

SCIENCE MUSEUM GROUP

# WORKERS WORKLOADS **BEFORE**

RESULTS & ACTIONS



JULY 2025

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ..... 3**

**1. OVERVIEW ..... 4**

**2. BACKGROUND ..... 4**

**3. RESULTS & FINDINGS ..... 5**

*3.1 TIME PRESSURES ..... 5*

*3.2 COMMUNICATION ..... 6*

*3.3 TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY ..... 6*

*3.4 RESPECT & RECOGNITION ..... 7*

*3.5 WELLBEING PROVISION ..... 7*

**4. RECOMMENDED ACTIONS ..... 8**

**5. NEXT STEPS ..... 8**

**APPENDIX A – SURVEY QUESTIONS ..... 9**

**APPENDIX B – RESULTS FIGURES ..... 10**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The SMG Branch of Prospect Union conducted a survey as part of our 'Workers Before Workloads' campaign. The campaign was the result of feedback from members and an effort to gather clear data on how SMG staff feel about their workloads. Several common issues emerged from the data relating to workload management, clarity of communication, staff morale, strategic direction, and impacts of organisational changes, which all ultimately significantly affect staff wellbeing.

**Time Pressures:** There is a concerning pattern of oversubscribed teams across the group. The data shows a disconnect between management and the practical realities of staff's everyday duties. There are unreasonable expectations and unrealistic time pressures.

**Communication:** Inconsistent and insufficient communication from senior management has resulted in "moving goalposts" which has led to confusion and frustration among staff. Realities of staff capacity are regularly overlooked when setting deadlines and projects to deliver.

**Transparency & Accountability:** There is an overly hierarchical approach to planning and workloads, with unrealistic deadlines and insufficient resources to support staff. There are also ethical concerns with the organisation's controversial sponsorships which impact staff pride, morale and motivation.

**Respect & Recognition:** A large proportion of colleagues felt they received adequate support and respect from their immediate line managers and teams, however there is a clear need for better support, clearer communication and greater recognition from senior management. There is a significant divide between front of house and back of house with front of house feeling undervalued.

**Wellbeing Provision:** In the face of high levels of stress, burnout and turnover, many colleagues have voiced disappointment in the wellbeing provision

from SMG, including welfare spaces, mental health support, and work-life balance policies.

The goals and actions outlined in the recommendations section will serve as a starting point to address the areas of concern outlined above.

**Goal 1 – Ask SMG to commit to doing a staff survey each year without fail**

**Goal 2 – Staff capacity to be reported on as part of KPIs and reported to trustees**

**Goal 3 – Introduce regular Executive Town Halls: In-person Q and A sessions with members of the Exec to update and raise issues from colleagues.**





## A SUMMARY REPORT PRESENTED TO PROSPECT MEMBERS

### 1. OVERVIEW

In February 2025, the SMG Branch of Prospect Union conducted a survey as part of our 'Workers Before Workloads' campaign with an aim to gather clear data on how SMG staff feel about their workloads. At the outset of our campaign, having heard from our membership, we set a series of goals that we believe will positively impact the wellbeing of staff. The goals of the campaign were as follows:

***Goal 1 – Ask SMG to commit to doing a staff survey each year without fail***

***Goal 2 – Staff capacity to be reported on as part of KPIs and reported to trustees***

***Goal 3 – Introduce regular Executive Town Halls: In-person Q and A sessions with members of the Exec to update and raise issues from colleagues.***

This report presents the results of the survey, which was completed by 333 people, highlighting several areas of concern. The findings of the survey are not only significant but also highlight areas where employee

wellbeing is at risk due to increasing and competing workloads. The results speak for themselves and propose actionable recommendations which will positively impact staff welfare.

We are grateful to all the members and non-members who participated in the survey and encouraged others to do the same.

### 2. BACKGROUND

Prospect ran the survey after repeated feedback from members that their workloads were unrealistic and impacting their wellbeing. This issue has been raised previously in regular Trade Union update meetings with SMG Management, as well as in writing. We approached SMG Management about running an all-staff survey with input from Prospect. However, this was not pursued. Prospect last ran a wellbeing survey in 2021 with the findings indicating that over half of respondents felt that the expectations of them had significantly, and unrealistically, increased.

### 3. RESULTS & FINDINGS

The survey was open to all SMG staff regardless of union membership, and it posed a series of questions about colleagues' workloads as well as their satisfaction and wellbeing at work. A list of all the questions asked in the survey can be found in Appendix A.

Overall, it was encouraging to see that 75% of respondents across the group felt that they had clarity about what was expected of them at work. In dissecting and analysing the data further, it became apparent that while the majority of respondents know what is expected of them, they do not believe that these expectations are achievable or reasonable. We saw some common issues emerging relating to workload management, clarity of communication, staff morale, strategic direction, and impacts of organisational changes.

The results of the survey validate our decision to run it. The following sections will expand upon 5 of the common themes that emerged from the survey results.

#### 3.1 TIME PRESSURES

Time pressures and workload expectations were a common thread through the survey. The below results reveal a concerning pattern of oversubscribed teams across the group, with SIP and Locomotion consistently scoring lowest of all the sites. This could be due to pressures to complete major works at each of these sites (Consolidation Project and New Hall respectively).

The survey asked colleagues whether they felt their deadlines were achievable, and just under half (47%) of respondents agreed, with SIP and Locomotion once again scoring the lowest (50% disagreeing with the statement). For an organisation with multiple sites and hundreds of employees, over half of staff believing that their deadlines are unachievable is a concern. These figures appear to represent a disconnect between management and the practical realities of staff's everyday duties.

Only 33% of respondents across the group felt

that they had realistic time pressures, with SIP and Locomotion having overall negative scores. When asked whether respondents were able to complete their workload in their contracted hours, only 36% agreed, with NSMM and Locomotion scoring the lowest. One of the main issues with regards to time pressures seems to be competing priorities. When asked if colleagues were able to easily balance work requirements from different teams, just under a quarter (24%) of respondents agreed.

Based on further feedback shared in the open responses, colleagues cited a few common issues with regards to unreasonable time pressures and workloads, including resource constraints, operational challenges, staffing shortages, uneven workload distribution, unclear communication, lack of strategic direction, and poor management practices. The unfortunate result is a significant impact on staff wellbeing and morale.

### **3.2 COMMUNICATION**

Poor communication has emerged as a strong thread throughout the results of this survey. Many respondents expressed that inconsistent and insufficient communication from senior management has resulted in “moving goalposts” which has led to confusion and frustration among staff.

When asked if colleagues are clear how changes at work will impact them and their workloads in practice, only 13% of respondents agreed. This reveals a larger issue around clarity of communication from management. .

Many responses detail intense deadline pressures and senior management focusing on deadlines, not whether a team has the resources to complete the task or if the task is achievable.

Colleagues care about the work they do and want to successfully deliver on projects, but this often happens at the expense of their wellbeing. These heightened levels of productivity that are a result of staff commitment and goodwill are taken for granted and then routinely expected.

### **3.3 TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY**

Another important theme from the results has been around transparency and accountability with regards to institutional decision making. When asked whether staff understand and agree with SMG’s decision-making on public programmes, sponsorship, and partnerships, only 17% of respondents agreed. Further, when asked if SMG’s aforementioned decision-making impacts their satisfaction/wellbeing at work, 44% of respondents agreed.

There is sentiment of an overly hierarchical approach to planning and workloads, with unrealistic deadlines and insufficient resources to support staff.

Many responses expressed ethical concerns

with the museum’s controversial sponsorships from companies like Adani and Shell, which have impacted staff pride, morale and motivation. There are also significant concerns about financial decisions and priorities, especially as teams are asked to deliver more expensive projects and exhibitions, while core staff face redundancies and resource cuts.

These results indicate two key takeaways – 1) there is a serious lack of transparency and involvement in decision-making processes, particularly regarding partnerships and public programmes, and 2) there is a lack of accountability for poor management behaviour and decision-making especially around resources.

### **3.4 RESPECT & RECOGNITION**

To explore whether SMG's workplace culture impacts wellbeing, we asked respondents about their work environments and interactions with colleagues. The survey shows that the overwhelming majority of SMG staff feel supported by their direct line manager, which is also in line with the results of SMG's Open For All Survey. This is hugely significant and shows that line managers are regularly engaging with their teams and doing their best to meet their needs. Resources on Thrive and training run by People and Culture are clearly making a positive impact and are to be celebrated.

