an increasing number of studies examining work satisfaction and stress levels of teachers (DEET, 2000; Dinham & Scott, 1998; Dua, 1994; Dunham & Varma, 1998; Farber, 1991; NTEU, 2000; Otto, 1986; Wissink & Stevenson 1998). Some studies (Kivinen & Rinne, 1998; Munt, 1999; Smyth, 1999) link the stress levels of teachers with "the economic rationalism underpinning educational policy [which] is both intensifying the work of teaching and dictating teaching practice" (Munt, 1999, p.3).

All industrialised economies have undergone significant change in the past decade and the tertiary education sector in Australia is no exception. "There has been greater politicisation of education and greater pressure from various stakeholders to 'reform' education, with the result that educational change has become almost a constant" (Dinham & Scott, 1998, p.2). A report from the Australian federal government Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) based on

responses of 2 609 academics at 15 Australian universities found that "since 1993 a number of aspects of academic roles, outlooks and sources of satisfaction have changed" (McInnis, 1999, p.xiii). For instance, general job satisfaction and satisfaction with job security had significantly decreased. At the same time, average working hours per week and hours spent on administration had significantly increased. Overall there had been an "increase in the proportion who say that their job is a source of considerable stress (from 52% to 56%)" (McInnis, 1999, pp. xiii-xiv).

Stress can be considered as a physiological and psychological response to specific demands made on the individual. These demands or causes of stress are often referred to as stressors and may refer to any environmental condition that results in a physical or emotional demand on an individual. The word stress has positive and negative connotations. As noted by the International Labour Office (Di Martino, 1992, p.4), some stress is normal and necessary for people to dynamically interact with their environment. The relationship between stress and performance can be conceptualised along a bell curve distribution. In a situation of very low stress, there may also be very low motivation, and performance may be impaired. In Edworthy's (2000) study into stress in further and higher education the concept of stress is defined as "a process that can occur when there is an unresolved mismatch between the perceived pressures of the situation and the individual's ability to cope" (Edworthy, 2000, p.7). LAS advisers have a unique position with regard to a number of stakeholders - students, lecturers, tutors and administrators - and can be subject to several opposing demands at the same time, therefore the aim of this research was to examine:

1. The major sources of work related stress for LAS advisers.

2. The range of strategies that LAS advisers use to manage the specific stressors of the LAS role.

3. Potential changes in the workplace that would lessen work related stress.

Changing identity of tertiary education

The magnitude of the changes that have occurred in the education sector in the past decade is frequently referred to in the literature discussing the causes of work related stress in teachers. The key factors that have affected the tertiary education sector are reduced funding, growth in diversity and number of students, and changes in delivery modes. These factors have had far reaching effects on academic staff and LAS advisers.

Commonwealth funding of Australian universities has been decreasing for more than a decade. At the same time, student numbers have increased 57.6% over the past decade and academic staff numbers have been reduced 3.8% (DETYA, 1998a, 1998b; 2000). To cope with reduced funding and staffing and increasing student numbers, class sizes have increased and consequently so have academics' workloads. The DETYA survey of changing work roles of academics found that the proportion of academic staff citing too many students as a factor hindering teaching had increased by 10% (McInnis, 1999, p.37). Although 68% of full time staff and 62% of casual and part time staff said they were committed to the pastoral care of their students (p.51), larger classes mean less time for discussion and heavier student assessment loads, so that inevitably there is less time to assist students out of class. It is reasonable to assume that language and academic skills staff also find the demand on their time and resources has increased as more students are referred for additional help as a result of the pressures on lecturers and tutors. Another aspect of the funding changes is the rising cost of an undergraduate degree; for example, a business degree currently costs approximately $5015 per annum (ATO, 2001). One of the consequences of the expense of getting an education is that students expect value for money from their investment in their education and so they are more assertive about their needs, including the need for language and academic skills support.

