

Local WPA report for Bioinformatics Research Centre (BiRC)



WPA working group:

Asger Hobolth, Associate professor

Elise Lucotte, Postdoc

Ellen Noer, Administrative secretary

Paula Tataru, Postdoc

Introduction

On the basis of the Psychological WPA report for AU, conducted in the spring of 2016, the Main Liaison Committee (HSU) and the Main Occupational Health and Safety Committee (HAMU) selected four work environment themes that they urged all units to incorporate into their local WPA follow-up work.

These themes were

- **stress**
- **good daily management**
- **recognition – both collegially and from the management**
- **constructive communication**

We have in this report chosen to focus on the first three of these themes, not because we don't find that treating one another with respect is a fundamental value at our place of work, but because we are at present not aware of any employees who have been addressed in an abusive or derogatory way, and we don't have any data for discrimination and harassment at BiRC. In addition to the three themes, however, we have also included a table regarding the overall well-being at BiRC.

At BiRC, the P-WPA has been discussed at info meetings and dialogue meetings, among these a major session at BiRC's annual meeting at Mols in August 2016, where all employees have had the opportunity to discuss suggestions for improving the local work environment with their colleagues (see pictures on p. 2). The discussion, recommendations and initiatives described in this report are based on these meetings.

Based on the answers from 17 employees at BiRC (81% of those who were invited to answer the P-WPA), it is possible to get a fairly good impression of the working conditions at BiRC. The report for the faculty can be found here:

http://medarbejdere.au.dk/fileadmin/www.medarbejdere.au.dk/hr/Arbejdsmiljoe/Arbejdspladsvurdering_APV_Rapporter/ENG/WPA2016_Report_no.2_ST_Faculty_report.pdf

And the report for departments and centres at ST here:

http://medarbejdere.au.dk/fileadmin/www.medarbejdere.au.dk/hr/Arbejdsmiljoe/Arbejdspladsvurdering_APV/Rapporter/ENG/WPA2016_Report_no.3_ST_Departments_and_centres.pdf

(data for BiRC on pages 85-88).

In general, the results for BiRC are positive, and the employees have a high level of well-being and involvement. For most questions, we are doing better or equally well as the rest of the departments at ST, but of course there is always room for improvement. In the tables below, we have compared data for BiRC with those for the faculty as a whole.

(Note: The percentages in the tables show the proportion of respondents in the 'Always/almost always' or 'Often' categories, or the proportion of respondents 'agreeing or partly agreeing' with the statement).



Above: Dialogue meeting at BiRC's annual Mols meeting Aug 2016: Discussion of the results of the P-WPA and how to improve daily life at BiRC.

Results

Overall well-being

	ST	BiRC
Do you feel comfortable at work	90%	82%
I am generally happy with my work	91%	100%
I am happy with my job prospects	62%	76%
I would recommend my workplace to others	71%	71%

Observations: Generally the work environment is very positively evaluated, 100% of respondents at BiRC mention that they are generally happy with their work. It is striking, however, in the light of this, that only 71% will recommend their workplace to others.

Furthermore, only 76% express that they are happy with the job prospects. This number is higher than for most units at ST, and for ST as a whole, but still worth considering.

Evaluation: The relatively low score regarding job prospects is considered to be a consequence of the fact that employment for many employees depends on them being able to attract external funding for their own employment (and for the employment of others), with the uncertainty about the future that this might give. Furthermore, as a PhD student, it can be difficult to predict much about future prospects.

Initiative: At job interviews, we should make sure that the future employee understands both the opportunities and limitations of his or her job. Encourage people to participate in staff development interviews (SDDs/MUS-samtaler).

Focus area: Stress

	ST	BiRC
Do you sometimes feel worn out?	23%	12%
Do you feel that your work takes so much of your time and energy that it affects your private life negatively?	26%	6%
Does your work cause severe stress symptoms?	10%	0%
Do you find that you are not happy with the results of your work because you are too busy?	19%	0%

Observations: In comparison with the rest of the faculty, the stress level does not call for immediate action at BiRC. One person (~6%), however, answered that '*work takes so much of your time and energy that it affects your private life negatively*', which is of course one person too many.