The perception of respect within the workplace is fundamental for employee wellbeing. The perception of a lack of respect will lead to disengagement and a negative impact on SMG's mission. Across the group, only 51% of respondents felt that they received the respect they deserved from colleagues at all levels. While a large proportion of colleagues felt they received adequate support and respect from their

immediate line managers and teams, there seems to be a clear need for better support, clearer communication and greater recognition from senior management. This overlaps with feedback relating to senior leadership understanding shared in SMG's recent Open For All survey.

Respondents noted a significant divide between front of house and back of house with front of house feeling undervalued. In addition, recent protests at the Science Museum are likely to be a contributing factor with front of house bearing the brunt of these disturbances.

It was also noted that recent change programmes had some staff feeling that their roles had extended beyond their job descriptions and poor communication from senior management often led to misunderstandings and frustrations that negatively impacted projects. High workloads with little recognition or compensation are leading to feelings of being undervalued.

### **3.5 WELLBEING PROVISION**

Many respondents stressed that deadline pressure was 'overwhelming' and that competing priorities made deadlines too difficult to achieve. Only 49% of respondents said they were able to take sufficient breaks, as staff are routinely working through their breaks to complete their workloads. Unmanageable deadlines lead to increased stress levels and reduced job satisfaction which in turn contributes to a high turnover of staff and a profound loss of talent, passion, and knowledge. Open dialogue would encourage staff to disclose this information to SMG, however, the lack of a staff survey since 2022 has removed this vital feedback mechanism.

In the face of high levels of stress and burnout, many colleagues have voiced disappointment in the wellbeing provision from SMG. Poor quality

and insufficient welfare facilities are affecting staff wellbeing. The survey results identify an urgent need for better quality welfare areas at all sites to support colleagues taking adequate breaks from work, as well as professional mental health support. Some colleagues also noted a lack of sufficient resources such as PPE to conduct their work safely.

Colleagues also highlighted the inflexibility of policies around sick leave and flexible working, which have led to feelings of being unsupported and difficulty in maintaining work-life balance. Employee wellbeing and sustainable workloads are crucial for staff morale and ultimately influence the overall success of the museum group.



## 4. RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

The goals and actions outlined in the campaign will serve as a starting point for SMG to address the areas of concern outlined above.

### ***Goal 1 – Ask SMG to commit to doing a staff survey each year without fail***

The responses made it clear that colleagues want to share their thoughts and be heard by senior management. Annual surveys would provide an opportunity for SMG to check in with staff and see how things are changing year-on-year.

### ***Goal 2 – Staff capacity to be reported on as part of KPIs and reported to trustees***

The responses showed that colleagues do not always feel that their concerns are taken seriously. Introducing a method and framework to measure staff capacity along with other performance metrics for projects would demonstrate a commitment to staff wellbeing.

### ***Goal 3 – Introduce regular Executive Town Halls: In-person Q and A sessions with members of the Exec to update and raise issues from colleagues.***

Respondents explained that communication with senior management often feels one-way, and they would like to be able to ask questions and get real-time responses. Many also expressed a desire to feel acknowledged and appreciated for their work.

## 5. NEXT STEPS

The Prospect Union Committee at SMG will be pursuing a series of actions and next steps as a result of this data. Some key actions include:

- Producing reports for SMG Executive Team and Trustees. Each report communicates survey findings along with selected, fully anonymous reflections from members.
- Discussing the results with SMG Management as part of our July 2025 Business Update Meeting. We will be feeding back to members on outcomes in due course.
- Holding a members meeting in 6 months to check in on progress, review any changes that have taken place since raising this with SMG Exec.

The input and support from members and non-members has helped us compile and present this essential information to SMG Management and we intend to advocate on behalf of all colleagues to take steps towards the change we deserve.





## APPENDIX A – SURVEY QUESTIONS

Respondents were given the option to 'strongly agree' 'agree' 'neither agree nor disagree' 'disagree' 'strongly disagree'. Respondents were also given a free text box to input additional comments.

1. I am clear what is expected of me at work
2. I have achievable deadlines
3. I am able to complete all the tasks that I am asked to do
4. My work requirements from different teams are easy to balance
5. I am able to do my workload within my contracted hours
6. I am able to take sufficient breaks when I need them
7. I am able to take my allotted annual leave and/or TOIL when I wish
8. I have realistic time pressures
9. I receive the respect at work I deserve from my colleagues at all levels
10. Colleagues are always consulted about change at work
11. When changes are made at work, I am clear how they will work out in practice and how they will impact on my workload
12. I have sufficient opportunities to question managers about change at work
13. The wellbeing support provision I have received from my employer has been sufficient
14. There are sufficient welfare spaces for staff at my site
15. I understand and agree with SMG's decision making on public programmes, sponsorship and partnerships
16. My satisfaction/wellbeing at work is impacted by SMG's decision making on public programmes, sponsorship and partnership

Free text prompts

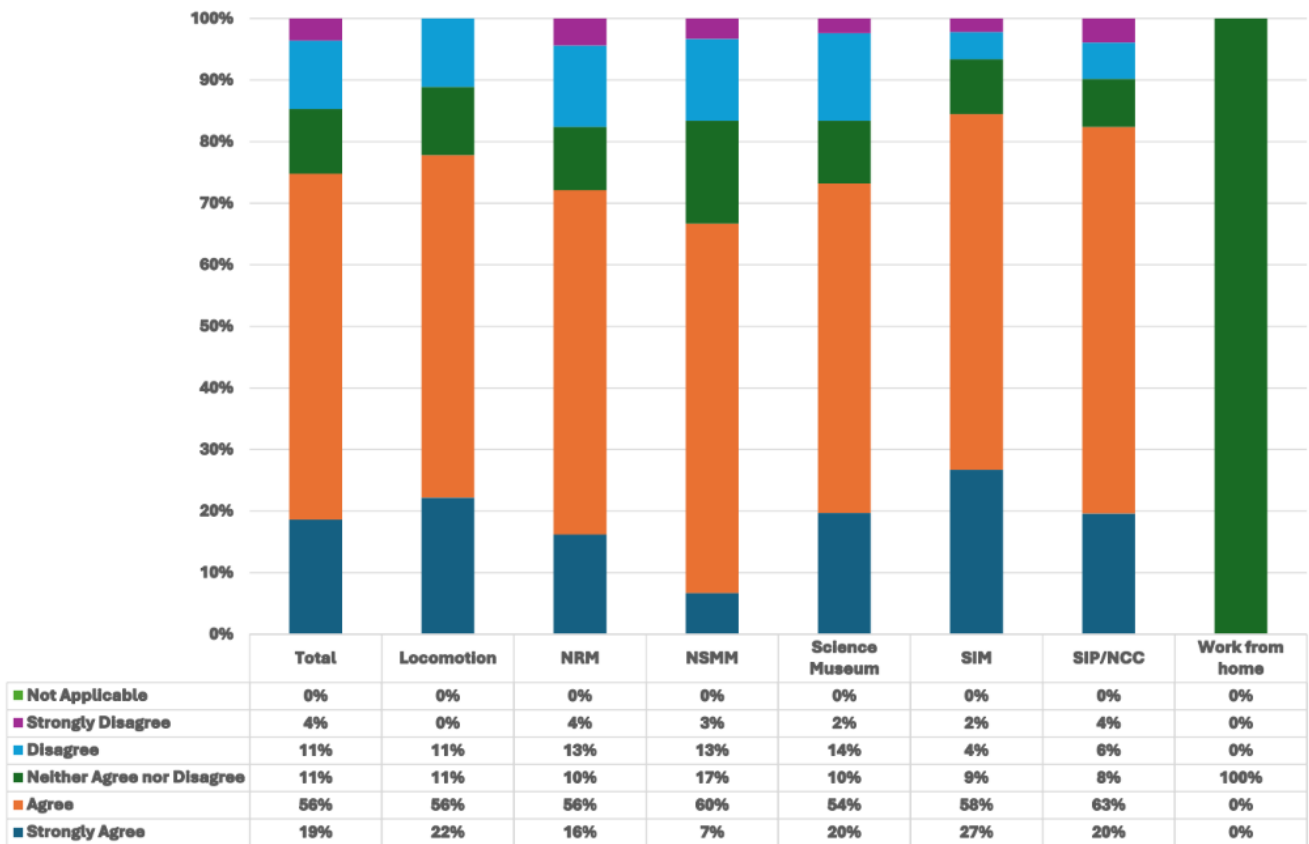
1. If you could make one change to improve staff wellbeing, what would it be?
2. Finally, if you had any other reflections please share in the box below

## APPENDIX B – RESULTS FIGURES

The graphs below detail the figures for each of the survey questions (see Appendix A). The graphs contain SMG-wide figures as well as site specific splits of the data.

