

## Annex: workload management systems

**For practitioners and managers effective workload management systems should:**

1. Be transparent, easy to understand and regularly reviewed
2. Deliver consistency but allow discretion and facilitate dialogue
3. Build in consultation and involvement of practitioners at the design and review stages
4. Enable fair and consistent workload allocation to individuals and teams within a service
5. Enable identification of an acceptable and agreed workload for each practitioner taking account of contractual working time, and their level of experience and development
6. Establish a mechanism for staff to raise concerns about their workload and have a guarantee that these will be addressed and acted upon
7. Establish the duty of managers where the workload reaches unacceptable levels to agree with the individual and/or team a written plan setting out actions to rectify the situation, for example removal or de-prioritisation of tasks or cases, allocation of additional support from another worker
8. Set a reduced and protected workload for newly qualified social workers (NQSWs)
9. Set a differentiated workload in the first few years of practice
10. Take account of intervention levels, risk and travel time
11. Take account of time needed for CPD and professional supervision activity

**Effective workload management systems are an essential tool for organisations to:**

12. Map staffing capacity against resources and demand
13. Provide robust evidence to enable monitoring, negotiating and accessing resources
14. Support a referral and escalation procedure through to service directors, elected members/board members/trustees when workload demands exceed staff capacity
15. Fulfil duty of care and contractual obligations to individual social workers

## **How to introduce a workload management system**

1. Decide the level you want to start at – you could start with one team, a few teams, or a whole service area.
2. You may need different approaches for different service areas. Your choice of scheme may for example depend on the pattern of casework in your team eg high volume/lower complexity, low volume/high complexity, short-term/long-term etc
3. Consult and involve social worker representatives/union stewards
4. When introducing a new system across a number of teams it is advisable to set up a working group involving a cross section of affected staff eg experienced and newly qualified, senior social workers and support practitioners. If you start at a single team level then all staff from the team should be engaged in the process if possible
5. Review a selection of systems and approaches and get the working group to say what they like and don't like (pros and cons analysis)
6. Select a system, refine and then pilot
7. Try to benchmark your system using a social worker who is working safely, effectively with a balanced and manageable caseload
8. Plan the training, briefing and support managers and practitioners will need to familiarise themselves with the system prior to roll-out, and during early implementation
9. Evaluate seeking comprehensive feedback from practitioners – for example, does the system accurately capture the workload pressures; are the points and time measures fair; are there other factors which need to be captured?
10. Adapt and review the system
11. Ensure that you have robust, high quality and consistent supervision arrangements in place – without these no workload management system will be effective. Review of workload should be a standard item in supervision and there should be a written record of actions agreed.

Individuals' personal circumstances should always be considered with temporary adjustments to workload as necessary and appropriate

Exemplar models can be found in next section.

## Resources for managing workloads and caseloads

Social workers are entitled to a reasonable workload but due to the variety of work situations for them there can be no single caseload number or workload measure which is universally applicable. Published models which we have drawn on in producing this resource include:

**UNISON/British Association of Social Workers (BASW) guide:**  
[www.unison-scotland.org.uk/socialwork/workloadmanagement.pdf](http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/socialwork/workloadmanagement.pdf)

**Social Care Institute for Excellence guide:**  
[www.scie.org.uk/publications/guides/guide01/managing-work/index.asp](http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/guides/guide01/managing-work/index.asp)

**Carolyn Cousins: 'Tried And Tested Team Manager Workload Allocation Tools':**  
[www.shirleyayresconsulting.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/Tried-and-Tested-Workload-Management-Allocation-Tools.pdf](http://www.shirleyayresconsulting.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/Tried-and-Tested-Workload-Management-Allocation-Tools.pdf)

[www.communitycare.co.uk/Articles/2010/04/16/114313/Social-worker-devises-workload-allocation-tool.htm](http://www.communitycare.co.uk/Articles/2010/04/16/114313/Social-worker-devises-workload-allocation-tool.htm)

**Northern Ireland Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety Caseload management model**  
[www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/dhssps\\_issued\\_caseload\\_management\\_model.pdf](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/dhssps_issued_caseload_management_model.pdf)

The exemplar of a points based caseload model in Section 2A is based on the workload weighting matrix developed by **London Borough of Tower Hamlets children's services**. For further information on this model you can contact Sukriti Sen [sukriti.sen@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:sukriti.sen@towerhamlets.gov.uk)

## Exemplars to calculate workload:

### 1] Time based template

This model attempts to establish an individual workload limit based on the capacity of each worker. It uses a quick case-by-case analysis looking at the time needed and should be used in monthly supervision sessions.

