



The Royal College of Pathologists
Pathology: the science behind the cure

The Royal College of Pathologists

**Workforce census
spotlight 2: morale
and wellbeing**

Introduction

Good morale and wellbeing among pathologists is fundamental for workforce satisfaction, workforce retention and patient safety.

Pathologists are facing growing pressures because of increased clinical demand with little to no growth in workforce capacity. This second spotlight explores how these factors affect the morale and wellbeing of the pathologist workforce.

Challenges included excessive workloads, inadequate time for professional development, and not feeling heard or valued, particularly at an organisational level. Understanding these issues is vital to ensure the retention of the pathology workforce and safeguard services for patients that utilise pathology services.

Burnout trajectory indicators

With over half of pathologists not feeling like they have enough time in the day to get through their workload and clinical demand continuing to rise and becoming progressively more complex, pathologists face increased pressure to meet targets while ensuring patient safety.

This section explores how reduced feelings of personal accomplishment, increased stress and disengagement with the role are contributing towards feelings of burnout.

54%

of pathologists do not believe there is sufficient time within each day to get through their daily workload.

“ It is impossible to manage full days of meetings, 200+ emails a day and clinical work in a standard working day.
– Consultant clinical scientist

Pathologists were asked if they had sufficient time within each working day to get through their daily workload. Only 24% felt they did, while 54% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

There was a correlation between the percentage of respondents that remained neutral or agreed to having sufficient time to get through their workload (46%) and the percentage of pathologists who felt they can effectively manage their workload (47%).

How often do you feel stressed at work? (UK)



We asked pathologists how often they felt stressed at work. Across the UK, nearly half (47%) said they always or often feel stressed at work, with little variation between England and the devolved nations.

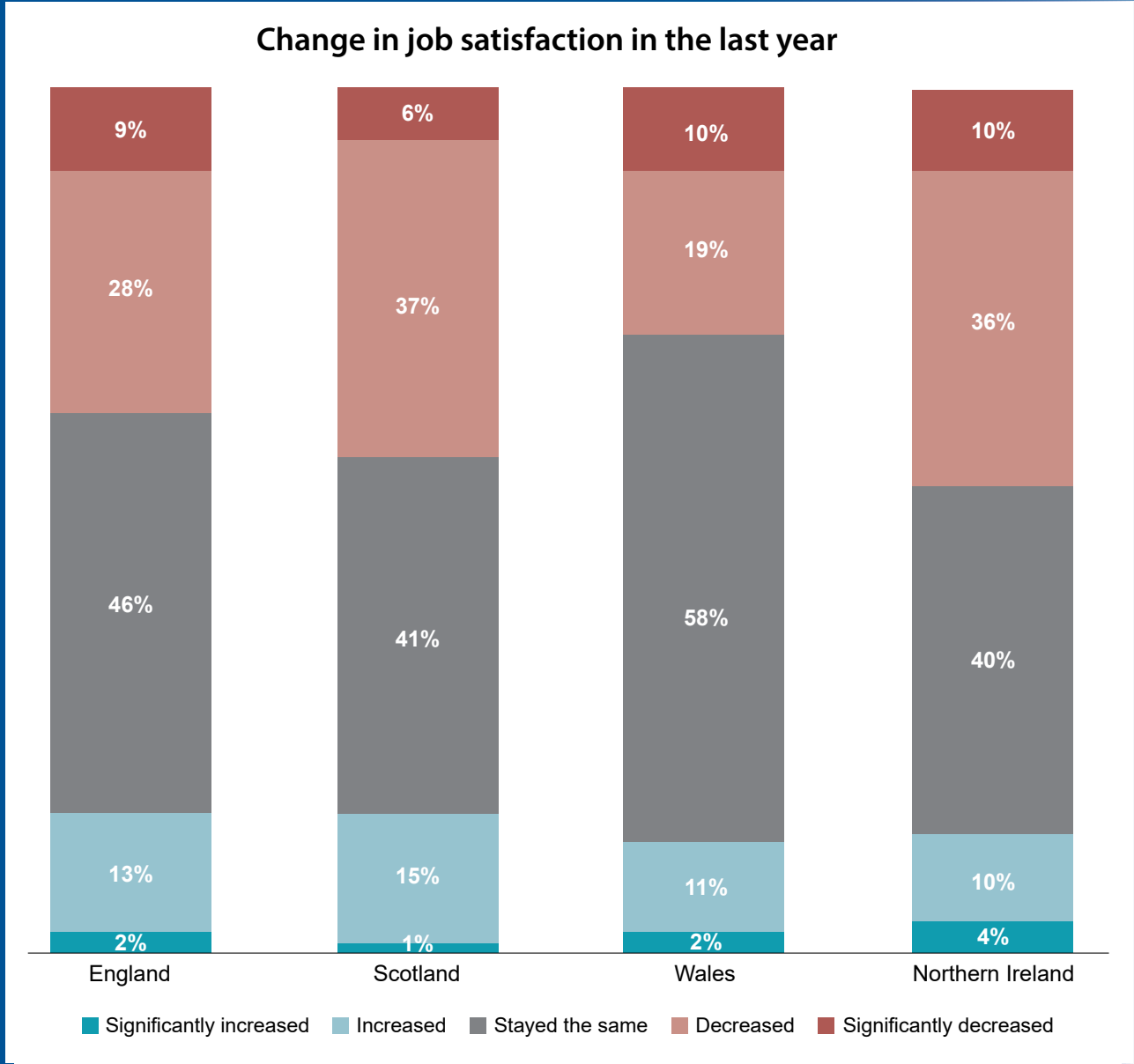
Significantly, across the UK, 1% of pathologists never feel stressed at work, highlighting increased pressure to meet targets while ensuring patient safety.