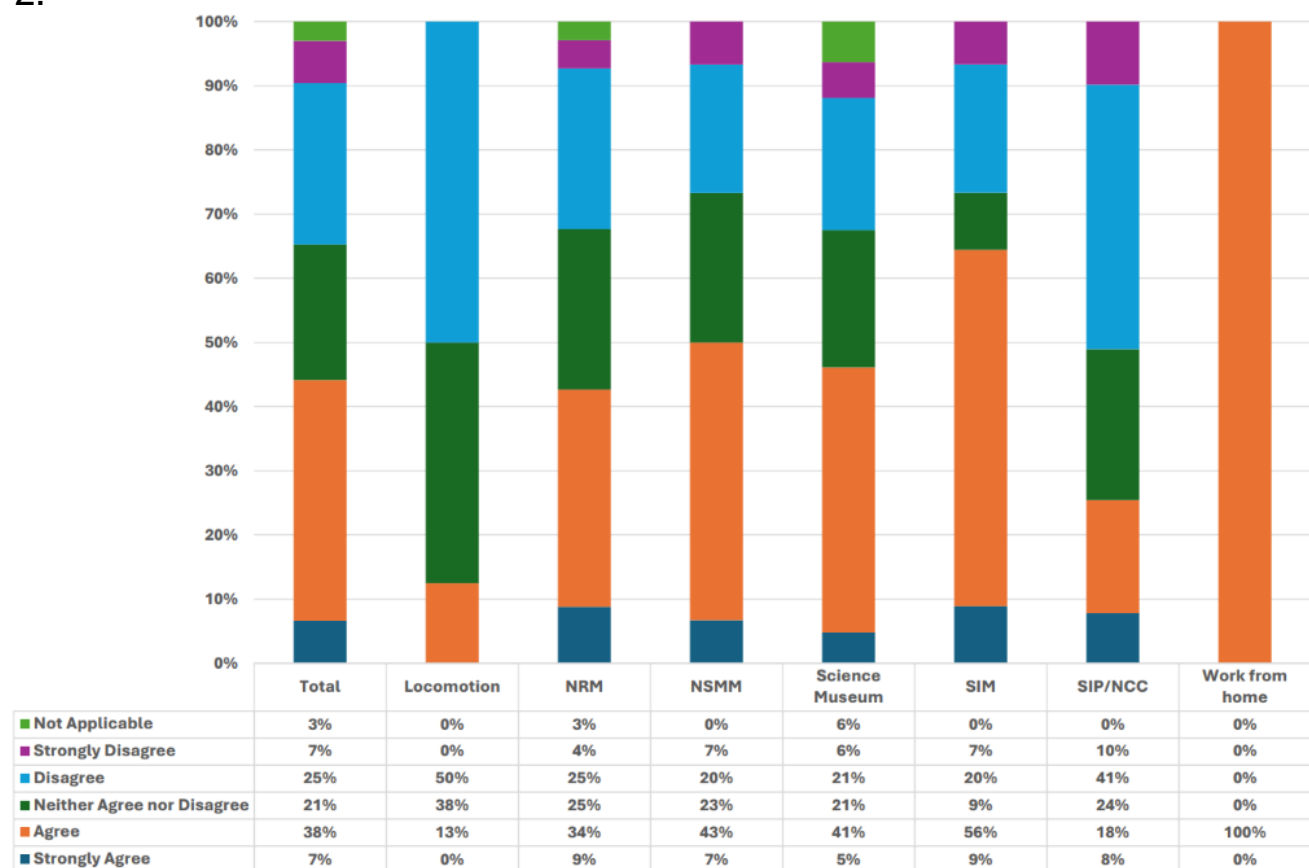
1.

### I am clear what is expected of me at work



2.

