Workload Planning (WLP) Framework

A Survey-Based Report

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Executive Summary

This survey was conducted with the goal to assess the adequacy of the current WLP framework, and to identify which areas—if any—could be improved and how. Nearly half of our members responded to the survey, providing us with both significant quantitative data on trends and patterns across the university as well as extensive qualitative comments reflecting individual experiences.

Our main finding is that there is indeed a significant gap between the hours allocated under the WLP Framework and the hours members actually work in reality. Additionally, we found that there are some clear areas where this gap is particularly acute, which should be addressed as a matter of priority.

The report summarizes the detailed findings of our survey, highlighting the general trends in terms of gross numbers and providing an overview of the comments and suggestions made by the respondents regarding the different areas of the WLP framework.

We would like to emphasize the pressing character of this issue, particularly in light of the health and safety concerns it raises amongst staff in terms of stress.

All percentages in the report have been rounded to the nearest integer.

I.   PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

A total of **152 union member**s participated in the survey. The participants came primarily from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (56), the Faculty of Business (31), the Faculty of Health and Life Science (29) and the Faculty of Technology Design and Environment (29). [Q1]

II.   KNOWLEDGE OF WLP FRAMEWORK

Over **84% of respondents were either fully, very, or quite familiar** with the Brookes Workload Planning Framework. About 14% reported having seen it but not having received a full explanation of it, while 2% had never seen it before. [Q2]

III.   TEACHING

A.   <u>**Teaching – General**</u> [Q3 & Q4]

Current allocation: **2.5 hours per 1 hour** of contact time.

Recommend allocation (average): **3 hours per 1 hour** of contact time.

<u>Comments</u>**:** The bulk of the comments emphasises the **unevenness between types of modules**, flagging the major difference between a) new modules, b) existing modules that are new to the teaching staff, and c) continuing modules. **Entirely new modules take a significant larger amount of time to prepare, as do modules that are new to the person teaching them**, (the WLP Framework is meant to accommodate the first factor and ought to accommodate the second factor). Regarding these issues, answers suggested the **need for much more preparation time**, e.g.: "if the session is either new, or new to the teacher in question, it is quite common to need 8 hours per hour of class contact. You could probably get by with less but this affects the quality of the teaching"; "writing a new lecture takes two days"; "preparation – particularly if the material is new to the lecturer – takes far longer than 2.5 per 1"; "a new module might take as much as 8 hours for each 1 hour session". A number of respondents also flagged **the 2.5 hour allocation as inadequate for modules with over**

100 students and for postgraduate courses, and noted that the existing allocation gives lecturers **little incentive to refresh and upgrade their lectures** from one year to the next.

B. **Teaching – Assessment** [Q5-Q7]

Current allocation**: 0.8 or 1.0 hours** (over 60%), **1.6 or 2.0 hours** (29%)

Recommended allocation (average): **2.2 hours**

Comments**:** Respondents overwhelmingly highlight that the **current allocation is deeply unrealistic** to meet student demands for both formative and summative assessment. Some respondents suggested the university should be **more transparent** with students regarding how much time lecturers are allocated to provide assessment and feedback to each of them. Respondents also noted the **difference between marking exams and marking coursework**— the latter being significantly more time consuming—and suggested this be taken into account in the WLP. Another regular suggestion was to adopt a sliding scale and increase the amount of time allocated based on the level of the course. Overall, the feedback points towards taking greater account of the variation in the type, number, and level of complexity of the assignments in each course.

IV. DISSERTATION SUPERVISION

A. **Teaching – UG Dissertation Supervision [Q8]**

Current allocation: **10 hours**

Recommended allocation (average): **14.1 hours**

B. **Teaching – PG Dissertation Supervision** [Q9]

Current allocation: **15 hours**

Recommended allocation (average): **19.0 hours**

C. **Teaching – PGR supervision by a team** [Q10]

Current allocation: **75 hours**

Recommended allocation (average): **98.5 hours**

Overall Comments [Q11]**:** Most respondents point out that the current allocation is **woefully insufficient**, including for UG theses as these often require quite a bit of guidance. A minority of respondents are satisfied with the existing allocation and/or emphasize how much the amount varies depending on the student.

V. RESEARCH, KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE, AND SCHOLARSHIP [Q12-14]

Respondents were asked to answer these questions based on their allocation of hours. The results have been summarized to reflect the distinction between different tariffs.

(a) 640 hours (0.4 FTE): Substantial research/KE activity and expected future REF submission; likely to have associated research management responsibilities and external research-related commitments.
   a. Q: Is this allowance sufficient to cover your actual research activity time?
      i. Yes: 52%
      ii. No: 48%
   b. Recommended allowance (average): 824 hours.

