WLPRG150317/05

Resourcing the Academic Experience: Report 2

UCU Members' Recommendations for Improving the University WLP Framework in 2015-2016

Jeff Waistell (UCU Branch Secretary), 4 March 2015

UCU is pleased to have a University Workload Planning Framework. We are also pleased to note that senior management agree the link between the academic experience and academic resourcing - and indeed recognise the need to review tariffs, given the implications of the 'Strategy for the Student Experience' for academic workloads. Following member consultations, UCU recommends that tariffs need to be clarified and increased. It is also recommended that the University ensures all faculties implement the whole Workload Planning Framework, in the interests of parity of the student experience and equity amongst all academic staff. This includes ensuring that staff have equal workloads (some staff are left with hundreds of hours left vacant in their timetable while others are up to hours or over hours).

This is a follow-up report to the one submitted to the University WLP Group on 12.02.15 and the two reports should be read in conjunction with each other. This report is based on further consultation with all OBU UCU members, it provides additional commentary on the 2014-2015 University WLP Framework, and makes specific recommendations to management for improving the 2015-2016 University WLP Framework, in order to enhance the academic experience. (Please note that the references to numbered activities below [e.g. activity 1] are comments on those activities within the 2014-2015 WLP Framework).

a) Activity 2 on "Preparation (and other activities related to the preparation of teaching materials)" requires more realistic resourcing (particularly given new pedagogical developments and university aspirations for the academic experience). Preparation ought to be resourced as follows: 'Actual hours as timetabled x 3 hrs for each presentation of the module/course/unit.' Quality teaching – including tutorials – requires sufficient preparation time.
b) Nationally, "students are…least happy with assessment and feedback" (NSS, 2014). Best-practice benchmarking with universities that excel in the NSS suggests that Activity 3 on assessment should replace the text "an allocation of 0.8, 1.0, 1.2, 1.6 or 2.0 hours per student" with "an allocation of 0.8, 1.0, 1.2, 1.6 or 2.0 hours <u>per assessment</u>" (e.g. one assignment or one exam but not a dissertation). This increased resource is needed for formative and summative assessment to account for designing, administering, marking, recording, and discussing feedback with students. The default position should not be the lowest tariff. Formative feedback (e.g. draft assignments) doubles the marking load, in which case the above assessment allowance should be set at the maximum (2.0 hours per assessment).

c) Double modules should carry a 100% increment, as they have twice the assessment load.
d) Dissertation assessment does not take less than one hour and there should be a proper allowance for reading, assessing and evaluating dissertations, including communicating with other marker(s) and second marking. The dissertation marking allowance is 'hidden' in the overall number of hours for assessment. It should be more explicit in order to reveal how little time we are being given to mark, second-mark and agree the mark.
e) Assessment hours need to take account of time spent on student vivas (in the case of plagiarism cases, especially dissertations), because the academic needs to read the dissertation again, prepare questions, meet with the ACO to discuss the viva strategy, attend the viva, and then discuss its outcome with the ACO.
f) There should be an allowance to provide support to re-sit students (as well as marking).
g) The baseline for "general administrative duties" is inappropriately low: 120 hours should be the standard. Part-timers receive an allocation in proportion to their FTE but they have to respond to many generic emails and are expected to attend meetings (i.e. they receive a proportionate amount of time for a disproportionate amount of work). A 'pro rata plus' rate should accommodate this.
h) The WLP framework should make explicit reference to time needed for inter-campus transit and for teaching-related travel off-site. This was discussed two years ago and management agreed that as part of the timetabling policy time to travel between sites should be included in workloads, although it does not seem to have happened. There were agreed times based on the assumption that it takes an hour to travel by bus between sites.
i) Time should be allowed for teaching set-up (e.g. of the computer and the room) and answering student queries, shortly before and just after teaching.
j) There should be additional development hours for the first run of a new module, module revisions, a module on a substantially revalidated programme, and one that the tutor is teaching for the first time. 300% of timetabled hours would be appropriate in such cases.
k) Programme Leads and all participating academics should receive sufficient hours for programme development.
l) There is insufficient guidance for allocation of hours to module leaders to ensure quality and parity of student experience. Module Leaders should have a specified rate, which should apply for every run of the module/course/unit. The rate should be based on the number of sets and tutors employed on the module. There should be a ban on any future reduced repeat rate imposed by individual managers and not expressly permitted by the University WLP framework.
m) The design and provision of virtual learning needs more resources than is the case with face-to-face delivery. There should be an assessment of the need for more hours for virtual learning, which should feature in the WLP framework.
n) There is a huge difference between module leading a module with one set of 100 students with the module leader as the only tutor, and leading a module with 150 students in 10 sets and with 10 tutors. Currently the ML allocation does not allocate workload accordingly. There should be a multiplier or divider based on the number of staff delivering the module.

