

Overtime Hours of the Junior Researchers at the University of Zurich



A Survey Conducted by the Swiss Public Sector Union | Verband des Personals öffentlicher Dienste Zürich (VPOD Zürich)

Survey conducted between April 23 and May 15, 2021

Introduction

The VPOD Zurich is a recognized social partner of the Canton of Zurich and thus also of the University of Zurich (UZH) and represents the concerns of employees vis-à-vis the university executive board, among others. Time and again, members have contacted the VPOD because they have a part-time position at the university, are paid accordingly, but are expected to work 100%.

In the general outlines of rights and responsibilities (“Rahmenpflichtenhefte”), the University of Zurich defines time allocations for employees on qualification positions indicating how many hours are dedicated to their own qualification and to what extent they can be deployed for teaching and other tasks. Here, too, there is a discrepancy between the guidelines and actual practice.

According to § 33 of the Employment Ordinance of the University of Zurich, members of the mid-level staff and the teaching staff (i.e. junior researchers as well as senior researchers and teaching staff) are not required to fill in time sheets. However, it is not possible for employees to claim compensation for overtime – to which they would be legally entitled – without time sheets that have been signed off by the supervisor.

In order to gain a better understanding of the issue of overtime hours for junior researchers, the VPOD conducted a survey among this target group in Spring 2021.

**«Thank you for this survey, you are thereby
addressing an enormous problem!!»**

Comment by a survey participant*

**«I have the feeling that many supervisors expect overtime,
as an indicator, so to speak, that one is cut out for
academia.»**

Comment by a survey participant

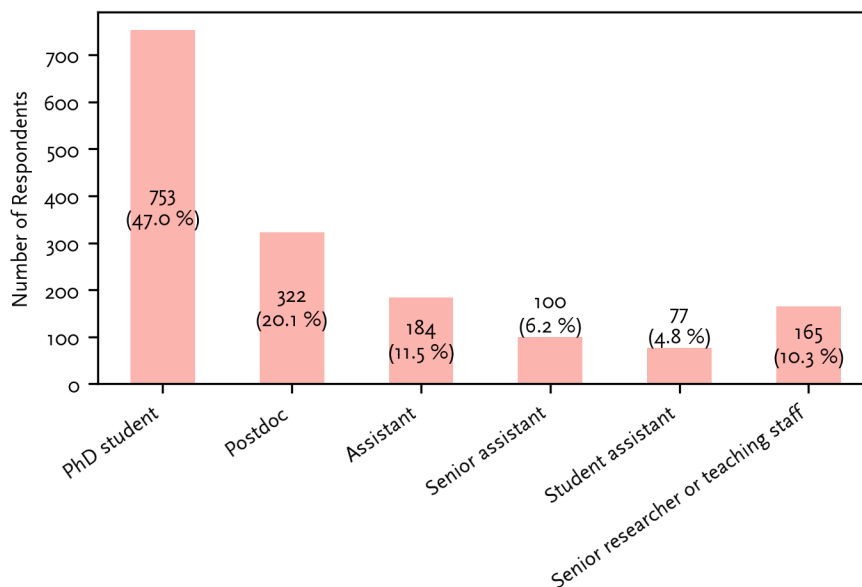
*all comments by survey participants have been translated into English by us

Basic Data

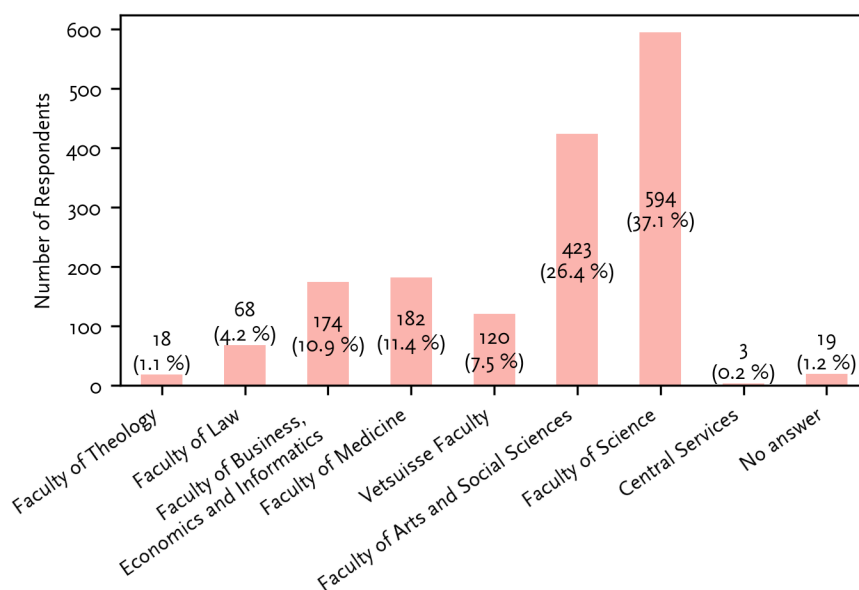
A total of **1,601 respondents** took part in the survey (this corresponds to approximately 27% of the UZH's mid-level staff¹).

