

# UCU-UWE Branch Newsletter 9 August 2021

*Stop Press: Not signing off Time Allocation Schedule (TAS)*



Members should not sign off their TAS, until last year's WAM bundles have been agreed to their satisfaction. Many members who have carried over bundles from last year (2019/20) are still waiting for this to be reflected in this year's allocation. For example if someone carried over 30 bundles this year's *available bundles* should be 624 ( $654 - 30 = 624$ ). Signing off TAS and agreeing what work has been done are connected, so both must be agreed at the same time. If members have any questions or feel that pressure is being applied, they should contact the UCU branch.

## Schools out for summer?



The intensity of work has relaxed for most of us, to a pattern that one colleague suggested was 'almost like a normal 9-5 job'. Many members have finally been able to take annual and scholarly

leave, and generally catch their breath. However, the impact of additional flexibility for students this year: multiple runs of modules, changing and multiple submission dates, later placements, changes to the academic calendar etc has created late changes with extra field boards etc, meaning there are very few weeks where it is easy to take leave.

Moreover, even as our final energies are spent trying to finish of 20/21, members are already in despair about the expectations for 21/22.

### *'The 3 demands'*



Members contributed to and ratified a letter to the Senior Management Team on July 1st, in pursuit of a ***fair, sustainable and well-resourced workload system***. The demands are:

1. The WAMS system should be subject to an in-depth review by the SMT in full consultation with staff and the union with a view to either revising it so it more accurately and fairly represents the work carried out by staff or seeking a new and better alternative. In addition, SMT must enable much greater ongoing union participation in the Workload Management Group.
2. If the results of the WAMS system review means that the number of FTE academic staff at UWE needs to be increased, then this must happen in order that all at UWE can continue to deliver a staff and student experience of the highest quality now and in the future. UWE should plan to be in the top 30 of the Good University Guide for 'Student–Staff Ratio' by 2025 and in the top 20 by 2030.
3. By Sept 2021, all staff should have recognition and compensation for the additional (including unbundled work) undertaken from March 2020. Acceptable and reasonable compensation should take the form of an honorarium payment of 3 weeks' pay or alternatively, Covid recovery bundles (equivalent to 15 days) as standard. Equivalent recognition and compensation should be made for research staff and academic-related staff. Additional annual leave is not acceptable, because this is a meaningless offer within the current workload system.

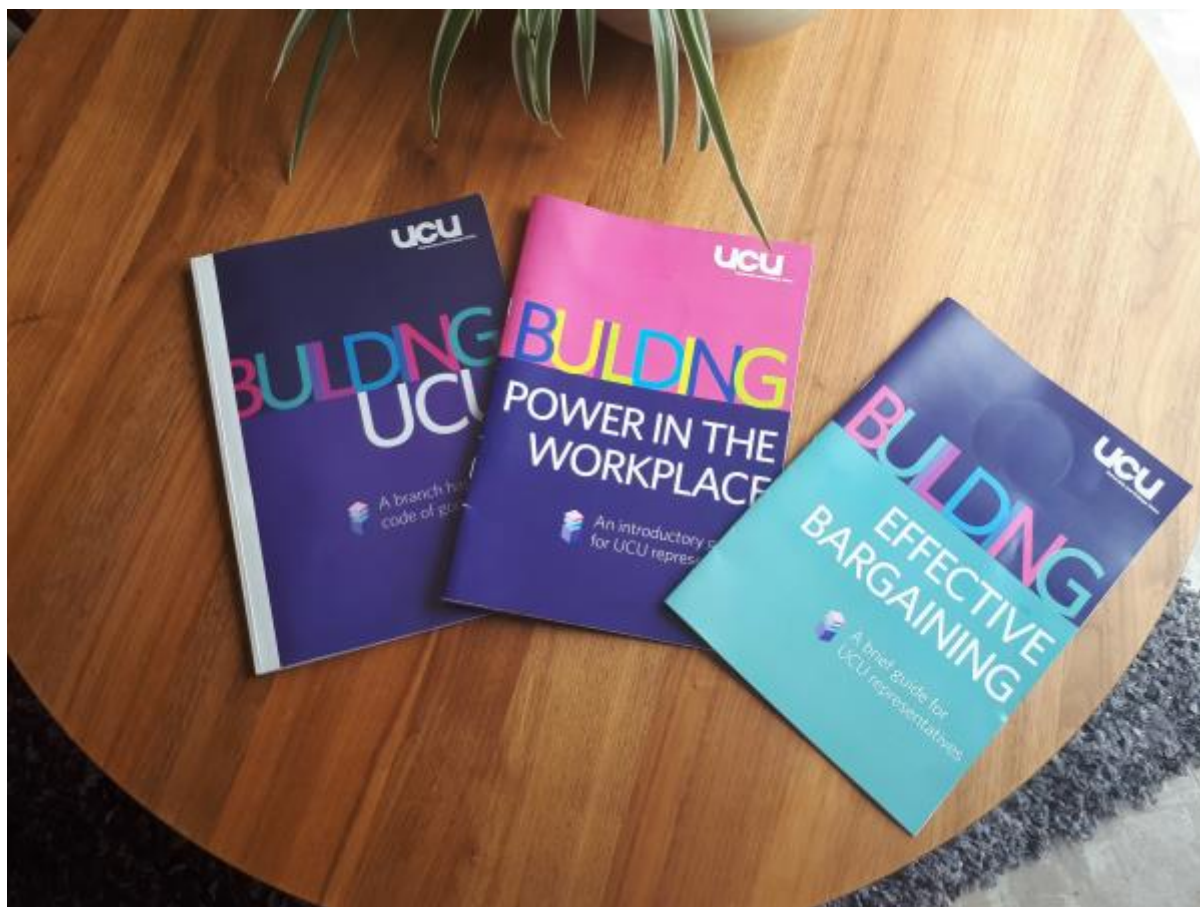
As we prepared to send this newsletter, the VC has acknowledged and apologised that this matter has not been formally responded to, and has now requested this be raised at the next Joint Union Forum (where such matters are negotiated). We look forward to their response.

