

## Important information for UCU Members at Warwick University

Your union on campus

April/May 2015

### Big turnout at meeting to counter TeachHigher threat

There was standing room only at the open meeting on TeachHigher on 22 April. Over 80 people including full-time and casualised academic staff, support staff, post-doctorals and students came together to find out about the controversial new initiative and discuss ideas for how to oppose it.

Justine Mercer, Warwick UCU President, introduced the meeting by highlighting that Warwick management have not talked with the UCU in the spirit of partnership, instead releasing little information about TeachHigher until prompted by the recent media flurry surrounding it. She also warned of TeachHigher fostering exploitation through competition among casualised staff.

Fears of a race to the bottom were echoed by Matt Jackson from the Hourly-Paid Tutor Group, who reported on a survey conducted by the group which showed the average wage of hourly-paid tutors, when adjusted for actual hours worked, sits at a sub-living wage of £7.77p/h. For context, a professor on the same rates would have to work 188 hours per week to make up their salary. Jackson welcomed the standardisation and transparency proposed by management, but warned that TeachHigher erodes job security and even the current theoretical guarantees afforded by the VAM system.

Contributions from the floor emphasised discontent that the TeachHigher initiative will not address any of the pre-existing problems of casualisation, and will put temporary staff in a grey area in relation to union recognition. This point was powerfully highlighted by Ruth, who used to teach on an academic writing course via UniTemps. She was 'terminated' by the company in 2013 for taking part in national strike action. The grounds for dismissal stemmed from her 'Temporary Worker Agreement' – a fixture which looks set to remain a part of TeachHigher even if it is brought in-house as an academic services department.

Ruth added that if the university wants to commit to standardised and transparent employment for hourly-paid tutors this needs to be fair and equitable in line with fully-employed staff, with tutors paid for every hour worked and entitled to take part in UCU industrial action.

During the discussion, it was noted that TeachHigher could also affect post-docs, teaching fellows, research fellows and even emeritus staff. It was also argued that casualisation pulls up the ladder for many demographics who cannot afford to rely on piecemeal work. It was further highlighted that TeachHigher won't employ international colleagues without a visa, *ignoring that a full-time contract is required to obtain a visa.*

To widespread nods, one contributor added that TeachHigher is also bad for the university's reputation and for students (and parents), as casualisation of the workforce flies in the face of the bespoke student experience Warwick sells for £9,000 a year.

*'What if ... we got more than a penny for every £4 students pay?' we might ask.*

A head of department and other senior staff confirmed that there has been no consultation with departments over TeachHigher, whether or not they have been selected for piloting the initiative. Many took umbrage with this, and representatives of the English department announced that in their staff meeting they unanimously voted not to participate in TeachHigher if it is rolled out across campus.

This sentiment was echoed around the room, with many contributors commenting that they would be in favour of either departmental or mass boycotts of the scheme. A planning meeting is to be announced for further discussion and decision-making regarding our response to TeachHigher.

#### English Department rejects TeachHigher

On 22 April the Department of English and Comparative Literature voted unanimously to decline to hire sessional teachers through TeachHigher. Last month, media platforms such as *Times Higher Education* erupted with concern over what the effective outsourcing of academic labour might do to an already precarious field.

At the meeting, faculty raised other concerns including that the introduction of TeachHigher would take away departmental control over hires, erode the union's ability to bargain effectively, be used to get rid of postdoctoral teaching fellowships, and solidify a two-tier system.

While faculty agreed that the university needed to address the problems of hourly-paid employees, and the larger problem of growing enrolment without growing complement, faculty suggested that TeachHigher would exacerbate instead of resolving the problem.

There is growing talk of other departments adopting similar motions.

#### Join us

The UCU has members, full- and part-time, from all areas of the university, including academics, researchers, administrators and librarians. Go to [joinonline.ucu.org.uk](http://joinonline.ucu.org.uk) now and follow a few short steps – it could make a big difference to your future. Hourly-paid tutors can join for as little as £2.64 a month.

