

Meeting	OLC Board	Agenda Item No. Paper No.	
Date of meeting	27 July 2020	Time required	

Title	Performance and COVID-19 update
Sponsor	Mariette Hughes
Status	OFFICIAL

Executive summary
<p>This report sets out an overview of performance in June, along with details of immediate mitigations and plans for improvement.</p> <p><u>Section 1: Current performance and baseline</u></p> <p>Performance in June shows a slight improvement on the previous month but is still sub optimal, and the impact of Covid-19 continues to affect the organisation. Current levels of performance are insufficient to keep pace with incoming demand, and will lead to a deterioration in the customer experience if not addressed.</p> <p>The key issues affecting performance are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact processing at the front end; • Investigator productivity; • Utilisation of ombudsman resource; • Line management capability; and • Levels of staff trust and engagement. <p>Full performance data is appended to the report at Appendix 1.</p> <p><u>Section 2: Performance recovery and proposed actions</u></p> <p>The proposals considered at the June OLC Board meeting are considered in further detail at Appendix 2. The Executive has systematically reviewed the benefits and risks of each of these proposals in turn, assessing the likely impact on the PAP, and is making the following recommendations:</p> <p>Proposal 1: Close the door and stop adding new files to PAP until the pandemic is over The Executive considers that the risks associated with this proposal are significant and that the potential benefits do not outweigh these risks. The Executive therefore does not consider that this proposal should be pursued.</p> <p>Proposal 2: Narrow the door and introduce a temporary change to the criteria for accepting cases. The Executive does not consider that there is a persuasive rationale for changing the criteria for cases to be accepted. Further work should be undertaken to understand any improvements that could be made to the contact streams at the front end.</p> <p>Proposal 3: Change the model and handle low complexity cases in an adjudication model. The Executive considers that the priority activities must be completed by the Interim Director of Operations before any pilots/process changes are introduced. The Executive does not consider that this proposal should be pursued until and unless improvements are made to staff morale and engagement, and levels of performance return to pre-Covid levels.</p>

Proposal 4: Relax the QUAF model and amend the model to require fewer checks for more experienced staff.

The Executive considers that this proposal should be considered further by the Interim Director of Operations and OMT once the current work which is underway to better understand ombudsman workload and flow is completed.

Performance Recovery: Recommending a staged approach

The Executive is of the view that the interim period before the arrival of new senior staff is critical. Whilst improvements will be sought, rapid and substantive changes represent a significant risk, and should not be pursued to the detriment of the improvements that have been achieved in staff morale and engagement. To do so may entirely derail the work of the People Plan, and may leave the organisation completely unable to recover.

The Executive is recommending that the first stage and the focus for Q2 must be on supporting staff to optimise output, by providing line managers with the tools to support and manage their staff effectively.

In order to achieve the first stage of performance achievement, the following are priority objectives for the Interim Director of Operations for Q2:

- Removal of the ombudsman WIP [end of August];
- L1 workload assured and optimized [end of August];
- Clear expectations on managing by behaviours set, and coaching sessions provided to operational line managers [end of September].

This will also allow for a much clearer view of operational performance as a whole, and allow the proposals at Appendix 2 to be reconsidered at the start of Q3.

A report on the first stage of performance achievement and further proposals will be brought to OLC Board at the end of Q2.

Section 3: Covid update

Command Team are continuing to make plans for an eventual reopening of the office in some capacity. Whilst this will not be implemented until such time as the official government advice changes, steps are being taken to ensure that any return can be carried out in a smooth and measured fashion.

A recent PULSE survey identified many positive themes in staff responses, particularly around levels of communication and engagement. The results in their entirety are included at **Appendix 3**.

Recommendation/action required

Board is asked to NOTE the paper and AGREE the recommendations for priority actions.

Performance and Covid-19 update

1. Performance overview

Front end contact

- 1.1. Having dropped off slightly at the beginning of Q1, levels of contact into GET are beginning to return to normal levels. In April and May, there was a significant channel shift towards emails rather than calls, however this now appears to be beginning to return to the usual split.
- 1.2. There is a risk that if this trend continues or worsens, service levels in GET will be adversely affected, because emails take longer to process. This is further exacerbated by a disproportionate loss of availability due to Covid-19 in GET advisors who handle emails (average 35hrs lost per week) compared with call handlers (2hrs lost per week).
- 1.3. At the time of writing, GET has a WIP of 2,100 contacts. It is anticipated that based on current performance this will remain steady through to September, at which point the backlog should begin to reduce as a result of new starters in the team becoming more proficient, and staff availability returning to typical levels. It must be noted that any improvements at GET would increase the PAP unless they are matched with similar performance improvements at the investigation stage.
- 1.4. Fluctuations in incoming contacts appear to have resulted directly from the effect of Covid-19 on our service users and do not appear indicative of an underlying shift in demand. This will be kept under close review, as it is likely that the effect of Covid-19 on the legal sector may well affect the demand profile for the Legal Ombudsman. However, these changes would not manifest until further down the line, owing to the time lag in complaints presenting themselves.

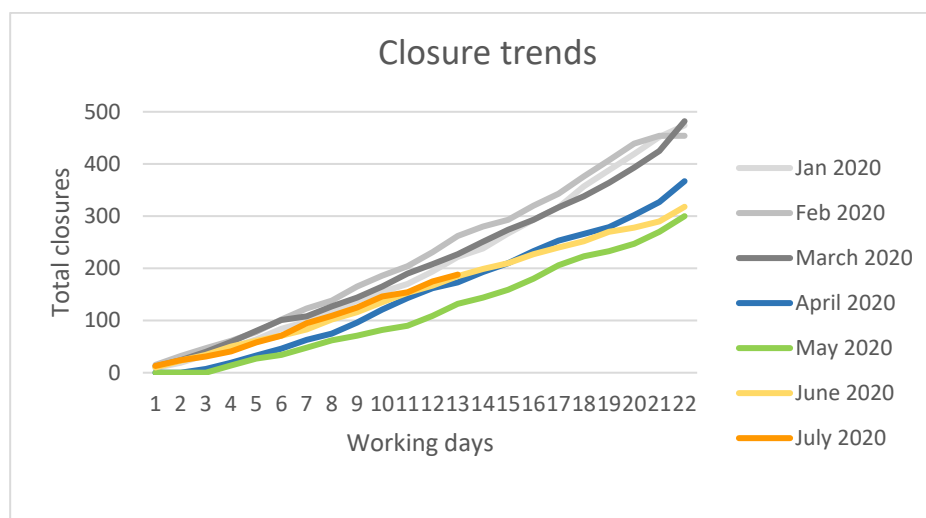
PAP

- 1.5. The Pre-Assessment Pool grew to 3,603 at the end of June, and the average age of files waiting in the PAP was 138 days at the end of June. It is likely that this will continue to grow, based on currently observed performance levels.
- 1.6. The number of cases taken out of the PAP increased significantly in June, which is due in part to the April cohort of new starters building up their case holding. It is also notable that the conversion rate of cases taken from PAP into live investigations has dropped to 85%, compared with the previously observed average of 92%. Further work is underway to consider whether there has been a shift in the nature of work put into

the PAP by GET, or whether the added advice and guidance provided through the 'nudge' initiative is beginning to take effect. An update on this will be provided at the next OLC Board meeting.

Investigations

- 1.7. Closures in June showed a slight improvement on the previous month, resulting in a final figure of 318. This brings total closures for Q1 to 985. It is anticipated that performance in July will show a further slight improvement, however this will be insufficient to keep pace with incoming demand, and should therefore not be considered a sustainable or acceptable level of performance.
- 1.8. In month closure performance is show below, as compared with the rest of Q1, and performance in Q4 of 2019-20.



- 1.9. Caring responsibilities continued to affect both the investigator and Team Leader cohorts. In June, on average 25% of investigators each week claimed some degree of special leave for lost capacity as a direct result of caring responsibilities, totalling more than 1,250 lost investigator hours in month. June also saw on average 6 Team Leaders per week reporting lost hours totalling approximately 200 hrs in month.
- 1.10. In addition, anecdotal evidence continues to suggest that the active handling time for cases is increasing as a direct result of disrupted hours causing a loss of efficiency. Many staff are working unusual and disrupted patterns to fit in their hours, which inevitably affects efficiency, particularly for the more labour intensive stages of the investigation.
- 1.11. Staff fulfilling their hours by working non standard patterns, such as very early mornings, late evening or weekends, may also be hampered in their ability to communicate with service providers during these times. This is compounded by service providers also working non standard patterns.

- 1.12. The number of cases being suspended in month continues to be significantly higher than normal, however this appears to have peaked in May and is now slowing down as service providers begin to re-open. This is mirrored in the number of returning suspensions in month, which rose significantly in June.
- 1.13. Whilst this has positive implications for our ability to close cases, this will initially have an effect on the size of the PAP as suspended cases come back into active case holdings and must be worked on, restricting the ability to take new cases.
- 1.14. The average case age at closure rose by 2 days in June, having also risen by 2 days in May. Although we are still within our overall timeliness KPIs, we were below the anticipated level of low cases closed in 90 days – 54% in June and 57% in May, against a target of 65%. This trend is likely to continue based on the age profile of the current investigation WIP and the increased handling time for cases.
- 1.15. This is reflective both of the efficiency issues referenced above, but also of the anecdotal evidence gathered from investigators, which suggests that although service providers may be re-opening, they are not operating at full capacity. As a result, it is taking longer to contact parties, and service providers are more frequently requesting extensions when responding to our requests.
- 1.16. Average investigator case holdings have fluctuated across the quarter. This dropped in April and May as investigators struggled to balance their new working patterns and requests for suspensions. The lower number of active cases held across the organisation in April and May goes some way to explaining the lower than anticipated performance. Case holdings have begun to pick up again now as investigators achieve a better work life balance and as more of their cases are able to be progressed.
- 1.17. On a positive note, whilst the new starters were initially delayed in taking new cases as a result of increased onboarding time during the pandemic, they are now taking cases in advance of what was anticipated, and are already starting to see closures, despite these not being forecast until next month. This would appear indicative of the success of the remote induction, about which the new starters have spoken very highly.
- 1.18. Attrition remains at lower than usual levels, with one investigator leaving in June. This takes the total investigator attrition for Q1 to 3.6 FTE, compared with 9.8 FTE in Q4. Whilst staff morale and engagement do appear to be recovering somewhat, it is likely that this change in attrition is more readily attributed to the uncertainty of the job market and an unwillingness to leave a secure position. This position may alter going forward, with local competitors having recently closed recruitment rounds.

Ombudsmen

- 1.19. One factor affecting overall closures in June was the number of cases closed by ombudsman decision. The standstill budget does not include any provision for any decisions to be made by pool ombudsmen. At the end of May, there were 56 decisions still waiting to be picked up, but this number grew to 105 at the end of June.

1.20. The decline in the number of ombudsman decisions being made has an impact on performance overall, and should this go unchecked the build up of work at this stage in the process will adversely affect the average case age at closure.

Immediate mitigations

1.21. Urgent work is underway to understand the workload of L1 and L2 ombudsmen, and whether there is any scope to improve the flow of work and maximise decision output. This work will inform any recommendations in terms of maximising performance recovery in future months, particularly in terms of whether more resource should be freed up by reducing the number of QUAF checks carried out.

1.22. In the meantime, a small amount of spend from other areas is being released to a limited number of pool ombudsmen in order to clear the backlog which has built up before the situation deteriorates further. This is a temporary measure which is not expected to be repeated in future months.

1.23. The Operations Managers are also considered redeploying a small number of L1 purely to decision work for a limited time period. The intention is to clear the ombudsman WIP by the end of August, and a verbal update on progress will be provided at the July meeting.

1.24. The Operations Managers are also currently supporting investigators where the Team Leader may have reduced capacity, however this is not a long-term solution. Consideration is being given to providing staff who passed the recruitment process for the Team Leader role (prior to the standstill budget being adopted) the opportunity to be redeployed towards some limited Team Leader activities in line with business need.

1.25. Work is also underway to consider whether the contact streams at the front end could be streamlined to enable GET to bring improve the service level for incoming contacts.

2. Performance recovery

Observations

2.1. During the first two weeks of the interim structure, meetings have taken place with the Operations Managers and the Team Leaders, along with a review of operational data and trends and feedback from staff to senior leaders. The review has identified a number of concerns and risks related to operational delivery which are hindering recovery, which include:

- Contact processing at the front end;
- Investigator productivity;
- Utilisation of ombudsman resource;
- Line management capability; and

- Levels of staff trust and engagement.

2.2. Whilst some of the elements affecting performance are partially explained above in section 1, it is clear that there are further questions to be answered, in order to be assured of the delivery potential within the organisation. It is not possible at this stage, two weeks into the discovery phase of the new interim structure, to predict or quantify the improvements that could be made.

2.3. Should performance continue at the same level as observed in Q1, the likely outcome would be an end of year position as follows:

Measure	Current performance	Anticipated performance
Cases Resolved	985 (Q1)	3,865
Cases Accepted	847 (Q1)	3,451
Files in PAP	3,603	6,036
Customer Journey - Low	128 days	391 days
Customer Journey - Med	155 days	440 days
Customer Journey - High	506 days	544 days

Risks and considerations

2.4. Whilst Covid-19 has impacted this in terms of our ability to close cases along with the decision to opt for a standstill budget, the current pandemic should not be used as a reason for not striving for improvements wherever possible.

2.5. At the end of the last financial year, improving operational performance was already considered a key priority, and performance levels have dropped further since then. Unless improvements in delivery are made, the customer experience will continue to deteriorate. This is of particular importance when considering the risks posed by the external pressures on the organisation to demonstrate improved performance.

