

Submission  
No 262  
Attachment 3

## INQUIRY INTO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN NEW SOUTH WALES

**Organisation:** OTEN branch of TAFE Teachers Assoc. (AEU NSW)  
**Date received:** 14/08/2015

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Partially Confidential

## **Report: Work-related stress survey OTEN branch TAFETA**

A work-related stress survey was undertaken by OTEN branch of TAFE TA (AEU NSW branch) to determine to what extent recent changes with EBS and SMART & SKILLED have contributed to work-related stress experienced by members at OTEN. Work-related stress is defined as the adverse reaction experienced by workers when workplace demands and responsibilities are greater than the worker can comfortably manage or are beyond the workers' capabilities. It can result in adverse health outcomes.

The results of the survey are extremely concerning and indicate a serious risk of immediate and long-term adverse health outcomes. It is a Work Health Safety issue covered by the WHS Act.

### **Methodology:**

A survey was created asking 8 questions relating to work-related stress. Questions 1 – 7 were asking for a scale, whilst Question 8 was an opportunity for comments. Questions 3-8 were taken directly from a Worksafe Victoria resource *Stresswise- Preventing Work-related Stress, [A Guide for Employers in the Public Sector, 2011](#)*.

An email was sent to the 111 Strathfield TAFETA email group, containing a link to the survey. The survey was sent out on Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> March and closed 9am Monday 9<sup>th</sup> March. This email group consists of teachers, managers and equity staff. Administrative staff are covered by other unions and were not captured by this survey.

A total of 73 responses were received from the 111 invites to participate in the survey. This is a response rate of 66%.

**Response rate: 66%**

### **Findings:**

The survey reveals extremely high and unacceptable indicators of work-related stress. Over 95% of respondents reported that their work related stress has increased since the introduction of EBS and Smart and Skilled. 75% indicated decreased work satisfaction. (See appendix 1 Q 1 & 2).

Possible harmful outcomes of such high levels of work-related stress include physical illnesses such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, autoimmune diseases and musculoskeletal disorders. Psychological illnesses such as suicide, clinical depression, clinical anxiety, bipolar disorder and PTSD can result from exposure to high levels of work-related stress. In addition, drug /alcohol dependency, excessive use of medicine and breakdown of relationships also results from work-related stress.

All indicators of stress, physical, psychological and behavioural were in the high risk range for adverse health consequences. Headaches, sleep disorders, muscular tension was experienced by over 50% of respondents and over 75% experienced fatigue (see appendix 1Q5).

The psychological indicators of stress were also unacceptably high, (frustration 85%; dissatisfaction 69%; irritability 66% and anxiety 66%), almost half of the respondents experienced pessimism. These indicators as well as low job satisfaction and feelings of discouragement are precursors to mental ill-health outcomes. Reported behaviours such as irritability 80%, impatience over 50% and decreased tolerance regarding frustration 60% are also precursors to ill-health outcomes and indicators of unacceptable levels of work-related stress.

Such a high incidence of the indicators of work-related stress can result from poor interpersonal work-place relationships however responses to sources of stress questions overwhelmingly implicate systemic causes. (See Appendix 1 q 3 & 4). These include, unrealistic time pressures, Job insecurity, changes to work practice, lack of adequate training, tools and systems to allow respondents to adequately perform their job roles. This implicates the implementation of Smart & Skilled policies along with the roll out of EBS as a major systemic cause of the work-related stress at OTEN amongst respondents.

