

GUIDANCE FOR LINE MANAGERS – MANAGING WORKLOAD FOR ACADEMIC STAFF

This document was compiled in collaboration with members of UEA and UCU (June-August 2020) and revised in consultation with UCU in April 2021.

CONTEXT

As a result of significant disruption to the delivery of University activities since March 2020 due to COVID-19, staff activities and methods of working have been rapidly reorganised and prioritised. In addition, many staff are experiencing continuing personal disruption to their ways of working and anxieties about what the next academic year will hold. In response, UEA and UCU formed a joint working group to communicate, consult and negotiate on workload allocation and academic activities, particularly in the light of changes driven by the COVID-19 crisis.

This document is intended to provide a framework **for line managers** responsible for supporting, planning and organising academic activities and workload allocation for all academic and related staff. It sets out core principles and guidelines that should be consistently applied across the University. Given that we have had to work quickly, certain concerns or scenarios will not have been considered here, but our shared intention is for a joint UEA-UCU group to review any such issues as the situation evolves. We intend to continue to work together to refine these initial core principles and guidance in the light of our evolving experience.

SHARED PURPOSE

The purpose of these core principles is to:

1. Support the efficient and fair allocation of resources to meet UEA and Schools' needs and objectives.
2. Ensure that any (re)allocation of academic activity and workload is carried out in a fair, pragmatic and transparent manner that avoids overburdening staff.
3. Foster understanding and respect for differing individual contributions in Schools, and ensuring exceptional contributions are recognised
4. Make health and safety a priority, including with regard to staff wellbeing and work-life balance.
5. Ensure that all staff can contribute to areas of activity as appropriate to meet their career goals, while balancing contractual obligations and resources.
6. Provide management information on academic activities within and across units of the university to monitor equality and diversity issues and to help inform future staffing/resource related decisions.
7. Prepare for the post-crisis future of the university by preserving and enhancing the university's organisational culture, and teaching and research dual-excellence.

CORE PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES

1. Creating an Effective Workplace Culture

An active, participatory, honest and open dialogue between employees and managers is expected, to ensure all staff groups feel able to raise concerns and are able to highlight any personal circumstances that may need to be considered in work prioritisation and planning.

Leaders and senior managers are responsible for taking an overview of how the academic activities and workload allocations of their unit are being affected in light of the COVID-19 context and the legacy this will have on subsequent academic years. They also need to respectfully acknowledge the contributions of individuals and teams as we all work through the COVID-19 disruption and its impact across our community. Therefore, it may be that some work can and should be paused to enable business critical work priorities to be achieved. This may be particularly relevant to managing the interface between Faculties and Professional Services where there are multiple and competing requests for support. However, it is essential that:

- Staff wellbeing, workload, personal / professional development and equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) are considered and protected when agreeing strategies for managing and prioritising work allocations.
- Work allocation should be fair, transparent and equitable in assignment of goals, recognising that equality of experience does not mean that the same decision has to be applied to all people within a team or role.
- All staff are expected to respect others' different and difficult circumstances, alongside respecting privacy and avoiding assumptions about others' challenges and needs.
- All staff are empowered to raise concerns about their workload without fear of redress and be willing to participate in finding solutions that continue to contribute to the ultimate purpose of UEA.
- All staff are encouraged to regularly refer to updates and other [HR information](#) and guidance via the University web pages to support them in managing individual support needs, issues or concerns.
- University processes such as annual appraisals and RAPs can be used to support ongoing constructive conversations between staff and line managers with regard to academic workloads, activities and priorities, and how staff can be supported to achieve them.

2. Reasonable and realistic expectations

Line managers may increase the time allocated to particular workload activities if there is a legitimate rationale for doing so, such as to ensure business continuity or sustain student experience. Changes to workload allocation may also relate to individual circumstances or differing local work practices.

When allocating workload, line managers should consider the wider impact on colleagues and avoid increasing other staff workload beyond reasonable limits. School- and Faculty-specific workload models should aim to achieve a fair, transparent, and manageable allocation across

teams. When undertaking a workload allocation review, line managers should take into consideration:

- Use of academic activity models or workload allocation tools helpful to line managers for identifying an overall picture of workload allocations across teams/schools.
- Any additional workload allocation (for individuals and/or teams) is to be identified for a specified time period, and counterbalanced with identifying activities that can be paused or re-allocated in a fair and equitable manner.
- Ensure opportunities remain available for promotion/professional development requirements so that any long-term impact on career trajectory is minimised.
- Staff preparing for confirmation of appointment should be given a workload allocation to enable completion of requirements (e.g. workload allowance for completing the MA-HEP programme).
- Time assigned for the completion of workload activities should be informed by the experience of ATR/ATS staff to ensure these are realistic and for a specified time period.
- Busy periods, and the avoidance of 'spikes' of effort required within particular time periods during the year.