## Life's little ironies (2<sup>nd</sup> in a series)...

Having featured so prominently in the Poppletonian as an object of derision, on the latest occasion for its 'tone of voice' guidelines (<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/comment/the-poppletonian/nothing-to-laugh-about/2019694.article>), the university seems to have decided that when it comes to shooting itself in the foot access to a suitable firearm should be restricted to senior management. Anyone using the 'lecture capture' system will be required to sign a *Presenter Consent Form* requiring them to promise that they 'will not reveal any information that could be damaging to the University's finances or reputation'. Another little dent in academic freedom – and be very careful not to sigh when using '*what if*'.

## Branch action on pensions

Justine Mercer, Dennis Leech and Jane Hutton all spoke at the Academic Assembly on Pensions on Monday 20 April. University management have been openly critical of the material distributed by USS and UUK. Indeed, a sub-committee of independent lay members appointed by the University Council concluded: 'Our overall view is that collectively the assumptions are over-prudent and consequently we believe the scale of the resulting deficit to be materially pessimistic.'

### What you can do

The Warwick response to consultation on pensions has been disappointing so far but you have until 22 May to respond, so there is still time to make your voice heard. Advice from UCU on what to write is available here:

<http://www.ucu.org.uk/uss>

If you need to know more, Dennis Leech has a very informative blog at:

<http://blogs.warwick.ac.uk/dennisleech/>

Jane Hutton, UCU member and Professor of Statistics at Warwick, has also provided some very helpful material on her blog, deliberately pitched at three different levels of complexity:

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/statistics/staff/academic-research/hutton/uss/>

## Union victory on DPR

Following pressure from the branch, management have now removed the categories 'below satisfactory' and 'poor' from their *Development and Performance Review* paperwork. It is clear that they have no place in a voluntary scheme.

## TeachHigher

Most of this issue is given over to TeachHigher. In our November/December issue we alerted members to senior management's failure to respond to approaches from the union and it is now pressing ahead with what Michael MacNeil, UCU's Head of Bargaining and Negotiations, calls 'a regressive move' that will 'place academic staff on contracts that guarantee them no work, give them inferior employment rights, and provide worse pay and working conditions.'

This issue concerns all of us because it is part of a wider strategy to increase centralised control at the expense of the working conditions and freedoms of Warwick staff. It has already come to national prominence, featuring twice in the Times Higher:

<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/comment/opinion/teachhigher-wages-lower-beware-the-outsourcers-razor/2019760.article>

<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/news/unit-causes-concern-over-conditions-for-hourly-paid-staff/2019691.article>

You can help by following the lead of the English department which passed a motion at their last departmental meeting declining to hire teachers via TeachHigher.

## Setting the tone

The 'Warwick tone of voice' guidelines have already attracted satirical comment and concerns from academics that an insistence on categorical statements will undermine the efforts they make to persuade students to make nuanced claims in their work.

We're also concerned about the lack of foundation for its '*what if*' orientation. Here is the justification from the 'guidelines' document: 'Warwick is a place that fundamentally rejects the notion of obstacles — a place where the starting point is always 'anything is possible'. This can be best communicated using the language of what could be and a phrase — '*what if*'.'

If anything is indeed possible, then why has management allowed the iniquitous situation described on the next page of this newsletter to develop, and why is it planning to introduce TeachHigher, which will serve only to worsen the conditions for hourly-paid colleagues? Until it addresses these issues, we suggest a more realistic orientation for its rebranding: '*if only*'.

## You don't need to face it alone

If you're facing problems associated with your employment at Warwick and are a UCU member, you can rely on our help. We have a team of personal caseworkers, all volunteers, who are trained to provide support, advice and representation on a range of issues from contract renewal to potential disciplinary action or harassment. If you are being disciplined, or taking a grievance against another member of staff, you have a legal right to be accompanied by a union representative.

If you find yourself in this situation and would like to speak, in confidence, to one of our caseworkers, email our administrator, Claire Duffy at [administrator@warwickucu.org.uk](mailto:administrator@warwickucu.org.uk)

## Hourly-Paid Tutor Group

*As promised in our last newsletter, in what follows we provide details of an initiative in the History Department and a statement from the Hourly-Paid Tutor Group (including the pleas we quoted in the last newsletter) exposing shocking inequalities in employment practices within Warwick. It is shameful that a university claiming to learn from good practice should have entirely ignored this.*

The Hourly-Paid Tutor Group (HPTG) started as an informal support network for hourly-paid tutors (HPTs) within the Department of History and provided an environment for us to collectively express the stresses we all experienced in handling an intensive and informally prescribed teaching workload amongst colleagues that faced the same difficulties. All this, of course, on top of our requirement to find adequate time to complete personal research.

