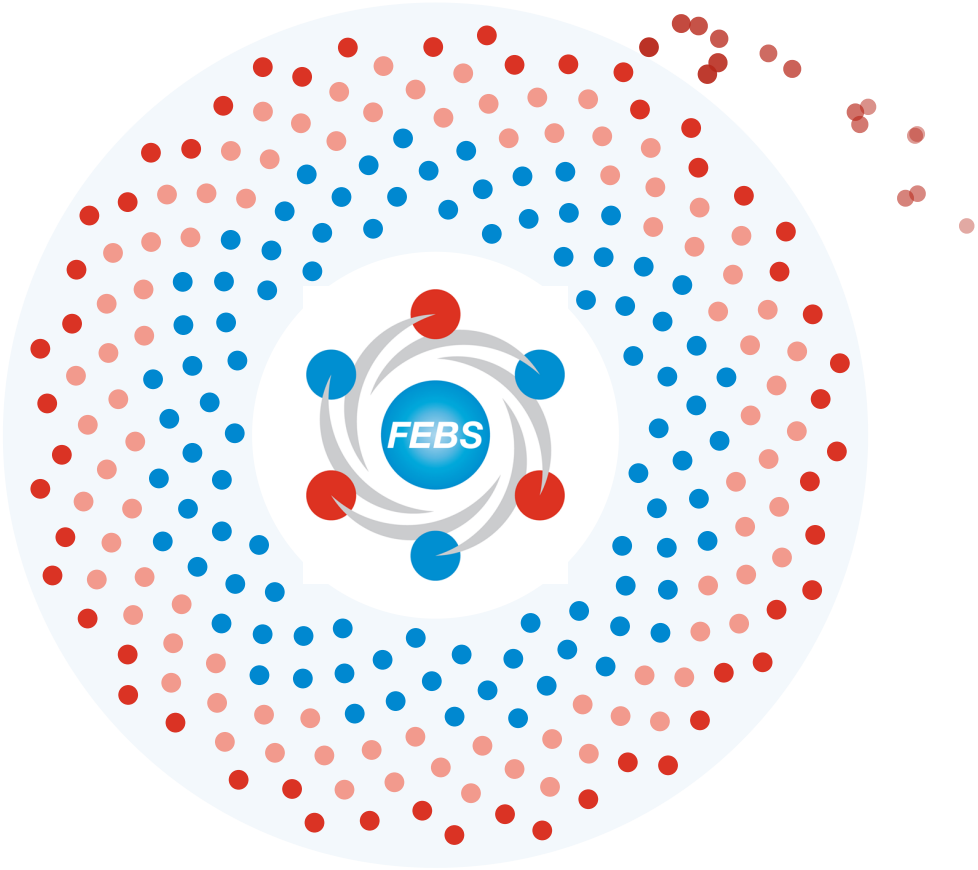
FEBS EDUCATION & TRAINING COMMITTEE
Federation of European Biochemical Societies

BRIEF REPORT
OCTOBER 2026



2026 FEBS CONSULTATION SURVEY

Academic Wellbeing in the Molecular Life Sciences

What 246 scientists and educators told us — and five actions for societies and institutions

About the cover. Each dot is one of the 246 survey respondents, gathered around the FEBS community. Moving outward: 89 never considered leaving academia for wellbeing reasons; 88 considered it occasionally; 53 think about it often; 16 are actively planning to leave or have already reduced their involvement. The dots drifting out of the circle are those already preparing to leave or stepping back.

For FEBS Constituent Societies, universities and research institutes, research leaders, supervisors and early-career scientists

ONE CHANGE. ONE LEAD. ONE YEAR.

AT A GLANCE

Science remains meaningful. The conditions around it need attention.

80%

often or almost always find their work **meaningful** and aligned with their values

198 of 246

yet

64%

have considered **leaving academia** primarily because of mental-health or wellbeing concerns

157 of 246

SIX NUMBERS TO TAKE INTO THE ROOM

The pressure respondents describe is not a lack of commitment to science. It sits in the **conditions** of academic work: workload, safety to speak, career security and confidence that institutions will act.

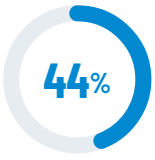
Respondents were clear about what should come first. **95%** chose a structural priority — workload, careers, or culture and leadership — as the most urgent area for improvement.

