

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT SERIES

The Management of Academic Workloads

Summary Report

Peter Barrett and Lucinda Barrett
University of Salford

January 2007

**Leadership
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Acknowledgements

The support of the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education has been greatly valued. Without their funding this work would not have been possible.

Special thanks are due to all of the universities and their staff who gave their time to help with this research, and to the non-HE organisations that also took part. All those interviewed were refreshingly open and we are grateful for the high quality of their engagement.

Valuable assistance in the logistical organisation of the project was given by Anna Higson and this was greatly appreciated.

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First published in January 2007
Leadership Foundation for Higher Education

Published by the Leadership Foundation
for Higher Education

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ISBN 0-9553788-2-6
ISBN 978-0-9553788-2-9

Designed & produced by Abbey DPM

Printed in the United Kingdom

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The pressures on UK higher education (from explicit competition and growth in student numbers, to severe regulatory demands) are greater than ever, and have resulted in a steady increase in measures taken by universities to actively manage their finances and overall quality. These pressures are also likely to have impacted on staff and, indeed, recent large surveys in the sector have indicated that almost half of respondents find their workloads unmanageable. Against this background it would seem logical that the emphasis on institutional interventions to improve finance and quality, should be matched by similar attention given to the allocation of workloads to staff, and a focus on how best to utilise people's time - the single biggest resource available within universities.

Thus the aim of this piece of research was to focus on the processes and practices surrounding the allocation of staff workloads within higher education. Ten diverse organisations were selected for study: six universities in the UK, two overseas universities and two non higher education (but knowledge-intensive) organisations. In each, a cross-section of staff was selected, and in-depth interviews carried out. A total of 59 such interviews were carried out across the ten organisations. By identifying typical practices, as well as interesting alternatives, views on the various strengths and weaknesses of each of their workload allocation approaches was collated; and associated factors requiring attention identified. Through an extensive process of analysis, approaches which promoted more equitable loads for individuals, and which might provide synergies for institutions were also investigated.

Key findings

The findings reveal that most universities have policy guidelines on workload allocation practices, but these are often rather limited and not well known by Heads of Department (HoD)¹ or other staff. Generally the guidelines included some universal advice on transparency and equity, but allowed each department or school to determine their own approach. None of the universities studied had a single system covering the whole institution, in fact it was universally felt that disciplinary differences rendered this impossible. Across the various departments examined, a wide variety of models were found, falling in three broad categories:

Informal approaches where the HoD collected various bits of background information, consulted and then divided the work among colleagues. These could work well if they knew all staff very well and created a positive consensus, however, the trend to larger departments is making this "traditional" approach harder to sustain.

Partial approaches where there was a move to combine data formally or numerically to give an approximate output in terms of points or hours. Sometimes this approach only covered teaching as this was timetabled so contact hours were more easily defined. In other cases administration was also included, but typically the research aspect was left out. This was partly because it was felt to be harder to quantify, but there was also a sense that academics were motivated to work on their research without having hours allocated for it. These partial approaches allowed for easier comparisons, but by being incomplete could not fully support achieving equity.

Comprehensive approaches where teaching, research and administration were all factored in with various weightings and multipliers to reflect the different loads involved. This could support equity in principle, but many were actually limited in some way with the involvement of 'capped' items. Further they could create problems if they became too detailed, and in some cases undermined the Heads' abilities to tune allocations to individual circumstances.

A huge variety of practices surrounding workload allocation were found, with no single method without its problems. There was, however, agreement on some ideal principles in relation to these methods, for example on equity and transparency.

Additional factors were also noted within this study, such as the impact of the general disposition of many academics, who seem to have a high regard for autonomy and a fairly well developed cynicism about managerial practices. The surveys also reported long working hours, with the majority of interviewees working in the evenings and at weekends. Along with this, at lecturer level there was some anxiety shown about ensuring the quality of their work and about the need to be efficient. Staff seemed to have a good level of trust for their Head, but they were often unclear about the overall direction of their department and lacked feedback

¹ Please note the terms 'Head of Department' (HoD) and 'Head' are used synonymously throughout this report and also apply to 'Heads of School'

about their role in achieving this, which in turn led to anxiety about their performance.

Recommendations

A broad 'ideal' process is suggested along the following lines: There is a need to explicitly identify at university level, the essential elements which must be included within workload allocation: equity, transparency and consultation; and a framework model must be developed, again at a university level. Results show that development of a broad, neutral framework is feasible; and it is suggested that a display of transformational leadership of this type can help to improve transactional leadership at a local level. Departmental factors such as particular teaching delivery methods, should inform the variable features of the allocation process and 'individualise' the framework to ensure a 'good fit' at a departmental, and to some extent an individual, level.

Hence the workload allocation (WLA) model itself might be usefully viewed as part of a dynamic process rather than a fixed feature, and staff themselves should feel they have a responsibility to actively engage. This could allow for incremental improvements to help staff feel involved in the process, and reduce negative thoughts on managerialist interventions. After accommodating staff views, the implementation process should involve a balance between the 'model' and discretionary inputs from HoDs, to fine-tune allocations for individuals, as in this study, case studies that operated with a strong imbalance between these two elements (technical and social) seemed to have more problems. It was also noted that attention should be given to informal bonds and feedback within the department, so that drives for efficiency do not leave overworked staff feeling inadequate and underperforming.

Summary of conclusions

At its simplest, it is suggested that the following are needed to achieve effective workload allocation practice in the higher education sector:

- Transformational leadership is required to drive university wide policy and a general framework model

is needed which sets out agreed workload allocation criteria.

- Transactional leadership is required through consultative local tuning of the general framework model to fit departments / schools (loop process).
- All work areas should be integrated within workload allocation models - including research.
- The workload allocation model must be linked to other systems.
- There must be potential for feedback from staff to the university model (loop process).
- Heads should fine-tune the resulting model to fit individuals.
- In addition there should be informal regular monitoring of loads - and individual responses to stress noted.
- Heads need training to support these systems.
- Existing teaching allocations should be refined – management of peak periods, role stability.
- Staff should be encouraged to think about / negotiate the balance of their own activities.

Most universities will be taking some of these actions, but to achieve the full effect demands action, including appropriate leadership, on all fronts. In this way equitable workloads can be achieved, the fit between organisational needs and staff interests can be improved, synergies with other university performance management systems can be facilitated, and the universities' capabilities to achieve strategic alignment in a complex environment can be enhanced.

Workload allocation could be seen as a low-level operational issue, but given the centrality of staff to the success of universities, it is in fact a major strategic process, which if not done well can disable the organisation. If it is effectively and authentically handled, universities can create strong socio-temporal contracts with their staff that embody the vision of the university. We hope that this work will provide a way forward to the benefit of university staff individually and universities in general.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this project was to focus on processes and practices surrounding academic workload allocation. Through identifying typical practices, as well as interesting alternatives, views could be collated on the various strengths and weaknesses of these approaches, and the associated factors that might need attention clarified. This process would also make it possible to identify approaches which might promote more equitable loads for individuals and provide synergies for institutions. The higher education context is volatile and complex with many pressures, such as the move to a mass market, increases in tuition fees and pressures from quality review systems such as the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). There is at least an apparent tension between these growing pressures and the traditional notion of academic autonomy, which can lead to negative feelings about increasing bureaucracy and managerialism. The challenge for workload allocation systems then, is to support individual needs and organisational goals without adding to the administrative burden.

This report summarises the results of our study. Full details are given in the longer 'Final Report'². The term 'workload allocation' (WLA) has been used to refer to the policy and modelling aspects of the process, however, 'workload balancing/tuning' refers to the more individualised/negotiated dimensions of the process.

2 LITERATURE SYNTHESIS SUMMARY

The literature synthesis examined a variety of issues, covering the large surveys of academics' work done on behalf of unions, both in the UK³ and Australia⁴; and studies carried out on behalf of governments⁵; and employers⁶. Research in other areas was also covered, namely: the higher education context; research on work related stress; and leadership issues in higher education, communication, trust and resource allocation.

The Kinman and Jones UK union survey showed that a large proportion of staff found their work stressful (69 per cent), with 42 per cent regularly undertaking work in the evenings and at weekends. The Australian survey reported very similar findings.

The literature on workplace stress from many sources, highlighted the link between this form of stress, and the degree of fit between a person and his or her environment or work context⁷. Many of these influencing factors seem relatively fixed, for example the total amount of work required to be done, or individual characteristics which affect their responses to certain situations. However there are elements such as the match between staff and task; feelings about autonomy; and rewards; that might be practically influenced by strategies at both department and university level. Interpersonal elements such as leadership styles, communication processes and models of trust have all been shown to positively influence job satisfaction, motivation levels and the sort of coping responses adopted⁸. The resource planning models examined, also looked at related key factors such as equity, transparency and the 'alignment of staff to strategic goals'⁹.

The synthesis helped to clarify, on the one hand, the possible impacts of a range of environmental factors and, on the other hand, the likely scope for action by universities using variables more fully within their direct influence.

3 METHODOLOGY

A subjectivist approach to the investigation was deemed most appropriate, as this study was embedded in the real world and required multiple perspectives on this complex social issue. Further, there could be no control of variables and no means to scientifically observe and measure the processes involved. Consideration was given to the approaches which were available that could be used within this subjectivist stance, such as participant observation, archival research, questionnaires and surveys. The best method within resource restraints to understand the complex workings of the situation, seemed to be interviews backed up by relevant documentation.

As the field of workload allocation is relatively undeveloped, the approach had to be one of theory-building rather than testing, and thus Grounded Theory¹⁰ was ultimately chosen as a useful way to build up theory through comparisons of the same event or process in different situations. In this approach, the data which might come from sources such as observation and interviews, is systematically collected,

² www.lfhe.ac.uk/research/projects

³ Kinman, G. and Jones, F. (2004)

⁴ Winefield, A. et al. (Australia, 2002)

⁵ McInnis, C. (1999)

⁶ UUK (2003)

⁷ Karasek, R. (1979); French, J. et al. (1982); Siegrist J., (2000)

⁸ Middlehurst, R. (1993); Mayer R. and Davis J. (1995); Thornhill, A. et al, (1996);

Lewicki R. et al. (1998); Gillespie, N. and Mann, L. (2004)

⁹ Clarke, G. (1997); Burgess, T.F. et al (2003)

¹⁰ Glaser, B. and Strauss, A. (1967)

then analysed under a coding system. The aim of these systematic techniques is to maximise the rigour, precision and ‘generalisability’ of the analysis¹¹. Within this general approach a decision had to be made as to whether the interviews should be with individuals or grouped in case studies. It was felt that looking at isolated individuals would not reveal the complex interactions, relationships, network of activities and consequences pertaining to each of the workload allocation models. Hence, the case study method was chosen to get a fuller picture of the dynamic implications of choices made in an iterative process, a process Yin¹² called ‘explanation building’.

An initial draft of relevant issues, stimulated both from the literature and from the personal experience of the researchers, was compiled in a semi structured questionnaire. Broadly it covered generic areas such as codes of practice within the university; departmental context; the normal allocation processes as understood by the interviewee; and the transparency of these processes. Other sections dealt with the interviewees’ own workload, their work relationships (specifically in relation to the process and consequences of workload allocation) and their perceptions of organisational culture. It should be stressed that although there was a checklist of issues which might arise, care was taken neither to direct nor bias the interviews.

4 FIELDWORK

4.1 SELECTION OF SAMPLE

As the study was theory-building in nature, and its aim was to maximise the robustness of the findings - the research design stressed achieving triangulation from a rich variety of sources¹³. Thus the universities themselves were not selected randomly, instead they were chosen to give a broad picture across the sector, so that size, geographical location and type of university grouping were taken into account. For the latter, the groupings are as set out in UUK’s ‘Patterns of Higher Education Institutions in the UK: Third report’¹⁴. This sampling frame is partly summarised in Table 1 below, but full details are not given in order to preserve the anonymity of the case study organisations.

Care was taken to avoid selecting those universities heavily involved with other external research projects. Some universities that were approached initially also declined to be involved owing to heavy commitments resulting from issues such as restructuring. Apart from six UK universities; two ‘non-HE’ knowledge intensive organisations and two Australian universities were also selected to add richness to the perspectives captured.

TABLE 1

DIVERSE SELECTION OF UK UNIVERSITY SAMPLE							
CASE	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	UK UNIVERSITY GROUPING				OVERSEAS UNIVERSITIES	NON-EDUCATION
		1994 GROUP	CMU ¹⁵	RUSSELL GROUP	NON-ALIGNED ¹⁶		
1	10,000	●					
2	19,500				●		
3	10,000		●				
4	47,000					●	
5	40,000					●	
6	31,500			●			
7	8,000				●		
8	14,000		●				
9	-						●
10	-						●

¹¹ Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. (1990)

¹² Yin, R. (1989) p114

¹³ Denzin, N. (1970)

¹⁴ UUK (2003)

¹⁵ Coalition of Modern Universities

¹⁶ Alliance of Non-Aligned Universities

In order to get a broad view of the processes involved, the interviews were designed to cover a range of staff at each organisation. At each university, two lecturers and their HoD were interviewed, as well as a senior university staff member, and representatives from Personnel and the union body. Through the lecturer and HoD interviews, insights were gained in detail about two departments, and from the other more general interviews the insights and information gleaned ranged over a wider number of departments. These were usually selected by the university, in many cases the Personnel office approached a specific department who then selected members or asked for volunteers. Obviously this process could have been problematic because of the potential for staff to be chosen, for example, because of their compliant nature, and consequentially a range of issues and practices relevant to the research question might not have been covered. However, the diversity of responses and their forthrightness, indicates that in practice, this method proved successful and a wide range of disciplines were covered overall (as listed in Table 2 below).