Any workload allocation process will invariably have deficiencies and be unable to capture the full extent of staff activities. We can also expect disruption to plans and to staff availability over the coming year. Normally, additional capacity should be available in staff workload allocation models to ensure colleagues have the ability to respond to changing circumstances at short notice. Given the financial situation, it may not be possible to secure the budgetary headroom usually allocated to Schools and Faculties to respond to short-term increases in workload, but this will be a priority when financial stability returns to the institution.¹ In all cases, any adaptations required at short notice to workloads should not lead to staff being expected to work unreasonable additional hours and must not fall disproportionately on particular groups of staff, such as those beginning their academic careers and/or with protected characteristics.

Ideally, workload models will be designed in such a way so as to make it obvious whether there are specific individuals or groups that are allocated a particularly high number of working hours over a specific period of time. However, staff are also encouraged to monitor this, and to discuss with their line manager as soon as possible if they can see problems with excessive workloads or expectations. If for unavoidable reasons an individual is required to undertake an additional or unusually heavy workload to ensure business continuity, then the line manager should work with the staff member to identify strategies to:

- a) Explore how best to ensure a pattern of high numbers of hours is not continued over a long period. This should include an explicit discussion of which academic activities can be deprioritised or rescheduled to a later period.

¹ UCU and UEA continue to differ on the mechanism by which additional capacity should be built in to the system of workload allocation, with the former believing this should occur at the individual level in staff workload allocation models and the latter preferring School or Faculty level capacity via additional financial reserves. Both, however, would like to reiterate their commitment to preventing unreasonable workload burdens via the principle of headroom.

- b) Agree an action plan to counterbalance intensive work periods, which might include time away from work, and/or allocated to alternative activities that are less intensive or demanding.

Where disruption is unavoidable, staff must be informed of proposed changes at the earliest possible stage in development to allow them to adjust their plans accordingly. Line managers should work proactively with staff to make reasonable adjustments to their workload patterns in accordance with UEA's HR guidance.

Staff who remain unsatisfied with their workload following discussions with their line manager should speak with their HR Business Partner in the first instance. If they continue to be unsatisfied with the outcome they may raise a formal grievance as outlined in [Ordinance 6](#) of [Statute 7](#).

3. Health, Safety and Wellbeing

Within the recent (May, 2020) PULSE survey, it has been acknowledged that many UEA staff are experiencing increased stress, anxiety and mental health related matters during this COVID-19 period, which should be taken into consideration when planning work priorities and support as required. Health, safety and wellbeing should be at the heart of workload allocation and management processes.

Consideration of the impact of changing work patterns (e.g. periods of home schooling, shielding, reduced hours, reduced staffing due to recruitment freeze etc.) on colleagues, teams and their workloads should be taken into account when supporting staff to plan their work pattern.

There are further useful resources on staff wellbeing, including how to access the [Staff Employee Assistance Programme and the Report and Support website](#) on the [UEA Portal](#). Line managers might find the following ideas suggested by specialist organisations² useful as a way to communicate and plan necessary changes to staff activities and expectations:

- **Stay connected:** Regularly check in with staff to maintain awareness of any issues, which are being experienced and to share updated policy (e.g. Government Social Distancing Guidance; UEA risk assessments).
- **Plan:** Work with colleagues to help address the impact of pressures being faced (e.g. re-prioritising work, extending deadlines, pausing activity that is not business critical etc.).
- **Share:** Increase the number of people to be called upon to help, sharing work amongst a greater number of people. While it is recognised that a problem shared is not always a problem halved, collaborating with colleagues through working groups or team

² <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/>; <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak>; <https://www.coursera.org/learn/the-science-of-well-being>

teaching can generate new ideas, problem solve and help build flexibility in delivering teaching and research.