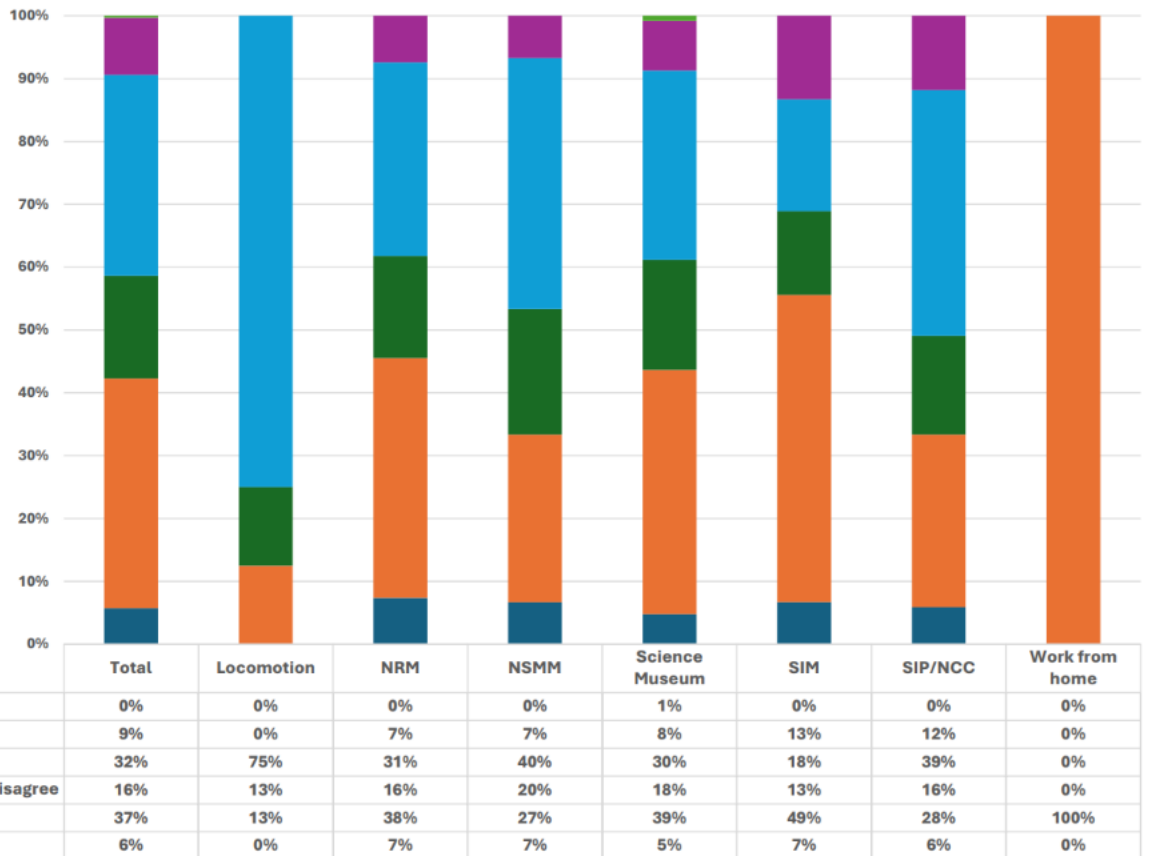
### I have achievable deadlines



## APPENDIX B – RESULTS FIGURES

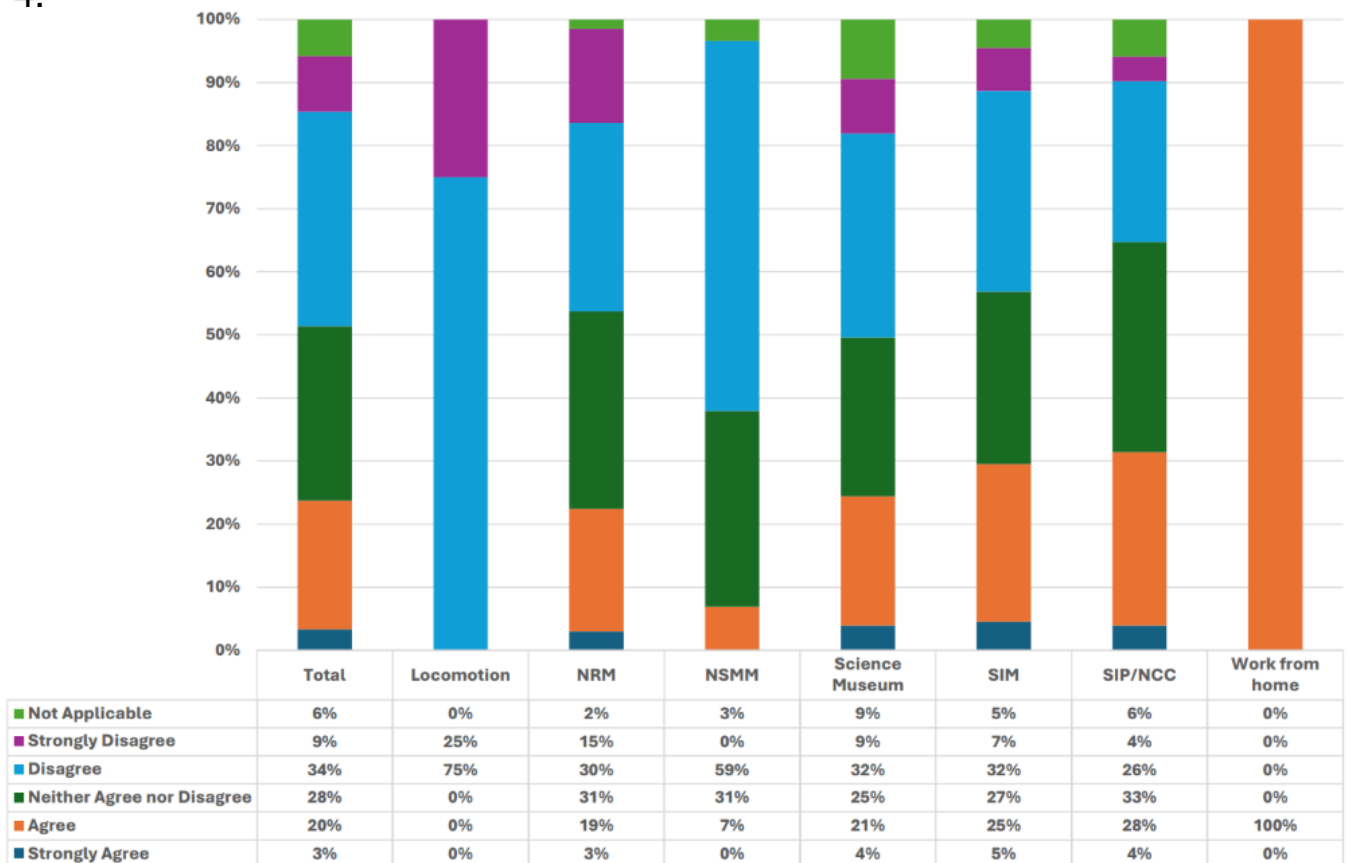
3.

### I am able to complete all the tasks that I am asked to do



4.

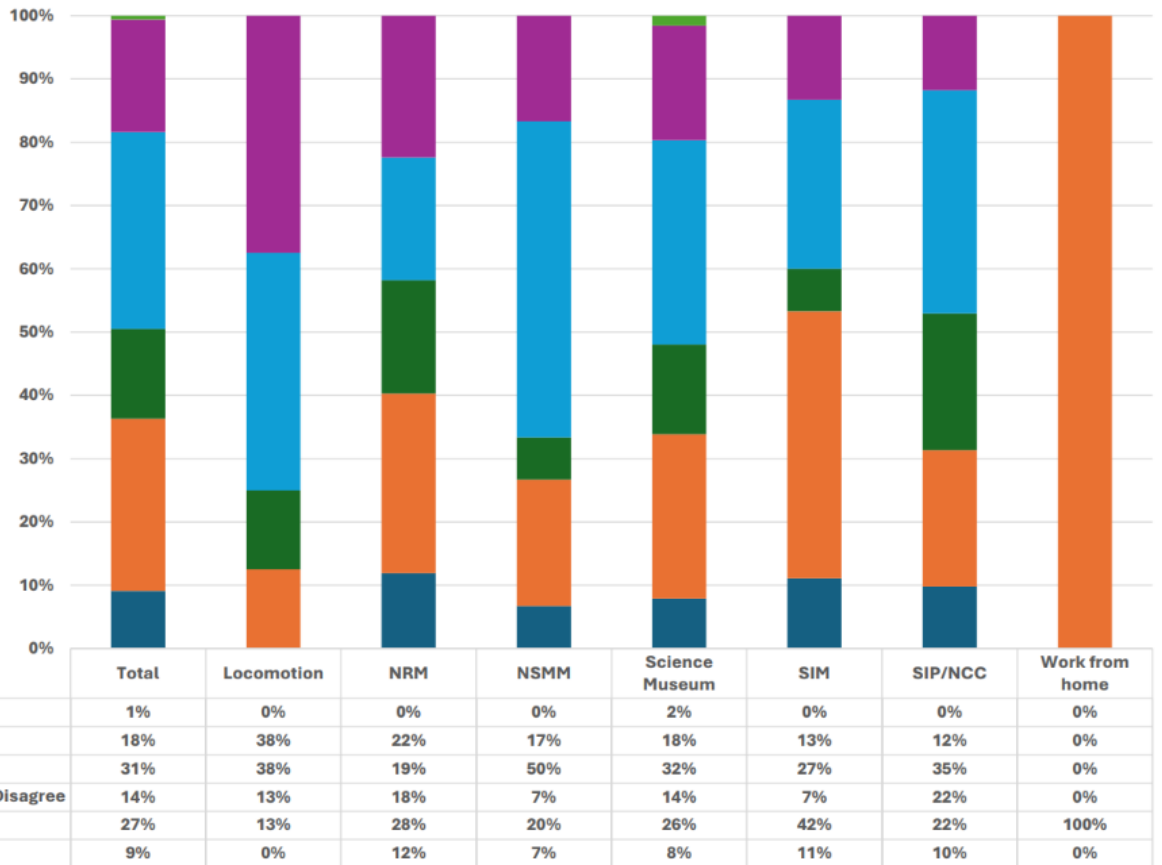
### My work requirements from different teams are easy to balance



## APPENDIX B – RESULTS FIGURES

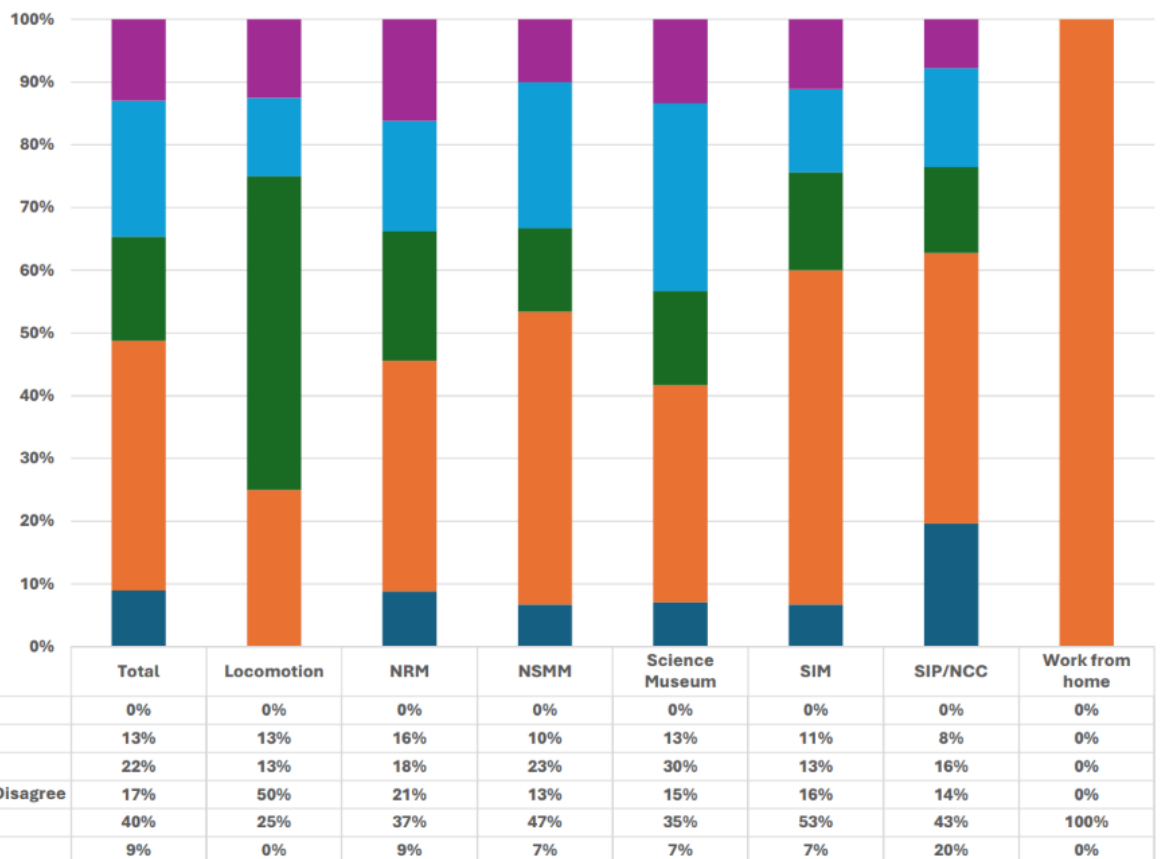
5.

### I am able to do my workload within my contracted hours



6.