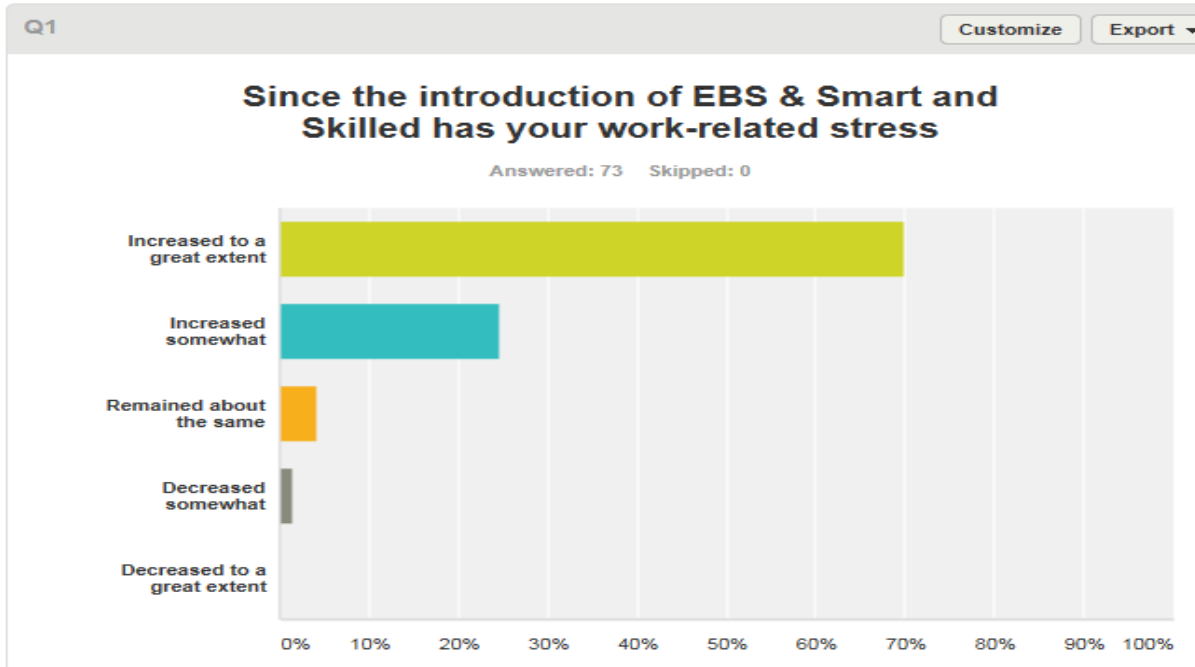
It could be argued that a certain amount of stress would naturally accompany any new systems and workplace changes. However, when work-place stress is affecting the physical and mental health of the workers to the extent revealed by the respondents to the OTEN branch of TAFE TA survey then urgent remedial action needs to be taken in compliance with WHS laws.

**Summary Data Analysis: (see Appendix One for full responses)**

Question 1: Work related stress	Over 95% of staff have indicated an increase in work related stress since the introduction of S&S and ebs.
Question 2: Job satisfaction	Over 75% of staff have indicated a decrease in work/job satisfaction
Question 3: Minor glitches	Less than 10% of staff agree with the GM's statement about 'minor glitches' with ebs
Question 4: Sources of stress	Generally the responses to this question indicate systemic causes of stress rather than interpersonal relationships. There is a high proportion of staff reporting work related stress such as unrealistic time pressures, job security and changes in work practice. Staff are also indicating a lack of training, tools and systems to allow them to adequately perform their job roles.
Question 5: Physical indicators	The top 4 generally accepted indicators of stress have a response rate of over 50% with some tipping the scales at over 75%
Question 6: Psychological indicators	Over 85% of staff reporting frustration with anxiety, irritability and dissatisfaction over 65%
Question 7: Behavioural indicators of stress	Irritability, impatience and a decreased tolerance regarding frustration are prevalent. A clear symptom of stress overload is reflected in the near 50% of staff who indicate disinterest.
Question 8: Free text	<p>Of the 73% of staff who have responded to this survey, 43 colleagues included a response in this 'free text' category. These include comments such as:</p> <p>"S&amp;S ... has broken the spirit of many"</p> <p>"staff at the coalface need to be involved when systems are changing..."</p> <p>"morale at all-time low"</p> <p>"Cuts in staffing have already affected the workplace and create an atmosphere where staff are unsettled"</p> <p>"increased level of stress. Fee changes, lack of student numbers and 'lack of future' this has produced"</p> <p>"Decisions are made for staff carte blanche and are seemingly inequitable and discriminatory with no recourse or justification: This creates friction and factions within a disintegrating workplace"</p> <p>Commonly repeated terms, phrases and sentiments include:</p> <p>"extremely frustrated"</p> <p>"anxiety"</p> <p>"copping abuse"</p> <p>"stressed"</p> <p>"disgruntled"</p> <p>"extra workload"</p> <p>"worst thing that has happened"</p> <p>"despair and frustration"</p> <p>"demoralising"</p> <p>"unreasonable expectations"</p> <p>"student complaints adding to stress"</p>

**Appendix ONE**  
**Detailed Data Analysis per Question:**

**Question 1:**



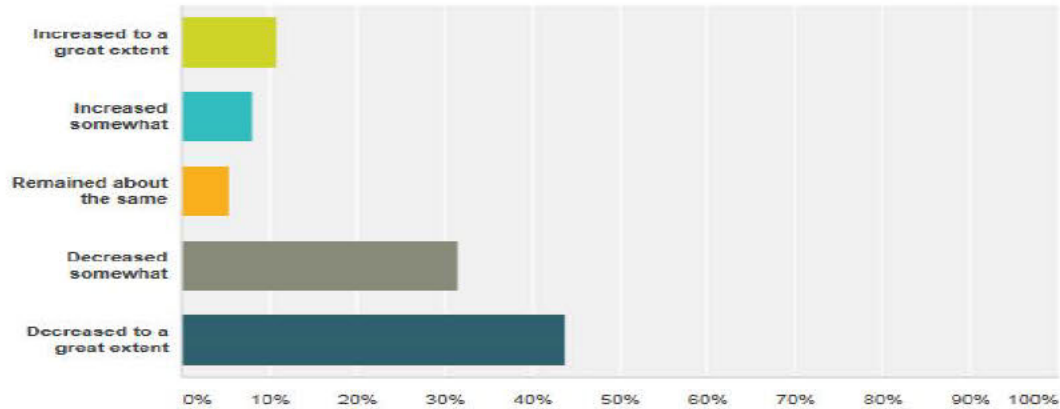
Answer Choices	Responses
Increased to a great extent	69.86% 51
Increased somewhat	24.66% 18
Remained about the same	4.11% 3
Decreased somewhat	1.37% 1
Decreased to a great extent	0.00% 0
<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>