The interviews were recorded digitally and then downloaded as voice files, before being transcribed into word documents, and once checked these records were sent back to the participants. Ethical procedures in relation to interview confidentiality were followed.

4.2 CODING AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Coding of the documents was then carried out following a simplification of the general procedures set out by Strauss and Corbin¹⁷. This involved the comparison of various phenomena leading to groupings under general category names. So, for example, one group was 'work allocation practices', and these had attributes (called properties) such as transparency and consistency, which in turn had dimensions along a continuum (see Table 3 overleaf page 10).

As the interviews proceeded, these categories were added to and, on occasions, merged where similarities and overlaps were found. The appropriate level of detail was tuned through experience. NVivo software was then used to plot and explore the findings, and to help uncover relationships and develop theory from the results¹⁸. The analysis and coding of the transcripts was carried out at the level of paragraph, sentence and even word. This allowed the researchers to call up all the references to a given category or property from wherever they chose, from one interview, from all interviews, or from a particular set of interviews. Further, different categories could be placed together in sets to allow for different sorts of comparison to be made.

TABLE 2

RANGE OF DEPARTMENTS / SCHOOLS INVOLVED IN CASE STUDIES	
Arts and Humanities	Law (x 2)
Biological Sciences	Languages
Built Environment	Life Sciences
Chemistry	Medical and Radiation Sciences
Engineering (x 2)	Psychological Sciences
Geography	Sociology
Health Care	Specialist History Department
History	Transport Studies
IT and Informatics	

¹⁷ Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. (1990)

¹⁸ Gibbs, G. (2002)

Summaries were written for each case study on each of the major categories (these were called nodes in NVivo). Not surprisingly, given the focus of this study, several of the properties within the 'allocation process' category warranted individual discussion. Thus the cross-case analysis was performed looking across these categories and properties. Following Strauss and Corbin's ideas about axial coding, the data from the interviews was used to identify the associated context, actions and consequences for each category, thus revealing their relationships to each other. From this data, cognitive mapping diagrams were produced using Decision Explorer software, so that a visual representation of the different relationships operating could be seen¹⁹. Different

views were then extracted from this rather complex model, to show the most pivotal or central factors, or to look from a certain perspective, such as the HoD's. From this modelling, the relationships between major factors could be seen, and a narrative constructed in the form of tentative initial theories about the phenomenon of workload allocation. These were then tested back against the raw case study data.

The main output in this section is the view of the raw issues emerging from the data as captured by the coding categories given in Table 3 below. The following sections of this report, will describe the results from the subsequent steps in the analysis.

TABLE 3

CODING CATEGORIES		
CATEGORIES	PROPERTIES	DIMENSIONS
Allocation Process	Consistency	Common across institution, or diverse.
	Equity / Fairness	Ranging in degree. HoD role.
	Model development / History	
	Timings	
	Disputes / Conflict	Degree experienced.
	Problems	
	Transparency	Open or non-open process
	Methods	Hour unit / FTE / Other. Accuracy / Allowances.
	Staffing - balancing roles or loads, including recruitment	
	Flexibility (including sabbaticals)	Range of flexibility.
	New staff	Allowance made or not made in allocation.
	HoD role	Leadership / Strategy.
	Consultation	Range in degree.
	Department / Faculty strategies	
	Department / Faculty environment	Including size, subject, RAE etc. and existing methods.
Home working	Extensive or limited.	
University Code of Practice / Policy		Code known / operational - or unknown.

¹⁹ Ackermann, F. et al. (1996)

TABLE 3

CODING CATEGORIES (CONTINUED)		
CATEGORIES	PROPERTIES	DIMENSIONS
Teaching	Courses	New or stable.
	Qualitative	Specialisms / Core courses. Expertise issues. Input of professional bodies. Modes of delivery. Online courses. Audit issues.
	Students	Issues relating to students.
	Assessment and marking	Timing and number.
	Quantitative	Range of class size. Number of modules involved. Hours.
	Scholarship activity	
	Other teaching staff / students.	Part timers (and research students).
Research	RAE	
	Qualitative	Empirical / Non-empirical.
	Bidding / Grants	Time allocated or not. Grant implications.
	Research students	
	Dedication	Allocated / Residual time.
Administration	Types	Quality audits. Finance. Marketing.
	Specialist staff	
Workload	Fit	Degree of match, work to individual.
	Quantity	Hours etc. Overburdening. Creative space.
	Support factors	IT mechanisms. Library. Staff aspects.
	Gender	
	Distribution patterns	Spread and work combinations. Holidays / research days / evening work.
	Roles	Specific tasks undertaken and open endedness. Part-time staff.
	Time-sheets	
Other activities / Influences	Consultancy work	
	Professional associations	

TABLE 3

CODING CATEGORIES (CONTINUED)		
CATEGORIES	PROPERTIES	DIMENSIONS
Employment Contracts	Part-time or sessional	
	Limited – research or teach only contract	
Individual Response	Service length / Age profiles	New / Experienced staff etc.
	Performance	Efficiency and quality. Student assessment of teaching. Extra activities.
	Behaviour / Relationships	Responses to the allocation system such as changing teaching methods or even social interactions. Home / Work balance. Motivation.
	Coping	Prioritise or plough on regardless leading to lower standards.
	Satisfaction	Role / Research / Teaching.
	Frustrations	Areas that in teaching, research or administration irritated staff.
	Autonomy	Autonomous / Interference.
Organisation	Environment	Internal and external factors. Stable / Turbulent; Niche / Reviews.
	Union	Degree of influence. EB ²⁰ agreements.
	Resources	
	Management style	Collegial / Managerial.
	Leadership	
	Strategies	
	Communication; shared values; goals	Good / Poor communication or sharing.
	Trust	High / Low trust at departmental or institutional level.
	Head of Department	Degree of Involvement with institution.
University Systems	Surveys	
	Full Economic Costing	
	Review / Appraisal	Linked to process or not linked to process.
	Training	Availability of schemes.
	Promotion	Degree related to work types.
	Framework agreement	
	Centralised Timetabling	

²⁰ Enterprise Bargaining

5 CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

Using the case study material a cross-case analysis was carried out looking at individual categories and selected properties, such as policy and equity across all the cases. Through the frequency of occurrence and the different factors that related to a category, its context, and the actions and consequences associated with it, a broader picture of the mechanisms and relationships at play was built.

The focus here, in this short report, is on the immediate issue of workload allocation, covering: university policy; allocation methods; transparency and equity; HoD; consultation; workloads; and individual response. A fuller picture of the findings can be found in the longer report which covers, in addition, elements such as: flexibility; problems; organisation; university systems; and the specific areas of teaching, research and administration. (Please see www.lfhe.ac.uk/research/projects) for details.

Please note in the following summary of findings: cases 4 and 5 are Australian universities; where a case number alone is given this refers to the university or a response from outside the in-depth studies of any given department, e.g. from Human Resources; lower case letters 'a' or 'b' relate to specific departments or schools within a major university case study.

5.1 POLICY

Nearly all of the universities interviewed had a set of principles or guidelines about workload allocation models. The contents of these guidelines usually related to aspects such as fairness and transparency in the process (case studies 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, and 7), although as case study 6 noted transparency levels could vary in degree. However the guidelines did vary in the level of detail involved, and nearly all of them were under review by working parties and review groups. In addition staff themselves (including Heads) very rarely knew about the institutional policy or any of its details.

A view frequently expressed was that it would be impossible for one university-wide model to accommodate all the different needs of the departments and schools (cases 2, 3, and 8). As a consequence, the development of the actual model was usually left to the discretion of the Head of School/Department. Whilst most universities were happy to leave the HoD to develop and implement systems, there was recognition that such discretion also had costs. Some felt it

was too vague, with not enough training and direction given to HoDs to accomplish such a task, and that it resulted in a 'mishmash' of systems (cases 2, 3, 4, 6). To compensate for this, one had introduced more training (case 5), another had a committee to monitor implementation (case 4), and some included recommendations to HoDs about models to ensure that the system was 'defensible' and to avoid interpretation issues leading to disputes (cases 1, 4, 5, 6). The expectations on levels of agreement in relation to the models varied. In one there was a feeling that the model should be agreed between all the parties concerned (case 6); others related to compliance with employment contracts, especially in relation to teaching hours (cases 3, 4, 5).

Many of the universities commented on the time-consuming nature of sorting out the issue of workload allocation, especially when burdened with other higher-priority administrative tasks. Some described the need for input from high-level leaders to address the problem systematically (cases 2 and 8).

Another issue that arose both explicitly (cases 1 and 6) and implicitly (case 8) was that managing workloads should be a faculty wide issue. Case 1 stipulated in its code of practice that departments' workload assessments should be mapped onto student full time equivalents (FTEs), both to assess the funding resource balance and to allow for interdepartmental comparisons. In case 6, the university had decided that schools within a faculty might have different balances of activities, but that they should reflect the strategic plan of the faculty as whole. Here, the units used should be able to be converted to notional hours in order that comparisons might be made. This idea of balancing staff and resources at faculty level, rather than just within schools or departments, cropped up again in case 8, where it was apparent that resources were balanced or averaged out across the faculty as a whole, leading to problematic differentials in resources between schools.

Some universities (cases 3, 4, and 5) seemed to have had a greater degree of involvement from union representatives in the formation of workload allocation guidelines. One (case 3) used, as a basis, its employment contract agreement for a maximum of eighteen hours contact time a week. Australian case studies (cases 4 and 5) used enterprise bargaining agreements to inform their policies on workload allocation and whilst actual working hours were not set, there were guideline recommendations of

thirty-seven hours a week. In addition, work types were specified and in case 4 time was proportioned between the main areas of teaching, research and administration, set at 40:40:20 respectively. Unions had expressed concerns about systems that required precision accounting, and about systems that required staff to total their hours in relation to different duties over a year. The latter was seen as being potentially undermining of the professional decision making of staff in relation to their work. In universities without forms of contract stipulating work hours, there was an often-expressed belief that capping of hours would be destructive in relation to working practices. However the issue of reasonable workloads was often discussed and some had this built into their principles (cases 5 and 7), with a system of checks being initiated if levels consistently exceeded notional guidelines.

Some case studies expressed an interest in using the allocation models to look beyond workloads to issues of service quality and an understanding of funding that could feed into activity costing and full economic costing.

5.2 ALLOCATION METHODS

A wide variety of models existed, even within individual universities; one interviewee described the situation as ‘bumpy’, ranging from sophisticated approaches to more ‘ad hoc’ divisions that relied on a ‘kind of traditional grandfatherly Head of Department’. The model involved was often the result of an evolutionary process and was a reflection of factors such as: the discipline and culture of department; the leadership style of the Head; the size of department; the complexity of the allocation; and the employment contracts set. Sometimes the HoD delegated responsibility for the model to another member of staff, whilst still making final decisions and fine adjustments.

These systems actually fell into three main approaches: those that collected background information, consulted and then divided the work informally; then the sort of model that actually combined a limited range of activities formally or numerically to give an output in terms of points or hours; and lastly those that had a more comprehensive scope. However, within and across these broad categories there was a continuum of approaches. As a starting point the taught element obviously had to be timetabled and so the contact hours were fairly easily defined. The research aspect, on the other hand, was commonly not included in

models, partly because it was felt that it was harder to quantify, but there was also a sense that academics were motivated to do this work anyway, so there was less need to include it in the model. Administrative work was sometimes just divided up ‘equally’ and in other cases some rough weighting was used, using a teaching hours or points equivalence.

The following sections offer a broad summary of the methods used to allocate work and a discussion of some of the advantages and disadvantages encountered in each. Although the summary works from the more simple approaches through to the more complex systems, this is not a reflection of any evaluative judgement on the methods, i.e. the more complex models might not be any better or appropriate to their given situation than the simpler systems. More specific discussion on this and issues such as transparency and consultation will follow in later sections.

5.2.1 INFORMAL APPROACHES

At the most informal end of the spectrum, the HoD divided up work, based on consultations with staff and taking into account preferences, specialisms and competence issues (cases 7a and 2a). Often this division was informed by basic rules, for example that staff should deliver two modules (case 6b). Administrative work was similarly divided up, informed by a consultation process. Research was not allocated as such, and staff were expected to arrange their own work in this area (although a day free of contact teaching was often allocated to facilitate this). At a more formal level, another case study (case 7b) had a database in which module level, class size and assessment type were collected and used by the HoD, in judging the work allocation and dividing up the teaching and administrative work. The last case (case 3b) that could be included in this group was one in which a formal model had been introduced and had found disfavour with their Union. This was partly because of the institution’s attempt to collate all the different activities with an hourly rate, and partly because the loads were seen to balance over a year rather than accommodating the weekly limit as set out in their contract of employment. As a result the Head concerned had been forced to revert to forming a judgment on duties and loads through negotiating with staff individually. The breakdown here seemed to be a result of misunderstandings about the nature of various agreements within the process.

As the last case illustrates, the advantage of this informal mechanism might be the potential for an individualised system which can accommodate complex information, in a way that a more numerical model would find hard to deliver without being over-complex. It could also potentially be used flexibly to accommodate change. However such a system would be harder to operate in larger departments, partly because of the time it would take to operate and also because it relies on a Head being knowledgeable about all the staff and the intricacies of their work. However, cases (2a, 7b) also indicated that problems might arise due to inadequate consultation and a lack of definition and norms for work, even in small departments.

Another related disadvantage of the system, is that the rather subjective basis of decisions might make Heads vulnerable to claims of favouritism and 'doing deals', or responding to 'who complains the most'. Conversely, where decision-making criteria are not transparent there might be no effective mechanism of appeal against unfair allocations, or the issue of 'workhorses and skivers'. The system also does not readily accommodate employment contract specifications and problems might arise when trying to accommodate the potentially huge differences in the assessment task size. In practice, a variety of approaches were used to counteract this: some institutions used other teaching tasks and student projects to accommodate differences in class size and fine-tune loads (cases 7a and 3b), others used second marking and weightings to balance things (cases 6b and 2a).