Why this brief. FEBS Constituent Societies asked for the findings to be shared beyond the 2026 FEBS Congress. As the FEBS committee responsible for education and training, we present them here with feasible, evidence-informed actions for societies and institutions.



say work spills into or takes over their personal time

211 of 246



work more than 50 hours a week, including evenings and weekends

108 of 246



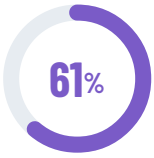
feel at least sometimes unsafe voicing concerns or disagreement

77 of 246



experienced frequent or near-constant work-related anxiety in the past month

107 of 246



rate their institution's response to wellbeing concerns as ineffective

150 of 246



are sceptical or not optimistic about real improvement within five years

172 of 246

INSIDE THIS BRIEF

01 Workload — p. 4

02 Safety & belonging — p. 5

03 Purpose & strain — p. 6

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30' Call to societies — p. 9

Voluntary, self-selected sample connected to FEBS networks (N = 246). Descriptive findings only; they indicate concerns and cannot be generalised to European academia as a whole.

ABOUT THE CONSULTATION

Why the FEBS Education & Training Committee asked

In 2026 the Committee placed academic wellbeing at the centre of its Education Special Session at the FEBS Congress. We wanted to understand the pressures affecting PhD students, postdocs, educators, supervisors and research leaders — and to help societies turn concern into action.

We asked a simple but rarely asked question: *how are you actually doing?* Not how the CV is progressing, but how people are coping in the conditions in which they teach, learn, supervise and do science.

HOW IT WAS CONDUCTED

- Anonymous online questionnaire, shared through FEBS Education Ambassadors, the FEBS Junior Section, FEBS networks, social media and academic contacts.
- Descriptive analysis of the full sample only. No breakdowns by demographic group, to protect anonymity.
- Self-selected respondents: views may over-represent those most motivated to answer. Two in three respondents are women, and country of work was not recorded.

TIMELINE

JANUARY 2026
ETC decides to investigate academic wellbeing and convene an Education Special Session

MAY 2026
Anonymous 30-item questionnaire opens: 6 demographic and 24 wellbeing questions

7 JULY 2026
Results presented at the FEBS Education Special Session, FEBS 2026 Congress, Maastricht (preliminary figures)

8 JULY 2026
Data cut-off: 246 responses included in this analysis

OCTOBER 2026
Brief report shared with Constituent Societies and institutions

TEN WELLBEING DOMAINS

Work–life balance · Workload & pressure · Psychological safety · Sense of purpose · Social connection · Mental health · Institutional support · Physical wellbeing · Flexibility & autonomy · Priorities & change

WHO ANSWERED 246

respondents — every career stage, from PhD students to principal investigators

66% identify as female

49% hold a permanent or tenured post

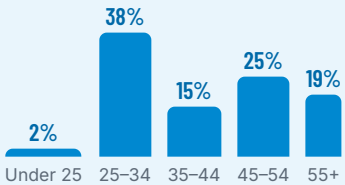
33% have worked in academia for more than 20 years

43% have caregiving responsibilities outside work

Academic role *(more than one could be selected)*



Age



How to read the figures. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number of all 246 respondents (245 where one answer is missing). Multi-select questions show the share choosing each option, so totals can exceed 100%. No causal claims or subgroup comparisons are made.

FINDING 1 · WORKLOAD

01 When pressure becomes the norm

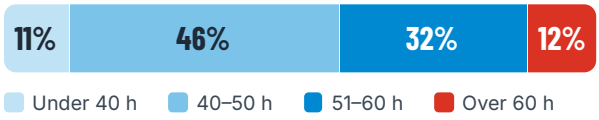
Overwork is not an exception for a few; it is the everyday setting for most respondents — and the pressures stack on the same people.

