

Are university staff stressed, and what should be done about it?

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Quality of Working Life (QoWL)

- 'Quality of Working Life' is that part of overall quality of life that is influenced by work. It's more than just job satisfaction or work happiness, but the widest context in which an employee would evaluate the influence of work on their life.
- QoWL Ltd is a University spin-out company based in Portsmouth
- We use survey tools to measure stress, well-being and wider QoWL and have carried out benchmarking research in the HE Sector

QoWL Survey Tool

- 23-item, 6 Factor WRQoL Scale
- 35-item, 7 Factor HSE Stress Scale
- 21-item Workplace Wellbeing Outcome scale
- 10-item Biographical Information scale
- At least 1 open question

Stress in Universities

- Are university staff stressed?
 - Is stress a problem in universities?
 - For whom?
 - Why?
- What must / should / could universities be doing about it?

HSE Stress Standards

Health & Safety Executive (HSE) Management Standards (MS) Indicator Tool

- **7 research based factors which contribute to job-related stress**
- **Role, Peer Support, Relationships, Managerial Support, Demands, Control, Change**
- **Available for organisations to assess stress**

The Good

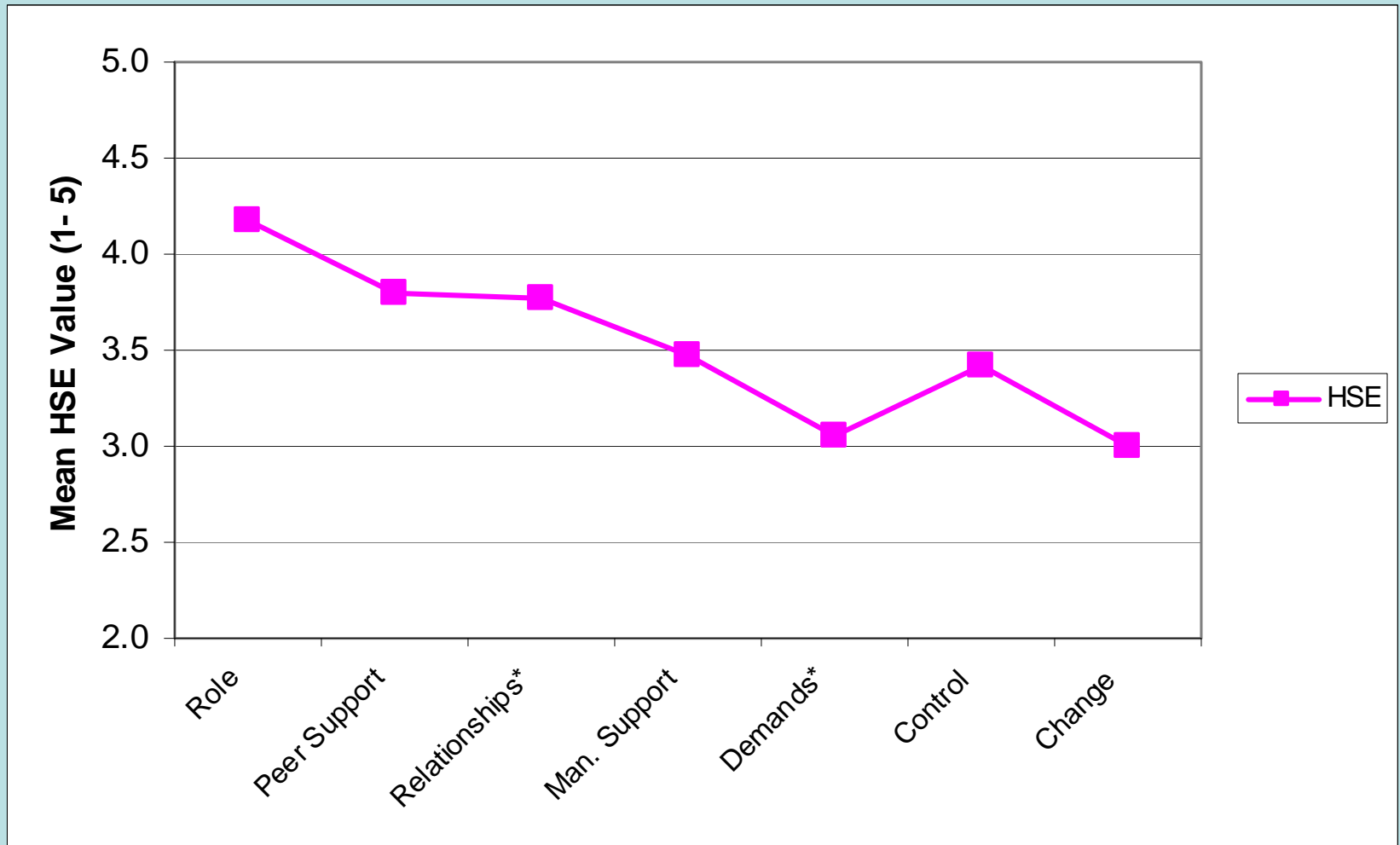
- By and large universities appear to be good places to work in...

HSE: Unis v. Working Population

	% UNIV	% HSE	Z	Sig.
Role	78	82	7.76	p < 0.001
Peer Support	68	68	-0.15	0.438
Good relns	69	55	-20.06	p < 0.001
Man Support	53	52	-1.53	0.063
Good demand	36	32	-5.69	p < 0.001
Control	70	52	-26.59	p < 0.001
Change	39	36	-4.45	p < 0.001
bullying (q21)	3	6	10.81	p < 0.001

