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Jeremy Miles MS
Minister for Education and Welsh Language

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Email only

Dear Jeremy

Re: Workload of lecturers in Further Education

Since March 2021, the academic trade unions have been meeting with Welsh Government officials and Colegau Cymru (CC) to start to address the excessive workload of lecturers in FE. Excessive workload has been evidenced twice by the workforce survey conducted by the EWC in 2016 and 2021 and by a separate UCU survey in 2015 which found very similar data to that of the EWC.

The workload steering group, with the independent chair John O'Shea have just concluded their report and recommendations for phase two of the project, phase one being the EWC data collection. We are currently trying to agree a project proposal for stage three, which is the reason for this letter.

In the recommendations from phase two, the final draft states on page three that of the 51 average hours (reported in both EWC surveys, five years apart) that 21 hours are spent on teaching, 6 on assessment and marking, 6 on planning and preparation and 4 on digital preparation. Yet the second draft of the phase three project proposal makes no mention of the fact that these four activities listed above are academic activities.

The current lecturer contracted hours are calculated as follows:

365 days - 52 weekends (104 days) = 261

Bank and Annual Hols = 54 = 207 days

7.4 hours in working day based on 37 Hours 207 days x 7.4 = 1532

*Time available to be allocated as workload within the National Contract = **1532***

Compare that with the **1265** expected of schoolteachers in their contracted hours.

The survey tells us that on average lecturing staff teach 21 hours a week. We find ourselves arguing with CC about changes to the National Workload Agreement, incorporated terms of the National Contract. Put simply, a few key individuals within CC do not accept the survey results and believe that staff are over reporting.

At this point we would acknowledge that given the NPISH status of colleges that you or your government officials cannot intervene in matters related to pay and conditions. However, from the start of this work it has been clear that it is being done in Social Partnership and that from our perspective, it is a crucial part of the Fair Work agenda.

Phase three of this project is where the key deliverables are located from the Joint Trade Unions' (JTU) perspective. We are arguing that finance directors should be asked to cost what each college would need to reduce the teaching week to 21 hours. That would vary college by college depending on the split between A level and vocational provision. Bringing the maximum teaching hours down to 21 hours per week would free up space for staff to engage in professional learning, given the changes the Welsh Government want to see in the Welsh economy. We need to create space for lecturing staff to work collaboratively to develop new curricula, to meet the demand for blended and digital learning.

We also want the National Contract and Workload Agreement to recognise the work needed to support retention in colleges and the efforts made by lecturing staff to provide support to their learners linked to the hour in the classroom. We are calling that a 'flexible tutor hour' per week that would be given to each lecturer, regardless of their contract type but pro-rata, to reflect the work they already do which is not recognised by the current workload model.

We suggested to your officials and CC that this could be done over a three year period reducing to 23 hours year one and providing one tutorial hour per week. In year two reducing to 22 hours and giving two tutorial hours per week and in year three reducing the maximum teaching hours to 21 and giving three tutorial hours. This would have no immediate direct impact on the learners, but in the longer term we believe there will be significant benefits of creating the space to allow lecturing staff to engage in collaborative professional learning. Evidence for our views can be found in the work of A. Hargreaves and P. Sahlberg.

Finally, we want CC to recognise that the current 20 minutes of preparation and marking time within the National Workload Agreement does not reflect the actual amount of work currently undertaken by lecturers, as reported by the survey. The survey tells us that 12.5 hours are spent on assessment, marking, planning and preparation, and that figure does not include the 4 hours needed currently to convert teaching materials to deliver blended and digital learning.

The vision the Welsh Government has for the post 16 sector is fully supported by the JTUs, but the FE sector will not be able to deliver the changes needed unless it creates the space for lecturers to do what will be needed of them going forward.

Returning to the Phase Three project proposal it states in the introduction to phase three,

"The data indicated that, on average, lecturers were working 51 hours per week, this included 21 hours per week spent on teaching. 65% of lecturers reported that they were unable to manage their workload in contracted hours. The three factors noted which had the biggest impact on lecturers' ability to manage their workload were: administration, non-teaching activities supporting learners and digital preparation."

There is no mention of the figures we have just discussed in this letter, the 16.5 hours spent on academic related tasks whereas the current allocation model provides for 8 hours if you are delivering the maximum contracted limit of 24 hours. Again, from our perspective this strongly suggests that CC do not want to engage with changes to the National workload agreement to reflect the current substantive workload of lecturers. Reducing administrative tasks alone will not achieve the change that is so desperately needed.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our concerns with you.

Yours sincerely



Margaret Phelan
JTU sec and UCU

Encs relevant EWC data
Draft versions of phase three project proposal