



**Fire Brigades Union**

*Campaigning for Firefighters and Emergency Fire Control Staff*

**MERSEYSIDE FIRE BRIGADES UNION**

**BULLYING, HARASSMENT AND**

**INTIMIDATION**

**QUESTIONNAIRE FINDINGS**

## Comment on Merseyside FBU's survey on "Bullying, Harassment and Intimidation"

Merseyside FBU has recently carried out a survey of its members' perceptions of bullying and harassment in the Merseyside organisation, which bears witness to a hostile and intimidating work environment with the relationship with management on the brink of collapse. When 98% of respondents consider bullying to be a serious problem within their organisation and nearly two out of three perceive themselves to be bullied, it is time for management to listen and pay attention to the results. And although there are some weaknesses in the survey's design with the term bullying possibly used too loosely, this should not deflect from the sheer weight of the findings of the survey. The scale and frequency of exposure to negative behaviour associated with bullying reported in the survey, as well as FBU members' own description of their experience, both indicate a widespread perception among organisational members of an oppressive and disciplinarian work regime with relationships sharply deteriorating in the aftermath of the national dispute. The fact that nine out of ten respondents do not feel that it is safe to use the organisation's own anti-bullying policy should act as a signal that something is seriously wrong and demands a serious, constructive and conciliatory response from management as well as the union.

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### Selected publications:

Hoel, H. & Beale, D. (2006) Workplace bullying, psychological perspectives and industrial relations: towards a contextualised and interdisciplinary approach. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 44, 239-262.

Hoel, H., Faragher, B. & Cooper, C.L. (2004) Bullying is detrimental to health, but all bullying behaviours are not necessarily equally damaging. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 32, 367-387.

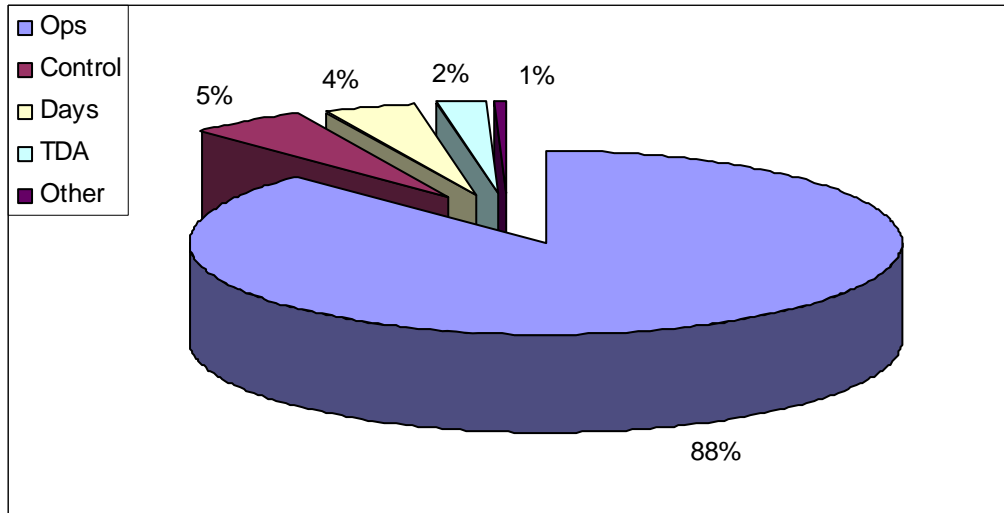
Hoel, H., Cooper, C.L & Faragher, B. (2001) Workplace bullying in Great Britain: The impact of occupational status, *European Journal of Work and Organisational Psychology*, 10, 443-465

Hoel, H, Einarsen, S. & Cooper, C.L. (2003) Organisational effects of bullying. In S. Einarsen, H. Hoel, D. Zapf & C.L Cooper, C.L. *Bullying and Emotional Abuse in the Workplace: International Perspectives in Research and Practice* (145-161), London: Taylor & Francis.

Rayner, C., Hoel, H. & Cooper, C.L. (2002) *Workplace Bullying: What we know, who is to blame and what can we do?* London: Taylor & Francis. (210 pages)

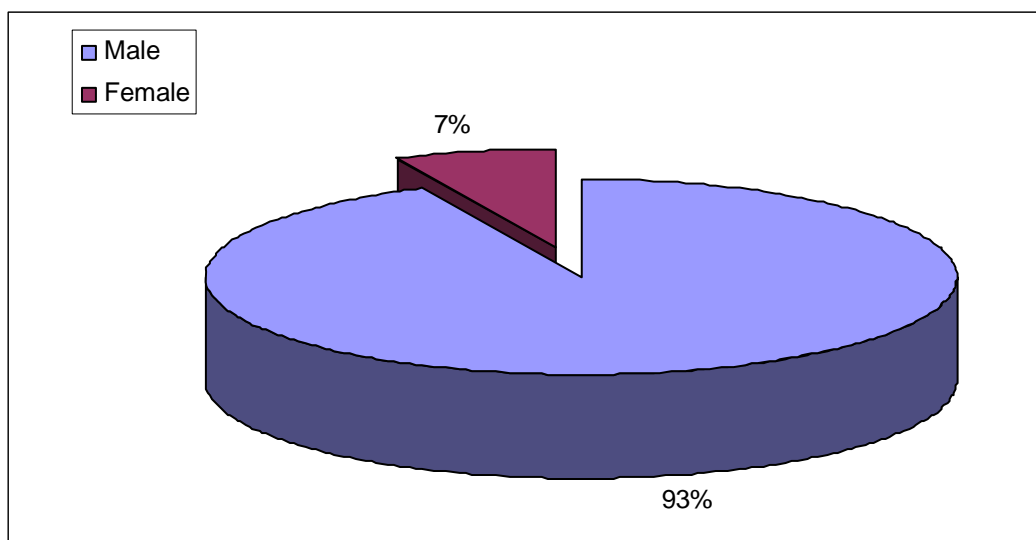
## Question 1

Where do you work?