2.6. The OLC Board will be aware that staff morale and engagement were noted to be critical issues at the end of the last financial year, and represent one of the biggest risks affecting operational delivery. It was agreed that this needed to be an area of focus in the People Plan, whilst also recognising that the organisation continues to experience a degree of change fatigue. Whilst some ground has been gained in this regard as a result of the organisation's approach and flexibility during the pandemic, the situation remains extremely fragile.

2.7. A number of proposals for improving performance were discussed at the OLC Board meeting in May. Following feedback from this discussion some of these proposals appear at Appendix 2 for further detailed consideration during this meeting, in terms of the risks, perceived benefits and associated costs.

- 2.8. However, in terms of consideration of fundamental changes to the operating model, it must be noted that the current performance impacts of Covid-19 on service provider availability and staff availability and efficiency would also affect the success of any new processes or pilots during the pandemic.
- 2.9. It should also be noted that the changes to the senior structure are currently having an impact on staff. There is a real concern that the extensive changes in the senior structure, such as a new Chief Ombudsman and a new Chief Operating Officer will bring a significant change in direction for the Legal Ombudsman without consultation, and staff are nervous about what these changes may mean for them.
- 2.10. In this context, this interim period before the arrival of new senior staff is critical. Whilst improvements should be sought where possible, rapid and substantive changes represent a significant risk, and should not be pursued to the detriment of the improvements that have been achieved in staff morale and engagement. To do so may entirely derail the work of the People Plan, and may leave the organisation completely unable to recover.

Forward plan

- 2.11. In order to aid performance improvement and recovery during the pandemic, the focus for Q2 must be on supporting staff to optimise output, and the way to do this is providing line managers with the tools to support and manage their staff effectively.
- 2.12. Line managers are currently not comfortable managing by behaviors, and have not yet been equipped to have the level of conversations required to be able to manage confidently through this period, without relying solely on targets and data.
- 2.13. Work has already begun to streamline the behavioural framework into a model that is fit for purpose. Additional work is planned, drawing on the experience of the additional support resource put into place to ensure operational line managers at all levels are able to effectively manage their direct reports.
- 2.14. Improvements in the confidence and capability of operational line managers at all levels will allow for a much clearer view of operational performance as a whole during this period. This could well then offer further insights into improvements that could be made. It will also demonstrate commitment to making real changes to levels of staff morale, by moving more towards staff autonomy, and recognising the value and experience of our staff.
- 2.15. It is anticipated that by the end of Q2, improvements will have been made to the ombudsman WIP, and any adjustments necessary to make the best use of operational resource will have been put into place. Should performance improvements from September onwards be sufficient to deliver output levels similar to those observed immediately pre-Covid, the end of year position could potentially change as follows:

Measure	Current performance	Anticipated performance	Improvements from September
Cases Resolved	985 (Q1)	3,865	4,915
Cases Accepted	847 (Q1)	3,451	4,501
Files in PAP	3,603	6,036	4,875
Customer Journey - Low	128 days	391 days	324 days
Customer Journey - Med	155 days	440 days	372 days
Customer Journey - High	506 days	544 days	476 days

2.16. By this stage, it will then be possible to put forward any further proposals for improvement, with a much better understanding of the factors at play.

2.17. Should Covid-19 cease to impact staff and service provider availability, this could then lead to a further improvement in performance. By way of an example, should staff and service provider availability return to normal levels from November, the end of year position could potentially change as follows:

Measure	Current performance	Anticipated performance	Improvements from September	Reduced Covid-19 impact
Cases Resolved	985 (Q1)	3,865	4,915	5,620
Cases Accepted	847 (Q1)	3,451	4,501	5,206
Files in PAP	3,603	6,036	4,875	4,123
Customer Journey - Low	128 days	391 days	324 days	294 days
Customer Journey - Med	155 days	440 days	372 days	343 days
Customer Journey - High	506 days	544 days	476 days	447 days

2.18. It is important to understand that these figures are illustrative only, and should not be considered a forecast. There are a number of variables which may affect and improve operational delivery.

2.19. In order to achieve performance improvements, the following are considered to be priority objectives for the Interim Director of Operations to be completed in Q2:

- Removal of the ombudsman WIP [end of August];
- L1 workload assured and optimized [end of August];
- Clear expectations on managing by behaviours set, and coaching sessions provided to operational line managers [end of September].

2.20. This will allow the Interim Director of Operations to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of any issues facing operational delivery and to assess in detail the merits of any potential proposals to bring improvements.

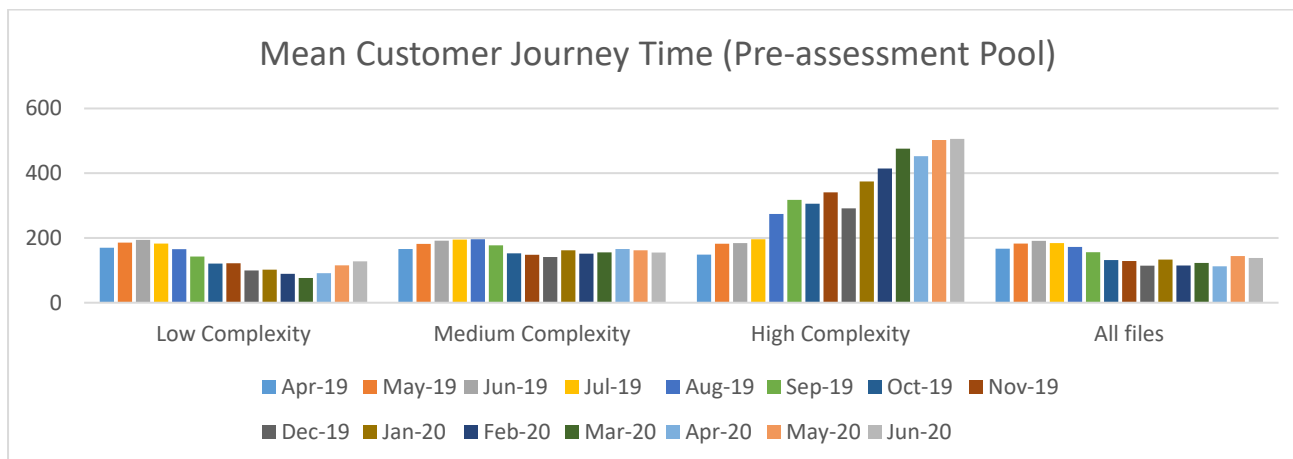
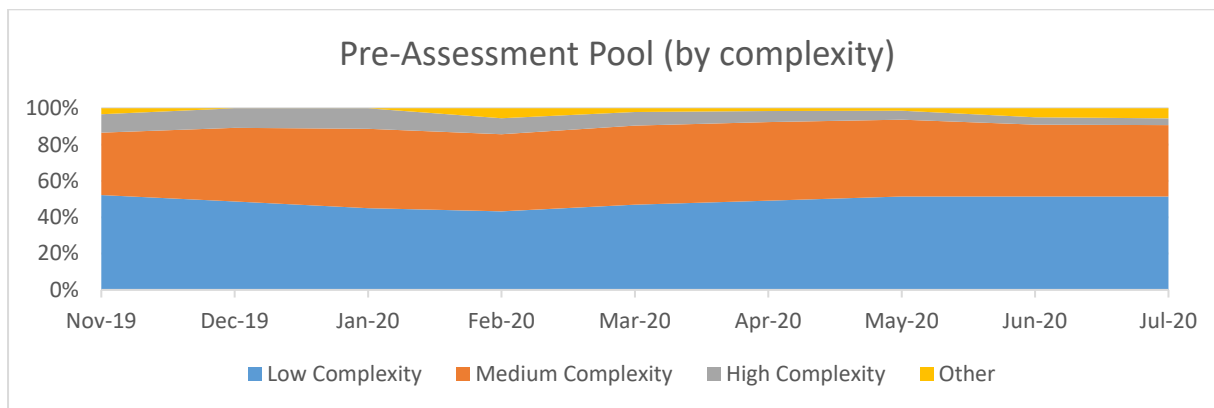
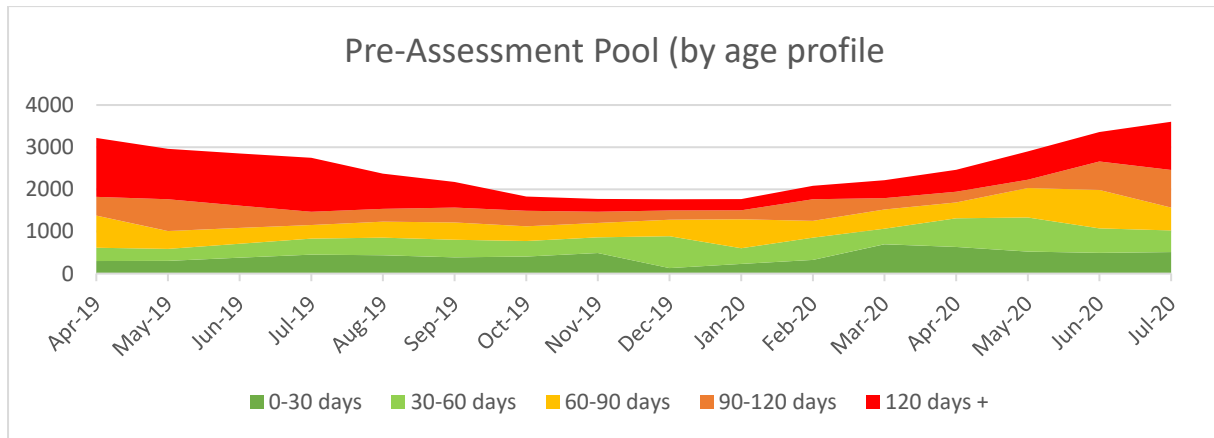
2.21. A report on any improvements made and further proposals will be brought to OLC Board at the end of Q2.

