

# The teaching hours transfer window

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For readers who have followed our previous blogs, you will know that we often lean on sport analogies to explore and understand the everyday complexities of academic life. This time round we want to focus on something that appears each year like clockwork, usually accompanied with a dose of collective dread amongst academics, our topic this time around is workload allocation.

Workload allocation covers a whole gamut of topics from who teaches which module, through to which programme needs additional support? It stops off at; who has capacity, and who is already stretched too thinly? It is an ongoing puzzle that brings to mind both a super-sized game of Sudoku and also a 2000-piece-sized jigsaw.

But what if we borrowed an idea from the world of sport to rethink the whole process?

If you are familiar with football, you will know the drama and strategy wrapped up in the transfer window. For a set period of time each year, clubs negotiate the permanent transfer or the loan of players. Someone who is surplus to requirements at one club might be exactly what another team needs. A striker who doesn't fit one manager's system could become the missing piece in someone else's game plan. Importantly, during this window, every club is alert, active, and intentional about building the right squad and improving their position. This analogy offers a useful lens when analysing academic workload allocation.

In this blog, we are putting forward a proposal: Instead of the standard, sometimes static process of assigning module hours within siloed teams, why not create our own teaching hours transfer window?

At the heart of the proposition is the idea of promoting autonomy and redistributing responsibility; specifically, giving Programme Leaders [PLs]/Course Directors [CDs] the freedom to shape their teaching teams within an agreed timeframe. Rather than distributing hours from the top down, our model takes the transfer window model as its inspiration, introduces what we call a 'teacher transfer window' and allows PLs/CDs to:

- Allocate their team's hours across their programme strategically
- Engage in open dialogue with other PLs/CDs about staff availability and specialism
- Build a teaching 'squad' that aligns with the programme's vision
- Consider both staff preferences and programme needs in one transparent process

During the teacher transfer window, PLs/CDs can focus on constructing the best possible teaching team, rather than simply filling gaps. We turn reactive into proactive, and the language shifts from **'Who is left to take this'** to **'Who is the best fit to deliver this well'**

#### **Movement between programmes benefits everyone**

One of the key advantages of this transfer-style approach is that it increases staff mobility. In many existing allocation systems, staff remain tied to the programme where they sit in the organisation chart, even when their expertise belongs elsewhere. This leads to staff mopping up hours rather than teaching within their true specialism. Something that is both an inefficient use of resources and frustrating to the academics concerned. Introducing a teaching transfer window brings a transformative approach to academic staffing. It allows educators to focus on areas where their expertise truly shines, ensuring that programmes benefit from staff who meaningfully enrich the curriculum. Just as in football, where a change of team can revitalise a player's career, shifting between programmes can offer staff new challenges, better alignment, and a greater sense of reward. It is not merely about moving people around, it is about placing people where they can thrive rather than just survive.

#### **Reducing the annual headache**

Of course, no system will make workload allocation fully stress-free. But a structured, time-bound, collaborative window can significantly reduce stress for all concerned. Instead of last-minute silent frustrations and feelings of unfairness, we gain clarity as everyone knows when the window opens and closes. Fairness, as opportunities are visible across teams that allows PLs to make decisions on expertise, rather than convenience. With a shared process and a clear timeline, the experience becomes less about

scrambling to cover hours and more about building strong, sustainable teaching teams.

**Two key goals - Happy staff and high-quality student learning:**

When staff teach subjects they care about, within programmes that value their expertise, the impact on students is significant. Engagement rises. Energy returns. The classroom becomes a space where knowledge and enthusiasm are aligned.

Like the football transfer window, the teaching transfer window is about opportunity, about finding the right fit for both staff and programmes.

**Time to rethink the season**

Workload allocation may never be the highlight of the academic year, but it doesn't have to be something we simply endure, instead it can be the opportunity for improvement. With a more open, strategic, mobility-based approach, we can transform the process into something constructive, collaborative, and even, dare we say it, optimistic.