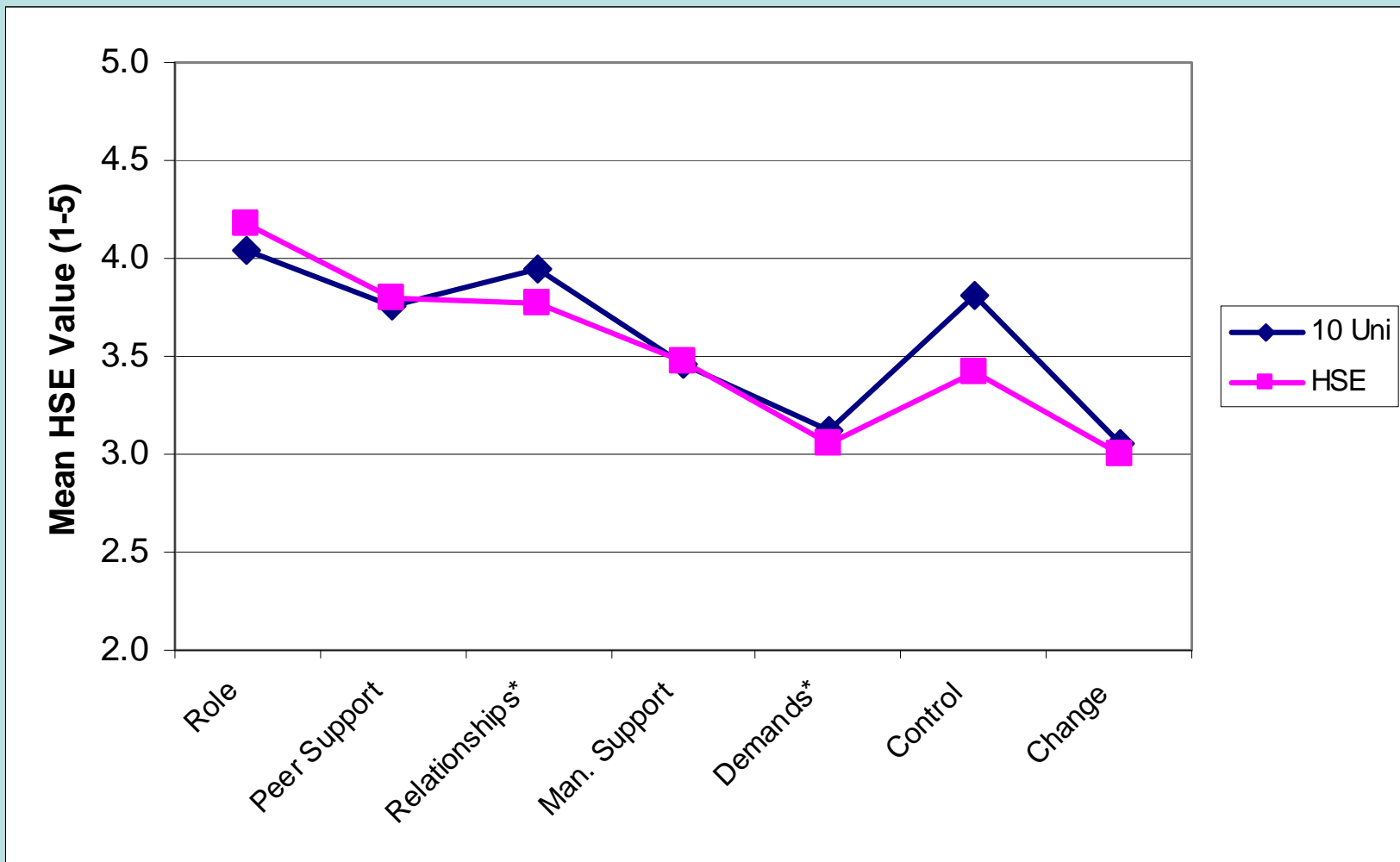
University and HSE Benchmark Samples, %SA + A with questions