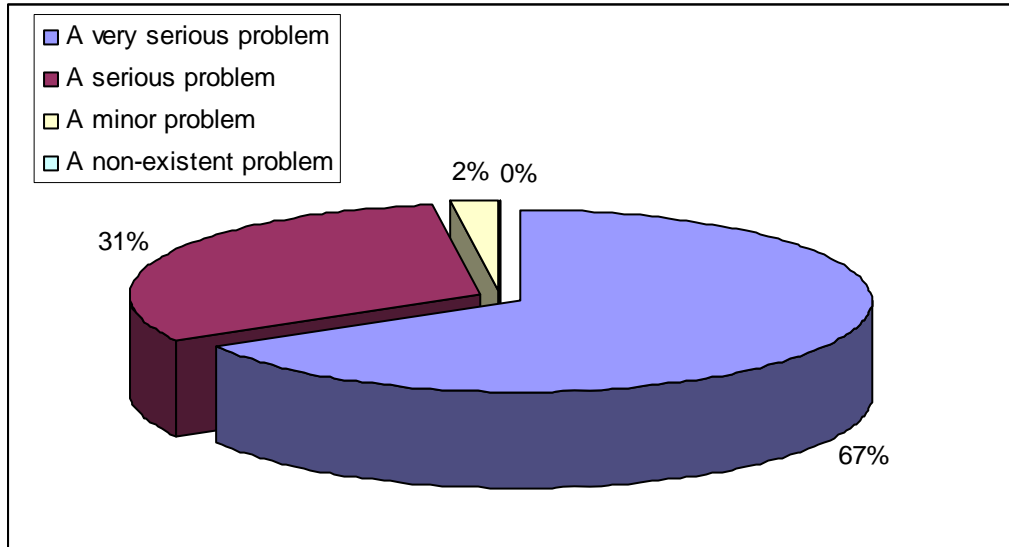
## Question 2

Are you Male or Female?



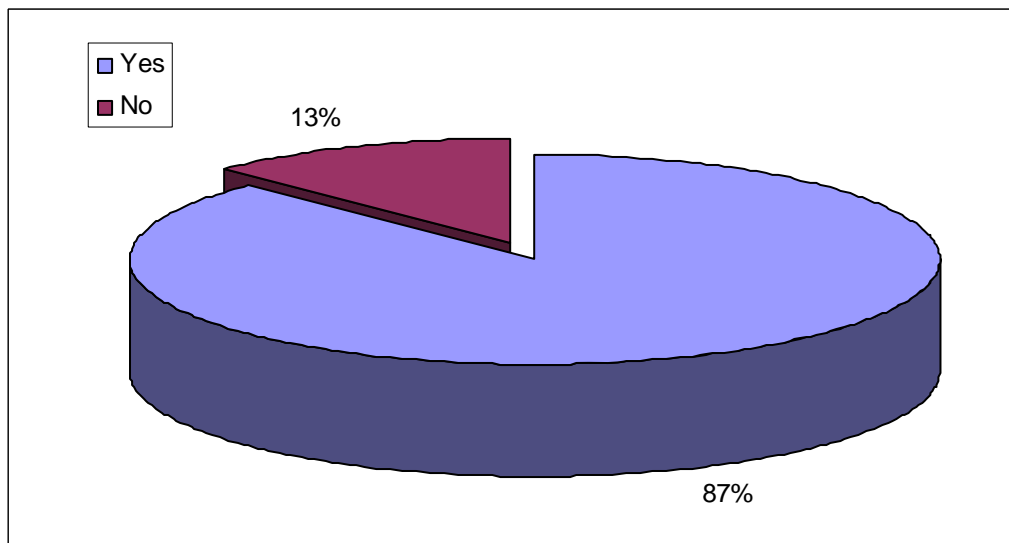
### Question 3

Is bullying within MF&RS.....



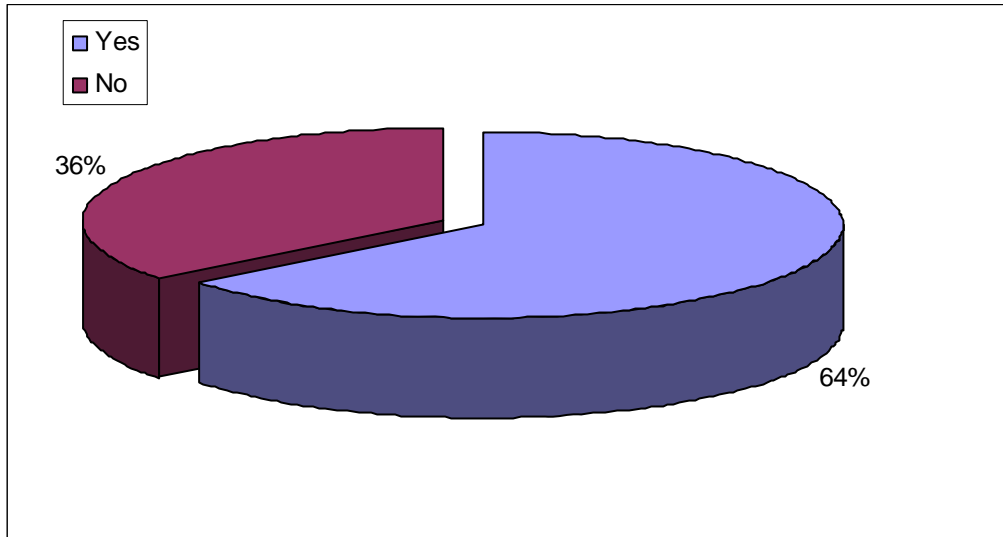
### Question 4

Have you ever been bullied at your place of work?