Another set of factors which characterise the changing identity of tertiary education are the increasingly diverse student demographics in terms of age, first language, cultural background, educational background and vocational ambitions. For example, in 2000, of the non-overseas students enrolled in Higher Education (excluding

external studies), 81 612 spoke a language other than English at home (DETYA, 2000), and 215 143 were enrolled under equity provisions (DETYA, 2000). In addition, international students represent 14.7% of the total student population (4.7% in 1991)(DETYA, 2000). There also has been a twofold increase in the number of postgraduate students in the past decade (DETYA, 1999). Many postgraduate diplomas are marketed to employees who have not previously studied in a university and these students often need LAS help to understand the requirements of their course.

McInnis (1999, p.37) found that there had been an 11% increase in the number of academic staff who believed that "too wide a range of students' abilities" hinders their teaching.

Similarly, 31% of the respondents to the NTEU (2000, p.24) survey felt that a more diverse student population had increased their workload. University administrators and academic staff have in turn placed more pressure on LAS advisers to assist in meeting the needs of such a diverse group of students.

These shifts in age, focus and skills of the student population have required changes to the curriculum and teaching methods. Two-thirds of academics have "reported that developing course materials for new technologies has had a major impact on their changing work hours" (McInnis, 1999, p.xiv). In 2000 the enrolments of 95 361 students were categorised as "external" (DETYA, 2000). Some academics and LAS advisers have moved to teach off campus or been required to adapt to new technological modes of delivery.

LAS advisers have been in the forefront of devising strategies to support both students and academic teaching staff as new relationships between teacher and student have emerged as the result of shifts in the sources of funding, the changing student profile and the influence of new technologies in our society. There is little evidence however, that LAS staff has been adequately resourced to cope with the increased demand for their services.

Job dissatisfaction and stress

Change does not necessarily cause stress or mean a lessening of a person's satisfaction with their workplace. Nevertheless, there is evidence of a correlation between increased dissatisfaction with work and increased levels of stress. McInnis's (1999) survey found that 61% of academics are negative in their outlook regarding their academic career, yet 51% reported that they are basically satisfied with their job (p.9). However, this represents a drop in the level of general job satisfaction from 67% in 1993 (p. xiii). In addition, 56% of academics regard their job as a considerable source of stress (21% do not) (p.9).

In the NTEU (2000) survey, 28.5% of academics reported that they were dissatisfied with their job (55.1% were satisfied). They also indicated a decrease in job satisfaction since 1996 (pp. 36-38). The NTEU suggests there is a correlation between stress and job satisfaction since 16.6% of academics (compared to 11.9% of general staff) report that they find their job almost always stressful and they have the highest level of dissatisfaction of university staff.

Workplace stressors

Research shows that adverse effects of workplace stress on employees is widespread across blue and white-collar occupations and cultures (Di Martino, 1992). Stressors can be divided into two main groups: physical and psychosocial (Di Martino, 1992; Walsh, 1998). Physical stressors include aspects of the physical environment such as noise level, chemical hazards, lack of privacy and room temperature. The psychosocial category is much broader and relates to a variety of factors including the characteristics of the job itself, role conflict, interpersonal stressors and factors relating to organisational management and structure. In their literature review and discussion of research and theories relating to professional burnout, Schaufeli & Buunk (1996) describe the wide range of studies and methodologies that characterise this field of interest. Nevertheless, despite different methodologies and the criticisms levelled at them, there is considerable agreement about the key workplace characteristics that are implicated in causing work related stress. These are discussed below with particular reference to teaching.

The literature reporting research on stress in teachers covers all levels (pre-school to postgraduate) and many subgroups, for example, students with a disability. However, only one article (Cowling & Wilkes, 1999) relating to LAS teachers, but which specifically referred to the work of international student advisers, was located. Otto (1986, p.109) lists a number of concerns for highly stressed teachers including: "insufficient time for work that needs to be done; students' problems which are impossible to solve, given available resources; and, a feeling of powerlessness in relation to the wider education system and particular aspects of it with which teachers disagree." Other key factors relevant to tertiary teachers include: management and administration structures and processes (Dua, 1994); conflict and ambiguity in definition of role (DEET, 2000); lack of feedback about work (Walsh, 1998); and interpersonal work relationships (Brown & Ralph, 1998).