86%
say work spills into, regularly takes over, or leaves little room for personal time
211 of 246 respondents

44%
work more than 50 hours a week, including evenings and weekends
108 of 246 respondents

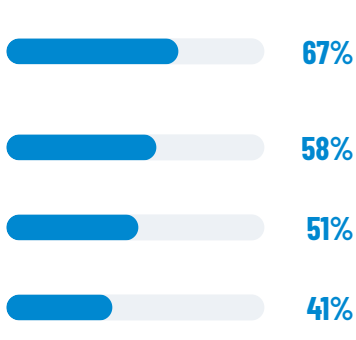
43%
find their workload often difficult to manage or consistently overwhelming
107 of 246 respondents

Typical weekly working hours



Nearly one in eight (12%) report working **more than 60 hours** a week.

Main sources of pressure *(select all that apply)*



These are overlapping demands, not isolated causes: **70%** name two or more.

WHAT THIS TELLS US

In a sample where half hold permanent posts and a third have spent more than 20 years in academia, overwork is reported as the everyday norm. The leading pressures — publication expectations, administrative processes and funding insecurity — are shaped largely by **systems rather than individual choices**. That is why the response must come from teams, institutions and societies together.

WHAT COULD CHANGE

Research teams
Make expectations on working hours and availability explicit. Agree priorities and realistic deadlines together.

Institutions
Remove unnecessary approvals and duplicated reporting. Recognise teaching and mentoring; assess quality, not output counts, in promotion.

Societies
Judge awards on narrative CVs, not journal metrics; offer carer support at meetings.

DISCUSSION STARTER

Which recurring demand could your team simplify or stop this year?

FINDING 2 · PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY & BELONGING

02 Speaking up carries a risk for many

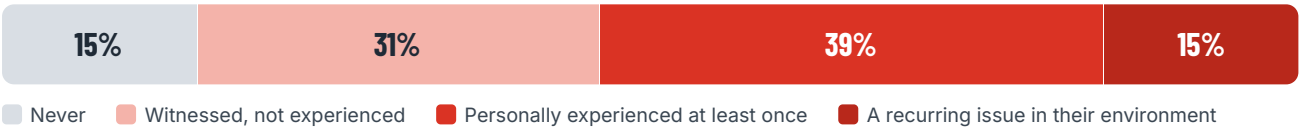
Beyond workload, the environment itself is a concern. Many respondents hold back their views or themselves, and very few have never encountered bullying, harassment or discrimination.

31%
feel sometimes or very unsafe expressing concerns or disagreement with colleagues or supervisors
77 of 246 respondents

24%
feel sometimes or very unsafe being their whole selves in their academic environment
60 of 246 respondents

27%
feel quite or very isolated from colleagues and their department community
66 of 246 respondents

Experience of bullying, harassment or discrimination in the academic environment *(one answer each, N = 245)*



Only 15% report **never** having experienced or witnessed it. **39%** (96 of 245) have personally experienced it at least once. The four answers are mutually exclusive; the last two should not be added together as personal experience.

Only 20% feel *very safe* to disagree, with open dialogue actively encouraged. Almost half (48%) feel mostly safe but sometimes self-censor.

26% believe that being LGBTQIA+ negatively affects a scientific career (63 of 245) — a signal about perceived inclusion.

WHAT THIS TELLS US

Safety to speak up is not a concern for a few: it shapes everyday academic life for most respondents. It is also something that **supervisors, institutions and societies can influence directly** — through how disagreement, mistakes and complaints are received.

WHAT COULD CHANGE

Supervisors & teams
Invite respectful disagreement and respond constructively to mistakes. Clarify authorship and feedback expectations; criticise privately and with respect.

Institutions
Provide confidential reporting with protection from retaliation, and report annually how concerns were resolved.

Societies
Adopt a code of conduct with named contacts at events. Support mentoring and peer networks across career stages.

DISCUSSION STARTER

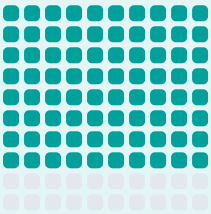
Can the least senior person in the room safely challenge an idea?

FINDING 3 · PURPOSE AND STRAIN

03 Committed to science, worn down by the system

Purpose remains strong, yet many report significant anxiety and have thought about leaving. The problem appears to lie less in the science than in the conditions around it.