“ Workload is excessive. Management are not listening. Bullying behaviour is not being addressed. I am at breaking point and constantly stressed, despite working every waking hour.
– Consultant in haematology

Change in job satisfaction in the last year

We asked pathologists if their job satisfaction had changed over the past year. Across the UK, most respondents reported no change (46%), but 38% said their satisfaction had decreased, while only 15% experienced an increase.

Reported declines in job satisfaction were highest in Northern Ireland (46%) followed by Scotland (43%). Wales saw the lowest proportion of pathologists reporting a decline, although it still represented a significant shift for almost a third (29%) of respondents.



Wellbeing determinants

This section considers what factors negatively impact staff wellbeing, the experiences of pathologists at both an organisational and departmental level, and how limited time for continuing professional development impacts staff wellbeing.

Factors negatively impacting wellbeing at work

We asked pathologists to select from a range of factors that may negatively impact their wellbeing at work, with the option to choose multiple answers. Excessive workload was cited by 50% of respondents, followed by administrative burden at 44%

As highlighted in Spotlight 1, administrative workload related to clinical duties was also the most selected reason why pathologists work beyond contracted hours.

Across all 4 nations, excessive workload, administrative burden, staff vacancies and poor workplace morale emerged as the top concerns, although their order varied. Poor workplace morale was a particular concern in Northern Ireland, where 44% of respondents highlighted it as an issue, compared with 35% in Scotland, 31% in England and 29% in Wales.

The graph on page 6 shows how the top 5 factors ranked across the UK.