5.2.2 PARTIAL APPROACHES

This group of departments reported quite high levels of consultation and negotiation, and models varied with regard to what they included and how this was incorporated into the allocation. For example some models included administration, but not research activities and vice versa; in some, variations in student numbers and assessment work were balanced through informal mechanisms, and in others through numerical weightings.

More generally, another distinction between these various sorts of approaches was whether they used hours or points to describe allocations. There was perhaps more inclination to use an hours model in departments or organisations that had employment contracts stipulating maximum contact hours (case 3a, and 'comprehensive' cases 5a, b and 8a, b). The 'experimenting' case 3b, mentioned earlier was the

only exception to this. Two cases (cases 1b and 2b) not within this 'contract' category still chose to use the hours units. In one case this was because the Head had made a definite choice to use hours to highlight high workload issues (case 1b) and in the other (case 2b) the model used a thirty-seven hour week as its basis. However what staff often commented on was that although the system looked equitable, both the weekly limit and allowances for each work type were unrealistically low and made to accommodate a set total. As an indication of this, for those models using hours research was either not included (cases 3a, and 1b), or calculated retrospectively and capped (cases 2b, 8a and 8b). The Australian cases 5a and 5b were an exception to this as they set standard loads in each area and varied the balance between them to match the individual staff member. However, this seemed only to fit within their contract hour limit through efficiencies on the teaching front, such as online provision.

In the most simple 'partial' approaches, the allocation was based solely on teaching contact hours, with marking equalised out, and with administrative work shared out informally through the judgement of the Head in relation to equity (case 3a). More complex approaches accommodated this administrative work within the actual weightings of the model (cases 1a and 1b). These approaches used allowances for teaching and administrative work, with assessment and preparation weighted within the model. However, the mechanisms used to calibrate them varied: one used hours (case 1b) and another (case 1a) used a system of FTE units as a means to match allocated time to resource inputs, an approach probably informed by their university policy (see section 5.1 above). So, for example, if second-year students did four courses, then staff teaching one of them would get a quarter of an FTE per student. The advantage of this FTE model meant that the lecturer could teach the students in however large a group they wished, and the marking would also be reflected in the numbers. Administrative tasks were also given an agreed FTE tariff although this had to be tweaked frequently to try and more accurately reflect the work involved in these tasks. Loads were then weighted to reflect aspects like new appointments (50 per cent load); HoD role (40 per cent); leave (0 per cent); although most people were on a 100 per cent load.

The disadvantage of this approach was that as the figures were expressed in percentages, it was felt that the number of hours could inflate over the years as student numbers rose. Another disadvantage was that research was not explicitly weighted within the model.

5.2.3 COMPREHENSIVE APPROACHES

Within the more comprehensive systems, the research element was incorporated into the model, although in many of the cases it was a capped element. Cases 8a and 8b used research outputs, distinguishing between funded and unfunded research, to determine this allocation retrospectively. In both of these models, target teaching hours were determined by the maximum contact hours stipulated in the employment contract. They used weightings in teaching for numbers, assessment and preparation but, interestingly, these models also had weightings for administration work, reflecting things such as staff, student and programme numbers that subject group leaders would have to coordinate as part of their role. Once this data had been entered into the model (usually held on a spreadsheet), Heads could then examine allocations to identify any areas in which small readjustments were needed.

These models were felt to have the advantage of accommodating areas such as assessment and preparation times, whilst at the same time allowing staff the flexibility to make choices about modes of delivery. However, some staff felt contracted employment hours were accommodated in a way that obscured actual loads; and in both models of this type, the allocation spread over a forty-week period, whereas the actual teaching was fitted into a period of about 26 weeks. This meant that staff with a higher researching load had their work more evenly spread than staff predominantly teaching. Some staff also felt that tariffs for certain administrative tasks, although carefully weighted, did not reflect the actual work involved and that there had been a gradual reduction in some of these allowances over the years. Retrospective inputs on the research side were also felt to be slightly inflexible, in that changes to work patterns took some time to be acted upon.

In case 2b this practice of entering data retrospectively extended to all the work areas. Here the model allowed staff to constantly update the spreadsheet on their work. It had a system of weightings for the various areas (some of which were capped) and would then work out the next year's allocation based on the data entered. A problem found with this model, was that again it was based around a 37 hour week. The whole idea of hours did create problems, often because amounts allocated to tasks were not felt to reflect the reality of the situation.

There also seemed to be an almost cultural resistance to defining allocations too exactly in hours. Where hours were used they often referred to contact time or to specific duties, leaving out or capping aspects such as research. Heads were faced with the problem of conditions within contracts of employment, and the unacceptable face of the actual loads. Staff seemed resistant also to the restraints of tight systems and accountability, that might threaten their cherished autonomy. Systems using points to some extent obscured this issue, and some cases such as 6a (and 4b), Heads were keen to ensure that their model would not be used to limit work, in the way that an hours based one might. The 6a system used a database that collated information on teaching tariffs (comprised of fixed elements on credit rating and module level and a variable element on numbers) for each module that could then be divided amongst the staff teaching on it. This was especially important in this case as each module had inputs from a large number of staff, thus making the task of allocation very complex. Administration and research tariffs were determined through a consultation process and also fed into the database, and a 'catch-all' category was included in the allocations to account for various and diverse work types. The purpose of this was to reduce quibbles over minor allocations.

The Australian models

The approaches taken by the Australian departments are best described separately. The approach taken in case 4b was informed by the University Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EB), which divided the time allocated to each work area, at 40:40:20 to teaching, research and administration activities respectively. Although it was not fully inclusive, in that administrative tasks were shared out equally, it was a very sophisticated approach that was developed through high levels of consultation. Different models and weightings had been developed for the different modes of study (undergraduate / PHD etc.), and each divided into sections on co-ordination, facilitation and assessment. Credit rating and student numbers were fed into the model, and also the dependence level of students in relation to the coordination and facilitation aspects. This refinement captured the fact that the marking element of a large class had greater work implication than the differential between lecturing small and large groups. To inform the model, comparables between teaching and research were found by examining the workloads of staff employed 100 per cent in teaching and 100 per cent in

research. Then a base-line level for research was set and the weightings used to 'reward' or 'punish' variance from this. The advantage of this model was that the weightings allowed staff to move the balance of work between research and teaching.

Case 5b used a similar approach to the last model of determining a load for a given area by calculating the work involved at 100 per cent loading. Staff had to rank themselves on a scale in the three main areas, and then, through negotiations, Heads would work out allocations by using staff self-assessments against these notional 100 per cent loads. Similarly, in case 5a, standard loads in each of the main areas (teaching, research, administration) were set as a benchmark to balance workloads against. Care was taken to avoid the polarisation of staff, so teaching hours were not used as the balancing mechanism. (This was similar to the aim in case 4a, where with the EB agreement in the background, equal weightings of points were given for the three main areas). In general the teaching loads were allocated equally, but not capped. Research on the other hand was capped, but those staff not gaining funding were not given extra teaching duties, as the aim was to maximise chances for them to succeed in research in the future.

Figure 1 overleaf (page 18) now summarises, in a continuum, the range of approaches discussed above. It also shows the disposition of all of the cases and summarises the broad advantages and disadvantages of all three of the main systems used.

5.3 ISSUES OF TRANSPARENCY AND EQUITY

Transparency

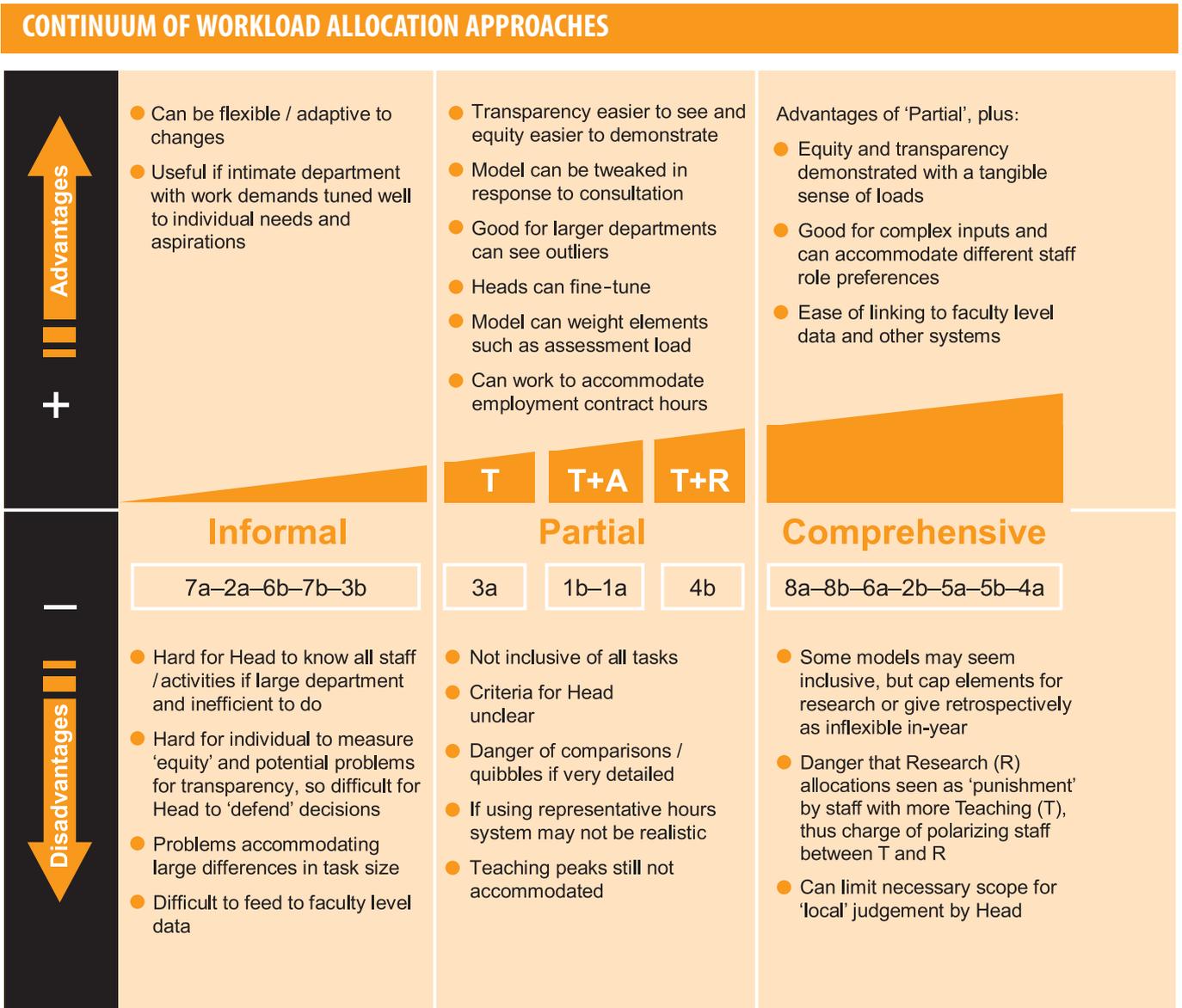
Whilst the majority of those interviewed saw the advantages of transparent systems, there were a few areas considered to be problematic. The definition of a transparent system was also open to interpretation, and these ranged between:

- Systems that named individuals and listed all their duties (cases 1a, 1b, 3a, 3b, 4a, 4b, 7a, 8a, 8b), some even worked out roles in an open forum (cases 1b and 7a)
- Publication of a summary document of the range of duties (cases 2a, 2b, 5a, 5b, 6a, 6b)
- The more confidential approach between HoD and staff member (case 7b)

In some cases, it was also found that even where decisions were transparent, the criteria for arriving at them was less so, for example why particular individuals got certain roles or how weightings for tasks were decided upon (cases 3 and 6b). Hence some felt that openness needed to extend to an articulation of the decision-making criteria, as without this management weaknesses could be suspected (case 8). The context was also felt to be pivotal in relation to transparency, not just the stance of the HoD, but also the physical environment, the size of department and other factors affecting perceptions of openness and trust across operations (cases 6 and 7). Some felt that changes at a university level, with guidelines and calls for numerical systems, would facilitate more transparent systems.

The perceived advantages of transparent operations in relation to workload were numerous. Many suggested that it would curtail issues of unfair treatment, discrimination, and favouritism (cases 2, 5, 6, and 8). It was also felt that a system that openly used a measure allowing for comparabilities, would help to create a mutually agreed idea of a reasonable load. This could then facilitate a 'moving towards the middle' in workload distribution, as 'outliers' from this range became evident, allowing the HoD to identify and manage the issues of underproductive and of overstretched workers (cases 4 and 7). Other staff mentioned that transparency was an important way for staff with different roles to appreciate the contribution made to the department or school by others. For example, teachers might see the benefits that research funding brought in and researchers could better understand the workloads of staff involved in teaching large classes. In some cases this had helped to reduce tensions and niggles arising. Some staff also felt that it helped to promote diversity, and when work was balanced openly and flexibly (case 5 and 8) this helped staff to find their own niche. Others felt that the openness of systems was useful when it came to times such as appraisal and promotions, so that the importance of an individual's contribution was more easily judged (cases 1, 5). As with many situations, these issues could be seen from other perspectives. Some saw a danger in transparency, particularly if the model was detailed, as it could encourage staff to bicker over the smallest details through divisive comparisons (cases 2, 5 and 8). Still others felt that such openness was best only at identifying those lying outside the normal range. Despite concerns in some cases, the majority of those interviewed saw the advantages of transparent systems and most felt that the model needed to

FIGURE 1



be detailed in order to be fair and comprehensively cover work areas (cases 6 and 7).

