

# The Workload Issue.....

## 'More With Less' And Other Presumptuous Prepositions

In spending cuts doublespeak, the new mantra is 'more with less'. What's 'with' this preposition? Is this, after years of 'efficiency savings' and unrewarded 'productivity gains', the unveiling of some miraculous secret HEFCE weapon – the academic energy equivalent of nuclear fission? Or, when UUK talks of achieving 'more with less', is it conveniently slurring its prepositions, and actually intending 'more for less'. In other words, are we simply being confronted with the timeless demand for an intensification of work, and now, in addition, at a time of real salary cuts?



That was a rhetorical question. In the rhetoric of national politics, the only arguments are about how much more, and for how much less. We can support national UCU protests against this philistine 'coat-cutting according to cloth' competition, of course. And locally (see the website) SUCU has pledged to support members confronted by unreasonable workload demands, and is monitoring the new workload management formulae emerging from the VC's laudable transparency commitment. But members will have to think seriously about what they are prepared to tolerate, and how to prevent the 'more with/for less' process becoming a personal nightmare of overwork and lowered standards.

What we do have at our disposal, since the 2006 Framework Agreement, and especially for academic staff, is the working week clause. At the time the University wanted academic contracts to specify a 'minimum' 35-hour week. SUCU rejected that of course. The term 'nominal' 35-hour week, that was agreed, performs the double function of excluding overtime pay, and preserving the flexibility of professional commitment. The self-regulated flexitime we operate is certainly positive for us, and

undoubtedly highly productive for scholarship and for the University. The notion of academic professionals having a 'working week' has, however, often been treated with derision or disdain, carrying a proletarian stigma - one step away from clocking in and out.

In the new world of slurred prepositions, though, we should welcome the opportunity presented by the 'nominal' 35-hour week. It offers individuals a benchmark, and an opportunity to argue with line managers about what they can reasonably be expected to do. It may be reasonable to be asked to take on some new task, or one left undone by a departed colleague, but it is equally reasonable for us to enquire what, then, is to be left undone in its place? And to be able to do more than simply counter assertion with assertion in case of disputes, it makes serious sense for colleagues to keep a private record of their working time and the balance of its content. When the REF machine goes into overdrive, vaguely asserting that you lost weeks of research time, doing more for less on the teaching front two years ago, will not be much use if current experience of HR's 'performance management' juggernaut is anything to go by. SRDS is a routine opportunity to record such matters, more serious procedures are available for unreasonable work demands. Academic-related colleagues may be less vulnerable to conveniently vague notions of workload, but will certainly face new demands. Knowing the content of one's job summary is a sensible starting point for discussing what is and what is not a reasonable work demand.

The VC's insistence on focusing on our core values and tasks may be unavoidable, but members need to know their own working time, and where relevant their own job summaries, if they are to avoid line managers making unreasonable demands to do more than one job, or jobs that are the proper duties of higher paid staff.

At least the t-shirt industry should be able to achieve efficiency savings. They can flog us 'more for less' t-shirts, and with a simple adaption offer our students the 'less for more' t-shirts that capture the combination of reduced services and increased fees coming their way.

May 2010

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# Workload Protection

'I love my job, but not 24/7'. This was the title of a well-attended fringe meeting on workloads at UCU Congress 2009. Many staff working in higher education do like a lot of their work and they do believe education is a worthwhile project. The problem, however, is that in any job enthusiasm and commitment can turn to resentment and dislike, if working hours are excessive or the work pace is constantly intensive. That is why UCU members are increasingly interested in workload protection, both in terms of contractual provision and good working practices.

Workload protection can give academic and academic-related staff some contractual boundaries on what can reasonably be expected of them. This does not solve the problems of the universe, but it does give a firm platform from which excessive workloads can be tackled. It is not unprofessional to set some boundaries and to challenge people (whether managers, colleagues or students) when they treat your time as an unlimited free good. Often in Higher Education we hear employers and managers equating professionalism with flexibility and unlimited working hours, forgetting that professionals such as solicitors and accountants charge for their time by the hour.