(b) 480 hours (0.3 FTE): Likely future REF submission, but a less significant volume of research/impact/KE-related activity than in category (a). The research plan set out last year has been fulfilled.
   a. Q: Is this allowance sufficient to cover your actual research activity time?
      i. Yes: 40%
      ii. **No: 60%**
   b. Recommended allowance (average): **623 hours**.

(c) <u>320 hours</u> (0.2 FTE): A possible future REF submission; some good research/impact/KE contributions but not at the quality or volume levels of categories (a) and (b).

    a. Q: Is this allowance sufficient to cover your actual research activity time?

        i. Yes: 33%

        ii. No: 66%

    b. Recommended allowance (average): **469 hours.**

(d) <u>160 hours</u> (0.1 FTE): The basic level of allocation for teaching-related scholarship activities and/or limited levels of research, impact and KE activity; this tariff applies to academic staff who do not receive an (a), (b) or (c) allocation.

    a. Q: Is this allowance sufficient to cover your actual research activity time?

        i. Yes: 46%

        ii. No: 54%

    b. Recommended allowance (average): **251 hours.**

(e) <u>Newly-appointed</u> Lecturers and Senior Lecturers: As part of the University's First Three Years commitment to newly- appointed staff on a research trajectory, new L/SLs will received an RKES allowance of up to 640 hours in years 1 and 2.

    a. Q: Is this allowance sufficient to cover your actual research activity time?

        i. Yes: 80%

        ii. No: 20%

    b. Recommended allowance (average): 573 hours.

<u>Comments</u>: Numerous respondents emphasize the **plainly insufficient character of their allocated hours**. Another one of the recurring comments amongst respondents is the fact that even in cases where these hours are sufficient in theory, the fact that all the other activities (teaching, supervisions, etc) take much more time than what is allocated for means they end up **spilling onto research hours** ('the main difficulty is ringfencing time for research'). As a result, research is done over weekends and presumed holidays. A few respondents explicitly link this problem to OBU's continued efforts to reduce the proportion of university finances spent on faculty academics. Another commonly flagged issue is the **lack of a distinction between scholarship** (i.e. keeping up with scholarship in the subject area) **and research activity**; some respondents suggest having a separate allowance for scholarship.

VI. ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP ACTIVITY

A. **Programme Leads** [Q14]

Undergraduate Min: 2-4 programmes and approx. 350 students

- Current allowance: minimum allocation **320 hours**
- Allowance sufficient? 28% yes, **72% no**.
- Recommended allowance (average): **560 hours**.

Undergraduate Max: 6 programme or more and approx. 1100 students

- Current allowance: maximum allocation **480 hours**
- Allowance sufficient? 27% yes, **73% no.**
- Recommended allowance (average): **816 hours**.

Postgraduate Min: 1-2 programme at less than 100 students

- Current allowance: minimum allocation **200 hours**
- Allowance sufficient? 35% yes, **65% no.**
- Recommended allowance (average): **429 hours.**

Postgraduate Max: 3-5 programmes and more than 150 students

- Current allowance: maximum allocation **480 hours**
- Allowance sufficient? 27% yes, **73% no.**
- Recommended allowance (average): **727 hours.**

B. **Principal Lecturer** (Student experience) [Q15]

Current allowance: 320 hours.

Allowance sufficient? 67% yes, 33% no.

Recommended allowance (average): 510 hours.

C. **Research Lead** [Q16]

Current allowance: 320 hours.

Allowance sufficient? 73% yes, 27% no.

Recommended allowance (average): 440 hours.

D. **Subject Coordinators** [Q17]

Current allowance: 80-320 hours related to size of subject area.

Respondent allocation (average): **184.5 hours**

Allowance sufficient? 26% yes, **74% no**.

Recommended allocation (average): **290.5 hours.**

Overall Comments [Q18]: While some respondents again emphasize the **insufficiency of the allowances, particularly for programme leads**, a few respondents also point to the unfortunate complexity created by the creation of so many different roles and suggest simply providing better admin support.

VII.   OTHER ACTIVITY AREAS

A. **University Research Ethics Committee** [Q19]

Allowance sufficient?
-   Chair (480 hours): 100% yes
-   Committee member (up to 240 hours): 100% yes.

Recommended allowance (average): no recommendation.

B. **Academic Advisers** [Q20]

Current allowance: 2 hours per student per year.

Allowance sufficient? 59% yes, 41% no.

Recommended allowance: 3.7 hours.

C. **Module Leadership** [Q21 & Q22]

Current allowance: As appropriate to workload involved; to be determined by PVC Deans.