Reducing workplace stress

The plethora of self-help books available in any bookstore would seem to indicate that the solution to reducing stress lies with the individual. Much of the "pop" literature and some of the academic literature discuss the physical (eg. relaxation techniques), cognitive (eg. positive self-talk), practical (eg. time management) and social (eg. talking with colleagues) ways that individuals can attempt to reduce the effects of workplace stress. Some organisations, recognising the harm that stress causes their employees, hire specialists to run stress reduction workshops.

Farber (1991) refers to these individual approaches as first-order strategies and states, after an extensive review of the literature on these strategies, that they are "generally ineffective" (p.297), for "unless there is ongoing commitment to modifying structures and procedures that contribute to staff stress... the benefits of stress workshops are ephemeral" (p.305"). Walsh (1998, p. 27) expresses a stronger view that is also supported by Munt (1999), that stress training can be seen "as attempts to increase employee tolerance to noxious or unacceptable job characteristics."

Dunham and Bath (1998) emphasise the importance of whole-school stress management because "one of the major causes of work stress is the school organisation" (p.139). Unfortunately, as Walsh (1998) notes, there are few reports of programs that target strategies for reducing stress in the workplace. However, she

states that "there is mounting evidence that job redesign interventions... can... enhance employee well-being and alleviate work-related strain" (Walsh, 1998, p.29). Such interventions include increased employee control and autonomy, greater clarity of job descriptions and providing performance feedback. Dunham and Bath (1998, p. 150) also believe that "the key to success of any policy is to show that it has the full support and commitment of those at the very top." They also comment on the importance of middle management and "the crucial impact of middle managers' attitudes and actions on the well-being of their colleagues" (p.152). As a consequence they recommend that middle managers receive "appropriate training about running meetings, appraisal, time management and good communications" (p.152).

The staff at the University of New England who responded to Wissink and Stevenson's (1998) survey about stress indicated the importance of self care and nominated "interaction with other staff" as "the most popular strategy for dealing with workplace stress"(p.77). Schafer (1987) cites research that shows that social support at work can result in two different types of positive input. The "direct effect" demonstrates that "the greater the social support from supervisors and co-workers, the less stress and the better health becomes" (p.316). The indirect effect occurs when appropriate social support reduces the damaging effects of stressors such as autocratic management, by acting as a filter and a moderator to the way stressful events are interpreted and experienced.

Wissink and Stevenson's (1998) respondents also wanted improved communication at departmental and faculty level regarding the running of meetings, decision making, information dissemination and support measures for staff. Similarly, Cowling and Wilkes (1999) found that international student advisers believe that organisational support including "more consultation, better communication, inclusion in decision making at organisational level, clearer expectations of what the job involves, training/staff development" (p. 96), as well as self care, are important for reducing stress and improving job satisfaction.

For this investigation a questionnaire was developed based on a review of the literature on organisational stress, its causes and remedies (Dinham & Scott 1998;

Dunham & Bath, 1998; McShane & Von Glinow, 2000; NTEU, 2000; Walsh, 1998; Wissink & Stevenson, 1998).

Methodology

Survey design and implementation

An initial draft of the questionnaire was piloted with LAS advisers in another institution. Following the pilot, the format, categories of questions and some individual question wordings were modified. The final version of the questionnaire placed stressors under five broad sections: work demands; lack of control over processes; conflict and ambiguity in definition of role; lack of feedback; and work relationships. Forty-six discrete items were listed under these five sections, as well as space for any other issues that related to each section.