HSE Stress Standards



HSE = 26,382 UK Employees from 39 organisations

HSE Stress Standards

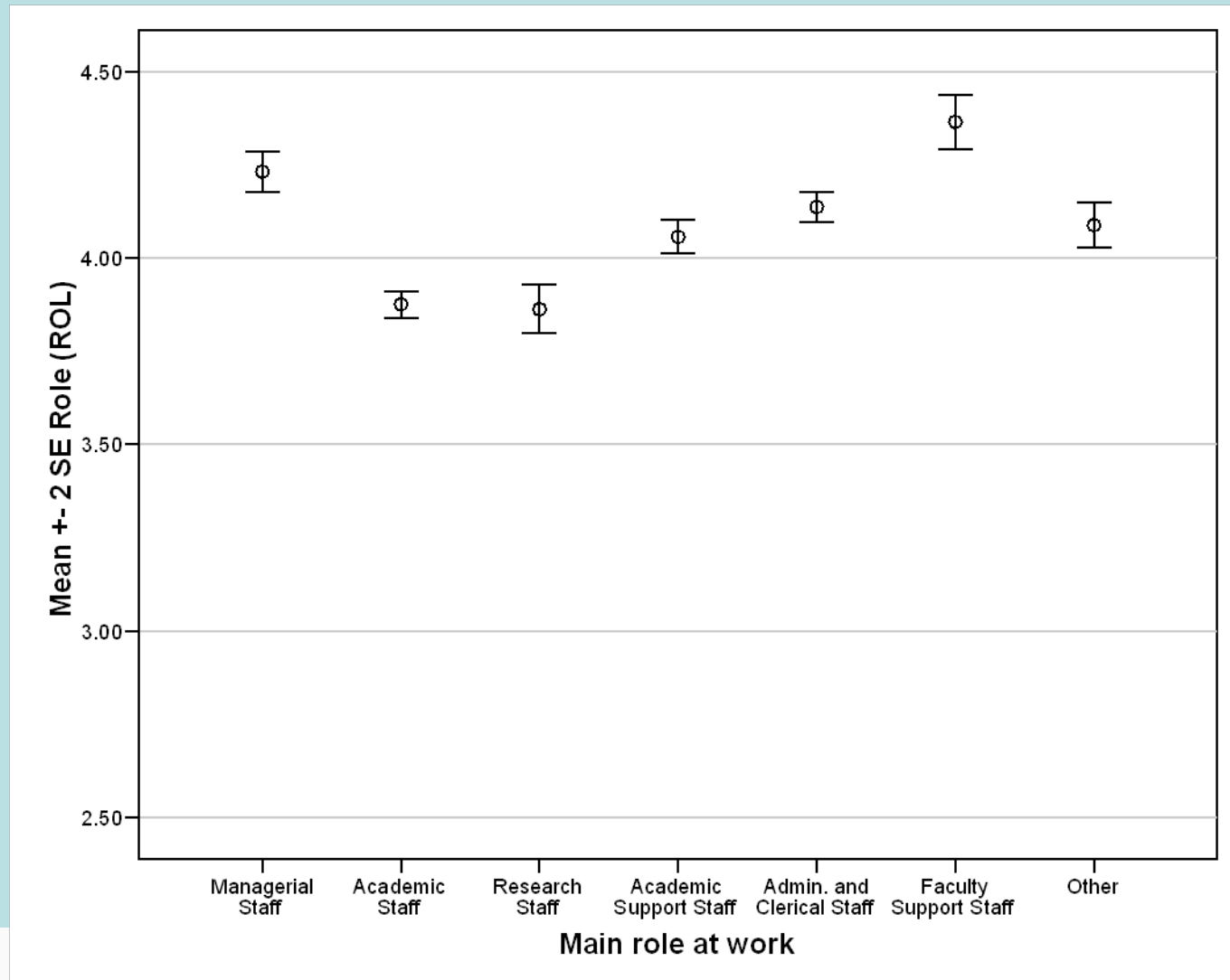


10 UNI= 5,961 UK University Employees; HSE = 26,382 UK Employees

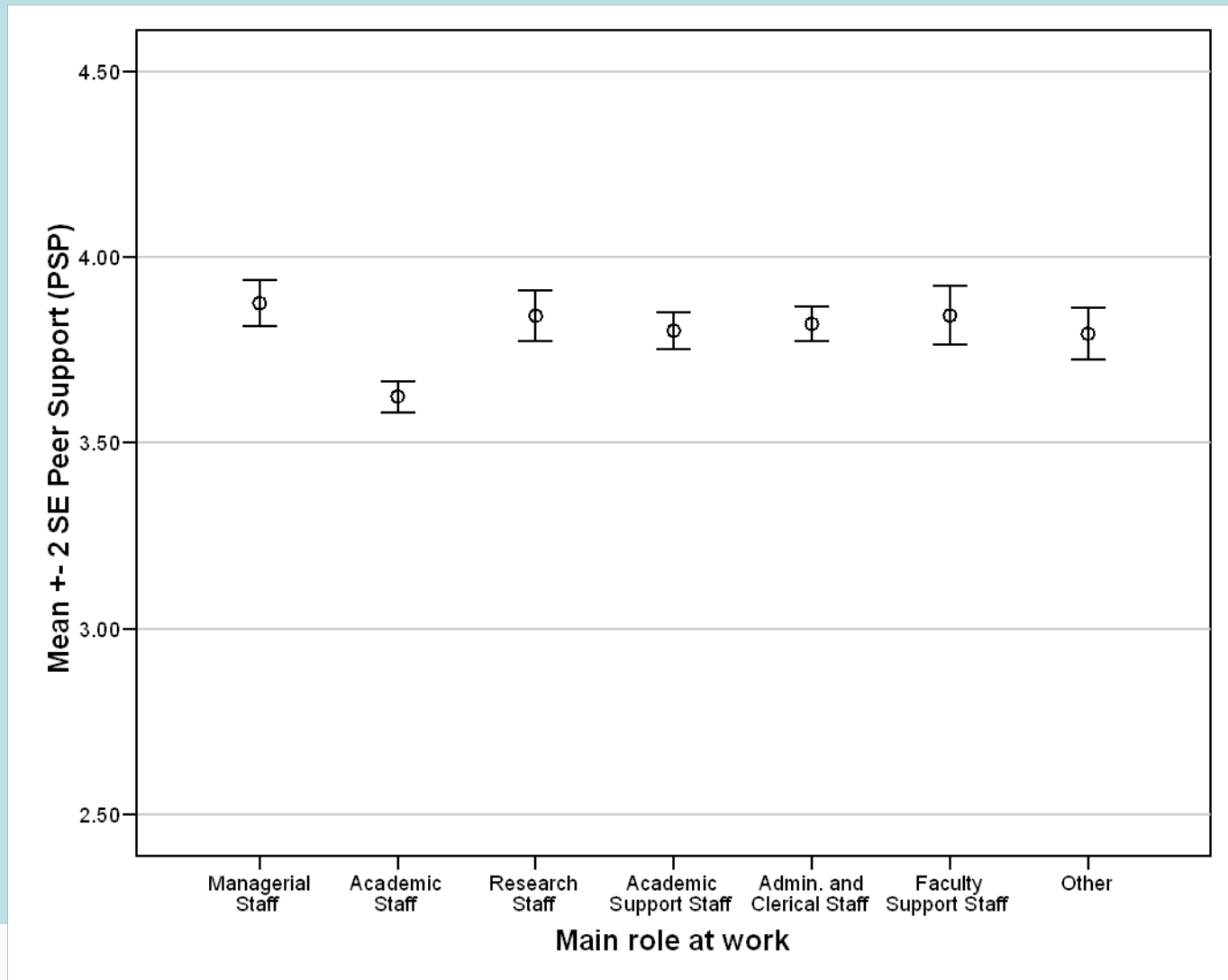
The Bad

- But not everyone who works in universities is as happy.
- Who do you think might be unhappy? (and we mean *much* unhappier than other occupational groups)?
- Why?