- **Reshape:** Working from home brings different disruptions and pressures throughout the day (e.g. home schooling/caring roles). Staff should be encouraged to reshape their working patterns, and not feel they have to “make up” time. It is important that people have breaks from work, away from intensive computer screen exposure, in which they can do other things. Line managers can help by ensuring that workload allows for this kind of positive break-taking activity, and modelling good boundaries on length and timing of meetings (for example, the Faculty of Arts and Humanities has agreed a principle of limiting the length of online meetings to 90 minutes).
- **Rest:** It is important to encourage staff to allocate time away from work, and to undertake activities they enjoy that benefit health and wellbeing. Line managers should make reasonable efforts to encourage staff to take their full allowance of annual leave, or at least the minimum statutory 28 days (consisting of 20 days statutory annual leave and 8 bank holidays) in the leave year to September 30th 2021 and each year thereafter. Where staff report that they are unable to take leave due to workload concerns, line managers should work with colleagues to identify strategies to manage these concerns and revise workload expectations where appropriate.
- **Reach out:** Encourage staff and teams to reach out to each other and to offer help to each other through offers of shared activity and small acts of kindness. Informal mentoring and support can help develop a sense of connection even when people are working remotely.
- **Respect:** Ensure that colleagues’ concerns are being recognised and heard. Listen and acknowledge their anxieties and hopes for the post-crisis future, even if the practicalities of this situation mean that there is little line managers can do to directly change the context.

4. Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

The COVID-19 crisis is impacting differently on different individuals based on their own circumstances.³ We know that the pandemic has particularly affected certain categories of staff, for instance those that are shielding, have caring and home-schooling responsibilities, come from certain Black, Asian and Minority Ethnicity backgrounds, have a disability or other protected characteristics. We believe it is likely that our reaction to COVID-19 and the changes this requires in our working practices could also have unintentional, but very real, impacts on particular communities if this is not closely monitored and considered. Pre-existing and persistent equality, diversity and inclusion concerns around workload have been exacerbated by the crisis, requiring a concerted and long-term response.

The allocation of workload is one of the key places where line managers can play a role in ensuring that all staff are included in the academic activities of schools, that diverse perspectives can enhance the overall performance of the academic unit, and that all have an

³ See for example [Myers et al. \(2020\) Unequal effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on scientists. Nature Human Behaviour](#) and [Malisch et al. \(2020\) Opinion: In the wake of COVID-19, academia needs new solutions to ensure gender equity](#), Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the USA.

equal opportunity to thrive at UEA. The university is committed to ensuring that there is broad comparability within units in workloads, that there is procedural fairness in workload allocation, and that any systematic disadvantage in work allocation by protected characteristic is made visible and actively addressed over time.

In order to support this commitment:

- Workload allocation processes should ensure equity across staff groups. It is recognised that equity does not mean equal treatment in all circumstances.
- Workload allocation processes should be consistent with the Equality and Diversity policies of the university and commitments under Equalities legislation.
- Line managers should be able to demonstrate clearly and reasonably how they have aimed to ensure equality, diversity and inclusion in workload allocation.
- Any systemic changes to work priorities at University, Faculty or School level should be subject to an Equality Impact Assessment, which is available for review and publication within the institution.
- Reporting mechanisms for workload allocation should allow for the monitoring of local variation to ensure this does not inadvertently promote inequity. Data on overall workloads should be shared at least annually with Athena SWAN committees, Athena SWAN Leads and those involved in other Equality Frameworks (i.e. Race Equality Charter) to ensure that inequities are noticed and corrected. School and Faculty Executives are responsible for regular equality and diversity monitoring.

5. Transparency and communication

Line managers should ensure that any (re)allocation of academic activity and workload is carried out in a fair, pragmatic and transparent manner. One way to achieve this is to communicate and consult with staff about their workloads within the context of School, Faculty and University needs as openly as possible. More specifically:

- Workload allocation processes should be transparent and staff should understand how their workload will be calculated. A list of tariffs set for individual activities should be transparent and available to staff.
- Members of staff should be involved at the beginning of the workload allocation process and reviewed at least annually. During the immediate COVID-19 context, more regular review meetings will be required to monitor and implement action plans if high workload is being identified for specific staff or groups.
- Workload should be communicated in a timely fashion to staff before the start of the academic year (i.e. July- August).
- All changes to workload should be made clear to staff in advance of their implementation, where possible.
- Workload allocations should be presented in a form and location that will be accessible to staff throughout the year.
- Staff are free to share their workload allocation with colleagues if they wish to.
- Faculties and Schools regularly publish anonymised statistics on workload allocations that can be used by staff to help assess individual workloads.

6. Planning and prioritising

All workload allocation planning processes should recognise academic freedom and the professional autonomy of staff while recognising the mission of the University to deliver high-quality teaching and research. Local teams (including Faculties, Schools, Departments and others) should agree local work priorities in line with these principles and guidance. Workload planning and prioritisation is overseen by School and Faculty Executives, under the overall guidance of the relevant Faculty PVC (or professional services equivalent, where relevant).

