

## **UCU Response to Staff Constraints Guidance - 9 March 2017**

Bristol UCU is deeply concerned by the content of the most recent iteration of the 'New Guidance Regarding Constraints to Teaching Availability'. These proposals should not be implemented in their current form. There is widespread dismay amongst UCU members at this latest set of proposals. Given the low proportion of staff who complete a Constraints Form, and the often pretty limited set of constraints included in many forms, it is not convincing to argue that these changes are needed to ensure a stable timetable. The proposed changes do, however, have significant, and detrimental implications for colleagues across the University, both in terms of managing their work to best effect, and with respect to work/life balance, and the University's commitment to a positive working environment.

As the J TU Workload Agreement notes, academics are autonomous professionals who are expected to work flexibly to discharge their duties. We have very extensive evidence of high workload, particularly amongst academic members. The established approach to staff constraints appropriately reflects the autonomous and flexible nature of academic work. Indeed, the use of constraints form has been valuable, where properly managed, in eliminating unfair disparities between colleagues in terms of availability for teaching. Bristol UCU supports this process, and would argue that with better management at HoS level, perhaps with renewed support from HR, there remains scope for creating greater parity between staff.

The most recent version of the proposed staff constraints form seeks to make it harder for colleagues to nominate a particular day for their research. Most colleagues choose not to do so, so the impact on timetabling is limited. Where colleagues do, it is for good reason, not least in terms of maximising productivity, especially for those who regularly need to visit archives, libraries, or other facilities outside of Bristol to conduct their research. It is understood by colleagues that it may not always be possible to accommodate all such requests, and, as has been pointed out in UCU feedback, colleagues in fact show considerable collective flexibility in helping make timetabling work. But this restricting of a valued capacity to influence when a research day is scheduled will cause considerable resentment, while achieving little.

In addition, the most recent version of the form suggests that it would not be possible to block off time at both the start and end of the day for the whole of the week for child care. Such requests are not, in fact, at all common; but where they are made, they are greatly valued. A colleague doing this is still offering plenty of slots for their likely teaching load; these requests are not lightly made, and tend to come from colleagues facing acute pressure in combining caring responsibilities with high workloads. It is clear from our feedback that members, whether they have children/caring responsibilities or not, are very unhappy about this proposal.

Lastly, the most recent iteration of the form excludes commuting as a potential constraint. A non-trivial number of colleagues were appointed on the express understanding that such arrangements were possible. This proposal will make Bristol a significantly less attractive

place to work, and has clear implications for recruitment and retention in a highly competitive and global market for academic talent. Again, we would question how many such requests are actually made, and the impact that these have on the production of a stable timetable.

In sum, the scale of change and the controversial nature of these proposals in their current form makes proper consultation and negotiation impossible on the projected timeframe. The existing approach to constraints should therefore be implemented for timetabling in 2017/18, while institutional timetabling is piloted, and extra teaching space comes on stream. This will allow appropriate discussion to take place of constraints in good time for the 2018/19 academic year.

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