3. Covid-19 activities

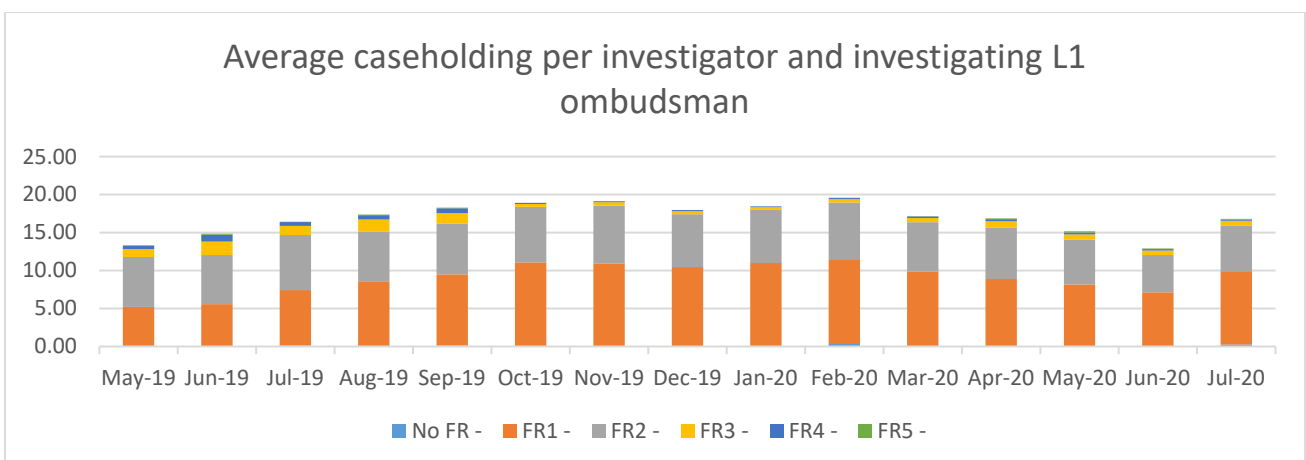
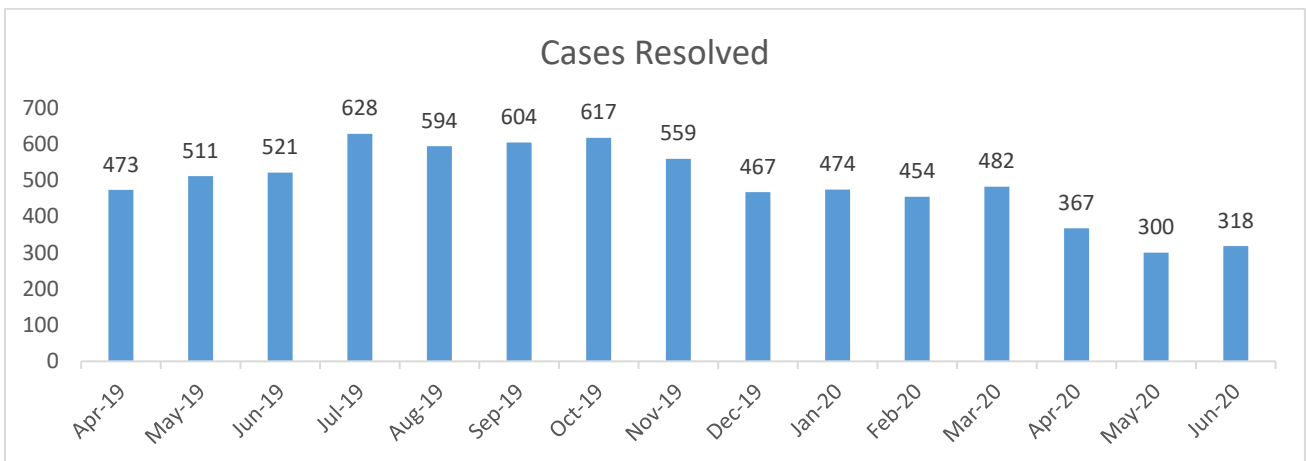
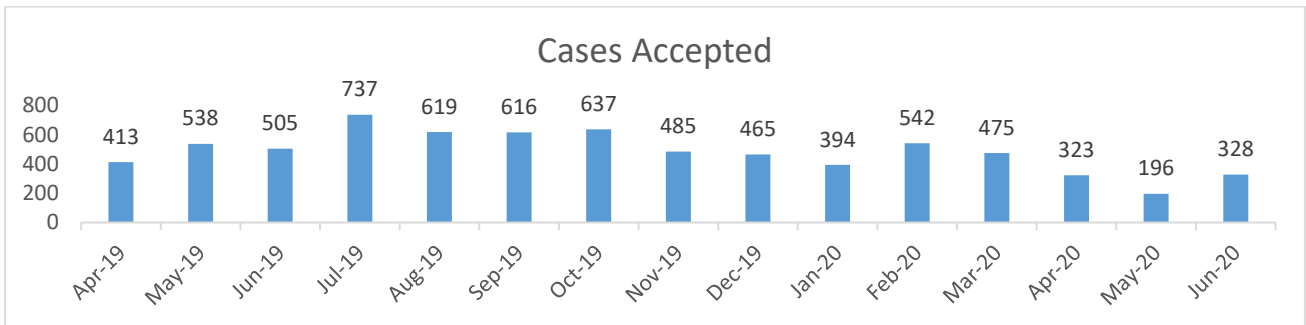
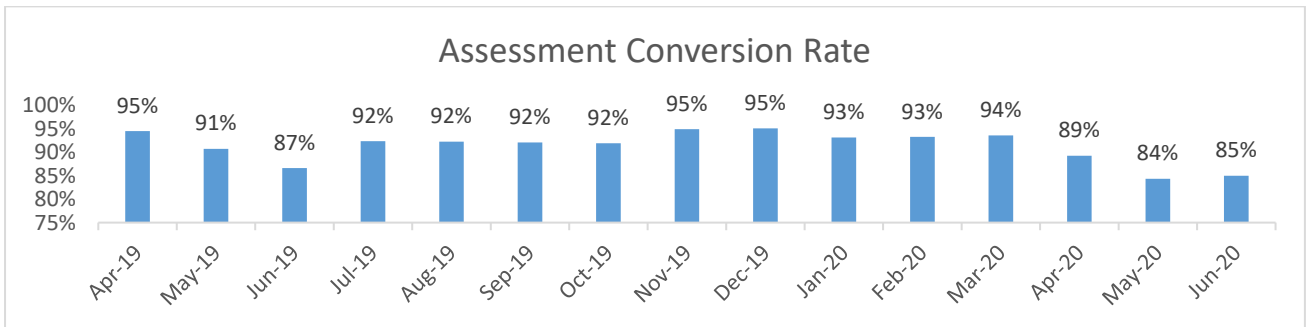
- 3.1. A PULSE survey was launched to understand the impact of the pandemic on all employees, and to understand whether the level of communication and support being provided were considered sufficient. A full copy of the report is included at Appendix 3.
- 3.2. The overall response rate was 65%, which is higher than in previous surveys, and responses were received from all areas of the organisation. There were many positive themes identified in the responses, mostly focused around the level of communication received, and the support provided in being set up to work from home.
- 3.3. Of particular note was that whilst only 24% of staff wanted to return to the office environment, many more staff wanted greater clarity on the organisation's long term plans in this regard.
- 3.4. Another common theme in the comments received was that staff had noticed a shift away from target based performance management, which was welcomed, there was a degree of concern that, should the situation abate, targets would once more be strictly enforced. This is reflective of the fragile nature of staff engagement referenced above.
- 3.5. Command Team are continuing to make plans for an eventual reopening of the office in some capacity. Whilst this will not be implemented until such time as the official government advice changes, steps are being taken to ensure that any return can be carried out in a smooth and measured fashion.
- 3.6. New guidance has been issued to all line managers, enabling them to have more structured and documented conversations around any requirements for Special Leave going forward. This is of particular importance as the summer holidays approach. This guidance will ensure decisions are being made in a fair and rational manner and any delivery implications are clearly understood upfront.

Performance metrics June 2020

Pre-Assessment Pool

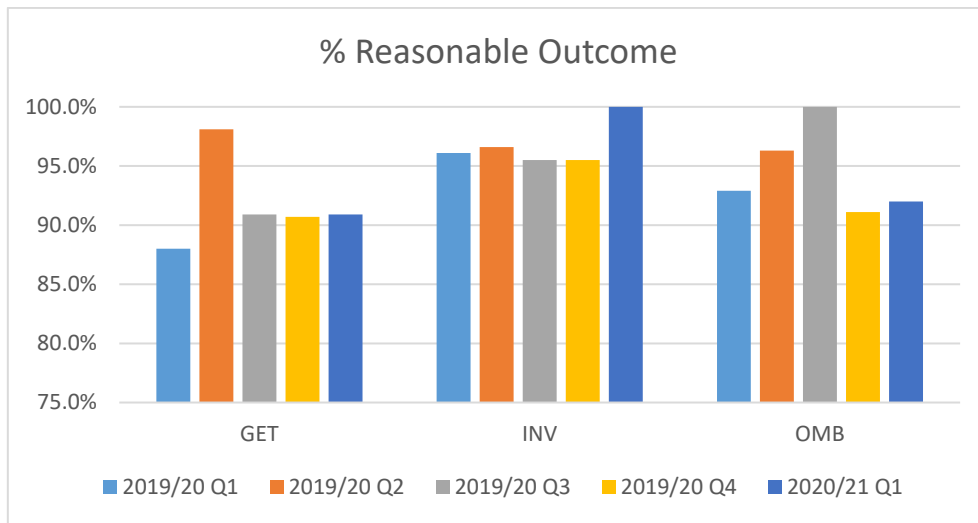


Investigation

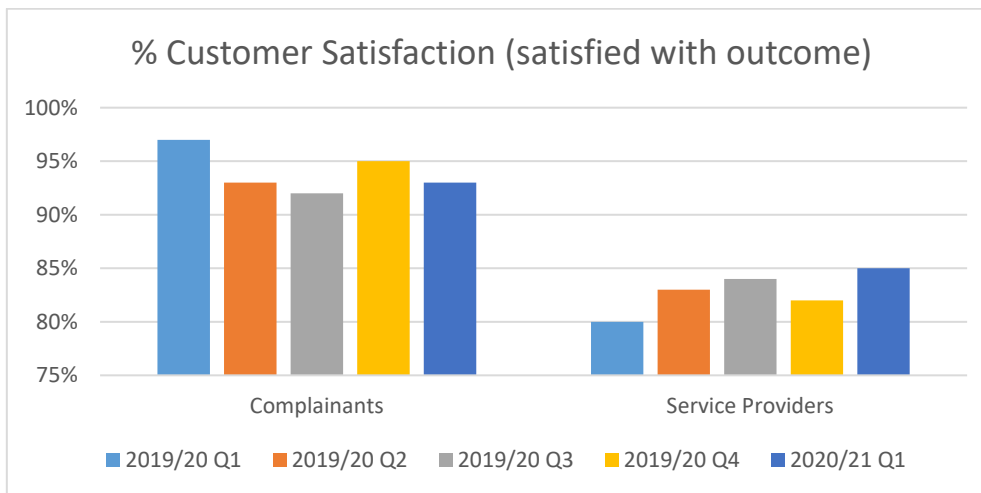


Quality

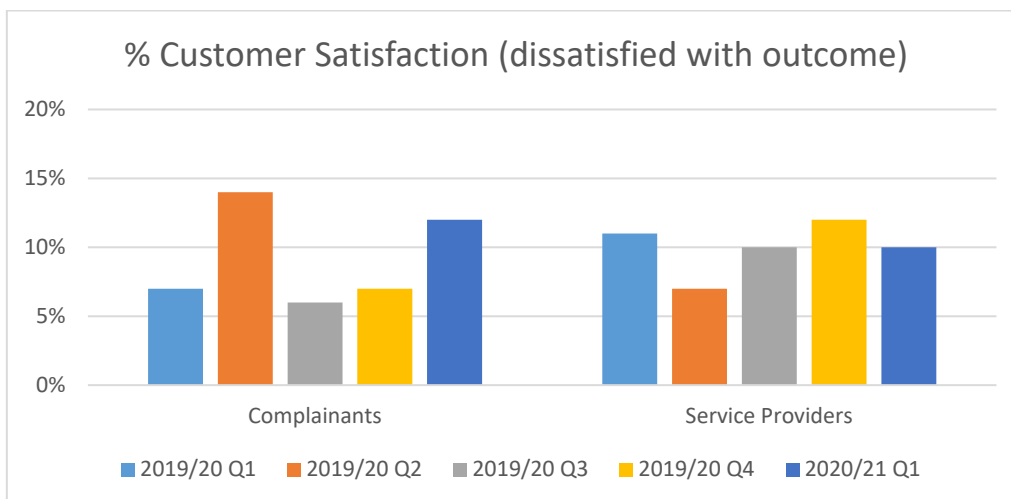
Quality outcomes – 95% target



Customer satisfaction (satisfied with outcome) – 85% target



Customer satisfaction (dissatisfied with outcome) – 12% target

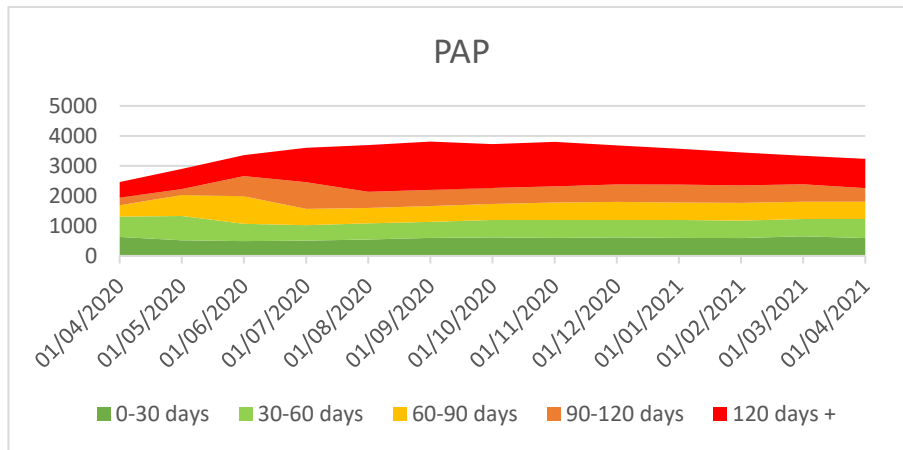


Performance recovery proposals – risk balance

PROPOSAL 1 : Close the door	
Stop adding new files to PAP until the pandemic is over.	
BENEFITS	
<p>- Fewer files would be added to PAP - this would then begin to reduce as cases are taken out, with no more to replace them - see chart below which illustrates the effect of closing the door for 3 months on the PAP:</p>	
<p>The chart, titled 'PAP', displays the total number of files over time, categorized by age. The y-axis represents the number of files, ranging from 0 to 4000 in increments of 500. The x-axis shows dates from 01/04/2020 to 01/04/2021. The categories are: 0-30 days (dark green), 30-60 days (light green), 60-90 days (yellow), 90-120 days (orange), and 120 days+ (red). The total number of files peaks at approximately 3500 in late 2020 and then gradually declines to around 2000 by early 2021.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Service level at GET would improve as the WIP gets worked down - GET could then be redeployed to elsewhere within the business - Customers would not be added to a queue to wait for a long time before their investigation would even start 	
RISKS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Closing the door removes the ability to monitor incoming demand and plan accordingly. This could be crucial for future planning, as it is likely that the effects of Covid-19 on the market may have a knock on effect on the number of complaints coming to LeO. - Closing the door without considering our jurisdictional time limits will disadvantage customers (complaints are out of time if they are brought to LeO more than 6 months after the final response from the service provider). - The PAP is an issue only in terms of the customer experience. Adding fewer cases to the PAP does not improve the experience for those customers - it shuts them out completely, rather than giving them the option of choosing whether they wish to wait. - The customer journey time would not show any significant improvement for customers until the PAP were entirely cleared, as those already in the PAP will continue to wait until their case can be taken by an investigator 	

- LeO could face a flood of complaints whenever the doors were reopened, which would instantly overwhelm the front end of the process with an enduring backlog which would adversely affect the service level at GET for the entirety on 2021/22.

If GET were able to deal with the number of incoming complaints once the doors reopen, the benefits on the PAP would quickly be negated:



- Closing the door without considering our jurisdictional time limits will disadvantage customers (complaints are out of time if they are brought to LeO more than 6 months after the final response from the service provider).

- Severe risk to reputational damage - performance and the PAP were already an issue before Covid-19, and closing the doors now would not be well received.

CONSIDERATIONS

- This is an approach already taken by many other ombudsman schemes (albeit those who tend to deal with frontline service providers). There is an argument that the opportunity for taking this course of action has passed.

- Some level of front end contact would need to be maintained in order to identify and prioritise vulnerable customers

- An alternative to closing the door entirely would be to partially close - ie reduce acceptance of files to 50% - however this would simply result in a backlog of contacts waiting for processing at GET.