Proper work-planning can also help with campaigning against redundancies. UCU demands equality impact assessments of all redundancy proposals. We also need to talk more about workload impact assessments. What will the impact of the proposed redundancies be on the workloads of the remaining staff and the quality of education and support provided to students? Too often redundancies mean that staff leave, but their work does not. This can mean that the remaining staff feel so over-loaded and stressed that they decide they have to retire at the earliest possible opportunity or take the next severance package offered. The University of Staffordshire has

recently paid £110,000 in compensation to an employee who became ill with stress, arising from non-filling of vacancies in his area. We have to use work planning processes to show the need for the work done by the existing staff, when campaigning against proposals for job losses.

Workload protection is also important for UCU in terms of our equality agenda. We want to support members in doing a good professional job, having a decent work/life balance, being able to spend time with family and friends, and having time to be an active citizen. Will some university staff be too busy to find the time to vote on General Election day? I hope not. Please book in the time for voting in your diary or on-line calendar if you use one. Workplans are also important when negotiating reasonable adjustments for disabled staff. Union reps need to check that the basic work plan is reasonable for anyone, whether disabled or not, before discussing reasonable adjustments. Otherwise there is a danger that we will simply move an unreasonable workload back to one that can be done within a normal and reasonable working week.

So what makes a work plan reasonable? It should have some 'headroom' or 'contingency time'. If all hours are allocated at the start of the year, then clearly the employee will end up working beyond hours. It must be within contractual parameters. A reasonable workplan must contain a reasonable balance of duties, which recognises both institutional priorities and the career development of individuals. It must have regard to equality issues and it must be agreed in an open and transparent process, so that individuals can compare their workplans with those in their work area in terms of fairness, equity and contract compliance.

*Liz Lawrence*

*UCU Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Secretary*

## Acting up/special responsibility payments

Ok, so you've agreed to take on extra workload on a temporary basis. You've agreed with your managers that you have the capacity to take the work on, whether this is as a result of a temporary absence of a colleague or the creation of a vacancy when someone leaves.

Think about whether what you've agreed to take on is within your current grade or is it work of a higher grade. You'll find grade profiles at: [www.shef.ac.uk/hr/reward/usgs/profiles](http://www.shef.ac.uk/hr/reward/usgs/profiles) and information about the university policy on acting up or special responsibility payments at: [www.shef.ac.uk/hr/reward/additional/](http://www.shef.ac.uk/hr/reward/additional/)

Be clear that any payment is for a temporary period only. Remember that promotion is the way forward if there is any likelihood that the work is yours for keeps. The next promotion round isn't far off. Look at [www.shef.ac.uk/hr/reward/promotion](http://www.shef.ac.uk/hr/reward/promotion)

If you need help to interpret any of this then contact us at [ucu@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:ucu@sheffield.ac.uk)

## Leeds Solidarity Rally



Sheffield UCU supported a rally called by Leeds University on 4th March to mark a significant victory in their battle against compulsory redundancies. Leeds UCU members voted overwhelmingly for strike action, and their (very aggressive) management backed off the day before the strikes were to start. So what was to be a solidarity rally became more of a celebration - though there may well be more battles to come...



# Majority of Hourly Paid staff are Bank Workers say University

As part of continuing negotiations we have been requesting outcome information to include equality data (that is ethnicity, disability, gender and age) and were shocked to find at the beginning of March, in spite of assurances during negotiations, only 50 people have been given contracts of employment, 19 have been designated as self-employed and a whopping 780 individuals have been deemed to have Bank Worker status.

Bank Worker status, which attracts poorer conditions of service and fewer benefits, is not appropriate for those who are teaching, demonstrating, instructing etc (ie working to grade 6 or above) on a regular basis for even an hour or two a week, as these duties carry with them mutuality of obligation (requiring the same person to do it), control and personal service, all of which are factors which give rise to employee status.