### I am able to take sufficient breaks when I need them

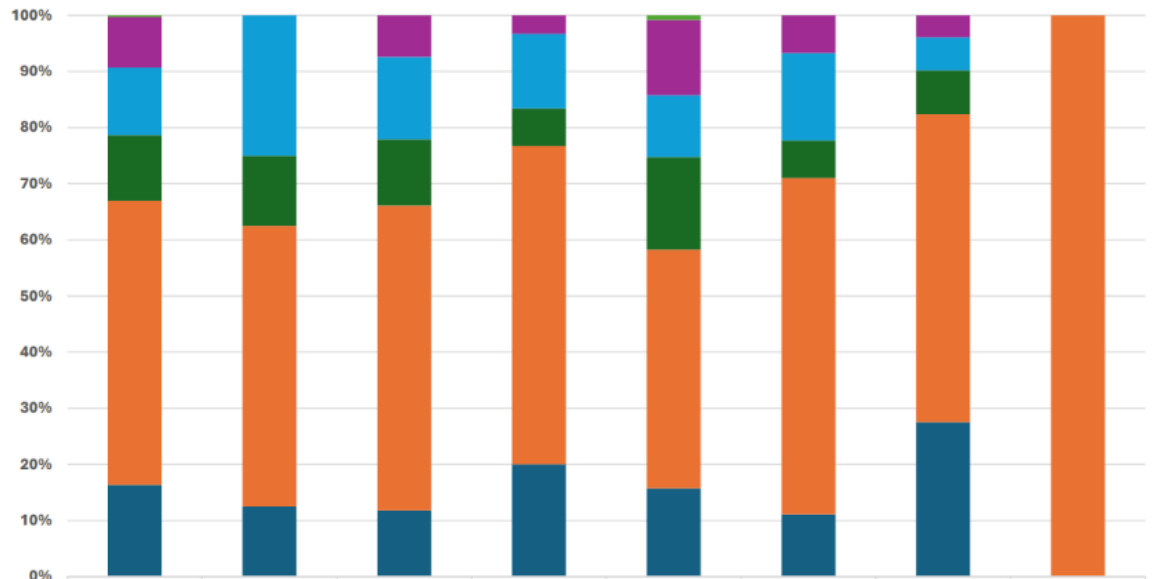




## APPENDIX B – RESULTS FIGURES

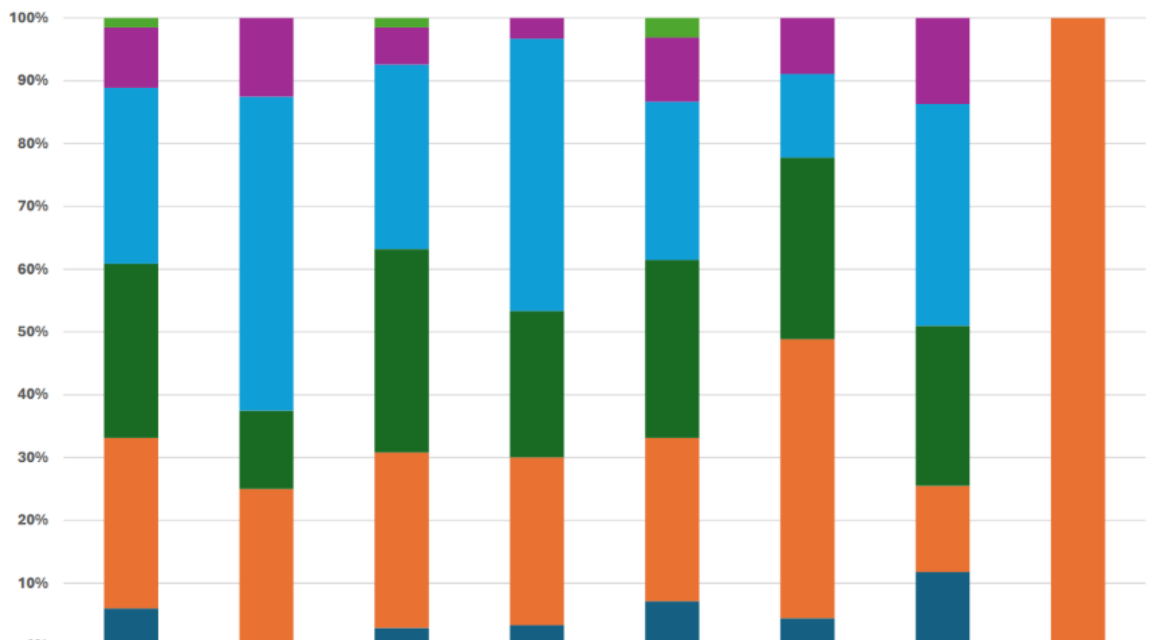
7.

**I am able to take my allotted annual leave and/or TOIL when I wish**



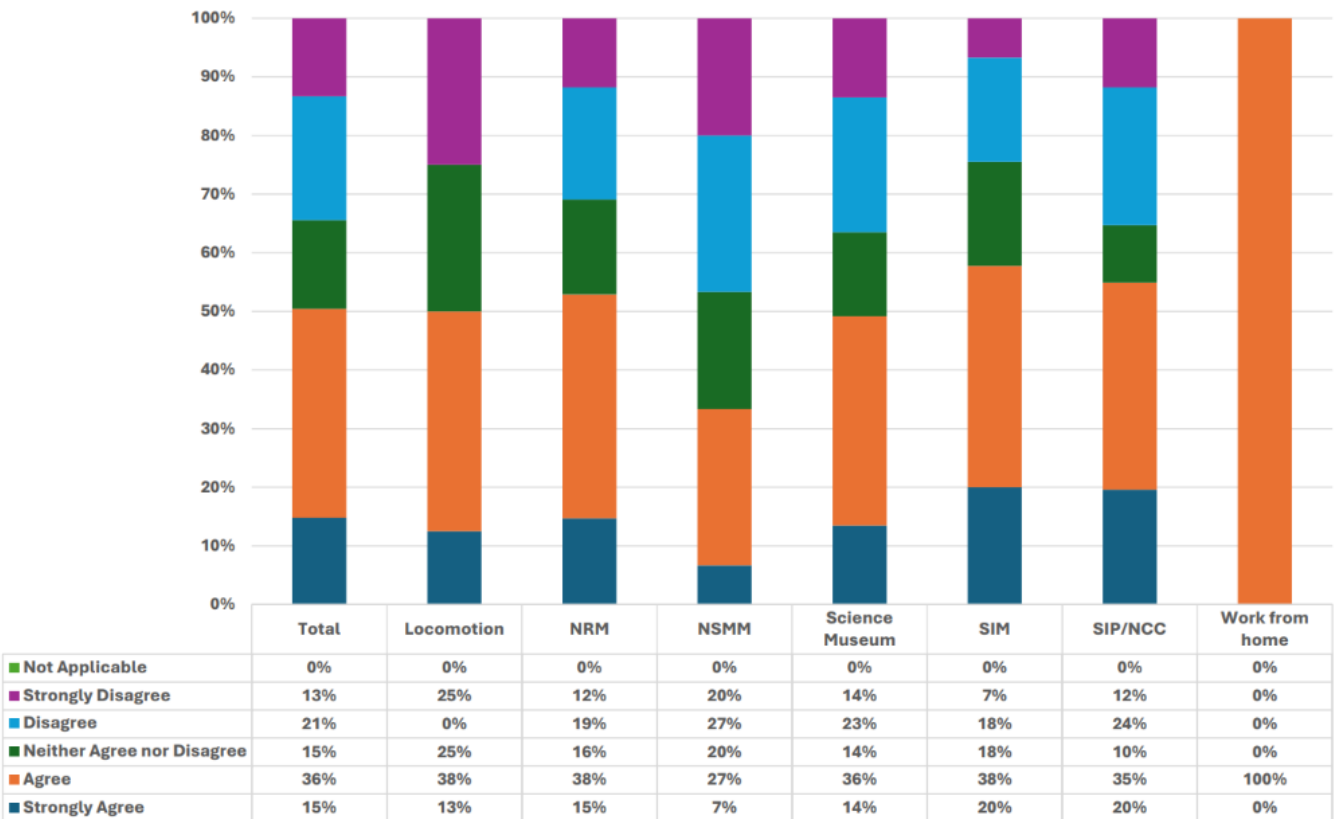
8.