Equity

In relation to equity there was generally a belief that these issues were handled fairly within schools and departments, however this was somewhat hazier where systems were less transparent. Some departments used simple principles, along with the WLA models, to ensure equity, for example in some an explicit expectation that all staff should do some teaching (cases 4a, 5a, 6a) and others that all staff should research (case 1a). The Head was actually considered to be pivotal to perceptions of trust and equity, rather than the workload allocation model.

There was a lot of discussion within the interviews about, on the one hand, staff who tried to do the minimum, and, on the other, those efficient, amenable and diligent members that always picked up any extra tasks (cases 1, 2, 3, 6, and 7). Some Heads talked of the problems of managing equity where some staff seemed to 'thrive' on hard work and always worked beyond the allocation.

Research was mentioned frequently as the aspect that accounted for the most diversity in loads, and many staff reported routinely using their vacation periods to catch up on research work. Further, it was felt to be relatively more difficult to quantify research activity time-wise, than other work types.

Administrative tasks were also a vexed issue. In some cases, staff attempted to avoid large tasks, and in other instances a knowledge of their weightings or promotion prospects had made staff more willing to take them on. Certain administrative roles were felt to often fall to women, (sometimes because of a belief in their superior communication skills (cases 1, 2, and 7)), and these roles tended to be more open-ended.

Marking and assessment were also areas frequently highlighted as being potential problem areas in relation to equity because of differences in class sizes.

Finally, from a more general position, there was some questioning of the time allocated to given tasks within the various models where they were not a true reflection of the work involved, even though across a department there might appear to be equity between staff. Looking at the wider picture, some staff were starting to question equity levels across their faculty and even their university (cases 6 and 8).

5.4 HEAD OF DEPARTMENT AND THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

The Heads interviewed often expressed enjoyment at managing their department, but many had also found it very challenging - especially at the start when they often felt they were expected to be aware of things of which they had no real knowledge. Heads also generally acknowledged that as they became more experienced the, initially daunting, task of managing staff became easier and less time consuming.

Some felt that the training they received after taking up the role would have served them better if it had been given prior to appointment (cases 1, 3, 4, 6, 8). However in general most felt that they were able to represent the views of staff to the university, and also successfully relay information back to staff.

The Heads considered involvement and information were key elements to help build confidence and trust in organisational decisions and noted that size of department was a key factor when it came to actually knowing what was taking place (cases 4, 8). Juggling resources and balancing the needs of students, staff and RAE priorities were the biggest causes of tensions for Heads, many of whom had invested in more administrative support and felt the need to delegate and not micro-manage situations (cases 2, 3, 4).

Nearly all the Heads involved felt that their staff were committed and industrious. Some felt they needed to ensure that staff did not over-teach, and looked for efficiencies, consolidation and new modes of delivery in their teaching programmes (cases 2, 4, 5, 8). They discussed mentoring staff, and many felt an important part of their role in this was encouraging, and at times challenging, those who were not fully engaged. Heads also frequently discussed the issue of personalities, often in relation to staff who were motivated and almost overstretching themselves (cases 1a, 7b). They more rarely talked of difficulties, but had experienced passive resistance to change, such as in relation to a new workload allocation model (case 3); disruptive personalities; and problems with work paid as overtime (cases 8b and 3b). Some Heads expressed a belief that the problems were best acted upon quickly to avoid their escalation (cases 5, 6, 8), and even small grievances were generally felt to be very time-consuming.

Heads did report that workloads were high and felt that workload allocation models were important to help achieve equity. However there was a feeling not only that Heads themselves needed the discretion to make adjustments, but that ultimately staff had to make their own assessment of work priorities. Most Heads had been highly consultative over the introduction, or amendment, of workload allocation models, discussing aspects such as weightings for roles (cases 1a, 1b, 2b, 3b, 4a, 4b, 5a, 5b, 6a, 6b, 7a, 8) although this process was not always successful (case 3b). Even when there was a process of consultation, some staff were reportedly unwilling to engage in the consultation process (case 8), but where staff had become actively involved, their awareness of the complexities of the problem of workload allocation had made them more supportive (cases 4 and 6). One school had invested in quite a lengthy process of consultation and pilot study implementation, followed by further review, consultation and implementation (case 4b). This resulting model seemed to have been introduced with little friction.

Often, Heads had inherited a working model of workload allocation and continued to run it without too many problems, (cases 1a, 2b, 3a, 8a, 8b) although resistance was reported to any changes made to existing processes. Indeed the introduction of new workload allocation models was more often greeted with suspicion; in one case this had meant the model was withdrawn altogether (case 3b). Heads noted how difficult it was to judge all the issues and implications (cases 4, 5) of a new model.

In relation to their own work, some HoDs noted how the job could be isolating or lonely (cases 3 and 7). Some also noted an element of 'competition' with other areas of the university which was necessary in order to serve their department (cases 1 and 6). In certain cases, Heads met up to share knowledge on things such as workload allocation. Some departments had also introduced associate heads to support the Head and to prevent any undue dominance.

A few Heads still managed to teach a little and several still carried out research, (cases 1a, 3a, 4a, 4b, 5a, 8b); however, others had difficulties maintaining research (cases 1b, 3b, 6a, 7b) or felt it to be squeezed by other demands (cases 1a, 2a, 2b, 5b, 6b, 7a). Research was frequently cited as being pressing and the demands of the RAE seemed to be uppermost in the minds of many at the time of interview.

Other staff interviewed seemed to generally have good relations with their Head of Department and there appeared to be quite high levels of trust towards them (cases 1a, 2b, 4a, 4b, 6a, 6b, 7a, 8a) although the question of trust was not asked directly. Only on two occasions did staff show some nervousness about being interviewed and require reassurance on the confidentiality of the process. Honesty and openness were said to be appreciated, although there were a few instances in which staff unsure of the plans of their Head (cases 1b, 2a, 3a), and others did suggest that communication of plans was sluggish (3a, 4a, 7b). Where staff had had anxieties and concerns over their work, any reassurance given by Heads had done a lot to mitigate the stress of the situation. There was a degree of conflict between a small minority of staff and their Head in a few departments, and this often focused on problems surrounding workload allocation, sometimes in relation to contracts of employment (cases 3b, 8b). In others this 'unhappiness' was more limited to the detail of the model (such as marking allocations) or temporary in nature due to staffing shortages (4a, 6b, 7b).

5.5 WORKLOADS

Most of the universities had carried out surveys on issues such as workloads and well-being. In some, unions had also tried to get involved in the agreement of what a reasonable workload was, sometimes where there were contracts of employment specifying contract hours this had a sharper focus (cases 3,5,8). Workload levels were generally seen as high, with many academics working in the evenings and weekends (all cases). How staff responded to this seemed to depend to a large extent on what their work involved.

Increased bureaucracy and demands for external audit had been one of the most unwelcome aspects discussed in almost every case, especially 'mundane' and 'repetitive' tasks which were very unpopular (cases 3, 4). Where Heads had employed more administrative support this was widely felt to be beneficial. Small-sized departments specifically reported problems in distributing certain tasks and roles (cases 3a and 7a) owing to limited flexibility. Workload allocation models showed research to be the cause of the biggest inequalities in workload; however it was something that many staff seemed keen to do and would fit in even if it meant working unsocial hours. The open-endedness of research was also cited as problematic in this regard (cases 1, 2, 7). Research caused most difficulty in departments where the discipline was new to research and had no background of resource support, but where the organisation still had high expectations of research success.

Another issue frequently discussed was the uneven flow of work through the year, mainly in relation to teaching and assessment (cases 2, 3, 6, 7). Some Heads had tried hard to find ways of spreading the work, using part time sessional staff, and PhD students for some work, and also using innovative ways to cope with large class sizes, Australian case studies especially showed an extensive use of 'casual' staff. Some Heads had also liaised with central administration departments in order to minimise extreme peaks of work caused by short periods between exams and expected completions for marking. High staff : student ratios were problematic in several cases (cases 1, 3, 6, 8). This was sometimes because of an extreme upturn in the popularity of a given subject and a time lag before new staff were employed, and at other times because of resource implications where staff losses were not replaced. Some cases, especially those in less densely populated locations, also spoke of problems recruiting suitably qualified staff. Importantly, many staff, especially junior academics, expressed anxieties about the implications for students as a result of these high loads (cases 1a, 1b, 2b, 7a, 7b, 8b), feeling that lectures were not prepared as well as they hoped and time for student consultations limited.

The credit rating of modules was mentioned as a factor in two of the universities (cases 6, 7). In both institutions, moves were being made to increase the minimum credit rating of modules. Although it was felt that this would be beneficial in the longer term through efficiencies, in the shorter term it had increased workloads as staff had to prepare new material.

New work was also being created through the use of technology. Many staff complained of an influx of student emails and queries and other talked of organisational moves to put more work online and even to delivering lectures online (case 5). Some felt happy to move in this direction; while others worried about equity issues, where their load was compared with an individual who had made a large investment to prepare online work, but thereafter did much less.

Personality issues were also seen as a big factor in relation to workloads. Sometimes this was felt to stem from enthusiasm, the desire for high standards and high levels of motivation; at other times staff felt it was because of inefficiency (cases 1, 2, 3, 5). Conversely some staff felt a sense of irritation with managers who glibly talked about the need for efficiency, but did concede that discipline was required to limit the amount of time that they spent on tasks.

Another frequently cited issue was that of efficient staff being loaded down because they could be relied upon to do the work well. There were felt to be dangers in being considered 'a safe pair of hands'. However, staff also recognised the problems of mismatching staff to a role and acknowledged how often this limited the choices available to Heads (cases 1, 7). There was a feeling that to progress one just had to work harder, and some believed that newer staff felt more comfortable in this climate than staff that had been longer in the profession (cases 2, 4). However, some did note that there were dangers in new staff being overloaded too early with important responsibilities, such as admissions officers (cases 1, 5). Many suggested new staff should be mentored and nurtured (cases 4, 5, 6), yet there was also an issue if new staff were protected and supported through teaching certificate programmes, as this could mean a knock-on effect of higher loads for the more experienced staff.

Although staff felt comfortable discussing high workloads, they mostly played down any suggestions of stress-related illness. Only one Head actually commented on staff with physical symptoms, although Human Resources and Union staff seemed to be more aware of cases, suggesting that high workloads made staff feel more vulnerable (cases 3, 5, 6, 7, 8). A few universities had noted a large upturn in these cases and in two universities, Human Resource staff felt that women workers were presenting with relatively more cases (cases 2 and 3) - they felt that these were often related to poorly developed personal support structures. An

additional gender specific finding was that some schools had used workload allocation models to assess the hours of fractional or sessional workers, who were mainly women with childcare responsibilities (case 4). They found that the total hours worked often far exceeded what these individuals were contracted and paid for.

5.6 INDIVIDUAL RESPONSE

This section links to the above 'Workloads' section which notes that high workloads and the open-endedness of much of the work, means that staff in all cases seen often worked long hours into the evening and weekends. Some felt that they had compromised a little on the quality of their teaching, but generally this commitment was their first priority. Research was felt by many to be the element that differentiated loads, and was the area that suffered most when loads rose; a loss of creative thinking time was also frequently reported (cases 1a, 4b, 5a, 5b, 6, 8). The factors that were mentioned about responses to this work situation were: personal efficiency, motivation and the compromises that staff were willing to make. Reference was made in all of the cases to the personal qualities that made some staff willing to pick up extra duties and this section will examine these individual factors in more detail.

Efficiency was often cited as pivotal, and the need for staff to actively place a limit on some of their work activities, especially in relation to administrative work (cases 2a, 2b, 4a, 4b, 5b, 6). Heads often noted how, as they became more experienced, they had improved in areas such as making decisions under pressure. The disadvantage for willing staff was felt to be that they could prejudice their chances of promotion if they burdened themselves with 'mundane' tasks – so the balance between efficiency, role stability, and promotion was implicitly weighed. Some were felt to thrive on their work and interviewees expressed a belief that to get promotion staff needed to put in some long hours (cases 2b, 5b). Others commented that families and the work life balance were upset by such an attitude, trips overseas to conferences were also sometimes problematic for family life (cases 1b, 3b, 4a, 5, 7).

One of the elements that academics seemed to most enjoy was their autonomy at work, and this in many cases was felt to mitigate the strain caused by high workloads (cases 3, 5, 6, 7, 8). Women staff also said that this autonomy was helpful in juggling family and work commitments (cases 5a, 6b).

Quite a few of the universities had undertaken surveys around the issues of workload, stress and satisfaction (cases 5, 6, 7, 8). One survey had found academics to have much higher stress levels than any other workers within the university, but that these levels amongst academics varied enormously between faculties. It also revealed that academics did not feel particularly supported by colleagues (case 6). In the interviews quite a few individuals expressed some anxieties about their own performance, efficiency, and adequacy (cases 1a, 1b, 2a, 3a, 7b). In cases where this issue had been confronted, reassurance given by the Head had relieved feelings of guilt and strain. Some staff did talk of their 'tetchiness' especially at peak periods, and reported some minor health problems (cases 1a, 2a). Another survey carried out had found no negative correlation between high loads and satisfaction levels (case 5). Interestingly the variety of the work involved - the teaching, research and general interaction between students and staff - was often cited as being one of the most satisfying aspects of the work (cases 4, 5, 6, 7, 8). Staff and Heads both seemed to find 'the buzz' of their work environment stimulating (case 4, 6, 7). These findings have parallels with the large Kinman and Jones survey (2004) which also showed that psychological well-being measures had surprisingly low correlations to hours worked.