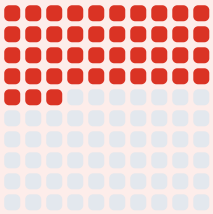
PURPOSE PERSISTS



80% often or almost always find their work meaningful and aligned with their values

198 of 246 · 22% "almost always"

STRAIN IS WIDESPREAD



43% experienced frequent or almost constant work-related anxiety causing significant distress in the past month

107 of 246

Have you ever considered leaving academia primarily due to mental-health or wellbeing concerns?



28% think about leaving **often**, or are already planning to leave or have reduced their involvement (69 of 246). Overall, **64%** have considered it at least occasionally.

30% rate their sleep in a typical working week as poor or very poor (73 of 246).

24% rarely or never engage in physical activity during a typical week (58 of 246).

WHAT THIS TELLS US

The survey does not establish why individuals feel distressed or think about leaving. It does show that reported pressures coexist with a strong sense of scientific purpose — pointing to action not on the science itself, but on the **conditions under which it is carried out.**

WHAT COULD CHANGE

Supervisors & teams

Make wellbeing a normal one-to-one topic, not only in a crisis; know where to refer. Model reasonable hours and rest.

Institutions

Make support visible and easy to reach — only 10% know it well and have used it — and pair it with action on working conditions.

Societies

Value teaching, mentoring and collegiality in awards; hold a research-culture session at every congress.

DISCUSSION STARTER

What keeps people here in science — and what pushes them out?

FINDING 4 · INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE

04 Confidence in institutions is weak

Support is seen as hard to find and slow to change practice. Respondents are asking less for more services than for the system to change.

61%
rate their institution's response to wellbeing concerns as mostly or completely ineffective
150 of 246 respondents

56%
feel supported in developing their career not at all or only to a small extent
136 of 245 respondents

59%
say their institution discusses, develops or rewards collegiality not at all or only a little
144 of 245 respondents

70%
are sceptical or not optimistic about meaningful improvement within five years
172 of 246 respondents

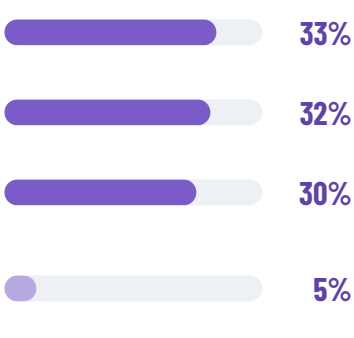
Awareness and use of institutional wellbeing resources

10%
are very aware of the resources **and have used them**

25%
do not know what exists, or say their institution offers no support

Support that people do not know about, or do not trust, cannot help them.

Most urgent area for improvement *(one answer each)*



95% chose a structural priority. This does not mean services are unimportant: reforms to working conditions, careers and leadership should accompany them.

WHAT THIS TELLS US

Respondents are not primarily asking for more wellbeing initiatives. Only 5% put mental-health and wellbeing resources first. In their view, wellbeing is **the product of better policies and practice** — not something to be treated after the fact.

WHAT COULD CHANGE

Institutions
Publish what has changed after staff and student consultation. Review workload, leadership practice and access to useful career guidance. Use existing HRS4R and CoARA reporting.

Research leaders
Hold regular, respectful career conversations — not only discussions of experimental progress.

Societies
Host cross-institution exchanges; share one practice example a year with FEBS ETC.

DISCUSSION STARTER

What improvement could your researchers see within 12 months?

A PRACTICAL ACTION AGENDA

Five actions to start now

Each action responds directly to what respondents reported. Most are feasible within existing structures and build on frameworks many institutions have signed (European Charter for Researchers, CoARA, MSCA Supervision Guidelines); adapt them locally, then evaluate. The survey is an indicator of concern, not an intervention trial, so measuring progress is part of every action.

01

Reduce avoidable overload

86% say work invades personal time; 58% cite administrative burden.

Audit recurring tasks. Simplify or stop one administrative workflow. Agree realistic expectations on hours and availability.

WHO LEADS
Heads of department, research team leaders

HOW YOU WILL KNOW
One workflow simplified or removed; a team agreement in place

02

Recognise supervision, teaching and mentoring as real work

41% name teaching and student duties as a main pressure; 59% see little recognition of collegiality.

Offer supervisor training and protected time. Make feedback, professional development and fair expectations routine. Count them in hiring, promotion and award criteria.

