

UWE-UCU Branch Newsletter May 2021

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Dear members,

The Easter break and the May bank holiday has come and gone. Hopefully, we all had some sort of break after such an immensely busy semester. Many of us are still teaching, and most of us are marking and trying to work out the ever-changing situations for boards and resubmissions.

This is also a time when staff are starting to plan for next year. Whilst there are some examples of good forward planning, (e.g. we have the odd branch member who knows exactly what teaching etc they will be doing next year!) an almost universal worry coming through from members is around workload and workload planning.

According to UWE's 'Workload management timetable', a key principle is that 'Enough time must be allowed for workloads and timetables to be prepared, so staff can plan adequately for the next academic year'. We should have begun workload discussions in January and our allocators should now have received the WAMs resource to allocate. Crucially, during June, draft workload summaries are produced and discussed at meetings held with allocators and individuals.

However, it was clear from the initial analysis of 'Covid conversations' (see UCU communication dated 1st April) that a sizable group of members don't recognise this process from their workplace settings this year or from previous years. Indeed, its not just the process, but the units of measurement, the logic and the terminology are 'other worldly'. We therefore offered the first of a series of 'WAMS Translation workshops' on 7th April. It was apparent that members did not know what their workloads were; and did not know how the WAMs system calculated bundles. There were reports that workloads were impossible to deliver; that staff were not aware of the working time directive, rights to a break, or that there existed a maximum teaching hours per week (18!) and other conditions within our national contract. As well as this first workshop, your branch planned/ will plan:

- A further opportunity to discuss WAMs occurred at the AGM on 5th May;
- Further workshops – watch out for a dates in May;
- Branch members are trying to develop a more member-friendly calculator for wams;
- Save this UWE link on your favourites: <https://intranet.uwe.ac.uk/tasks-guides/Collection/workload-management> and share with your colleagues;
- To view OUR national contract, see here: <https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/1970/Post-92-national-contract>

WAMS top of the pops!



The sheer cunning of WAMs can cause tears and laughter as well as befuddlement. We all know some of the tricks it can play, but it might be helpful to see some of the favourites grouped together.

So, with a respectful apology to those members who might miss this peculiarly British cultural reference, we thought we'd bring you the WAMS Top 10! Feel free to read this with the appropriate background music: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KOPiVpHvXd0>

Our starter for 10 this week is "**1st module runs not attracting 15 bundles, or later runs attracting none**". One to keep your eye on!

Last week's number 8, moves back a place and its "**Student class size increase over 25, but with no extra bundles**" Yay!

Back in at number 8 is "**Member doesn't have any capacity to take on a new task until, that's right, bundles disappear from their wams**" Hey presto – you have capacity!

Still a favourite but now at number 7 is "**Additional bundles not given for covering teaching/marking**" – great voluntary work guys!

Climbing from relative obscurity to number 6 is "**Not being given whole bundles for work deemed to be worth less than a bundle**" – imagine if we worked in units of 1 hour – revolutionary!

A cheeky entry at number 5 is "**WAMS taking little or no account of staff sickness**" – how low will this one go?

Well, we can go lower now, to number 4, which is "**Member goes part-time, gets rid of some bundles, but still works 5 days a week to manage the admin**" – an absolute classic for those with caring responsibilities!

Now, in 3rd position we have a late Spring favourite; its ... "**Retrospective bundle reduction at the end of the year time**" – maybe a contender for a new number 1 by June folks?

Battling for position at number 2 is "**Lack of transparency around WAMS from, or for AHoDs and PLs**" – this one looks to be a fast growing weed.

And, wait for it pop-pickers, holding strong at number 1 for the 4th week running is – "**Being allocated roles and tasks without having any clue what resource comes with it!**" And as a bonus B-side, we have "**Agreeing the resource when taking the role, only to find it halved when its finally applied to your WAMs**". ... "we won't get fooled again?"!

So, that's it for this week pop-pickers, but you know, these charts change quickly. Classics come and go, we get new kids on the block, and of course we'll see some jazzed up cover versions. Its important to keep alert, keep talking and of course, let us know what you want to see 'named and shamed' in the top 10 of workload transgressions. We're always listening to you. Indeed, there is bound to be new entries from the Researchers soon...

Calling all Researchers: Tell us about your Researcher Workload



Workloads continue to be a concern for many UCU members who are researchers. The allocation, recording and management of researchers' work often appears to lack any clarity and varies considerably across different parts of UWE.

