

University of Aberdeen

Workload Planning Review Group – Full Group Meeting

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 30 November 2021 (Teams Meeting)

Present: Karl Leydecker, Amanda Lee, David Muirhead, Chris Collins, Tracey White, Ruth Taylor, Svirthe Pugh, Laura McCann, Neil Vargesson, Brian Paterson, Adam Price, Laura Benvie, Sarah Duncan, Garry Fisher, Hulda Sveinsdottir, Sam Waldram, Lindsey Hamilton (clerk)

Apologies: Debbie Dyker, Marion Campbell, Tracey Slaven

1. Minute of Meeting 19 February 2021

The group approved the minutes of the meeting 19 February 2021.

2. Oral Report of the Academic Subgroup Activity

Karl Leydecker (KL) advised that the last full group meeting was held in February 2021, for the last 10 months the Academic Sub-group had met regularly, made good progress and produced a draft report as per item 3 of the agenda. KL continued that the work of the academic sub-group would continue to be informed by other streams of work currently being undertaken including the Research Culture work led by Gary Macfarlane (as recently presented to Senate) the work on the Research Concordat being led by Clare Hawes and Mirela Delibegovic as well as the Promotion Review Group.

3. Discussion on the Workload Planning Review Group Draft Report

KL introduced the paper and explained that good progress had been made in the last year. Draft principles had been agreed and work on the Teaching and Workload Allocation Models was ongoing.

KL asked for initial feedback and the following was received:

- It was raised that item 5.1 in the Paper needed to be discussed in more detail at a future sub-group meeting.
- A query was raised whether the academic subgroup had discussed if the workload of academic and research staff had been negatively impacted by having to perform duties previously undertaken by support and technical staff, due to the reduction in levels of these staff. It was confirmed that this had not been discussed but would be at a future meeting.

Action KL – points to be raised at future subgroup meeting

4. Power BI Staff Survey Data Analysis

Adam Price (AP) talked through the paper, giving an overview of the Power BI Tool, and explained that the tool allowed the subgroup to explore the findings from the staff survey in more detail. The group were asked to comment on the report and the following comments were received.

- It was noted that the results of the survey also indicated that workload pressures are seen at higher graded Professional Services levels too (Grades 5-9). The Power BI subgroup looked at 'academic staff' and didn't review the findings in detail relating to Professional Services Staff, and this should be considered when discussing workload for this group.
- There was a comment that since the staff survey was undertaken, the pressures on some staff have worsened, for instance, managing a heavier volume of emails, Teams messages and other pressures arising from hybrid working and needs to be considered.

5 Reflections on the Workload Reduction Toolkit one year on

5.1 KL discussed that it had been one year since the Toolkit was introduced and he felt it would be useful for the group to reflect on the benefits and if the group felt any enhancement or changes were needed.

The following comments were received:

- It was mentioned that when the Toolkit was launched there was a lot of compliance at the start (i.e., respecting meeting free Friday and an hour free for lunch), however, that compliance was now slipping.
- There was discussion about whether the messages that some people put on their 'email signature' stating that it was their personal choice to respond to emails "out of hours" and the recipient did not need to reply was useful. Some members felt this was a powerful message, but KL commented that there was a commitment to try and reduce the volume of emails and to limit those sent out with business hours to reduce psychological stress; his preference was for individuals to use the delay tools on Outlook so that individuals did not receive emails out of hours unless absolutely necessary.
- It was raised that the toolkit helped support and professional service staff more than academic staff and could more suggestions be made for academic staff in the toolkit.
- It was raised that many students would email academic staff 'out of hours' and it was felt many expected a quick response to their email regardless of the time it was sent. It was queried whether a reminder should be sent to students about that. It was agreed that KL would discuss this with HoS to discuss what was agreed / had been issued in each school and send a reminder to students if appropriate.

Action - KL to discuss with HoS students' expectations regarding responses to out of 'hours' emails.

