

# UCU UWE Branch news

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

*November/December 2017*

*As we approach the winter  
holiday.....things to celebrate*

- ◆ *Each month the Branch membership is growing, thank you to all our members and welcome to our new joiners*
- ◆ *UWE UCU is one of the largest branches in the South West*
- ◆ *The Branch is regular communication with the NUS, Unison and Unite*
- ◆ *We have settled into the Trade Union Centre, (access from Car Park 7, adjacent to Felixstowe Court) alongside our Unison colleagues*
- ◆ *We are planning both Social and CPD events for 2018*
- ◆ *Our thanks to so many really great colleagues in Unison, Unite and HR for working so hard with UCU reps in 2017.*

*Greetings from the Branch Chair,  
Phil Sayce and all of the Branch Executive*

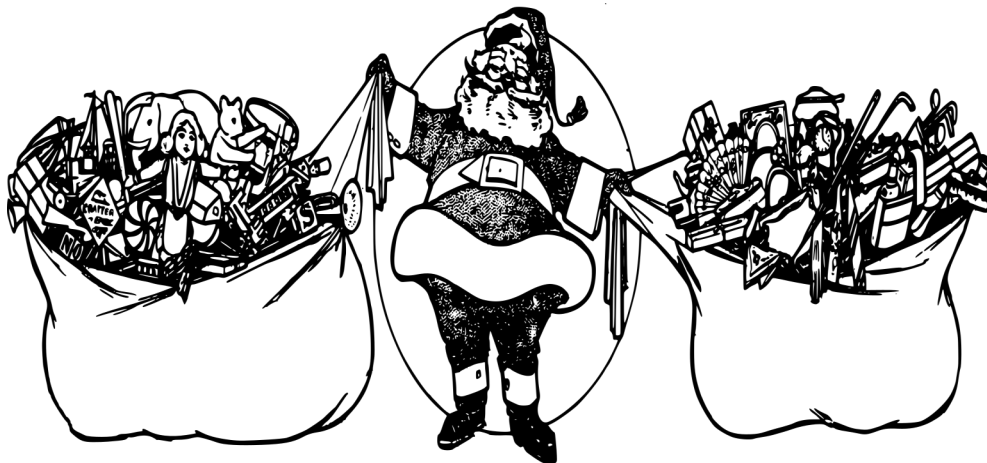


## A Workload Story.....

The professional academic contract has traditionally implied autonomy for university lecturers. Hours of work are not defined, but lecturers are expected to work 'such hours as are **reasonably necessary** in order to fulfil your duties and responsibilities'

Originally it was down to the individual professional to define what was '**reasonably necessary**', but over the years University management have increasingly taken this over and the current expectation seems to be that lecturers will undertake whatever duties the EMPLOYER deems necessary. Unfortunately the legal system and the government have tended to support this development and tribunals have often upheld the employers' right to define the duties of their employees. Lecturers can, however question the expectations and duties when these are considered **unreasonable**.

UWE chose to define the expectations and duties of academic staff through a 'Workload Model', first introduced in 2008. This model specifies an explicit **ceiling** for workload at 550 'bundles' per year which (at 2.5 hours per bundle) equates to approximately 38 hours per week over 36 weeks within an academic year. UCU have consistently argued that the system fails to capture all of the work that is required to fulfil the role so that most academics are working in excess of 38 hours per week. Management agree that not all of the workload is specified within the model. In 2016 the Workload Task and Finish Group stated that 'The UWE Bristol Academic Planner does not record the full requirements of the role as stated in the contract'. This implies that there is an expectation that staff who are fully bundled are actually working in excess of 38 hours per week. UWE staff who responded to the UCU survey in 2016 reported working an average of **53.5 hours** per week. This is in **excess of the European Working Time Directive (48 hours)** and is in the **highest quartile** of all higher education institutions in the UK included in the survey. (Across the sector (132 institutions) the average workload was reported at 51.45 hours per week).



**In 2018 the Branch will be conducting its own workload survey. Please do look out for that in the New Year and contribute your views.**

There is clear evidence that significant numbers of UWE academics believe they are working excessive hours. In the 2017 staff survey only 28% of academic staff stated that they agreed that they could meet the requirements of their role without working excessive hours. Only 48% of academic staff felt they were 'able to cope' with the competing demands and pressures they experience at work. UCU are concerned that this may be leading to excessive stress and stress-related ill health within the academic population but it is difficult to find enough specific evidence to support this. This may be because individuals are reluctant to admit to 'not coping' or being adversely affected by stress, so the recording of work-related stress is inevitably flawed. This may also be exacerbated by staff not feeling they are being genuinely listened to – in fact the staff survey results suggest that only 21% of academics agreed that the staff voice was being heard by management and only 40% agreed that it was safe to speak up and challenge the way things were being done at the University. It is perhaps not surprising that under these circumstances so few members of staff feel able to disclose stress related problems.

