

Investigating the careers of Staff Tutors in STEM for Athena SWAN

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Executive Summary

Staff Tutors within the STEM faculty form a large part of the academic workforce and are described as the glue between central academics and students, however the role is varied and complex. Alongside their management of Associate Lecturers, they contribute to the running of their respective departments in terms of module presentation and production, together with maintaining research, scholarship and outreach activities.

Given the diverse nature of the role, which has a large focus on managerial tasks, access to opportunities which enable career progression is an area of concern. Each of the departments within STEM have submitted Athena SWAN applications and the Staff Tutor role has been highlighted in feedback to these submissions as a group of staff who need further investigation; the Staff Tutor role attracts a large proportion of women in STEM.

This analysis was constructed to investigate the reasons behind a predominantly female Staff Tutor population and to assess whether there were differences between the departments in STEM in terms of their recognition and support of Staff Tutors, with the aim sharing good practice throughout the faculty. However the analysis raised wider issues in terms of how the managerial role, which Staff Tutors unanimously agree is of paramount importance, needs appropriate recognition and support by the University in order to retain this group of staff.

The recommendations of this report highlighted the desire for more administrative support, robust cover arrangements, and in particular routine online access to meetings, all of which would mean that Staff Tutors are better placed to devote more time to research, scholarship and outreach, areas where academics need to engage for their career development. Routine online attendance at meetings also enables all Staff Tutors to have equity in terms of exposure level to new opportunities and the ability to contribute, at all levels, in the University. The new promotions criteria is also highlighted as an area that needs urgent review and monitoring for Staff Tutors.

1 Aims and Scope

The Athena SWAN Charter was established in 2005 to encourage and recognise commitment of higher education and research employers with regards to advancing the careers of women in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine. Individual departments, together with the institute as a whole, can apply for Athena SWAN chartered status. Feedback from successful bronze Athena SWAN submissions in both the Mathematics and Statistics department and the Department of Physical Sciences, and from the Department of Physical Sciences' Institute of Physics Juno Champion submission, highlighted Staff Tutors as a category of staff, particularly in terms of their career progression, where both departments needed to focus attention. In order to aid all departments in STEM with Athena SWAN submissions this research considers Staff Tutors across the six departments of STEM; Environment, Earth & Ecosystems (EEE), Life, Health & Chemical Sciences (LHCS), Physical Sciences (DPS), Computing and Communications(C&C), Engineering and Innovations (E&I) and Mathematics and Statistics (M&S).

The Staff Tutor role is an academic role where a proportion of the time is spent managing and developing Associate Lecturers (AL) and directly supporting students, whilst the remaining proportion is spent in the equivalent activities associated with a central academic role, that of module presentation and production, research, scholarship, knowledge exchange and department/faculty roles. The proportion differs with the Science departments specifying that 60% is AL management with C&C, E&I and M&S giving the split 50/50.

The line management of ALs involves not only recruitment, but staff development, monitoring tutorials and correspondence tuition and carrying out the career appraisal for this group of staff. This means that Staff Tutors directly impact on the support provided by ALs to students. As staff tutors have a broad knowledge of the curriculum and flash points within modules, they are the first port of call with questions from front line staff regarding student queries, and the staff who enable the provision of extra support which certain groups of students need in order to succeed. Much of this work is unpredictable and time consuming, whilst being incredibly enjoyable and rewarding. Alongside this Staff Tutors are involved in all other areas of academic life, however there is a concern that they may not always be provided with the same opportunities, particularly with regards to activities which enable career progression, as their central academic colleagues.

Background data, as of November 2015, shows that roughly two thirds of the Staff Tutors in STEM are women. Each department has a majority of female Staff Tutors with no large differences in the distribution of gender between each of the departments (Table 1).

Number (col. %)	Comp & Com (C&C)	Eng & Innov (E&I)	Maths & Stats (M&S)	Env, Earth & Ecosy (EEE)	Phys Sciences (DPS)	Life, Health & Chem Sci (LHCS)	STEM
Women	11 (58)	10 (63.5)	11 (73)	4 (57)	3 (60)	10 (83)	49 (66)
Men	8 (42)	6 (37.5)	4 (27)	3 (43)	2 (40)	2 (17)	25 (34)
Total	19	16	15	7	5	12	74

Table 1. Numbers of Staff Tutors by gender in the STEM department (percentages in brackets)

There are a mixture of full-time (74%) and part-time (26%) Staff Tutors in all the STEM departments, with 85% of the part-time staff being female. Given the small numbers of Staff Tutors in Physical Sciences and Environment, Earth & Ecosystems there doesn't seem to be any department who has a bias towards part-time staff (Table 2).