**I have realistic time pressures**

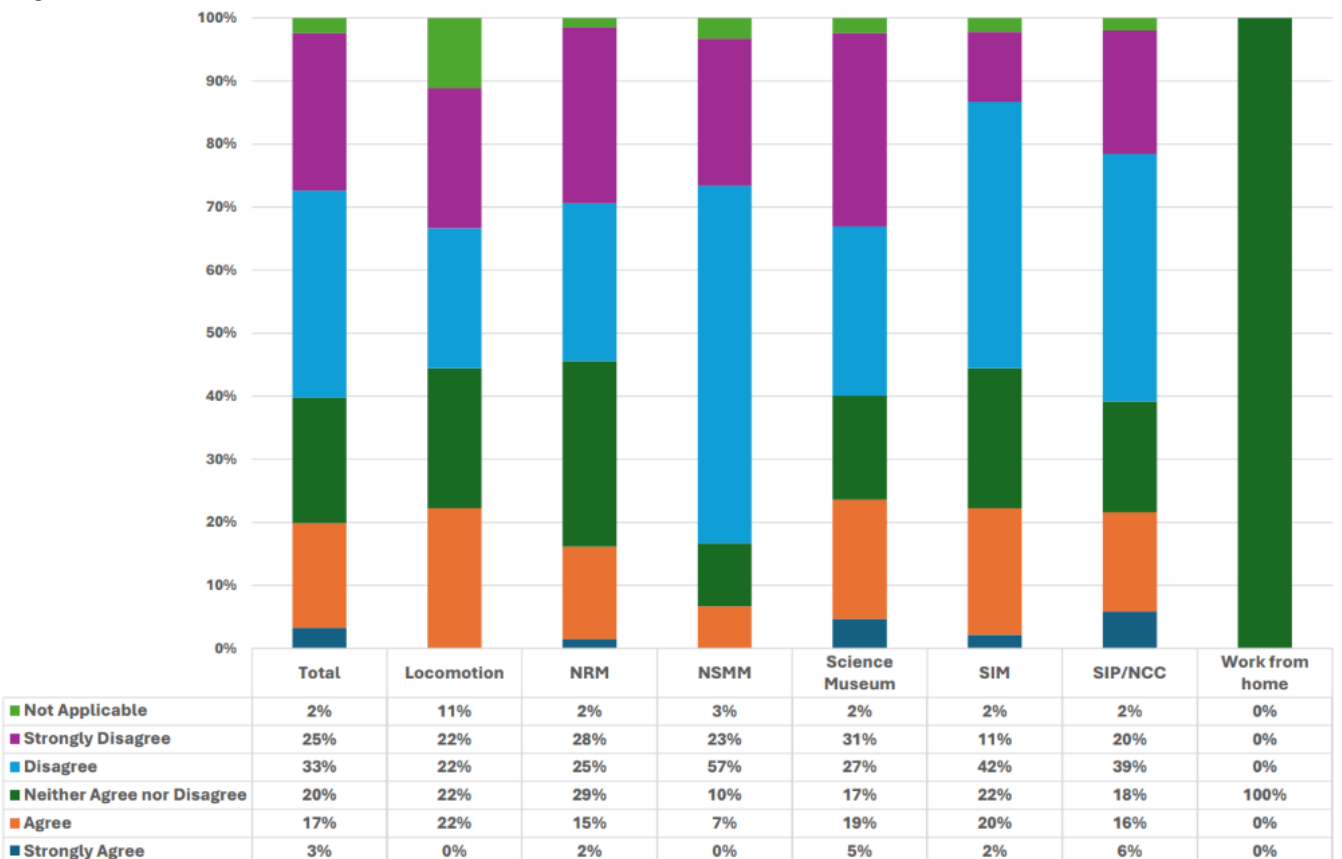


## APPENDIX B – RESULTS FIGURES

### 9. I receive the respect at work I deserve from my colleagues at all levels



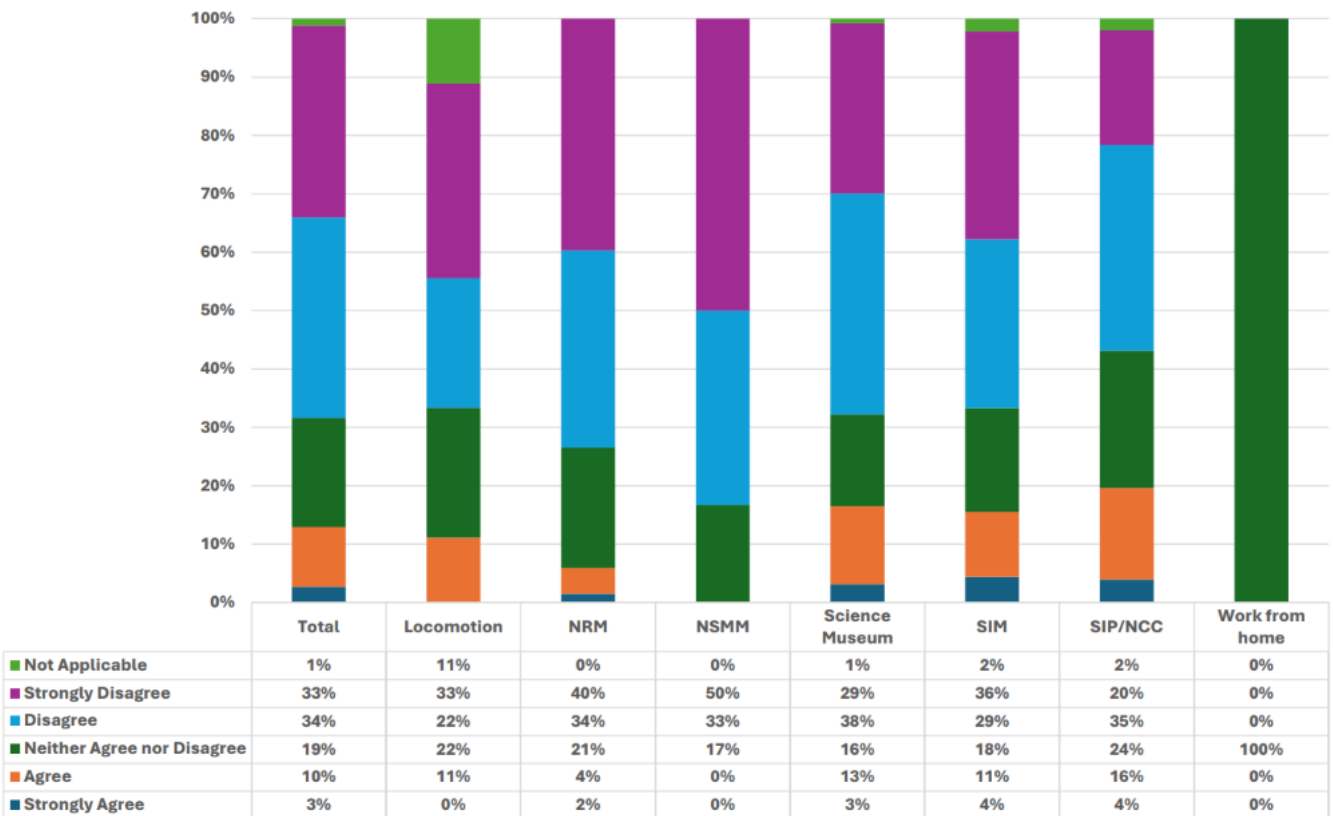
### 10. Colleagues are always consulted about change at work