- It was noted that extra worked was caused by the current situation of changing from hybrid working and then back to full homeworking, which meant staff having to prepare for these different scenarios of work and therefore everyone was trying to do too much.
- It was noted that some UCU branches were participating in strike action because of working conditions, in addition the pandemic had made some reassess their priorities and some had decided to resign from their work as a result, therefore it was important to ensure good working conditions for individuals' wellbeing and to retain staff.
- KL confirmed that it was acknowledged that more academic staff and support staff were needed, and that recruitment plans would be discussed at future meetings. KL continued that this Planning round had a focus on attracting more academic staff and putting more staff into directorates, that also included appointing staff who would focus on student and

staff mental health wellbeing. KL commented that the University's strategy was to grow revenue to enable investment in further staff appointments. The toolkit is one element of the support for staff, and responding to the results from the staff survey was high on the agenda.

5.2 KL asked for suggestions to further enhance the toolkit and the following was noted:

- It was suggested that practical measures like keeping the annual review light touch and reducing marking/assessment administration would help

Action KL – To discuss this with HoS

- It was raised that staffing cuts had been significant at lower grades, an example being a reduced level of porters, therefore technical staff and other support staff had to do this work then negatively impacting on the support they gave research/academic staff. It was suggested that as the Staff/Student ratio was measured should more discussion take place on the Academic Staff/Support Staff ratio. It was noted that discussion on the appropriate levels of technical staff should be discussed at the appropriate school planning groups.
- It was suggested that as well as the festive/winter closure there should be another time in the year that allowed for more people to be off at the same time. Everyone appreciated the extra days that were given, especially as staff don't return to a large volume of emails like they did after individual annual leave periods.
- There was follow up discussion on whether a summer shutdown or reduced meeting time in July would work. It was queried whether a skeleton staff level of staff could cover essential duties and they would leave when other staff returned. It was discussed that this would have to be balanced with the summer teaching commitments
- It was suggested that different Professional Services Teams could learn from each other how they are managing hybrid working and whether they have any top tips which could be published in the Ezine.

Action KL to ask Tracey Slaven to speak to Directors

- It was commented that PGR students are heavily supported, often meeting tutors every two weeks compared to the past when students would see their tutor a few times a year and should this be reviewed.
- It was suggested that as there are several committees that have task and finish groups, could there be a limit to the number of groups an individual can be on; when they join a new one, they step down from another.
- Could lessons be learnt from job share arrangements where you don't pick up workload that you miss, this is compared to part-time staff who are given a full load of work and expected to pick it up.
- KL commented that it was important for everyone to take all the annual leave they were entitled to. KL commented that he took his and encouraged line managers to lead by example and empower their staff to take time off. KL continued that he would speak to HoS about the suggestion that staff were encouraged to discuss taking annual leave at the annual review. In addition, he would ask HoS to ensure that local discussions were taking place on the toolkit, and that this was fed back to him.

Action - KL to discuss annual leave and the toolkit with HoS

- It was queried whether any systems were in place to measure and highlight pressure times/points in the year.
- Could work that is too bureaucratic be identified with a systematic review to simplify some processes.
- Some members of the committee commented that in the past when a large project or piece of work was completed there would be a chance for a break and reflection, but this didn't happen now, as staff had to be straight into the next big task.
- It was suggested that we should do more reporting of additional staffing appointments to show the positive changes taking place to the wider community.

5.3 KL closed the meeting by thanking everyone for being open. He acknowledged that he was aware of the workload issues, and confirmed that that they were working to try and recruit more staff and to ensure appropriate support was given to staff as much as possible.

6 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To be confirmed

Action Table

SECTION	ACTION	LEAD
3	Comments from draft paper – item 5.1 to be discussed at future meeting	Karl Leydecker
5	Action to raise with Heads of School <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Light touch annual review for 2022 • Any reductions that can be made to assessment/markings • Encouraging the uptake of all annual leave entitlement • Student expectations regarding responses to emails sent 'out of hours' 	Karl Leydecker
5	Action to raise with Tracey Slaven <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggestions from Professional Service staff on tips for hybrid working 	Karl Leydecker