Number (col. %)	Comp & Com (C&C)	Eng & Innov (E&I)	Maths & Stats (M&S)	Env, Earth & Ecosy (EEE)	Phys Sciences (DPS)	Life, Health & Chem Sci (LHCS)	STEM
Women							
Full time	7 (64)	9 (90)	9 (82)	1 (25)	1 (33)	6 (60)	33 (67)
Part time	4 (36)	1 (10)	2 (18)	3 (75)	2 (66)	4 (40)	16 (33)
Total	11	10	11	4	3	10	49
Men							
Full time	7 (87.5)	6 (100)	4 (100)	2 (67)	1 (50)	2 (100)	22 (88)
Part time	1 (12.5)	0	0 (0)	1 (33)	1 (50)	0 (0)	3 (12)
Total	8	6	4	3	2	2	25

Table 2. Number of full and part time staff in each STEM department by gender (percentages in brackets)

Given this background data there was a need to understand why more women were attracted to the Staff Tutor role and if individual departments were supporting these staff differently. The aim was to share good practice through the STEM faculty. The research aimed to address three initial questions:

- Is there a difference between the STEM departments in range and depth to which Staff Tutors engage with all areas of their academic roles?
- Why does the Staff Tutor role seem to attract a greater proportion of women?
- How do Staff Tutors feel their role is perceived within the different departments, faculties, the university and the wider HE sector?

The questionnaire was devised with input from a team of Staff Tutors across a range of the different STEM departments and contained a mixture of closed and open ended questions. The open ended questions were analysed by a qualitative expert and used to construct themes which were then followed up in focus groups. A stratified random sample of 12 Staff Tutors, 3 from each of M&S, E&I, C&C and Science grouped together was taken to pilot the questionnaire; one of these Staff Tutors left the role leaving a pool of 11. The questionnaire was sent 18 March – 8 April and received 8 responses. In addition an email was sent to each of these respondents to explore the content of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was revised in the light of this pilot and the focus changed. Even in the Spring of 2015 there was concern amongst Tutors about the, yet to be announced, locations analysis and how this would affect their working environment. The questionnaire was therefore refocussed with the following aims:

- Gain more knowledge about the role of the Staff Tutor and what support this group of staff will need after the distribution of regional offices due to the locations analysis is clear
- Identify key issues around career progression and aspirations and the support needed to achieve these goals
- What attracted Staff Tutors to the role and how their role can be supported by the departments and the University

The invitation to the 74 Staff Tutors in STEM was sent on 16th November and closed on 7th December. It is important to remember the timing of the decision, endorsed by council on 24th November to close 7 of the 9 English locations where many of these staff are based. Therefore, many responses as to how departments and the University should support Staff Tutors are practical suggestions based on their requirements to fulfil their role, whilst they adjust to new working conditions, including for many the change to homeworking status. The high response rate of 47 (64%), of which 33 were complete responses to a very long questionnaire demonstrates the depth of commitment of these staff to execute their responsibilities to the highest possible standard. As part of the questionnaire Staff Tutors were invited to participate in focus groups, 22 agreed to this of which 14 actively took part in these groups which were held on 9th February 2016. Qualitative comparative analysis, using a modified NVivo type classification, was used to analyse the open ended responses to the questionnaire, this resulted in the following themes which were of particular concern to participants and explored in the focus groups:

- To gain more knowledge about the role of the Staff Tutors in the context of the locations analysis and what support from the departments, faculties and University would be needed
- To identify issues around career progression and the new promotions criteria
- To identify the type of support Staff Tutors would need to reach their goals

2 Activities

The data finding from the questionnaire and focus groups were triangulated to assess the consistency of the statements (Figure 1). All of the subjects who took part in the study gave their consent to use the information from the questionnaire and focus groups, and a confidentiality clause was provided.

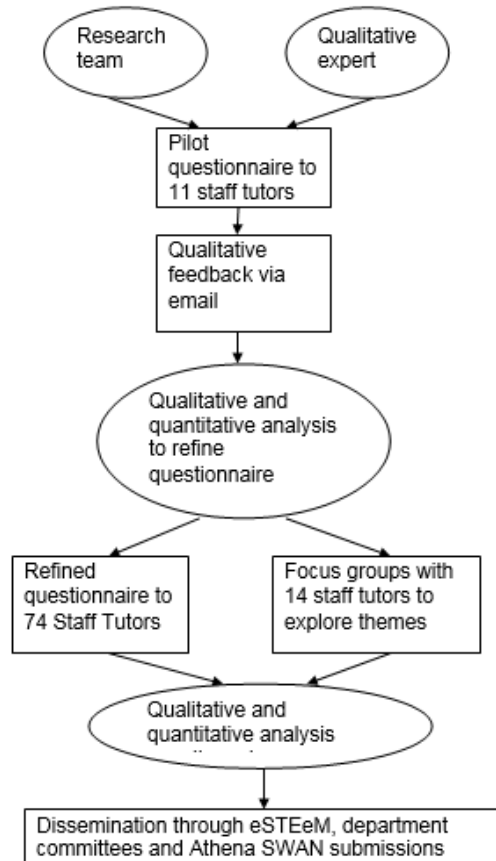


Figure 1. Study design and methodology

3 Findings

3.1 The Staff Tutor Role

3.1.1 Representation of participants

Four participants choose to answer the questionnaire anonymously, so their responses cannot be linked to demographic data. Of the remaining 44 participants, women and staff on part time contracts, are slightly over represented in the number of participants who answered the questionnaire compared to the STEM staff tutor population, (Table 3). The distribution of the seven departments is comparable with the distribution of the departmental mix of the 74 Staff Tutors. Therefore the responses may be slightly biased by the female and part time responses compared to the population, however the sample is large enough to be robust.