The respondents were asked to rate on a six-point scale (always/often/sometimes/rarely/never/ NA), how often the specific items in each section were a source of stress for them in their job. In addition, at the end of each section there were two open-ended questions. The first asked respondents to describe what strategies they could suggest to help manage the stressors caused by workplace demands. The second asked them what they would like to see happen in their workplace that would lessen workplace stressors.

The survey respondents were drawn mainly from LAS advisers in Victorian universities who attended a Victorian Language and Learning Network meeting in June 2001. Most of the questionnaires were completed at that meeting; the rest were returned to the researchers by mail.

Data analysis

Data were analysed by totalling the frequency of responses. Responses were then converted to percentage scores for each of the 46 discrete items.

The data from the two open-ended questions that followed each section were collated and summarised to highlight key themes. However, it was not possible to distinguish in the responses whether the respondent currently used the strategy or

was putting forward a suggestion. Very possibly some of them fell into the mode of "Do as I say, not as I do"!

Methodological limitations

A nonprobability sample was used and hence the results may not completely represent the views of all LAS advisers working in Victoria and should not be generalised to represent the views of LAS advisers Australia wide. The aim was to get a thumbnail sketch of the situation regarding workplace stress as perceived by LAS advisers working in Victorian tertiary institutions. The subjective nature of the self-report questionnaire means that it gives information about an individual's level of stress, but it is unsuitable as a basis for comparing workplace practices in educational institutions.

The particular words used in any questionnaire are always subject to interpretation and can lead to varying interpretations by both respondents and researchers. As the majority of the questionnaires were filled out at a meeting, people had the opportunity to clarify terminology and several comments are worth noting here. One respondent felt that the categories ranging from "always" to "NA" did not allow for the situation where a demand which did cause great stress was however only a rare occurrence. Another respondent commented that items banded together as qualitative work demands in fact could reflect quantitative demands; that is, it may not be the one or two students with particularly high demand needs that cause stress, but the overall number of such students which creates a considerable strain on resources. Another relevant comment was made by a respondent who suggested there should be sections in the survey that allowed respondents to explain why particular items caused great stress.

Results

Profile of the respondents

Of the 38 LAS advisers who completed the survey, 34 were female and 4 were male. Seventeen were employed on a full-time basis, with the remaining 21 employed part-time. Thirty respondents were in a tenured position, while four were on contracts and

four were sessional staff. Twenty-five respondents were classified as academic staff, ten as general staff, two identified themselves as having a TAFE classification and the remaining four were sessional staff.

The profile of the respondents to this survey revealed that tenured academics' student contact hours (SCH) ranged from 10% to 87% of their workload. The distribution was quite symmetrical, with half of the respondents' SCH in the range of 50–58 % of their workload. Overall only seven staff indicated they did not have additional duties outside of their teaching load.

The principal responsibilities of the respondents were:

i)	one-to-one tuition	35
ii)	workshops	35
iii)	coordination	26
iv)	team teaching	22
v)	committee membership	20
vi)	teaching subjects for credit	12

Other responsibilities listed included: publicity, out reach and community activities, managing staff, devising professional development programs, preparing budgets, administration and marking of tests, developing student resource materials in a variety of modes, policy development, strategic planning and special projects.

Our survey did not provide details about the size of the institution or the location of the campus.

Causes of stress

There was a very high response rate (99.9%) to all of the 46 listed items. Analysis showed that twenty factors were nominated as always or often causing stress to 30% or more LAS advisers. These factors came under the sections of work demands, lack of control over processes, conflict and ambiguity in definition of role and work relationships. Table 1 lists the stress factors, the percentage of staff who nominated them as causing stress always or often and their frequency ranking.

Table 1: Factors that "always" and "often" cause stress to 30% or more LAS advisers.