**Question 2:**

Q2 Customize Export

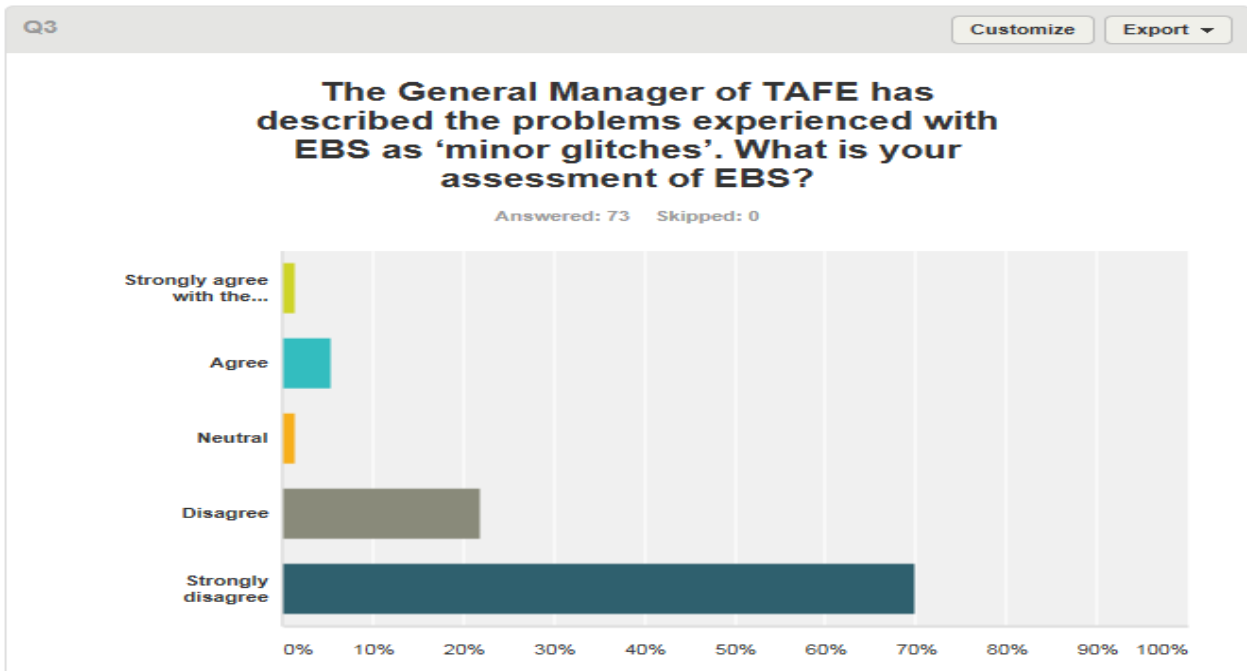
**Since the introduction of EBS and Smart & Skilled how would you describe changes to your job satisfaction?**

Answered: 73 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses
Increased to a great extent	10.96% 8
Increased somewhat	8.22% 6
Remained about the same	5.48% 4
Decreased somewhat	31.51% 23
Decreased to a great extent	43.84% 32
<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>

**Question 3:**



Answer Choices	Responses
Strongly agree with the General Manager of TAFE	1.37% 1
Agree	5.48% 4
Neutral	1.37% 1
Disagree	21.92% 16
Strongly disagree	69.86% 51
<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>