Gender	Men			Women		
Sample	10			33		
Population	25			49		
Contract type	Full time			Part time		
Sample	28			15		
Population	55			19		
Department	C&C	E&I	M&S	EEE	DPS	LHCS
Sample	10	11	9	3	4	6
Population	19	16	15	7	5	12

Table 3. Distribution of participants

3.1.2 Attraction of the Staff Tutor role

The data shows that many Staff Tutors came to the University having worked in a variety of different areas, however the majority of Staff Tutors have in addition had earlier experiences with The Open University in an assortment of different roles including; AL, tutor-counsellor, pathway tutor, summer school tutor, involvement with eSTeEM projects, consultancy for writing module material, forum moderation, involvement in course choice events and providing part time cover for Staff Tutors on short term contracts. Each of these experiences contributed to the decision to become a Staff Tutor. There was very little evidence of events of experiences outside the OU which contributed to the reason for choosing the Staff Tutor post. This may well be the reason why there are a greater number of female Staff Tutors, as there are also a greater proportion of female ALs given the highly flexible nature of the AL role.

When asked what their expectations of the job were, 40 Staff Tutors answered this question. Many comments to this question highlighted the desire to have greater involvement with the OU and the wish to secure a permanent post in contrast to the contractual nature of the AL role. Their main responses were:

- 59% thought the flexibility of the role was important or very important
- 95% thought meeting the teaching aims and mission of OU were important or very important
- 93% wanted to gain experiences in new areas

This suggests that one of the main motivators for gaining a Staff Tutor role in the OU are the principles which the OU stands for, together with the possibility of flexible and interesting opportunities. The flexibility of the role was highlighted positively by several, one example being;

“By working predominantly from home I can accommodate some childcare, for example once a week I collect my child from school (rather than childminder) and then I work that evening instead.”

Other Staff Tutors talked about the need to be flexible in order to accommodate tutorial visits, run AL staff development events and interview people.

There is a concern that if there are large numbers of Staff Tutors migrating to the role from the AL role, because of a desire for a permanent post, this could severely reduce the pool of potential candidates when the new AL contract is secured unless there are other clear additional advantages associated the Staff Tutor role. The impact of closing locations on the working conditions of Staff Tutors will need to be carefully monitored to ensure that the role is sufficiently attractive. Many of these staff will be forced into becoming homeworkers. Whilst this might seem like a flexible solution, unless the University invests in IT equipment both in the remaining centres and central campus to enable remote access to meetings, the increased travel requirements to attend such meetings may effectively make the role less flexible.

3.2 Workload Balance

3.2.1 Range of academic activities

Staff Tutors were asked to estimate the proportion of time they currently spent on the four areas of research/scholarship, teaching, knowledge exchange and management; that is the four areas identified in the new promotions criteria. They were then asked to allocate their ideal proportion of time spent on each area. The difference in percentage points were then analysed by department; because of the relatively small number of Staff Tutors in the three Science departments these were combined into one Science grouping for the purpose of this comparison.

In general Staff Tutors would ideally like to spend more time on research and scholarship and less time on management, this pattern was most marked for Mathematics and Statistics Staff Tutors, (Figure 2).

