

BREAKING NEWS

*LISTENING TO, WORKING WITH, PROMOTING THE NEEDS OF MEMBERS
AND STRIVING FOR A SECURE FUTURE.*

Branch news:

Work Related Stress is an industrial accident...

On the 6th June the Branch launched its reinvigorated campaign on workload, focusing on ways to fully understand the workload model, reduce stress, achieve reasonable adjustments where appropriate and avoid the collateral damage of being over worked. In this summer edition of Branch News we cover some of the highlights from that event, as well as reflecting on the future plans for event capture.

This photo was taken at the end of the afternoon: Sandy Thomas, Negotiator on the Workload working group, Dr James Costello, Health and Safety Officer, Phil Sayce (Branch Chair), Phil Davey (Regional Support Official), Dr Nicola Goodall (Branch Secretary), Elaine Hall (Equality and Diversity Officer, Branch and casework coordinator).



The Workload Model: Sandy Thomas....

Workloads in HE are a national problem. There are recurrent threats of custom and practice sustaining very high workloads. In the Staff Survey of 2017 only 47% of UWE academics said that they could cope with the competing demands of their work. Only a third felt able to achieve their goals without working unreasonable hours or missing out on annual leave. This is an unsustainable situation.

Working over 550 Workload bundles should be the exception. However for some staff this feels like the norm. The workload model is a complex phenomenon, rendered even harder to understand by multiple variances and individual differences. Whilst flexibility may well be required, opacity and obfuscation of process can emerge.

Once annual leave, scholarly leave, university closure days and teaching related admin is taken into full consideration, that leaves 36 weeks in which to teach. Our advice is to get that plotted on your diary as soon as possible at the start of the academic year.

As module leaders are best placed to know how to resource their modules, the emphasis should be on supporting them to achieve an accurate calculation of their module resource envelope and then distributing it fairly between the module team.

There should be a fair and transparent process to reflect the marking load too. This may often equate to about 30-45 minutes allocated to marking assignments, with more for extended pieces like dissertations.

Over the next academic year we will be putting on regular events, including more on Workload and Stress. Sandy will be presenting more details regarding her now expensive knowledge of the Workload model.

Part of the issue is the amount of unrecognised work. You might want to keep a track of how much time the bundled and unbundled work takes you. When you start to see the results in exact hours worked you may well start to fully envisage the scale of the issue. Some work like module design or re-design is inconstantly recognised in WAMS.

In the last UCU national survey UWE respondents cited an average weekly workload of 53.5 hours per week (compared with the national average in HE of 50.9. That's puts academics at UWE in poll position as some of the most overworked. Future newsletters will focus on some strategies to deal with some of these issues.



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Stress and over-working

Dr. James Costello



‘The silent army of the walking wounded’

- In 2016-17 mental health problems (i.e., stress, depression or anxiety) accounted for ca. 526,000 cases of work-related illness, with the loss of an estimated 12.5 million working days in the UK alone (HSE, 2017).
- Each person with a mental health difficulty was absent from work for an average of 24 days per year.
- At any given time, one-sixth of the population attend work whilst experiencing symptoms associated with mental ill health (presenteeism) - sleep problems, disruption of appetite, headaches, migraines, neck and back complaints, tiredness, and a preoccupation with work issues (HSE, 2017).
- UK researchers examining the relationship between wellbeing, sickness absence and presenteeism note that organisations are somewhat reluctant to participate in their studies because of a fear of “opening Pandora’s box” (Collins et al., 2018).
- WHY: Issues around high workload, work-time pressures, under-staffing, overtime demands, a sense of commitment to colleagues, the organisational mechanisms for controlling work attendance (e.g. availability of paid sick leave), and insecure job status are likely to be seen by workers as barriers to taking time off (Henderson et al., 2013).

What does not kill us, makes us stronger?

- We can do better than simply ask that the workplace do us no harm!
- An organisation genuinely committed to psychological wellbeing will seek to do more than identify appropriate reactive precautions to minimise potential negative impact.
- Framed as it is in risk management, the UK Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has sought to understand the factors at work that can affect psychological health, publishing management standards for organisations which address the primary – and overlapping – sources of stress (or distress) at work.

