

Managing the Workload

INTRODUCTION

No one said teaching was easy! In fact, those six words could be all we need to say about it. There's no simpler way of putting it: anyone who thinks they will "just do some teaching" to fill in a few idle hours, "give a bit back" or make some extra money is in it for the wrong reasons. Fortunately, although that type of person is often the loudest complainer about the workload involved, they are actually quite rare. Most people know before they start how challenging the job is – and that's part of the "attraction".

Teaching is an involved and involving job. It can't be measured in terms of contact hours, which is why the hourly rate for part-time tutors is so high in comparison to other jobs – it takes into account that for every hour of student contact there could be anything from half an hour to several hours of supporting work. Preparation, informal student guidance, meetings, and – importantly – training and development take up time.

The golden rule, though, is to make sure that this time is invested, not wasted.

To see what we mean, read the following case study. As you do, make a note of the things that go to making up the job of a visiting lecturer.

How do you feel about them? If this is your first year of teaching, how can you make sure that next year things will be easier? What are the pitfalls of getting too reliant on repeating the same things year after year?

Case Study

I started out designing architectural models for competitions, working in a team. Then I went into advertising work, designing models for magazines, posters and commercials. I was invited through networking to do some teaching. I've been working as a part-time visiting lecturer for a couple of years now.

When you first start out as a visiting lecturer you need to know straight away what is expected and try to stick to it. There is always more admin than is allowed for and you need to keep on top of it, otherwise it's very easy to let the teaching overlap too much on your professional work. Some admin time is attached to each hour of teaching, and assessment and preparation tend to be seen as admin time, so are in addition to teaching time.

The kind of things that are likely to be involved in delivering a lecture or seminar could include:

PREPARATION:

- **RESEARCH**
- **PREPARING THE BRIEF**
- **ROOM BOOKINGS**
- **PLANNING SESSIONS**
- **TECHNICAL THINGS LIKE PREPARING A PRESENTATION OR A COMPUTER DEMO**

THE SESSION ITSELF

FOLLOW UP:

- **POSTING NOTES ON THE “VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT”**
- **DEALING WITH ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK FORMS**
- **KEEPING PAPERWORK AND TUTORIAL RECORDS**

Preparing a two-hour lecture on making a computer model, for example, could take a day the first time, but then less when you deliver it again.

When you see courses that have recycled the same briefs for years you see from a professional perspective that they're out of date so you want the students to get the benefit of your experience. I would always rather spend more time going through books in the library and get a better result. I have a certain expectation, having been to advertising meetings where lots of work and preparation goes in. In education the same programme can be developed and recycled but it won't inspire the students. When they are inspired it's much more rewarding. You need to be enthusiastic yourself and by writing the brief you really understand it and can follow it through and assess it. Because so much of teaching is about getting students enthused you have to put time and energy in or they won't be interested.

It's difficult as a visiting lecturer to understand the room booking processes. For example IT suites may be block-booked but are actually not used, so you may be able to find one that's free, but you need a back-up plan and to know who to talk to.

You can easily end up with a week of assessment, and again this is extra to teaching time.

When I first started there was a small level of tutorial records. Now we *have* to have tutorial records and there's much more paperwork, although the process of doing it is quite useful. It's good to keep records to refer back to. Tutorials should be about planning: where the students are now and where they want to get to.

In addition there are induction and staff development days that we're expected to attend, on things like equal ops and health and safety, although these usually get paid at half the hourly rate.

You can really only do freelance work when you work as a visiting lecturer because of the time you need for admin. When you're freelancing you can use the weekend and you should be able to fit the work in. The problem is

taking time to find work. You need some time on weekdays for meetings and showing work. You're also limiting the area you can work in, as there isn't time to travel.

When you're working in a lecturing team everyone knows what needs to be done and you tend to pick up the bits that you know no one else is tackling. You'll always end up doing more than you expected!

Points for discussion

- **IS ANY OF THE TIME DESCRIBED BY THIS PART TIME TUTOR WASTED?**
- **WHAT DIFFERS IN YOUR EXPERIENCE FROM THAT DESCRIBED IN THE CASE STUDY?**
- **WHAT STRATEGIES MIGHT BE USED IN PLANNING THE USE OF TIME?**

TIME MANAGEMENT

Ironically we often criticise students for poor time management but we are far worse. Much has been written on time management, and all teachers should invest in a good book on the subject. Then find the time to read it...

Interruptions are one of the things that cause the biggest problem. A five-minute chat often lasts far longer and achieves nothing. Students who either missed a session or didn't understand something also interrupt. If you're lucky enough to have a desk and a computer, the telephone and email can be massive distractions – or temptations.

But interruptions are easy to deal with. One tutor found that just putting a piece of paper over the window to his office cut down interruptions dramatically, while another put a whiteboard in front of her room with times clearly allocated when she was available. Some staff insist that students only see them in small groups, while some institutions pay second and third years to act as tutors for minor issues such as "how do I do X on the computer?".

Contrary to popular belief it is *not* your job to be available all the time – it is your job to teach effectively and this means being prepared; something you can't be if you are constantly being interrupted! Students respect tutors who are fair with their time. They take advantage of those who are not...

MEETINGS

Part-time staff are often left out of meetings. Sometimes this is to do with payment, of course. But meetings are important if you are not to feel uninvolved and unimportant. A huge contributor to stress and time wasting is being left out of the loop, so consider an hour spent in a *productive* meeting several hours saved. If you want to attend useful meetings, suggest they are held at the end of the day or during lunchtime on days you are in already. Programme Leaders with some imagination should be able to schedule your timetable so that you do not have to attend meetings unpaid.