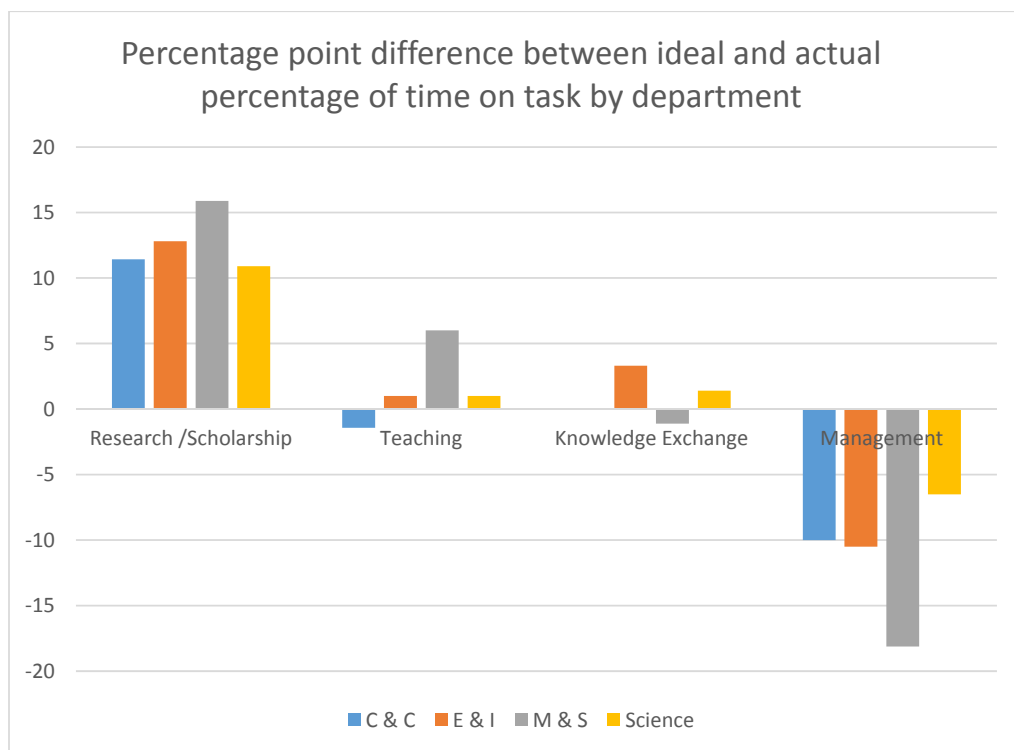


Figure 2 Percentage point difference between the ideal and actual percentage of time spent on each task by department

Male Staff Tutors expressed an even stronger preference for more research and scholarship and less management. In addition male Staff Tutors would prefer less teaching whilst female Staff Tutors would prefer more teaching, (Figure 3). It would be interesting to investigate any departmental and gender differences in the official workload allocations. In the focus group several Staff Tutors emphasised working more hours than they recorded in the workload management system. If there is a consistent discrepancy between the official recorded hours and the amount of time spent on tasks in particular categories this should be investigated further.

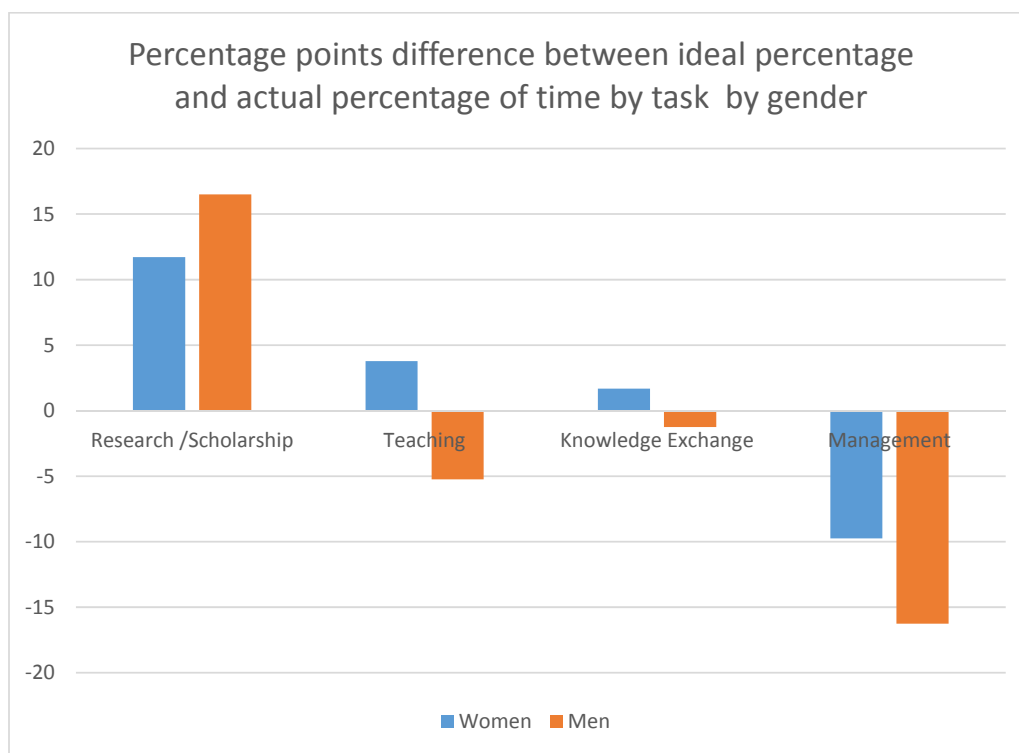


Figure 3 Percentage point difference between the ideal and actual percentage of time spent on each task by gender

Much of the scholarship work for this group of staff is supported by eSTeEM, whilst a small number of Staff Tutors have links with other institutions to carry out subject research.

The issue around the time taken by management tasks was highlighted in several of the open comments:

“This is an academic role - and the tasks should reflect that. I feel I have lots to offer in terms of scholarship, and teaching (producing module materials, and quality assurance of ALs) but end up spending too much time on management duties such as organizing additional support sessions following plagiarism cases, timetabling, and other administrative duties.”

There were also comments regarding the need to spend time in research and scholarship in order to be effective managers of ALs.

“It is essential to keep developing professionally and intellectually and while teaching (by which I mean involvement in module teams mainly) can be creative sometimes, then it can also be relatively limited. Hence time for scholarship or research are necessary personally but also to maintain some level of respectability in the academic community, which ultimately impacts on how Staff Tutors are seen by ALs and by central academics and outside the OU.”

