SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP

WORKLOAD PROJECT

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Introduction

This paper attempts to set out some ways forward as we approach the end of phase two.

It sets out actions for the partnership to recommend to its partner bodies for them to consider.

The topics and therefore the actions are inter-connected; no one action would resolve all of the concerns identified; the concerns identified are diverse and require an integrated plan of several actions to improve lecturer experience and thus learner experience.

I shared a first draft with Kelly Edwards, Margaret Phelan, Marian Jebb and Mark Dacey; and I am grateful to them for their thoughts.

John O'Shea 13 May 2021

1 Recommend to colleges that they consider the survey outcomes for their college when planning workload for 2021-22

Colleges might consider how best to ensure that workload is equitably distributed, how to ensure that workload comes more in line with the contract and workload agreement. The workload agreement sets 24 hours teaching as a maximum, not a target (and the survey suggests that the average is under 21); and the contract sets 37 as a maximum, not a target (but the survey suggests that the average is 51). The challenge for lecturers and managers is to address the 51-37 problem.

As a first step colleges may wish to ensure that they have an accurate understanding of lecturer workload in their college. To underpin this understanding we should circulate (once we have resolved any DP issues) the data spreadsheets and text box analysis to all colleges and unions. We could also send some headline prompts from the survey outcomes to guide local discussions. It should help them gain a better understanding of workload pressures.

Recommended action: CC to circulate survey data and text analysis (once agreed by EWC), with headline prompts, to colleges by 30 May 2021. Colleges then to work with local trades unions to review their own data and agree an action plan aimed at reducing workload, addressing any issues of perceived inequity and improving wellbeing.

Outcome – improved wellbeing and lecturer workload for 2021-22.

Should we consider recommending to colleges, managers, trades unions and lecturers that they continue the practice used from the start of the pandemic of not following the workload agreement too closely; but rather emphasise personal autonomy, trust and responsibility? It appears that this approach has been very successful during the difficult times of college closure and restricted opening (disputes and case work have reduced significantly) – and therefore it might be worth considering whether this approach should be continued as colleges return to more normal working arrangements? A more flexible and autonomous approach is not meant to increase workload (obviously); so it may be worth emphasising that to lecturers and managers!

One example of this is working on and off campus. The workload agreement limits off campus working to up to five hours a week. Practice over the last year has been very different and the partnership may wish to recommend a more relaxed and autonomous approach for 2021-22 (where the lecturer and line manager believes this to be advantageous to her and her learners, of course). This could also have benefits for the environment.

Recommended action: WNCFE to consider revising workload agreement by 30 June 2021 so that the current maximum of five hours working offsite is phrased in terms of a normal expectation of a maximum of five hours off site working becomes a minimum for 2021-22.

Outcome: improved lecturer autonomy and wellbeing.

2 Wellbeing

Colleges have undertaken several successful initiatives to promote staff wellbeing, eg Teams-free-Fridays, evening and weekend email embargoes, wellbeing days, etc. Colleges could consider providing free flu vaccines for all college staff; and encourage staff with potentially contagious conditions to work from home (provided they are fit to work) - recognise success of covid protocols in reducing illness of all kinds.

Recommended action: HR network to collect and share good practice on staff wellbeing by 20 June 2021 with a view to local discussions designed to improve lecturer wellbeing.

Outcome – improved lecturer wellbeing.

WG is working with colleagues in education to review counselling support available to young people, including a survey of colleges and of local authorities. This should provide an evidence base to help ensure more consistency of the counselling services available in different settings – which could help address some of the capacity issues raised in the workforce survey.

The Welsh Government provides £2m each year to the FE sector to support institutional and collaborative mental health/wellbeing projects. Institutions are required to include staff as well as learning wellbeing in their project proposals. There is an opportunity for colleges to use Hwb to share challenges, ideas and resources – there is now a Hwb network for mental health and wellbeing leads.

