ACADEMIC ASSEMBLY

29 May 2026 / MS Teams

MINUTES

855 Welcome and Quorum

REPORTED

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and noted a quorum was present. A particular welcome was extended to the Director of Human Resources who attended to answer questions as part of the consultation.

856 Declarations of Interest

REPORTED

No distinct conflicts of interest was made however it was noted that the Workload Allocation Model impacted on all academic staff.

857 Actions and Matters Arising

REPORTED

There were no actions or matters arising from the previous meeting of the Assembly to discuss.

858 WAMS Consultation - AA25/26 - 12

REPORTED

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor and the Director of Human Resources presented the Assembly with an update on the work of the Workload Allocation Management System (WAMS) Task and Finish Group. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor had identified the WAMS as a priority area to review when they started in post due to its importance in supporting the allocation of staff workloads as well as future planning and required statutory returns including using the data to inform the Transparent Approach to Costings (TRAC) return.

As part of the process the Group had felt it important to proactively engage with the Assembly and consult with staff on which areas of the WAMS they felt required review and improvement. This consultation would make up part of the first phase of the review which had focused on gathering requirements and feedback different user groups. As well as the consultation a staff survey had been issued, with 166 responses gathered from across the University, resulting in a fairly representative view of the community's views.

Feedback from the survey had highlighted what was positive about the WAMS including

supporting departmental planning, however it had also identified where improvements were needed. One of the main areas highlighted had been that the tariffs within the system do not accurately reflect the real workload taken on by staff, with elements of work going unnoticed within the tariff system.

Following this consultation phase the project would look to review the current WAMS tariffs and how these could best be amended to suit the needs of the community, before progressing to phase three which would review the system processes themselves and how WAMS was used within the institution. Throughout the course of the project communication and consultation with staff would be maintained.

The aim of the project was to reach a point where it worked reasonably for all academic colleagues, recognising that there would be individual differences which would require consideration at department level but that tariffs broadly represented the academic community.

DISCUSSED

The Assembly discussed the principle that workloads should not routinely be allocated to 100%, noting the previously adopted approach of allowing approximately 10% of the overall workload within WAMS for citizenship activities and unforeseen demands. It was acknowledged that many staff currently appear above the 100% workload however this does not necessarily indicate overload. A consistent approach was needed across the University to ensure workloads remain manageable and enable intervention when necessary. Discussion considered whether workloads should be allocated to approximately 90%, with the remaining capacity retained either as unallocated flexibility or explicitly allocated as citizenship time. The Assembly emphasised that WAMS should be supported by effective line management, regular workload discussions and professional judgement rather than being relied upon as a standalone solution. Consistency had been identified as a key focus of the Task and Finish Group's work, alongside ensuring individuals were accountable for work allocated within the system and that workload allocations would be supported by evidence. It was reiterated that WAMS was not a replacement for effective people management.

It was recognised that the WAMS was a significant improvement on previous workload allocation methods and provided a useful framework for planning workloads. The Assembly noted the need to balance flexibility and responsiveness with the effective utilisation of staff resources.

Concerns were raised regarding whether current workload tariffs adequately reflected operational realities, particularly during peak periods such as assessment and marking periods. While individual tariffs may appear reasonable in isolation, the cumulative impact of teaching multiple units and meeting requirements such as the 15-day marking turnaround would have impact on staff. The Assembly noted that work was often not evenly distributed throughout the academic year and that WAMS should be viewed as a long-term planning tool rather than a precise representation of daily workload pressures.

It was acknowledged that no workload allocation model would be perfect, however a reasonable and transparent system is preferable to a situation where workload concerns remain unaddressed. It was agreed that openness regarding workload allocations was important, particularly where significant variations exist between colleagues' workloads.

Questions were raised regarding the visibility of WAMS data within departments and whether greater institutional oversight could support consistency of operation. A tension existed between transparency and consideration of reasonable adjustments and individual circumstances. It was agreed that colleagues should be encouraged to discuss concerns about workload allocations with their Line Managers where allocated hours did not appear to reflect actual requirements.

The Assembly questions how the WAMS tariffs were developed, whether they were evidence-based, and how they were reviewed over time. There was broad agreement that the current tariffs were not always perceived as accurate and further work was required to develop realistic, evidence-based tariffs. Ongoing consultation with staff was considered essential to this process. It was noted that caution was needed to avoid focusing solely on tariffs and the importance of the wider cultural issues surrounding workload allocation were highlighted. It was recognised that workload concerns often related to perception of fairness, transparency and trust rather than the technical operation of the system itself. The need for clear and transparent processes for the ongoing review of tariffs was highlighted. Suggestions from the Assembly included establishing formalised independent review mechanisms or escalation routes where staff were unable to resolve concerns through normal management channels. Greater transparency in how tariffs were determined and reviewed was considered important in building confidence in the system.

Concerns were raised that some activities undertaken by staff were not adequately captured within WAMS, including time spent on grant applications, peer review activity and other forms of academic citizenship. Additionally, it was noted that the system could not fully account for factors such as multitasking, competing priorities, and day-to-day operational pressures. However, the Assembly did note that it would be impossible for any system to capture every aspect of academic work and re-emphasised the importance of regular workload conversations with Line Managers alongside use of the system.

Consideration was given to the impact of increasing student numbers on workload and whether changes in examination practice, such as greater use of group assessments, multiple-choice assessments and automated marking, were being driven by wider workload pressures. The Assembly queried whether these developments aligned with the University's educational objectives.

It was noted that some departments appeared to manage workloads particularly effectively and suggested that examples of good practice could be gathered and shared as part of the next phase of the review.

859 Programme of meetings for 2026/27

REPORTED

The Assembly noted the programme of meetings for 2026/27.

860 Any Other Business

REPORTED

There was no further business to discuss.