## Design

- You will need to develop agreed baselines for the number of hours factored in for general administration; a 'crisis' allowance per month (a buffer to cover the unexpected urgent demands that come up on cases); travel; and other roles.
- Then develop some benchmark timings for case-specific activities such as assessments, report writing.

## Process

- The tool should be used as part of supervision meetings at an agreed frequency or at the request of either the supervisor or the supervisee.
- The worker prepares in advance an estimate of hours to be allocated to each box in the template and shares this with the supervisor in good time before the meeting.
- Manager and worker use the meeting to discuss, adjust as necessary and agree
- If working between 95% and 99% of capacity this is considered within the acceptable range (green)
- If working between 100% and 109% of capacity this is within the warning range and should be managed by de-prioritising tasks (amber)
- If working at 10% or more above capacity, tasks/cases need to be removed (red)

## Benefits

- Completion of the template enables at-a-glance review of allocated work vs available hours.
- For the practitioner this approach enables discussion and review where case work is taking longer than originally estimated.
- For the manager and the organisation this approach helps build a broader analysis of capacity and service demand to inform workforce planning.

The template below has been partly populated for illustrative purposes to cover a 4-week period for an experienced practitioner. When using the template you will need to have agreed your inputs for admin, travel, CPD etc.

<b>Example for an experienced social worker</b>	
<b>TOTAL TIME AVAILABLE (contractual working week of 37 hours)</b>	<b>148 hours</b>
Personal adjustments e.g. annual leave; TOIL; training; trade union facility time; other identified exceptional roles, reasonable adjustments for disabled staff	-7.4 hours (1 day holiday taken)
Individual line management and professional supervision [1 ½ hours + 1½ hours preparation]*	-3 hours guideline minimum
CPD average of ½ day a week (1 day a week for	-15 hours (2 days)

NQSW)**	
Other roles e.g. practice teacher, panel member, NQSW mentor, duty rota	
General admin, team meetings, support for colleagues etc	-20 hours
Crisis allowance	-2 hours
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local travel</li> <li>Additional travel</li> </ul>	-3 hours -1 hour
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>-51.4 hours</b>
Itemise for each case current case-work tasks e.g. visits, write-ups, assessments, case conferences, reviews, court reports  Case A ▶ ▶ Case B ▶ ▶ Case C ▶ ▶ Case D ▶ ▶ Case E ▶ ▶	Number of hours
<b>Case-work time required</b>	<b>-95 hours</b>
<b>TOTAL TIME REQUIRED</b>	<b>146.4 hours</b>
<b>Total time available</b>	<b>148 hours</b>
<b>Capacity surplus/deficit</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Total time available minus total time required</li> <li>As a percentage of total time available</li> </ul>	<b>+1.6 hours</b> <b>+1.1%</b>
<b>ACTION REQUIRED: NONE</b>	

Notes:

- The Social Work Task Force laid out minimum supervision frequencies as follows: weekly in the first 6 weeks of practice; fortnightly for the next 6 months; reverting to monthly thereafter. It also said sessions should comprise at least 1½ hours of uninterrupted time.