Recommended action: colleges to make full use of Hwb resources to develop wellbeing resources more efficiently.

Outcome: improved wellbeing.

The 2021-22 mental health budget has been used to fund *Well Aware*, a JTU project to facilitate the development and embedding of designated staff mental health and wellbeing reps. A pilot project is being run in two colleges (Coleg y Cymoedd and GLLM) until the end of 2021 and will then be evaluated. There is a potential to mainstream staff wellbeing rep role in all colleges after the pilot has

been completed and evaluated; possibly by ring-fencing some of the mental health funding for this purpose.

Recommended action: colleges to review outcomes of Well Aware project by 31 December 2021 and submit resource proposals as appropriate.

Outcome: improved wellbeing.

Resource implications see 10b below.

3 Professional development

The notion of INSET days has changed during the pandemic; the partnership may wish to recommend that INSET days are used exclusively for professional development and professional reflection – and that when corporate training is necessary it is provided for separately. Similarly INSET days should not be used for verification or administration. Professional development, personal reflection and mentoring is more important in times of rapid change – and yet it can be the first thing to go when colleagues are under pressure. What examples could the HR network and TUs find of good practice to share for further education? Can the HR network work with the WG's post 16 workforce development project to identify further improvements in FE professional development?

Recommended action: HR network to collect and share good practice on professional development by 20 June 2021 to facilitate local discussions; and then to work with WG on outcomes of its post-16 workforce development project.

Outcome – improved professional development.

4 Supporting learners

Ask the CC curriculum and quality network to survey colleges quickly about effective ways of supporting learners outside of timetabled sessions, sharing the outcomes with unions and colleges – with the objective of learning from practice. Ask the network to ask for examples of good practice in controlling learner access to lecturers whilst at the same time facilitating learner access to lecturers, ie lecturers are understandably concerned at 24/7 access, but do value the opportunity to support their learners more.

WG is reviewing counselling support available to young people, including a survey of colleges and of local authorities. This should provide an evidence base to help ensure greater consistency of

counselling services available in different settings – which could help address some of the capacity issues raised in the workforce survey.

Recommended action:

1. *WNCFE to agree a twelve-month protocol to manage student expectations of lecturers outside of working hours by 30 June 2021.*
   Outcome improved lecturer wellbeing and more effective student support.
2. *CC curriculum and quality network to identify and share practices in supporting students outside of timetabled sessions: by 20 June 2021.*
   Outcome – a reflective document that would form the basis for local discussions to deliver improved student support and lecturer wellbeing.
3. *WG to commission research (possibly involving Jisc) into best practice on how to support learners 'outside the classroom' in the digital age – the research not to be restricted to Welsh further education, but to led by FE digital leaders.*
   Outcome: improved support for learners outside of the classroom and improved lecturer wellbeing.

Resource implication: see 10b below.

5 Digital

Recommend to Welsh Government that it asks Jisc to work with colleges to improve the IT infrastructure. The Jisc survey *State of the Nation* should be invaluable when it reports later this year. As remote learning grows and in taking further education towards *Digital 2030* it is vital that the IT infrastructure is robust and effective.

Recommend to Welsh Government that it asks Jisc to work with colleges to share and develop best practice in remote learning and blended pedagogies. If the many good practices developed over the last year could be identified and shared quickly – with appropriate staff training packages - it could address one of the most significant pressure points identified by staff. This might include sharing teaching materials between colleges and commissioning external expertise to convert common teaching materials to high quality packages. Would a pilot in areas such as GCSEs or essential skills be helpful — and how do we best involve other members of the social partnership (besides Colegau Cymru)?

WG sponsors Jisc to support the FE and skills sector, including professional learning and projects designed to meet identified sector needs. WG has asked Jisc to develop a modular professional course for the sector, building on the existing training offer. Initial scoping work is taking place over the summer. In 2020-21 WG has funded delivery of two courses for FE in Wales:

- Designing for digital capabilities in the curriculum
- Digital leaders

Jisc is currently carrying out its *Digital Experience Insights* survey which gathers detailed information from both learners and staff; reports from the last Wales survey in 2018-19 are available and participating institutions get their own feedback reports.