6 COGNITIVE MAPPING

From the above material it can be seen that complex forces are at play within departments and institutions which deserve further analysis. Following Strauss and Corbin's ideas on context, actions/strategies and consequences, a framework for the research was developed, based on the cross-case analysis and associated interview data (as described in the Coding and Analysis of Data section above). Through this, a deeper understanding of the connections between categories (nodes) could be gained. The results were tabulated and data from the tables extracted and plotted using cognitive mapping²¹. Thus, the links between contextual factors, and consequences or outcomes could be considered. Sometimes this relationship was cyclical, so that, for example, the HoD category might have 'departmental environment' as both the context and the consequence for their activities, in this case diagrammatic arrows would be shown in both directions. Software was then used to model various situations and structure the findings. The related groups of concepts were colour coded for clarity, the following colours are used in Figures 2, 3 and

4 later in this section:

- Organisational - light grey
- People - light orange
- Workload - dark grey
- General characteristics - dark orange

To avoid over complication of the diagrams the 'properties' were not included (with a few exceptions) in the main 'organisation' and 'system' categories. In the case of 'teaching', 'research' and 'administration', these are major categories in themselves, but are also sub-categories of 'workload' so shared many of its contexts and consequences. To avoid over complication of the diagram only factors particular to 'teaching', 'research' and 'administration' were shown. (The discussion section covers this in greater detail).

Once all the nodes were mapped, the tools within the software allowed any given node, such as 'transparency', to be extracted with and all its direct connections viewed. This was a useful way to understand the relationships at work in greater depth, but it was also necessary to get an overview of the process. Whilst the whole map usefully highlights the complexity of issues involved, the sheer number of nodes can obscure the main or pivotal factors at work.

To overcome this problem, commands which list the links between nodes in order of their density of connections were used (namely 'centrality' and 'domain' commands). The 'centrality' command highlights chains of influence extending across up to seven links and hence, the centrality of a node may be seen beyond just its immediate vicinity. 'Domain' commands on the other hand highlight direct links to adjacent concepts. For both commands, results were listed in numerical order from those with the greatest density of connections to the least. The results of these two different commands, identified the same top ten linked concepts with only the order varying slightly between the two lists. These were: individual response; organisation; workloads; problems; workload allocation processes; HoD; equity, systems; transparency; and departmental environment. These were then taken as the pivotal elements that make up the core dynamics of the process.

In any of the mapping diagrams, concepts could be hidden from view. This was especially useful for those nodes that seemed to impact or have connections with every other

²¹ Ackermann, F. et al. (1996)

node, for example, the major node 'University Systems'. Whilst this had to be borne in mind for general understanding, it could be temporarily removed to make the diagram clearer. Many of these main nodes have 'properties' that are also involved in the relationships, and a judgement was made, with reference to the data, as to each one's specific relevance to the issue in practice. For example, in relation to 'university systems', 'appraisal and promotion systems' have been explicitly mapped, whilst 'framework agreement' has not.

Figure 2 (page 24 - top), is the main map showing all of the connections. Given its complexity a series of more specific maps were captured and experimented with. The most insightful were those that showed the relationship of the top ten factors from the 'domain' and 'centrality' selections, and the maps of particular perspectives on the issue, namely, HoD and also individual response.

Figure 3 (page 24 - bottom) gives a map of the top ten nodes and shows that 'Organisation', 'Departmental Environment', 'HoD', and 'Individual Response', all directly inform the workload allocation process.

Organisation (University)

Looking at each of these in turn, informed by the source data, we can see that the environment of the university concerned, such as its level of resources, had an impact on issues such as staffing and recruitment. The strategy that was adopted, such as the degree of focus on research, affected how these strategies were implemented at departmental level, within workload allocation processes, as did how these strategies were communicated. The management style used was also influential - for example, more managerialist approaches aimed for some conformity of approaches within faculties, in order to facilitate their resource allocation systems.

There were also a wide range of other organisational factors that influenced workload allocation. For example, 'geographical location' affected recruitment for both staff and students, and 'mergers with other institutions' resulted in different staff having different employment contracts. Both these scenarios resulted in the HoD needing workload allocation models that could accommodate such variety.

Department Environment

The departmental environment, for example its size in terms both of staff and students, influenced how formal the model

needed to be, and the different disciplines also had different implications for aspects such as teaching modes and delivery.

Research profile was another departmental environment factor, found to affect the model - for example issues such as determining whether research should be included in workload allocation, what weightings are given, whether they are capped or given retrospectively and how they are decided upon.

Head of Department

The HoD, or head of school, was shown to have an impact on the workload allocation system. This was a function of: their own management style and character; the amount of control they feel it necessary to have over staff; how much responsibility they delegate; and how detailed a workload allocation model they develop. For example, some HoDs seemed happy to adopt an old model and adapt it to fit changes in circumstance, whilst others were clearly happier experimenting to try out new methods.

Individual responses

The individual responses of staff working collectively, or in some cases in isolation, had an effect on the workload allocation model adopted in their institutions. Some staff constructively engaged with aspects of the consultation processes such as determining weightings, whilst others seemed more passive, and yet critical, of the process. In developing and implementing a model, Heads seemed to be very aware of the potential reactions of staff, these seem to be a function both of intrinsic character factors such as efficiency and performance, and also extrinsic factors such as particulars of employment contracts and role profiles affecting individual responses.

Consequences

Branching out from the Workload Allocation Process node (WLA Process) in Figure 3 (page 24 - bottom), it can be seen that there are *consequences* in the form of 'Workloads', 'Equity', 'Transparency', 'Problems'; and *reciprocal relationships* with 'Individual Response'. This indicates that the way work was distributed had an effect on workloads, and in the interviews, many did report a move to 'distribution towards the middle' whereby those with extreme workloads could be identified and rectified through processes such as transparency.

The link from 'Workloads' to 'Problems' reflects issues often resulting from sheer quantity of work, but also other qualitative factors such as the roles undertaken and the

FIGURE 2

OVERALL RELATIONSHIPS

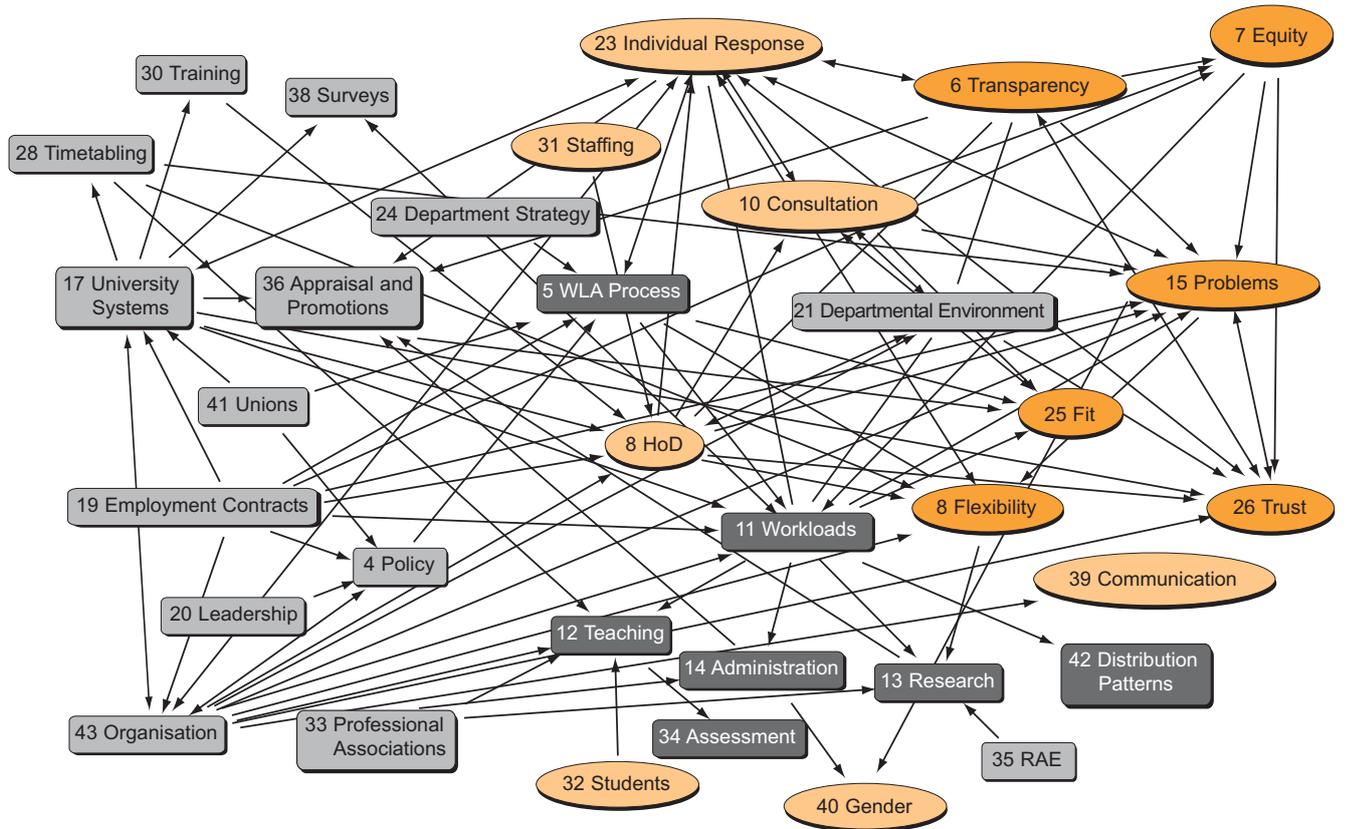
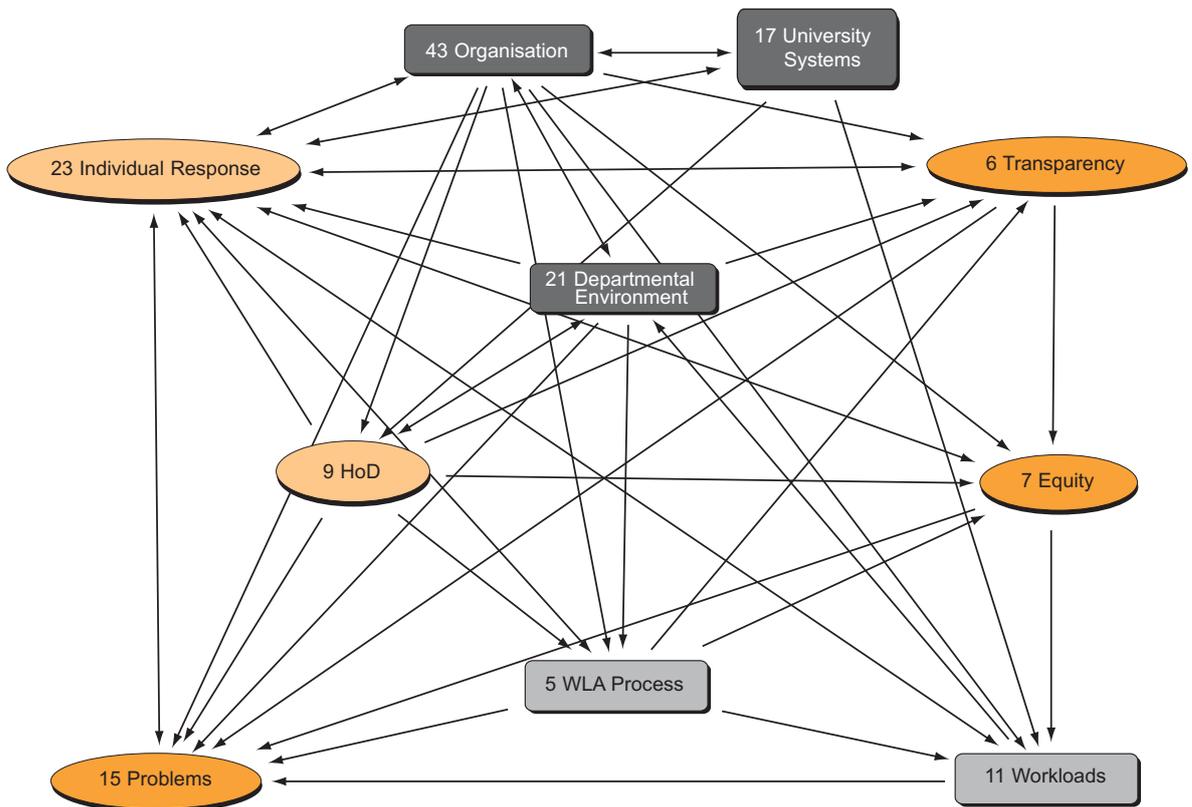


FIGURE 3

'TOP TEN' MOST CENTRAL FACTORS



impact of work on issues such as promotion. Equity of workloads was also affected by characteristics of the workload allocation model used, including the number of factors considered within the system, and how calculations were made. For example, many models did not include research, which seemed unfair for those staff spending large amounts of time in this area. In relation to teaching, inequities were reported in relation to online teaching and in models where no account was taken of differences between class, and hence assessment, size.

'Transparency' can be seen to connect to issues of 'Equity' as staff awareness of others' loads became a force for more equitable distributions. However, 'Transparency' and 'Equity' also connect to 'Problems', indicating that awareness could also cause or alleviate problems if staff were able to make direct comparisons with others.

'Individual Response' connects in a reciprocal relationship with workload allocation process, as perceptions of the model can be seen to influence aspects such as motivation and behaviour. Further, the actual equity of the system had impacts in relation to coping and performance. A reciprocal relationship operated in relation to 'Workloads' and 'Individual Response' where aspects such as efficiency and coping styles had an effect on how workloads were dealt with, this in turn influenced staff reporting emotions such as satisfaction and frustration.