### **ACTION**



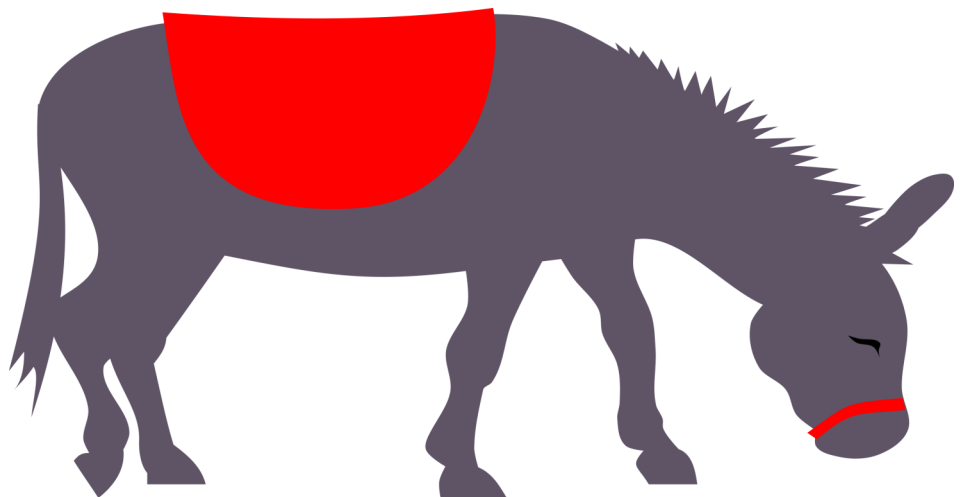
**It might be useful to take this to the Health and Safety committee to pursue the development of a form to report stress and over-work related incidents. Management have said that accident forms can be used to report stress but they are not designed for the purpose and their wording is unsuitable .**

The allocation of bundles for specific duties and roles is also an unreliable measure of workload and workflow - because it is inconsistently applied across the university. UCU has provided management with lists of duties over the past 5 years to support the assertion that workload bundles do not reliably correlate with the amount of work required to fulfil academic roles. In 2012 we went into dispute with management and requested a review to include a role analysis of a number of key roles within UWE. Management accepted that bundles are not all worth the same and agreed to a review of workload, however this review did not include time and motion studies, or any data to support the validity of the allocations.

It would be fair to say that the Branch have never considered that these issues were satisfactorily addressed following the review or at any point since and remain concerned that the workload model is being applied inconsistently. UWE's current management training is generic and does not focus on academic issues such as workload. It is therefore imperative that more specific training programmes for academic managers are provided and that managers are required to complete these – preferably prior to undertaking managerial responsibility.

UCU continue to meet with Gay Attwood and we repeatedly ask management to develop a process for ensuring that allocations are made consistently and have validity in terms of the role or task they are

allocated for. We have requested additional meetings as we currently are not given sufficient time to cover our outstanding agenda items. We remain concerned regarding the lack of follow up of these meetings and frustrated at the lack of progress in resolving the issues we have raised.



**Newsletter Editor: Dr. Nicola Goodall, Branch Secretary**

# Accountability across the university: Compare and contrast

Despite inherent flaws within the National Student Survey, the university continues to use the NSS as an accountability tool. The flaws inherent in treating minor fluctuations in results as statistically significant is widely known, and yet the university persists to apply this metric. The NSS taskforce is one of many 'sticks' that the university use to browbeat programme teams with.

**About the NSS Taskforce (abridged from Paper AB16/07/03 by Jane Harrington)**

**All programmes where the NSS score is below 80% will meet with the task force.**

**For programmes that were at risk last year and remain below 75% then further action will be taken – as a minimum [this will] involve a formal and full review being undertaken. It may involve: performance management; restructuring of a programme; a change in management of the programme or line management.**

## But where is the accountability for management?

It has now been 5 months since the results of the Staff Survey were released and there has been little word of taskforces springing into action to resolve issues of poor performance amongst some key areas of UWE management, still less any transparent action taken. Indeed, questions about some layers of management were removed from this year's survey. If only programme teams could get rid of unpalatable questions from the NSS that they didn't like the answer to!!

### Key Differences between the NSS and Staff Survey

	NSS	Staff Survey
Timing	An annual survey	Every two– three years...if we're lucky!
Choice of questions	Set independently	Can be meddled with by the University Executive
Neither agree nor disagree responses	Treated as negative	Treated as neutral
Qualitative results	Pored over by the NSS taskforce	Not released and so cannot be scrutinised
Outcomes	If positive: a 'token of appreciation', i.e. a mug to be shared between the whole programme team! If negative: meetings, reports, investigations,...	If positive: a performance related bonus for some University management If negative: ???? Absolutely no clarity

Is it any wonder only 34% of people at UWE think it is a safe place to speak up and challenge the way things are done at the university? When those at the top feel like they are not accountable to those who keep the place running we have a serious cultural problem that needs to be collectively addressed.





# NEW YEARS RESOLUTIONS?



# change

# 4 life

Eat well    Move more    Live longer



Kindness  
is the most important  
superpower