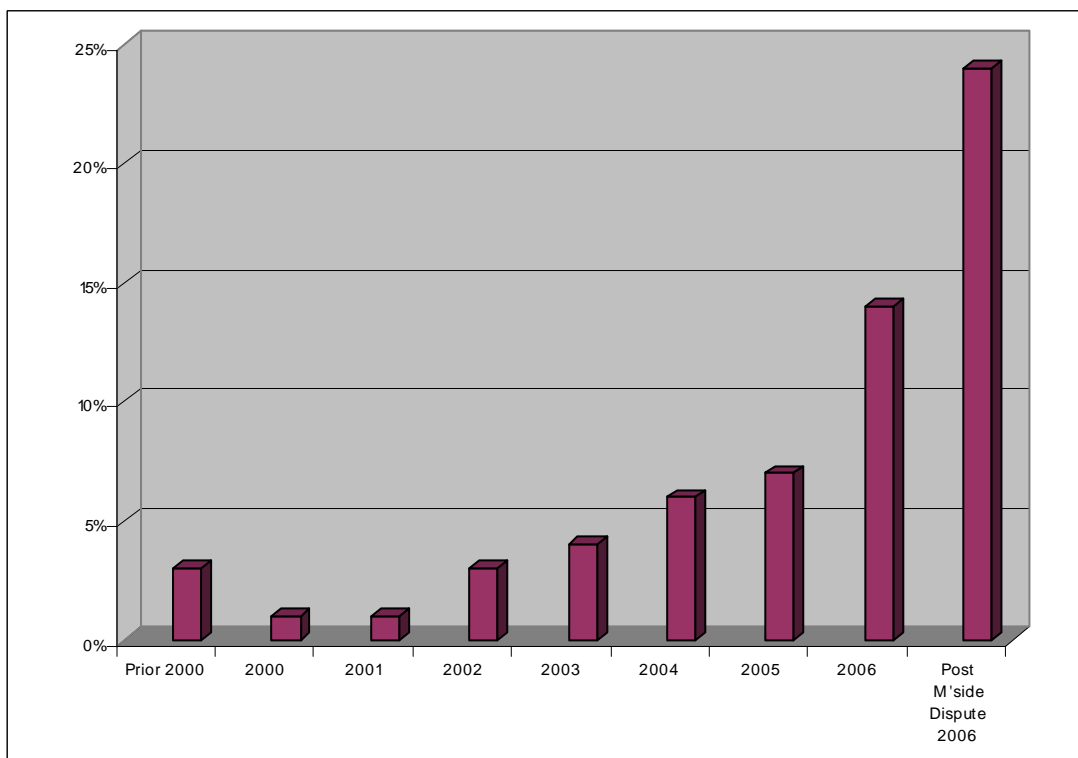
## Question 5

Are you currently being bullied?



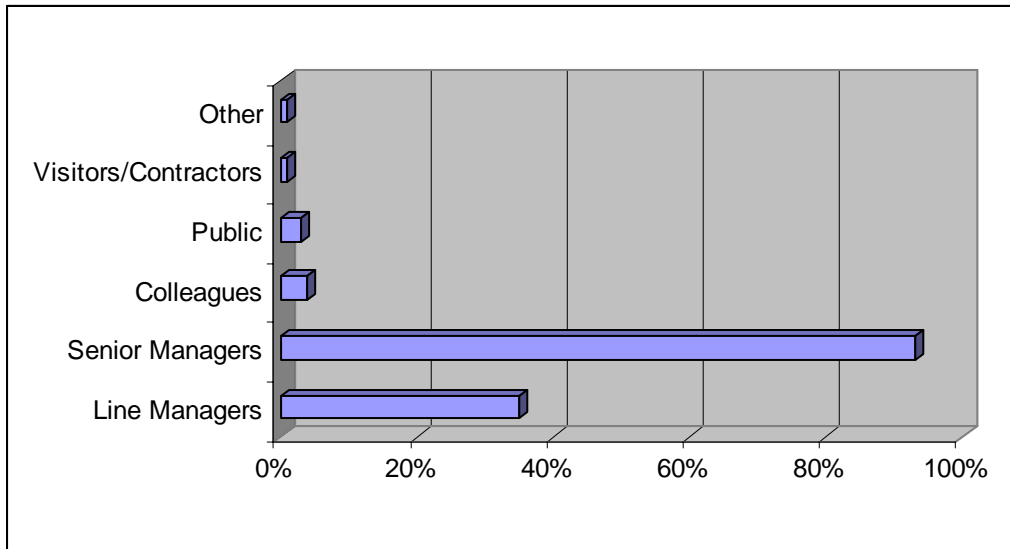
## Question 6

If you answered "Yes" to question 5 when did the bullying start?



