

Submission to the Academic Workloads Taskforce.

On behalf of the Tertiary Education Union (TEU)

Massey Branch

by TEU Branch Committee

28th February 2014

The Tertiary Education Union (TEU) is the largest union at Massey University and represents more than 1200 of its staff. The establishment of the Academic Workloads Taskforce was a result of collective negotiations held in 2013 between Massey University and TEU. It is hoped that the findings will help to alleviate the many complaints and concerns raised by members regarding workload and its allocation.

We thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Academic Workloads Taskforce and we wish to also make an oral submission for further discussion.

The current version of the University Workload Policy and Procedures were updated in 2012. This review and consultation occurred in 2012 and was headed by Professor Susan Mumm. There were no significant changes from the proposed version despite a strong measure of opposition in some areas. I have attached the tracked changes version of the consultation version of the policy and procedures we have as dated 17/4/2012, along with the submission made by TEU as dated 30/4/2012. Please note that proposed workload procedures document also lists guidelines for Academic Workload Allocation in Appendix 2.

1. Introduction

This submission is guided by various responses and comments from members. In addition, we have also made an informal email survey of our members, where we asked the following question. Are you satisfied with the way your workload is allocated (yes/no)? Despite this message being sent to members in the first week of semester, with its considerable demands on staff time, we have received a large number of responses. The current count is No = 74, Yes = 34, with a large majority of the 'No' votes being stressed in capitals or bold.

A number of members also took the time to add comments. A number of these comments were made under conditions of remaining anonymous. We find it of some concern that

university staff do not feel safe in expressing their views despite the principles of open discussion and academic freedom promoted within the academic profession.

Our submission to you follows the key definitions listed in the workload policy, along with a conclusion and general comments.

2. Equitable

Equitable:

means that staff members with comparable levels of appointment and responsibilities should have similar workloads. Casual, proportional part-time and fixed-term staff members with limited term appointments shall have workloads that are equitable relative to confirmed full-time staff in the same teaching area of work.

The development of equitable workload models has generally developed at a school or institute level with guidance from the college management. This is understandable as each learning discipline has differing teaching practices and mixes of students which best determine the varying ratios of work area time allocations and how to manage these within an administrative unit. Workload models need to reflect an equitable allocation across staff across the school/institute, across campus and should be reflected in a fair allocation of work for all staff across the University.

A number of comments raised concerns about the loading of more junior staff with high teaching allocations, leaving them with little time for research or postgraduate supervision. It is understandable that senior academic staff may have a better research track record and funding base to require a higher research workload allocation. Care needs to be taken to ensure that junior academic staff are provided with the time and opportunities to develop their skills and enable their progression up the ranks for the future of the university and research communities.

Many workload models operate under a spreadsheet system with mathematical models measuring contact hours and student numbers to deliver workload units. The models developed with ongoing consultation and open discussion from the staff they represent seem to provide the most transparent allocation. It is recognised that some papers require a higher individual student contact hours, such as in Creative Arts or in areas where professional registration is required. This differs from what may occur in a large College of Business paper where students learn in large lectures and tutorials, with Stream based resources to assist.

A number of the workload models were developed some years ago and have not kept pace with the additional individual workload aspects on online teaching. Not only has an additional layer of learning content been added as Stream-based sites, but these resources need to be maintained with regular and timely responses to discussion boards and email contact from students. Lecturers with high teaching loads find that email contact with students can rapidly erode their time from the other aspects of their academic duties, generally at the expense of research time. We are aware that many staff respond to students' email and Stream discussion boards in their personal time in an effort to keep on top of their electronic mail. Some recognition of the time required for these student interactions may assist in setting more realistic workload limitations or guiding staff to better manage student understanding of acceptable response times, which should be supported by senior management.

3. Reasonable

Reasonable:

means that in allocating the workload all practical steps were taken to facilitate career progression; that the workloads so allocated can be managed within the time frames and deadlines set for the performance of the duties, and will allow staff to maintain a reasonable balance between their professional and personal life.

