Updates to School work allocation policy/model

Paper updated following StratComm meeting (11 Apr)

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E&D and Resource implications: Will improve E&D by implementing a fairer and more transparent policy. Project delivery will become more efficient (see 2 under Summary, below). Some staff/systems costs to improve tracking and accountability (see under Implementation, below).

Background and summary

The School's current work allocation model is not well-suited to the recent regime in which overall student numbers are very large and class sizes are highly skewed. However, previous attempts to revise the policy were seen as too radical and/or too complex.

We aim to improve the current model by adapting rather than replacing it. The main changes are:

1) Explicit reduction in required course credits for staff teaching large classes.

In practice, DoLT and HoS have been aiming to apply such reductions under the 'credits may be varied depending on factors such as course size' clause. However, a more explicit policy is preferable in order to reduce negotiation, increase transparency, and better support large classes.

2) Tracking overall project load (UG+MSc) rather than treating these as separate items, making it easier for staff to focus on just one type of project by request.

Doing so can significantly increase the efficiency of project delivery by staff, allow better allocation of staff according to areas of high demand (which differ between UG and MSc), and potentially permit staff to have a semester or summer completely free of teaching obligations. The updated model is also more explicit that what counts is the number of students supervised, not the number of project proposed.

3) More explicitly allowing trade-offs between classroom teaching and other contributions to teaching, and explicitly indicating that staff teaching very small non-essential courses may be asked to take on additional work.

At present, staff are expected to teach a certain number of credits. This incentivizes staff to teach very small courses, which typically require less effort. We aim to remove this incentive and instead encourage staff to find ways to bolster their course enrolment, help support larger courses, or contribute more to other teaching-related activities.

Implementation: can it work?

As noted, DoLT and HoS have already been moving closer to this model, and most staff with large courses already have only 10-15 credit points of teaching. It is probably too late to fully transition to this new model for the coming year (since UG projects and many courses have already been allocated) but we should aim for full implementation by 2020-21. In 2019-20 we will have more PT and project resource available due to new staff (most of whom have been asked to do these non-classroom teaching duties in their first year rather than classroom teaching), and we can assess the
extent to which staff with classroom overloads can be compensated by reducing tutoring, PTs, or admin duties.

Re projects: Despite dire warnings, many staff are very underloaded on MSc projects (~40% have 2 or fewer students, while 30% have 6 or more). We are investigating changes to DPMT to help balance loads, but it seems clear that we could have a lower total supervision requirement (i.e. 6-8 UG+MSc projects as proposed here), if staff are better allocated to UG/MSc/both, according to need.

At present, there is too little tracking/transparency/accountability (leading, e.g., to the very unbalanced MSc loads mentioned above). We propose that the School commit to resource administrative and systems support to ensure transparent reporting of actual teaching loads, including all components in one place. One contribution to increased transparency will be the allocation of tutorials as an explicit duty. We also propose to have a new admin role for an academic staff to work with support staff, DoLT and HoS to ensure fair allocations.

Proposed model
The School’s current model can be found here. The new proposed policy is given below. Changes relative to the current model are highlighted in red.

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Part A: Definitions
The following definitions are used throughout:

- Course sizes: very small (less than ~15 students), small (~15-25 students), moderate (~25-80 students), large (~80-150 students), very large (> ~150 students).

- “By agreement”: unless otherwise specified, agreement must be in written form from Head of School or designated delegate, and is subject to the needs of the School in any given year. The list of designated delegates will be published annually before duties allocation begins.

Part B: Principles
1. It is the collective responsibility of the body of academic staff to carry the teaching and admin load of the School, in any year.

2. By default, all academic staff contribute to both teaching and admin.

3. Duty allocation will be undertaken in a fair and transparent manner, and reasons for any variance to the standard work allocation for any individual will be documented and visible (respecting confidentiality, where necessary).

4. Staff on part-time contracts will undertake duties proportionate to their fractional contract.

5. Staff with exceptionally heavy or light research loads may have their duty allocation adjusted to compensate accordingly. As a guideline, staff at grade UE08 and UE09 with salary recovery from grants, and similar, in excess of 50% may be considered for a reduction in teaching and/or admin load. For staff at grade UE10, the guideline figure is 60% salary recovery.
6. Where approved by the Head of School, consultancy commitments above the usual maximum of 60 days per year, or where consultancy income is used to offset the member of staff’s salary, may result in a reduction in teaching and admin work allocation.

7. New staff will normally have a reduced work allocation in their first year and will not normally be allocated to a large/very large course unless co-teaching with a more experienced member of staff. A matrix is available that details remission for new staff.