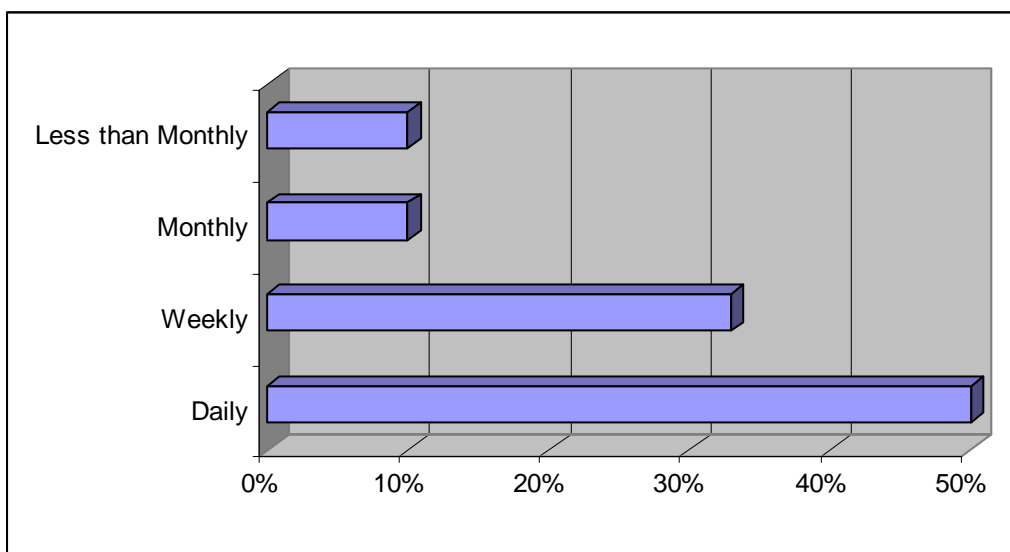
## Question 7

What are the main sources of bullying?



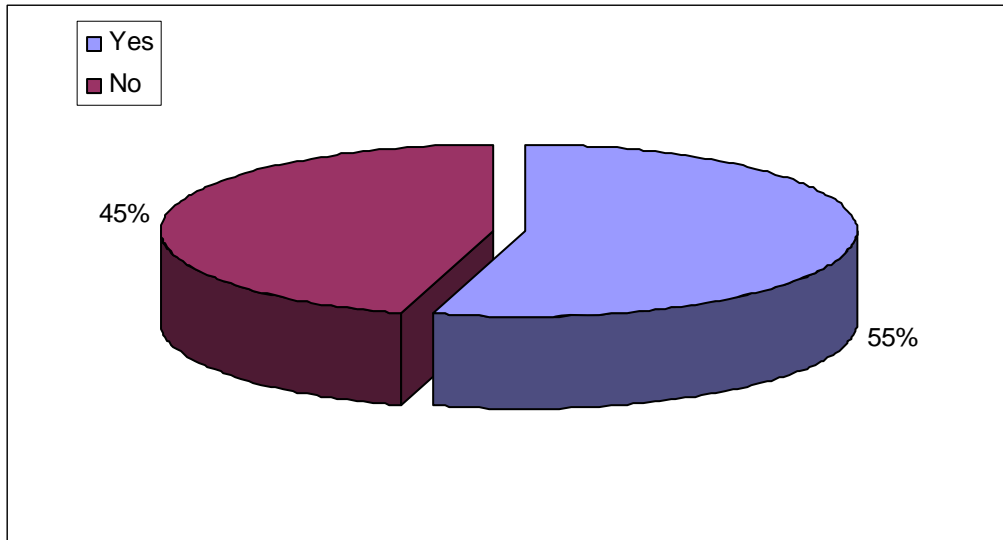
## Question 8

How often does the bullying happen?



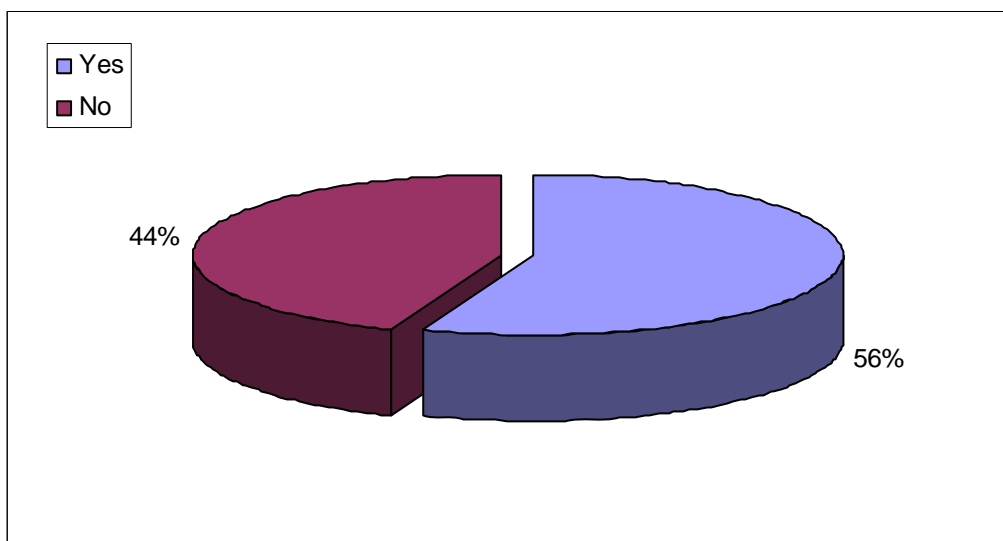
### Question 9

Have you or other staff in your section/department ever had time off because of bullying?