We had respondents in all of the categories of persons surveyed, doctoral students, however, were the most frequent. Likewise, employees from all of the faculties participated in the survey, with the largest group working for the Faculty of Science. The vast majority of respondents have a fixed-term employment contract.

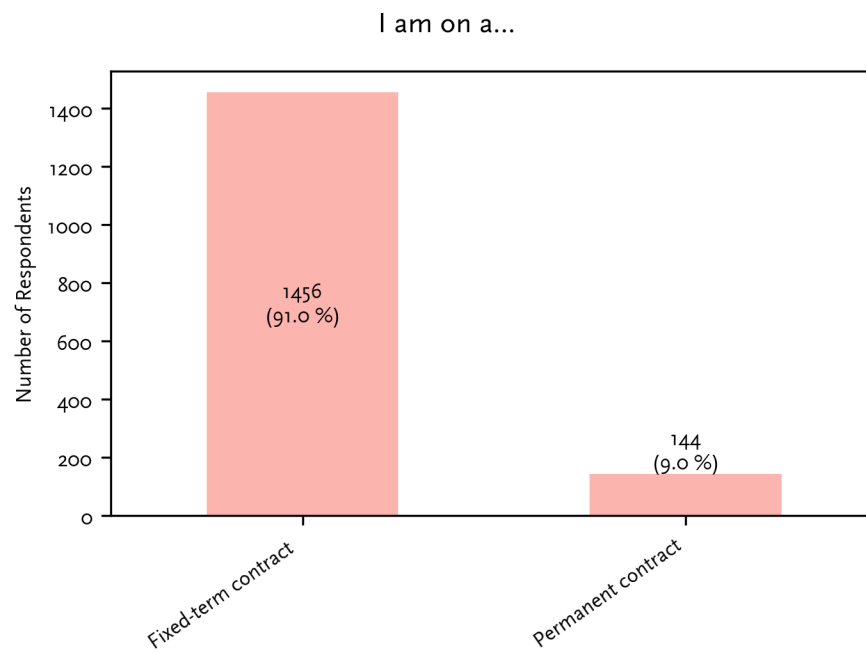
I am employed as...



I work at the...



¹ According to the annual report of the University of Zurich, 5,861 employees belong to the midlevel staff in 2020.



Frequent Extra Hours

The survey participants were asked whether they regularly work more hours than what their contracts stipulate. **73.5 %** of all of the respondents replied with yes. For doctoral students, the percentage was even as high as **81.7 %**. According to the survey, the least affected by extra hours are the student assistants with 28.6 % of yes responses.

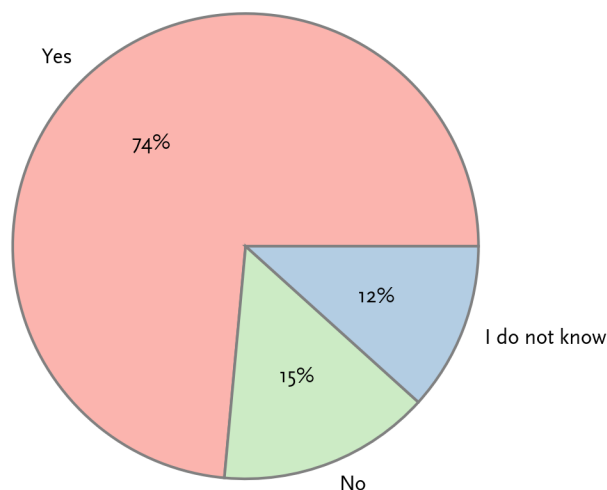
Employees from all the faculties indicated in the survey that they regularly work extra hours. The most affected are people working for the **Faculty of Medicine (82.4 %)**, the **Faculty of Science (81.3 %)** or the **Vetsuisse Faculty (78.3 %)**.