8. Responsibility for specific courses will normally be allocated on the basis that the member of staff will retain that responsibility for a period of between three and five years, with the responsibility rotating after that time.

9. Whilst individual preferences will be taken into account in the allocation of duties, a member of staff who is not fully allocated will be expected to undertake any unallocated duty that they could be reasonably expected to fulfil.

10. Doctoral research student supervision is a standard expectation of academic staff and therefore does not receive any specific recognition within the teaching and admin work allocation model.

11. The default date for the handover of duties is 1 August in each year. However, this date will not be appropriate in all circumstances so the incumbent and his/her successor should agree on the handover process, particularly for MSc-related activities. For instance, the incumbent may retain responsibility for the business of the outgoing academic year with his/her successor taking responsibility for the business of the incoming academic year. Non-standard agreements should be reported to the Head of School and any other relevant office holders.

12. Where agreement cannot be reached with a staff member regarding their work allocation, the staff member may request a meeting with the Head of School, to discuss the matter.

Part C: Standard teaching and admin work allocation

1) The standard teaching work allocation for a full-time member of academic staff is:

   a. Teaching of 20 credit points on moderately sized courses; 15 credit points for staff who make a significant contribution to a large course; and 10 credits of very large courses. This may be varied depending on factors such as complexity and maturity of the course.

   b. A standard tutorial allocation of two groups (typically 8-10 contact hours with no associated marking), or one group as specified annually for specific courses (e.g., IRR and IPP) where significant written feedback or marking is required. For courses where a single group is fewer than 8 contact hours, the number of groups is increased accordingly.

   c. A fair share of project supervision (normally six to eight projects in total). This total includes Honours, MInf, and MSc projects, and projects undertaken by MSc(R) students who are members of CDT cohorts (but not projects undertaken by non-CDT MSc(R) students). By default, supervision load will include both Honours and MSc projects. By agreement, staff may focus on just one type of project and/or may balance UG and MSc supervision across years. Project supervision by Research Assistants is additional to, not a substitute for, project supervision by their PI.
Project proposals must include projects that any reasonable Masters or Honours student, as applicable, can undertake.

d. A fair share of personal tutees (normally 20-30 tutees).

2) Actual numbers (credits, groups, projects, tutees) may vary, depending on the student cohort in any year, however the principle of fair and transparent allocation will prevail.

3) By agreement, staff may adjust the balance between responsibility for classroom teaching, tutorial groups, personal tutoring and project supervision, providing that an equivalent overall load is maintained.

4) If, through the normal allocation process, a staff member ends up with significantly fewer than the expected number of project students or teaching credit points, they will be expected to take on some alternative teaching or admin duties to maintain an equivalent overall load. These may include additional tutorial groups, marking and/or second marking.

5) Non-essential courses that are consistently very small will not be counted towards a staff member’s work contribution to the School but (by agreement) may be taught on a voluntary basis. Staff members teaching very small but essential courses, or non-essential small courses, may be asked to take on additional admin or other teaching duties to maintain a full work contribution to the School. Staff at risk of low enrolment are encouraged to consider ways to increase it (e.g., marketing; changes to material, timetabling, or prerequisites), ideally in consultation with the head of curriculum and/or DoLT.

6) Academic staff are also expected to undertake a minimum of four hours per year of recruitment or outreach activity, as directed by the School.

7) The standard admin work allocation for a full-time member of academic staff is one medium load admin duty or two lesser load admin duties.

8) Staff undertaking heavy admin roles may be granted relief from some other duties by the Head of School. Conversely, staff who demonstrate excellence in teaching may be granted relief from some admin duties by the Head of School if they wish to take on a heavier teaching load.

Part D: Support for Course Lecturers

To help support lecturers, the school will provide, at a minimum, enough funding to cover the following support staff, in addition to tutors and demonstrators:

1) Full exam marking support for all very large courses, and for all large courses taught by a single lecturer. Lecturer time in these cases should be spent primarily on moderation.

2) Full coursework marking support for all large and very large courses. Lecturer time in these cases should be spent primarily on moderation.

3) TA support as needed for course management and development needs for all very large courses, and for all large courses taught by a single lecturer.

4) Some coursework marking support for moderately sized courses, prioritising larger courses for full support where budget permits.

5) TA support may be provided for small and moderate courses, depending on course development needs, prioritising larger courses for greater support.

Further details regarding standard levels of support and support allocation procedures can be found in the Teaching Support Staff Policy.