Stressors	% staff affected always or often	Ranking
Work demands		
Lack of time for research	74	1
Lack of time for preparation of resources	66	2
No. of student contact hours	63	4
Volume of work done out of hours	47	5
Dealing with students with low literacy	45	6
Reporting demands and data collection	34	14
Volume of administrative work	31	18
Lack of control over processes		
Staffing levels	66	3
Funding uncertainty	45	7
University management	42	8

Faculty/Departmental management	40	10
Resource allocation	37	11
Feelings of powerlessness in the face of change	37	12
University restructuring	34	15
Inadequate IT support	34	16
Inadequate administrative support	34	17
Inadequate office space	31	19
Conflict and ambiguity in definition of role		
Other academics' expectations of your role	42	9
Student expectations of your role	31	20
Work relationships		
Lack of supportive leadership/management	37	13

The open ended questions

1. What strategies can you suggest to help manage the stressors in this section?

2. What would you like to see happen in your workplace that would lessen the stressors in this section?

The response rate to these two open ended questions was 86.5%. The responses to these two questions were separated into "Individual" and "Organisational" strategies. Organisational strategies were placed under three broad categories: LAS, lecturers and tutors and management. Initially every suggestion was placed under a category and then strategies that addressed the same issue were totalled. Some judgement was used in reducing the many individual responses to the 50 generic items listed. Table 2 is a summary of the suggestions put forward by LAS advisers to reduce workplace stress.

Table 2: Responses to the open ended questions

Category of suggestion	No. times suggested
Individual	
take a lunch break	14
talk to colleagues	13
accept personal limitations /prioritise	8
work at home	6
say "No"	6
keep work & home life separate	6
accept institutional limitations	4
physical exercise	4
time management	2
LAS	
increase liaison with academic staff	14
more professional development	6

clarify student expectations of LAS support	5
develop a mutually supportive team	5
more time for research	4
study leave	4
opportunities for being mentored	4
develop/distribute clear promotional material	4
make detailed reports to management	4
need a clearly defined non-teaching time	3
network with LAS staff in other institutions	3
clarify procedures for students to get help	2
network with other student support services	2
develop guidelines for dealing with emails	2
develop a list of relieving staff	2
proactive contact with large groups students to reduce need for individual help	2
Lecturers and tutors	
recognise LAS expertise ie. not just remedial teachers	17
professional development of teaching staff	10
accept shared responsibility with LAS staff for teaching students	9
recognise LAS advisers as academic staff	6
develop consistent guidelines for academic writing style	5
develop adjunct courses	4
integrate LAS skills in core curriculum	2

Management	
provide more resources & staffing for LAS	20
develop understanding of LAS expertise	20
professional development for more effective management	16
less rhetoric, more commitment to learning	13
recognise LAS advisers as academic staff	9
improve interpersonal skills	9
create more opportunities for shared decision making and problem solving	8
provide for more administrative support	8
improve physical environment	7
change evaluation methods of LAS work	6
no solutions	6
involve LAS staff in long-term planning for allocation of resources	5
implement consistent & higher level entrance requirements for international students	5
ensure a fairer pay structure and terms of employment	4
provide better IT support	3
allow for LAS input into job descriptions	2
acknowledge special needs students	2
resolve management conflict between rural and metro campuses	2

Discussion

The results of the survey indicate that LAS advisers have many issues in common with other academic staff that cause significant stress. Other stressors (for example, other academics' expectations of their role) are peculiar to LAS staff. The causes of stress as summarised in Table 1 are discussed below.

Work demands

Stress caused by work demands affected 35% of LAS staff. The high number of student contact hours as a percentage of workload (the majority between 50-58%) is probably a major contributor to the stress LAS staff feels. In the McInnis (1999, p.20) survey, academics rated "teaching classes" as 17.1% of their total activities and "teaching related activity" as a further 24.7% of total activities during the teaching period.

Five of the six most stressful factors were in the section titled "work demands". Lack of time for research was nominated as the major stressor for 28 out of 38 respondents (74%). This factor was also identified by the NTEU survey as the second highest stressor (63%). The McInnis (1999) survey found that while 91% staff believe that research is the "current priority in the reward system" (p.14), more than two thirds "find their teaching load is a hindrance to research" and nearly half say lack of funding is a problem (p.45).