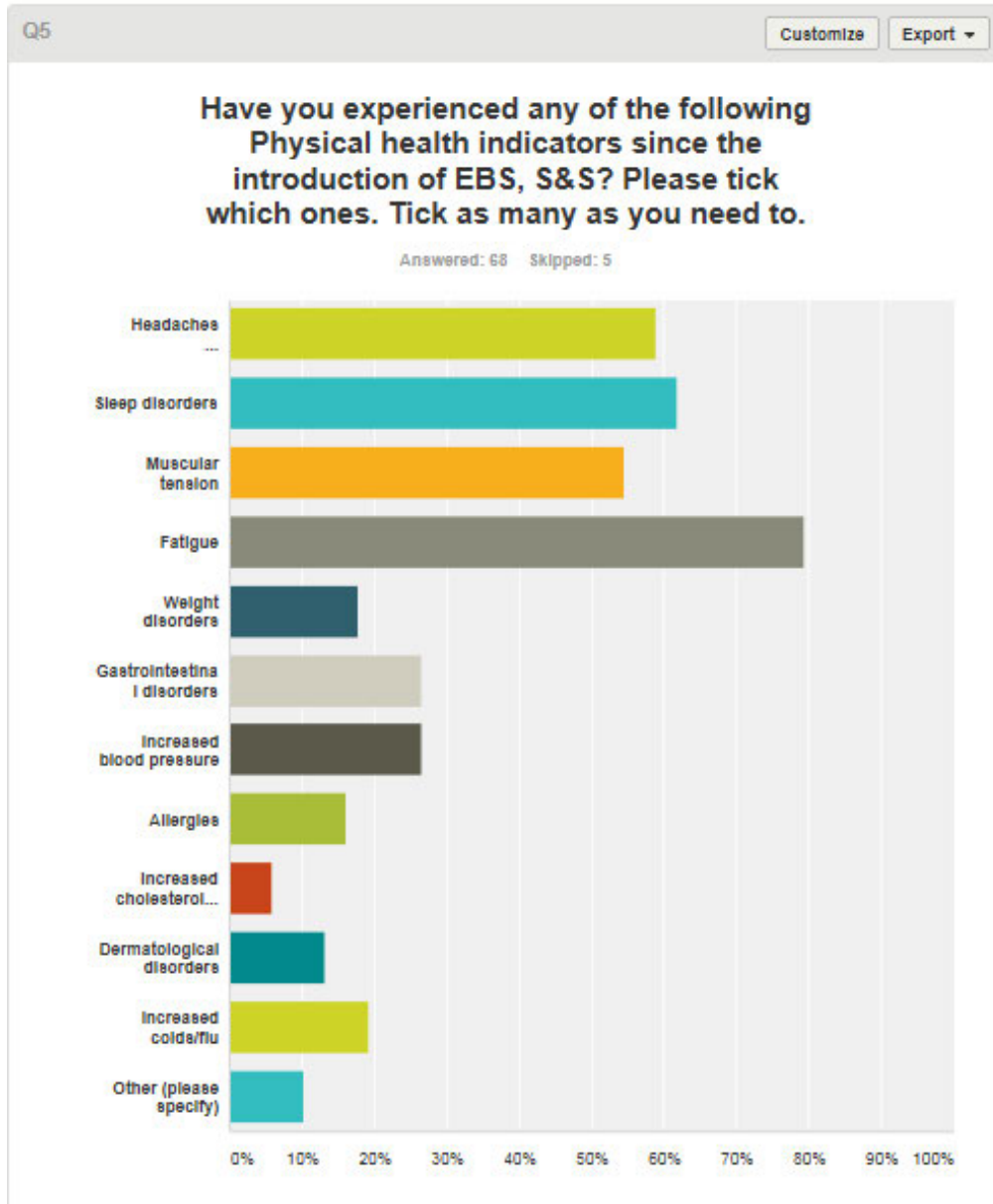
**Question 4:**

The following questions cover the areas that have been found to be the main sources of stress for people at work please tick the box that most accurately reflects how you feel about your job at the moment. Please only pick ONE box per question.

	often	sometimes	seldom	never/almost never	Total
I have unrealistic time pressures	56.34% 40	29.58% 21	11.27% 8	2.82% 2	71
I am worried about my job security	56.34% 40	30.99% 22	7.04% 5	5.63% 4	71
Staff are consulted about change at work	12.68% 9	23.94% 17	30.99% 22	32.39% 23	71
I have some say over the way I work	14.08% 10	33.80% 24	30.99% 22	21.13% 15	71
I am clear about what my duties and responsibilities are	34.72% 25	40.28% 29	18.06% 13	6.94% 5	72
I receive sufficient training to perform my job	19.72% 14	45.07% 32	28.17% 20	7.04% 5	71
I receive the respect I deserve from my colleagues at work	46.38% 32	24.64% 17	20.29% 14	8.70% 6	69
Staff are exposed to interpersonal conflict at work	42.86% 30	40.00% 28	11.43% 8	5.71% 4	70
My line manager encourages me at work	38.57% 27	31.43% 22	15.71% 11	14.29% 10	70
I have the systems and tools I need to perform my job	18.06% 13	48.61% 35	27.78% 20	5.56% 4	72