WHO LEADS
Graduate schools, institutions

HOW YOU WILL KNOW
Supervision counted in workload models; share of supervisors trained; criteria revised in at least one assessment procedure

03

Make speaking up safe

31% feel unsafe voicing disagreement; 39% have personally experienced bullying, harassment or discrimination.

Review how disagreements, errors, authorship and conduct concerns are handled. Ensure independent advice and protection from retaliation.

WHO LEADS
One named senior leader, with HR and ombuds services

HOW YOU WILL KNOW
A known, confidential pathway; staff and students aware of it

04

Put careers on the agenda

32% name career support and job security as the top priority; 56% feel little or no career-development support.

Hold regular career conversations, separate from progress meetings. Give timely guidance on academic and non-academic paths and contract transitions.

WHO LEADS
Principal investigators, career services, societies

HOW YOU WILL KNOW
Every early-career researcher has at least one career conversation a year

05

Show evidence of progress

61% find institutional responses ineffective; 70% doubt that much will change.

Choose two specific changes, name a responsible lead, set a 6–12-month review point — and report back.

WHO LEADS
Institutional leadership, society boards

HOW YOU WILL KNOW
A public "you said, we did" update within 12 months

FOR FEBS CONSTITUENT SOCIETIES

Thirty minutes that can change a year

At your next society meeting, dedicate 20–30 minutes to these findings. The aim is not another discussion of the problem, but a single, owned commitment.

0-5 MIN

Share

Present three findings from this brief that matter most locally.

5-15 MIN

Listen

Share anonymous input collected beforehand from PhD students and postdocs.

15-25 MIN

Choose

Agree ONE change, feasible within 12 months (see menu).

25-30 MIN

Commit

Name who will lead it and how progress will be checked.

ONE CHANGE. ONE LEAD. ONE YEAR.

THREE QUESTIONS FOR YOUR NEXT MEETING

1. Which pressure can we realistically reduce?
2. Where do students and colleagues need safer, clearer or more supportive academic relationships?
3. What specific change will we evaluate and report back on within one year?

TELL US WHAT YOU TRY

The Committee welcomes examples of local practice — and of the obstacles you meet. They will inform future FEBS education and training activities and help other societies move faster.

A STARTING MENU FOR SOCIETIES

- Code of conduct with named event contacts
- Carer support at meetings
- Early-career board seat
- Mentoring in award criteria
- Research-culture session at congress
- Peer mentoring

> **Commit:** "We will [change] by [date], led by [name]. We will know because [indicator], and will report to members at [event]."

YOUR 12-MONTH PATH

NEXT MEETING
Choose ONE change and name who will lead it.

FIRST WEEKS
Agree how progress will be checked, and who to involve.

MONTH 6
Review point: what has moved, what is blocked?

MONTH 12
Report back to members — and share your example with the FEBS ETC.

ABOUT THE COMMITTEE

FEBS Education & Training Committee

The Education and Training Committee leads FEBS action on teaching and training in the molecular life sciences for a community of **39 Constituent Societies and more than 30,000 members**. Through Joint Workshops, Supported Society Events, the Education Ambassadors network, Education National Lectures, Education Awards, certified Education and Training Academy modules and its Education and Training Conference series, the Committee connects educators across Europe and turns shared evidence into practice.

PREPARED BY

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

FEBS Network: *Wellbeing in the Academic World: What 246 European Biochemists and Life Scientists Told Us.* network.febs.org
FEBS Network: *Wellbeing in Academia: A Conversation Worth Having at the FEBS Congress 2026 Education Special Session.* network.febs.org

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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FEBS Education and Training Committee (2026). *Academic Wellbeing in the Molecular Life Sciences: key findings and actions from the 2026 FEBS consultation survey.* Brief report, October 2026.

Data and interpretation. FEBS 2026 consultation workbook (N = 246, responses to 8 July 2026). Every figure in this brief was recalculated from the raw response categories. Results are descriptive, drawn from a voluntary, non-representative FEBS-connected sample, and are not a clinical assessment. A fuller scientific manuscript is in preparation separately.

Responsible use. The survey collected sensitive information. This brief reports only aggregated, full-sample findings. Any further use of individual-level data must follow appropriate ethics and data-protection review.

Science remains meaningful. Now let's fix the conditions around it.

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