### Question 10

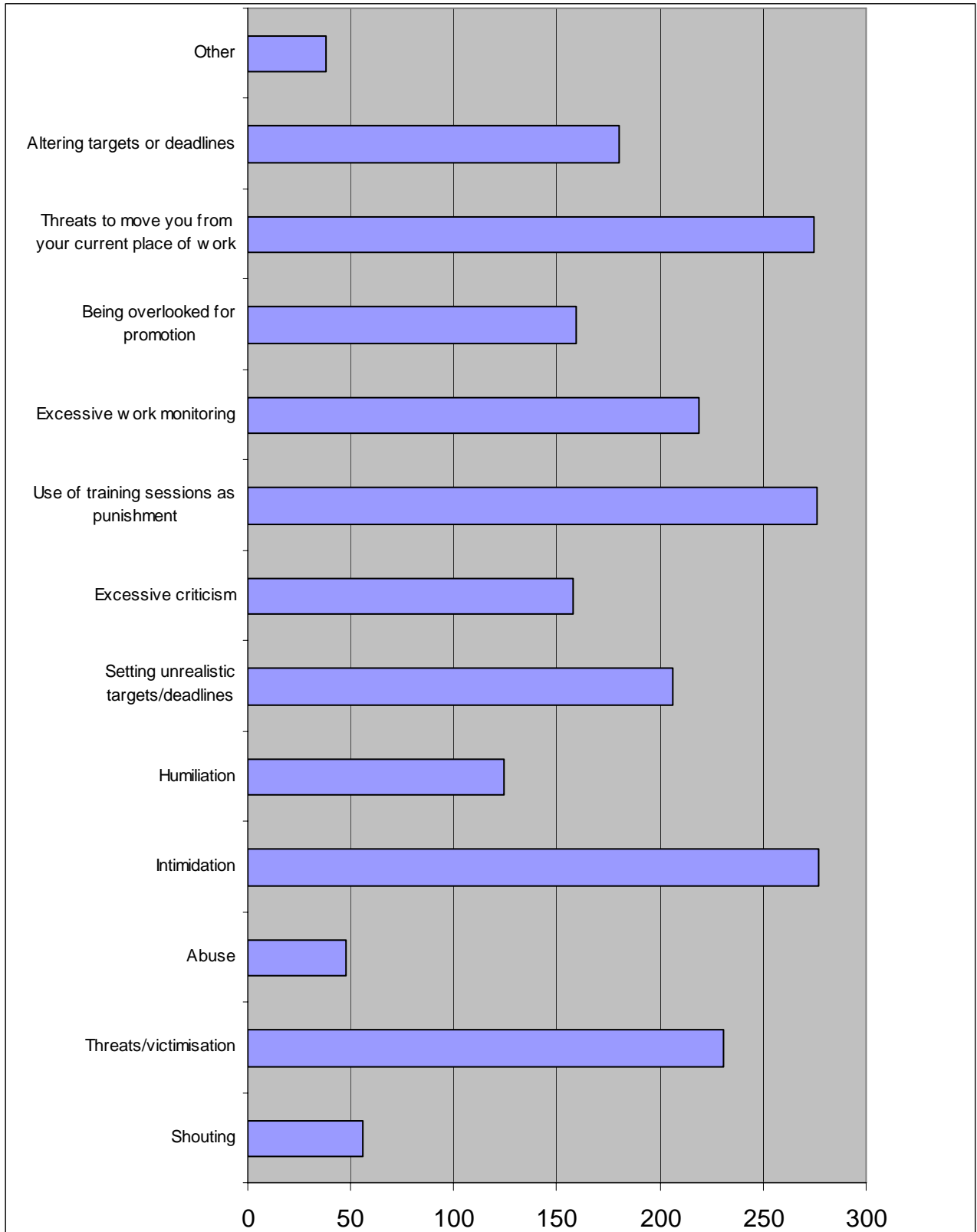
Have any staff moved from your section/department to another section/department because of bullying?



If Yes, how many? Average answer was 2.

## Question 11

What form does the bullying take?



Respondents supplied under "Others" examples they considered to be forms of Bullying, Harassment and intimidation within MF&RS.

Some of these examples follow-

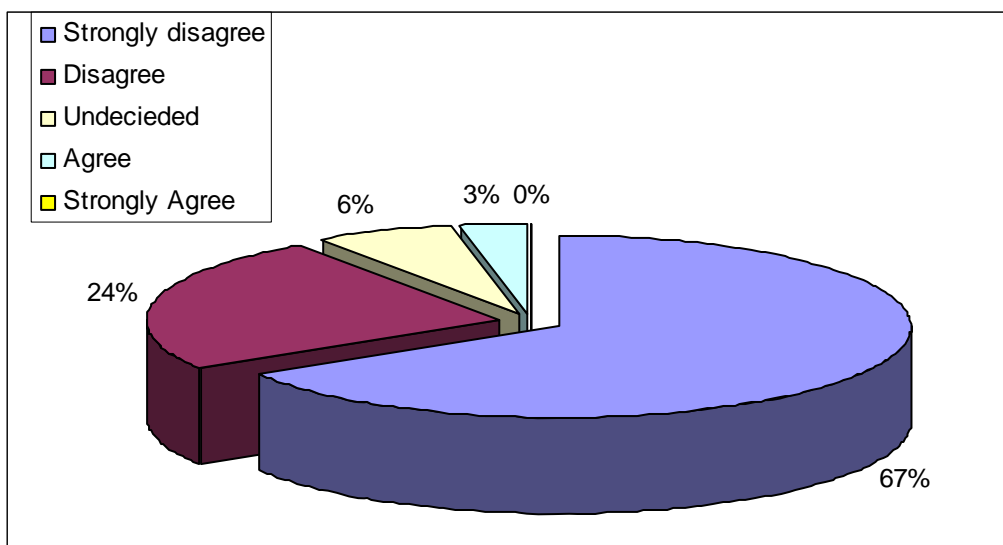
1. Being ordered to cold call.
2. Punishment postings.
3. Mutual exchange facility being removed and failure by management to give any reason (RRT).
4. Constant contradictions, making conversation and communication non-existent, two qualities that are invaluable in our work.
5. Changing the rules without negotiation or passing down the changes to the rules.
6. Intimidating e-mails.
7. Aggressive behaviour.
8. Misuse of disciplinary procedures.
9. Being ignored and excluded.
10. Condescending comments and behaviour.
11. FBU members being bypassed for promotion.
12. Loss of pay due to the Rank to Role process.
13. Being barred from using secured procedures and refusal to recognise and investigate bullying by management.
14. Being "sent to Coventry".
15. Using appraisals as discipline.
16. Constant harassment because of union membership.