The second, fourth and fifth highest causes of stress were lack of time for preparation of resources, number of student contact hours and volume of work done out of hours. These accord with the literature on stressors affecting other academic staff, but are much greater causes of stress for LAS advisers than was noted in the McInnis and NTEU surveys. The volume of work done out of hours (ranked 5th) supports the findings in a report by the Australian Centre for Industrial Research and Training (Light, 1999, p.9) that "a work culture has grown in which job commitment has been equated with working exceptionally long hours". It seems that LAS advisers work in this way in an attempt to provide effective services and programs for the student body while maintaining their reporting requirements (ranked 14th) and administrative work (18th).

Increases in administrative work are noted in much of the literature. However, reporting demands generally are the responsibility of heads of academic and administrative departments. Although the majority of the respondents were classified as academic staff, it seems that the demand for LAS advisers to report on their activities is much higher than for other academic staff.

Dealing with students with low literacy levels was the sixth most stressful factor affecting 45% of respondents. In the NTEU (2000) and McInnis (1999) surveys academic staff commented on the increase in workload due to the diverse range of students' abilities, but did not nominate this as a stressor. Initially this response seemed surprising since LAS advisers' main task is to work with students to develop their academic language skills. On reflection it could indicate that when LAS advisers consider they have insufficient time to devote to individual students who require intensive support they might feel frustrated with the situation. In the Cowling and Wilkes (1999, p. 92) survey, 37.7% of international student advisers stated that "dealing with different language levels" was stressful for them.

Lack of control over processes

The research literature on stress highlights the importance of feeling in control of work practices. The items in this section represent 50% of the main stressors nominated by the respondents.

The key stressor in this section (ranked 3rd overall or 66%) is staffing levels. It is also closely related to many of the items mentioned under work demands. Staffing levels were a cause of stress to significantly less academic staff (51%) in the NTEU (2000) survey. This particular issue generated many pessimistic written comments about the likelihood of a positive change and provided further expression to the "feelings of powerlessness in the face of change" which was identified by 37% of the respondents.

Closely aligned to the issue of staffing levels are funding uncertainty and resource allocation, which were identified by 45% and 37% respectively of the respondents. In her study into effective student support services in further and higher education in England, Bell (1996, p. 146) argues that "the delivery of a quality service" will

"depend on the resources available". Thus if the time and energy of LAS advisers are strained by inadequate staffing levels, resource allocation, administrative and IT support, and a poor physical environment, then the quality of the service provided will be seriously compromised.

University (42%) and Faculty/Departmental management (40%) were named as major causes of stress. Lack of supportive leadership/management, located under the section headed "work relationships", also was identified by 42% of respondents. The responses to the open ended questions in this section elaborated on the nature of these stressors and they are discussed in the next section. University restructuring was rated as stressful by 34% of respondents. The specific aspects of the restructuring process, which were most stressful, were not discernible from the survey.

Conflict and ambiguity in definition of role

Two issues emerged under conflict and ambiguity in definition of role - other academics' expectations of the LAS role (42%) and students' expectations of their role (31%). Both of these issues reflect the blurred boundaries that surround LAS advisers' work roles which lead administrators, other academic staff and students to make assumptions about who is responsible for student learning and what can be achieved given limited resources.

LAS advisers suggestions for reducing workplace stress

The following discussion examines the relationship between the major stressors shown in Table 1 and the suggestions for reducing workplace stress shown in Table 2.

Individual

The highest number of responses (36.9%) noted the importance of taking a lunch break. In addition, some emphasised the importance of leaving the building. The need to make such a suggestion possibly reflects the on-call nature of their work and

consequent lack of a timetabling structure which characterises many LAS advisers' work schedules. One respondent commented, "I feel very pressured to be always available for needy students." The lunch period (12 noon till 2pm) is also the main time when students are free from lectures and tutorials. This suggestion can be linked to many of the key stressors identified in the survey such as the number of contact hours, volume of administrative work and student expectations of the LAS advisers' role.