But meetings are often a waste of time, so use these rules to help you make use of them.

- **DECIDE IF YOU NEED TO GO. MAKE SURE AN AGENDA IS AVAILABLE BEFOREHAND AND THAT IT CANNOT BE HIJACKED. ASK THAT MEETING CHAIRS ONLY INVITE**

PEOPLE WHO NEED TO BE THERE, OR SCHEDULE AGENDA ITEMS SO THAT YOU CAN LEAVE EARLY. IF YOU ARE NOT NEEDED, SEND APOLOGIES. DON'T PUT OFF GOING TO AN IMPORTANT MEETING BECAUSE YOU ARE BUSY – MISSING IT MIGHT MAKE YOU BUSIER!

- **CAN A COLLEAGUE GO INSTEAD? IN PARLIAMENT THEY USE A SYSTEM CALLED “PAIRING” SO THAT MPs DON'T HAVE TO KEEP LEAVING MEETINGS TO VOTE ALL THE TIME. YOU COULD PAIR WITH A COLLEAGUE SO THAT YOU TAKE IT IN TURNS TO ATTEND MEETINGS, AND CONSULT WITH EACH OTHER BEFOREHAND TO ENSURE YOUR VIEWS ARE EXPRESSED.**
- **DECIDE BEFOREHAND WHAT YOU PERSONALLY WANT TO ACHIEVE FROM THE MEETING. ENSURE LENGTHY DISCUSSION TAKES PLACE BEFOREHAND SO THAT TIME IS NOT WASTED ON SURPRISES – DON'T BE TEMPTED INTO BEING THE PERSON WHO MAKES DRAMATIC ANNOUNCEMENTS AND CAUSES A SHORT MEETING TO DRAG ON.**
- **AFTER THE MEETING, FOLLOW UP ALL YOUR PERSONAL ACTION POINTS. ASK THAT THE MINUTES BE CIRCULATED IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE MEETING, NOT BEFORE (OR AT) THE NEXT. SUGGEST THAT MINUTES INCLUDE A SUMMARY OF ACTION POINTS ON THE FIRST PAGE. IF YOU DO NOT ATTEND A MEETING, ENSURE YOU FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENED AND HOW IT AFFECTS YOU.**

UNDERSTANDING YOUR INSTITUTION

Most new staff are offered an induction, but few part-time staff seem to take it up. And when they do, it is often too quick or too jam-packed to be of any use. But understanding the place you work is essential, particularly as you may find that someone is able to help you in ways you didn't realise, or help students far better than you could. For example, one entire course team spent several hours compiling a formal complaint about the amount of photocopying they had to do, only to be asked why they did not use the institution's free reprographics facility!

Below is a list of groups, departments and committees. The names vary from place to place so, for each one, work out if you have an equivalent and what it is called. Then find out

TRADE SECRET

ALL STUDENTS KNOW THIS – YOU SHOULD TOO. IF YOU ONLY GET TO KNOW A FEW PEOPLE, FOCUS ON CARETAKERS, FACULTY OFFICE STAFF AND CANTEEN STAFF. THEY ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT PEOPLE IN ANY EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION!

Managing the Workload

- ❖ **WHAT THEY DO**
- ❖ **HOW THEY CAN HELP YOU**
- ❖ **HOW THEY CAN HELP STUDENTS**
- ❖ **IF YOU THINK THEY MIGHT BE IMPORTANT, FIND OUT THE NAME OF A CONTACT AND MAKE A POINT OVER THE NEXT FEW WEEKS TO VISIT THEM, OR EMAIL THEM.**

You will probably find that some, like library staff and student services, will be only too pleased that you have made the effort and will be useful points of contact who can make your job easier in future.

- ❖ **BOARD OF GOVERNORS**
- ❖ **VICE CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE**
- ❖ **DEAN'S PA**
- ❖ **REGISTRY**
- ❖ **PERSONNEL**
- ❖ **ACADEMIC BOARD**
- ❖ **SENIOR MANAGEMENT GROUP**
- ❖ **TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMITTEE**
- ❖ **CENTRAL SERVICES**
- ❖ **CARETAKERS/WARDENS**
- ❖ **RESEARCH GROUP**
- ❖ **QUALITY ASSURANCE DEPARTMENT**
- ❖ **FACULTY BOARD**
- ❖ **STUDENTS UNION**
- ❖ **STUDENT REPS**
- ❖ **STUDENT COMMITTEES**

- ❖ CAREERS
- ❖ STAFF DEVELOPMENT OFFICE
- ❖ LEARNER/STUDENT SUPPORT
- ❖ SUBJECT CENTRE
- ❖ TEACHING UNION
- ❖ LIBRARY/LEARNING RESOURCE CENTRE
- ❖ IT DEPARTMENT
- ❖ REPROGRAPHICS

SUMMARY

No one said it would be easy. But that doesn't mean it should be *hard*. Taking care of yourself and investing time up front will help make sure you remain stress-free and on top of things.

All institutions have a duty of care towards you and help should be available for coping with the stress that even reasonable amounts of pressure can place upon us. It is easy to trivialise the effects of stress and you should be on the lookout for the warning signs, and get help immediately – as you would advise your students to.

You should also join a union or other professional body not for political reasons necessarily, but for the help and advice they can provide for health and other issues.

We teach for a variety of reasons, none of them to do with it being easy. Just trying to do the job well takes up time – such as the time taken to read material like this, for example. Hopefully, you won't count these few minutes as wasted.