We were further concerned when HR informed us they have no central records as to who the 780 people are, what kind of work they would undertake. In fact no personal information at all, and that they would have to go back to departments in order to pull together the equality information we have now asked for.

As many of you will recall, one of main purposes of the Pay Framework Agreement was to see casual workers assimilated to permanent pro-rata contracts. The agreement reached between UCU and University management was signed in good faith with a view that the Bank Worker agreements would very rarely be used for those staff engaged in teaching-related roles. It is just not acceptable to see therefore, the sheer scale of numbers of staff assimilated to inferior terms and conditions. Arguably the casualisation of staff has deteriorated further at the University. By choosing to implement the assimilation process in the way that they have, the UoS management are preventing individuals who make valued contributions to the University, the opportunity of hard fought-for, decent employment rights.

It must be said that University of Sheffield is alone in the

sector by taking this approach with many HEI's seeking to engage **all** academic and academic-related staff on improved terms and conditions and not to build what is in effect, an in-house agency providing a cheap and disposable casualised workforce.

UCU is meeting with University management again on the 26<sup>th</sup> April where we are planning on putting forward counter-proposals to amend the current assimilation procedure as currently practiced at UoS. The proposals will focus on ways in which the majority of staff engaged in teaching activities can be employed on more favourable contractual terms. If these proposals cannot be negotiated and agreed, UCU will have to consider withdrawing from the Agreement and will be seeking national support from delegates in attendance at UCU's annual congress at the end of May if this is to be the case.

One of the ways individuals involved can influence the process is to appeal against a decision if they feel it is wrong. We appreciate these individuals are amongst the most vulnerable in the University and are thus reluctant to appeal. It is important that everyone is properly employed since if the university continues to employ easily disposable staff to perform front-line duties it leaves little to the imagination as to what will happen in terms of quality and workload. So we have organised an open meeting for all those affected by this process, no matter what your contract or employment status is at the moment to bring everyone up to date with the current situation, to give help and advice on where to go next, and how to get support in achieving the right outcome for individuals, departments and the university.

## Open Meeting for All: The Regularisation of Atypical Workers — Monday 10 May 1 - 2pm Fulwood Room

If you are teaching at that time your HOD should appreciate how important it is for you to be released on this occasion. Members, non-members and postgraduate student teachers are all welcome to attend. **Please pass this information onto anyone you know who should come to this meeting.**

## Workload Allocation Models

In the post-VSS environment, workload has already intensified in many areas. In addition, the uncertain financial situation in HE is creating fears about job security, which some managers, themselves under pressure from above, may be tempted to exploit in order to "get more work out of" staff. In this context, the emergence of workload allocation models (WAMs) is becoming a hot issue here at Sheffield. Of course, WAMs are primarily an issue for academic staff, but the general threat of overloading is relevant to all members. UCU policy is that WAMs should be treated with caution, as they may lead to work intensification. On the other hand, they may also be useful in tackling overloading and inequities, always providing that they are transparent, equitable and within contractual boundaries.

**WAM Survey**—In an effort to gain insight into developments here, a survey was carried out by Sheffield UCU of workload allocation practice across a range of departments. The feedback raised a number of serious concerns. This survey makes it clear that there is a wide diversity of practice in relation to workload management, with some practices being more favourable to members' interests than others. Where WAMs are in use, evidence has emerged, for example, of a

lack of consultation with staff, as well as a lack of transparency in how work is allocated. There are clear grounds for concern about whether the work which members are being asked to do is fair, reasonable and contractually warranted. Where a system of local patronage is in operation, for example, with no clarity about levels of work, this is clearly not in members' interests.