Talking to colleagues was one idea suggested by 34.2% of the respondents. This strategy is supported by research which indicates that social support can be very beneficial to overall well being as it may act as a buffer to counteract workplace stressors (Williams, 1995). This also is reflected in Schafer's (1987) direct and indirect effects. However, achieving and maintaining effective social support in the workplace may often be problematic for LAS advisers given their time and work demand pressures and the way in which LAS staff often work on the periphery of departments or schools. As well, there may be practical difficulties one of which is encapsulated in the comment, "We don't even have a staff room so there's no opportunity to socialise over a cup of tea."

The third most popular suggestion for individuals related to accepting personal limitations and prioritising (26.3%). Accepting institutional limitations (10.5%) could also be included in this category. The assertive act of saying "No" was also favoured by 16% of respondents. However, few respondents elaborated on their ways of establishing priorities. One suggestion was to "work on what will benefit most students in the long term first."

Six respondents said working at home helped them to cope with workplace demands. "Working at home is the only way I can keep my head above water". This strategy is in stark contrast to the suggestion from another group of respondents to "keep home life and work separate."

Organisational

The strategies suggested to help reduce workplace stress caused by organisational factors were classed as actions that could or should be taken by LAS advisers

themselves, by lecturers and tutors, and management. Within this range of suggested actions, there were recurring themes indicating a need for improved relationships with lecturers and tutors and management to promote greater recognition and understanding of the work of LAS advisers and a clear definition of their role; the need for professional development of managers and all academic staff; increased resources; and LAS advisers inclusion in decision making processes that directly impact on their work.

Relationships with lecturers and tutors

The importance of liaison with lecturers and tutors was mentioned by 37% of respondents. Forty-five per cent of LAS advisers also indicated the need for lecturers and tutors to recognise LAS staff's expertise. Others stated the need for LAS advisers to be acknowledged as academic staff by lecturers and tutors, and to accept LAS advisers' shared responsibility for teaching and learning.

As well as developing a better understanding of the LAS advisers' role, the other predominant suggestion regarding lecturers and tutors was a need for their professional development. Five respondents specifically mentioned the need for lecturers and tutors to develop consistent guidelines for academic writing style. One respondent wrote about "dealing with the inadequacies of subject staff" and another wrote, "work with academic staff so assignments are appropriately worded and comprehensible".

Many respondents recognised that the role of LAS advisers does not easily match the roles of other academic staff. Several comments such as "I am dealing with a job with no boundaries, thus I cannot satisfy the needs or meet the demands", and " my job never feels finished", highlight the often nebulous nature of the LAS role and the way in which it contrasts with the role of most lecturers and tutors who have clearly defined non-teaching times and timetabled student contact hours. LAS staff, on the other hand, have difficulty separating their SCH from other duties. This is reflected in many of the stressors ranked 1-5 in Table 1. Role ambiguity and blurred boundaries of responsibility seem to create for LAS advisers a sense of "an ever expanding role".

Professional development

Lack of time for research was ranked as the prime cause of stress (Table 1) and respondents' suggested strategies for resolving this issue included (unspecified) professional development, study leave, clearly defined non-teaching periods and opportunities for being mentored. This raises questions about what LAS advisers perceive they need most for professional development. It is unclear from the survey whether LAS staff believes such activities will lead to more productive work with students or perhaps more pragmatically will raise their profile in the university and increase their academic credibility. Two respondents certainly thought so. One wrote, "I need to complete a PhD for recognition" and another explained that there "is pressure to gain a PhD, but I have no time".

Social and professional networks

A number of the other strategies that were suggested for reducing stress were related to social and professional networks. There were many comments about the value of supportive colleagues and working as a team. At the Victorian Language and Learning Network meeting held in June 2001, the majority of the 40 plus attendees voted affirmatively on the importance of continuing the network. This survey also contained comments about the sense of isolation experienced by some LAS advisers.