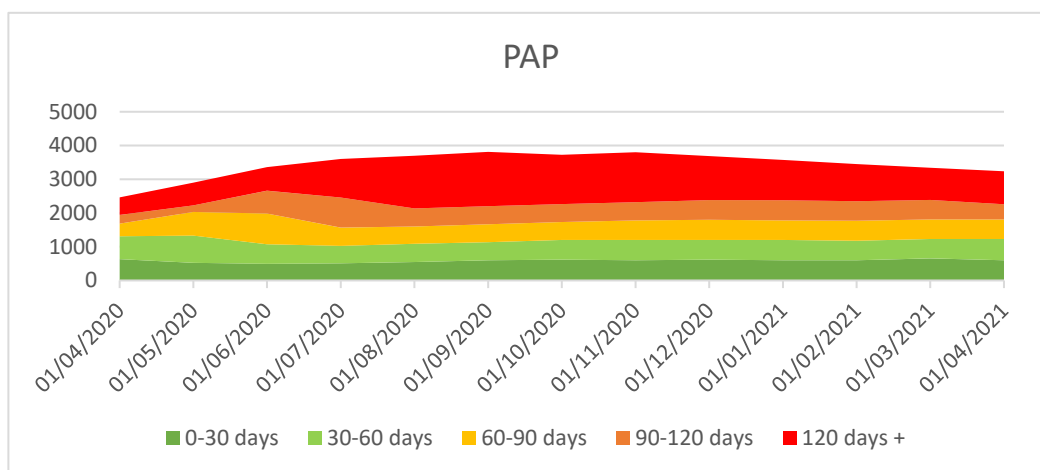
RECOMMENDATION: The Executive considers that the risks associated with this proposal are significant and that the potential benefits do not outweigh these risks. The Executive therefore does not consider that this proposal should be pursued

PROPOSAL 2 : Narrow the door

Introduce a temporary change to the criteria for accepting cases.

BENEFITS

- Fewer files would be accepted for investigation - this would enable the PAP to reduce at a faster rate as fewer cases are deemed to require investigation, and the others are closed at assessment rather than accepted.
- As an example, if the conversion rate were to drop to 75%, the PAP would reduce much faster:



- Customer journey times for cases accepted would then improve, as they would have spent less time waiting in the PAP
- Investigators could focus on the cases where there is the potential for significant detriment

RISKS

- There is a severe reputational risk in refusing service to customers who would previously have had their complaints considered, purely on the basis of performance concerns
- This approach would potentially cause an increase in challenges claiming that we are acting outside of the Scheme Rules
- The full extent of a case is not known at initial assessment, therefore dismissing cases based on initial assessment means we risks turning away customers who really need our help
- Choosing not to investigate certain cases reduces LeO's oversight of complaint trends and restricts our ability to provide feedback to the profession
- If this approach were applied to new cases entering the PAP, it would not have any effect until the current backlog were cleared.
- Should it be applied from a set date, customer who have already been waiting a significant time for an investigation will then be turned away, when they would have been accepted on the previous month's rules.

CONSIDERATIONS

- The cases that LeO can accept or refuse to accept are governed by the jurisdiction set out in the Scheme Rules. Any changes to the rules require consultation and approval, and all cases are considered within the parameters of these rules.

- Extensive internal training and guidance has already been provided in order to make sure that we are only investigating cases where we add value

- Consideration should be given to whether the contact streams at the front end could be streamlined, to narrow the door without adversely impacting customers. This would allow GET to clear their WIP and potentially be deployed elsewhere

RECOMMENDATION: The Executive does not consider that there is a persuasive rationale for changing the criteria for cases to be accepted. Further work should be undertaken to understand any improvements that could be made to the contact streams at the front end

PROPOSAL 3 : Change the model

Handle low complexity cases in an adjudication model

BENEFITS

- The active handling time of a case could be reduced, by allowing only limited interactions before an initial view is reached and communicated by the investigator
- Lower complexity cases could be progressed faster, by reducing active handling time
- This would increase the number of closures achieved, and positively impact the PAP, and customer journey time

RISKS

- Performance against our customer satisfaction KPI could suffer, as many complainants tell us they value the level of interactions and discussion around their complaints
- Removing the attempt to achieve an agreed outcome would drive all cases through to final decision. This would increase workload for ombudsmen and increase customer journey time, thus negating the benefits achieved by progressing the cases faster.
- Progressing cases through to final determination without a full understanding of the issues may lead to an increase in JRs
- Introducing a new business process risks destabilising the current levels of performance by putting selected staff onto a new pilot model, and brings the need for redistribution of work and cases
- Introducing another process change or pilot would negatively affect staff engagement and morale
- Using a new model to clear low complexity cases would change the case distribution for the rest of the organisation – this would limit the number of closures that are achieved by an investigator

CONSIDERATIONS

- The budget does not contain provision for any additional staff, and any pilot or new model would therefore need to be run within the constraints of current resources
- Investigators already close a number of simple cases at a very early stage, and there is little evidence to suggest that there are other cases which are suitable for adjudication
- A criteria for passing files through this model would need to be established – It is not clear at this stage what the criteria might be, or the rationale for selecting certain files
- This proposal seeks to improve performance, but does not address the underlying impacts of Covid-19, which would equally affect this process.

RECOMMENDATION: The Executive considers that the priority activities must be completed by the Interim Director of Operations before any pilots/process changes are introduced. The Executive does not consider that this proposal should be pursued until and unless improvements are made to staff morale and engagement, and levels of performance return to pre-Covid levels.

PROPOSAL 4 : Relax the QUAF model

Amend the model to require fewer checks for more experienced staff

BENEFITS

- Reducing the number of checks frees up L1 ombudsman resource to be deployed elsewhere - at current performance levels, this could equate to 180 hrs of ombudsman time - this equates to capacity to complete approximately 40 decisions per month
- Alternatively, L1 ombudsmen could be released from the model to work on cases, thus increasing closures.
- This would have a positive effect on staff morale , as it would recognise the feedback received from staff, and focus the model solely on very new staff or those in particular need of support
- This would marginally improve the handling time for cases, which would have a slight positive effect on closures and customer journey time

RISKS

- Quality could deteriorate with fewer checks taking place. Quality dip sampling for service levels has already been reduced in order to ease pressure on operational leadership
- The number of send backs and provisional decisions could rise, increasing ombudsman rework and thus neutralising the benefits
- Reputational risk, as we have spoken externally many times about the benefits of the model
- L1 ombudsman morale and engagement would be severely harmed by putting them back on investigation work, and this could potentially lead to increased attrition amongst this cohort

CONSIDERATIONS

- The current levels of ombudsmen work do not indicate a need to release capacity at this level - more work must be done to understand the utilisation of ombudsmen before a further quality measure is released
- A blended approach could be adopted, comparing staff performance in the IQR to make a risk based decision as to which checks could be removed.
- This proposal seeks to improve performance, but does not address the underlying impacts of Covid-19, which would equally affect this process.

RECOMMENDATION: The Executive considers that this proposal should be considered further by the Interim Director of Operations and OMT once the current work which is underway to better understand ombudsman workload and flow is completed.

LeO Pulse Survey – Understanding the impact of COVID-19

Survey period: 9th – 19th June 2020

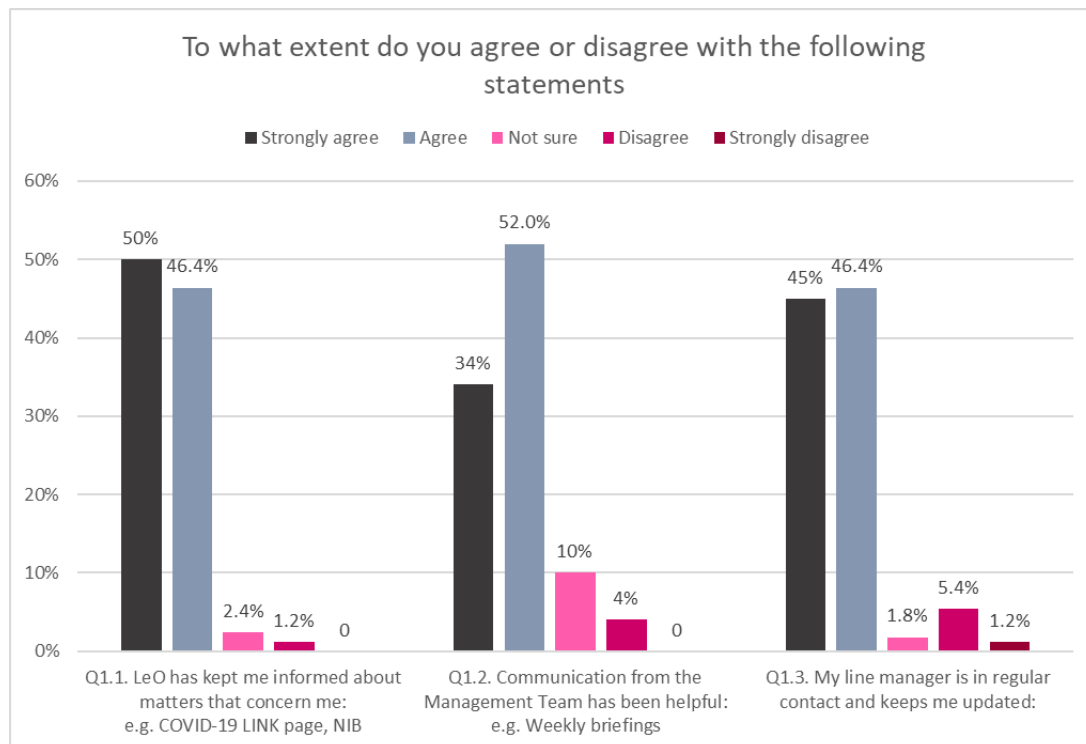
168 responses to the survey, a response rate of 65% response. Responses by working group:

- 31 Corporate (includes Operational Support & Operations Transformation)
- 19 General Enquiries Team
- 78 Investigators
- 24 Ombudsman (all Ombudsman)
- 16 Operations Managers & Team Leaders (RC and GET)

Summary of survey responses by section:

