

# Report of IP Inclusive & Jonathan's Voice survey for Mental Health Awareness Week 2022

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## Executive summary

### The survey

In spring and summer 2022, IP Inclusive and Jonathan's Voice collaborated with CIPA and CITMA to survey mental wellbeing in the patent and trade mark professions. IP Inclusive recognises the importance of mental wellbeing in creating an inclusive working environment, and as such sees this project as a key element of its work this year.

Building on similar surveys conducted in 2018 and 2019, this year the survey was extended to business support professionals working in patent and trade mark organisations, who are not necessarily members of either institute.

The survey was voluntary and anonymous. It aimed to capture data on mental health problems, in particular stress; their causes; their impact; the support available to help people cope with them; and the steps that might be taken to improve things. Separate, tailored versions of the survey were created for students; paralegals and business support professionals; and (the "main survey") other CIPA and CITMA members.

### The respondents

Responses to this year's survey were lower than in the previous years. There were 111 responses to the student survey. The new paralegal and business support version elicited 183 responses and the main version 181 responses. The ratio of CIPA to CITMA respondents was approximately 4:1 in the main survey and 19:1 in the student survey.

Respondents came from a range of professional roles, career levels and working environments, although in-house professionals were less well represented than private practice, the majority working in large private practice firms.

### Current mental health: the previous 12 months

Higher levels of stress, anxiety and depression were recorded than in 2019, particularly among students where 72% of respondents said that high stress levels had affected their work in the past year.

Significant numbers of respondents felt unable to talk to their employer about their mental health problems or take time off work, many feeling that they should be able to cope. These figures are marginally better than in the previous surveys. However, they suggest that stigma still surrounds mental health issues in the IP professions.

High workloads appear to be contributing significantly towards mental health problems, in the form of deadlines, billing targets and client demands/expectations. Exam preparation and performance fears are also significant contributors for students. Insufficient control over workload and insufficient support were likewise prominent factors in all three surveys.

High workloads are also impeding alleviation of mental health issues, since having too much work and not wanting to let colleagues or clients down were significant reasons cited for not taking time off work. The majority of respondents were aware that you are allowed to take time off work for your mental health. However, many felt that they should be able to cope and had concerns around the impact on career prospects of taking time off for mental health.

In terms of negative feelings that have arisen at, or because of, work, high numbers of respondents in the student survey and the main survey had the feeling they were not up to the job and many feared making mistakes at work. Negative feelings linked to EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion) such as feeling you don't fit in, pressure to conform, anxiety or isolation linked to something personal, and needing to hide aspects of oneself, were relatively common (up to 31%), particularly amongst student respondents.

Work-related stress had a significant impact on respondents in terms of difficulties concentrating on work and reduced productivity. There was also an impact in terms of the numbers of respondents nearly or actually making a work-related mistake. Significant numbers (up to half of respondents) were considering leaving their current job or leaving the profession.

Physical symptoms experienced which could be attributed to work-related stress commonly included fatigue and sleeping and appetite problems. Some had considered self-harming or had suicidal thoughts.

### Available workplace support

Whilst a significant proportion of respondents still appear unable to be fully open about their mental wellbeing among colleagues, many are able to turn to a sympathetic line manager or HR personnel.

Organisations have clearly invested in workplace support for mental health: the number of respondents with access to a trained mental health “first-aider” has more than doubled since the 2019 survey, and access to private health care which extends to mental health problem and to EAPs (employee assistance programmes) has also increased significantly across all respondents. In addition, the majority of this year’s respondents have at least a moderate amount of flexibility in their working arrangements, levels of flexibility being significantly higher for all three groups than in 2019.

### Self-support practices

Many respondents rely on sympathetic family, friends or colleagues for mental wellbeing support. Nearly 30% of respondents in the main and student surveys have drawn upon the support of a counsellor or therapist.

Increasing numbers are accessing resources or support online, for example via Jonathan’s Voice, IP Inclusive or the CIPA Informals.

### The effects of Covid-19

The effects of Covid both across and within the different groups of respondents were varied. The greatest consensus was amongst students in relation to their training and exams, where the majority of responders felt more concerned about these since Covid.

Significant numbers of respondents felt more concerned about their work-life balance than before the pandemic. This was particularly the case with respondents from the main survey, where nearly half indicated that they felt more concerned in this area, perhaps due to high workloads or perhaps suggesting difficulties in switching off from work when at home. This was also reflected in the responses regarding control over working hours, where over a third of respondents felt more concerned than before the pandemic.

Responses regarding parental/caring responsibilities were varied, but many with these responsibilities felt more concerned than before the pandemic.

In many aspects there was no change in how respondents felt post-Covid, eg in relation to job security, career progression, managing client demands and control over workload. Most respondents to the student and main surveys were less concerned about control over where they work since the pandemic, but this was not the case for all respondents to the paralegal and business support survey.