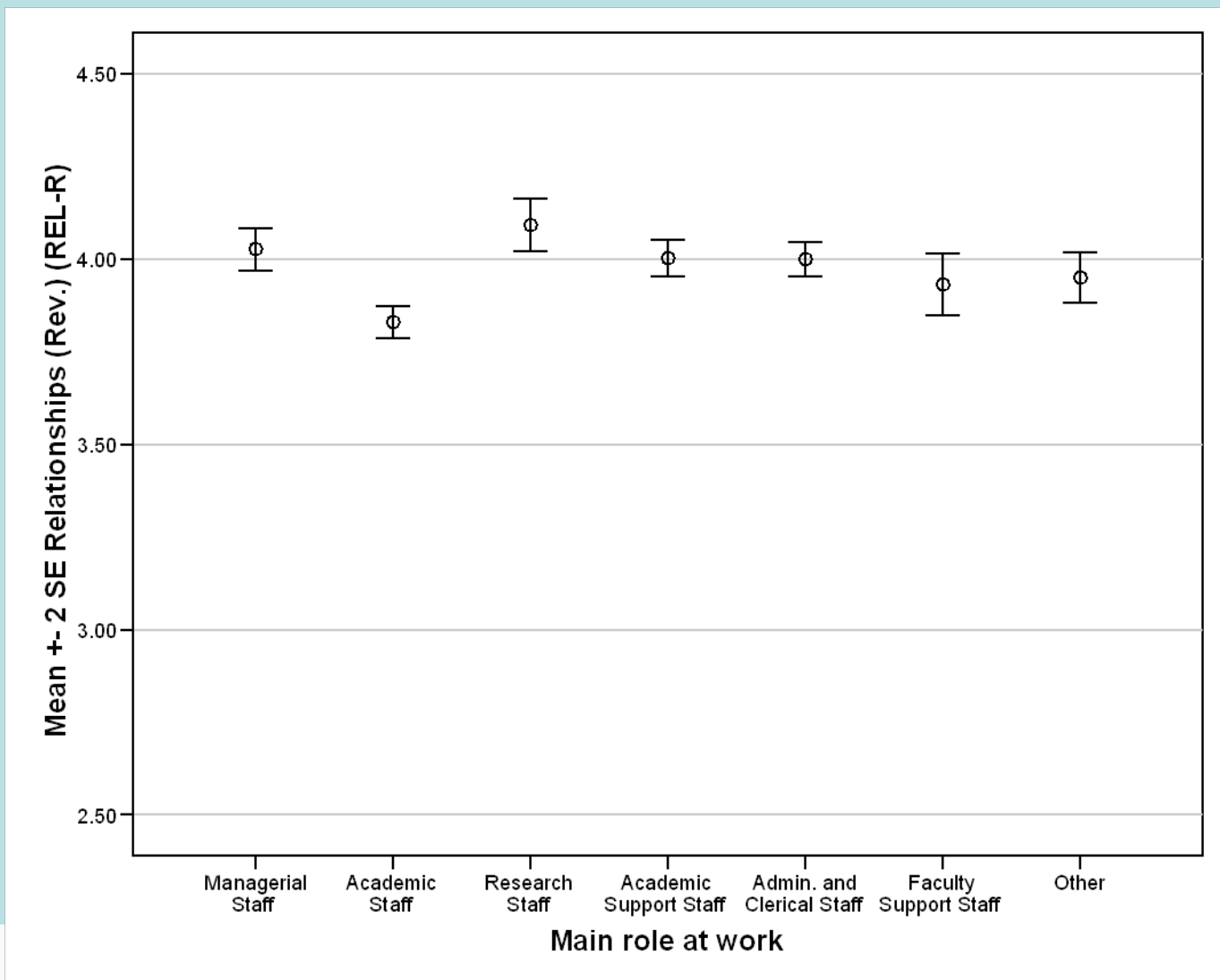
HSE Role: Whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles



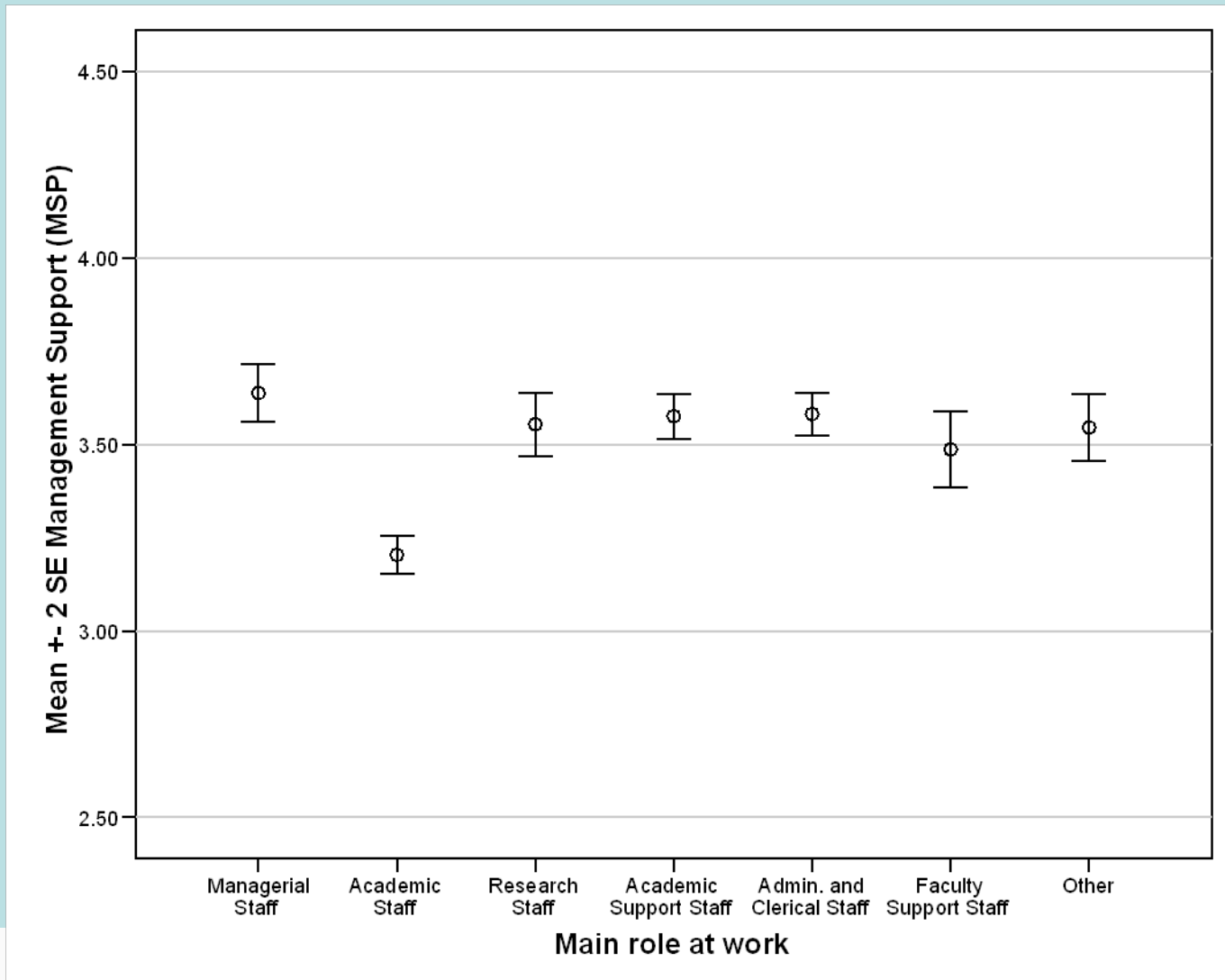
HSE Peer Support: Includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by colleagues