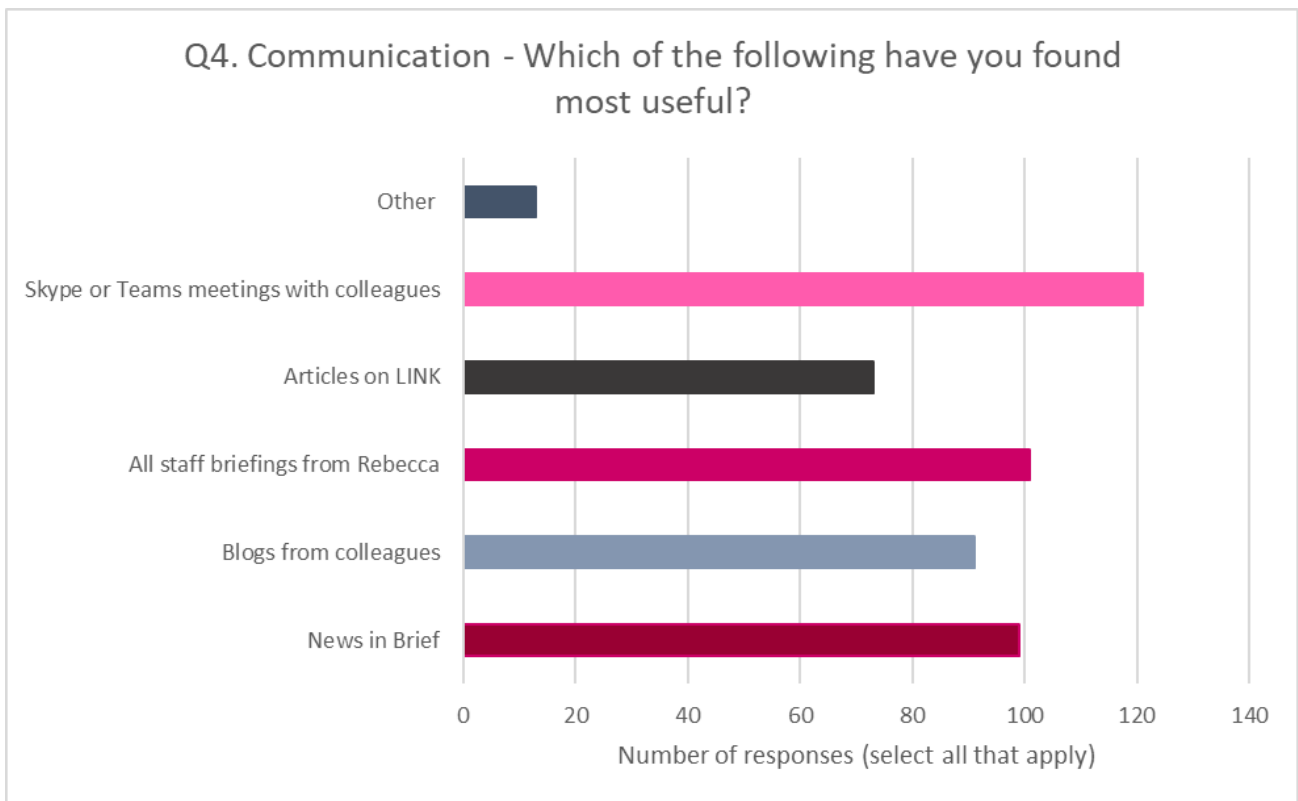
Communication

Q1,2,3: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements



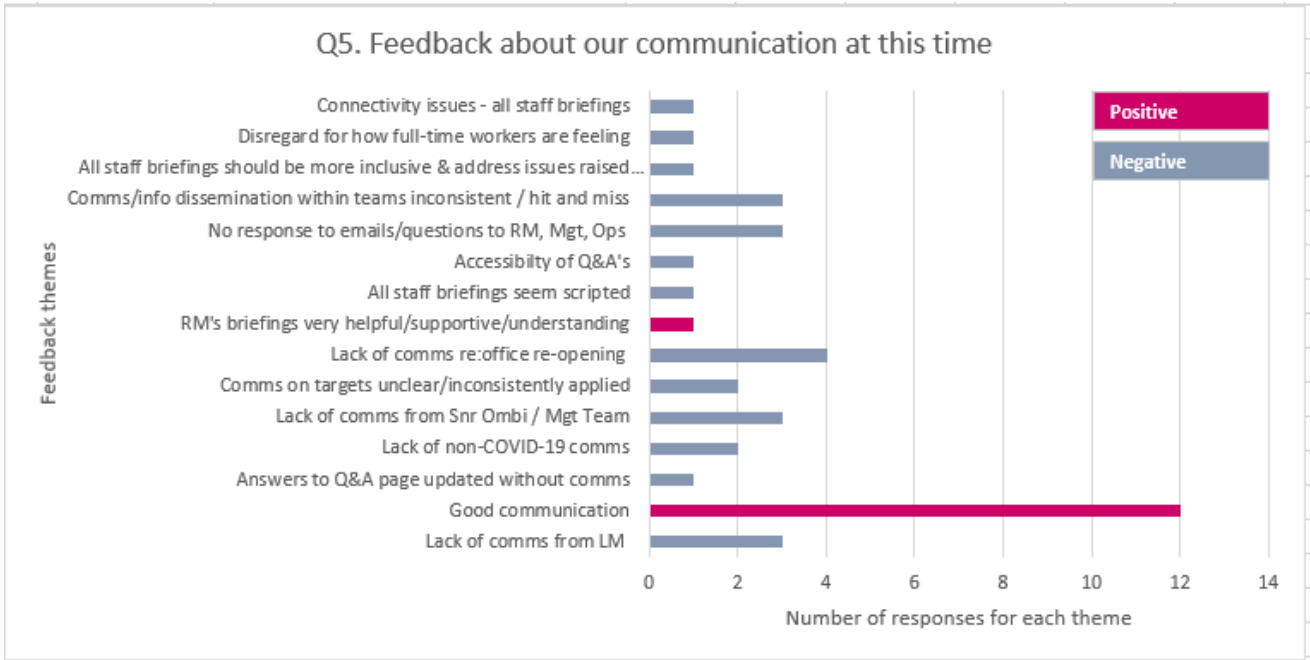
- **96% of staff agree that LeO has kept them informed about matters that concern them**
- **86% tell us that communication from the Management Team has been helpful**
 - In subsequent related questions, 86% of staff went on to say that the amount of communication from the Management Team is about right, however, 9% (7) of the Investigator group and 19% (3) of the Ops Mgr & TL group request more communication from the Management Team.
- **92% report that their line manager is in regular contact and keeps them updated,** however, 10% (7) of the Investigator group disagree with this statement
 - In subsequent related questions, 90% of staff say the amount of communication from their line manager is about right, however, 12% (9) of the Investigator group request more communication from their line manager.

Q4. Which methods of communication have you found useful?



- Within the 'Other' category, staff note that individual contact with their colleagues has been a useful method of communication.

Q5. Feedback from staff about our communication:

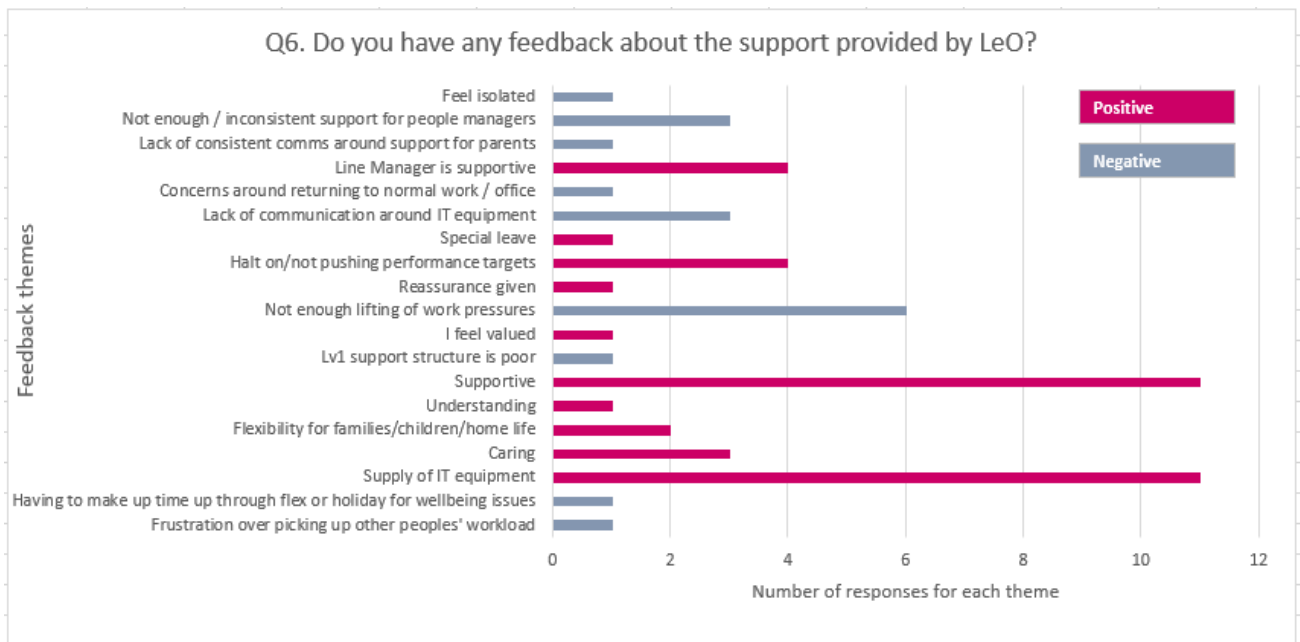


- Regarding the verbatim comments in respect of the support provided by LeO, there was approximately twice as much negative feedback as there was positive feedback. The most positive comments focused on how LeO was providing good communication, whilst the most negative comments centred around the lack of communication regarding the office re-opening.

Support

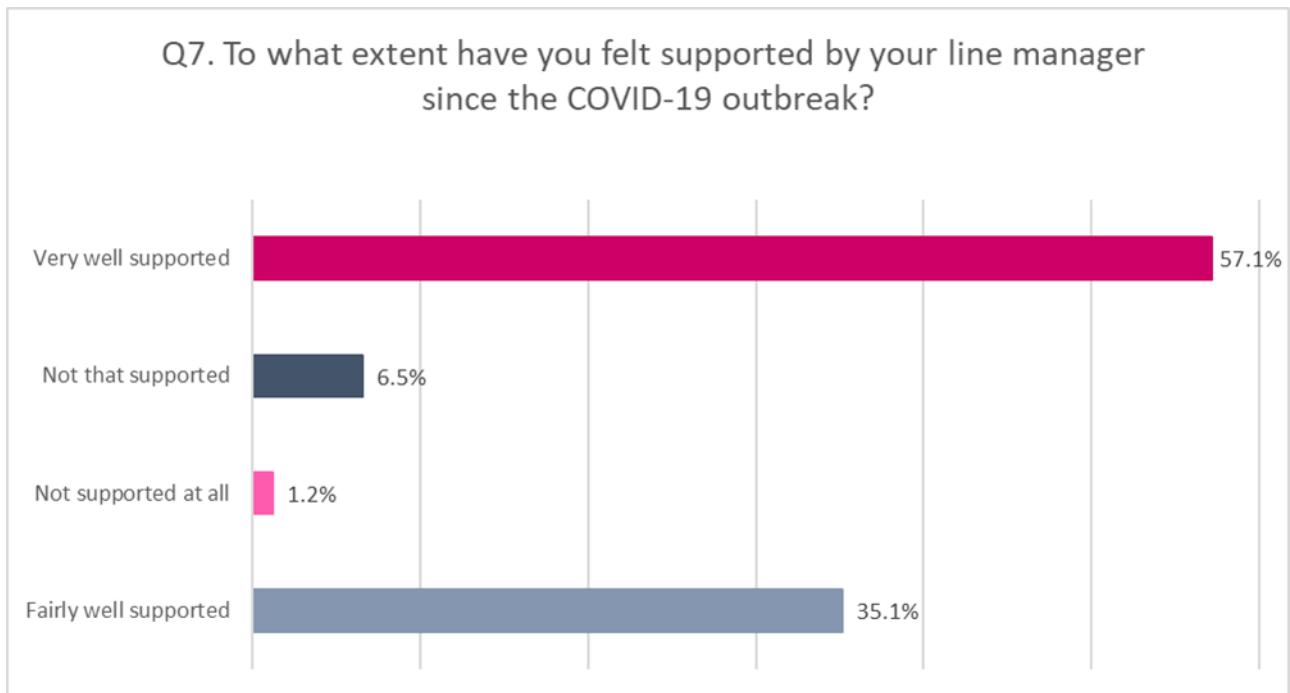
Q6. To what extent have you felt supported by LeO since the COVID-19 outbreak?

- **95% of staff feel well supported by LeO since the COVID-19 outbreak**, however 13% (2) of the Ops Mgr & TL group do not feel that supported

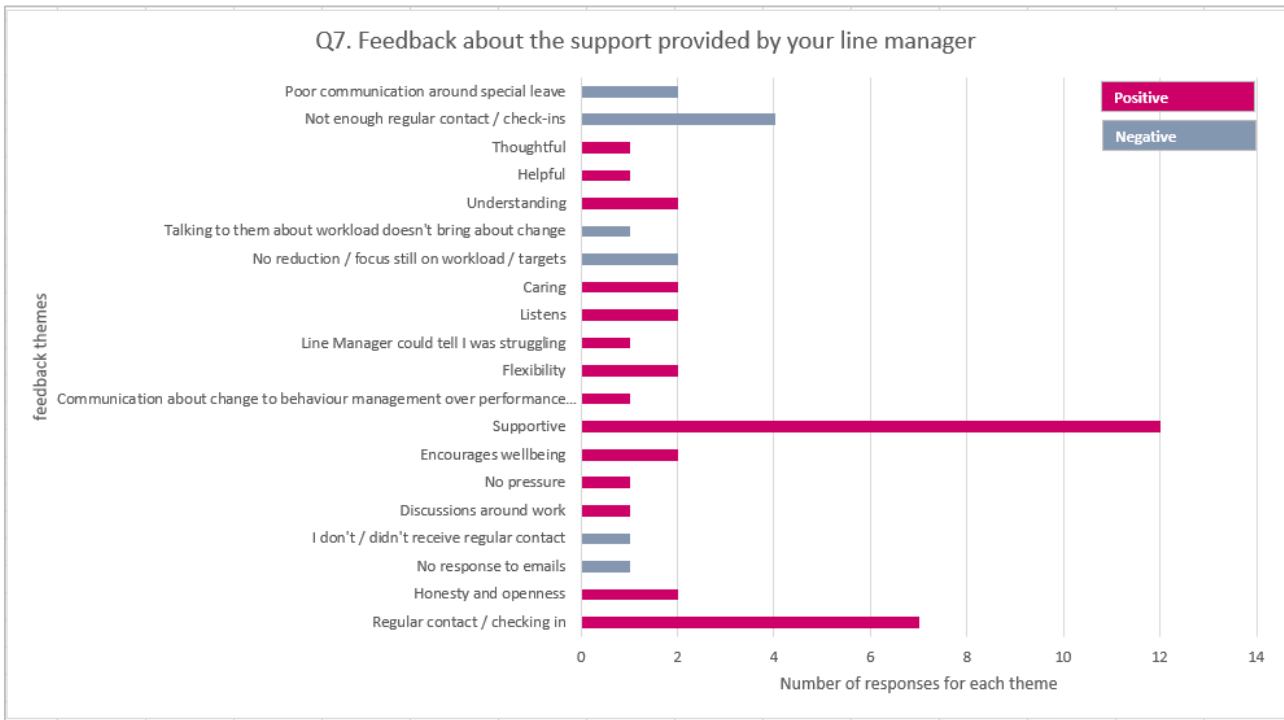


Regarding the verbatim comments in respect of the support provided by LeO, there was approximately twice as much positive feedback as there was negative feedback. The most positive comments focused on how supportive LeO was and the supply of IT equipment and the most negative comments were around LeO not enough lifting of work pressures.

Q7. To what extent have you felt supported by your line manager since the COVID-19 outbreak?