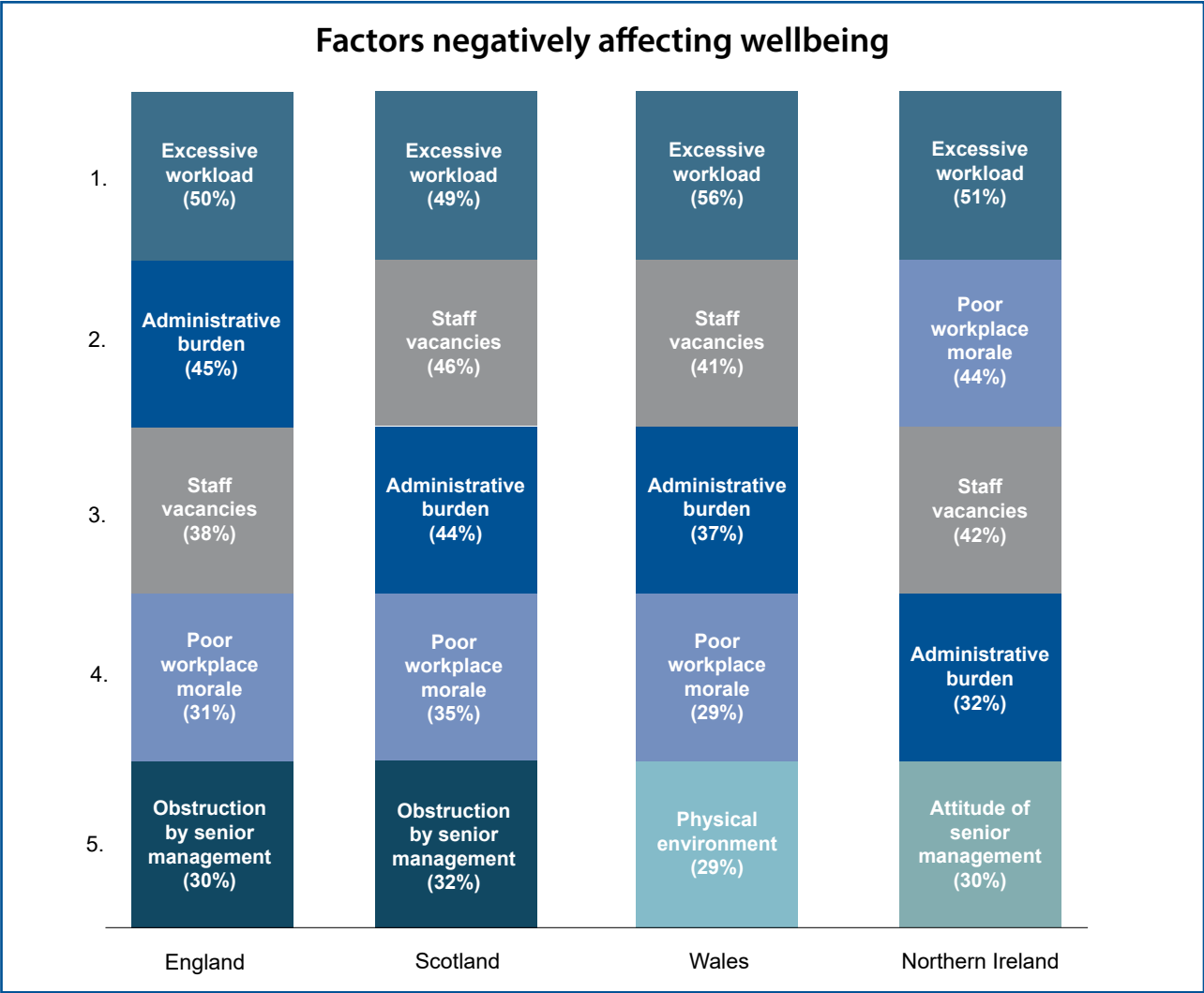
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Workload increases inexorably but time/staffing available to complete it does not. Feeling rushed contributes to fear of making errors and negatively affects job satisfaction and wellbeing.

– Consultant in microbiology

Four options relating to perceptions of senior management were given, each of which were selected by a significant proportion of respondents as a contributing factor that impacted morale and wellbeing. These included:

- 1. obstruction by senior management within the organisation or wider NHS (i.e. actions that hinder progress of effective functioning of services)
- 2. attitudes of senior management
- 3. interference by senior management in departmental matters without full understanding of operational or contextual issues
- 4. lack of support from senior management.



The experiences of pathologists

It is important for pathologists to feel heard, valued and supported in their workplace. At a departmental level, this is often the case, however, at an organisational level a larger percentage of pathologists don't feel this is the case.

Across the UK, pathologists were more likely to feel heard, valued, empowered, trusted and supported within their department than within their wider organisation, with the most notable difference seen in perceptions of feeling supported.

Scotland had a 53-percentage point difference between the number of pathologists that felt supported at a departmental level (74%), and those that felt supported at an organisation level (21%). A similar picture could also be seen in Wales.

Across the UK, pathologists are less likely to feel empowered by both their organisation and department compared with feeling heard, valued, supported and trusted.

Pathologists in Northern Ireland showed the least difference between their perceptions at the department and organisational level.