The focus group explored the issue of work distribution in relation to career development. It is clear that whilst Staff Tutors feel that the management side of their role is extremely important and worthwhile, they felt they needed time to engage with other activities if they were to meet the new promotions criteria; this is picked up again in Section 6.2.

“The type of work which scores points on promotions is stuff that can always be left until tomorrow – we are busy firefighting urgent things all the time so find it hard to get the time to do the high profile reward things.”

“Staff Tutors are labelled as academic but 50% of our work is management. And we are very skilled managers of a workforce that is difficult to manage. Whether you are a good or a bad manager, it is completely irrelevant within the University structure with the criteria for promotion. Management is however a very significant part of our role.”

3.2.2 Current study leave engagement

Staff Tutors are entitled to 22 days study leave which can, subject to line manager agreement, be supplemented by research leave. Respondents were asked if they had taken study leave in the last two years. Only 60% of the 40 replies indicated they had taken their study leave. Interestingly a greater percentage of women appear to have taken their study leave (Table 4), whilst Staff Tutors in Mathematics & Statistics and Engineering and Innovations have considerably lower take up of study leave than Computing & Communications and Science (Table 5).

	Female	Male	Total
No	10 (33%)	4 (50%)	14 (37%)
Yes	20 (67%)	4 (50%)	24 (63%)
Total	30	8	38

Table 4. Staff Tutors taking study leave in last two years by gender

	C & C	E & I	M & S	Science
No	2 (25)	5 (45)	4 (44)	3 (30)
Yes	6 (75)	6 (55)	5 (56)	7 (70)
	8	11	9	10

Table 5. Staff Tutors taking study leave in last two years by department

Only one Staff Tutor out of 30 responses said they had topped up their study leave with research leave in the last two years.

Staff tutors highlighted the need for robust cover arrangements for study leave in the open ended responses.

“I don't consider that I have been able to successfully use study leave - I have not been able to take more than the occasional day here and there because of other work pressures and the need to be able to respond to tutor/student issues promptly as they arrive.”

“I didn't feel like I could ask for proper cover arrangements. By the time I've explained everything about my job to someone else, I could just as well have got on with the job. Also, fellow STs are just as overloaded, so it seems unfair to ask someone to cover for me (and I'm not in a position to take on too many cover responsibilities in return).”

Many Staff Tutors highlighted that the unpredictability of the job made properly briefing someone else difficult; dealing with a student complain, finding cover for a sick AL, were just a couple of examples highlighted as queries which would need urgent attention.

“Some weeks will be completely taken up with interviews, some weeks on timetabling and TSA. Sometimes it is caught up on central academic work such as TMAs and exam. Then there are the days where what you needed to do doesn't happen because a query comes in from VOICE or via email or telephone call that demands urgent attention and everything else has to wait. It is very hard to plan when you can take time off to study or research as you can never say in advance how busy you will be. I end up fitting it in during evenings or weekends, or an hour here and there when nothing else is urgent.”

It would be useful to carry out a further investigation into Staff Tutor involvement with scholarly activity in particular. In STEM, eSTeEM provides a useful platform for both scholarship dissemination and support. Scholarship is recognised in the teaching criteria for promotion, relevant staff development sessions specifically designed for Staff Tutors who would like to engage in scholarship could be beneficial. If these sessions were designed primarily for Staff Tutors, then a suitable online delivery should be considered so that all Staff Tutors could engage with these workshops.

3.2.3 Recommendations in order to create time for scholarship and research

There were several recommendations about ways in which time could be generated and several open comments supported these suggestions.

1. Robust cover arrangements so that staff tutors could routinely take their study leave entitlement.

“It would help to be properly relieved of AL management duties during study leave periods. This has never really been possible. It would also help if someone had oversight on the procedures that Staff Tutors are expected to adopt and ask whether such procedures are justified in terms of the increased time we spend on them compared to the benefit to the institution.”

“Policies and processes should be developed in conjunction with users and IT systems should be fit for purpose. There should be a proper workload management system that allows you to record time spent on different activities accurately (rather than just adding up to 100%) and support from senior management to organise workloads so that study leave can be taken with proper cover in place.”

2. Investing in equipment for remote access to online meetings to save on extensive travelling time.

“The OU could invest in much better equipment for remote access to meetings. I often travel to MK rather than attending meetings remotely because I know the sound equipment will not be adequate to fully participate in the meeting. Online attendance at meetings with adequate equipment should be offered as standard. A reduction in travel time would free up a lot of time to do other activities.”

3. Administrative support.

“Proper efficient and consistent admin support, preferably in a single place instead of having to ask different people to support every individual task separately. There is a huge overhead in keeping on top of who I am supposed to request support from for different tasks.”