E resources are being developed to support A levels and Welsh medium delivery. Jisc is carrying out a scoping exercise to source existing vocational learning resources and to signpost them for the post-16 sector via Hwb; it is due to be completed before the autumn term.

WG is planning workshops in May and June to do a "stocktake" of the digital learning experiences over the last year, informed by Estyn's thematic review. Feedback from the workforce survey will be part of these discussions which will help to identify priorities and actions for the coming year.

Hwb accounts have now been rolled out to FE staff, giving them the ability to create and share resources, and to set up and join networks. Hwb is also the repository for resources commissioned, produced or funded by WG (including those created through FE mental health projects).

Potential for pilots to commission learning resources produced collaboratively by lecturers – eg: GCSE English and maths, ESW and ESOL. This could be part of phase 3 of the workload project, or a separate project – and will need co-ordinating.

Recommended action: WG and colleges to continue to participate in the activities set out above and to draft proposals designed to improve student digital experience and outcomes in general so that Welsh FE provides the very best experience to its learners and cutting-edge training to Welsh industry to underpin economic recovery – by 31 December 2021.

Outcome: improved student experience and outcomes; and innovative professional delivery, leading to improved lecturer wellbeing.

6 Administrative burden

Recommend to colleges that they review, with TUs, the administrative tasks that are expected of lecturers to check that they are essential and that the right staff are being asked to do them.

Colleges to identify reports and returns that come from WG or Estyn that they believe may have limited utility, so that WG and Estyn can review whether they still add value.

WG to tender for a specialist organisation to review business processes in colleges, with specific relation to workload and wellbeing.

Recommended action: Colleges with their local trades unions to review administrative activity currently carried out by lecturers – and to share outcomes between all colleges by 30 June 2021.

Colleges to review reports and returns from WG and Estyn and ask WG and Estyn to consider whether they add value – by 30 June 2021.

Outcomes: 1) reduced administrative activity across colleges by lecturers, 2) improved business processes that reduce workload and improve wellbeing, and 3) an evidenced proposal to increase administrative staff in colleges enabling lecturers to devote their time to academic and learner focussed activity.

Resource implication: see 10 and 10d below.

7 Qualifications

The academic network to work with Qualifications Wales to encourage a partnership approach to the development of new awards in such a way that the learner experience is enhanced, not undermined by late changes.

Recommended action: CC curriculum and quality network to discuss with Qualifications Wales timescales for the development and introduction of new awards – by 30 June 2021.

Outcome: improved student experience and lecturer workload.

8 WNCFE

The WNCFE to review the workload agreement with a view to it being fit for purpose for another ten years – taking on board the positive experiences of the last year and recognising that the current agreement appears not to have been as effective as intended.

The WNCFE to investigate whether college remission arrangements are working equitably and whether a national agreement would be more effective.

The WNCFE to review the role of course tutor and make recommendations on how best and fairly to manage courses in the digital age whilst at the same time reducing lecturer workload.

The WNCFE to review the operation of the suite of FE contracts to see if greater flexibility can be achieved to meet the needs of different groups of students, without exacerbating workload or wellbeing.

Recommended action:

1. *WNCFE to review the workload agreement during 2021-22 as described above by 30 April 2022.*
   Outcome: reduced lecturer workload.
2. *WNCFE to consider a process agreement to allocate time for course management - that requires negotiation and agreement at a local level; local agreements to be reached by 31 July 2021.*
   Outcome – reduction in lecturer workload.
3. *WNCFE to review the operation of the suite of FE contracts during 2021-22 to see if greater flexibility can be achieved without exacerbating workload or wellbeing issues.*
   Outcome: greater flexibility of delivery.

Resource implication: see 10c and 10e below.