- \*\* CPD is based on 10% of working time and includes training, study for further qualifications, case discussions, research, informal mentoring, union/professional body seminars etc

## **2. Points based template**

### **A: Caseload model**

#### **Design**

- Agree a baseline for what would be a reasonable and manageable number of notionally 'standard' cases for a full-time practitioner allowing for enough time within their contractual working week to deal with administration, and respond to crises, and other calls on their time. You will need to consult with practitioners to get this right. In the case of children and families you will need to agree whether to treat each individual child as one 'case', or to have a system for awarding reduced points for additional siblings resident in the same household and cared for by the same parent(s) or carer(s)
- Decide the base points each 'standard' case attracts.
- Then think about the factors which would affect a case's status in terms of higher risk factors, additional processes such as court proceedings, or requirement for more input or intervention. Scope how many levels there are and decide the additional points which can be awarded for cases which feature these elements
- Establish other factors such as out of borough travel that would require more time than a 'standard' case. Agree the number of additional points that can be awarded if these factors are present.
- There are two ways of dealing with supervision and CPD. The first is to allocate points to them into your model. The second is to take into account in advance time needed for these before setting your 'standard' number of cases. The Task Force guidelines recommend a minimum 1½ hours a month for supervision. You can then add 1½ hours supervision preparation time. For CPD reserve 10% of time.
- You can then take account of different levels of experience which affect supervision and CPD requirements by setting a lower level of benchmark points for newly qualified social workers, and for social workers in their second and third year of practice.
- Staff who are part-time or have additional duties such as trade union positions should be allocated a pro-rata allowance of the points benchmark
- Agree which additional points you will have in your system for additional duties such as practice teaching, training carers, AMHP duty, recruiting foster carers, panel member etc.

#### **Process**

- The tool should be used as part of supervision meetings at an agreed frequency or at the request of either the supervisor or the supervisee.

- Each worker will know the benchmark points for their experience level. Team manager and practitioner discuss cases and the points they attract before work is allocated
- If the workload allocated is between 95% and 99% of the benchmark points this is considered within the acceptable range (green)
- If the workload allocated is between 100% and 109% of the benchmark points this is within the warning range and should be managed by de-prioritising tasks (amber)
- If the workload is 110% or more of the benchmark points, tasks/cases need to be removed (red)

### **Benefits**

- The system is flexible and allows dialogue around the impact on workload of individual cases
- Workload can be adjusted up or down as case status or intervention levels change
- For the manager and the organisation this approach helps build a broader analysis of service demands and capacity to inform workforce planning
- Once established the process of agreeing points and allocating cases has been shown to be quick and easy to complete

Below we have provided a worked example which is taken from a system recently introduced in a local authority children's services department. This is an example to help show how the system works. The template can be adapted for any social work settings by changing the inputs and assumptions.

### ***Worked example: children and families***

**Base points:** 1 base point for each child to reflect individual needs

**Case status:** Child protection (CP), looked after children (LAC), care proceedings and private proceedings attract additional points for the family or household, not the individual child. This reflects the additional processes required compared with Child in Need (CiN) cases.

#### *Features:*

- CP/LAC or private proceedings = 1 point per family or household
- Care proceedings = 2 points per family

**Intervention level:** interventions are broadly classified as low, medium or high.

#### *Features:*

- Low level or transferring and ending of intervention = 0 or 1 points
- Medium (eg progression and co-ordination of CP/CiN/LAC plan) = 2 or 3 points
- High (eg timely and focused/intensive work with the family) = 4 or 5 points

**Additional factors:** to take account of out of borough travel, large group families, multi-agency co-ordination etc

= 1 or 2 points

**Additional non-case-related responsibilities:** to apply for example in practice teaching a student

= 5 points

## WORKLOAD ALLOCATION BENCHMARKS

- |                             |                          |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. NQSWs (first six months) | ~30 points               |
| 2. NQSWs (6-12 months)      | ~35 points               |
| 3. 1-2 years' experience:   | ~40 moving to ~45 points |
| 4. 3 years'+ experience     | ~50 points               |

In this worked example time needed for supervision and for CPD has been taken into account before hand when setting the points allocations. During the first three years of practice, the model is intended to provide for the building of NQSWs' caseloads and completion of portfolio together with CPD and learning needs in the second and third year.

