

Notes on evaluating workload models

Introduction

In some HEIs employers are introducing workload models for academic and related staff, either on an area basis or across the institution. In some cases this is being done with negotiation or consultation with UCU; in others the employer is treating this as purely a matter of managerial prerogative. Members are rightly concerned about the dangers of work intensification posed by some of these models. Nonetheless workload models can also be useful in tackling overloading, if they are transparent, equitable and within contractual boundaries. Thus a number of branches and LAs will find themselves either seeking to negotiate workload models, responding to managerial consultations over workloads or developing their own workload models in opposition to ones brought in by management.

Full guidance on negotiating on workload protection can be found at www.ucu.org.uk/workload. The negotiating advice provided is laid out in such a way as to give branches / LAs a choice over the areas of workload protection that they wish to concentrate on. The guidance is for use across the sector and applies to academic and academic related staff.

This paper has been developed in addition to the comprehensive negotiating advice to help branches / LAs who are faced with proposals from management on workload allocation on how to evaluate those proposals. It is worth noting that final report on the Management of Academic Workloads commissioned by the Leadership Foundation was launched in September 2009 and institutions may therefore have a renewed interest in this subject and may well be developing proposals that branches / LAs will then be asked to comment on.

What this paper attempts is to identify and discuss some of the issues branches and LAs will be facing and to give advice about how to evaluate proposed workload models, in order to inform a trade union response. It is not possible in one paper to identify all the challenges that branches and LAs may face, nor to predict all managerial proposals, but it is hoped this paper will give constructive suggestions on matters UCU reps should consider, if their employer tries to bring in a workload model.

At the end of this guidance is a checklist to assist branches / LAs evaluating workload models.

One workload model or several?

Sometimes UCU will be responding to one overall workload model; sometimes to ones which develop in departments, schools or faculties. There are some advantages to having one institution-wide model, assuming it is a model UCU supports. It can create greater equity and transparency. It can be easier for the union to enforce one model rather than several. It also simplifies casework, for instance when dealing with work-related stress and overload, since the UCU rep knows what the workload model is. Where there are many models, the rep first has to investigate the workload model and check whether it is reasonable and contract-compliant, before advising the member.

If there is one institution-wide model, this is more likely to lead to institution-wide allowances for roles such as year tutor, programme leader, principal investigator, team leader etc. and for activities, such as dissertation supervision, administration of research projects, staff supervision and development etc. This is generally beneficial, since it assures that all role-holders will receive a work plan allowance for these duties, rather than this being a matter of local patronage.

Nonetheless in some cases there will be a variety of workload models, particularly where these have been designed locally, perhaps on a collegial basis and agreed by the staff in the department. In this context the UCU branch/LA might decide to try to keep hold of local (departmental) workload models, if members are broadly happy with them and see them as based on collegial governance and amenable to local control by the staff group. In this context it might be a useful approach for the branch/LA to publish, or seek to negotiate with the employer, some underlying principles which should govern work-loading. One example of principles which should inform work-loading is the ones adopted by Leeds University UCU (see page 5 of the Workload Protection Negotiating Guide at: http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/d/7/ucu_heworkloadprotectguide.pdf)

Where there is one institution-wide model for work-planning, it is important that sufficient regard is given to different types of work and that allowances can be increased to account

for this. For instance some methods of assessment may be much more labour-intensive than others, and so should rightly attract a higher ratio of assessment time to contact time. Some staff may spend a lot of time on placement visits. Some research staff will have an allocation of time under full economic costing for the administration and management of research projects. If so, it is important that they are given realistic time allowances for doing this. One possibility is to have institution-wide minimum allowances for roles and activities, which can be increased (but not decreased) in discussion with local managers.

Processes for agreeing work plans

UCU needs to give attention not only to the content of work plans, but also the process whereby they are produced. This is essential to ensure that work plans are comprehensive, in recognising all the work that academic and academic-related staff do, transparent and based on negotiation not imposition.

The paper on 'The process of agreeing and negotiating individual work plans' deals with this issue in more depth - see page 29 of the Workload Protection Negotiating Guide at:

http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/d/7/ucu_heworkloadprotectguide.pdf

Ways of measuring workloads and counting time

One of the fundamental features to consider when evaluating a workload model is how it measures time. Essentially there are often two concepts of time in tension with each other in a workload model. The first is *time as a currency*, with x number of, for example, class contact hours and allowances against class contact hours for various roles. The second is *real time*. In both cases managers tend to under-estimate the time it really takes to do a job. As far as possible work plan allowances should represent the real time it takes to complete a task. For instance if travel to a placement visit takes 2 hours each way and the visit takes 3 hours then, then 7 hours should appear on the work plan against total weekly hours.

There are a few models which use some type of mystical units, which do not translate easily and clearly in hours. These models should be rejected, since they do not provide safeguard against overloading or allow realistic measurement of the time it takes to do a job.

Some models may try to use objectives, targets or outputs as measures. This is not acceptable since it will put pressure on the member of staff to work as many hours as necessary to achieve the target.