Management

By far the greatest number and the most strongly worded suggestions for reducing LAS advisers' workplace stress were directed towards management.

The majority of respondents believe more resources and staffing will reduce their stress. This issue is connected to at least 12 of the 20 stressors listed in Table 1 and in particular to the stressors ranked 1-4. This was a predictable response given the findings of the McInnis and NTEU surveys and the sentiments clearly articulated at the recent Vice-Chancellors Committee's submission to the Senate regarding public funding of Australia's universities. The president of the Committee told the Senate that the universities were in "crisis" with "rising staff ratios, slowly degrading

infrastructure and a decline in the quality of student educational experience and staff morale" (Noonan & Contractor, 2001, p.3).

The comments about lack of resources were often linked with the perceived lack of recognition by managers of the value of the work of LAS advisers. Fifty three per cent referred to the need for their expertise to be acknowledged and a further 24% want recognition as academic staff. More than a third also expressed disillusionment with managers' lack of genuine commitment to learning. There was a call for "less rhetoric about the quality of education and more action". These sentiments are mirrored by those respondents who want more opportunities for shared decision making (21%), involvement in long term planning (13%) and better evaluation methods of LAS work (16%).

Perhaps the most surprising comments were those made by 42% of respondents who specifically mentioned the need for professional development of managers. There were several comments about autocratic management styles, secretive behaviour and management "bullies". Two people mentioned calling in the union to support them. These remarks were in addition to comments by a further 24% of respondents who wrote that their managers needed to develop their interpersonal skills. Such comments substantiate why university and departmental managers respectively were perceived to cause 42% and 40% of respondents' significant stress. Sixteen per cent declared there were no solutions to issues dealing with managers or funding. The words "futile" and "I know it won't happen" appeared several times at the end of some comments.

To some extent these findings replicate those of the Wissink and Stevenson (1998) and Cowling and Wilkes (1999) surveys with regard to the desire for increased consultation and involvement in decision making. What is most evident in the responses to the two open ended questions in this survey is that some managers in universities, while under pressure themselves, have failed to develop policies through consultation with LAS staff to deal with change and the stress that it causes. It seems they may have ignored or misunderstood their role and responsibility for supporting their staff, and they may have failed to appreciate the need for leadership to strengthen their working relationships with all their staff.

Drawing tentative conclusions

The original aims of the study were to identify specific stressors for LAS staff, to share the strategies used to manage stressors and to discover potential changes that would lessen the stressors. The second aim became subsumed under the third because the key stressors identified by the respondents related to the "big picture", that is, the pressure that the changing identity of the workplace is putting on LAS advisers through funding and management practices. This emphasis on workplace and not on individual stress management supports the notion that "stressors do not impinge on a person in a vacuum. Rather, they are part of a larger environment" (Schafer, 1987, p.124). The respondents do not have control over many of the perceived stressors and consequently the weight of the suggestions for relieving workplace stress was directed towards management.

The skills of managers are seriously questioned by many of the respondents. There is little evidence of managers attempting to develop policies and strategies that focus on their workplace's organisation and practices with the aim of improving the well being of their employees. The consequences of this negligence are complex and far reaching as "the implications of a failure of middle managers to recognise and deal with stress in themselves and their colleagues are enormous" (Dunham & Bath, 1998, p.152).

A study such as this one tends to raise more questions than provide answers. It does however begin to fill a qualitative gap in the larger studies into stress of higher education staff by focussing on one small group in this area. It clearly points to areas where the needs of LAS staff differ from other academic staff. This is shown in their desire for professional development and time, including study leave, for research like their academic colleagues. The results of this survey overall demonstrate a strong call for the recognition of the value of LAS advisers' work by other academics and management which is not noted in other surveys of university staff.

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