**WAM Abuses**—Even where WAMs are in operation, there are a number of ways in which WAMs can be worked around by management. For example, management may seek to create an informal rule which says that 110% of work allocation is the 'real' or 'true' norm within the department, and then put pressure on members to work to that norm. Again, by using a model which is based on a unit of account whose relationship to working reality is not immediately clear, e.g. FTEs or 'credits', management can create uncertainty in members' minds about where the workload limit lies. Another way in which management may manipulate the model - where hours are not the currency - is to ratchet up the load each year without consultation. Lowering or under-allocating the hours required for the task is another managerial trick. *(Continued on next page)*

# Workload Allocation Models (continued)

This leaves staff in a situation where, in order to do the job properly, they have to work more than the allocated hours. Another managerial option is to fail to account thoroughly for all the work which is required; this leaves members in the position of being asked to do work for which there is no workload credit. Partly allied to this, management may also use a 'plug figure' or residual bucket into which a range of ill-defined and poorly time-costed responsibilities are dumped. Such a category might be called 'citizenship', for example, and its content left deliberately unclear so that it becomes a grey area.

**Changing Times**—In a rapidly changing environment, departmental workloads should be based on accurate data as far as possible and sensitive to future fluctuations in load. For example, where a department is put under pressure by the centre to increase its postgraduate recruitment, it should be possible to model the impact of any increase in student numbers on workload at both the departmental and individual level. Again, if due to severance schemes, non-

replacement of departing staff, suppression of posts, or any other managerial action, the number of staff available to do the work drops, then clearly some work has to be taken off the load.

**Principles** —The principles which should underpin WAMs include the clarity of the key measure and its relationship to work reality, full transparency for all staff about all staff, realistic time costing for the job, and control over who amends the allowances and how.

Members need to remember that excessive workloading is a Health and Safety issue. Staff should not have to work excess hours for normal progression and promotion.

Members are asked to keep their ear to the ground for developments in this area, and to let their departmental contacts or committee members know of any issues which arise.

## New Branch Organiser

Welcome to Paul Furbey, our new Branch Organiser Support!

Paul's recent experience has included working in an HIV/AIDS Rehabilitation Centre in India and working for a Housing Association in London.

Paul works Wednesdays and Thursdays and can be contacted at the SUCU Office, 2 Hounsfield Road  
[p.furbey@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:p.furbey@sheffield.ac.uk)  
☎ ext. 28976



## Local Subscription rate amended

The General Meeting held on 8 February agreed to increase local subs to enable the branch to provide appropriate admin support;

From 1 September 2010 to £1.50 per month  
From 1 September 2011 to £2.00 per month  
Future increases will be in line with percentage increase on national subscriptions on the uppermost payment band.

There will be no local sub payable by any member who earns less than £10,000 a year.

Please remember it is important to ensure you are paying the correct level of subscription. Failure to do this could limit your access to UCU legal advice and protection. You will find more information about subscriptions at: <http://ucu.group.shef.ac.uk/>. Click on the link to 'join UCU'

UCU offers a range of membership benefits and services in addition to employment, education and campaigning support. By making full use of these benefits, offered through recognised suppliers, you could save the cost of your subscription many times over. Look at: [www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2196](http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2196)

## Introduction of 'Fit Notes' from 6 April 2010

Changes to the sick note or medical statement currently available from GPs to certify sickness absence came into effect on 6 April. These certificates will now be known as 'fit notes' and will still be used to indicate reasons for absence from work but are also intended to assist and support a member of staff in the transition back to work following a period of sickness.

Here are some links for further information:

Preparing for the new 'Fit Note', TUC guidance for union representatives, published February 2010:  
[www.tuc.org.uk/extras/fitnote.pdf](http://www.tuc.org.uk/extras/fitnote.pdf)

University of Sheffield, Human Resources advice to staff and manager:  
[www.shef.ac.uk/hr/az/fitnote.html](http://www.shef.ac.uk/hr/az/fitnote.html)

Link to direct.gov website information:  
[www.direct.gov.uk/en/NI1/Newsroom/DG\\_184645](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/NI1/Newsroom/DG_184645)

If you encounter uncertainty or difficulty in using the new documentation then get in touch with us:  
[ucu@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:ucu@sheffield.ac.uk)