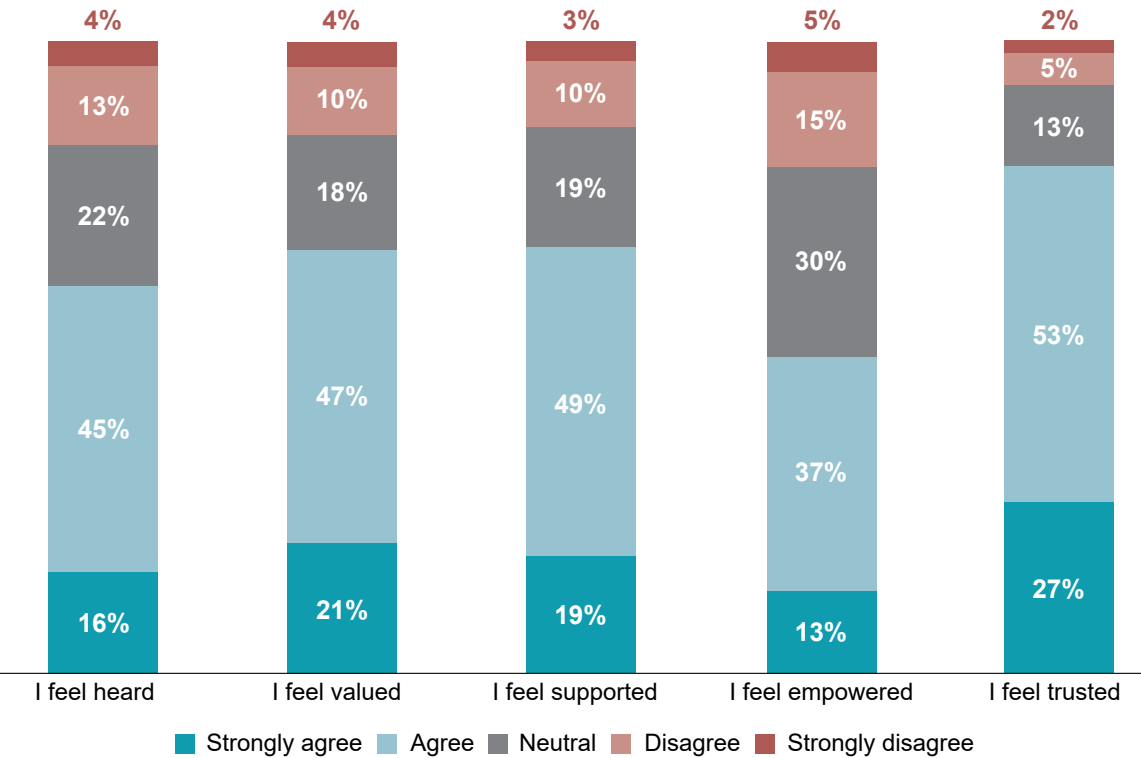
Trust is most strongly perceived by pathologists at both levels, with 80% saying they felt trusted within their department and 44% feeling trusted within their organisation.

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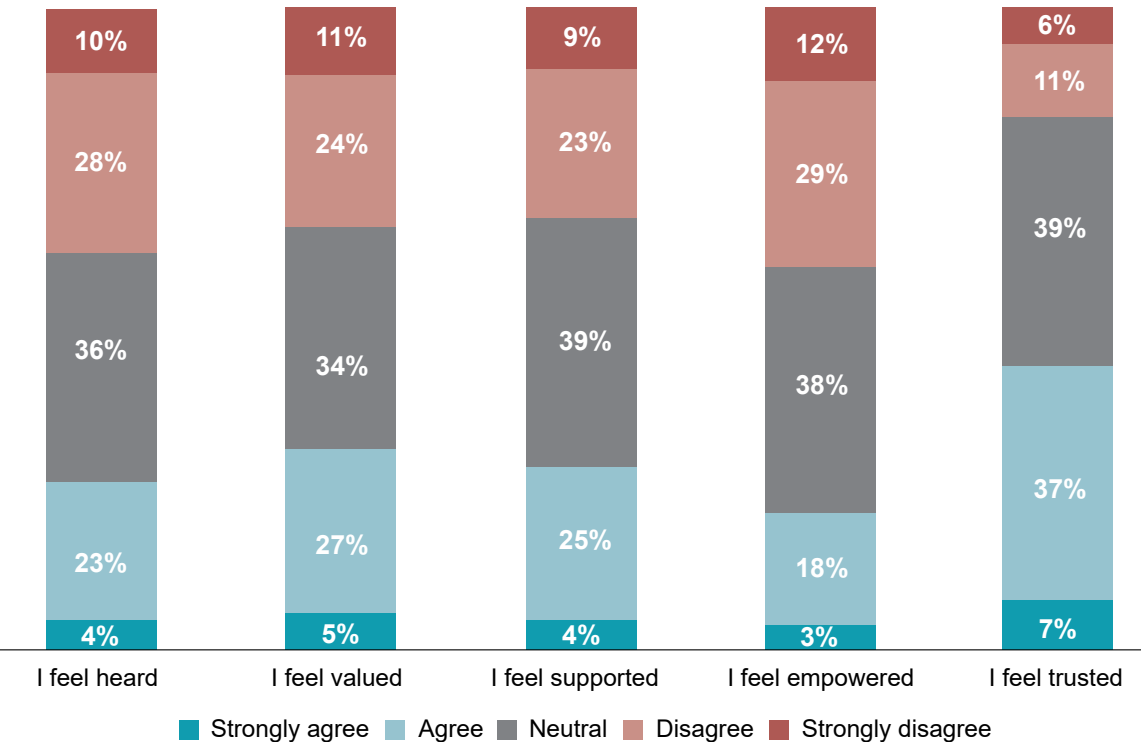
My experience, developed over 26 years in post, is that immediate colleagues and next level management are supportive and well committed to provision of satisfactory service and employee welfare. This is not necessarily reflected in senior management.

