

Allocation of Teaching Duties: A Suggested Reform

This is a discussion document that proposes reform of our approach to the allocation of teaching duties. It is written as a proposal to adopt but I think it is unlikely that strategy committee will be entirely content with it. I'm bringing it as a discussion document because I believe that our current system is pathological. The current system:

- Incentivises the creation of a large number of highly specialised courses that we cannot resource effectively.
- Is difficult to manage and does not recognise the role of the Institutes in determining the advanced courses on offer.
- Manages the swings in demand due to the popularity of courses very badly.
- Fails to recognise the very significant differences in contribution to teaching between courses with large numbers of students and smaller numbers of students.
- Is not sensitive to the need to resource courses more proportionately to student numbers (students who take many of our most popular courses have much lower contact with academic staff than those who take the less popular options).
- Is insensitive to differences in UG and PGT project supervision loads.

The School has failed to adapt to our current large student numbers. Changing allocation of duties process is one important element in adapting. This is an urgent issue; I'm reluctant to use our current system going forward.

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Our current model of teaching duties is manifestly inadequate. It does not distribute teaching work equitably nor does it provide students reasonably equitable access to teaching. It produces many unpleasant duties that are consequently hard to allocate and it incentivises behaviours that exacerbate these issues.

This is an outline proposal to move to a system based on the "student point". For each of our undergraduates we need to deliver 120 student points per year and for each of our PGT students we need to deliver 180 student points. We have around 750 UG students and 300 PGT students so in an academic year we need to deliver $750 \times 120 + 300 \times 180 = 144000$ student points of teaching and learning in an academic year. For the sake of simplicity let's say we have approximately 100 staff available to teach in any year - on average each member of staff should deliver 1440 student points in a year - say 1500 in round terms. In any particular year we will have a reasonably accurate estimate of the number of student points we need to generate and the staff numbers available to do this.

For example, teaching a 20-point course with 75 students on it would meet this average requirement. Supervising 10 MSc projects plus 5 Undergraduate projects plus one 10-point course with 70 students on it would also meet this requirement.

A 300 student 20-point course generates 6000 student points so we might consider allocating two academics plus a University teacher. That would mean each was responsible for 2000 student points of teaching.

In addition to allocating academic staff we should also allocate TAs, Tutors, Demonstrators, and Markers on the basis of the number of student points a course generates. This should be set to provide adequate support for the students taking the course.

There will need to be exceptions because some courses require more resource than the average and some structures are more difficult to accommodate. We need to decide on the exceptions and how they should be dealt with. We also need to fit tutorials and labs that are staffed by academics into this structure.

How should allocation of duties be carried out? Here is one proposal.

1. We centrally allocate teaching effort to all courses above a certain threshold number of students (e.g. 170 students). This would probably involve around 20 courses at most (all the year 1 and 2 courses plus the big courses in years 3-5). We should also ensure our most able teachers are allocated to these courses where possible to ensure the largest classes experience good teaching.
2. The remaining courses are partitioned across the Institutes (perhaps with some shared across Institutes). Small orphan courses might be humanely destroyed at this point.
3. Each institute then has an allocation meeting to allocate its remaining staff resource to the list of courses it has responsibility for. The only constraint is that the average across all staff in the Institute should be around 1500 student points per FTE member of staff (e.g. early stage chancellors fellows might count 0.3 in their first year and so on). This average would include the staff allocated to the big courses at stage 1.
4. There would then be some negotiation across Institutes to agree shared responsibilities or possibly to transfer student points in some way.
5. We would retain a record of the number of student points contributed each year by each member of staff to enable us to identify staff that regularly take on above or below average teaching contributions.
6. We might want to weight some courses a bit more heavily because the material is changing rapidly than other more slowly changing courses.

This approach has some advantages:

1. It devolves the allocation of teaching specialist courses to the Institutes who are best equipped to teach such courses.
2. It more closely matches staff effort to the numbers of students on a course.

3. It encourages Institutes to staff large courses because it has the potential to raise their student point per capita average.
4. It encourages the creation of courses that are likely to have reasonably large enrolments (e.g. more than 50). This could be by consolidating two smaller 10-point courses or by broadening the scope of a course. It provides a firm resource framework for Institutes to build their specialist course offerings inside. In particular it creates some pressure against the resourcing of a profusion of highly specialist, low-demand courses.
5. Institutes have discretion; in particular they can keep a small course going if they feel it is an essential part of their programme but this should be compensated for in some other part of the allocation.
6. There is a clear tradeoff between project supervision and other forms of teaching (but we might want to limit the number of supervisions – someone taking on 20 MSc supervisions plus 8 UG supervisions would contribute appropriately)

This is a quite radical departure from our current approach but I think it aligns incentives better towards the improvement of teaching quality and it is reasonably transparent while allowing the Institutes discretion in the allocation of teaching duties.

I request that Strategy Committee approve this approach in principle to be applied in allocation of teaching duties for Academic Year 2018/19. We will monitor implementation carefully through this year and develop a refined model for approval for Academic Year 2019/20.