3.3 Infrastructure and support for the Staff Tutor Role

3.3.1 Support needed due to loss of regional centres

Several Staff Tutors were concerned about the lack of regional centres and for many the change to homeworker status. Concerns were again voiced around administrative support and the need for the University to invest in IT equipment to ensure online access to meetings, in addition there were many who felt that the Staff Tutor network would be affected and the need for this to be protected. These issues were also explored further in the focus groups.

- Administration

“Fundamentally, it will make it harder to do my job (because it would probably mean having to engage with even more admin, such as booking rooms and the like), and make it pretty miserable. It's said that Staff Tutors are the glue that makes bits of the university work. The effect of the regions closing will make it difficult for us to 'glue' different bits together.”

“There is not enough admin support for the Staff Tutor role any more and this will get worse with the locations analysis. It is becoming increasingly difficult to engage with all aspects of being an academic due to the large number of admin tasks which fall on the desk of a Staff Tutor.”

“ALs are coming to me now with things that I did not do before like changing tutorial times, which should be dealt with by a faculty assistant. They need to be sorted but this is something that Staff Tutors should not be dealing with.”

- Online access to meetings

“The main issue I find is that staff in MK are not used to using Lync to its full potential, and so tend to have face to face meetings of 10 people with 2 people joining via Lync, this does not work. Those in offices need to have a camera and headset at their desk so they can video conference properly, and the OU needs to move away from regular face to face meetings as the norm, if ST's are to be able to participate fully from home.”

“Ensure every OU employee has a headset with a microphone, and a camera on their workstation, so they can use Lync properly. Encourage people to have entirely Lync meetings (ie everyone at their own desk), rather than dysfunctional hybrids if anyone is joining from offsite.”

“The OU as a priority needs to sort out remote access to meetings, this would immediately free up travelling time.”

“ They do not acknowledge how far away and remote we are...they say in a humoristic way, 'oh this system does not work very well' people in MK are not good at organising meetings online. They are not really investing in the infrastructure needed to do meetings effectively, they laugh it off, you need to be serious about supporting the system.”

- Staff Tutor network

“I am very worried about the change to a home worker. Staff Tutors already feel marginalized as academics and by taking away regional centres as places for regional academics to network and share ideas this will be an even more isolated job. I think it will be increasingly hard for new Staff Tutors to be able to learn the ropes in such an environment.”

“If Staff Tutors no longer have regional offices the University needs to put in more support to these roles which will become increasingly isolating unless staff tutors are made to feel part of an academic community.”

“There used to be Staff Tutor specific training events, but at the moment, there is nothing. HR has cut this. If the new faculty ever gets itself sorted out, each of the super faculty should do something to help with Staff Tutor training and development. Okay, a bit of it is up to us (and the Staff Tutor group), but I can't help feeling that higher level support would be beneficial.”

In addition there were several comments about the lack of understanding of the Staff Tutor role and a need for acknowledgement of the work of Staff Tutors. This lack of understanding of the role externally has been highlighted via feedback on the successful Athena SWAN submissions, and was a contributing factor to one unsuccessful submission.

“Acknowledge how much the role demands and how flexible and skilled ST's are. How dedicated we are and how much commitment it takes to travel when called to do so anywhere in UK as well as trying to balance the AI management work. The balance and skills alone are never recognised by VCE I always get the impression that Staff Tutors are purely seen as invisible roles. This does not make it easy to gain recognition or any sort of value from anyone higher than faculty Associate Deans.”

“The Staff Tutor role is largely hidden, even TutorHome rarely mentions us. The university could make the Staff Tutor role more visible to the outside world which would help enormously with recognition by external organizations.”

“I would just ask that I maintain the role and that VCE recognise the value of the regional academics and the skills that allow students and ALs to function and work smoothly. I would also ask that it is recognised that without Staff Tutors there would be a lack of communication between MK and the rest of work force.”

“The many many changes I have experienced this far would seem insignificant to the changes to come and all I can see is tiring my energy for the role and lacking my current morale as I constantly feel as if I will be made redundant and this makes me question my value in the role.”

3.3.2 Recommendations for support

- Need to preserve a network, this can in part be provided by the department and the faculty, however there is now a need to re-establish the Staff Tutor training sessions which would also provide a platform for cross faculty Staff Tutor interactions.
- There needs to be a balance of face to face (2-3 times a year) and online meetings (per month) STEM Staff Tutor meetings to ensure that the STEM Staff Tutor network is preserved and strengthened
- More administrative support is needed, ideally a named support which ALs also have access to, so that the routine administrative tasks are dealt with by faculty assistants and not Staff Tutors.
- Sufficient Staff Tutors to ensure there is space to both deal with urgent queries and free up the time to take leave, together with robust cover arrangements.
- The University needs to urgently invest in IT equipment both for Staff Tutors and in meeting room at Walton Hall, the Nation offices and the new Student Recruitment and Support Centres (SRSC). This would enable all staff to participate in online meetings which should be offered as the norm and not an afterthought. There needs to be more meetings rooms in MK which are equipped with 360° so that all participants are able to fully engage and proper training is provided in terms of chairing online meetings.