### *A hint of a win?*



UWE rarely acknowledge or proactively and publicly respond to UCU representations. Nonetheless, movements and improvements do frequently occur in response both at the level of individual and more widely. And after 18 months (and more) of raising the issue of workload in various forums: through casework representation; members meetings; surveys, we are starting to see acknowledgement that the WAMS workload system is not fit for purpose.

## The next steps



Whilst this has been a promising hint from SMT, we need to see a more concrete and meaningful response to the 3 demands. We are working with the ideas and contributions from recent member meetings to plan a campaign to achieve these demands. Work continues during August to be ready for September.

## Responses to the VC's message about NSS results



Issue 151

[Achieving the best for our students – building on best practice](#)

*posted 27 July 2021*

Given the **VC's update 151**, we were not surprised to see angry and despairing emails from members, worried that we are expected to do even more in the coming months. As our 3 demands make clear, members are in tune with the VC's overall intention: *Achieving the best for our students – building on best practice*.

But, as we painfully pore through the NSS results, received despite the additional work and effort over the last 18 months, staff are upset by a blaming and divisive tone. Whilst some of your responses were simply uttering disbelief and despair, themes are evident:

The message under-attributes the NSS results not only to the global pandemic, but also to strategic decision-making and leadership from UWE over the last year.

For example, members noted the message:

- Makes no mention of pursuing restructuring into the School for Health & Social Wellbeing during a global pandemic.
- Ignores the over-confidence in opening up campus in the face of contrary evidence.
- Ignores both the over-recruitment to programmes and the recruitment of new students as well as time consuming Block 0 activities that distracted staff from final year students.
- Fails to acknowledge the effect of communication and leadership approaches around on-campus teaching.
- Gives no mention of the way student expectations were raised despite real limitations in the capacity of staff to meet these in the context of an already punishing workload for staff.
- Has avoided an honest analysis of the latent errors within UWE's People Strategy; errors that unravelled when the pandemic hit.
- Conversely, the VC's message over-attributes responsibility to ***“unacceptable behaviours, poor professionalism and a lack of care... with a small minority (to be followed up) at a local level.”***. It doesn't consider the possibility that the wider context, including management decision making and systemic pressures can impact on individual practice.
- It's important that we undertake a thorough and systemic analysis of the context in which the NSS scores were given, and that our members are not scapegoated.

#### **“Honest engagement about our collective performance and focused action”**

Few of us are likely to disagree with the VC on this, or with ***“sharing and motivating people with best practice”***, but to undertake this, we need a thorough and systemic analysis of the context in which NSS scores were given. This is not something to rush over the next few weeks.

Staff missed out not only on annual leave and scholarly leave over the last 18 months, but on many evenings, weekends and lunchbreaks too. Many staff are struggling to take this years' leave because of short staffing and the increased admin associated with resubmissions etc. For so long, members have been running on empty and need time to recover.

It is not the time to embark on new university initiatives. Whilst we undertake an analysis of the NSS results, other initiatives **should pause or be stopped**.

For example, the subject readiness review should be paused.

Similarly, before we embark upon further re-structuring, announced in VC Update 152, we should undertake an honest review of the School for Health & Social Wellbeing, and the process of restructuring. We need to assess the impact that this type of restructuring can have on staff, on teams and on outcomes, including the ultimate impact this had on the student experience and NSS scores.

It is fair to say that the VC might not be aware of the strength of feeling about this Update 151 from staff. The VC has only received 1 email from a member of staff about this, whereas UCU have received numerous contacts. Some members send emails to the UCU email after VC Updates or

other SMT communications, many of you get in touch with Reps by email or phone, and whilst we protect confidentiality, branch officers do discuss and follow up themes that affect members.

In response to these queries, the branch contacted the VC. He has added *“we need honest engagement about our collective performance and focused action. This isn’t about accusations, this is about us all taking collective responsibility towards our students, ensuring our approaches support each other to deliver our best. Our people are our priority – our staff and our students.”* It is noted that the update had sought to balance the positive and negative points and was framed at the level of whole university, and moreover, that the VC has written to 34 programme leaders and their teams, across all faculties, for delivering really strong NSS scores.