17. Mistrust in others and lies.
18. Refusal of transfer request even though it is financially in MF&RS interests.
19. Criticism of union members to other staff.
20. Being forced to go against trade union policy.
21. Ordered off station for trying to hold a union meeting.
22. Being forced to sit and listen to principal management propaganda with no right to respond.
23. New appraisal system used punitively.
24. Intimidation of trade union officials.
25. Management "cherry picking" from SOP's and not adhering to own policies.
26. Threats about career prospects.
27. Unfair and illegal absence monitoring.
28. Not following procedures, protracted discipline and grievances also bullying by discipline when returning to work after sickness.
29. Constant talk of "black marks" against your name.
30. Undermining of your position to other colleagues.
31. Removal of memorabilia from station without owners consent.
32. Use of ground rules and bullying policy to bully and intimidate workforce.
33. Being refused essential training courses and courses being cancelled.

## Question 12

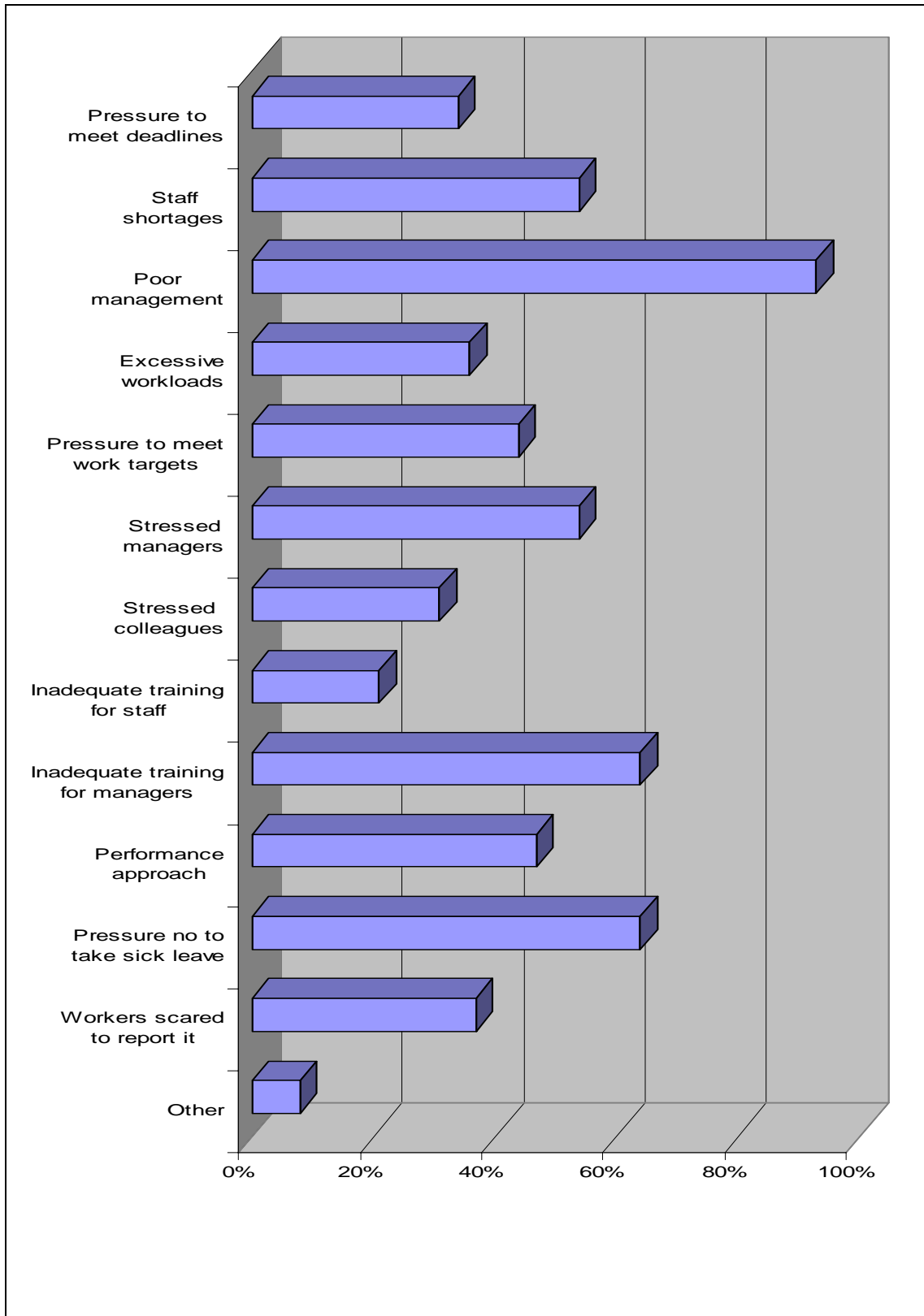
Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statement.