o) Subject Co-ordinators - how is the size: workload ratio to be calculated?

p) The Programme Lead tariff should be increased up to a maximum of 1,200 hours, in line with their burgeoning responsibilities.[i]

q) Academic Advisers: 2 hours per year does not begin to cover the requirement to see each advisee twice per semester: it should be twice as much.

r) There should be allowances for quality assurance activities (e.g. Periodic Reviews).

s) The WLP framework should define allowances for chairing the University Academic Committee; chairing or sitting on validation panels in other faculties; and being an internal examiner for PhDs.

t) Interviewing student applicants is quantifiable and a specific allowance should replace this text: "As appropriate to the workload involved; to be determined by PVC Deans."

u) Research categorisation decisions should recognise and accept funding applications that are in preparation (not just submitted/awarded), due to the length of time that bids take to prepare and to await decisions.

v) The research hours categorisation criteria are unacceptably ambiguous, leading to inconsistent and hence unfair and potentially discriminatory applications in the award of WLP research allowances.

w) There is no explicit definition of the temporal window to be taken into consideration for each of the research activities to be fulfilled (with the exception of the fulfilment of the 'previous year' research plans). The problem of categories based on multiple research activity requirements (e.g. publications, external engagement, impact and grants) can create perverse incentives in individual research plans and distortions in how research output and quality of individuals is evaluated. It is unreasonable to expect that all of these activities would need to take place every single year. Taking a snapshot of a 12-month window to establish whether one meets each and every one of these criteria is an absurd way of evaluating an individual's research contribution, which can only be properly assessed within a longer time window. The key point is that if multiple requirements are to be considered, then surely they cannot be expected to be fulfilled in the same year, every single year. Strict implementation of the existing criteria embedded in these research categories merely incentivises the frequency of research activity spread across multiple fronts rather than the quality of an individual's research activity over a longer time span (<u>a time span that should be akin to that of the 6 years of the REF temporal window – or, at the very least, a half-way point of 3 years</u>). Indeed, the Personal Research Plan document 2014-17 supports such an approach: "*This document is designed to set out your research plans for the next three years in order that an allocation under workload planning can be made to support such activities where appropriate. These will be reviewed in each annual PDR, and between PDRs where appropriate. The information provided will inform both the Faculty's research strategy and your personal work plan load*."

x) 160 hours (0.1 FTE) of allocation for teaching-related scholarship activities and KE activity is currently a tariff that "applies to academic staff who do not receive an (a), (b) or (c) allocation." However, researchers must undertake necessary teaching-related scholarship activities in order to support their students and so all faculties should award the 160 hours in addition to the researcher A/B/C allocation.

y) The following academic procedures should be reviewed in order to conserve academic time according to principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness: electronic-only enrolment of students; duplicated entries in the student assessment marking system; overly bureaucratic internal processes for external research funding bids; the frequency of examination committees; signing off assignments and exams; duplication of end of module reports for external examiners plus formal end of module reviews for course committees; writing new modules in template without much admin support; writing exam papers in an impossibly complicated template without admin support then signing off the final version in hard copy; increased requirements of programme annual review reports commenting on a range of metrics that add little value and the local interpretation of the requirements by senior managers.

z) Heads of Department and Programme Leads are overwhelmed with requests for management information, which could instead be made available automatically with improvements in information technologies.

---

[i] Line management (e.g. including PDRs, multiple meetings, staff development, and teaching observations)
WLP planning and mid-year WLP updating
Admissions decisions and strategy
Clearing enquiries
Induction all years
Module leader support and development
Teaching team meetings
Faculty exec meetings
PL away days
Exam committee briefings
SSC meetings
Subject coordinator meetings/monitoring and support
Admin/PL meetings
Costing and budgeting meetings
International student planning
Marketing materials
Marketing intelligence
Open days
Applicant day
Keep warm campaign
Setting and slotting
Major/minor changes/Validation/Periodic review
Results submission
SEC and MEC
Late mit circs
PETAL
PESE
Good degrees project
Semester 3 teaching/planning
Graduation
AA organisation and monitoring
Leavers tea
NSS survey promotion
NSS review
New staff induction/monitoring
Performance management
Observation of team members
PDRs

Programme surveys and student rep liaison
Student complaints within programme
Complaints Officer for level 1 complaints
Quality MRR meetings
Subject/programme meetings
Departmental meetings input
Challenge document input
PL training
Prizes
Professional body accreditation and campus visits
Careers advice
Placements promotion and support
Supporting subject coordinator