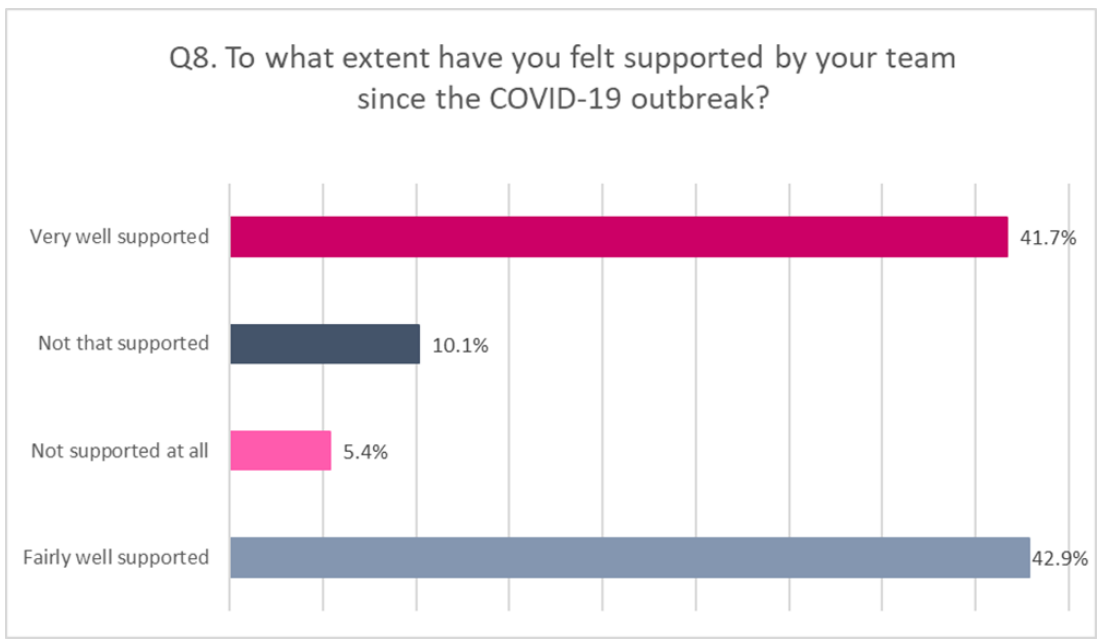


- **92% of staff feel supported by their line manager since the COVID-19 outbreak.** However, 13% (2) of the Ops Mgr & TL group and 10% (3) of the Corporate group do not feel supported

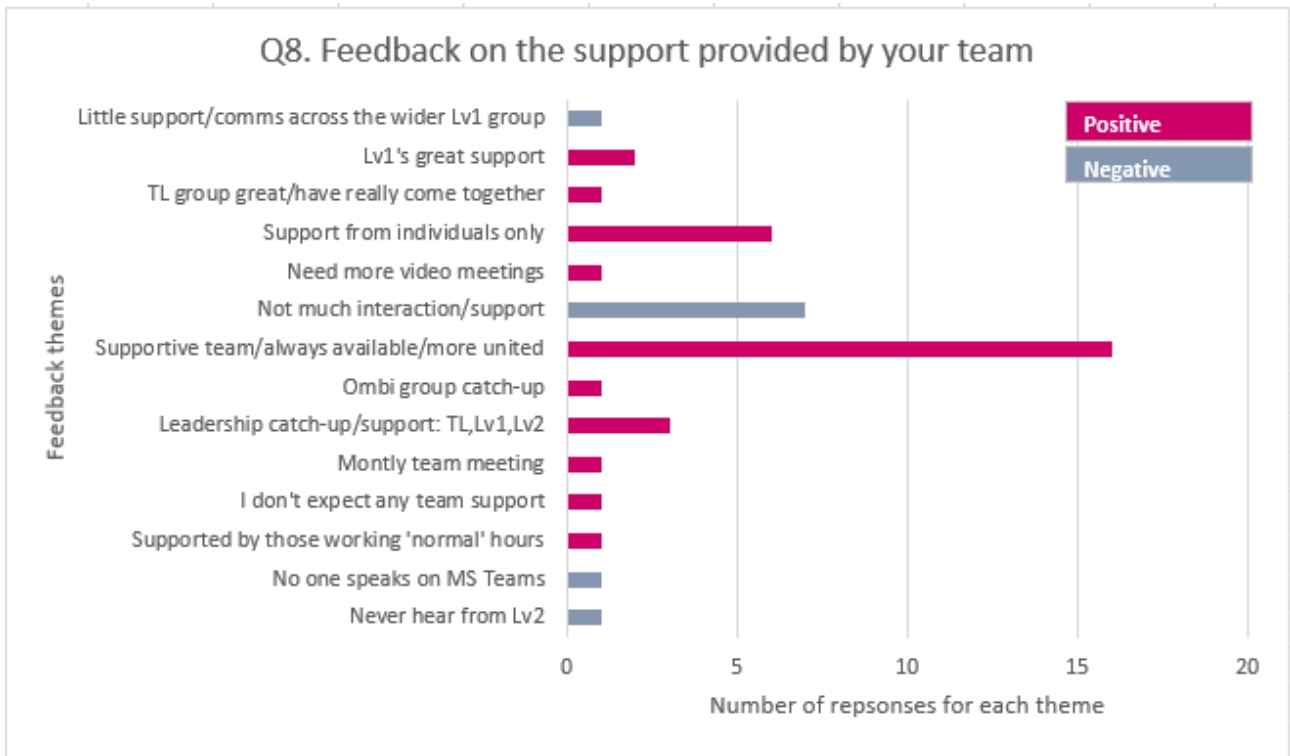


Regarding the verbatim comments in respect of the support provided by your line manager, there was around three times as much positive feedback as there was negative feedback. The most positive comments focused on how supportive the line manager was and that line managers were in regular contact and checking-in with staff. Conversely, the most negative comments focused on there *not* being enough regular contact and checking-in with staff. Other negative feedback focused on poor communication around special leave and a lack of reduction in/ focus remaining on, workload and targets.

Q8. To what extent have you felt supported by your team since the COVID-19 outbreak?



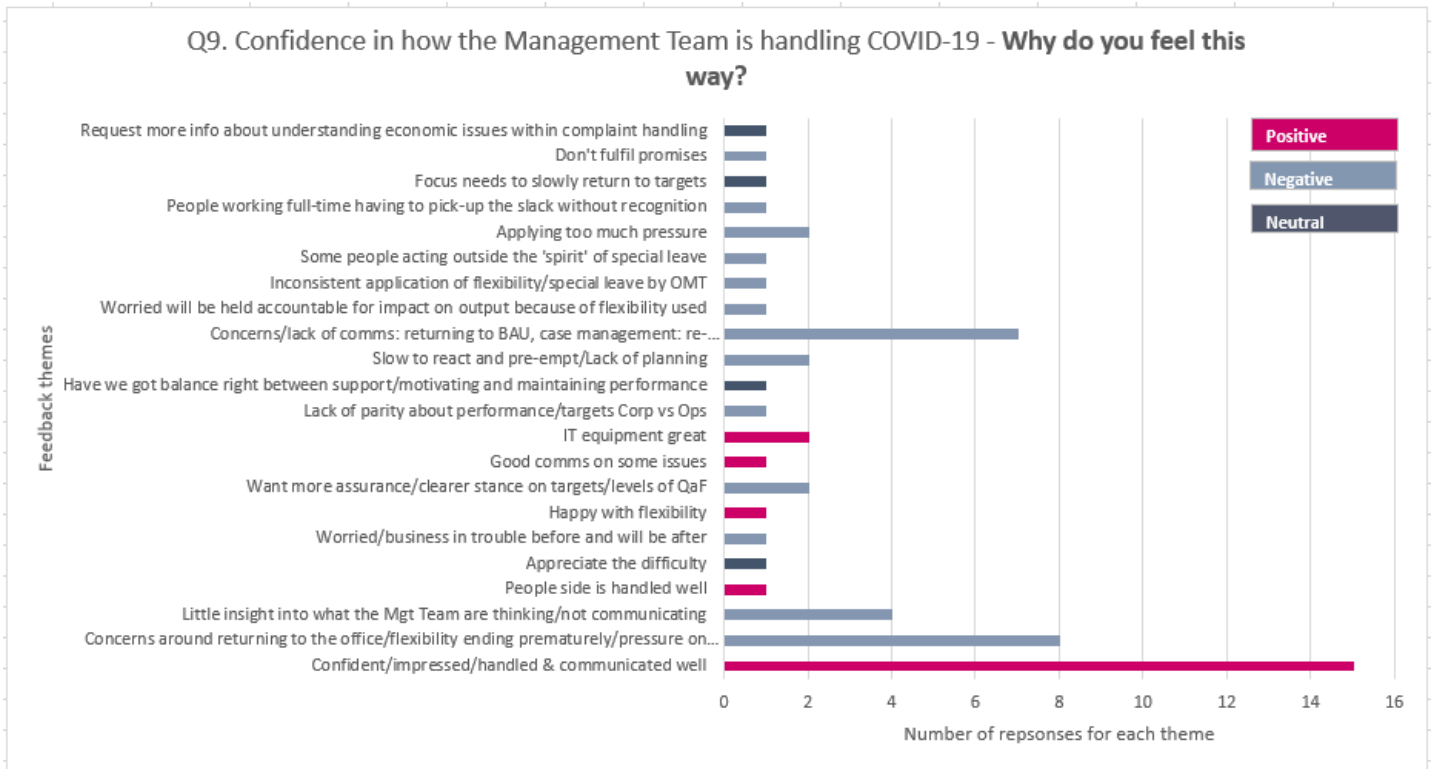
- **85% of staff feel well supported by their team since the COVID-19 outbreak** however, the following groups don't feel that supported or supported at all by their teams: GET 16% (3), Investigators 18% (14), Ombudsman 13% (3) and Ops Mgrs & TLs 25% (4)



Regarding the verbatim comments in respect of the support provided by your team, there was around three times as much positive feedback as there was negative feedback. The most positive comments focused on having a supportive team that were more united and always available for support and this theme also received the most negative comments, in that there was not much interaction or support with the team.

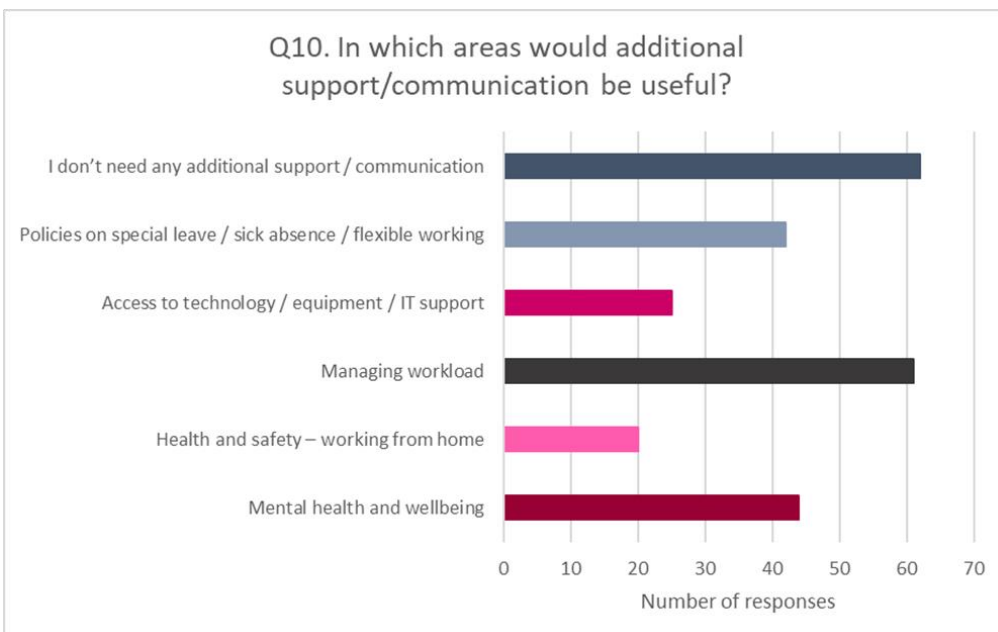
Q9. Extent of confidence in the Management Team handling the impact of COVID-19

- 83% of staff have confidence (to a great or to some extent) in how the management team is handling the impact of COVID-19



Regarding the verbatim comments in respect of why staff feel the way they do concerning confidence in the management team handling COVID-19, there was more negative feedback than positive feedback. The most positive comments focused on the staff being impressed at the handling and communication, whilst the most negative comments were focused on concerns around returning to the office, the current flexibility ending prematurely and pressure on targets returning; as well as a lack of communication and concerns around returning to BAU, re-allocations and suspended case files.

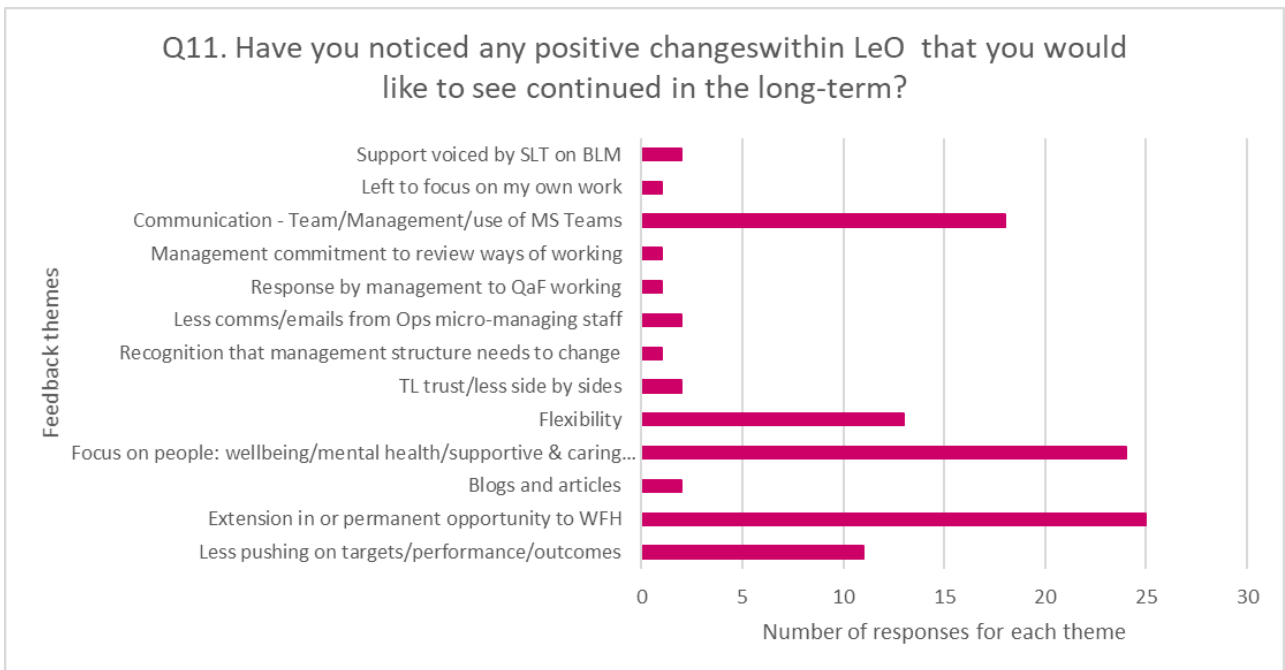
Q10. In which areas would additional support /communication be useful?