3.4 Career progression

3.4.1 The CDSA process

A peer appraisal process takes place in all the STEM departments with Staff Tutors at senior lecturer grade carrying out appraisals for Staff Tutors within their department. This is largely seen as a positive and supportive process, however there were some participants who voiced concern that their appraisers did not have the full access to the opportunities in which staff could participate. This inhibited their ability to build a promotions case. It was also articulated that, in addition to CDSA, a meeting with their Head of Department would be useful, as these are the staff who were able to outline all the departmental priorities and opportunities. Whilst CDSAs provided a good opportunity for reflection, some Staff Tutors felt it was not particularly helpful in moving their career forwards. One appraiser noted that the CDSA training did not really address this part of the role and therefore there was a need for this to be revised.

A lack of knowledge regarding opportunities for involvement was cited both in the questionnaire and focus groups. There was a real sense that unless Staff Tutors had easy access to meetings at Milton Keynes they were overlooked and missed out on 'being in the right place at the right time'. Yet again remote access to meetings was mentioned as a necessity if this situation was going to change and all Staff Tutors given equal opportunities to both engage in all areas of the University and increase their visibility.

3.4.2 Promotions criteria

The new promotion criteria were launched in 2015, and were anticipated to provide improved opportunities for promotion for those in Staff Tutor roles. The STEM Gender Equality Group provided robust feedback on the potential impact on Staff Tutors at the consultation phase.

Staff Tutors were asked to state which category they would use to submit a case under the new promotions criteria. Table 6 shows that the majority of the 37 Staff Tutors who answered this question would use the teaching category. As there is an expectation that HEA accreditation will become increasingly important, both for individuals to evidence and for potentially for the University as part of the TEF. It is therefore of interest to note that 36 of the respondents had either gained HEA, or an equivalent teaching qualification, or were working towards one, whereas only 7 did not intend to gain HEA status.

Research and Teaching	Teaching	Research	Knowledge Exchange
6 (16%)	25 (67%)	2 (5%)	4 (13%)

Table 6. The distribution of promotion criteria categories for consideration by Staff Tutors

The promotions criteria were explored in the focus groups. Generally Staff Tutors, both senior lecturers and lecturers, thought it would be harder to gain promotion under the new criteria and they felt the criteria did not suitably fit the Staff Tutor role. The problem of the management side of the role not allowing enough space to engage with other aspects of the role in order to gain promotion, was again highlighted as in Section 4.1. Staff Tutors were concerned that the management requirement in the promotions criteria was not fulfilled by the job of managing ALs and needed to be evidenced by leading management. They also felt that the management side of the role would become even more time consuming with the group tuition policy and new AL contract, leaving even less time to develop activities for a promotions case. In addition Staff Tutors felt that the closure of regional centres would make it harder to fulfil the outward facing part of the role and homeworkers may need to engage with the new criteria in different ways. The concern that homeworkers, nation and Staff Tutors based in an SRSC would all have different opportunities meant that there were not the same promotional prospects for all staff.

“It is totally unfair. It doesn't respect or acknowledge the types of job that staff tutors do: encouraging and developing ALs, listening to students, feeding forward to module teams. It places a huge emphasis on the role of central academics, and seems to disregard, substantially, the 'people work' that we do. We help to build the social capital that helps to encourage our ALs, who are, of course, the face of the university. ... We can do an awesome job developing and supporting people, and yet this is ignored. I've heard it said that staff tutors help to line manage a number of people that would, in other institutions, be considered to be a whole department. Yet, at the same time, we've got to jump through hoops to say that we're also engaging with scholarship. The current promotion criteria is nonsense, and it doesn't do any good to instil a sense of respect for the kind of work that we do to help the university.”

“I think it will be harder (both perceptions wise and from an actual basis) for Staff Tutors to get promotion under the new scheme because although the obvious routes are either teaching or the Knowledge Exchange profiles, these areas are less well defined and tested across the university. The metrics for the research (and to a lesser extent research and teaching) profiles are much better defined, easier to 'tick' (if you're working in research), and more familiar to central staff.”

“Most Staff Tutors will need to use the Teaching profile for promotion, but this includes scholarly output and we currently struggle much more than our central colleagues to find time to devote towards this. Very few Staff Tutors have managed to use their study leave and barely any have used research leave on top.”

“I think the new promotions criteria is very tough for Staff Tutors. It would be very hard for Staff Tutors to get through on any strand other than teaching and even this is tough as they don't have time to write well thought through bids. This also forces any Staff Tutor wanting promotion down the teaching route and gives them less opportunity than before for doing their own research.”

“I am not considering promotion, as I do not think I will ever have time to generate the evidence for all the criteria.”

“It used to be quite easy for Staff Tutors to excel in ‘management’ and, with a bit more effort, in ‘teaching’. Research was much harder – I used to do research in conjunction with my local University but that was quite difficult to maintain, and now the regions are closing I doubt whether it would be possible at all. Now the AL management side is much more prescribed there is far less scope for doing interesting and innovative things, so I would imagine it would be harder to display excellence there as well.”