Contractual figures or norms for weekly and annual hours (including teaching hours)

Where there are contractual provisions regarding working hours and weeks, as in the case of the post-92 contract for England and Wales and for many academic related staff, then it should be a fairly straightforward matter to check whether the model is contract-compliant. If it is not easy to see this, this may indicate a problem with the model.

It is important in reference to annual teaching hours to consider the number of teaching weeks which are being used for calculating the work plan. Assessment weeks should be included in the number of teaching weeks.

If time has been allocated under full economic costing for research management and administration this should be fully accounted for and should not detract from time allocated to personal research time. Local agreements on study leave, sabbatical leave (for example when staff are relieved of administration and / or teaching duties to be able to concentrate of their research for a period of time) etc also need to be recognised in any workload model.

If there is no defined contractual protection, but there are norms, whether decided at departmental or faculty level or university-wide, these should be used as a reference point to evaluate reasonableness. In the absence of contractual provisions governing working hours, reference may be made to the nominal working week that the employer uses for HR and administrative purposes – for example in calculating fractional contracts or making returns to research councils under full economic costing.

In both cases it is important to consider the balance of duties that individuals have, for example, substantial research and/or management responsibilities should lead to reduced

class contact time for academic staff. Substantial management responsibilities for academic related staff should be reflected in a reduction in other duties.

Defence of academic freedom and resistance to micro-management

Work plans should allow sufficient time for scholarship and professional activities for academic (including teaching and scholarship, hourly paid and part-time time staff) and academic related staff. This may entail reducing elements of routine administration and ensuring there is sufficient time for academic and professional activities. One aspect of this in the case of the post-92 contract for England and Wales is the protection of the period (approximately 4 weeks and 3 days) for self-directed research, scholarship and professional development.

How detailed should work plans be?

Academic and academic-related staff can be disadvantaged both by excessive detail in work plans and by lack of detail. Too much detail poses the danger of micro-management. Too little and much work goes unaccounted for and unrecognised. Members need to consider how much detail they want.

Maintaining some headroom and contingency time

Staff should not be work-planned to contractual maxima at the start of the year. If this is the case they will end up working well beyond the contractual maximum in terms of hours. There is a need to include some 'headroom' or 'down time', time for emergency cover, time for activities which emerge during the year etc.

Equality considerations and work/life balance

Can the job be done by someone who has caring responsibilities? Or is the job based on the model of a worker who is 100% fit and healthy and energetic, and has full-time

domestic support, so that they do not have to do their own housework, cooking, laundry, paying bills etc.?

Is the job so demanding that it is unlikely any disabled candidate would ever be appointed?

What are the provisions regarding evening and weekend and overseas working?

These are all questions which are useful for testing whether the workload model is compatible with the institution's equality duties and with respect for people's lives outside the workplace.

The branch/LA might want to propose an equality impact assessment of the workload model, before it is introduced.

Does the model work for staff on fractional contracts?

This question needs to be asked because not all activities can equally be scaled on a pro-rata basis. For instance one does not necessarily receive fewer emails if one works on a fractional contract. Some activities, e.g. participating in annual appraisal, will take as much time whether full-time or part-time.

Activities which should be recognised in work plans

This list is not exhaustive, but indicates the principal areas.

- research
- scholarship
- research administration and management
- teaching and teaching preparation
- assessment
- academic management and administration
- staff management, including time for staff development and mentoring
- routine administration, e.g. answering email

- general academic duties (e.g. departmental meetings, degree conferment ceremonies)
- participation in democratic processes of university governance and committee service
- agreed study leave and sabbatical arrangements
- trade union work
- inter-site and other work-related travel

If work plans are not reasonably comprehensive and do not identify the full range of duties academic and academic-related staff can be expected to undertake, they can produce a partial picture of the workload. This is dangerous because it allows managers to claim staff can take on more work. While the workload model should identify all the duties that academic and academic-related staff *may* perform, it should not be designed to imply all staff should be performing all of these duties all of the time.

Adequate time allowances

It is important to consider whether the time allowances given on work plans for activities, such as research projects, teaching preparation, academic management roles (e.g. year tutor, programme leader etc.) are reasonable. If the time allowances are not realistic, this just leads to more pressure on staff. It is important that time allowances are not set at a pace which can only be achieved by the most experienced or most energetic staff. Branches/LAs may wish to discuss various proposed allowances with members of staff who actually carry out the tasks in question.

Appeal and review processes

There should be a process for an individual to appeal/object if they feel their workload is unreasonable. This should be separate from rights under the grievance process.

There should also be review processes involving UCU representatives at departmental or faculty or university level to check that all work plans are contract compliant and reasonable.

Checklist

| Checklist Item | Acceptable | Needs improvement | Not acceptable |
|--|------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Has workload increased or intensified | | | |
| Process for agreeing work plans | | | |
| Method of accounting for time and activities | | | |
| Contract-compliant | | | |
| Defence of academic freedom | | | |
| Right level of detail | | | |
| Headroom | | | |
| Equality and work/life balance | | | |
| Does the model work for staff on fractional contracts? | | | |
| Comprehensive recognition of range of duties | | | |
| Adequate time allowances for roles and activities | | | |
| Appeal and review processes | | | |
| Other | | | |
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