Evaluation: We find that it is ok to feel stressed for a short period of time (2-3 weeks), but this should not last longer. Stress can be caused by many factors, and individuals may be affected differently by the same framework conditions, but as previously mentioned, uncertainty about the future (i.e. that the employment depends on attracting external funding), can indeed contribute to stress.

Goal: To bring down the stress level to zero to improve personal well-being, secure a good work-life balance and job satisfaction.

Initiative:

- Inform employees to the fact that they are not expected to answer emails at out-of-office hours.
- Provide easily accessible information about how/where to get help in case of severe stress, i.e. AU's agreement on psychological **anonymous** counseling with external advisers.
- Make an effort to become better at spotting and reacting to signs of stress among our colleagues.
- Detect stress and stress warnings at staff development dialogues (SDDs/MUS) and encourage having SDDs where e.g. expectations and prioritisations can be discussed.
- Implement procedures for good inclusion of employees affected by stress after a period of sick leave.

Responsible: Head of centre, supervisors, WPA group and colleagues

Focus area: Good daily management

	ST	BiRC
I feel that the daily management recognises the work performed by employees	77%	88%
I feel that the daily management is visible during the working day	71%	81%
I feel that the daily management can help me with problems of academic nature	68%	80%
I feel that the daily management is very approachable	85%	94%

Observations: In comparison with the rest of the faculty, the leadership (either the center director or the supervisor) is evaluated very positively. The daily management is seen as very approachable (94%) and visible during the working day (81%).

Evaluation: Regarding question no 3, we had a discussion about whether it is expected of the management to be able to help with problems of academic nature, and to prioritise work and keep deadlines. In the nature of research, a PhD or postdoc will often know the subject matter better than the manager or leader, and therefore we consider that the management should not be expected to a

high degree to help with problems of academic nature.

Goal: To maintain the current level of good daily management.

Initiatives: No new initiatives are planned, since the leadership is already evaluated very positively, as mentioned, and regarding question 3 we find that the 80% is sufficient, since the 'daily manager' doesn't necessarily have to help with problems of academic nature.

Responsible: Head of centre, supervisors

Focus area : Recognition – both collegially and from the management

	ST	BiRC
At my workplace, we are willing to listen to and provide constructive feedback on our colleagues' tasks	78%	88%
At my workplace, new ideas and suggestions are always welcome	84%	88%
At my workplace, we are free to express criticism	82%	88%
At my workplace, you are recognized for a job well done	61%	88%
At my workplace, my colleagues are very friendly and helpful	90%	94%
At my workplace, I feel part of a large social community	70%	65%

Observations: In comparison with the rest of the faculty, recognition - both collegially and from the management - is evaluated very positively. 94% state that they find their colleagues to be very friendly and helpful, and 88% indicate that you are recognized for a job well done. One thing stands out, however: only 65% feel part of a large social community at BiRC.

Goal: All employees should feel they are part of a social community.

Evaluation: It is important, through the organization of social and academic events, to increase the sense of community, and it is important to do so with a wide range of activities, so everyone can find something of interest. The employees' social situation at BiRC is different, some are parents with young children, some are single students with more leisure time, and some are foreign postdocs without family in Denmark.

Initiative: during our annual meeting at Mols in August 2016, we presented a few reminders and comments:

- Be inclusive (e.g. speak English if non-Danish speaking colleagues are present).
- Say good morning and ask colleagues to join for lunch.
- Be present at BiRC (do not work too much from home, we need you to maintain an attractive work environment).
- Support new colleagues to become part of the environment, ensure that appropriate help is available.
- Inform new BiRC students and employees about the BiRC Facebook group: BiRC social.
- Continue the social events we have at BiRC: BiRC Mols meeting, Christmas lunch, summer walk, Wednesday morning rolls etc, and encourage more people to join.
- Remember that afternoon cake and other social activities are always highly appreciated!
- Always show up at Friday seminars and Wednesday morning talks. If you hear a good talk, tell the speaker.

Responsible: Head of centre, supervisors, WPA group and colleagues