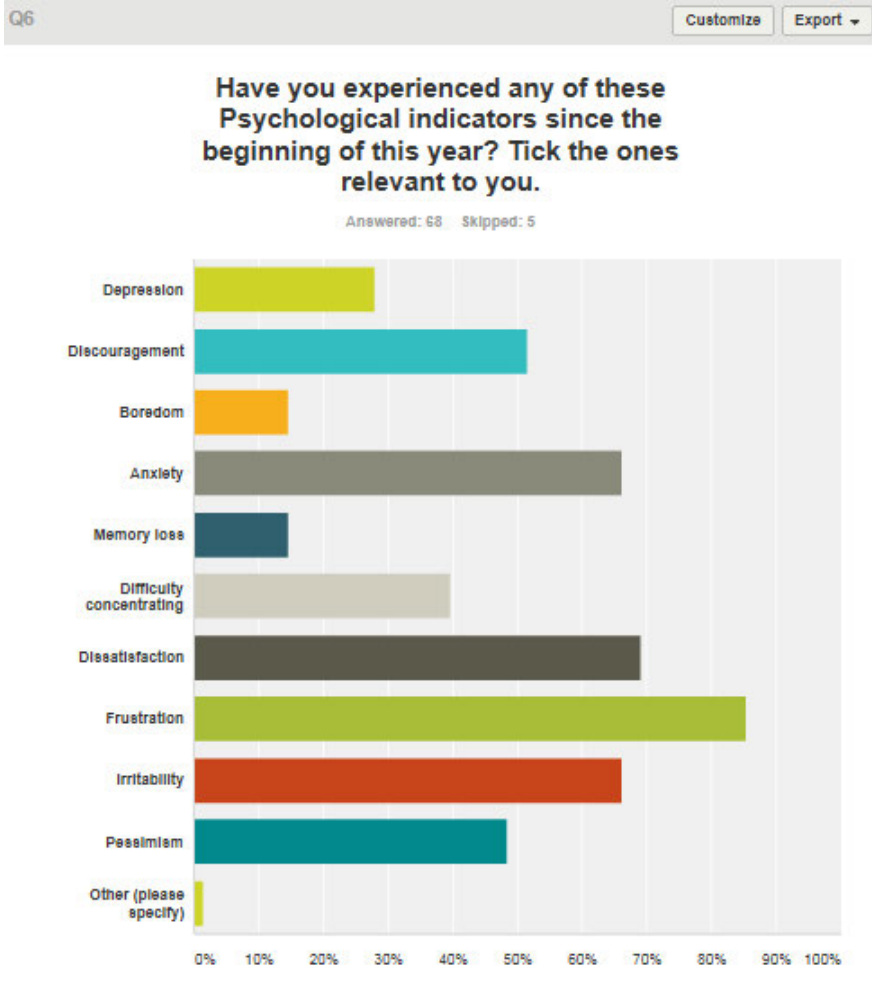


**Question 5:**



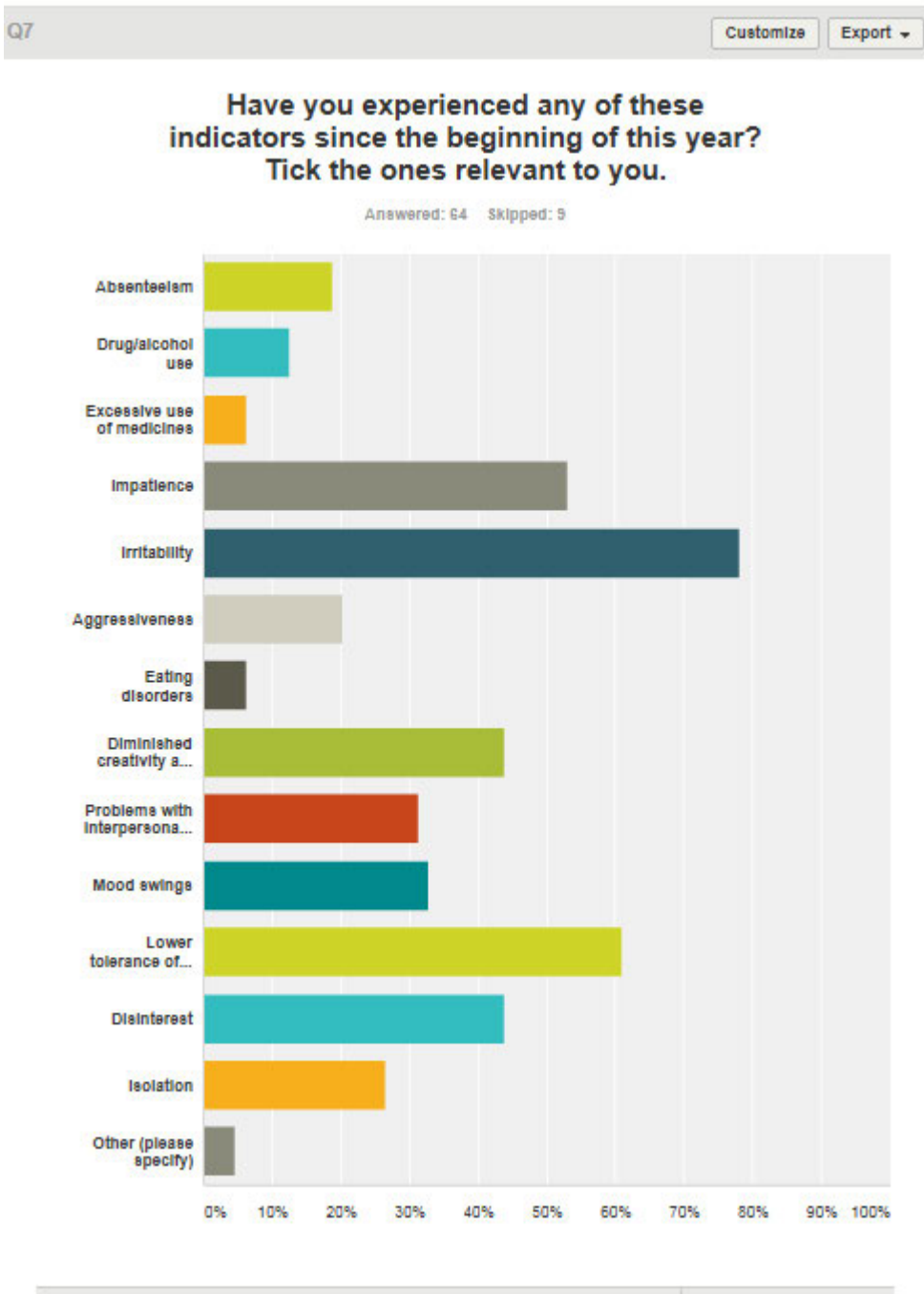
Answer Choices	Responses
Headaches	58.82% 40
Sleep disorders	61.76% 42
Muscular tension	54.41% 37
Fatigue	79.41% 54
Weight disorders	17.65% 12
Gastrointestinal disorders	26.47% 18
Increased blood pressure	26.47% 18
Allergies	16.18% 11
Increased cholesterol rate	5.88% 4
Dermatological disorders	13.24% 9
Increased colds/flu	19.12% 13
Other (please specify)	<a href="#">Responses</a> 10.29% 7
Total Respondents: 68	

## Question 6:



Answer Choices	Responses
Depression	27.94% 19
Discouragement	51.47% 35
Boredom	14.71% 10
Anxiety	66.18% 45
Memory loss	14.71% 10
Difficulty concentrating	39.71% 27
Dissatisfaction	69.12% 47
Frustration	85.29% 58
Irritability	66.18% 45
Pessimism	48.53% 33
Other (please specify) <span style="color: blue;">Responses</span>	1.47% 1
Total Respondents: 68	

### Question 7:



Answer Choices	Responses
▼ Absenteeism	18.75% 12
▼ Drug/alcohol use	12.50% 8
▼ Excessive use of medicines	6.25% 4
▼ Impatience	53.13% 34
▼ Irritability	78.13% 50
▼ Aggressiveness	20.31% 13
▼ Eating disorders	6.25% 4
▼ Diminished creativity and initiative	43.75% 28
▼ Problems with interpersonal relationships	31.25% 20
▼ Mood swings	32.81% 21
▼ Lower tolerance of frustration	60.94% 39
▼ Disinterest	43.75% 28
▼ Isolation	26.56% 17
▼ Other (please specify) <span style="float: right;">Responses</span>	4.69% 3
Total Respondents: 64	

**Question 8:****Would you like to make any comments about the impact these changes have had on you &/or your colleagues?**