Respondent allocation (average): **23.1 hours**

Allowance sufficient? 26% yes, **74% no**.

Recommended allowance (average): **46.1 hours.**

Comments: The vast majority of respondents point to the **inadequate character of the hours allocation for module leadership**, for instance: "the current allowance is barely sufficient to cover the administrative burden prior to week one (updating materials; tending the Moodle site; briefing seminar leaders)." Respondents emphasize that this is **particularly the case with large modules** that require practical splits, managing big teaching teams, moderating assessments, dealing with MC applications and email traffic, etc. In addition to an increase in hours, suggestions include an improved room booking system, the standardization of these hour allocation across the university (rather than having line managers decide on an ad hoc basis), and taking into account variations across types of modules (e.g. independent study modules require more time).

D. **General Administrative Duties** [Q23]

Current allowance: Baseline 60 hours; maximum 120 hours.

Respondent allocation (average): **96.1 hours**.

Allocation sufficient? 38% yes, **62% no**.

Recommended allocation (average): **181.9 hours**.

Comments: Respondents overwhelmingly point to the **disproportionate amount of time occupied by administrative duties,** and the **insufficient time allocated to these in the WLP Framework**. In particular, many point to the very large quantities of emails that have to be addressed: "email is one of the key distractions at work." Respondents also highlight the increasingly cumbersome bureaucratic processes, and suggest the need for better admin support.

E. **PCTHE** (2 year programme)

Current allowance: 120 hours per year.

Allowance sufficient? 90% yes, 10% no.

Recommended allowance (average): 180 hours.

VIII. TOTAL NUMBER OF WORKLOAD HOURS

Respondents were asked: "your expected total number of workload hours is stated at the end of your Workload Plan. E.g. 1600 hrs for a full time contract and 800 for a 0.5 contract. What percentage over or under this figure did you work during the previous academic year according to your final WLP?"

In response, **77% reported having worked over the allocated figure, with 34% of respondents selecting the highest category of "more than 10% over" the allocation**. Just 12% thought the number matched about right, while 9% were slightly under their existing allocation (i.e. 1% and 5% under) and 2% were more significantly under their allocation (i.e. more than 6% under).

Comments [Q27]: Though a few respondents seem to be relatively satisfied with their allocation, **the vast majority of respondents are adamant about the fact that they work far more hours than they are allocated**: "Bears no relation to the number of hours required", "I have no doubt that I work 50% over my tariff", "I usually work a 60 hrs week,

but this is to keep on top of research", "my WLP in no way reflected the number of working hours in the year", "I often work weekends and evenings – much more than my allocation", "232 extra hours", "does not represent reality", "always starts higher and ends the year even higher", "I am on a .6 contract, i.e. 3 days per week. Last year I worked 5 days, plus many evenings and weekend. I reckon, without exaggeration, that I exceeded my allocated hours by between 75 and 100 per cent", "I averaged 50-60 hours/week", "I worked 2600 hours last year and recorded it through my ipad", "60-70 hours per week on average", and the list goes on.

IX. OTHER AREAS OF ACTIVITY THAT COULD BE INCLUDED IN THE FRAMEWORK

1. Response to the broad range of continuing institutional changes.
2. **Repeatedly emphasized**: Curriculum development: development of module/programme contents, including allowance for new modules and for rewriting and/or updating of modules.
3. Added administration of working on multiple programmes.
4. Internal moderation.
5. Inter-campus travel.
6. NSS and annual reviews.
7. Personal development/training.
8. Preparation for field trips (not just the hours spent on the field trip itself).
9. Voluntary participation in other modules if one has an area of expertise.
10. Adapting to increasing use of a range of technologies.
11. Support for colleagues, e.g. new members of staff.
12. ACO attending appeal panels.
13. Increase in student numbers and student demands.
14. Corporate citizenship: membership of validation panels and peer review panels.
15. Additional suggestion: clearer allocation of assessment hours.

X.   ANY OTHER COMMENTS

<u>Comments</u>: Respondents highlighted **some positive aspects** of the WLP, with one respondent noting that it had enabled them to factor in some voluntary work, but they also flagged **a few further issues**. These include: the fact that **workloads are changed as late as September**, the fact that the WLP **ignores external activities** that are significant to Brookes' international reputation such as examining, refereeing, editing, working for professional societies, and sitting on external committees; the **unrealistic marking allowances**, which seem to significantly underestimate "how long it actually takes to mark an essay thoroughly and fairly" and the additional fact that these are somehow lower for ALs even though the task is the same; and the fact that **extra tasks** are piled on beyond the 1600 hours without allowance.