The percentage of yes responses differs only slightly between persons on fixed-term contracts (74.9 %) and those on permanent contracts (59.0 %).

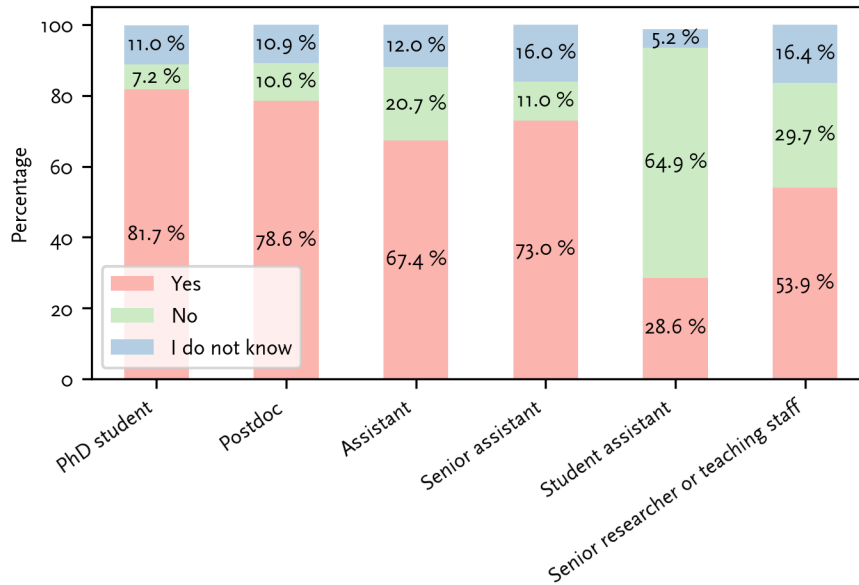
«Officially, I was hired on a 60% contract. However, I'm expected to work 100% and not supposed to take on additional jobs.»

Comment by a survey participant

I regularly work more than contracted

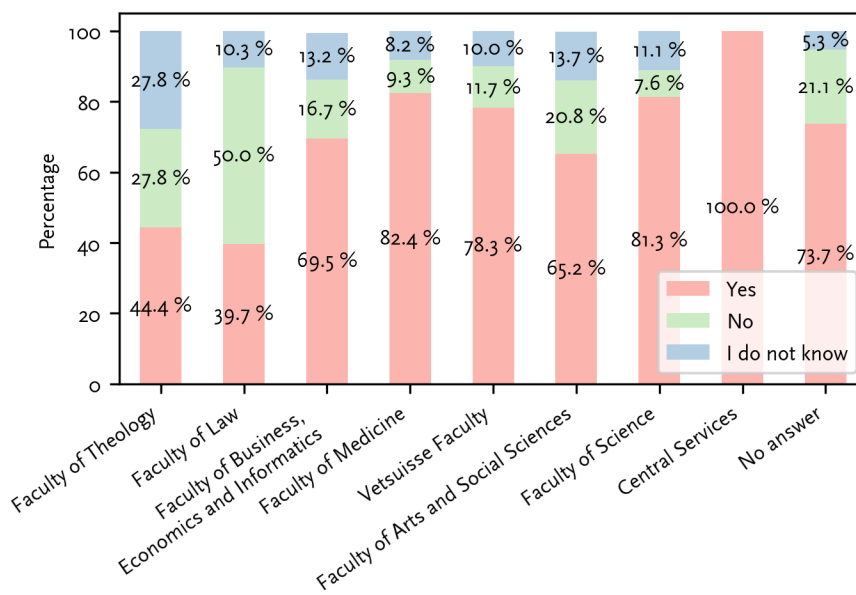


I regularly work more than contracted



«A contract for 100% employment with the same annual salary would be fair rather than these crooked percentages that lead to disadvantages in taxes and retirement provision and are anything but truthful.»