Eventually, the HPTG needed to find a more constructive way of changing our unacceptable employment conditions and decided to collect opinions and information that could be formally presented to the Department. The UCU Day of Action against Casualisation on 5 November 2014 provided a suitable vehicle for our agenda. We organized an anonymous survey asking casual employees to respond to ten questions on their experiences of employment at the University.

The response was positive and the comments tutors made underlined the saddening realities of the University's policy of casualisation. 33% of respondents did not have a contract, 60% did not have a clear job description, while just over half of respondents did not know how much and when they would be paid for their teaching. Respondents expressed that they felt undervalued and undertrained in their employment, yet equally overworked and vastly underpaid. "I teach the same amount of hours as a teaching fellow", admitted one respondent, "but earn 1/7th of what they make". This was but one of the many deplorable statements of injustice offered in response to our survey.

The HPTG also ran a teaching diary in week 7 of the spring term in an attempt to capture an accurate picture of the hours worked by hourly-paid staff. This exercise produced some truly shocking statistics. Comparing the time that tutors worked – the time spent on teaching in the classroom and preparing for seminars, communicating with students and staff, marking, meeting and providing feedback with students, and monitoring attendance – with the hours for which they were technically paid, our calculations revealed that hourly-paid staff are far from 'hourly paid'. Hourly-paid tutors were paid, on average, for just 19 minutes of every hour that they work. Only four of our respondents received the living wage, while six were paid below the minimum wage. The average true hourly rate (£7.77) for all respondents was below the living wage.

To put this in perspective, a permanent member of staff at the top of the Grade 6 pay spine would have to work over 90 hours per week, every week, to obtain this average hourly rate. It would be impossible for the average professor to work for this wage, as they would have to work for 188 hours per week, every week.

We presented this information to the Department of History alongside a charter that we had composed using an amended version of the Royal Historical Society's 'Code of Good Practice for Employing Temporary Teaching Staff in History' <http://royalhistsoc.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/CodeofGoodPractice.pdf>. Our HPTG charter, submitted in January 2014, stressed that HPTs felt undervalued, underpaid and undertrained in their employment, and that these working conditions seriously affected their financial security, time for personal research, and mental wellbeing. In outlining these issues, we hoped to initiate a constructive dialogue with senior departmental staff, and provide the grounds upon which we wanted them to take decisive action and enact change.

On 4 February, five representatives from the HPTG met with the Head of Department, senior staff and departmental administrators to discuss the HPTG charter and the case of unfair employment that we had been building for several months. The meeting was highly constructive in many aspects. The Department agreed that module conveners would be made more accountable for their workload and that the Department would actively challenge a system that allows conveners to informally offload work onto casual staff. It was agreed that additional and specific tutor training sessions would be introduced and that this training would be paid, as would the formally unpaid training lectures that tutors were casually offered to provide for undergraduate students on their courses.

As a result of our charter, the Head of Department has made a commitment to doing what is possible to improve the conditions of hourly-paid workers and has promised to refer the issue of rates of pay to HR. More recently, we have been invited to participate in the departmental council meetings that monitor teaching standards, allowing our group to provide feedback on the experiences and difficulties of working as tutors. The Department has also guaranteed greater clarity and transparency in all further policy changes and in the conditions, expectations and limitations of our contracts. Primarily, then, this meeting was a success on two levels: firstly, we created a dialogue with our Department; secondly, our Department have responded by taking our grievances seriously and supporting our motivations for change. With such immediate impact and improvement in the working conditions of hourly-paid tutors, our example is one that all departments and university management should look to implement. *(Continued on next page)*

Join your union online at: [www.ucu.org.uk/join](http://www.ucu.org.uk/join)

Hourly-paid tutoring was once, and still largely is, framed by senior staff as an 'opportunity' for postgraduates to gain invaluable teaching experience. The University is apparently doing us a 'favour' by allocating teaching responsibilities before the completion of our studies. Hourly-paid teaching no longer operates within this same land of 'opportunity', nor can the casual language of patronage be offered to justify the working conditions of hourly-paid tutors. Casual employees make up over 50% of the teaching staff at this University, and in this respect the number of hourly-paid tutors within the Department of History is fairly typical. With this said, I would like to sign off with two pleas.