<p>The introduction of ebs and Smart&amp;Skilled have decimated TAFE NSW. It seems that this has been a deliberate move by government to get rid of TAFE which is bewildering to teachers and students alike.</p>
<p>The increased workload and unrealistic timeframes are the hardest to work with as they are unachievable and create extra stress when trying to achieve them!</p>
<p>The stress from TAFE at the moment is a major concern to my health. I feel very stressed and often sick on my way to work. The changes have brought me many sleepless nights. I am a professional teacher with many years' experience, many qualifications and currency, yet I am now reduced to one day a week for work. I am usually very proactive, motivated and positive person, yet feel that none of this encouraged or utilised at the moment. For TAFE to be successful in this very competitive market surely we need to ensure that learners are getting value for money in the quality of teaching and resources available. It must be time for a detailed audit of qualification and currency to provide learners with the best opportunities that TAFE can provide.</p>
<p>EBS is woeful. We have adopted a system full of errors, obviously wasn't tested or run parallel to initiate testing. Absolutely frustrating. I spend 2/3 of my week chasing ebs issues. I am being very polite in my terminology. The real language would be unacceptable. Switch it off, fix it and turn it back on. I see the benefits of ebs, it's a barry crocker at the moment.</p>
<p>Increased anxiety over job stability from PT teachers and clericals, putting out sport fires with limited resources or answers all leading to general dissatisfaction with work; lack of support and advocacy by Head Teachers and line managers; threats to jobs by HT if productivity not increased; management by destabilisation</p>
<p>The situation is extremely frustrating as it seems to be constant that we (I) feel that I am being presented by all of the inconsistencies to students and prospective students and other industries that we (teachers) are incompetent. There are so many times we are making excuses for these "glitches" that I feel incompetent and if you are acting as a professional, which I continually strive to do, you cannot blame anyone or failures in the system for not being able to do your job correctly so you have to "cover" over and thus in some instances put yourself down to cover up for the larger inadequacies and incapacibilities of the system. And all of this happens daily and continually</p>
<p>Thank you for setting up this survey. I think we are all experiencing difficulties as this is the good name of TAFE that is being trashed and we are not incompetent. We did not change overnight on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2015. The difficulties are disproportionately falling on some front line individuals and not on the bosses. This is my perception.</p>
<p>Good on you for this opportunity to have some input. I think it is S&amp;S that has broken the spirit of many rather than ebs by itself. Without ebs I think we would have coped and been able to be proactive rather than reactive and 'out of control'</p>
<p>It has been a nightmare, I have felt sorry for dozens and dozens of students who worked really hard to finish last year and it took months for them to get their certificates, hindering their study and work options for 2015. This was the major cause of my stress and unhappiness – it simply disadvantaged students in a most unfair way.</p>
<p>All staff are learning new skills which is a natural accompaniment to the introduction of new systems. The senior management team at OTEN have been extremely supportive of staff and have demonstrated a strong understanding of the impact of the introductions of the new systems.</p>
<p>Staff at the coalface need to be involved when systems are changing and being implemented. There was little or no training on ebs prior to roll out.</p>

<p>The introduction of EBS and Smart&amp;Skilled has been a disaster. I do not see management in crisis meetings to overcome MAJOR issues. Our now poor service is making prospective students talk with their feet, as they exit the once great brand of TAFE.</p>
<p>Staff are constantly asking about what their future is in TAFE. I now have one staff member admitted to hospital due to increased level of stress, the fee changes, lack of student numbers and 'lack of future' this has produced.</p>
<p>The EBS causes frustrations as the parameters do not meet the demands of the enrolment process for RPL. eServices that were state wide allowed a quick report of assumed met credits from all of the TAFE NSW institutes. Time intensiveness of enrolment processes and trying to meet RPL students are entitled to at the enrolment is difficult. Access to ebs changes almost with each login to the system. Trainee students that are enrolled in the latter half of 2014 have not rolled over into the current year this puts pressure on resources to try and have this amended. The frustration levels have created a workplace where approx.. increase 50-70% of illness is being experienced. Less job satisfaction and anxiety in regard to job security is something that is uppermost in the mind and conversations of majority of staff. Staff morale is poor – worse than at most times. Relationships between colleagues are suffering. Staff are now disgruntled and issues that impact upon their work and personal life are colliding together and affect work life balance. I personally now experienced tension in a workplace that was once a pleasure to be in. cuts in staffing have already affected the workplace and create an atmosphere where staff are unsettled. The minor issue are seemingly becoming major issues. It would seem that no-one wants to listen to individual concerns that effect individual staff or staff as a collective – staff are just a number and it is business as usual. Decisions are made for staff carte blanche and are seemingly inequitable and discriminatory with no recourse or justification. This creates friction and factions within a disintegrating workplace.</p>
<p>This is the worst thing that has happened since I've worked at TAFE. The top managers have no respect of what staff are having to go through. As a teacher my role has now increased to include clerical assistant, student counsellor, staff counsellor when staff verbally by other staff, cashier etc etc</p>
<p>Great amount of extra workload because of ebs changes and implementation dealing with student issues which increases stress to complete regular job duties and deadlines. Unreasonable expectations to complete normal duties on top of ebs as ebs takes up many work hours every day. Student complaints adding to stress and anxiety. Loss of enrolments. Job security at risk.</p>
<p>I hate everything right now especially _____ and _____ lacks understanding and always barking orders and not understanding what we are going through</p>
<p>Frustration has been high at times. Response to queries often very slow</p>
<p>There has been a lot of uncertainty about job security, mixed messages – different approaches from head teachers – some are very encouraging and supportive and others are less so – mixed messages about productivity and requirements, inconsistency with casual FT requirements – leading to resentment and feeling a high sense of responsibility to complete all tasks and not have enough time and then if you have a sick day feeling responsible for others so coming in sick and then being told to go – it's all very confusing. The processes and stress from students not understanding delays, the increases expectations and changes to processes on a sometimes hourly basis leads to stress and frustration. We want to help students to learn and we want it to be a positive experience and their frustration at the delays leads to frustrations with us, clerical staff and teachers being yelled at due system issues causes great amounts of pressure. I love my job and am committed to my students and my colleagues and have good coping strategies but the past few months has been a real test in strength – and that has an impact on home life...aaaahhhh</p>
<p>My colleagues should be receiving bonuses and medals for their unstinting attention to</p>