There needs to be an urgent review of the new promotions criteria specifically for Staff Tutors. Clarification is also needed for Staff Tutors in terms of the criteria together with clearer support for appraisers.

3.5 Opportunities for senior roles in the University

3.5.1 Senior Roles - barriers

When asked ‘Are there any barriers to obtaining more senior roles in the faculty/University?’ of the 36 respondents 67% said there were barriers. Yet again the issue of time taken to travel to Milton Keynes was raised and the urgent need for the investment in equipment to enable remote access to meetings. This certainly does pose equality issues as there were a number of female Staff Tutors who could not spend extended periods in Milton Keynes, with the current need to attend many face to face meetings, due to family commitments. By not providing routine good quality remote access the University may well be losing the experience of good quality regional staff in these senior roles.

“The time spent travelling to MK for meetings, because of the lack of good quality equipment for remote access. This means that I would need to spend either many hours of the road or large amounts of time away from my family.”

“A barrier that probably cannot be addressed is that I cannot spend extended periods of time in MK because of my family commitments.”

“One significant barrier is that I am remote from the centre and there is a lack of good equipment for joining meetings remotely. There needs to be a cultural shift towards incorporating remote meeting participation as a normal way to work.”

“These barriers are probably self-imposed. The majority of senior roles require being on campus at Walton Hall for at least a few days each week. I live a considerable distance from Milton Keynes and do not wish to move in order to take up a more senior role.”

Given that many Staff Tutors felt it would be difficult to move outside the OU because of their specialist role, the University has an obligation to ensure these staff are provided with the opportunities to further their career within the Open University.

4 Impact

Staff Tutors have chosen the role because of a clear belief in the Open University mission, they are a dedicated group of staff who are the interface between students, ALs, faculty staff and the external world. The commonality of the staff tutor post outweighs any differences between the STEM departments and the recommendations are true for the whole of STEM. Several recommendations are made throughout this report, but many of these are summarised by the four below.

Recommendations

- Clear definition and communication of the Staff Tutor role and the value the role plays in the organisation
- Organisational commitment to ensuring good quality online access to all meetings as routine
- Urgent review of the new promotion framework and analysis of feasibility for Staff Tutors to meet all the criteria.
- Increased administrative support

The need for good quality remote access to meetings in Milton Keynes on a routine basis is a constant theme throughout the responses. This recommendations alone would enable Staff Tutors to free up time to engage more deeply with the non-managerial part of their role. More importantly it would ensure that Staff Tutors were always visible, connected with central campus, had the same opportunities as central staff to serve of committees and equally considered in all opportunities.

There is an urgent need for a review of the new promotions criteria and a thorough analysis of both the promotions data and an analysis of the feasibility for Staff Tutors to engage with these criteria. This analysis needs to be carried out in the context of the closure of locations, which has a substantial impact on the working conditions and career opportunities for Staff Tutors.

These recommendations have been disseminated to each STEM Athena SWAN group and Heads of Departments to be used in Athena SWAN submissions. The University Secretary's Office, PVC Academic, STEM Executive Dean and Strategy Office have considered recommendations in this report as the basis for requirements for home working. The University Promotions Committee have also been considering how this work can feed into a review of the promotions criteria.

5 List of deliverables

1. R. Hilliam, R. Gracia, C. Calvert and V. Pearson 'Enabling Staff Tutors to achieve their potential and equipping them with the correct support in STEM', eSTeEM conference (2016), The Open University (contributed talk)
2. R. Hilliam, V. Pearson, S. Northover, E. Thomas, J McCloughry, K. Chicot, M. Gibbons, C. Calvert and R. Gracia 'Investigating Staff Tutors' careers across the STEM departments', SHARE conference, (2015), The Open University (Poster)
3. R. Hilliam, V. Pearson, S. Northover, E. Thomas, J. McCloughry, K. Chicot, M. Gibbons and C. Calvert 'Investigating the careers of Staff Tutors in STEM departments' eSTeEM conference (2015), The Open University (Poster).
4. November 2015, The STEM Staff Tutors - Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going? – SHARE, seminar series, The Open University
5. Rachel Hilliam, Carol Calvert, Rosaria Gracia, Victoria Pearson and Emma Street. 'Athena SWAN report Staff Tutors in STEM' – Report for STEM Athena SWAN groups, departmental meetings, PVCs, University Promotions committee and Strategy Office.

6 Figures and tables

Table 1. Numbers of Staff Tutors by gender in the STEM department (percentages in brackets)

Table 2. Number of full and part time staff in each STEM department by gender (percentages in brackets)

Table 3. Distribution of participants

Table 4. Staff Tutors taking study leave in last two years by gender

Table 5. Staff Tutors taking study leave in last two years by department

Table 6. The distribution of promotion criteria categories for consideration by Staff Tutors

Figure 1. Study design and methodology

Figure 2 Percentage point difference between the ideal and actual percentage of time spent on each task by department

Figure 3 Percentage point difference between the ideal and actual percentage of time spent on each task by gender