The template below has been filled in with an example to show how it works:

<b>Social worker X Experience level: 3 years + Additional commitments: practice teaching</b>						
<b>Case</b>	Base points = 1 per child	Case status (1-4 pts per household)		Intervention level (1-5 pts per household)	Additional factors per household	<b>Total points</b>
<b>A:</b> 1 LAC + court proceedings	1	3		2		6
<b>B:</b> 2 CP	2	1		2		5
<b>C:</b> 6 neglect	6	1		2		9
<b>D:</b> 1 LAC	1	1		2		4
<b>E:</b> 1 CP	1	1		3	2 (multi-agency)	7
<b>F:</b> 2 CP neglect	2	1		2		5
<b>G:</b> 1 CP	1	1		2		4

H: 2 CiN, special needs	2	-		1		3
I: 1 CiN	1	-		1		2
<b>Additional points non-case related</b> eg practice teaching						5
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>						<b>50</b>
<b>Experienced practitioner benchmark</b>						<b>50</b>
<b>Capacity surplus/deficit</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Points</li> <li>• As a % of the benchmark</li> </ul>						0 0%
<b>ACTION REQUIRED: NONE</b>						
<b>Number of families: 9</b>			<b>Number of children: 17</b>			

This worked example is based on the workload weighting matrix developed by London Borough of Tower Hamlets children's services. For further information on this model you can contact Sukriti Sen [sukriti.sen@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:sukriti.sen@towerhamlets.gov.uk)

## B: Tasks or pieces of work template

This is a variation on the caseload model set out in template 2A above but uses tasks or pieces of work as the base unit, rather than cases. To design this model you will need to scope out indicative timings for each type of task or piece of work (as required by the time-based template). This means it will be more suitable for work areas where tasks and time needed are relatively consistent and well-defined.

<b>EXAMPLE</b> Experienced practitioner month ending		
Case and task or piece of work	Number in	Points

	current caseload	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Care plans</li> <li>▶ Assessments</li> <li>▶ Home visits</li> <li>▶ Safeguarding investigations</li> <li>▶ Case conferences</li> <li>▶ Court reports</li> <li>▶ Court appearances</li> <li>▶ Reviews</li> <li>▶ Other eg counselling sessions, running course for service users, life story or memory work</li> </ul>		
Additional out of borough travel required per task <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶</li> <li>▶</li> <li>▶</li> <li>▶</li> </ul>		Additional points
Additional duties Eg panel member, responsibility for a student <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶</li> <li>▶</li> </ul>		Additional points
<b>TOTAL POINTS</b>		
<b>Experienced practitioner benchmark</b>  <b>Surplus/deficit</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Points</li> <li>• As a % of the benchmark</li> </ul>		
<b>ACTION REQUIRED:</b>		

### A note on caseload limits

Evidence heard by the Social Work Task Force suggested that in high volume work areas such as child protection, older people's services etc there is a demand from practitioners and managers for national caseload ceilings. These would establish an additional safeguard recognised by services and regulators to protect against overload and practitioner burn-out which are particularly prevalent in these service areas.

Data from the Task Force workload survey showed a wide range in the numbers of cases held by practitioners. There were also inconsistencies about what counted as a case (particularly with sibling groups) and respondents raised the issues of varying complexity and other factors which mean one case has a much bigger workload impact than other.

However the data did show that the most common number of cases held was in the 11 to 15 bracket.

It would therefore be possible to adopt 12 cases as a crude benchmark for high volume areas and use the traffic light methodology as follows:

Amber – 13-15 cases (manage by de-prioritising some tasks)

Red – 15+ cases (tasks/cases need to be removed)

*For NQSWs apply 90% of the above.*

It must be stressed that this guideline can only ever establish an indicative warning system for overload – caseloads still need to be assessed against risk, complexity, travel and other duties to establish what is acceptable for the individual practitioner using methods described in the previous sections. For example a caseload of 8 or fewer could be the maximum acceptable for some practitioners in some work areas, while a caseload of 15 might be manageable in others – depending on both the individual's experience and capacity, and the type of cases.