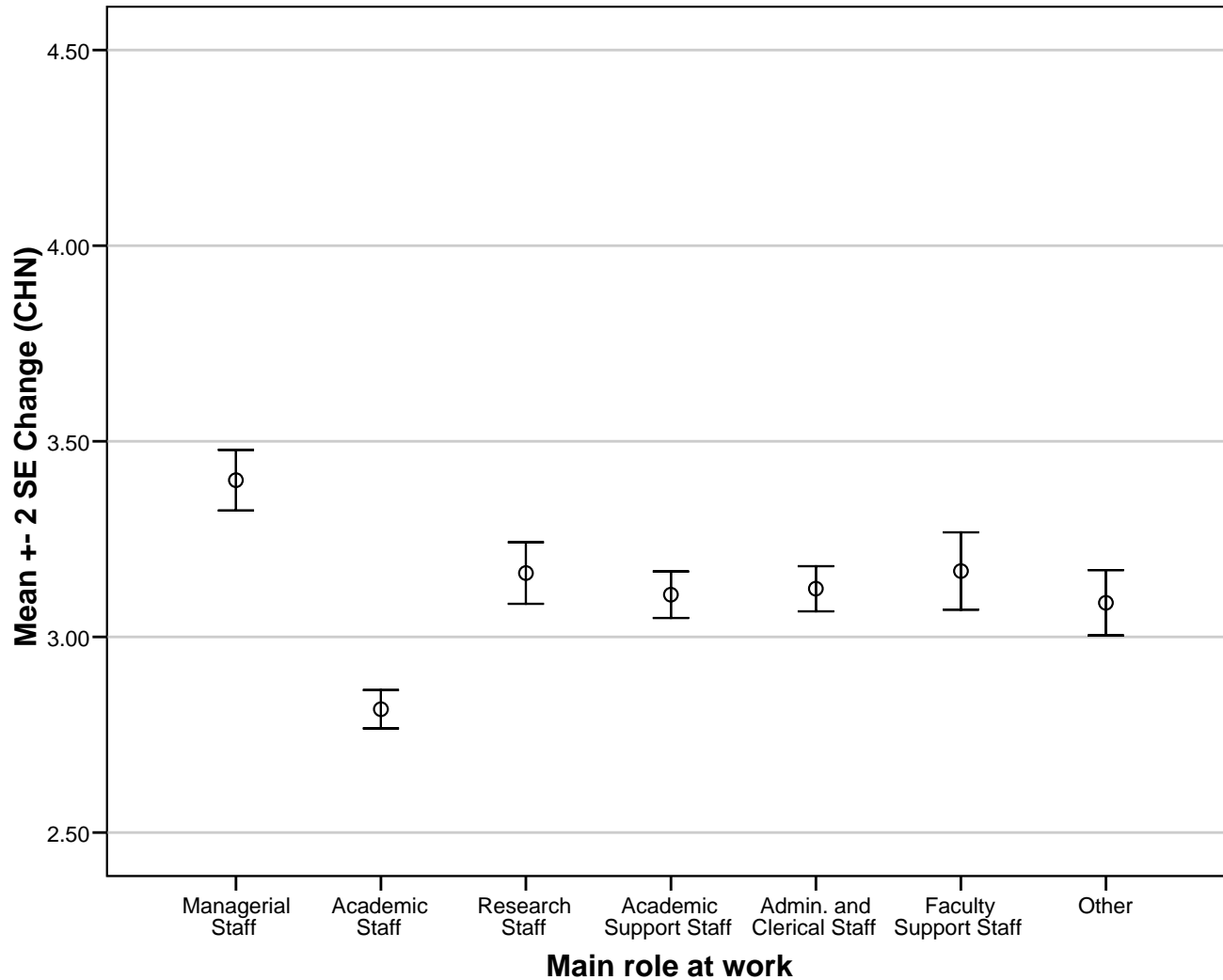
HSE Relationships: Includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour



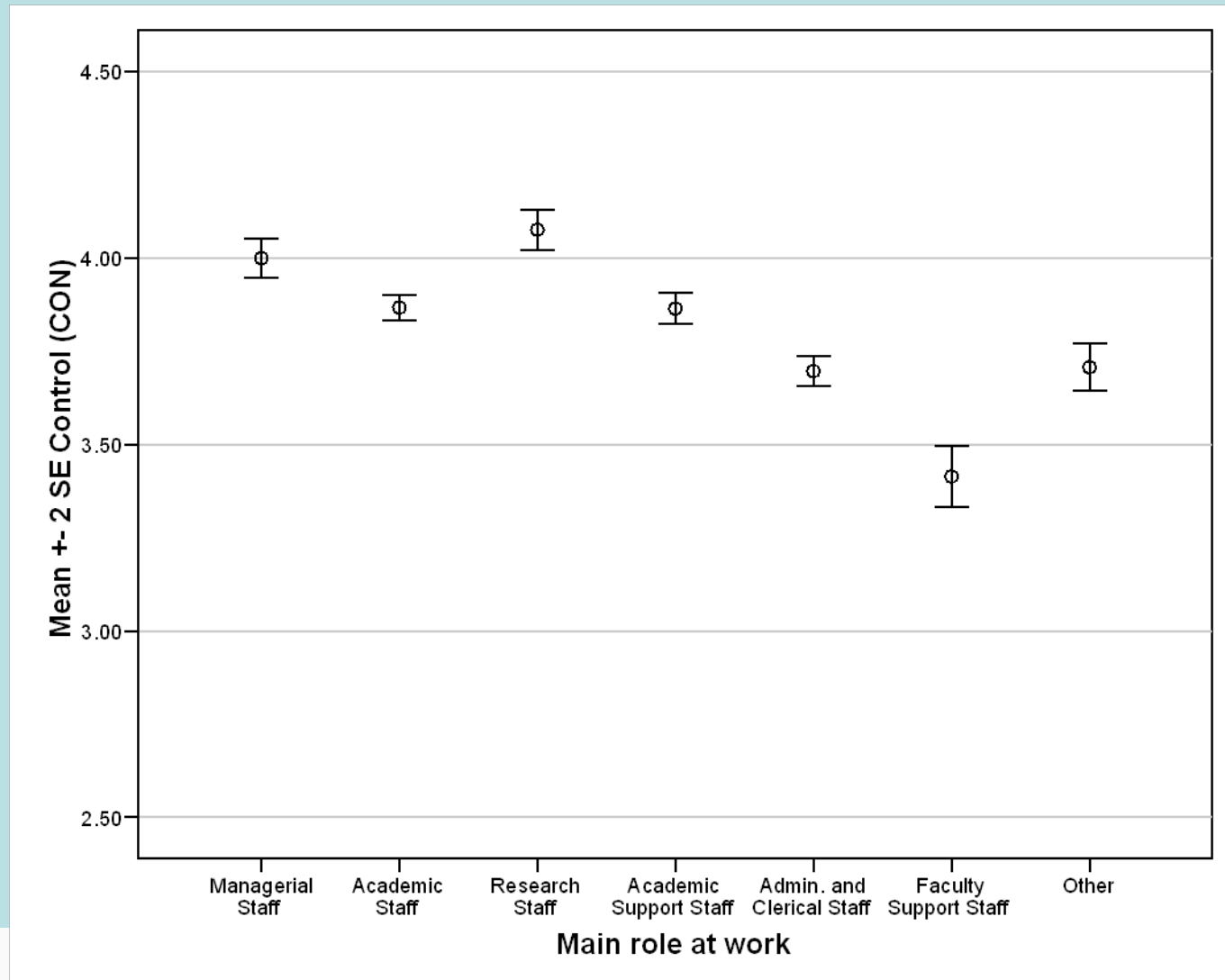
HSE Managerial Support: Includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation and line management



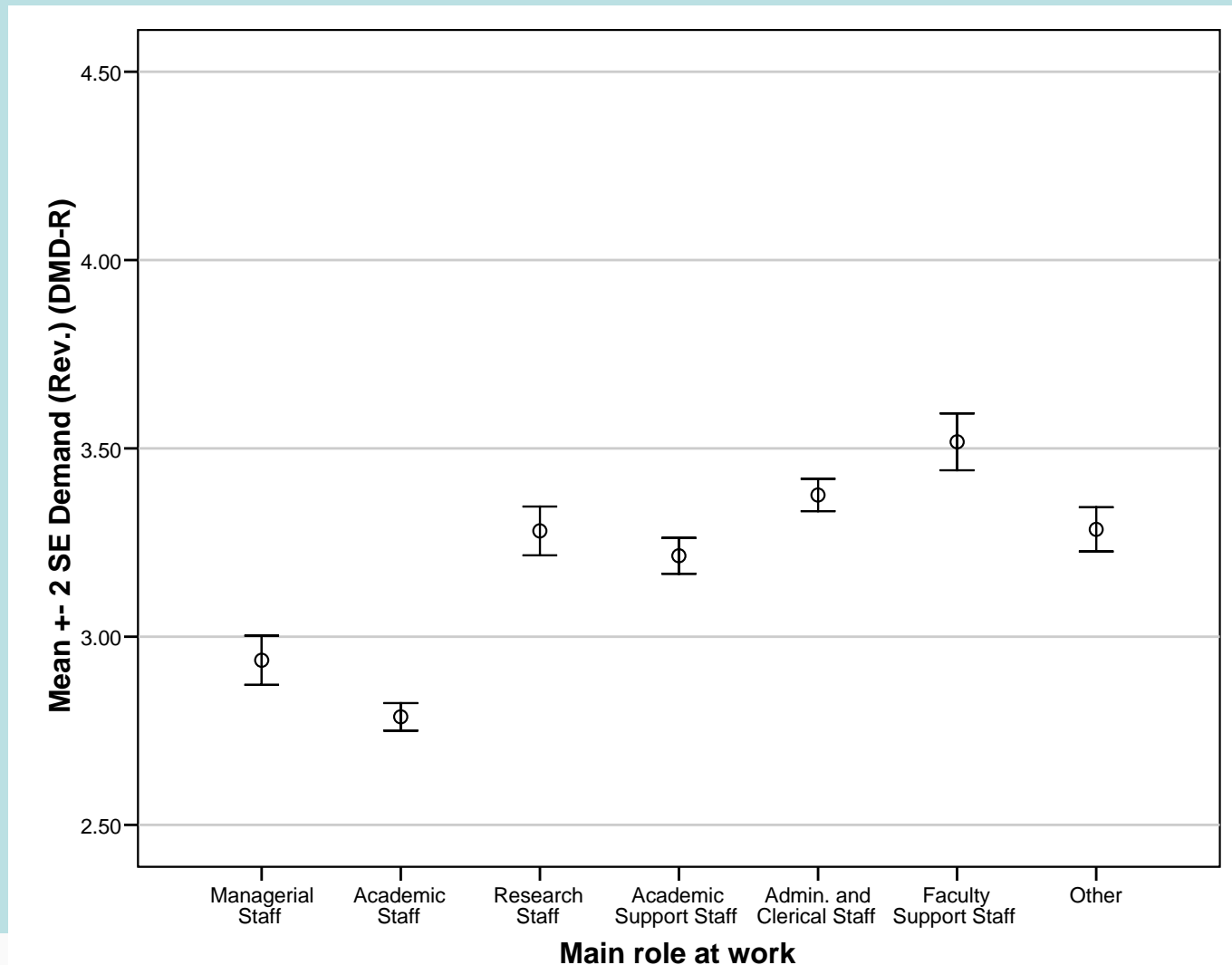
HSE Change: How organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation



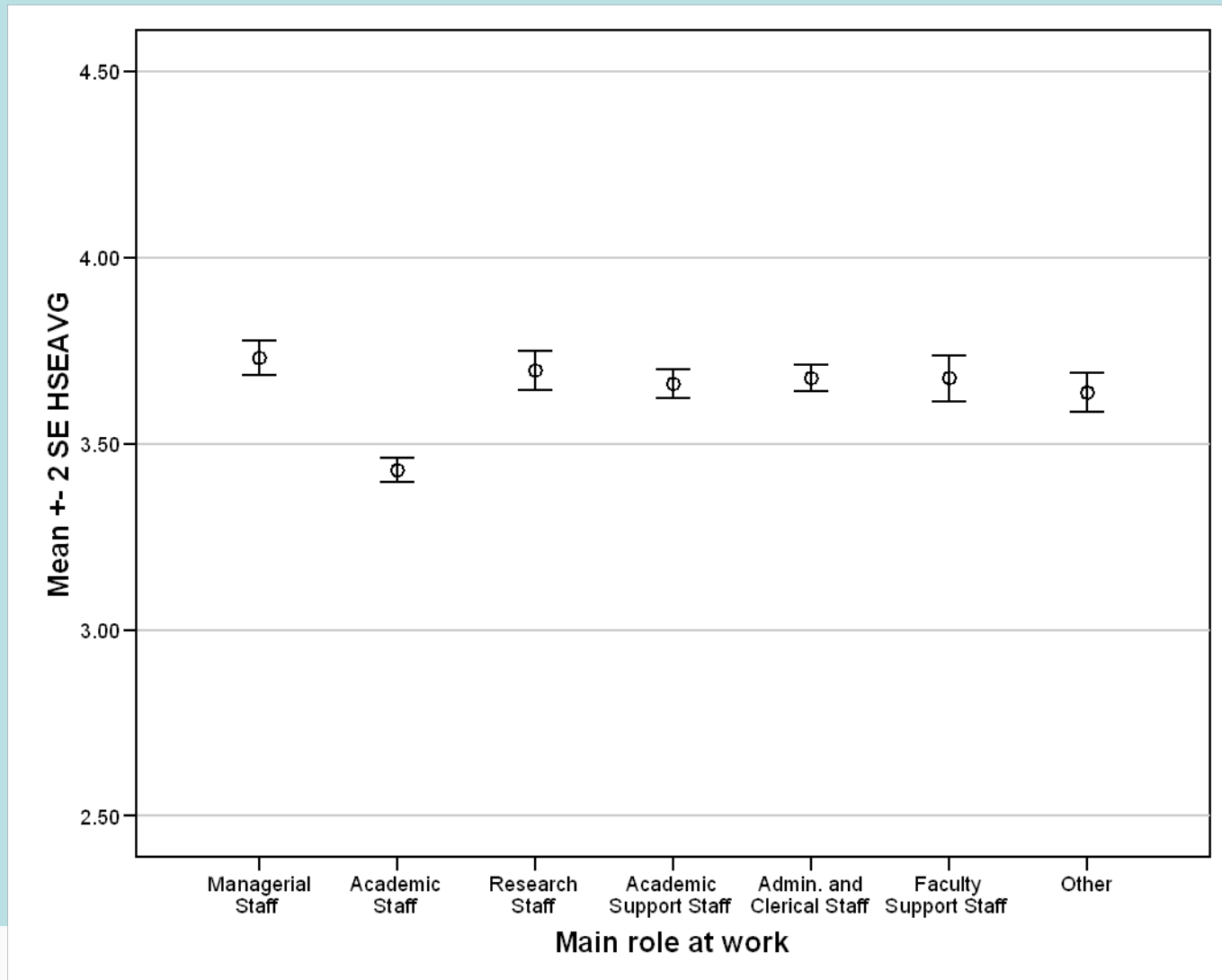
HSE Control: How much say the person has in the way they do their day-to-day job



HSE Demands: How far respondents agree they can cope with demands made of them regarding workload, work patterns, and the work environment