Indirect influences around workload allocation

Going one step back from these more direct relationships about the workload allocation process, it can also be seen from Figure 3 (page 24 - bottom), that a number of other nodes have a network of relationships which influence the process indirectly.

Many of the organisational and systems influences described above, are mediated through the 'Department Environment' and 'HoD' nodes initially. Hence, university systems which carried out more administrative work, and had more organisational aspects (such as resources), reported impacts at department level both in the work needing doing and the ease with which that work could be done (i.e. getting help from support staff). Looking at the HoD node again, these organisation and university system categories had an influence through factors such as policy, employment contracts and even the training programmes offered to new HoDs. These factors can be seen to affect the decisions and choices made by HoDs about allocation

methods, their strategies, consultation processes and elements such as transparency. This, in turn, affected perceptions on issues such as trust and autonomy that could be seen to affect the 'individual response' node, in terms of behaviour and satisfaction.

Another method of analysis, rather than to select the most densely linked nodes, was to select an individual node and examine all of the connections made to it. Such an approach works well with the soft systems approach of naming the main perspective or *Weltanschauung* of the analysis²². For this method, the HoD was chosen as the pivotal role that, for workloads, mediates between the individual academic and the university. Figure 4 (page 27, overleaf) shows the additional factors highlighted as a result of taking these views, these include 'Trust', 'Flexibility', 'Consultation' and 'Staffing'. The 'Organisational' and 'Systems' nodes that connect to just about everything, have again been hidden from this view in order to see other influences more clearly.

Staffing is a contextual factor for the HoD, but the node 'Consultation', driven by the HoD can be seen to impact on many of the other nodes: 'WLA process', 'Trust', 'Equity', 'Transparency', 'Flexibility' and 'Problems'. The 'Trust' node also follows as a consequence, from 'HoD', 'Equity' and 'Transparency' nodes, but without a direct connection from 'WLA Process' itself, highlighting the importance of these 'soft' elements within the process.

'Individual Response' had been hidden from view in this HoD *Weltanschauung* for ease of analysis, but if it were introduced again, its highly influential and interactive nature could be seen. Once again it must be stressed that these maps cannot show all the subcategories operating as they would become too complex, (for individual response this would include behaviour, coping, and satisfaction nodes).

Summary of cognitive mapping diagrams

In summary, the main map (Figure 2, page 24 - top) shows a very complex system of relationships at work. This appears to move from the general and pervasive influence of university-level organisational factors on the left-hand side, through a complex web of interactions to outcomes, such as 'Problems' on the right-hand side. However, this apparent linearity belies the dynamic nature of the situation, which has to accommodate past actions and their consequences and in so doing creates the conditions for future exercises. The map shows that there are quite different sorts of factors involved, such as people-related,

²² Checkland, P. (1993)

organisational, workload-specific elements and general characteristics. The broad split is between hard factors, such as the calculation and allocation of workloads, and soft factors, such as trust and equity.

The map of the top ten major factors (Figure 3, page 24 - bottom) highlights the key relationships and reinforces, first, that the various categories of factors are all involved; and second, the frequency with which these are connected with reciprocal links, hence stressing how dynamic the interrelationships are. The analysis taking the perspective of the HoD (Figure 4, page 27) reveals consultation to be pivotal, with consequences to both workload allocation process and factors such as trust and equity.

7 DISCUSSION

The cognitive mapping phase was the culmination of much of the previous analysis. However, its stress on the central processes means that some aspects, such as unintended consequences, would benefit from further discussion and consideration in relation to the interview data. In addition, to avoid impossible levels of diagrammatic detail, the cognitive mapping did not set out in full the sub-categories of activity (namely: teaching, research and administration) so issues around the interplay of these activities also deserve a further mention.

7.1 ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

There was a wide variety of approaches to workload allocation taken by departments within each university. This would seem to be a direct consequence of a weak strategic stance on workload allocation systems at most universities. They may have aspired to address this issue, but other priorities such as the Higher Education Role Analysis (HERA) seemed to have taken over.

The relationship between individuals and their universities is highlighted by their approach taken to promotion. In most universities, policies have been pursued that widen the criteria for selection to include teaching and administration more strongly. However in a survey by Kinman and Jones²³, over 80 per cent of staff reported they had felt a significant increase in pressure over the last five years, to be awarded research funding and to publish work. Despite the apparent equality in university systems, it seems staff still felt that research was more highly valued than

other tasks, this would appear to be an engrained ideology within higher education. At a senior level it could have been reinforced by a culture within higher education that highly values the creation of knowledge, and increasingly tends to rate students, staff and universities, using naturalised criteria for distinguishing 'the best'. As Coaldrake and Steadman²⁴ point out, success in research may also be easier to measure as it can rely on the existing peer review and competitive grant funding processes, this could add to the perceived pressure to perform in this area.

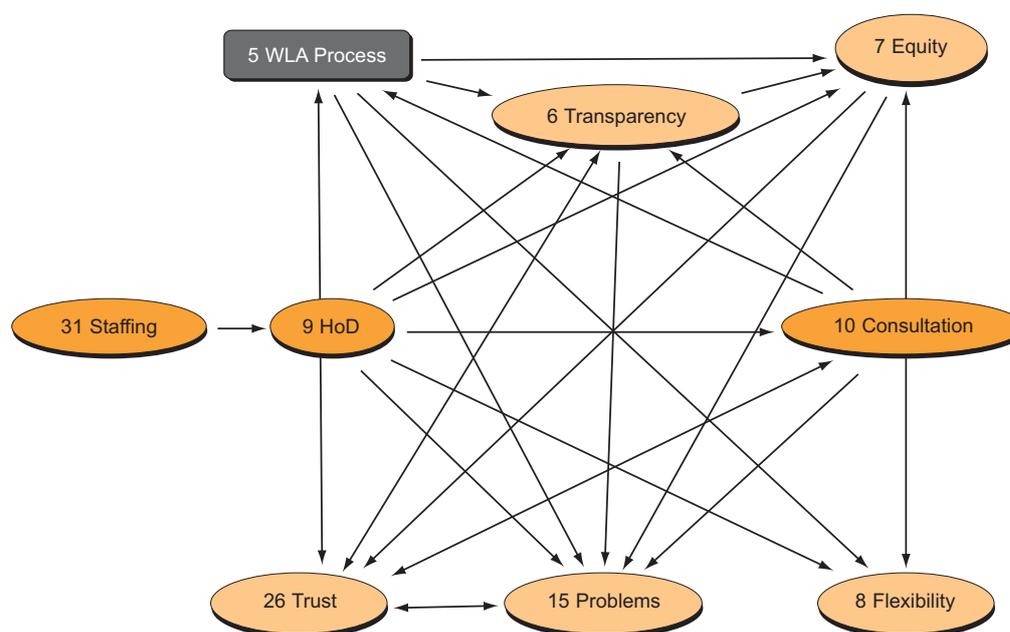
In a rather counter-intuitive way, these general attitudes and perceptions about research, appear to have led to many of the workload allocation methods omitting this type of work from their calculations. These systems instead rely on self-motivated staff, often tackling work outside of normal working hours. Where research is used in a model it can sometimes be perceived as a measure to 'punish' some staff with more teaching. However, some approaches found did aim to promote synergies between these two areas with active researchers continuing to teach and enthuse students with their subject, and in turn encouraging some of them to embark on postgraduate research studies.

The competitive nature of gaining promotion in higher education organisations, emphasises the need for leaders and managers to consider the personal qualities of staff, and to ensure that they feel motivated and rewarded, with the inherent qualities of their work valued. It might be argued that when resources are pressed, what actually determines the success of a school is how many of its staff are prepared to work over their workload allocation, or how many do not actually fully meet it. This might be particularly relevant in a research context, as although highly defined teaching commitments were usually reported to be met, research was the area commonly cited as that which had to 'give', again in contradiction to the value system described above. Staff also suggested that this was the area that they mainly worked on after office hours. Success in research within this form of workload allocation system, could be seen to depend, in part, on how many people work over and above their 'normal' hours. Self-directed work at home may have benefits for the organisation, but in breaking down the home-work divide there are potential dangers for the individual and their families, although staff as professionals must take some responsibility to balance their own workloads.

²³ Kinman, G. and Jones F. (2004)

²⁴ Coaldrake, P. and Steadman, L. (1999) p24

“HoD” VIEW OF ALL RELATED CONCEPTS (excluding Organisational Factors and Individual Response nodes)



7.2 WORKLOAD ALLOCATION PROCESS

Those working in higher education clearly enjoy their autonomy and there is much evidence that stress responses are, in part, a function of individual styles of coping, enabled by the existence of a relatively high degree of autonomy (Karasek, R., 1979). Workload allocation systems might seem like an attack on this autonomy, yet within higher education, in addition to high levels of individual responsibility is an organisational context which potentially offers less support from colleagues than other work environments. Organisational hierarchies are flatter and more fluid when compared to professional non higher education organisations, for example a HoD might be elected and hence a colleague turned temporary line manager.

Universities still hold dear the notion of autonomy, and as a result gain much self-motivation from staff. This latter appears to impact particularly on research with consequences for potential overload of individuals, especially in a context where collegiality is under pressure. These are all factors that operate as part of the complex series of relationships between individuals, organisations, the various work types and the models that are used to organise them.

In many situations people were fairly happy with the status quo of an allocation process. It was when change occurred that staff got anxious, even if the new system offered greater prospects of equity and efficiency. One case described ‘robust negotiations’, and another Head told of how, in an open meeting, one member of staff had ‘ranted and stamped out’. This sort of response to changes might be because of the disruption to staff’s ideas about how their work is packaged, beyond just the time element. Despite this caution there was a feeling that these processes could be used positively to match staff and resources, to identify uneconomic activities and help provide fairer systems. However, many also commented that despite sophisticated models, the process was not an exact science, and had to rely in part on ‘gut feeling’ and the HoD’s judgment to a large extent.

A quite strongly held general view was the belief that no single model could cope with the diversity of subjects and the different modes of delivery in a higher education setting. This issue was raised with particular reference to science subjects versus the arts. However, the results from this research paper challenge this view, showing that various models were in fact used across all the disciplines, although the science area displayed a slight tendency to adopt *comprehensive models* (Figure 5, overleaf page 29).

Many also expressed the view that a model which did aim to accommodate such diversity would be either too complex to operate, or insufficient to cope, and some believed that too much detail would allow staff the room to 'bicker', opening up various antagonisms between them. Generally though, the more complex systems did seem capable of accommodating the intricacies of workloads such as marking; small inputs into modules from a large number of staff; weightings for research and administration work; and different modes of delivery. The informal systems seen were in fact more precarious, and more dependent on the skills of the HoD.

The 'unit of currency' in the model was also an issue for some. Academics at all levels expressed their dislike of the notion of time-sheets. Explicit reasons given for this ranged from: a dislike of having to fill in another form; suspicion of how the information could be used; and concerns about what was perceived as an attack on academic autonomy. Some HoDs also expressed a belief that if hours were used as the unit, then staff would work to them and not beyond. However, the overriding problem was that working hours seemed insufficient to cover the range of tasks to be done. In models that used hours, certain work types, such as research, tended to be excluded or capped, so that actual hours were not apparent. As one interviewee stated, workload is all about ensuring 'the onerous task' is completed, and staff were not so anxious about the time used to do what they were really interested in, such as their research or scholarship. Hence, workload models could often exclude or cap research, knowing that it would still get done. There was the potential for problems too under the points system as if loads increased, some allocations could become devalued.

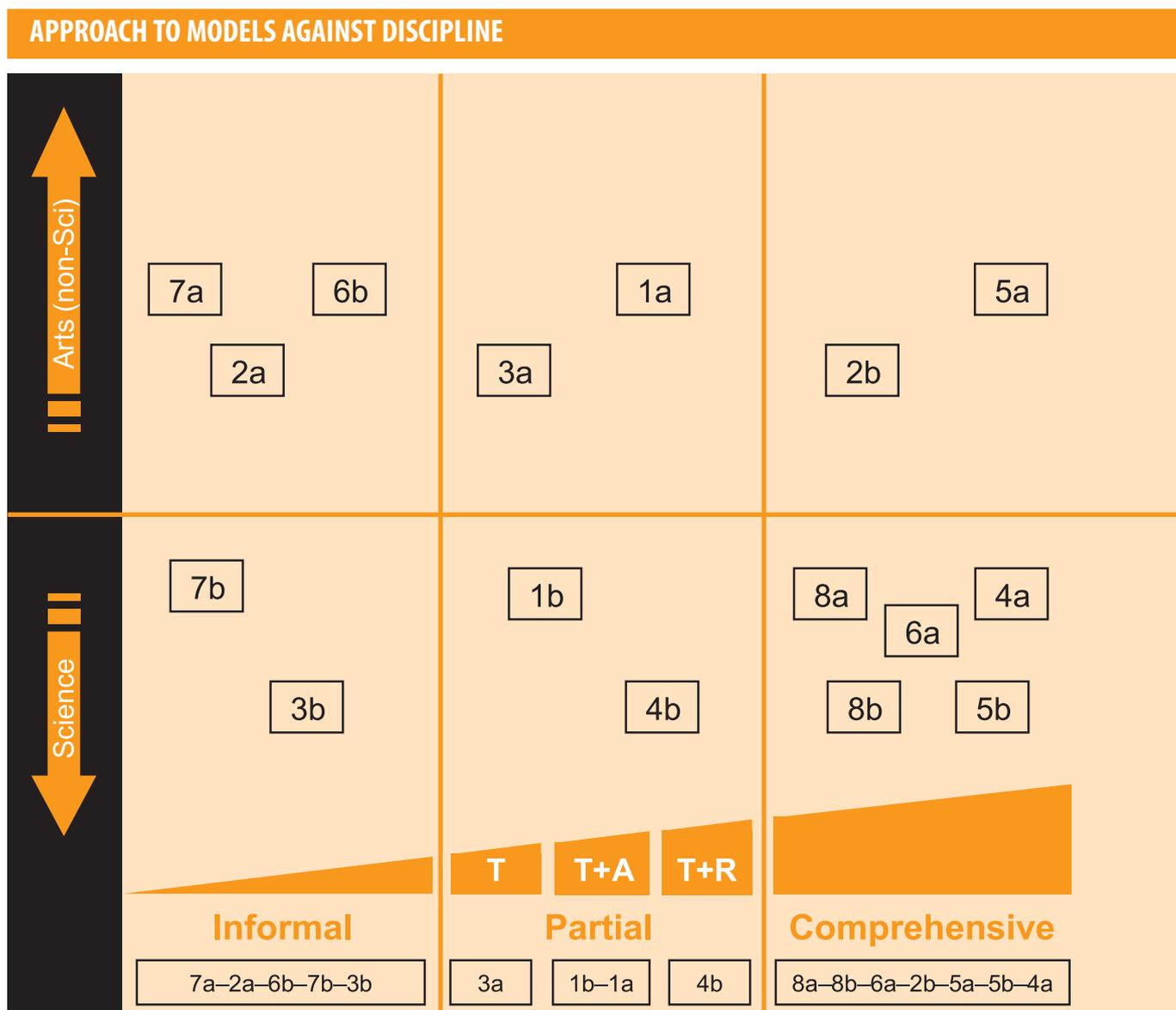
Even in those areas with a formal workload allocation model, there was often resistance to the introduction of change or minor refinement - a basic conservatism. A workload allocation system might highlight areas requiring change, and this could be hard even for those staff working particularly hard. Where a system was not well managed the implications for staff were also great. One case reported that a member of staff had been given two 'full' workloads from two different departments, and another claimed the workload was four times what was described at initial interview. In contrast, if there was no workload allocation model in place, staff seemed to be less aware of the actual hours that they were working. Often this was because of quite complicated inputs of varying amounts in