I regularly work more than contracted



The survey participants (who stated that they regularly work overtime) were asked how many hours they work more **per week** than contractually agreed. 21.5 % stated that they work up to 5 hours more than what their contracts stipulate. For 31.5%, the extra hours amount to between 5 and 10 hours. **Almost half (47%)** reported working **10 or more hours per week** in addition to their contracted hours – **14%** even **more than 20 hours**.

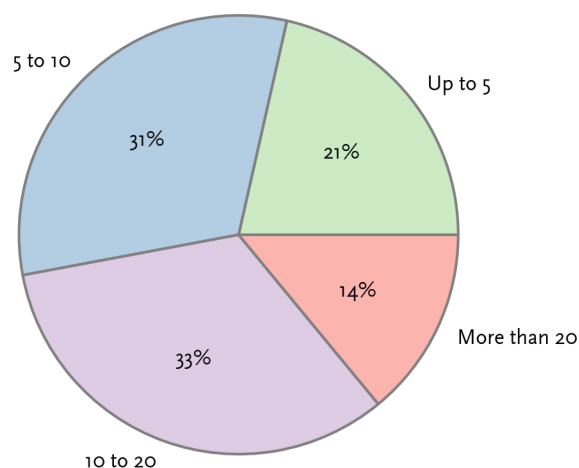
Doctoral students are the ones who report the highest overtime hours. **65%** of those working extra hours reported working 10 hours or more per week in addition to their contracted workload.

There is no significant difference in the overtime hours between faculties. Only the employees at the Faculty of Law reported fewer extra hours compared to the other faculties.

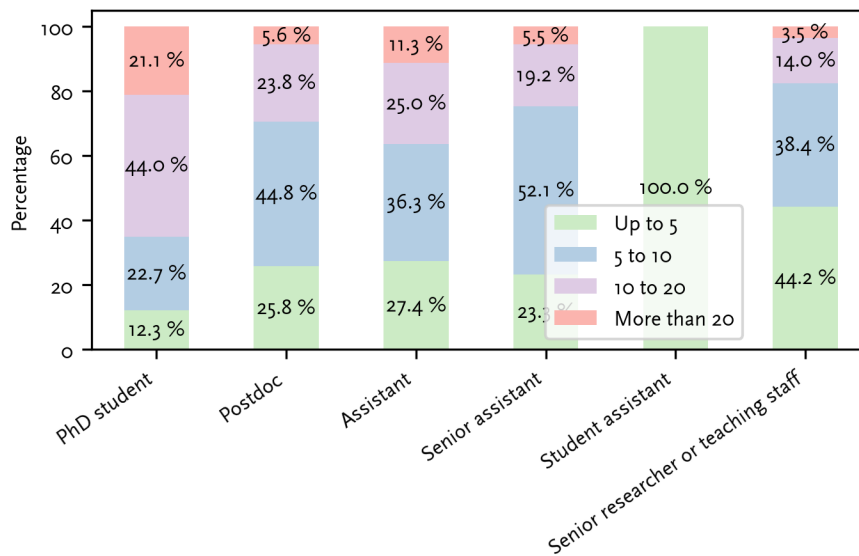
«We have endless overtime, sometimes it's even more than 30 hours extra per week!!»

Comment by a survey participant

On average I work ... hours
more per week than I am contracted for.



On average I work ... hours
more per week than I am contracted for.



«A doctoral student will never graduate on a 60% contract without the accumulation of significant overtime. ... I think it is a real pity that our work receives this little recognition with the current salary, even though we contribute significantly to research as well as to the education of other students.»

Comment by a survey participant

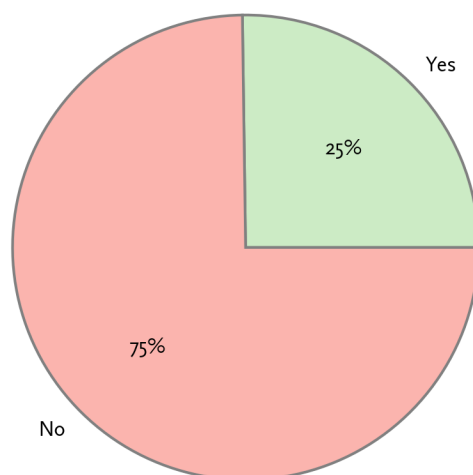
Time Sheets

Overall, **25.2 %** of the survey participants stated that they filled in a time sheet. For doctoral and post-doctoral students, the number drops to under 20%. Only for two of the faculties (Law and Vetsuisse), more than 40 % of the respondents stated that they record their working hours.