HSE Stress Scale - Average



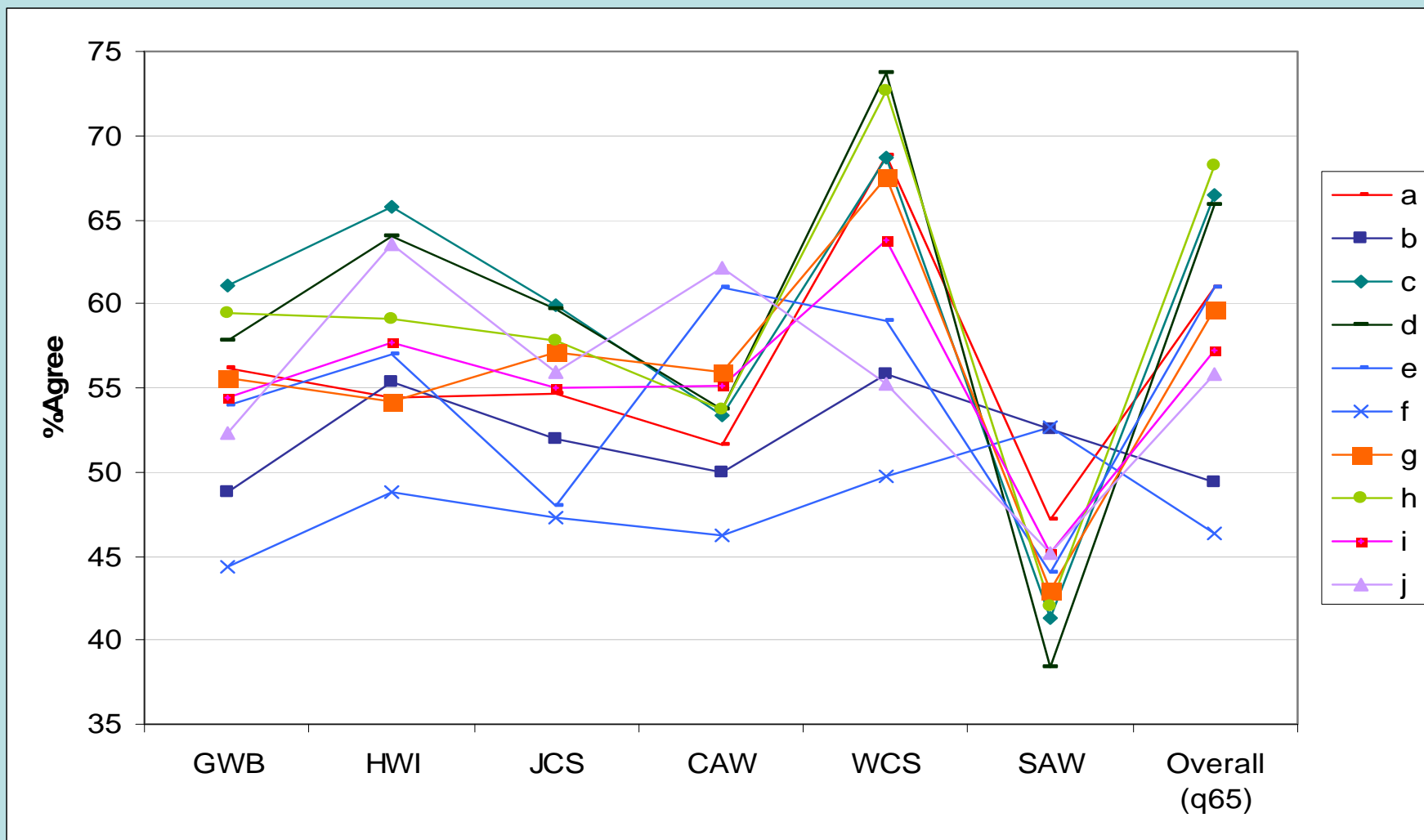
Discussion

- Your reaction to seeing these results?
- Why do you think academics are much more stressed and unhappy than other occupational groups?
- What could/should be done to address academic stress in universities?

The Ugly

- We found major issues in *some* universities, with higher stress and much lower QoWL
- Why? What would characterise universities with much lower QoWL (and higher QoWL)? What sort of profile would they have?
- Our research indicates some possible answers

Who has a good quality of working life?



Discussion

- Given this evidence, what kinds of interventions might improve things? What would be the best kinds of interventions?
- Where does 'stress' fit into all this?

What best predicts Overall QoWL?

Question or factor	t	Sig.
General Well-Being (GWB)	16.205	0.001
I am able to achieve a healthy balance of work and home	14.805	0.001
Working Conditions (WCS)	9.606	0.001
I am satisfied with my job	9.572	0.001
I feel my job is secure	8.522	0.001
I enjoy my work	7.339	0.001
I would recommend this organisation as good to work for	6.388	0.001
My work is as interesting and varied as I would want it to be	4.087	0.001
The quality of supervision is as good as I would want it to be	3.979	0.001
Good Relationships	3.531	0.001
Stress at Work (SAW)	-3.275	0.001
...		
(17 th) I am paid fairly for the job I do, given my experience	2.11	0.035

Multiple Regression, with dependent variable: q65: I am satisfied with the overall quality of my working life. $R^2 = .75$, $N = 5500$.

What should universities be doing about stress?

- Helpful to look at this in terms of musts, shoulds and coulds
- Musts – legal obligations
- Shoulds – what you should be doing
- Coulds – going those positive steps further to prevent and reduce stress at work and enhance well-being at work

Musts

2 key legal obligations that all employers have:

- 👤 A common law duty of care [to all employees] to do what is reasonably practicable...
- 👤 Legal requirement to carry out risk assessments:
 - Stress is regarded as a hazard
 - Therefore the risk it poses must be assessed and managed in some way
 - Is your risk assessment approach [process] **suitable and sufficient**? See HSE's checklist
 - <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/pdfs/checklist.pdf>

So what *must* you do in terms of stress risk assessments?

- You *must* carry out risk assessments.
- You *must* assess stress (because it's a work-related hazard)
- But HSE says you do not 'have to' follow their Management Standards approach as long as your approach is suitable and sufficient. **Can you prove that *your* approach is sufficient?**
- That means following a coherent process:
 - Prepare, indentify, who & how, evaluate, record, monitor & review

Other important legal aspects...

- Increasingly stress-related illness may be seen as a 'disability'. Employers must therefore 'make reasonable adjustments'
- Because of the principle of 'reasonable foreseeability' in personal injury cases, employers must take great care in cases where the stress risk was 'clear and apparent'

So what should you be doing?

- You *should* have some kind of stress/well-being policy, which would normally explain the why, what, who, how, where and when of stress management action in the organisation. The policy should cover both prevention and support
- This normally necessitates awareness raising, training to support implementation of the policy

What should your managers be doing?

- An important question, because managers:
 - Can cause stress, spot stress, can act to reduce it in teams and for individuals, can implement policy
- So you *should* be training all managers to:
 - Raise awareness, understand responsibilities, manage local risks, adopt appropriate behaviours and management styles (management competencies)
- See HSE <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/mcit.htm>

But what *could* you be doing?

- Yes, address stress, but based on our research, we would argue for a much broader, more holistic approach to staff well-being, because:
- Other factors may be more important than stress in improving well-being and overall quality of working life
- A positive approach is more likely to gain commitment and ‘buy in’, and therefore will be more effective (whereas managers are afraid and suspicious of stress audits and specifically stress management interventions)

Thank you for listening

Happy Easter!

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