The majority of comments received were in regard to the levels of teaching workload in some respect or other. The definition above supports the view that workload allocation amongst the staff in a unit needs to provide time and support for junior staff to progress within their career. In a university environment, staff research activities are one of the key measures used to determine any promotion up the ranks of academia. Loading junior staff with high teaching loads limits their ability for research and promotion. The guidelines attached to the *Workload Policy* have a nominal research workload allocation of 30% with a range of 10-50%. Our members report that many of them struggle to complete their teaching and administration duties within their work periods, let alone have time for research investigations and the contemplative thinking required to advance knowledge.

The varying nature of daily workloads of academic staff due to various high pressure periods of intense activity (such as examination marking) has consequently determined that there is no set hourly limit of work for academic staff. In the past, there has been some level of trust between staff and management, such that the ebb and flow of work routines has balanced out

over the year. Additional administrative and teaching requirements have increased over time and the goodwill of staff, which has maintained a relatively stable service to their students, has eroded over time. Our members are asking what a 100% workload is supposed to entail in terms of hours per week or year, as time in their personal life is increasingly used to support the university. One member commented that the University gets “50-100% more work than they pay for”.

While there are many variations across the university in how workload is allocated, it is important for staff to be informed of their allocations early in the year so that they can plan their activities across the year. In some cases, additional duties are added to workloads as the year progresses and without adequate discussion or agreement of the staff member concerned.

Setting a reasonable workload also needs to take into account the capability and experience of the staff members. Some of our members are pressured to teach courses in which they are neither trained nor qualified. Little or no allocation of time is provided for their personal development and scholarship required to enable them to teach such a course. Papers with international accreditation or knowledge of legislative changes require ongoing reading and scholarship to remain current in the field of study and this often has to be accomplished in personal time. Professional development time also needs to be included in time allocations to learn new tools such as those now needed for the various delivery aspects of online learning.

The ability of academic staff to maintain a healthy work/life balance is becoming ever harder to attain. The ever increasing load of online communications and management’s desire to support student demands rather than staff needs is resulting in an increasing number of staff answering messages at home or while on leave. Pressure to take leave to alleviate the financial liability of the university merely forces staff to work from home while on leave to meet these demands. The inability to complete their workload in a standard working week is unhealthy and unreasonable. The recent changes to the workload policies and procedures, which removed the requirement for “mutual agreement” and the “agreement of the staff member” has made it increasingly difficult for staff to challenge and workload allocation. The current dispute processes are loaded in favour of management, when there appears to be a climate of fear or trepidation in raising issues, especially for staff on fixed or part-time contracts where loss of favour may severely impact upon their financial status.

The Disputes Procedure is not promoted or supported by the employer and in our experience is rarely utilised by members. When members have accessed these provisions the experience

has been adversarial with the members feeling they have to defend their situation in the face of a manager reluctant to accept there is a problem because to do so would potentially come at a financial cost. The impact on colleagues is another reason individual members are reluctant to raise a workload issue. Members consistently report that there are not enough staff to cover when academics are on leave or awaiting appointment of new staff. These processes returned comments from our members as being “hopeless” or “takes forever”.

A requirement of staff to travel to other campuses for contact courses is also seen as unreasonable by some members, when there are qualified staff located at the other sites. This is a historical artefact of extramural teaching being provided by Palmerston North staff and is slowly changing in some schools. Better consideration of workloads of all teaching staff across all delivery modes is required to balance loads across the schools and limit costs in terms of staff travel time and monetary budgets.

4. Safe

Safe:

means that all practical steps will be taken to minimise physical or mental harm to staff.

A safe workload is expected to exist in all working environments. Anecdotal reports of staff presenting at their doctors with work related illnesses are sometimes referred to as having the “Massey disease” and is related to overwork and stress. The Vice-Chancellor is aware that some staff choose to expend a great deal of energy into their teaching and research activities. This “culture of overwork” needs to be addressed by management to ensure the ongoing safety of their staff. Overwork is seen as normal and acceptable by most staff and there are few who would challenge their manager and report their workload as unsafe. It is understood that the level of work may be too high, but budget and staff limitations require ongoing commitment to the students, so staff just carry on trying to make ends meet, even if it impacts on their personal life.

