

Workload Planning Review Group Meeting

Meeting Minutes – Monday 27th March 2023

Teams Meeting

Attendees:

Karl Leydecker, Chris Collins, Sarah Duncan, Debbie Dyker, Garry Fisher, Brian Henderson, Laura McCann, David Muirhead, Adam Price, Syritha Pugh, Karen Scaife, Hulda Sveinsdottir, Neil Vargesson, Sam Waldram (Clerk)

Apologies:

Laura Benvie, Marion Campbell, Amanda Lee , Brian Paterson, Tracey Slaven, Ruth Taylor

1. STAFF SURVEY 2022 – WORKLOAD RELATED RESULTS

- 1.1 The meeting had been arranged to discuss the results of the Staff Survey 2022. Following the 2020 staff survey the Workload Toolkit was developed and it was evident from the results in 2022 that the issue of workload was still prominent for many members of staff. Following a discussion of the results it was hoped that a plan could be developed to address the issues raised.
- 1.2 It was noted that the survey had given a strong message in relation to the workloads of academic staff and in particular those in Teaching and Research posts where 91% of staff said that they were frequently working in excess of their contracted hours. This is especially important given the University's aim to improve research but not at the expense of teaching.
- 1.3 The proposal noted in the side deck to take forward a listening exercise to 'walk in the shoes' of academic staff was welcomed. A formal plan for this was in development and would be shared with the group, and also discussed at SMT shortly. The proposal for such an exercise had been flagged to the University Court and also been discussed at a meeting of some members of SMT with the Senate Assessors and David Anderson. This would focus around 'Ways of Working'..
- 1.4 It was discussed that this level of working additional hours by academic staff may have been similar 10 years ago but at that time this was due to the choice of the T&R staff who spent their own time doing research. However, now, staff have to undertake research in their own time as they can't fit it into their contracted working hours.
- 1.5 The recent communication regarding the harmonisation of terms and conditions, and in particular the move to a 35-hour week was discussed. If people felt they were working more than their contracted hours currently, how would moving to a 35-hour week help that? It was confirmed that the University was currently consulting with all staff regarding the 35-hour week proposals. The process was starting with Grades 1-4 with a Paper going to SMT shortly. Since the article had appearing in Staff News there had been lots of feedback submitted. Some was positive and others expressed concern about the current volume of work fitting into 35 hours per week. The Framework agreement in 2006 was built on the assumptions that institutions would be working a 35-hour week. It was recognised that the issue would need a lot of work but the University would listen to all the feedback before making a final decision on how to proceed.
- 1.6 It was queried whether there was a workload task force being set up and if so, why UCU were not represented. It was confirmed that there was not a group but it was a project that was being undertaken and this was what was referred to on Page 10 of the papers. The work was currently in proposal form and

the Workload Planning Review Group would oversee the work to be undertaken. It was proposed it would look at various issues such as more integrated and efficient IT systems, whether there were tasks currently being undertaken by academic staff that could be done by professional services staff, as well as what elements of education, such as assessment, might be streamlined. The IT issues had already been discussed in the Digital Strategy Committee and the project would involve pulling all this information together to agree actions to be taken. The information would go out to the University community there would also be a discussion at the upcoming Senate also. This would give staff the opportunity to raise issues in their feedback and it was intended that the most important ones would be addressed first. There is also a motion that will be considered at the next Senate that all papers going to Senate which proposed new actions should include a workload calculation to be attached. KL confirmed that the WLPRG would be the group to oversee the proposed work. Work would be led by Marion Campbell (MC) and Ruth Taylor (RT) who would take proposals to the group in the near future regarding the suggested way forward.

1.7 The analysis of the data that had been undertaken for the group was deemed helpful. AP had undertaken some statistical analysis and it was felt that the workload results were slightly less than the 2020 survey. It was highlighted that the Schools which had the biggest issue with workload were the same in 2020. It was discussed whether this could be due to the ratios of academic to professional services staff in these Schools, as science-based Schools which had technical staff did not report the same issues. It was agreed that it would be helpful to look at these ratios. The staff:student ratios were already available. There was also a difference between Grade 9 staff and Grade 9+ staff where Grade 9 were showing more issues than the Grade 9+ staff. It was questioned why this was. **Action: SW**

1.8 The idea of 'walking in the shoes' of academic members of staff was welcomed. However, there was a concern that if staff were asked to provide information and give ideas for solutions then this would be bias against those worse affected. This was because they were the very people who would probably be too busy to respond fully to the requests. In addition, it was felt that any initiative in this regard would have to be done over a period of weeks as one individual day would not provide a balanced viewpoint. It was also queried whether TRAC data could provide the information being discussed in this regard.

1.9 It was highlighted that the aim of the project needed to be stated as currently what it was aiming for, or what the target at the end of the work was, was unclear.