The assaults to our wellbeing

- Demand: Jobs characterised by high emotional and/or cognitive demands includes workers in education, healthcare, social workers, lawyers, industrial workers, and hospitality workers etc., and they tend to have high rates of psychological distress.
- Control: Describes the power a person has in managing the way they work and encompasses issues of micromanagement or insufficient management. Jobs with high demands or time pressure but low control or low decision making authority are “high-strain” jobs and bear the greatest risk of psychological dis-ease (Henderson et al., 2013).
- Relationships: The quality of interpersonal relationship is key factor contributing to our matrix of factors supporting wellbeing. Workplace bullying is estimated to cost Australian employers at least \$6 billion per annum (Henderson et al., 2013). Studies have found that employees who were bullied had lower levels of job satisfaction and high levels of anxiety, depression, and PTSD (Tehrani, 2004).

Reasonable adjustments.....Elaine Hall

UWE has a duty under the Equality act of 2010 and there is a Reasonable Adjustments Policy to guide the managers as to what to do to support staff who need this support. The issue of 'deemed to know' is very important as the duty does not apply if the organisation could not reasonably have been expected to know. So there is some responsibility upon the employee to make their line manager aware of any temporary or permanent disabilities if they are requesting reasonable adjustments. This may involve referral to occupational health, but this is not to be used as checking service. There may be no need for referral to occupational health to enact recognition and establishment of reasonable adjustments. This must be sensitively completed and the reasonable adjustments once identified should be met.

When considering this issue, it is useful to reflect on the definitions of what equality means and it is unnecessarily divisive to view this as a 'problem' because the individual might need a lighter workload for a period of time or to do reduced hours. Stress is of itself not a disability but what the Branch has discovered through case work is that staff with disabilities can be disproportionately affected by stress, especially if their reasonable adjustments are not met. With the pace and intensity of work incrementally climbing, staff with reasonable adjustments can be made to feel 'guilty' as they are told by some managers that their colleagues are pulling up the slack on their workloads, but this is an effect of suboptimal workload planning not the automatic result of RAs being applied.



Lecture capture (Audiovisual policy)

In September 2017 UWE issued a policy for Audio-visual recording that was developed and agreed with the unions. UCU contributed to a number of meetings, helped formulate draft documents and negotiated an agreement giving lecturers a fundamental right to choose whether or not to record events in the first place, and whether to publish recordings to students in Blackboard (with or without editing).

In June 2018, less than a year after the policy was introduced, the University has drafted an 'Annex' to the original policy that could challenge these rights:

2018 New policy (Draft Annex):

Deciding when to record in case of prescheduled recordings

Pre-scheduled recordings will be programmed to record in advance and will start and stop automatically within the designated learning spaces (four lectures rooms on Frenchay Campus) in line with the activity's timetabled start and finish times.

The system will publish the recording to relevant student groups through the university Virtual Learning Environment 48 hrs after the session has taken place.

This new draft addendum to the policy has been added to allow a trial of prescheduled recordings and is being introduced without formal discussion with the unions as of yet. The group that developed the original policy were not consulted on the annex.

UCU are concerned and would oppose any change which :

Transgressed the lecturers right to autonomy over the learning process for their sessions and learning resources

Challenged any performance rights of the lecturer in the recording

Might cause risk to individuals if the system published inappropriate, defamatory or confidential material

Disregarded the consultation process and the importance of UCU involvement in UWE committees and decision making groups

The implication of this change is that (for this trial) lecturers could be required to get permission from their HOD (in advance) if they **don't** want a session to be recorded. We are concerned that this system will be difficult to sustain and increases the risk of inappropriate publication as well as extra workload for the academics involved.

What action should UCU take now? So far, UWE have yet to make any response to UCU's views on this annex, which were formally submitted in June 18. However we have listed this issue on the Joint Union Forum, which is scheduled to meet in August 18. We would be pleased to hear your suggestions as to how we should respond to this challenge to our professional academic autonomy and will work resolutely to achieve ongoing recognition of our union.