## APPENDIX B – RESULTS FIGURES

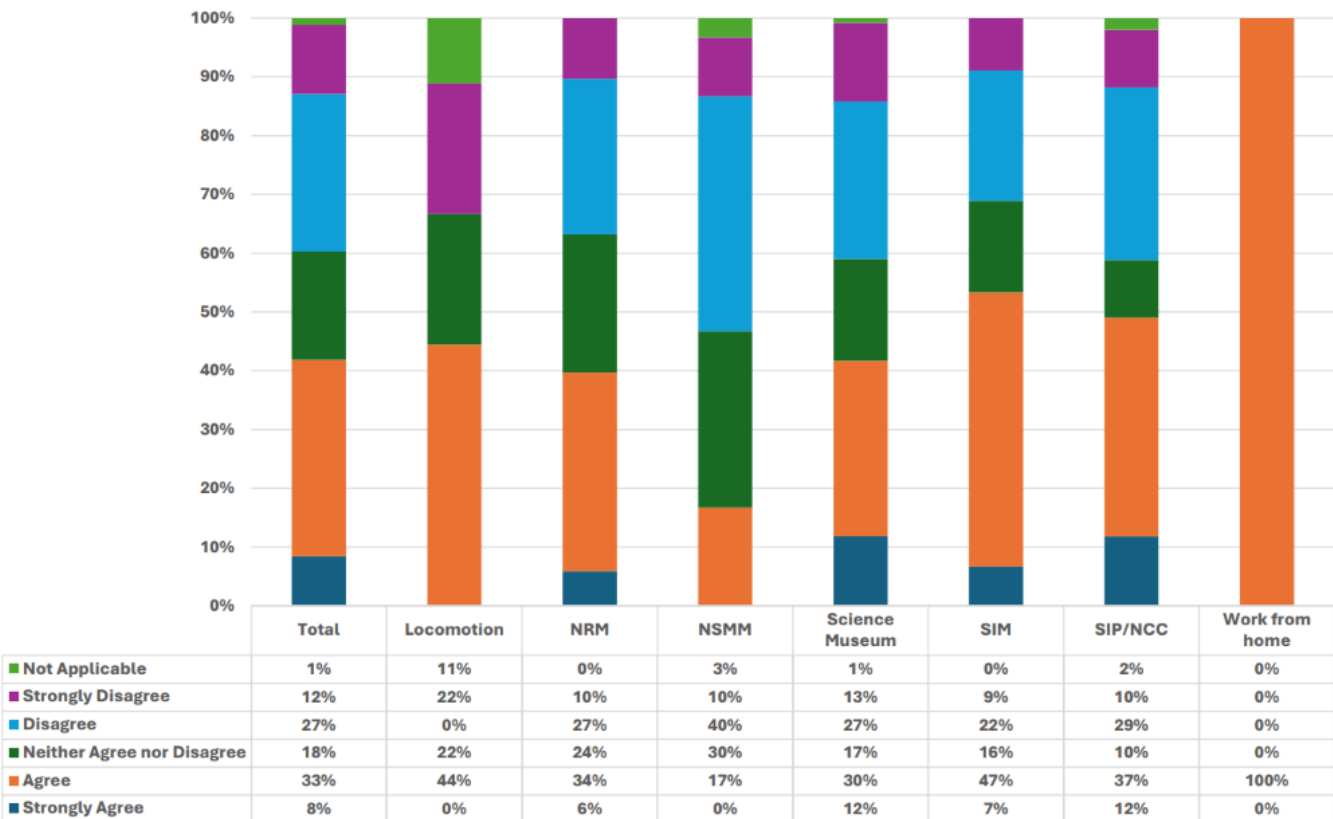
11.

**When changes are made at work, I am clear how they will work out in practice and how they will impact on my workload**



12.

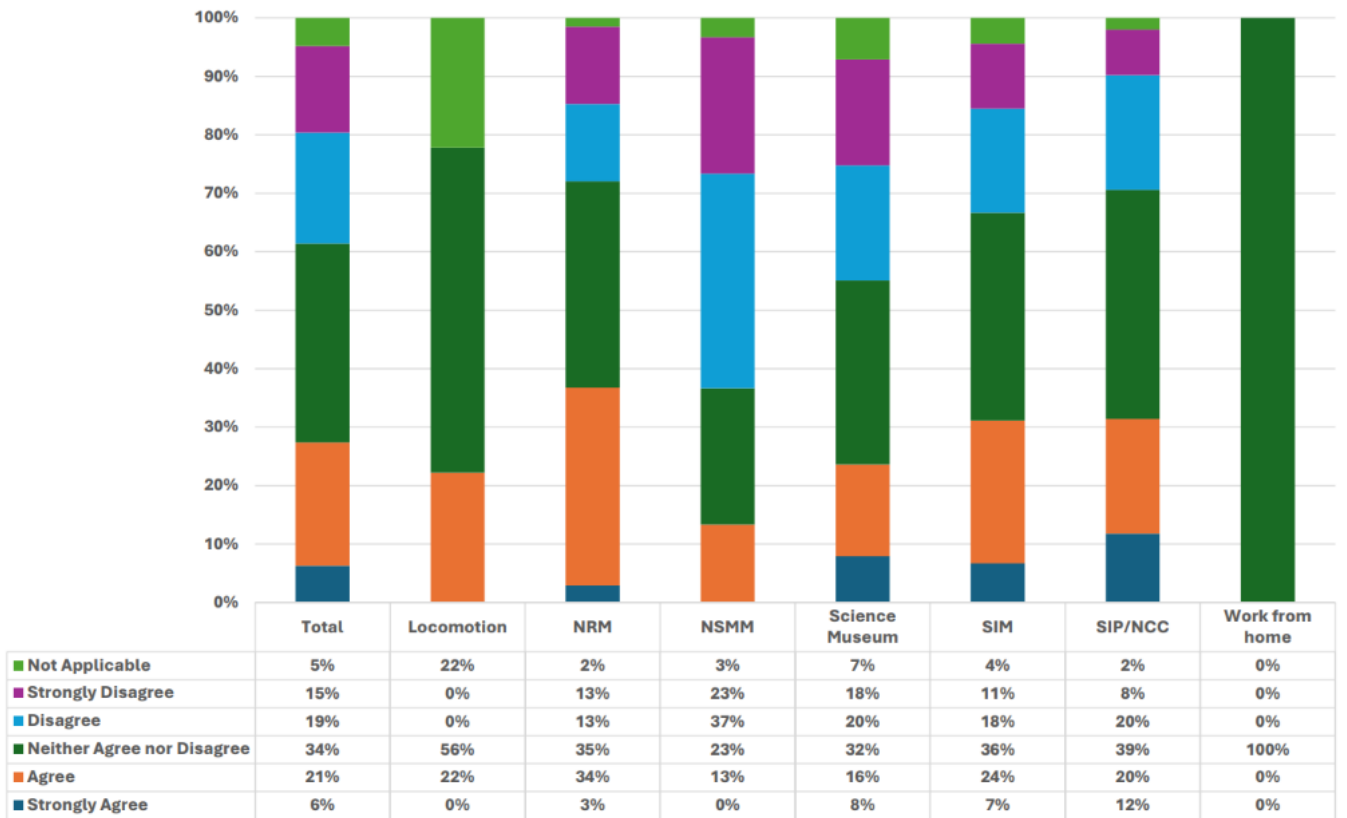
**I have sufficient opportunities to question managers about change at work**



## APPENDIX B – RESULTS FIGURES

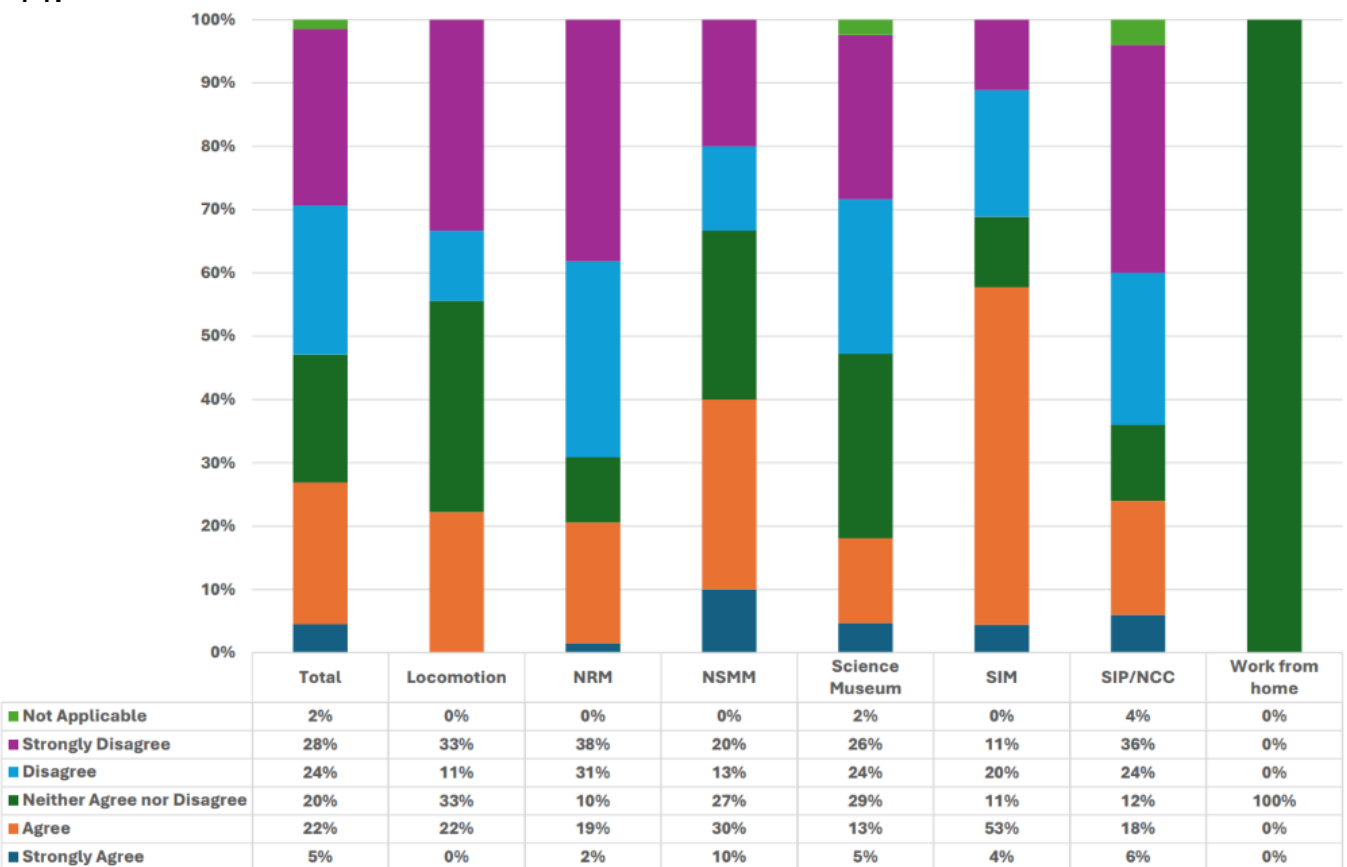
13.