While the proportion of time spent on each element of a staff member's role may change in the next two to three academic years as the impact of COVID-19 continues to unfold and be managed, all staff should be allocated work within their contracted role scope. Exceptions to this should be raised and addressed with line managers. Where relevant and possible, all staff should retain the same level of variety in their roles, but with a need to be flexible and responsive to ensure the needs of the University are met.

- In determining local priorities, consideration should be given to the balance between education and student experience, research and research impact, regulatory compliance and financial resilience.
- Teaching and research are at the core of UEA's activities as a dual-excellence institution, and care should be taken to preserve and enhance teaching and research activities when considering what activities may need to be deprioritised in the upcoming academic year.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, research (ATR) and scholarship (ATS) time may need to be reduced in order to ensure business continuity, for instance to adapt to online teaching and dual delivery in the Academic Year 2020/21. Where this is necessary, line managers must ensure that reductions do not disadvantage particular groups of staff, such as those beginning their academic careers and/or with protected characteristics. Commitments to externally-funded grants should be respected.
- In cases where delivering School or University core activities requires an individual to allocate less time to research (ATR) or scholarship (ATS) than is usual in their normal workload, this should be explicitly recognised and recorded as soon as possible. Individual staff should not be disadvantaged in confirmation, promotion or other advancement processes where they have been allocated less time for research (ATR) or scholarship (ATS) than is usual in their area due to the COVID-19 crisis.
- Timescales for delivery of longer-term strategic activities may need to be extended, and/or paused during the current COVID-19 context.
- If work needs to be reallocated or de-prioritised, this should be agreed through discussion between staff and their managers. Where new activities are assigned to individuals or where employee's agreed goals will take longer under the changed way of working, they should agree with individuals which goals will be reduced in priority.
- Workload allocation should aim to maintain broad stability across workload cycles so that colleagues can make longer-term plans, recognising that an individual staff member's contribution to workload can change throughout their career.

- Wherever possible, managers should focus on agreeing the outcomes and outputs that will be delivered by individuals, giving as much discretion over when and how activities are delivered as is possible within the role, whilst maintaining a focus on quality of work delivered.
- Where new activities are added to workloads, estimates of time duration should be informed by exploratory work and take into account that colleagues are likely to require additional time to adjust to new ways of working.
- Where possible and appropriate, tasks should be designed to be completed in as efficient a manner as possible and staff are encouraged to take a pragmatic approach to reducing the bureaucratic burden of processes.
- When planning working hours and tasks, managers should engage individuals in supportive, open conversations about the options available to them (e.g. flexible working, part-time working).
- University processes such as annual appraisals and RAPs can be used to set realistic and achievable objectives for the year ahead, and to make a record of how COVID-19 has impacted individuals' work productivity.

Appendix:

EMBEDDING THE WORKLOAD PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES ACROSS THE UNIVERSITY

In August 2020, the university launched the new Workload Principles and Guidelines for Academic Staff that were developed by the joint UCU-UEA working group in response to the pandemic. As part of the implementation monitoring process, the Executive Team (ET) discussed initial feedback from Faculty Executives on how the Guidelines are operating in practice. ET also considered the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) that was completed by HR in January 2021.

ET recommended that the final task of the joint UCU-UEA working group should be to ensure that mechanisms are in place to embed the principles and guidelines into existing processes and structures across the university. These will remain under review to ensure that excessive workload across UEA is avoided for the duration of the recovery measures, and that dialogue with all of the Trade Unions on this issue continues in the longer term.

The UCU-UEA working group has made the following recommendations to be adopted by the University, which have been approved by the ET in April 2021.

1. Identifying gaps between principles and current practice

We are aware that there are gaps between the guidelines and principles as laid out in the document and the current situation in Schools and departments across UEA. We acknowledge that closing these gaps will take a sustained effort on behalf of colleagues across the University and commit to full implementation of these values in the 2020/21 academic year. Consequently, we understand that detailed implementation plans and strategies will need to be produced in order to identify, understand, and close these existing gaps. ET notes the following actions:

- *That relevant Faculty PVCs are tasked with ensuring that suitable workload allocation processes are present in their schools and report back to the Executive Team where further action is required.*
- *That staff are included in this process and are encouraged to identify areas for improvement and suitable strategies at a local level for implementation of the guidelines.*
- *That a one-size-fits-all approach is unhelpful, but that there must be a consistent commitment to the guidelines and these need to be implemented across the University in a meaningful and equitable way.*