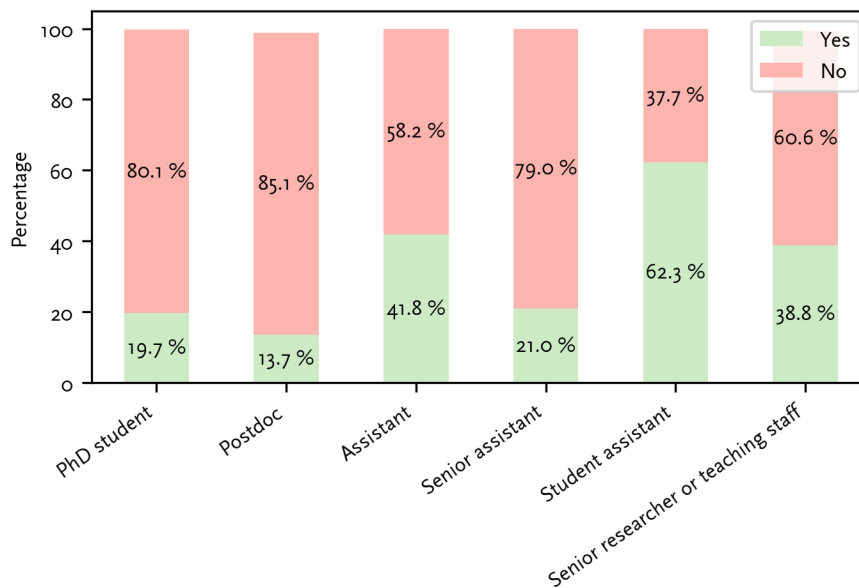
«My boss doesn't look at time sheets, because we don't have to fill them in/shouldn't fill them in/are allowed not to fill them in. According to her, working overtime is part of the training and thus you cannot be compensated.»

