Updates to School work allocation policy/model

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Requested action: approval of updated policy

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. 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 (nearly all of them to Part B) are highlighted in red.

Part A: 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 course (80-100 students or more) unless co-teaching with a more experienced member of 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. 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 B: 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 (> ~80-100 students); and 10 credits of very large courses (> ~150 students)[1]. This may be varied depending on factors such as complexity and maturity of the course.

   b. Three standard tutorial groups or 1-2 groups as specified annually for specific courses (e.g., IRR and IPP) where significant written feedback or marking is required.

   c. A fair share of project supervision (normally six to eight projects in total)[2]. This total includes Honours, MInf and MSc projects, and is reduced by one for each two project supervisions of MSc(R) students who are members of CDT cohorts. By arrangement, UG and MSc supervision may be balanced across academic 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). [See notes, **Appendix A**]

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, and subject to the overall needs of the School in any year, 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.

5) Non-essential courses with consistently very low enrolment (< 15 students) 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 (~15-25 students) 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/ discuss ways to increase it (e.g., marketing; changes to material, timetabling, or prerequisites).

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.

[1]Logged hours by SG and anecdotal evidence from others suggests that very large courses can easily require twice as much staff time (or more) as small ones, despite extensive use of teaching support.

[2] We now say "3-5" projects of each type, but if combined, no one should be expected as a baseline to take 10 in total: it's a problem that some people now do.

[3] This year we ran 3 essential and 6 non-essential courses of <15, and 11 non-essential courses of 15-25. See **Appendix B** for a discussion illustrating the benefits of re-allocating resource from delivering these courses to other areas.

Appendix A: Personal tutoring

SG sent an email to PTs asking for their own estimated time spent on PTing this year, and the number and type of tutees. 18 responses were received from 5 MSc PTs, 11 UG PTs, and two others (DSTI, VUG). The MSc PTs have around 30 tutees each, while the UG PTs have around 25 each.

Unsurprisingly, the variance in reported number of hours per tutee is very high. However, there are several points worth mentioning:

- The mean estimated hrs/tutee/yr is 2.6 for MSc (range: 1-4.8) and 1.7 for UG (range: 0.6-3).

- Those who logged hours were at or above average, and several PTs said their estimates were a 'lower bound'.

- Several people mentioned that the number of hours doesn't fully account for the effort required, due to factors such as:

  o unpredictable urgent requests/task-switching

  o potential emotional toll

  o frustration caused by Euclid

  o huge workload at start of semester when already busy

- SSOs have reduced the burden of SCs but not all students are aware of them yet.

Recommendations:

MSc PTs should not be given more tutees than UG PTs, as there is no evidence that MSc students are less work (but, statistically speaking, also insufficient evidence that they're more work). Anectodally, they probably have fewer SC's to deal with, but require much more time for course advice, registration, and re-registration.

In general, we should aim for no more than 30 students/PT, and ideally no more than 25. Staff with a light load elsewhere and who don't teach in S1 might be able to manage a somewhat larger load.

Appendix B: Why we should encourage alternatives to small courses

There can be good reasons to run very small courses (e.g., to create a "cohort" effect as part of a CDT or specialist degree) and they are often enjoyable for staff and the (few) students involved. However, such courses are inefficient (in terms of staff hours per student-credit delivered), even relative to other duties with high staff-student ratios such as project supervision and tutorials (see below). Thus there should be strong reasons for running them. By default, staff should be encouraged to either (a) increase the size of the course through marketing, offering it at a more attractive time, or other means; or (b) devote their effort to other aspects of teaching delivery, such as project supervision, PTing, or tutorials – all of which also provide close student-staff contact.

Hypothetical case study: reallocating resource

The number of hours spent on each task doesn't fully capture effort (due to, e.g., task switching and enjoyment/dissatisfaction), but it's still instructive to consider.

For example, a **10 point course with 15-20 students** delivers 150-200 student-credits and requires:

- An estimated *minimum* of 100 hours of lecturer time (assuming no updates at all), and realistically often 130-150 hours. (See attached spreadsheet for details of estimates.)

- Significant administrative overhead: time from ITO for timetabling, room booking, and exam organization; and from external examiners, colleagues for scrutiny, and BoE convenor.

Any **non-course alternative** immediately frees up all the overhead costs, and the 100-150 hours of lecturer time could alternatively be used for any of the following (or a combination):

- An extra 4-6 individual projects, or a cluster of 7-8 with a TA, delivering 160-480 student-credits (depending on UG/MSc) and potentially allowing a colleague teaching (say) a 200-student course to do fewer projects.

- 2-3 IRR tutorial groups (including feedback and marking).

- An extra small-medium admin role.

- An extra 5-10 PTs and an extra 2-3 tutorial groups. (This is probably less than 100 hours, but staff feedback suggests that the cost of PTing is high relative to the number of hours.)

Other colleagues might still feel that a lecturer given one of these alternatives in lieu of teaching a small course is getting off easy relative to those teaching larger courses, but the trade-off still benefits the common cause: it reduces the total amount of work being done and contributes more to reducing other staff loads than does the small course.

Comments

The proposed workload model permits staff to argue that a particular small course should run because it is critical to the curriculum (or simply because they want to teach it), but the strength of that argument dictates the extent to which they can count the load towards their work allocation.

Excluding CDT-only courses and those required for particular degrees, we ran about 6-8 very small courses this year, across a fairly wide range of topics from several institutes (some, but not all, by lecturers who could easily attract project students). The goal is not necessarily to kill off all of these courses, but to provide incentives for lecturers to switch to other forms of delivery if possible.