

Three colleges read staff pressure weekly for a month

Each expected workload to be the problem. In two of the three, it was not. University Campus of Esports and two FE colleges, January to February 2026, 238 check-ins.

WHAT EEMBER DOES

We make burnout risk visible, in individuals and in teams, and provide a catalogue of proactive actions, logged and evidenced, to reduce the absence, churn and recruitment requests caused by staff pressure. So you do not spend on the wrong fix.

THE FINDING

The cause of the pressure was different in every college

Same sector, same term, comparable starting risk. Three different causes.

	UNIVERSITY CAMPUS OF ESPORTS	COLLEGE B	COLLEGE C
Weakest of the six areas	Change, 3.76	Support, 3.83	Support and relationships, 2.0
What staff named as the driver	Lack of control	Time management, health	Work management
Burnout risk, week 1	37.9 yellow, peak 53 orange	36.2 yellow	42.6 yellow, peak 48.3
Burnout risk, week 4	15.4 green, peak 18.5	25.8 yellow, improving	30.4 yellow, improving

HOW TO READ THE TWO NUMBERS ABOVE

Burnout risk score. Scored against the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory, where **lower is better**, and banded green, then yellow, then orange as risk rises. 37.9 sits in the yellow band. 15.4 is green.

The six areas. The HSE Management Standards, the recognised causes of work-related stress: demands, control, support, relationships, role and change. Each is scored **0 to 6, where higher is stronger**. Under 4 is variable, under 3 is urgent. The weakest of the six is the one to act on. Staff also name a driver in their own words, which is why the top two rows can differ.

Together they set the dose. The weakest area decides which controls a team gets. The risk score decides how many. A team reading yellow gets fewer and lighter controls than one reading orange, so nobody is handed more than the situation warrants.

- **An annual survey would have told all three the same thing**, and sent all three after workload.
- **Workload was the main problem in none of them.** University Campus of Esports scored 5.05 on demands, one of its strongest areas.
- **The cause moved inside four weeks.** College C went from demands at 2.0, urgent, one week to 5.0, strong, the next, while support fell to 2.0.
- **One thing was true everywhere.** How change is communicated was a driver in all three, independent of workload. Mixed messaging and mid-week changes of direction. It was the first thing every college fixed.

This is not a failure of anyone's leadership or HR. An annual survey returns one number for a whole college, and it is the only instrument the sector has ever been given. Nobody is failing to look. There has been nothing to look at.

THE RESPONSE

What each college changed, and who ran it

Controls are chosen against the weakest area and sized to the risk score, so the number and the type both follow the reading rather than a fixed package. Each one is owned, dated and logged weekly against an HSE Management Standard, which is the form the evidence takes for Ofsted under leadership and governance.

CONTROL	WHAT IT DOES	RAN AT
Top three tasks, and what finished looks like	Caps the day so it stays finishable	All three
Change windows, one channel	Two change points a day. Stops plan churn	All three
Support fast lane	Named person on call. Blocked over 30 minutes escalates	All three
Protected breaks, end-of-day cut-off	Stops fatigue stacking across the week	Esports, College B
Capacity cover trigger	Cover put on before strain shows, not after	College B

Nothing in the controls is new. What made them work is that each was owned, dated and logged, so the record shows what was done and whether it moved, not just that something was flagged.

Nobody at any of the three ran this. No new post, no working group, no rota of someone's Friday afternoons. That is usually where this kind of work dies.

THE EARLY WARNING

The first thing to move was whether staff could finish a day

Not how much pressure staff felt, but whether they could complete what the day asked of them. That shifted first in both colleges that ran the full four weeks, in both directions.

- **University Campus of Esports** scored 2.7 out of 6 on this in week one, its weakest area, while workload and control read strong. Once the churn of mid-week changes was fixed, the score lifted to between 4.5 and 5.3, and risk followed it down. The proportion of staff in the green band went from 10% to 100%.
- **College B** ran green for two weeks, then had one yellow week caused by a cluster of health issues. This score dipped first, a week before the risk score did. The college's own closeout names that as the early warning.
- **"Can staff finish a day" moves earlier than "are staff under pressure"**. A daily check answers it. An annual survey cannot.

A department where staff stop finishing the day is a timetable conversation. Eight weeks later it is cover, agency spend and a recruitment round.

THE LOOP

We do the work. You read the output

We build the dashboards, choose the actions and keep the evidence log. The only time your side spends is roughly fifteen minutes on a Friday, ticking off which actions ran and sending the proof back. Nothing to install, no logins, a QR code on the wall.

WHO	WHAT LANDS, AND WHEN	WHAT THEY DO
Every member of staff	Their own actions, the same day they check in, private to them. Scored to their own risk and the driver they named	Check in. Under a minute
Head of department or faculty	A weekly dashboard for their area only. The reading, what is driving it, and the action to take that week	Read it. Run the action
Principal or executive	One high-level view across all departments each week. Direction of travel, and which areas need attention	Read it
Governance and audit	An evidence log we build and maintain. Every action set, whether it ran, the date it ran, and the reading before and after it	Friday: tick what ran, send the proof. About 15 minutes

The evidence log is the part that survives scrutiny. It is the difference between recording that a concern was raised and being able to show what was done about it, when, and whether the number moved. We build it. Your side confirms what ran.

THE INDIVIDUAL HALF

What each member of staff gets back, the same day

The read is not only a management report. Everyone who checks in gets their own actions, scored to their own burnout risk and to the driver they named. Nobody else sees them.

WHAT THEIR CHECK-IN SHOWED	WHAT THEY GOT BACK THAT DAY
Struggling to finish the day, but workload itself is manageable	Pick three things for tomorrow and write down what done looks like. Everything else moves to the list
Little control, with change named as the driver	Two points in the day to take changes. Outside those, note it and carry on
Low support, blocked repeatedly	Name the person you go to when stuck. If it passes 30 minutes, it goes up
Exhaustion rising across the week	A protected break at a fixed time, and a cut-off you hold to
Health named as the driver	Cover arranged before the day, not after it

The same controls the college is running, sized to one person, delivered daily, private to them. A measure that takes something and returns nothing stops being answered by about week three.

LIMITS

What this read does not prove

- **Participation was uneven week to week.** Direction across four weeks is readable. A single week's figure is not.
- **Voluntary and anonymous.** Aggregated, with groups under seven hidden. Participation rose in all three across the four weeks.
- **It does not say a good score means safe.** It says the cause differs by institution, and that guessing which one has been wrong more often than right.

WHAT TO EXPECT

What the first four weeks actually look like

- **Four weeks is enough to see direction and name a driver.** It is not enough to prove a trend.
- **The first fortnight is mostly about signal quality:** participation rising, and staff naming a cause instead of skipping the question. Useful reads started in week three in all three.
- **Start at the top of a term.** Cleaner baseline, and the first fortnight is not competing with a pressure spike already underway.
- **One department or the whole college.** Either works. The four outputs above land from week one.

THE QUESTION THIS LEAVES

In two of the three, leadership had the cause wrong

Every one of these three had a view on which of their areas was weakest, and why. In two of the three, that view was wrong. The correction took four weeks, and in each case it changed what the money should have been spent on.

Very few in the sector can currently show whether what they spend on this works. These three can.

Esports named with permission, the other two anonymised at their request. Daily check-in, weekly report, scored against the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory and mapped to the HSE Management Standards. No individual identified. EEmber is a trading brand of TWINIO LTD, company number 16701569 · eember.co.uk/education