The branch looks forward to working with the university to ensure adequate resources are allocated to improving the NSS results.

### *Concerns about under-resourcing:*

## **My workload, your education**

### **My workload, your education: a joint statement by UCU and NUS**

Research shows that excessive workloads can lead to increased stress, greater absences and personal health issues for those effected.

Yet recent surveys show that workload is increasing for staff in further and higher education, particularly as a result of the recent waves of redundancies.

26% of further and higher education staff work in excess of 50 hours a week during term time; 75% describe their job as stressful; and 46% say their work involves unrealistic time pressures.

The 3 demands include those that relate to reviewing the current workload system, and should this suggest so, that it be more adequately resourced. A range of evidence has been shared by members about under-resourcing that is causing particular problems as we get ready for the new academic year. For example:

Slow to recruit to vacancies have been reported across faculties; at all levels, module and programme leadership roles remain uncovered for September; members of staff starting the year already over bundled. There is a particular worry about...

### *G grades being paid G-grade salaries for H grade work*

We have received increasing queries and concerns raised by members across faculties about discrepancies in the contractual expectations of G (lecturer) & H grade (senior lecturer) staff. Despite vacancies arising from H grades leaving, recruitment advertises G grade vacancies. New and existing G grade staff are being expected to lead modules and programmes despite these being H-grade role, often with little support and without any financial reward.

It's unfortunate that this practice has raised its head again. UWE, UCU and its sister unions (Unite and Unison) spent a great deal of time in negotiation and arbitration around this and other Career Pathway processes. No agreement was reached. Therefore, the existing Pay Equality Project (PEP) stands and the UCU position remains that module leadership is a role only to be taken at H grade and above at UWE.

There is room in the PEP that allows for G-grade staff to take on module leadership, but crucially, G-grade member of staff needs support in this role by a H-grade member of staff. The H-grade member of staff should be fairly recognised and rewarded in WLBs for their part of the module leadership, and moreover for the mentoring role that they are undertaking with the G-grade member of staff. Used correctly, this is consistent with our campaign aim of ***a fair, sustainable and well-resourced workload system***.

However, the practices reported by members suggest that subject areas are under-resourced, that G-grade staff feel they have no choice, that they are under-supported in stepping up to H-grade tasks and moreover are not financially rewarded for doing so. There are reports of relatively new staff leaving UWE due to these expectations which further exacerbate the staffing crisis. On the other hand, H-grade staff are being encouraged to hand over modules to G-grade staff (in order to take on new modules and programmes) with a view to 'mentoring' those G-grade members of staff, but with little resource or detail on how this should happen. Such practices constitute a failure to meet the conditions of the PEP.

All of this not only undermines the current terms & conditions for staff, but is unethical and unsustainable. Moreover, this practice undermines our aspirations for excellence. At a time when we are asked to reflect on the NSS scores, UCU reiterate our demand that the workload systems, structures and practices at UWE are reviewed so that *"UWE can continue to deliver a staff and student experience of the highest quality now and in the future"*.

### ***Principles for managing your workload:***



As we wait on a response to The 3 Demands, we will also be challenging the above practice. But we are very aware that in the meantime, some staff are being asked to take on impossible work for the year ahead. Early summer brings a period of workload allocation and planning, and this remains as confusing and unfair as ever. So, branch colleagues have pulled together some advice on the key pitfalls to watch out for [Key Principles for your Workload Planning](#). We hope this will help you question and manage your workload allocation, and that you share the document with your colleagues, whether they are members or not.

## *Members meetings and summer drop-in sessions*



Members meetings have paused for the summer, and will be back in September. However, we know many of you will be worried about workload, return to campus and the threatening tone of messages from SMT. So, we will invite members along to drop-in meetings on zoom in August and September where branch officers will be available to offer support, advice and signposting. Watch out for the dates and links getting posted.

Members have suggested online meetings have been more accessible, and that Wednesdays are generally good, but in response to some requests, we intend to bring in some variation to days and times from next term so all members have a chance to get attend.



## Meet the Reps: Introducing Sarah Chicken, Disability Officer

UCU's new



“I have recently shifted my role within the UCU Exec and I am now the Disability Officer (and Rep for City Campus). I am driven by a social justice agenda with a keen interest in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and sit on a number of University Committees for EDI. As an adult with dyspraxia, I aim to support the move towards viewing disability and neurodiversity in a more positive light in all that I do.

This year has had a disproportionate impact upon disabled people across the county and the following issues are being reported by some of our disabled members at UWE

- The return of disabled staff to campus
- The disabled working group (which seems to have folded)
- Managers awareness of processes related to reasonable adjustments including the need for regular review meetings
- Disabled staff and (lack of) career progression
- The need to develop inclusive recruitment and interview strategies for disabled staff

I would be interested to hear any other issues that are currently significant for our disabled members so that these can be raised with HR and developed through UWE policies. Please contact me at [sarah.chicken@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:sarah.chicken@uwe.ac.uk) or via TEAMS for a chat and a virtual coffee.”