Comment by a survey participant

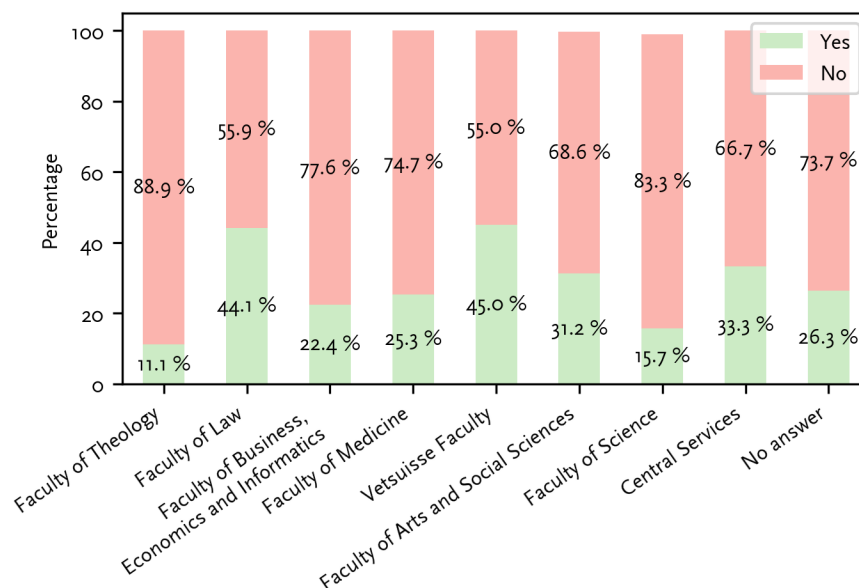
I fill in a time sheet



I fill in a time sheet

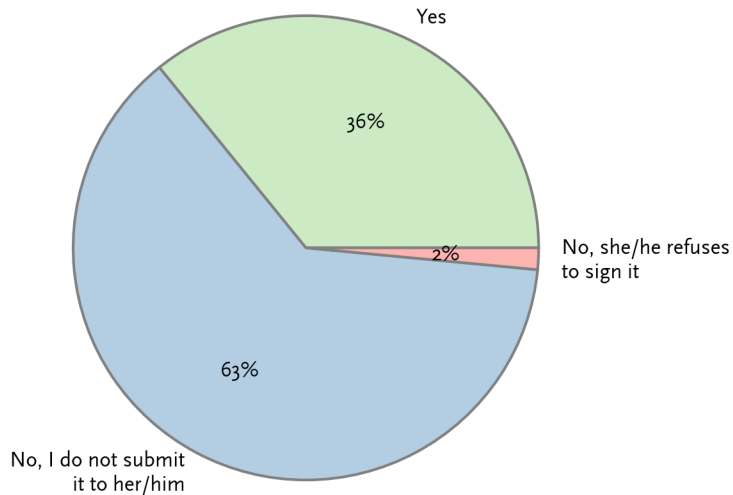


I fill in a time sheet



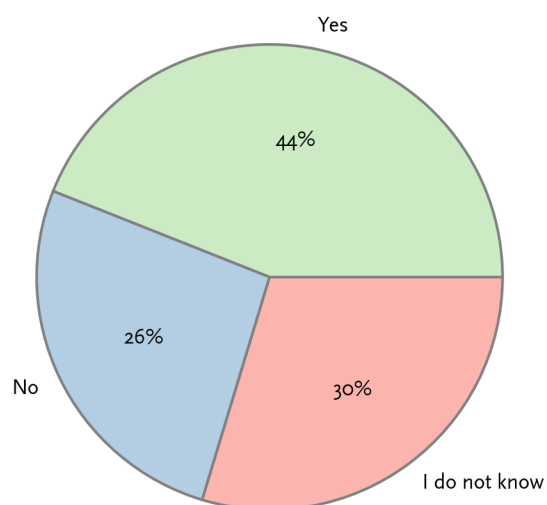
Those employees who stated that they filled in a time sheet (25.2%) were additionally asked whether these were signed off by their supervisors. This is the case for 35.8 %. **However, 62.7 % do not submit their time sheets to their supervisors.** Only in a few cases do the supervisors refuse to sign off on the time sheets. There is no significant difference in response rates regarding the type of employment or the faculty for which the respondents work.

Is the time sheet signed by the line manager/supervisor?



44 % of the survey participants think it would be useful if all employees filled in time sheets, approximately a third is unsure. 26.3 % are against it. At three faculties (Law, Medicine and Vetsuisse), more than 50% would welcome it if everyone had to fill in time sheets. The approval rate for making time bookkeeping obligatory outbalances the dismissal in all faculties (except for the three survey participants from the Central Services) and in all types of employment (except for senior researchers or teaching staff).

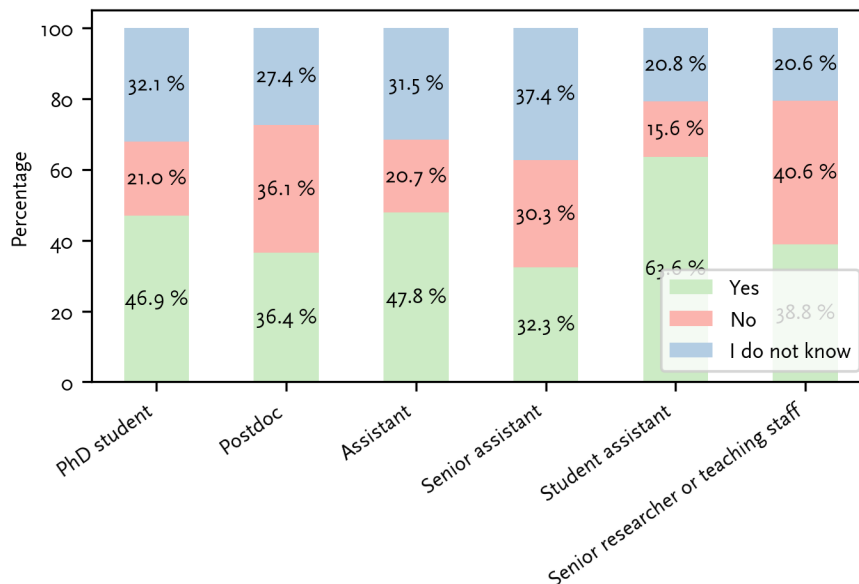
I think it would make sense if all mid-level staff kept a time sheet