– Veterinary pathologist

When thinking about the work you do within your department, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

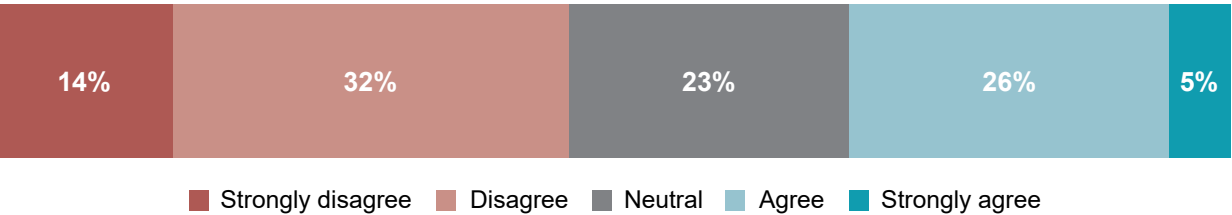


When thinking about the work you do within your organisation, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?



Continuing professional development

I am given the time I need to complete my professional development within my agreed working week



Job plans are required to include dedicated time for pathologists to undertake supporting professional activities (SPAs). This includes necessary training, CPD and educating pathologists in training.

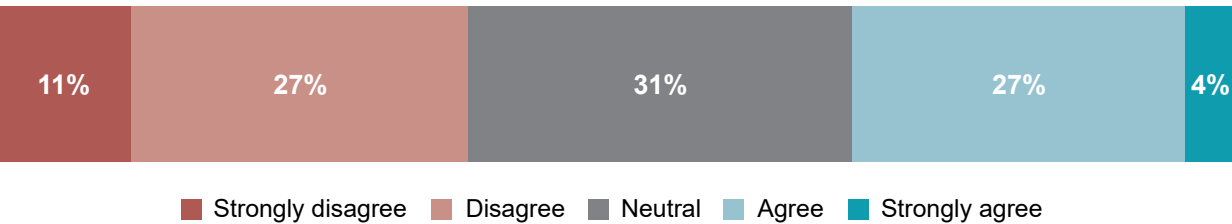
As clinical demand rises, it is becoming more challenging for the workforce to find the time to complete professional activities within their agreed working week.

46% do not believe they are given the time needed within their working week to complete professional development activities, including necessary training and teaching. This rises to 53% in Wales.

“ While ‘job planned’ for admin and SPA time, I have been unable to use this in the last >6 months due to work pressures and admin is often required to be undertaken at home/on my days off (unpaid).
– Consultant in haematology

Development of profession

I am given the time I need to participate in the development of my profession



Pathologists were also asked if they were given time to participate in the development of their profession. This includes volunteer roles at the College, NHS oversight groups and research activities.