**The wellbeing support provision I have received from my employer has been sufficient**



14.

**There are sufficient welfare spaces for staff at my site**

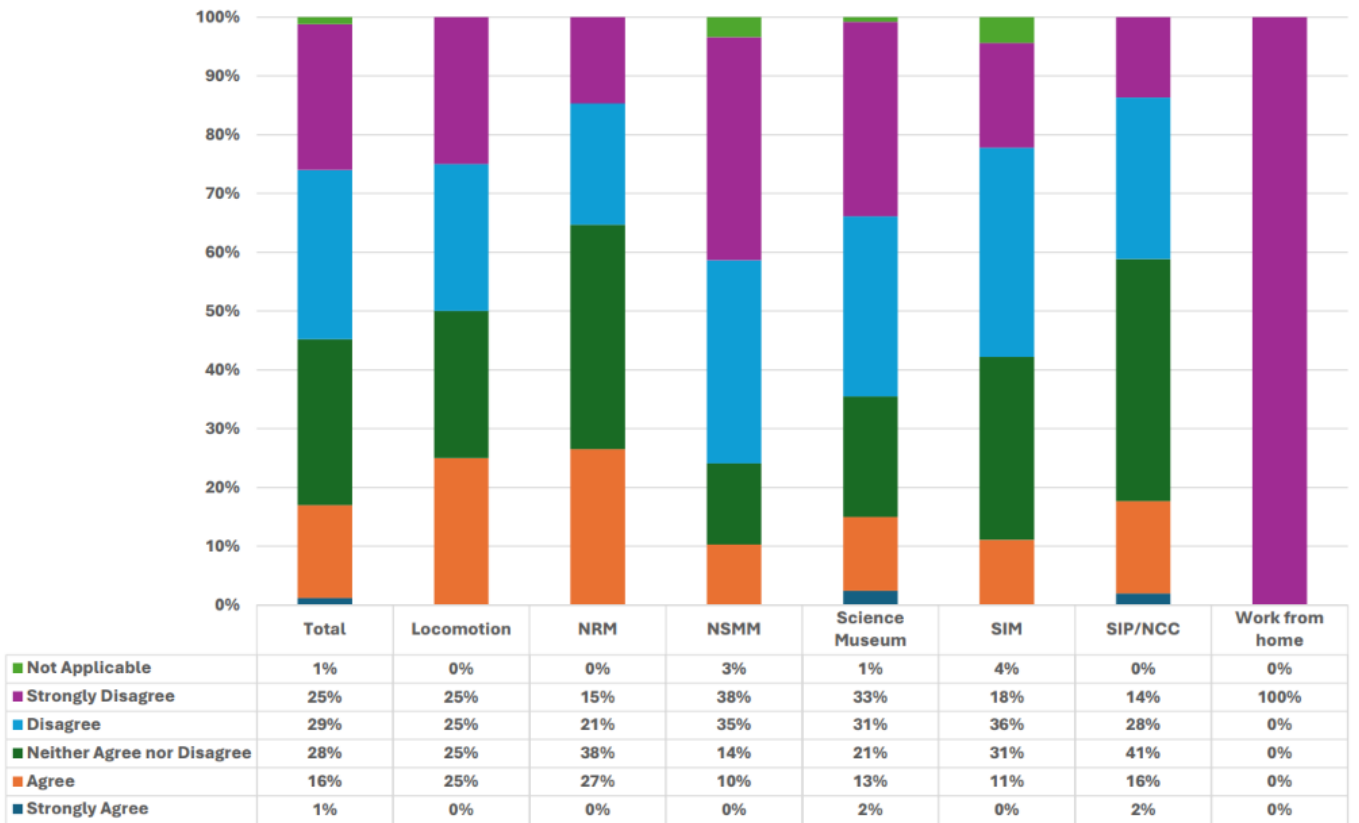




## APPENDIX B – RESULTS FIGURES

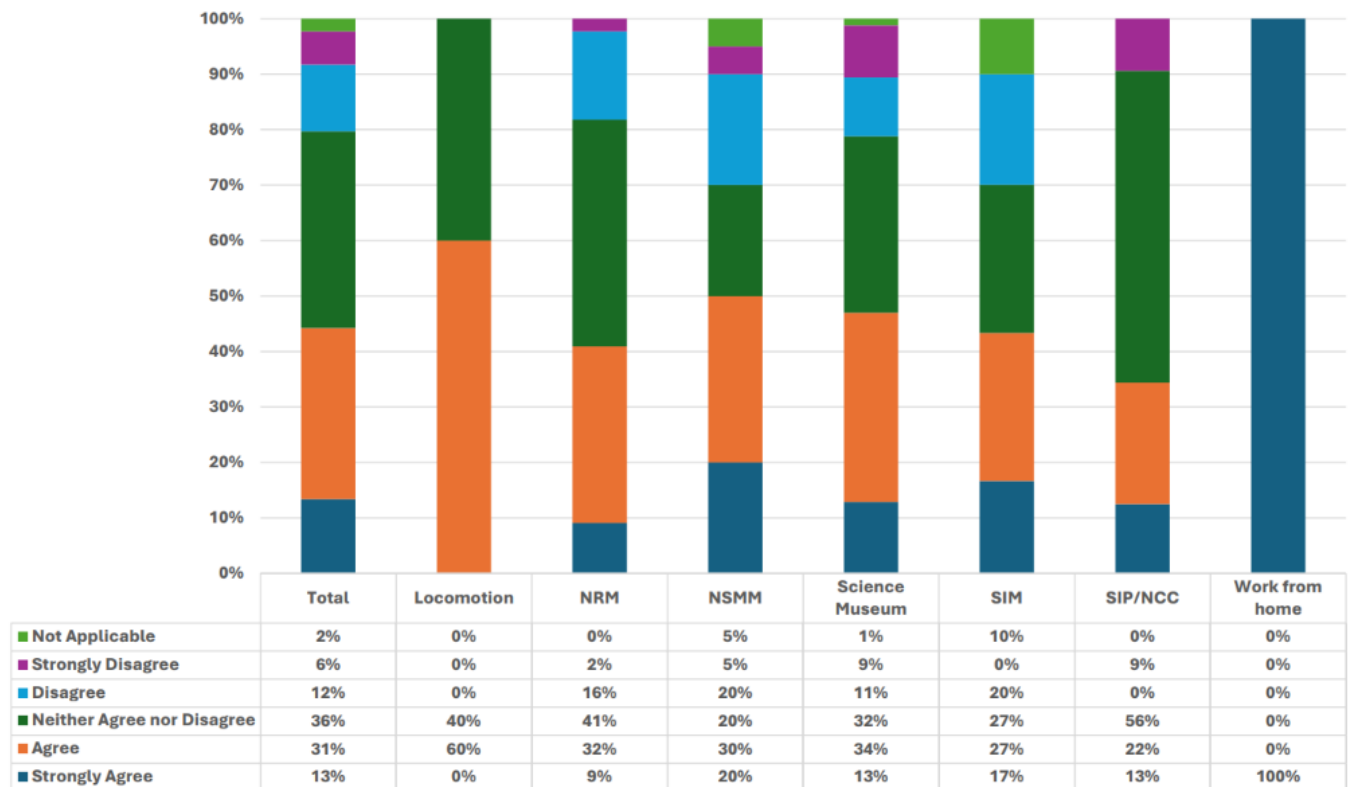
15.

### I understand and agree with SMG's decision making on public programmes, sponsorship and partnerships



16.

### My satisfaction/wellbeing at work is impacted by SMG's decision making on public programmes, sponsorship and partnership





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