

**Poking the beast in the ivory tower:  
workload models and performance  
management in contemporary academia**

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The context of Higher Education in the UK, and more generally in Europe, is changing as today's Universities are increasingly being managed as business organizations (Sousa, de Nijs and Hendriks, 2010). Far from being locked in ivory towers (Barry *et al.*, 2001), academics nowadays are expected not only to teach and make original contributions to knowledge but also to show the impact of their publications, to

apply for funding or grants, to engage in knowledge exchange activities within the local or international community and to contribute to widening participation agendas or developing links with external businesses and organisations. This is considered by many in the field as going against the very 'nature of the beast', the academic way of working and managing performance (McAlpine and Åkerlind, 2010). In addition, departments, and more generally Universities, have been asked to develop particular forms of accountability in reference to performance, budgets, human resources management and income generation in order to monitor efficiency and provide a quantification of the time spent on various teaching, research or administrative tasks (Anderson *et al.*, 2002). The oversight and management of such processes, is generally left to academics in senior positions who often find themselves caged in roles they do not particularly wish to take on and are not always able to carry out effectively. Within this environment, the implementation of workload models has proven contentious as it is rejected by many as a form of control, but advocated by those who

seek fair allocations of work and efficient management of resources.

Drawing from Foucauldian theories of power, this paper explores tensions and nodes of resistance to academic control through the opinions voiced by staff in a UK University with reference to the implementation of workload models. We investigate this topic through the use of thematic analysis conducted on an email trail of 54 messages, and the 117 results of a university-wide survey of staff aimed at understanding their position regarding workload models.

### **Keywords**

Work Load Model, University, Human Relations

### **Reference List**

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