any given semester. In some cases staff seemed to obfuscate on the details, this might have been because they were really hazy on them and genuinely believed themselves to be overloaded, but without any objective reference point. In this way the lack of transparency in the allocation from the HoD seemed to spread through the department. There was also a feeling that without a transparent system, there was a need for everyone to give an account of being busy to prevent further loading. One Head described how she always had a spare job ready to give to anyone who entered into workload negotiations with her. Hence a transparent model with quantifiable allocations might lead some staff to be more open to taking on extra work, but could make others more resistant and cause conflict.

Through the discussions it was apparent that introducing a workload allocation model was a time consuming, resource-intensive process and that the introduction of such a system could initially create more managerialism and administrative work in a sector already suffering from high loads. Perhaps because of this, few managers saw the need to connect workload allocation to a wider web of activities such as appraisal, activity costing and strategic planning. However, there was pressure in some quarters to develop some sort of comparability between schools of a faculty (cases 1, 6a, 7a). This was felt necessary because within a school, allocation models might balance, but if the faculty was the budget holder, then it would need to ensure that schools' resource levels balanced between, rather than averaged across, the faculty. In case 8 there was some evidence of this disparity occurring, where one school was hard pressed compared to another, even though loads within the schools were balanced. Contracts of employment seemed also to create complications beyond simply the hours limit. In some cases (cases 6 and 8) HoDs had to create models and systems that could accommodate staff with different contracts. Although this was felt to be potentially problematic in relation to equity, staff had been reasonable in their response to the issue.

Size of department or school was also found to be an issue. High staff numbers helped to spread the load and create flexibility for delivery and for requests such as sabbaticals. Yet this also made it harder for Heads to know their staff and to have a sense of who was more lightly loaded and who overburdened. This might seem not to matter if a good workload allocation model was in place, but in fact

FIGURE 5



throughout the year Heads would still need to make informal adjustments to the model, using their discretion and judgement to accommodate variations in work and resources. Flexibility could also be problematic for small departments, making it harder to cover sickness, maternity leave, fluctuations in student numbers and ‘pinch points’ of peak activity. To accommodate this, some used longer periods for balancing loads, in some cases up to three years. Generally though, departments large and small used their models to give lighter loads to new staff and time to accommodate the acquisition of teaching qualifications.

Finally it should be mentioned that the Australian cases, (4 and 5), looked at workload allocation more from a position of trying to enhance the student experience, whereas the UK cases seemed more grounded in the staff perspective. This could perhaps be a reflection of the

different funding sources, with home students in Australia apparently contributing between 25 and 33 per cent of the course income in fees (depending on the course), with uncapped numbers of foreign students at full fee and consequently a relatively low percentage input from Federal Government, at around 20 per cent overall. The UK funding model could well look more like the Australian one in the future, so implications for student experience should be of interest across the sector.

8 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There are a huge variety of different practices surrounding workload allocation in higher education, with no single method without its problems. There was, however, some agreement on ideal principles in relation to these methods, for example for equity and transparency, and many also

considered the context, such as the discipline, to be very important to the process chosen. An additional factor to be considered, is the general disposition of many academics who seem to have a high regard for autonomy and a fairly well developed cynicism about managerial practices. Taking all these together, an approach which is individualised to its context, whilst at the same time encouraging involvement from staff, might seem to be the most appropriate way of meeting the agreed criteria. However, given the resource pressures within departments and the frequent merger of units into larger schools, traditional, informal approaches are becoming less appropriate to this new context. This is further reinforced by an increasing demand for the actuality and demonstration of equitable practice across institutions.

More formal systems may be seen as invasive managerialism that erode academic autonomy, however organisations are held accountable not just for their resources, but for how they treat their staff (for example potentially by the Health and Safety Executive over aspects such as stress-related illness linked to high workloads). Hence a balance needs to be sought between individual needs and the needs of the organisation, with the hope that synergies between the two might be found.

The range of factors which this research indicates are currently at play can be summarised as follows:

- There are a variety of allocation practices used.
- There is wide agreement from all levels of staff on principles such as equity and transparency.
- There is a general move towards larger departmental / school units.
- Many believed they were overloaded with work, objections were mostly to administrative tasks.
- There is a widespread suspicion about changes to workload allocation processes.
- Staff are disinclined to measure time in detail.
- Hour-based models do not represent real hours.
- There are some variations in employment contracts on this matter.
- There is a strong belief in academic autonomy.
- Teaching commitments are usually met, but some staff report worries about efficiency and quality.
- Motivation to carry out research tasks is strong, but this work often takes place 'outside' of university.

- Individuals believe there is a need for particularised systems for each discipline.

To move forward from the current position as set out in the interviews and their analyses, this report will now put forward a set of connected recommendations focusing at the university level; the HoD / school level; and that of the individual. The wider context of these, the higher education sector, has been widely commented on elsewhere, and there is broad agreement on the additional challenges placed upon it through issues such as resource constraints, public scrutiny and accountability.

8.1 UNIVERSITY LEVEL

At university level, most organisations had a set policy on workload allocation although few members of staff were actually aware of it except union representatives and staff from Personnel departments. It would seem reasonable to recommend that universities ensure their policy is widely known to staff. A display of transformational leadership of this type²⁵ would be a step towards the creation of a culture in which criteria surrounding workload distribution were known and could be discussed. Further, following from the work of Thornhill et al²⁶, this sort of improved organisational communication might provide benefits in terms of staff commitment, and hence facilitate an improvement in the transactional type of leadership²⁷ that operates within the day to day processes of departments and schools.

To further this end of improved leadership, it would be helpful if prospective HoDs were given training to help them to understand the issues involved in workload allocation. This could focus on the potential for a conflict of roles as individuals become both manager and colleague²⁸; and on the problems meeting seemingly innocuous, but sometimes conflicting, basic principles, such as equity and quality. Discussions about common situations arising for Heads might also be useful, on issues such as temptation to give an overloaded, but high performing and willing, member of staff the newly arrived extra task.

Whilst many believe that it is impossible to create a workload allocation system that can accommodate all the intricacies of a given department, this research indicates that it should be possible to provide a broad framework that goes some way to address policy criteria, such as the need for equity. Such an approach would provide some reassurance that all

²⁵ Bensimon, E. (1989); Middlehurst, R. (1993); Gillespie, N. and Mann, L. (2004)

²⁶ Thornhill, A. et al. (1996)

²⁷ Bensimon, E. (1989); Middlehurst, R. (1993); Gillespie, N. and Mann, L. (2004)

²⁸ Gmelch, W. and Burns, J. (1994)

departments were, at the very least, meeting certain minimum criteria, even if their chosen approach remained quite informal. It would also help to prevent local disputes, for example with unions, through misinterpretation of employment contracts, or arising from a lack of consensus where informal approaches were being used. A general framework could also be customised to meet the more specific needs of individual departments. Central to this task should be consultation (as shown from the cognitive mapping diagram in Figure 4, page 27) which should positively affect outcomes in the areas of equity, trust and transparency. This does already partially happen in many departments, for example over aspects such as the weighting for certain tasks. However more developed input of this type might help new Heads avoid adopting extreme responses, either rushing to develop new models without fully understanding the dynamics involved, or simply using an old system for 'efficiency' or in order not to upset certain sections of staff.

Equity is hard to achieve through partial systems or in those that do not integrate all work areas. However departments often operated this type of system, possibly because of the problems attendant on creating a fair and thorough model.

When examining equity, a university framework should carefully consider the units of measurement that could be used. These might be calibrated in unit points, hours or FTEs - the essential aspect would be ease of integration of these units across all the different work types. Decisions about which units of measure to adopt, should depend on the employment contracts in place, and on organisational history and experiences. Models based on time measures would provide ease of use within those employment contracts that stipulate teaching contact hours, and would allow staff a tangible sense of loads. Preparation and assessment loads could then be calibrated using weightings. However, there could be potential problems in that these hours might not actually be a realistic measure of the work involved. An advantage that FTEs and points systems can offer, is the encouragement to staff to think flexibly about how they deliver their teaching. Discussion could then focus on how these units of measure, centred on teaching, could be used in relation to other roles such as research and administration. Examples of weighting equivalence might be helpful here, as well as, in relation to research, decisions on allowances being calculated retrospectively on outcomes or as part of forward planning to accommodate or to encourage research work. University level guidance on these choices would help Heads to gain a

clearer view of implications within their department, and would be useful for Deans looking across faculties at how resources are utilised.

More specifically guidance could be given on factors that should be included within each type of work. For teaching this might include student numbers; assessment; credit rating of each module; and reduced loads for new staff. Other department specific factors, such as method of delivery and weightings, could then be consulted on and agreed locally. For administrative work, discussion could cover both internal commitments and external elements such as work placements, field trips, and liaison with industry partners. In a similar way to teaching, some assessment of the size of the role might be calculated, for subject group leaders this could take into account factors such as student numbers and the number of programmes to be co-ordinated. A pragmatically useful measure adopted in one case, was to allocate a certain number of units to cover all the small elements in personal workloads that a model could not encompass, defusing counter-productive exacting discussions over 'small change'. With research, global allocations or calculations based on funding, published papers and research student supervision might be used for weightings.

Advice on all these detailed elements could centre around a loose framework of factors that require consideration, but that are dependent on the departmental context. However, as previously stated, the aspect that needs the most careful attention is how these major elements are integrated so that systems provide an equitable distribution of work, balancing all the work types. Research was left out of many models; but at university level all the organisations, even those with limited experience of it, had research success as a strategic aim. Such an approach then relies on staff working on research in the time left over or, as most frequently occurred, in their own time. Omitting this aspect and relying on the self-motivation of individuals does not help with equitable distribution of work across the departments.

The importance of team-building activities and workload monitoring was evident in the non higher education organisations, and this could be an interesting avenue for exploration within training sessions for higher education Heads. Support from colleagues and reassurance from line managers on aspects such as performance and efficiency seemed important to many junior academics, and were reported to be of great assistance in alleviating work stress.

Again, these did not depend on formal procedures or appraisal, but rather on informal talks, which served both to reassure and informally monitor ongoing workloads. Changes in working habits were cited by some to be contributing towards a decline in these valuable informal support mechanisms, for example working from home, and the decline in use of a senior common room. A discussion about how to improve informal discussion might be useful, and although many staff were slightly cynical about university-wide surveys, consideration could be given to other local, focused feedback mechanisms. These issues also relate to the work of Dirks and Ferrin²⁹ on the guidance 'strength' of the work environment. They suggest that in situations where guidance levels were 'weak', trust becomes a higher imperative. In the higher education sector with its widely shared belief in academic autonomy, guidance levels are likely to be weak, as this research suggested. The consultation process thus can be seen as pivotal, both in relation to stress, and the necessary reciprocal trust between academics as work is shared out.

8.2 HEAD OF DEPARTMENT / SCHOOL LEVEL

After receiving suitable training and advice on the various potential dimensions to be considered, the Head should then engage staff in a collective consultation process. Through this they would be able to customise the framework model to their own department, and get some broad agreement on the scope of the model, for example how detailed or formal it should be, how to include research, or how to include the division of teaching work into co-ordination, delivery and assessment aspects. Case evidence has shown that where radical changes are being made, the process benefits from an approach that incorporates a pilot study, with feedback and modifications. Such a double loop process seems also to facilitate staff engagement with the process, and reassure those staff resistant to change. This customisation process need not be seen as monolithic, consultation should also be facilitated between staff and Heads individually, so that judgement and discretion can be used to fine-tune the overall model to optimise equity within it. Findings about the importance of consultation, confirm results from research looking at strain and the need for managers to facilitate a good match for staff to their tasks³⁰.