“I am treated with respect by management and the people I work with”



## Question 13

What do you think causes bullying?



Under “Others” respondents identified other reasons as to what they consider causes bullying.

### Examples of answers follow-

1. Managers using the bullying environment in which we work as a tool to advance their careers.
2. There are many types but most recently it feels organised and co-ordinated by the whole of senior management. It is politically motivated and has a purpose.
3. Childishness and bitterness after recent dispute.
4. It is institutionalised; FF's are the “poor relation”.
5. Corruption and intimidation from the management.
6. Leaving temporary ranks in situ for years with threats of demotion.
7. Sick child/ Divorce.
8. If you report anything you are posted.
9. Pressure to carry out work against Service, Union and Authority policy i.e. Cold calling
10. Station Managers not being left alone to manage their stations.
11. Vindictiveness from senior management.
12. Dishonest managers with hidden and punitive personal agendas.
13. Dictatorial Principal management.
14. Inadequate managers grouping together and intimidating colleagues.

15. Managers at all levels unable or unwilling to question decisions or guidelines given them by their superiors.
16. Bullying has taken place by middle management because they have been bullied and threatened by senior officers. It appears they have been told to implement policies at all costs regardless of their own professional opinions.
17. Management/Ranks promoted above their ability and not confident enough in the job they have been given. Only promoted for being "yes staff" terrified to question senior management and make sensible decisions themselves.
18. A culture of management over a sustained period, using recent industrial action to threaten and intimidate workers.
19. I believe that it is corporate policy to force through management views without any discussion.
20. Some managers bully because they are being bullied themselves.
21. Managers always accepting another manager's version of events and always assuming anyone below their rank is untruthful.

## Question 14

What measures would you like to see to reduce bullying?

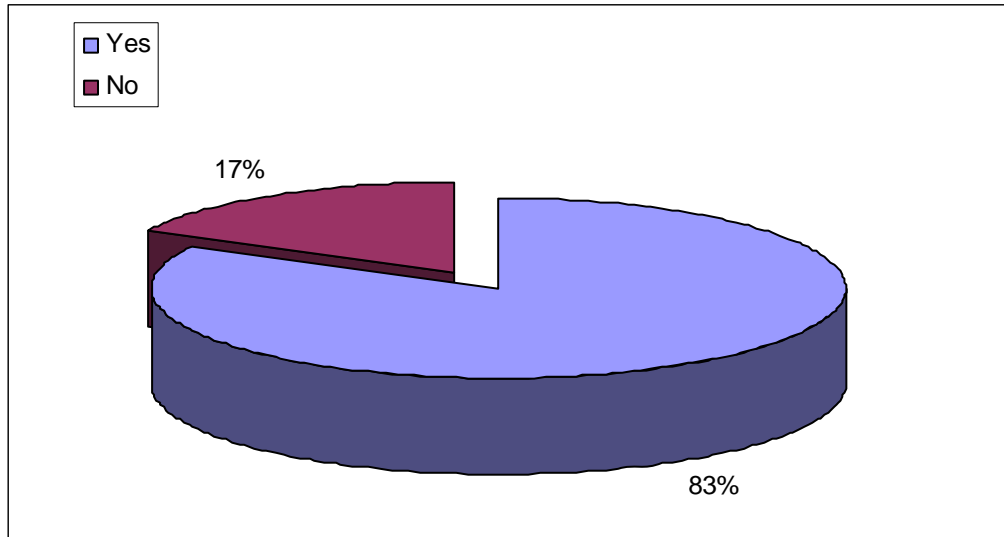
Below is a small sample of 100's of answers provided- (Respondents felt the need to identify individuals within MF&RS who they allege to have bullied them, although the same names occur many times they have been omitted from this list)

1. Loss of rank if proven.
2. Senior management to attend staff management course.
3. Senior management reprimanded by the Authority or the courts.
4. Equality at work for FBU members.
5. This Brigade has adopted a Bullying culture, which is a poor way of managing a workforce and until these bullies are thrown out morale and relations will continue to deteriorate.
6. Management to realise they are employees of MF&RS and work together with grass roots to provide the service we are employed for.
7. Senior Officers to spend time talking to FF's and listening to their viewpoints and having the courage to act on their "viewpoints"
8. Laid down procedures for conflict resolution adhered to.
9. Treat people with dignity and respect and management abide by their own "Fairness at Work Policy"

10. I would like to see managers revert back to managing, value their workforce and concentrate their energies in the right areas of the Fire Service rather than trying to build their own personal empires.
11. Stop managers with too much power without recourse.
12. Act as one team all moving in the same direction.
13. More co-operation between senior officers and FF's.
14. Adequate training for senior managers and management taken to task for bullying.
15. If grievances are reported then for them to be investigated thoroughly and action taken if necessary.
16. One rule for everyone.
17. I would like to see a management system that is not like a dictatorship, individuals employed and promoted on their merits and not because of who they know or what they are prepared to do.
18. Change in the attitude of senior managers.