As a Branch we want to:

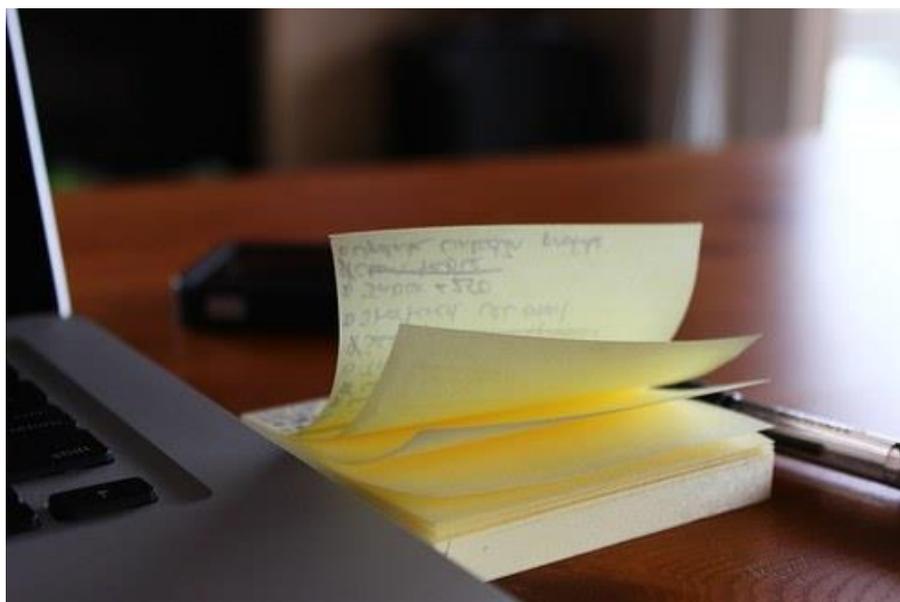
Explore the numerous additional and non-contracted tasks that are often invisible with 100% research contracts (e.g. teaching, managing modules and bid writing).

Determine the extent of additional workload that researchers are being expected to do over and above the recognised workload.

Develop an understanding of what is a reasonable workload for researchers and campaign for a fairer working system across different settings.

In order to build up a picture of current experiences of research members we would like to hear your stories of workload. These will help us gain a greater understanding of what is occurring on the ground and may be anonymised and used as examples for discussions with senior management. If you would like to contribute to this discussion please contact Sarah.Chicken@uwe.ac.uk with your stories. Maybe yours will make the top 10!

What do branch officers do?



There are a range of roles in the branch, and most Rep's cover more than one role. Hopefully, you got to meet branch officers at the AGM (or read in the report about what they have been working on this year) and through members meetings. The website also holds the list here: [UCU UWE Branch Officers and Reps 2021-2022](#)

Casework continues to be our branch's single biggest area of work, with most branch officers undertaking some level of case-work. Most members self-refer to a Rep they know, whilst other referrals are taken and allocated by our Case Work Officer, Elaine Hall. Elaine reports, perhaps unsurprisingly, that the biggest areas of case work relate to workload issues (more below), whilst two further priority issues relate to challenges to equalities and more specifically, to supporting staff whose diverse needs are not being recognised by UWE. Interestingly, these issues often appear to be related. Evidence from members' meetings, and from active members contacting us, suggests that whilst workload appears to be an issue for most members, it appears to cause disproportionately disempowering difficulties for some part-time and Disabled members. Elaine is also the current Equalities Officer and therefore is able to address these themes at Executive level.

Whilst most member enquiries to a Rep are resolved with immediate advice, support or sign-posting, some member difficulties turn into 'case-work'. This includes cases where individuals take out a formal grievance against UWE. This is very detailed and time-consuming work, but an area where case-work Reps excel in their support to members.

Not all Reps undertake casework, and not all case work becomes a grievance. Much of the work that branch officers do is taking proactive action to avoid problems for members. Experience shows us that early identification and intervention in relation to policies and practices at UWE can address potential pitfalls. Moreover, early mediation can prevent problems escalating. Lead Branch exec officers negotiate regularly on your behalf, raising awareness of where the staff experience is under threat, including attending set meetings with HR and the Directorate. We advocate for the protection of your terms and conditions. However, it is not always the case the branch are given warning of changes that will affect members. Frequently, it's members who alert us to significant issues. So, keep talking to your colleagues and your union. We must sustain a collective awareness of the key priority issues affecting us. Branch officers work hard to raise and respond to matters that

affect members, including working with UWE to get better at spotting, sustaining and rewarding the **right talent, in the right way, at the right time**. The current promotion rounds may help. Let's dare to hope, and reserve the right to audit the experience robustly afterwards!

Over the next few newsletters, we will hear from members of the Branch Executive about their roles, and we will also be hearing from members about their experiences of being supported by their union.

Nationally and locally...



Don't forget to check out the UCU national website here: <https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/1685/About-UCU> and see what's going on nationally. Salena Williams, our Branch Officer for Member Engagement has been arranging regular members meetings not only to keep us up to date on the dispute, but to support our connection with national issues and campaigns. Knowing that it's 'not just us' can help us understand the scale of attacks on HE and its workforce, and inspire our plans to push back to shape our workplaces. We know we need to get our UCU UWE branch website running again - we'd be keen for any ideas and help from members! Finally, and despite the humorous look at WAMs above, both the national and local picture is telling us that we need to act on workload. Listening to views at the AGM, amongst reps and active members, and via case-work - there is a growing call for a review of this broken system. I leave you with this question - what are you and your colleagues prepared to do to make them fix it?

Contact Us



UWE-UCU Branch

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