Additionally there needs to be a monitoring process. Case study evidence showed many junior staff were anxious about their own efficiency and the quality of their work; this often

required reassurance rather than readjustment. The Head, therefore, must be alert to those individuals predisposed to strain responses, whilst at the same time optimising staff autonomy, which has been shown to reduce strain³¹. This is quite a tall order, and this approach may seem resource intensive, however it should be a sound investment as feedback from Heads showed that even small disputes with staff at later stages were extremely time consuming. Stress-related illness is also a consequence that all parties will wish to avoid. The benefits of achieving a good fit for staff around equitable workloads will be very real. So it is important to remember that despite the existence of the model and a responsiveness to individuals, the Head ultimately has to make hard decisions about work allocations and the criteria for these judgments need to be clear and defensible. The Head will be key to developing a model with staff through consensual processes and feeding back suggestions to the general university model.

Figure 6 (page 33), summarises the recommendations diagrammatically, working left to right from the organisation level to the Head, staff and their outputs. The solid arrows show existing typical practice and the dashed arrows those elements that seem to call for action as set out above. Such an interactive approach could help to facilitate a collegial response to the issue, rather than it being seen simply as increased managerialism. Agreements with staff could also look beyond the model and the overall balance of work, to more specific aspects such as how the work arrives, patterns and distribution. In this area case studies showed, for example, that workload peaks sometimes caused more stress for staff.

Such an understanding of more of the factors and issues involved, could form the basis of a Socio-Temporal Contract, where work is not viewed in just the one dimension (related to time), but rather as part of a richer network of relationships that require attention. This of course draws on the notion of psychological contracts, an idea with a long history starting with Agyris in the 1960s³², carrying notions of organisations and their staff negotiating a 'social as well as an economic exchange'. The specific idea here draws from Vischer³³ where the analogous 'social-spatial contract' is introduced, highlighting the social complexities of managing work-spaces. In relation to workloads the 'temporal' aspect expresses the more subjective experience of time. For example, teaching contact hours are not just objective measures, but are informed by other aspects such

²⁹ Dirks, K. and Ferrin, D. (2001)

³⁰ French, J. et al. (1982)

³¹ Karasek, R. (1979)

³² Cullinane, N. and Dundon, T. (2006)

³³ Vischer, J. C. (2005)

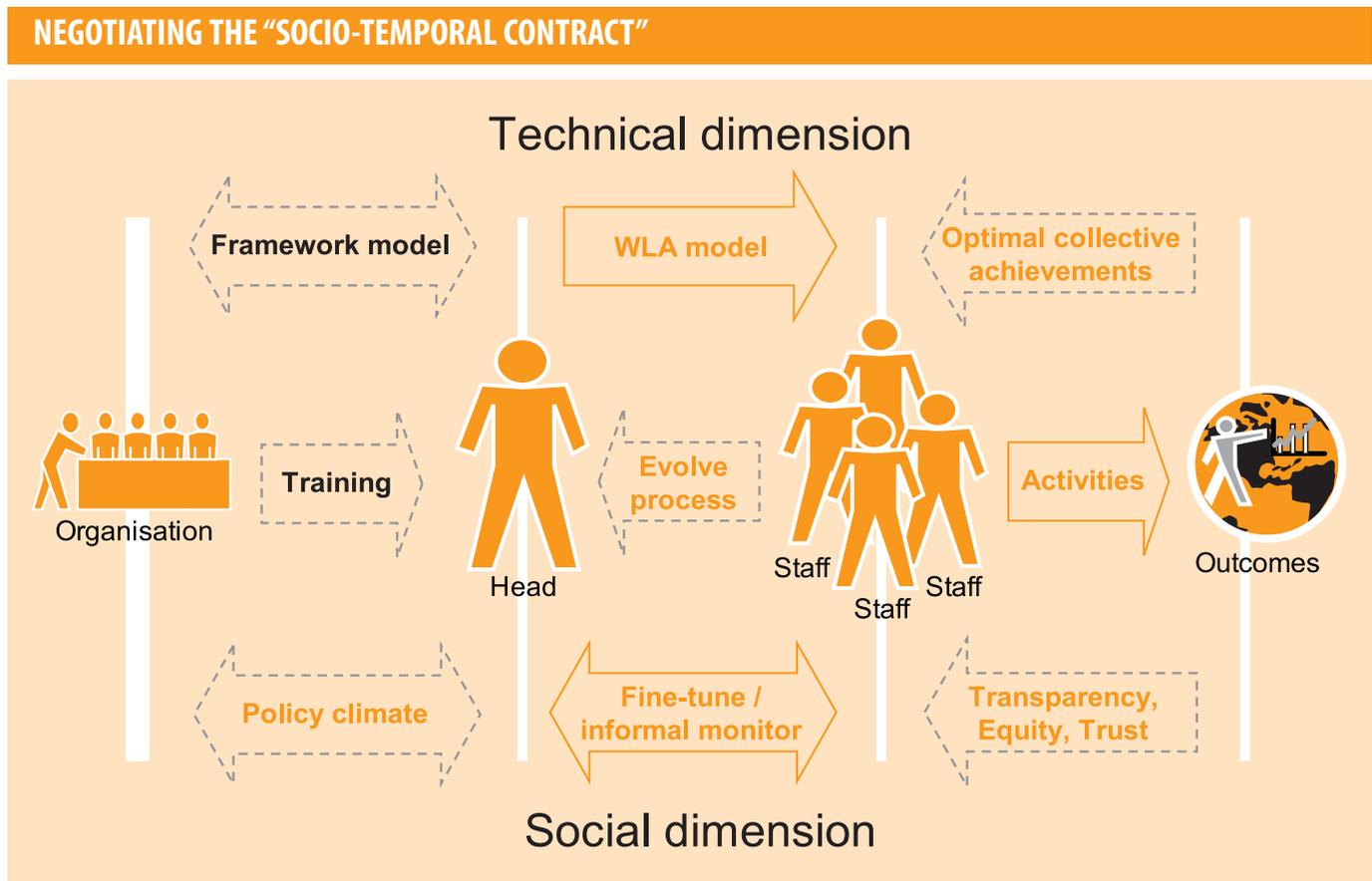
as whether the teaching material is new or repeat, how the contact hours are distributed through the week and the diversity of tasks involved. This approach makes explicit what the better-managed departments do anyway through packaging work sensitively. This type of approach with a broad understanding of what is fair and reasonable, built up across the department (the 'socio' part) and supported by a spread sheet or data base model, could assist in times of change, whether arising from external influences or internal factors such as a change of Head.

This approach also resonates with the conclusions of researchers in New Zealand, whose findings on workload allocation systems in one university indicated that the factors contributing to successful implementation of a system included department-specific procedures, consultation between manager and staff and regular reviews of the model³⁴. They also noted how 'interviews with staff identified a surprising lack of problem solving or creative thinking' and warned of the dangers of a 'blame culture' in relation to workload management and the need for 'proactive problem solving'³⁵.

8.3 INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

Surveys indicated that the increasing demands placed upon the sector have translated into a great strain on staff. In a positive vein many staff are enthusiastic and self-motivated, and so committed to their work that they undertake significant amounts of it in the evenings and at weekends. Individual members of staff should take personal responsibility, not just through actively engaging with the consultative processes, but in the choices that they make in relation to their work. Case studies showed that staff needed to be aware of their own input to various aspects of work; and to consider elements such as inefficiency and exceeding quality requirements. In addition, work resulting from research interests or external industry partnerships, might result in staff working evenings and at weekends. This might be an individual's choice, and the work rewarding, but there must be an awareness of the impact it might have on other work, such as from fatigue. This finding resonates with the work of Lazarus (1984) about individual evaluation of work demands. In fact, rather than just absorbing this extra work with some negative consequences, there is a need for staff to communicate issues and if necessary to negotiate compromises with their team.

FIGURE 6



³⁴ Houston, D. et al. (2006) p26

³⁵ Houston, D. et al. (2006) p28

8.4 SUMMARY

Stepping out from the issue of workload management, it is clear from all of the cases that there is very seldom a connection made to other university performance management systems, such as staff appraisals, activity costing or Transparency Review. This is not because of any lack of acceptance that it would be useful, but rather is likely to be a result of the sheer impossibility of aggregating data and synchronising activities given the devolved and idiosyncratic approach taken to workload allocation. The implication is, if a university can achieve some broad consistency in its approach to workload allocation then these linkages become much more feasible.

Thus, against a background of workplace stress, a first step is to create a broad framework to support workload balancing between staff, leading to more equitable workloads. Through this process, and the associated interactive, individualised actions described above, a base should be provided for achieving a better fit between organisational needs, and staff interests and capabilities. In addition, from this basis of sound information within a broad, but consistent framework, it should be possible to link the staff workload data to other performance systems. This would then enable better strategic choices to be made, so alleviating some of the tensions flowing within the complex higher education environment. This progression in levels of impact that could be achieved is illustrated in Figure 7 opposite (page 35).

Hence this research indicates there is a need to explicitly identify the essential elements within the workload allocation process such as equity, transparency and consultation; and to provide a framework model at a university level. Departmental factors can then inform the variable features, such as particular teaching delivery methods. The workload allocation model itself might be usefully viewed as a dynamic process rather than a fixed feature which, would allow for incremental improvement that would help staff to feel involved in the process and reduce negative thoughts on managerialist interventions.

After accommodating staff views, the implementation process should involve a balance between the model and discretionary inputs from Heads and fine-tune them to individuals. Case studies operating with a strong imbalance between these two elements seemed to have more problems; Heads operating without any model left staff feeling unsure about decision making processes; and

departments with very tight models and little input from Heads saw staff comparing and arguing over the fine detail of models. Finally, attention must be given to the informal bonds within the department so that drives for efficiency do not leave overworked staff feeling inadequate and underperforming.

Thus, at its simplest it is suggested that the following are needed to achieve effective workload allocation practice in the higher education sector:

- Transformational leadership is required to drive university wide policy and a general framework model needed which sets out agreed workload allocation criteria.
- Transactional leadership is required through consultative local tuning of the general framework model to fit departments / schools (loop process).
- All work areas should be integrated within workload allocation models - including research.
- The workload allocation model must be linked to other systems.
- There must be potential for feedback from staff to the university model (loop process).
- Heads should fine-tune the resulting model to fit individuals.
- In addition there should be informal regular monitoring of loads - and individual responses to stress noted.
- Heads need training to support these systems.
- Existing teaching allocations should be refined – management of peak periods, role stability.
- Staff should be encouraged to think about / negotiate the balance of their own activities.

Most universities will already be taking some of these actions, but to achieve the full effect action must be demanded on all fronts. In this way, equitable workloads can be achieved, the fit between organisational needs and staff interests can be improved, synergies with other university performance management systems can be facilitated, and the university's capabilities to dynamically achieve strategic alignment in a turbulent environment can be enhanced.

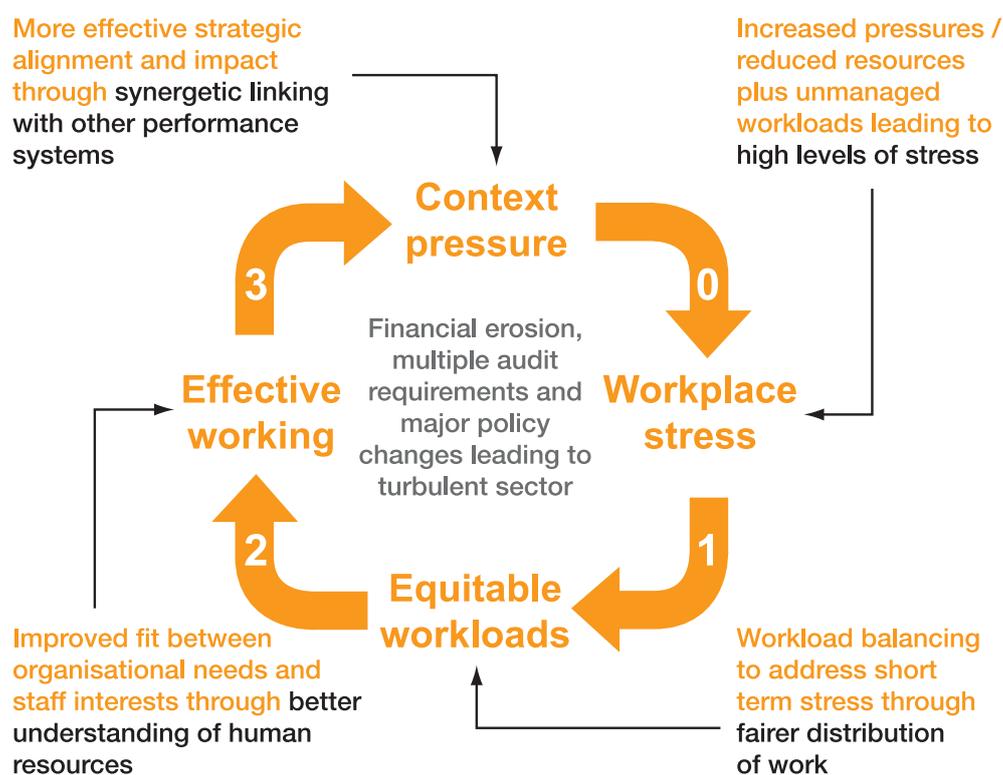
Workload allocation could be seen as a low level operational issue, but given the centrality of staff to the success of universities, it is in fact a major strategic process, which if not

well done can disable the organisation. If effectively and authentically handled however, universities can create strong socio-temporal contracts with their staff that embody the vision of the university.

We hope that this work will provide a way forward to the benefit of university staff individually and universities in general.

FIGURE 7

PROGRESSIVE LEVELS OF IMPACT POSSIBLE



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