



***Choices and Responsibilities:
Higher Education in the Knowledge Society***

Programme on Institutional Management in Higher Education (IMHE)

Managing academic workloads and meeting requirements whilst respecting the academic culture

Shelley Paewai, Don Houston & Luanna Meyer

Massey University

New Zealand

The 'knowledge society' places increasing demands on university staff in terms of productivity, flexibility and accountability. Studies have focused on the intensification of academic work, the balance between research and teaching, and the increasing expectation that universities contribute to the economic and social good. Others have investigated the impact of the increasing demands on staff stress and 'work-life balance'. Workloads management is becoming a critical feature of maintaining a reputation as a 'good employer' while protecting the qualities of academic life that define a university. The challenge for universities is to develop a work environment where staff are able to participate in core academic activities - critical thinking, reflection and collegial interactions reflecting disciplinary interests and expertise - as well as responding to the demands of a diverse student population, a competitive research environment and the plethora of administrative tasks that accompany an accountability-based climate.

Massey University has risen to the challenge of addressing concerns about workload through a joint initiative between the University and staff unions. This paper introduces the university's workloads process, providing some detail of critical features of the approach, and of issues that arose during policy implementation. The paper then presents the key findings from a study of workload allocation models carried out in 2003, focusing on practical solutions identified to address some of the issues raised. Particular attention is given to the challenges faced by academic staff in juggling multiple demands and prioritising activities to fulfil responsibilities to teaching, research and service.