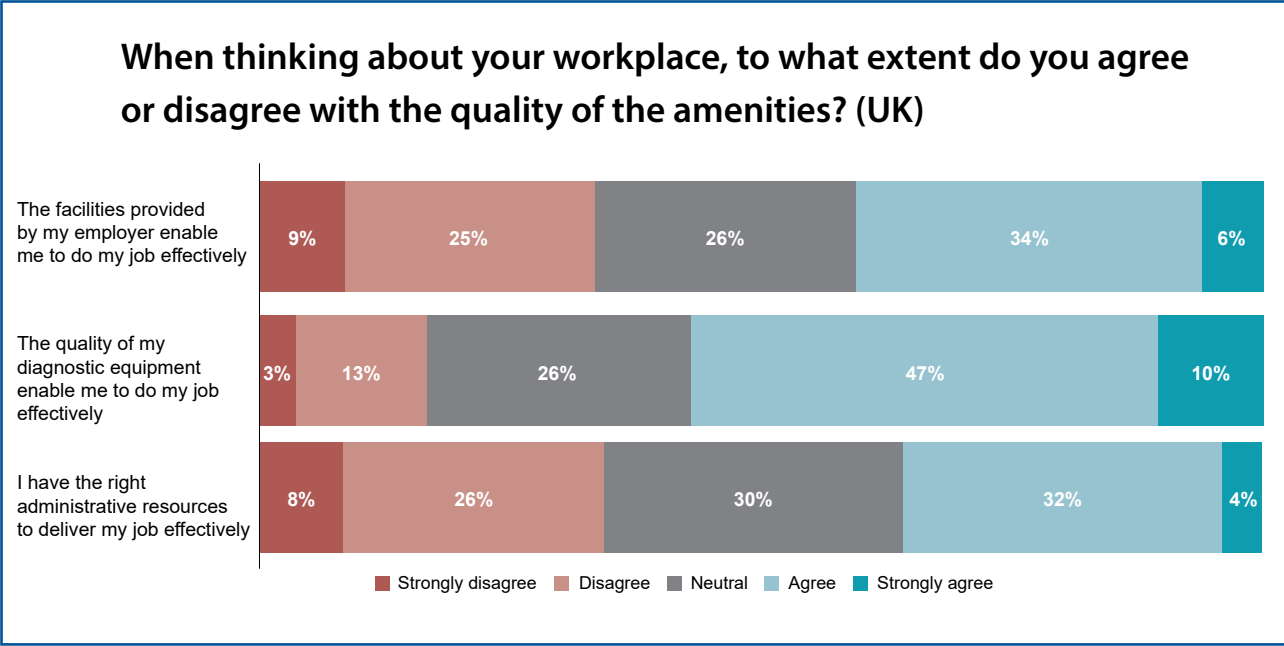
The same percentage (31%) of people who agreed that they had time to complete professional development also agreed that they had the time to participate in additional professional roles and activities.

The number of people who did not agree that they had time to participate in the development of the profession lessened to 38%, with more respondents taking a neutral stance.

Pathologists reported through the census that time constraints and concerns about adding to their workload (due to time taken away from clinical duties) prevents them from taking on additional roles that support the development of the pathology profession.

The quality of amenities

Integral to satisfaction in the workplace is ensuring high-quality equipment, resources and facilities to enable pathologists to do their job effectively, efficiently and safely.



Diagnostic equipment

There are relatively positive impressions about the quality of diagnostic equipment available to pathologists, with 57% agreeing that the quality of their diagnostic equipment enables them to do their job effectively.

Administrative resources

We asked whether pathologists felt they had the right resources to deliver the administrative elements of their role. The UK results were more divided, with 36% agreeing they do have the right resources, 34% disagreeing and 30% remaining neutral.

Of those who do not believe they have the right resources to deliver the administrative elements of their role, concerns were raised around suboptimal digital infrastructure to support communication and processing, the shortage of physical administrative support and the quantity of administrative work expected to be achieved within set time frames.

Quality of facilities

Of those who do not believe the quality of facilities provided by their employer enable them to do their job effectively, issues were raised around limited physical space, including shared office arrangements, teams being split across sites and shortages of laboratory space.

NHS IT support is woeful – constantly submitting tickets to fix things which have stopped working with last ‘update’ (2 IT tickets a week on average). Spend hours every week fire-fighting problems between EPR and LIMs. Trust is blind to it. Infrastructure is falling to bits – have hose pipes running from ceilings to divert leaking roof.

– Consultant in microbiology



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