work demands. Rather we are threatened with retrenchment.
The general inequality of treatment of part time teachers and the hours that are given to staff without qualifications. Smart and skilled has reduced teaching across all institutes so this has an immediate impact on personal income and extremely high levels of staff and anxiety!!!!
Overwhelming feelings of despair and frustration as to how we are supposed to deal with complaints from students, severe frustration at not getting responses to requests for help from student services as they are completely overwhelmed as well, pressure from management to keep giving when we are pushed to absolute breaking point as it is. Discomfort with taking potential student details and payment details, not part of teaching duties. Overwhelming feelings of hopelessness at not being able to perform jobs correctly due to the system issues.
Morale at an all time low. Given I have almost 38 years teaching at TAFE including 15 years at OTEN, this is huge statement. There is a joke in the office – how do you start a small business – put NSW gov't and TAFE senior management in charge of a large business. This has been one enormous cock up and the teachers are the last port of call both internally and externally. We have been asked to fix the band aids to all the sores and cop the brunt of students enormous frustrations. It is getting to the point where we are directing them to external providers such as Fortress.
Ebs and S&S has caused a great amount of anxiety in our roles, on top of what was already a very stressful role here at OTEN with reduced hours and increased workload.
It is just an unpleasant organisation to work for, because it is so unorganised etc from the Institute Director to and etc
As a teacher, deliberately placed in the response position. We are made to be the focal point for rightfully angry and frustrated students for non-academic issues. All reactive. Can't focus on academic issues as no time. Management couldn't give a stuff. No confidence in those running the show.
There has been a GREAT increase in frustration and stress in my job over the last 6 months.
The introduction of Ebs and S&S has had a huge impact – the problems are non-stop and every situation is different, especially difficult for re-enrolling students who paid a much lower fee before. Every call seems to be from a frustrated and upset student/potential student who has tried repeatedly to speak to someone who can give them an answer. There is so much frustration and ebs does not have 'minor' glitches. It has several MAJOR glitches which we have had to try and get our head around. It's been a very very hard start to the year and I have contemplated leaving OTEN.
Management pretend meetings were they TELL US what do is consultation. We do not have advanced knowledge of meetings and are not asked to contribute. This is not consultation under the ebs requirements.
It seems there is a sad mood has landed in the workplace and it doesn't look like it will be leaving very soon
We are now forced to spend the majority of our work time correcting, investigating and administering problems created by system changes rather than focussing on teaching our students
What seems a small issue becomes a major hurdle and very time consuming when the section has to deal with so many unexplained problems, continually revised procedures all eating away at precious time and already most I know are giving extra time to try and achieve some level of acceptable service and completion of tasks
Formal networks have broken down due to overload and informal, personal networks are taking their place. This leads to inconsistency in the ability of different staff to get their job done
My head teacher and colleagues are exceptional but the institute lets us down hugely.

There is major lack of support and/or organisation
The current work environment is appalling. Management at the highest levels are deluded. On the ground staff are very supportive of each other, but the instability and constant shifting of goal posts is wearing.
The implementation of the new working system was very poor. Someone at the highest level did not do their homework
Devastating for all our colleagues
Introducing Ebs and S&S has made me seriously consider resigning from my permanent position at WSI. I no longer care about how well I work and I am absolutely depleted. I don't care if TAFE folds because of this, and I'm not surprised if it seriously damages TAFE NSW. I believe that this overwork, including significant overtime by some staff members has resulted in SIGNIFICANT psychological damage to some. Casual staff are concerned about their job security. At least one staff member has passed away, and I believe that this has been a very small piece which influenced that particular event. The General Manager describing ebs as having 'minor glitches' is welcome to come to OTEN and sit in our chairs for a week and watch what occurs. Thank you for providing us with the opportunity to feedback on this. I hope that changes are made and that the actual consequences of this are acknowledged and reparations made.
This has been the worst year I have ever worked at TAFE. The constant demands placed on use and the level of aggression directed to us from students is unacceptable and downright depressing.
This has been the most stressful and demoralising year at work. Morale is at an all time low and there is no indication that anything will change soon. Honestly, it is almost like self-sabotage; they want people to quit in frustration. I wonder how many people have or will have long term health consequences from this.
I feel sad and frustrated at what has happened to OTEN and its students.