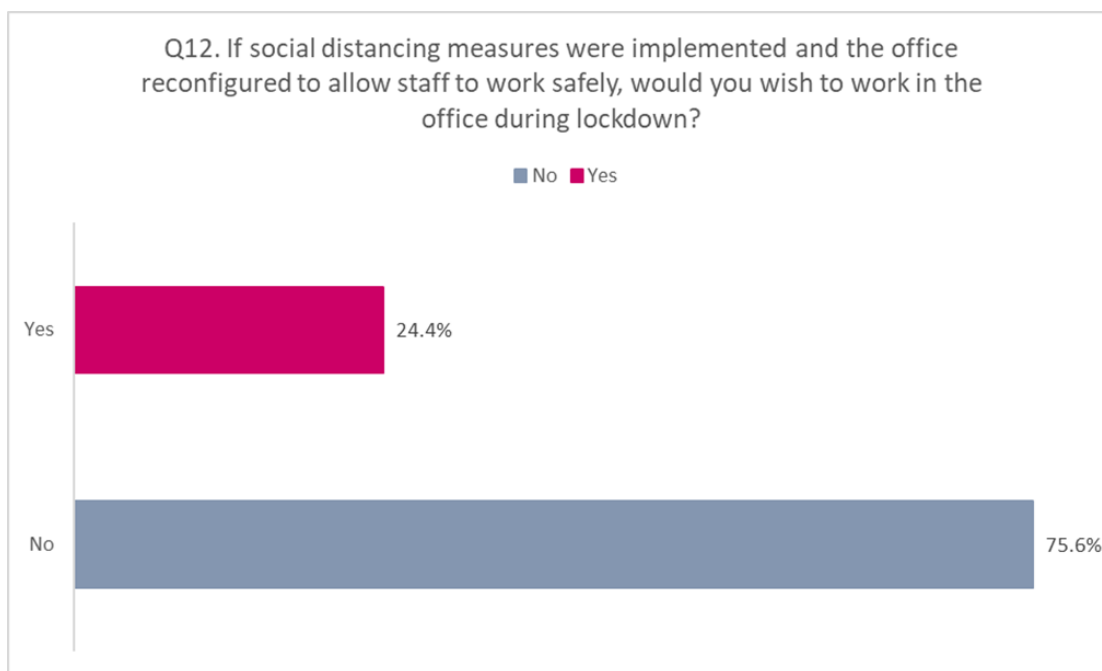
Within the 'Other' category, staff note that additional support would be most useful regarding;

- Mental health support
- Plans about returning to the office
- The probation process and onward journey
- Workload management
- Strategy/planning for unallocated/reallocated/suspended cases
- Future plans on performance

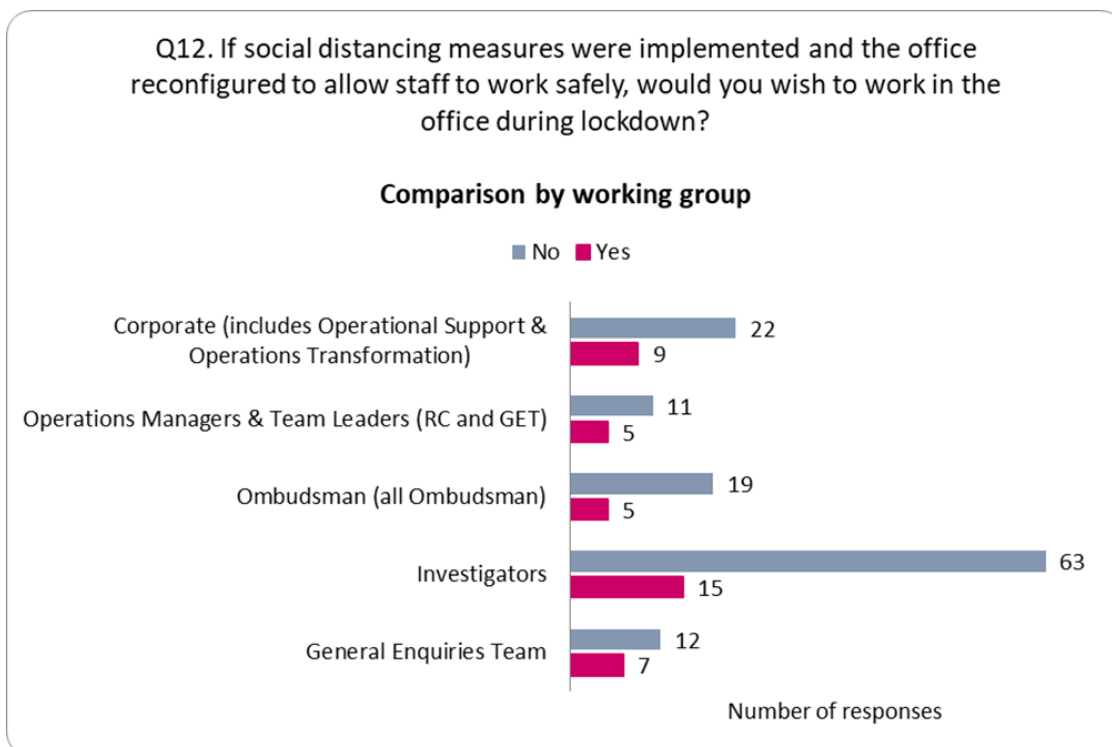
Q11. Have you noticed any positive changes within LeO that you would like to see continued in the long-term?



Q12. If social distancing measures were implemented and the office reconfigured to allow staff to work safely, would you wish to work in the office during lockdown?

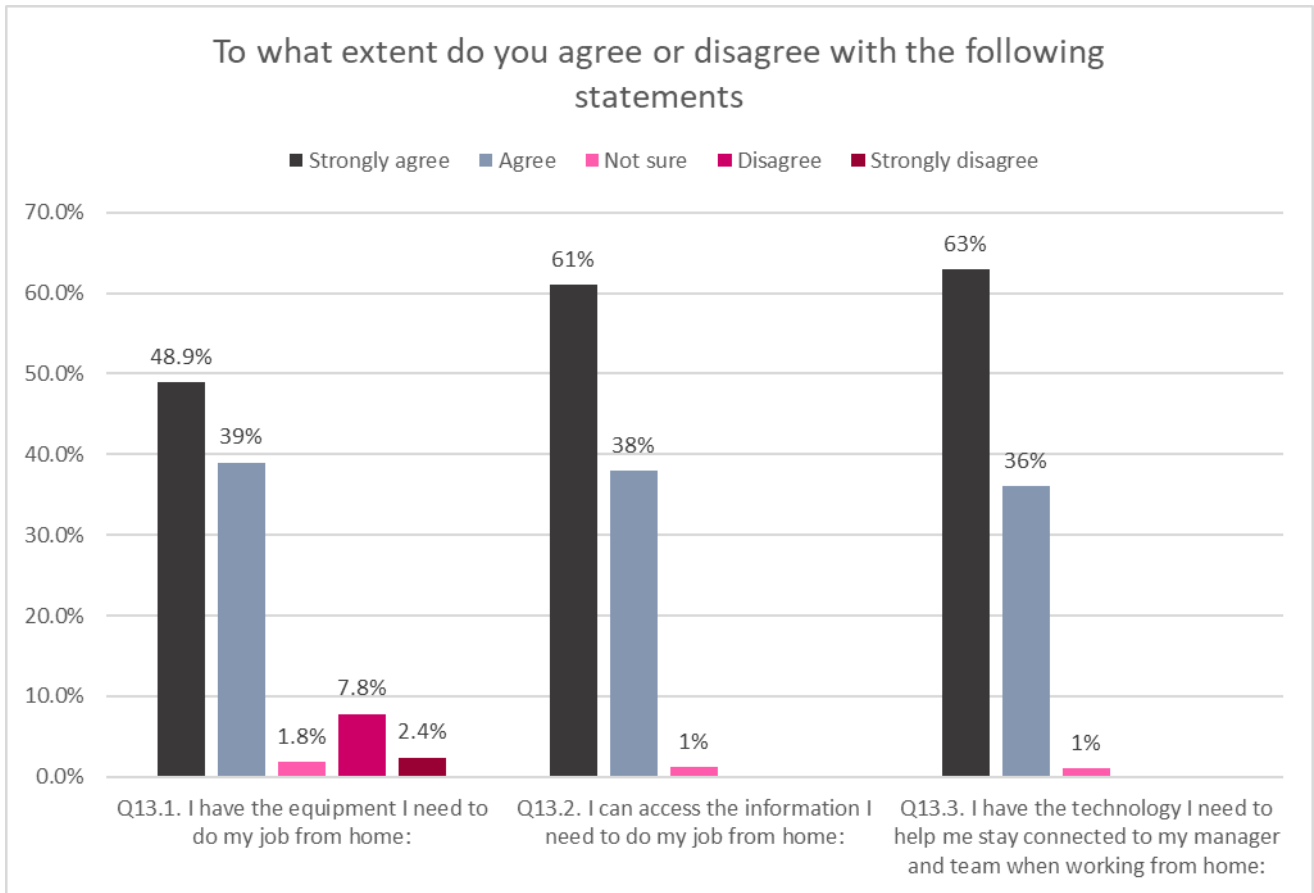


- **76% of staff reported that they would not wish to work in the office during lockdown.** For a breakdown by working group please see below:

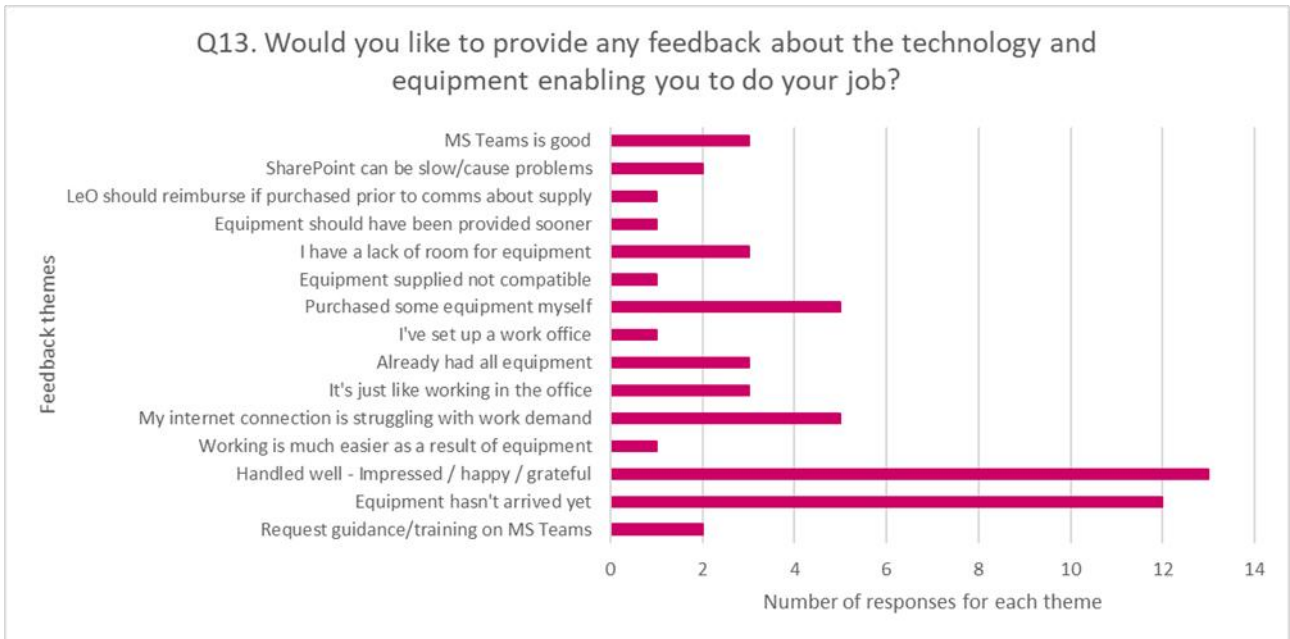


Technology and equipment

Q13. I have the equipment I need; can access the information I need and have the technology I need; to help me stay connected