1.10 It was confirmed that the stress elements of the staff survey feedback were to be led by Tracey Slaven within the Health and Safety Committee, with GF carrying out a deep dive into specific areas. It was confirmed that this would involve talking to staff to help identify specific issues and potential solutions.

1.11 Looking at the stress results by grade was discussed. It was confirmed that this would normally be done across a part of the organisation e.g. a whole School, as this would pull out issues across the board but grades could be considered.

1.12 It was highlighted that Page 10 in the presentation was very academic focussed and there was a request for the project to look at all grades. Disappointment had been expressed by staff that what may have been done for professional services staff was not visible. There was a request for a holistic view to be taken as the survey results showed that there were increase workload and stress issues with PS staff in grades 5-9+. It was confirmed that there was a particular need for academic staff issues to be addressed, then systems would be looked at as well as how PS staff can support academic staff. The second last point on the slide (prioritisation of investment in academic and professional services) stressed that both groups of staff needed to be looked at. However, this will become more difficult due to the continued lack of funding available in the sector. The University needed to look at what could be done differently. It was agreed that this needed

to be fundamental changes not just things which saved an extra hour a week. The narrative needed to be changed to get the community to think bigger.

- 1.13 The fact that stress could also have been contributed to by the fatigue of getting through the Covid period as well as wider external pressures, and the need to recognise that, was discussed.
- 1.14 Pinch points at different times of the year for different groups of staff needed to be recognised so that tasks were not scheduled at the most inconvenient times, which added to stress and workload e.g. academic staff having to comment on next year's timetabling during the period they are undertaking assessments with students and do not have the capacity. It was agreed that there was a profound need to understand what the lived experience was for different groups of staff and looking at different times of the year was also very important. It was recognised that resourcing was going to continue to be an issue and efficiencies would have to be found.
- 1.15 There was discussion in respect of reconfiguring the academic year and the work that was being undertaken in this regard. It was suggested that this should be negotiated with UCU as it had huge implications for academic staff. Just because some supervision was required over the summer period did not mean that it should be widened to cover everyone as this would result in a 'levelling down'. Limited Masters supervision over the summer was very different to having a full teaching term. In response it was noted that this was not part of staff terms and conditions and that the matter should be handled through the normal academic approval processes overseen by Senate. It also clarified that the process was in the early stages of consultation and that careful consideration of workload allocation across the full academic year would be needed whatever the final decision regarding the structure of the academic year in order to ensure that staff were able to devote sufficient time to research. It was agreed to discuss the structure of the academic year separately in the appropriate forums.
- 1.16 Using previously recorded lecturers was discussed as a way of giving time back to academic staff and it would make an immediate difference to their workload. It was questioned whether contact time with students should be the first thing to be cut. It was suggested that other issues, such as large numbers of small course modules which put additional workload pressure on staff should be looked at first.
- 1.17 Timescales were discussed and it was acknowledged that changing processes such as those being discussed would take time. In addition, the issues being experienced would not be solved by moving the workload burden from one group of staff to another unless they were properly resourced to cope with the additional tasks.
- 1.18 The group were supportive of the IT changes which were discussed as these have been raised in the past but it was acknowledged that an assessment of all the systems would also require resources.
- 1.19 In respect of the assessment review, Schools had been asked to evaluate this for a long time. Some changes were being made such as moving from individual to group dissertation projects.
- 1.20 The group discussed that making the changes to reduce workload would be a lot of work initially and everyone involved would need to accept this. Benchmarking against other HEIs who had made these changes may help. It would also involve having to make hard decisions about what areas of work needed to be prioritised or slowed down.
- 1.21 In conclusion, the group agreed the following points:
 1. there had been some movement on workload issues from the 2020 position.
 2. they were broadly supportive of the proposals made in Slide 10,

3. Part of the solution to workload pressures would come from digital technology solutions
4. they recognised that the staff survey demonstrated that PS staff had their own issues with regard to workload especially within the Grade 5-9+ group
5. Stress issues would be reviewed by the H&S Committee

1.22 It was agreed that the plan for the work being led by RT and MC would be circulated to the group when it was ready.

MEETING CLOSED.

2. ACTIONS

Reference	Description	Action by	Action Date
02Mar22 Section 3.3	Develop roadmap of the next steps for further analysis of the Staff Survey data	K Leydecker	Ongoing
26Apr22 Section 6.2	Review of Sabbatical Leave process and application in Schools	M Campbell	Ongoing external to WLPRG
26Apr22 Section 7.2	Discuss how to address the issue of identifying workload on an annual cycle.	K Leydecker T Slaven	Ongoing external to WLPRG
29Sept22 Section 2.1	Continue review of academic staff working on a public holiday versus a university closed day and the associated procedures.	R Taylor D Dyker	Ongoing
29Sept22 Section 3.4	Review the need for additional comms in relation to business cases being submitted for additional staff, especially PS staff.	K Leydecker SMT	Ongoing
27Mar22 Section 1.7	Review ratios within the Schools for Academic v PS Staff	S Waldram	