The impact of inter-campus travel also has some safety concerns. Travel to Albany from either of the other campuses, without an overnight stay, requires an early start and/or late conclusion to the day’s work. Additional commuting travel required at the end of the day’s work may create serious risk of accident due to inattention and sleepiness. Workload models which may require travel to other campuses need to take into account the extensive travel time required.

In the past, academic staff have provided course advice to students on their proposed study as part of their academic service. Changes to the structure of academic advice and a move to a shared services model has migrated some of this advice away from staff members towards a student self-help model or support via the contact centre. An increasing litigious environment has increased the possibility that a staff member's advice is challenged. Without the ongoing support of management, staff need to feel safe to offer advice or may need to direct students towards the contact centre and free up time for other work activities. Academic members report reduced administrative support and an increased expectation that they will pick up more and more administrative tasks.

The current *Workload Policy* has an empty section under the heading of Relevant Legislation. There are various safe working practices and legislation which should be listed here to ensure that the University is aware of the consequences of requiring their staff to work under unsafe working practices.

Transparent

Transparent:

means the mechanism for the allocation of workload is clear and open to scrutiny, and that for academic staff information on the average and range of workloads in the department is available, and for general staff that they can compare their workload with staff in the same or similar occupational class in their department.

The transparency of workload models is variable across the university. Some schools have complex models with mathematical calculations to determine loadings in the different areas. Many models are shared across the school for all to see, but some schools are less open in how workload is allocated. A multitude of equations within the models help to hide how the workload is calculated. Transparency of workloads across a college or university is unlikely to be supported by management, but the ability of Heads of Schools/Institutes to view various models and compare the division and scale of workload will assist in maintaining an open and transparent system.

The average and range of workload allocations for staff needs to be reliably provided across the university. This will permit staff to make comparisons between their own workload and those of other staff in similar circumstances. These allocations need to be presented in a simple easy to follow report with basic headings of teaching, research, postgraduate supervision, administration and service.

Proper consultation is required with the manager regarding allocation of workload. This requires a two way discussion and time to engage in the process and should not be a task controlled by an administrator or workload committee who are not aware of “the staff member’s strengths, capabilities and development plans”. (2012, *University Workloads Procedure*)

The consultative discussions between managers and their staff on allocation workloads can provide some recognition of the additional time required for updating or developing new courses and provide adequate time for acquiring the scholarship updates required to address knowledge and legislative changes in some papers.

5. Models

A number of the mathematical models often bear no resemblance to reality. Academic staff will do whatever it takes to get the course taught and delivered. A 20-30% workload in teaching activity may have little to do with a normal working week of what is supposed to be 37.5 hours and more to do with fitting existing staff into the teaching requirements of the year.

A number of the models were initially created many years ago before the advent of online teaching. Updated models need to be developed within each school with open and frank discussion of staff on what is needed to provide a suitable learning environment for our students and delivery of papers efficiently and with the quality expected of Massey University.

Input from staff in the development of any updated workload mechanism or formula needs to be strengthened, Currently the policy requires ratification by the “relevant senior manager” but does not require that the workload formula is developed in consultation with staff.

6. Conclusion

It is the view of a significant proportion of our members that the current workload allocation process is unfair, unsafe or does not properly address the needs for a suitable work/life balance. The advent of extensive online communications as part of teaching contact hours is not being addressed in normal workload allocations and this is impacting upon the time available for research and other university activities. As research activities are the lead drivers for promotion, this has severe impacts on staff with higher teaching allocations on their future career progression. The apparent favouring of senior staff for higher research and

lower teaching workload allocations further degrades possible progression and promotes disunity within a department rather than creating a positive working environment.

The dispute processes place an unfair onus on the individual with any dispute raised directly with the manager or manager's manager. More open and transparent processes may negate the need to settle any workload allocation problems, but we would prefer that proper consultation between the parties occurs before any such situation arises.

The bottom line which is understood by most staff is that the university system is underfunded and allocation of workload is often a matter of schools needing to allocate their teaching requirements among the staff and budget that exist.

The enormous growth in the bureaucracy and administration of universities, the constant and complex demands of funding applications, the increasing demands of online learning and the expectations of students to a responsive educational experience have not resulted in a commensurate growth in staffing. Academic and general staff have instead absorbed the demands which have in turn become the norm.

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