Firstly, a direct plea to the University of Warwick and its senior management. We want you to understand that tutoring is no longer an opportunity, it is a supply of labour upon which you are dependent. Without our commitment to work as hourly-paid tutors, departments across this University would simply not function. Furthermore, if you value the quality of teaching delivered to students at this University, you must recognise the integral role that we fulfill as hourly-paid staff in the attainment of that quality. Casual contracts with no clear job description, verbally agreed workloads, and a range of duties far exceeding our 'hourly' rate merely serve to reinforce an impression that you are unwilling to invest fairly in the workforce that defend and maintain the prestigious national ranking of your institution.

Secondly, a direct plea to all casual and full-time members of staff, academics and non-academics at this University or members of UCU: If you wish to support our growing movement, join us at [warwickanticasualisation@gmail.com](mailto:warwickanticasualisation@gmail.com).

Casualisation is so much more than an issue affecting hourly-paid tutors in 2015. It is a system of employment that the University endorses to identify teaching staff as expendable, disposable and unimportant. *TeachHigher* only serves to strengthen this endorsement. Both should serve as alarming indications to all that the future of teaching is in jeopardy if we do not collectively oppose such 'casual' shifts in employment policy and procedures. The HPTG does not want the University to do us a 'favour', we want them to formally recognise us with the same respect and quality that we deliver to Warwick's students.

***Join UCU if you aren't already a member. All hourly-paid tutors are eligible and it costs as little as £2.64, per month. This will give you a stronger say in any local negotiations.***

## An hourly-paid tutor speaks

I'm Matt Jackson from the Department of History. I am an hourly-paid tutor teaching a core-second year module, 'The European World', and am pursuing a comparative doctoral research project around the culture of alcohol consumption in early modern England and France. I've been a student and seminar tutor here at Warwick for nearly 5 years, and have gradually become more involved in supporting UCU, taking part in the negotiation and resolution of union matters, and particularly contributing to the Hourly-Paid Tutor Group here at Warwick alongside its growing number of members since 2014.

The Hourly-Paid Tutor Group was created to provide an environment where tutors and teaching fellows, particularly those new to Warwick, could share the stresses they encountered in managing their time for marking, preparing seminars and meeting the needs of their students, alongside the pressures they faced in completing their own personal research projects. The Hourly-Paid Tutor Group now has members and support from students, full-time and temporary academic staff across departments, and it is fantastic to be involved in a campaign that strives to find a better alternative to the casualised employment conditions that temporary staff are increasingly facing. If you would like to be involved, attend future meetings, or simply hear more about the work that the Hourly-Paid Tutor Group has completed, please send an email to the group mailing account:

[warwickanticasualisation@gmail.com](mailto:warwickanticasualisation@gmail.com)

## 'If only'... Warwick and gender

The *Times Higher Education* pay survey for 2015 reveals a sadly unsurprising gap between the average salary of male academics and that of their female counterparts across the sector – and Warwick's gap is not too far short of double the national average. The average at Warwick for male colleagues is £56,589, while female colleagues have to be satisfied with £47,768, almost £9,000 less. Members seeking a more equitable arrangement need look only up the road at Aston University, where female academics earn more (an average of £49,512) and the gap is £2,781. Of course, Aston does have a female Vice-Chancellor...

## Teach Higher Developments

A follow-up meeting on 29 April attracted over 40 members who identified a number of ways of resisting the proposed changes. Meanwhile, there has been an exchange of letters between the Vice-Chancellor and UCU's Head of Bargaining and Negotiations, who is pressing for a meeting. The branch will keep members informed of developments and a full update will appear in the next newsletter.