2. Strategic priorities, resource issues and workload monitoring

The guidelines state that workload allocation planning and prioritisation is overseen by School and Faculty Executives, under the overall guidance of the relevant Faculty PVC (or professional services equivalent). Section 5 on transparency and communication requires that Faculties and Schools regularly collect and publish anonymised statistics on workload allocations. ET notes the following actions:

- *Embed monitoring of resource and workload issues within Faculty Executives. Include discussions of staff workloads in Risk Registers, planning and budgeting discussions, and under 'Resource Implications' section of standard UEA committee papers.*
- *Ensure that it is possible to generate these statistics for publication in the 2021/22 academic year and at disclosed intervals (at least annually) in each subsequent academic year.*

3. Health, Safety and Wellbeing

Section 3 of the guidelines and principles includes several areas where staff and their line managers may find support (e.g. Employee Assistance Programme). The EIA suggested including a reference to [Report and Support](#). ET also suggested that academic staff workloads are incorporated into the work of the VC's Taskforce on Mental Health and Wellbeing (Project 6: Staff Wellbeing) and the implementation of the broader Staff Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy.⁴ The University recognises that overwork has health and safety implications and that stress at work contributes to ill-health and is, therefore, a legitimate health and safety concern. ET notes the following actions:

- *Embed staff mental health and wellbeing aspects of workload management within Project 6 of VC's Taskforce, and ensure link-up with the implementation of the Staff Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy. Reports on workloads to be also shared with Project 6 Taskforce Group, and to be referred to ET for further discussion or action where appropriate.*
- *That Health and Safety committees are supported to examine workload concerns and overwork to identify potential health and safety risks due to stress and associated ill-health.*

4. Equality, diversity and inclusion issues

Section 4 of the guidelines and principles state that overall workloads should be shared at least annually with Athena SWAN committees to ensure that inequities are noticed and corrected. School and Faculty Executives are responsible for regular equality and diversity monitoring. In addition, the EIA suggested that there might be a role for Athena SWAN Leads and also those involved in other equality frameworks (e.g. Race Equality Charter). ET notes the following action:

- *Any reporting of overall workloads should be shared with Athena SWAN and other equality framework leads at the school, faculty and/or university level, to ensure robust monitoring of EDI issues related to workload.*

⁴ First pillar of the Strategy (section on 'Cultural and Behavioural change') includes "Exploring options to decrease excessive workloads carried by staff and counter the culture of long working hours through improving local workload allocation systems/approaches, increased use of flexible and agile working, examining performance expectations from job roles. In particular, the impact of no fixed hours contracts on Academic (ATS/ATR), Academic-Related (ALC) and Research & Analogous (RA) staff; and, additional hours worked by staff on Grade 6 (TECH /S&C) who receive additional annual leave in lieu of overtime."

5. Employment terms and conditions

The UCU-UEA working group was formed as a task-and-finish sub-group of the UEA's JCC. The Terms of Reference for the working group state that any areas that may impact on terms and conditions should be signalled for urgent review and, where appropriate, formal negotiation with the relevant unions. ET notes the following action:

- *Any issues that arise from the implementation of the principles and guidelines that may impact on terms and conditions should be addressed within the standing structures (e.g. JCC) for discussions between UEA and the campus unions.*

6. Querying Workload Allocation

The current guidance suggests that any member of academic staff, who considers the quantity or content of their workload to be unreasonable or considers that they are being treated unfairly with regard to workload allocation, should raise their concerns with their line manager (for most academic staff, this is usually their Head of School).

The EIA recommends that the guidance should be clearer on how issues which cannot be resolved between staff and their line managers will be addressed. ET notes the following action:

- *In the event that the matter is not resolved, the individual may write to the Faculty PVC or Head of School as appropriate, outlining their concerns for consideration. If once the Head of School or Faculty PVC has responded in writing to the concern, the matter remains unresolved, the individual is at liberty to pursue it formally through the grievance procedure.*

7. Training and communications

The guidelines encourage line managers to take a collaborative, respectful and empowering approach to workload management. The key principles will need to be embedded within training for line managers, and regularly communicated to all as a reminder of the positive standard of workload allocation expected across the University. ET notes the following action:

- *Information on the Guidance is shared on the UEA portal, including the versions of the guidance for academic, professional services and support staff, a UEA Workload Reduction Toolkit, and a suggested template for managers to use in structuring these discussions with colleagues (<https://my.uea.ac.uk/divisions/people-and-culture/human-resources/staff-resources/workload-changes-due-to-covid-19>).*