9 Summary of actions agreed in 1-8 above.

9.1 CC to circulate survey data and text analysis (once agreed by EWC), with headline prompts, to colleges by 30 May 2021. Colleges then to work with local trades unions to review their own data and agree an action plan aimed at reducing workload, addressing any issues of perceived inequity and improving wellbeing.

9.2. WNCFE to consider revising workload agreement by 30 June 2021 so that the current maximum of five hours working offsite is phrased in terms of a normal expectation of a minimum of five hours off site working for 2021-22.

9.3 CC HR network to collect and share good practice on staff wellbeing by 20 June 2021 with a view to local discussions designed to improve lecturer wellbeing.

9.4 Colleges to make full use of Hwb resources to develop wellbeing resources more efficiently.

9.5 Colleges to review outcomes of Well Aware project by 31 December 2021 and submit resource proposals as appropriate.

9.6 HR network to collect and share good practice on professional development by 20 June 2021 to facilitate local discussions; and then to work with WG on outcomes of its post-16 workforce development project.

9.7 WNCFE to agree a twelve-month protocol to manage student expectations of lecturers outside of working hours by 30 June 2021.

9.9 CC curriculum and quality network to identify and share practices in supporting students outside of timetabled sessions: by 20 June 2021.

9.10 WG to commission research (possibly involving Jisc) into best practice on how to support learners 'outside the classroom' in the digital age – the research not to be restricted to Welsh further education, but to led by FE digital leaders.

9.11WG and colleges to continue to participate in the activities set out in 5 above and to draft proposals designed to improve student digital experience and outcomes in general so that Welsh FE provides the very best experience to its learners and cutting-edge training to Welsh industry to underpin economic recovery – by 31 December 2021.

9.12 Colleges with their local trades unions to review administrative activity currently carried out by lecturers – and to share outcomes between all colleges by 30 June 2021.

9.13 Colleges to review reports and returns from WG and Estyn and ask WG and Estyn to consider whether they add value – by 30 June 2021.

9.14 CC curriculum and quality network to discuss with Qualifications Wales timescales for the development and introduction of new awards – by 30 June 2021.

9.15 WNCFE to review the workload agreement during 2021-22 to reduce workload and enhance wellbeing by 30 April 2022.

9.16 WNCFE to consider a process agreement to allocate time for course management - that requires negotiation and agreement at a local level; local agreements to be reached by 31 July 2021.

9.17 WNCFE to review the operation of the suite of FE contracts during 2021-22 to see if greater flexibility can be achieved without exacerbating workload or wellbeing issues.

10 Resources implications arising from 1-8 above.

The social partnership to work with the CC resources network to draw up a set of inter-connected and inter-dependant, costed and phased (eg over three years 2022-25) proposals for additional resource in the following areas:

a. additional administrative staff to release lecturers to work with students for a greater proportion of their time.

b. additional learning support/welfare/counselling staff to release lecturers to work with students on their academic programmes ('outside of the classroom') for a greater proportion of their time (equal to 10 minutes per teaching hour), improving the support given to students.

c. specific support to be given to course management so that lecturers can work with students for a greater proportion of their time.

d. external review of college business processes – subject to external tender

e. reduced teaching hours so that (even after the improvements secured in a-d above) lecturers **can undertake their core professional academic activities such as preparation (including digital), marking, student advice, colleague mentoring and professional reflection – as well as any corporate** activities that inevitably flow from working in a publicly funded organisation – **within** their contracted hours.

The proposals to set out:

- progress made within existing resource,

- the consequences of not improving resource levels,

- the benefits to learners, industry and lecturers,

- how economies of scale would be achieved and

- any refinements to the funding methodology.

Recommended action: Huw Morris to be invited to meet social partnership when costed proposals are complete.

Outcome: a robust evidence-based set of proposals that will meet the Welsh Government's objectives, improve learner experience and outcomes whilst addressing the issues identified in the lecturer survey.