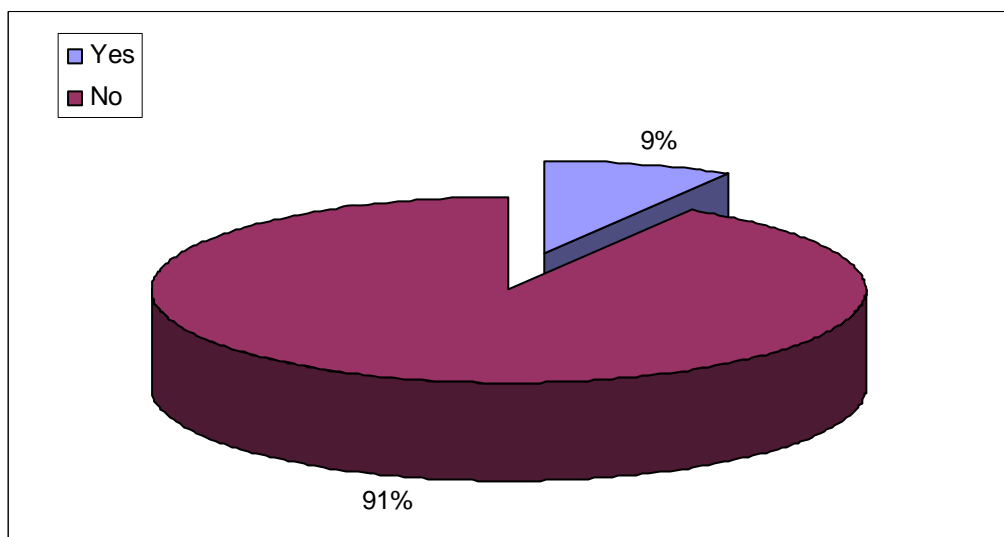
## Question 15

Have you got access to a counselling service?



## Question 16

Do you feel able to report any bullying without fear of reprisals?



If you have experienced bullying/harassment/intimidation/unwelcome attention, could you please provide examples in the space below.

Respondents took the opportunity in this section to relate, in very specific detail, their personal experiences of what they consider to be bullying, harassment or intimidation within MF&RS.

A small sample of those examples is reproduced below.

1. I was threatened with being posted if I did not sign up to working the retained contract at Birkenhead.
2. Threatened with disciplinary action if we did not sit and listen and then fill in the Firefighters Forum form.
3. Intimidated by a manager at 0900 safety brief, after strike had finished, putting us all down and "slagging" FBU off.
4. I have been told my job is in jeopardy if I refuse to leave FBU.
5. I witnessed management trying to intimidate employees to change to a different shift pattern that was supposed to be voluntary.
6. I was told while off work with work related stress that a senior officer had contacted my work colleagues and told them to tell me to get back to work.
7. Just a general fear of opening your mouth about anything, and because you have the temerity to voice an opinion you are liable for a punishment posting, regardless of whether you are being constructive or not.
8. I was told verbally I've got "no chance" of being promoted because I "went against the CFO and with the FBU".

9. I have been made to feel like a trouble maker if I ask for Health and Safety procedures to be followed.
10. I have been intimidated by senior managers who know they are in an unassailable position of power. They seem to have no accountability and on the occasions when I have complained there is never any action taken.
11. I have witnessed a colleague, who chose to work through the recent strike, bully and intimidate others without the fear of any comeback due to the fact that as he worked during the strike and now feels that he is untouchable.
12. At an interview for a Station Manager's position I was asked if I was a member of the FBU, and if so would I leave the FBU if I got the position.

The Merseyside Fire Brigades Union Officials have, over a period of many months, been contacted by Fire Brigades Union members on Merseyside alleging workplace bullying, harassment or intimidation. FBU members have also told Officials they do not feel comfortable or confident enough to report these allegations. Due to the inordinate amount of complaints it was decided to produce a survey in the form of a questionnaire to ascertain precisely the extent of these allegations.

The Merseyside Fire Brigades Union Questionnaire to determine the extent of Workplace Bullying, Harassment and Intimidation within Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service ran from November 2006 until January 2007.

There were nearly one thousand surveys sent out to FBU members on Merseyside, the amount completed and returned to the Union office was exceptional; it yielded the largest return of any survey undertaken by Merseyside Fire Brigades Union.

During the collation of information from the questionnaires it became apparent that some respondents felt the need to alter certain questions to emphasise their point, unfortunately any altered questions had to be disregarded otherwise some of the results would have been much higher. Respondents also took the opportunity to refer to specific incidents and name individuals who they allege have bullied, harassed or intimidated them. These names and incidents have been omitted from this document, although all questionnaires have been retained.

This document was compiled by Mark Rowe on behalf of Merseyside Fire brigade Union's Brigade Committee.

The questions for the "Merseyside Fire Brigades Union questionnaire to determine the extent of workplace Bullying, Harassment and Intimidation within Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service" were compiled from the following sources:-

Parliament debates workplace bullying.  
23rd March 2003

Andrea Adams Trust. UK charity dedicated to tackling workplace bullying

"Those who can, do. Those who can't, bully" John Johnston  
AIIRSM 10<sup>th</sup> November 2004

ACAS advice leaflet - Bullying and Harassment at Work.  
July 2004

TUC: Know your rights - Bullied at Work.  
October 2004

Bullyonline - [www.bullyonline.org](http://www.bullyonline.org)

Health and Safety Executive - Bullying Survey  
November 2005

UNISON - Branch Bullying Survey  
March 2006