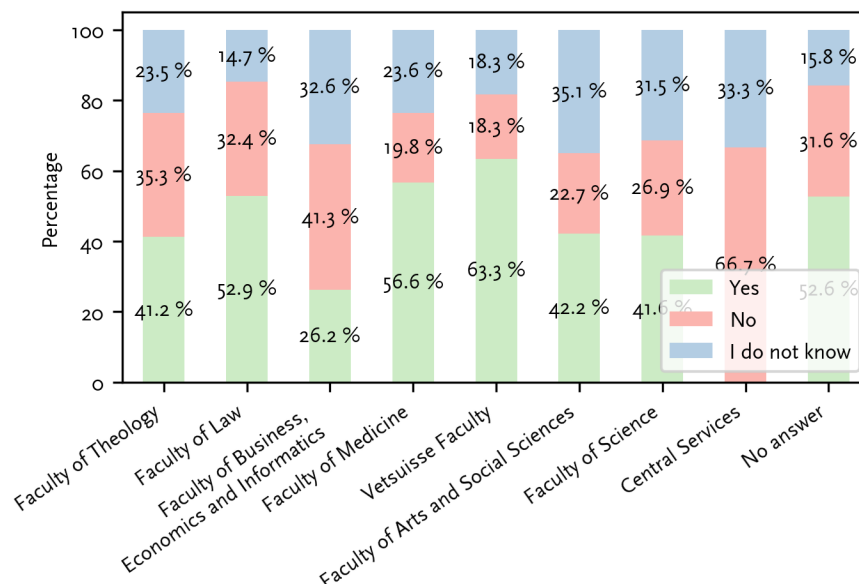
«In general, I think time sheets would be useful to limit exploitation and improve awareness of the work done by the mid-level staff.»

Comment by a survey participant

I think it would make sense if all mid-level staff kept a time sheet



I think it would make sense if all mid-level staff kept a time sheet



«I am skeptical whether time sheets are the right instrument. The pressure on early career researchers is due to structural reasons, including fixed-term contracts and high competition.»

Comment by a survey participant

Conclusion

The survey clearly shows that all groups of academic staff at all of the faculties work extra hours on a regular basis. Three quarters of the employees are affected by this. Particularly striking is how high number of overtime hours exceeding contractual compensation is. For 65% of the doctoral students surveyed, the number of overtime hours is 10 or more per week.

Only a quarter of those surveyed fill out time sheets. However, over 40% would welcome the general introduction of time bookkeeping. A quarter of respondents is against it. In the comments section of the survey various concerns were raised in this regard, in particular namely that time bookkeeping should not lead to restrictions in the flexibility of working hours and that the handling of such a time bookkeeping tool should be as simple as possible.

«It would be essential to not only keep time sheets, but also to be reimbursed for overtime or to be able to compensate for it respectively.»

Comment by a survey participant

For the VPOD it is clear that the current situation needs to be improved urgently. It is not worthy of a university that their junior researchers do not get compensated for this many overtime hours! We therefore call on the university executive board to take measures to improve the current situation and, in particular, to consider the introduction of mandatory time bookkeeping.

«In addition to keeping time sheets, it would be important to have clear job specifications that state, even more clearly than is already the case, teaching, supervision and research activities.»

Comment by a survey participant

VPOD Zurich – Your Union

Swiss Public Sector Union organizes around 33,000 employees in Switzerland. Whether you are a teacher or a nurse, a university employee or a librarian, a city gardener or a social worker, a public transport employee or a firefighter - anyone who performs public services is a part of us!

Your membership supports the VPOD's engagement for all of the sectors of the public services. The VPOD is exclusively financed through membership fees, which is great as it allows the VPOD to remain politically and financially independent.

We, the VPOD members of the University of Zurich, organize ourselves in our own group. In regular meetings, we exchange ideas, participate in consultations, network and launch projects or initiatives.

Are you interested in our union work? Do you have questions related to your working conditions? Or are you interested in becoming a member of the VPOD?

Contact us: www.vpod.uzh.ch | vpod@websites.uzh.ch

Or contact the regional office Zurich:

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