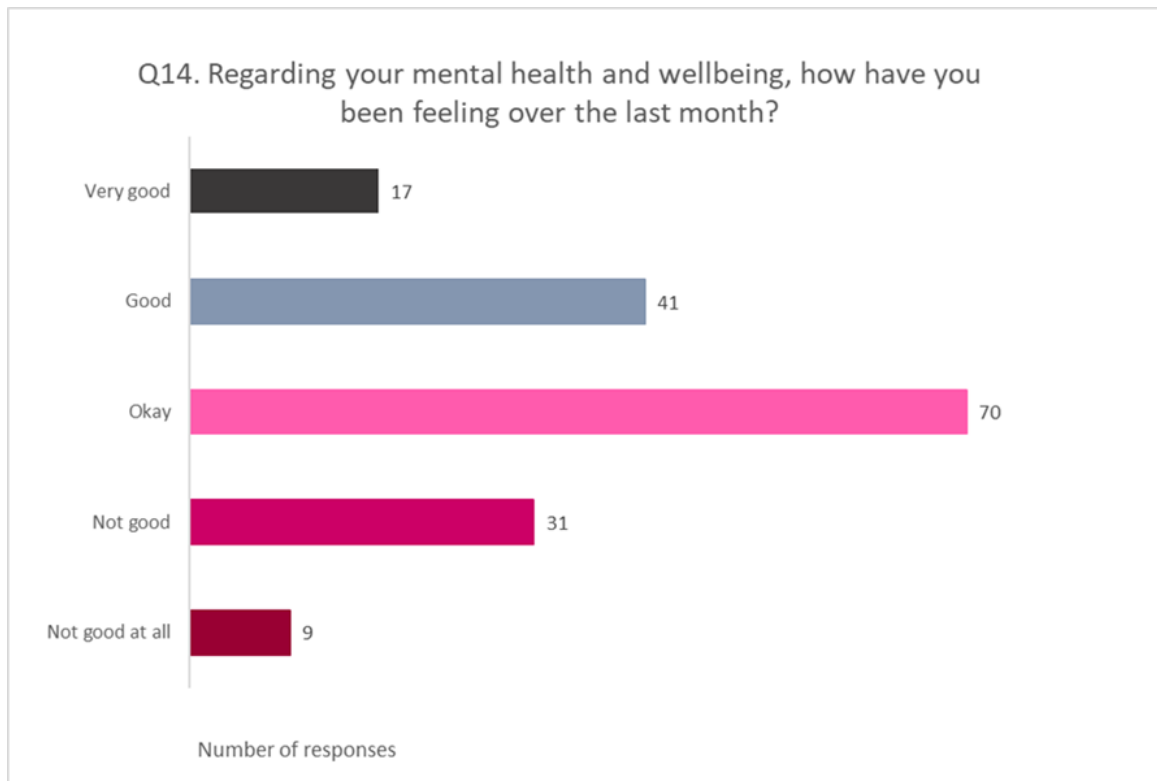
- **88% of staff tell us they have the equipment needed to do their job from home**, however, 15% (12) of the Investigator group disagree with this statement.
- **99% say they can access the information they need to do their job from home**
- **99% tell us they have the technology needed to stay connected to their manager/team when working from home**



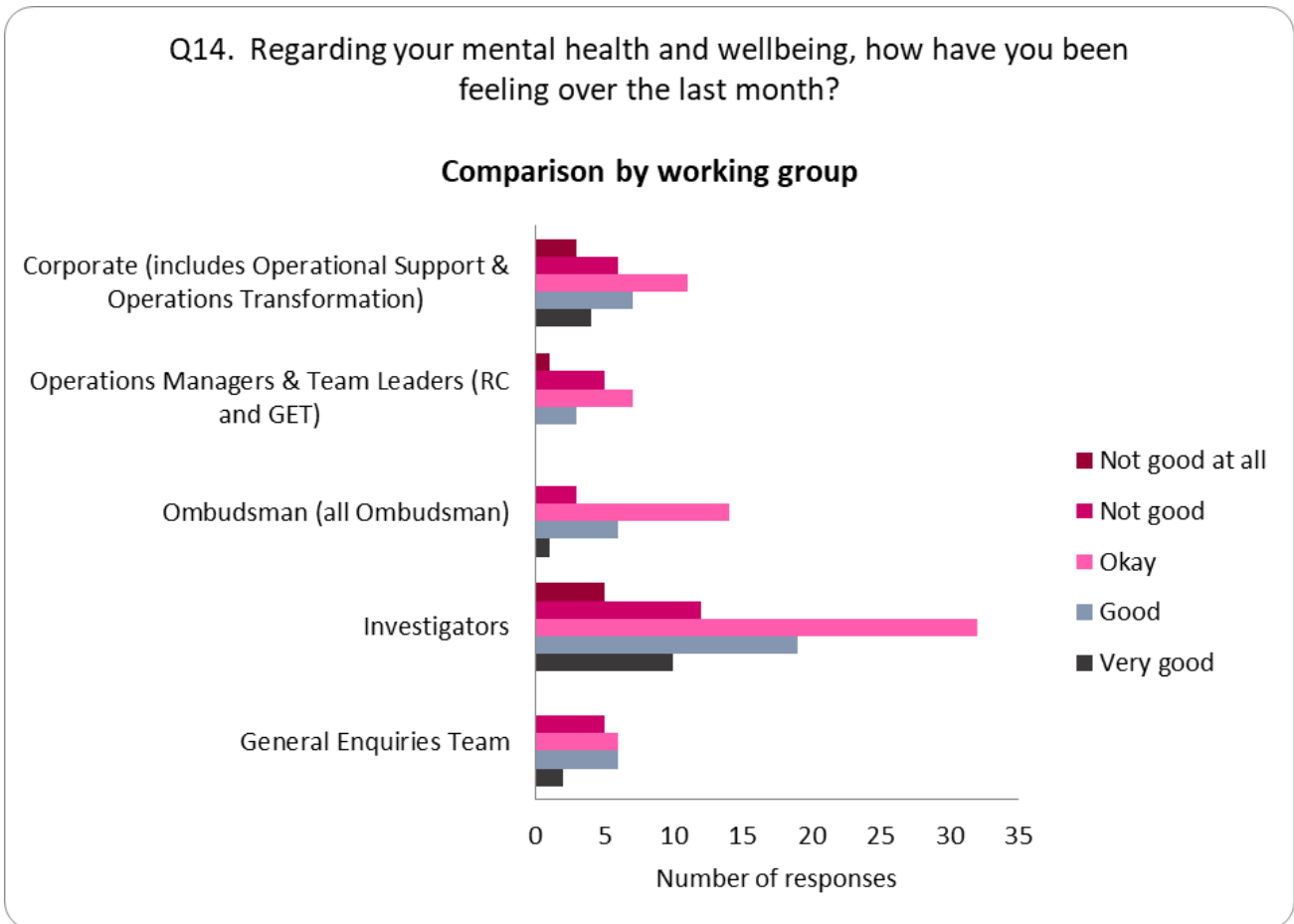
Regarding the verbatim feedback on technology and equipment, the most positive comments focused on staff being impressed, happy and grateful and that it was handled well. The most negative comments were focused on equipment not arriving as yet.

Mental health and wellbeing

Q14. How have you been feeling over the last month?



For a breakdown of how staff have been feeling over the last month by working group please see below:



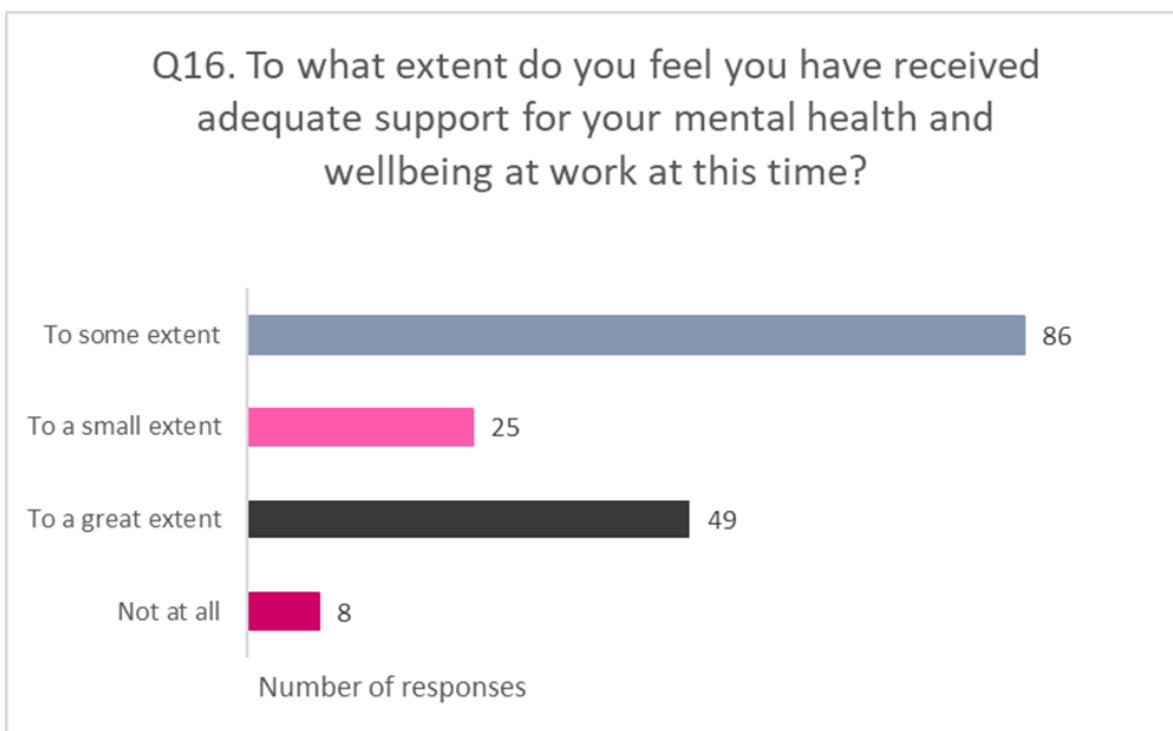
Q15. What made you feel this way?

124 people answered this question with a combination of 73 different reasons given as to why they feel this way - people often cite more than one reason.

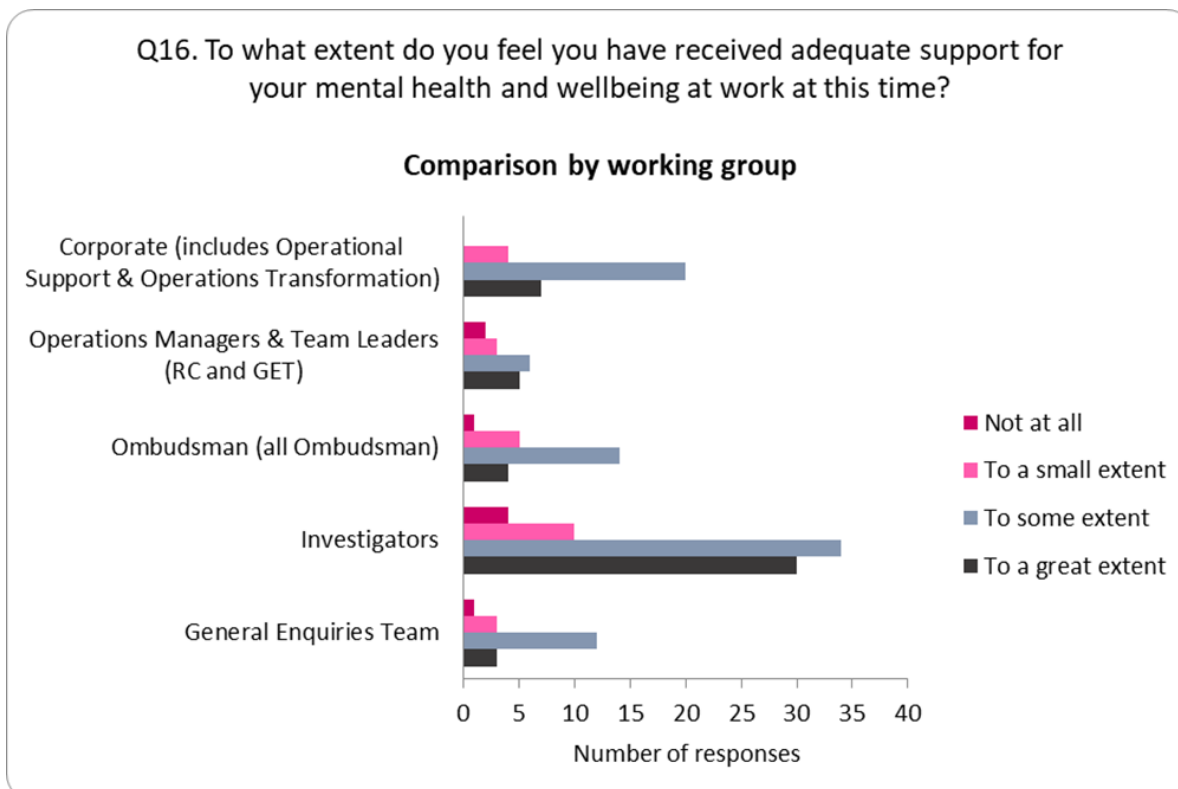
The most common reasons reported are:

- Difficulty due to children/family/caring (33)
- LeO/my team has been understanding/supportive (14)
- I'm happy/comfortable/adapted/productive working this way (12)
- Missing the office environment (12)
- Unable to see family/friends (12)
- Improved work/life balance (11)
- Caseload /high workload /unbalanced workload/volume of work (10)
- Struggle to concentrate/focus at times (10)
- WFH taking over home life / no disconnect
- Good and bad days

Q16. To what extent do you feel you have received adequate support for your mental health and wellbeing at work at this time?



- 80% of staff feel they have received adequate support (*to a great or to some extent*) in respect of their mental health and wellbeing. For a breakdown by working group please see below:



Q16. Feedback about the support being provided for your mental health and wellbeing at work at this time:

43 people answered this question, citing 32 different themes of feedback about the support being provided - people often cite more than one reason. The most common themes were;

- TL supportive with mental health /bereavement/wellbeing (10)
- LeO is very supportive (9)
- Team support (5)
- Articles and blogs have helped – knowing that others feel the same (4)
- Speak to colleagues frequently (4)

Q17. Is there anything else that LeO could do to support your mental health and wellbeing?

30 people answered this question, citing 27 different ideas about what else LeO could do. The most common themes were;

- Give clear commitments/guidance on how targets/timelines/QAF/case holdings are going to be looked at in the future
- More information/approach about re-opening the office including childcare over the summer/caring/shielding
- Re-open the office