

Important information for UCU Members at Warwick University

Your union on campus

October/November 2015

TeachHigher falls! Now to secure proper contracts!

Amid widespread outcry and under the threat of a national demonstration on campus to coincide with a summer term Open Day, TeachHigher was scrapped by university management, Warwick UCU is proud to say.

Early in the campaign, the university was forced to abandon its 'insourcing' strategy to administer casualized teaching through a wholly-owned subsidiary company, instead proposing TeachHigher as an 'academic services department'.

Nonetheless the university failed to address fears that the standardization of pay would mean the 'levelling-down' of wages, the question of whether hourly-paid staff would be employees of the university or contracted workers (potentially affecting their right to strike alongside other UCU members), and worries over the ease with which TeachHigher teaching contracts could be terminated by the university.

The planned demonstration was halted once UCU received notice from the university that "ongoing scrutiny of TeachHigher has become a distraction and TeachHigher should be disbanded." Instead, members held a one-day conference on the future of casualization with attendees from across the country.

The defeat of TeachHigher is something we should all take pride in, as with every industrial win. But let's not be complacent – TeachHigher showed the will of the university and we need to be vigilant for what will fill the void it has left.

In place of TeachHigher, the Sessional Teaching Project (STP) is being piloted in seven departments to review the pay and conditions of hourly-paid tutors. Warwick UCU president has a seat on the STP User Group, alongside hourly-paid teachers from each department. What we don't have, but are pressing for, is a seat on the Steering Group where the Heads of Department make decisions.

A recent meeting on STP hosted by the new Warwick SU postgraduate officer, Nat Panda, attracted staff from over 10 departments.

Post-TeachHigher: the view from Sociology

The victory over TeachHigher galvanized hourly-paid tutors in the Sociology department. It also brought the battle against casualization closer to home.

While efforts to corral us all together in one politically vulnerable mass across the university may have failed, sociologists have had to organize to deal with what might be considered TeachHigher-lite.

It is no longer clear to whom tutors in Sociology really answer. Is it the Head of Department? Or is it the Director of Administration? The latter, non-academic office carries joint responsibility for Sociology, Politics and Philosophy – three departments who would surely protest their distinctiveness with equal vigour.

Under the new arrangement, the hourly-rate has been cut quite substantially, but proactive negotiations on the part of a well-coordinated group of nearly 30 tutors have ensured greater recognition of the actual hours worked.

This year, tutors who deliver course seminars will be able to claim three hours of preparation time. If they deliver more than one seminar for the same module, they can claim only one set of prep time. This is better than before, but it still fails to acknowledge that tutors with more than one seminar class might want to adapt the material to better suit the needs of each group.

As the department – under its Director – forms a 'working group' to deal with hourly-paid tutors, the tutors' own group continues to insist on rolling representatives instead of being divided and, if not conquered, co-opted.

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USS Pensions

Dennis Leech, Warwick UCU Pensions Officer, and an Emeritus Professor of Economics, attended a UCU briefing in London on 25 September, along with representatives from most of the pre-1992 universities that are part of the USS scheme. He presented a full report of the day's events to the October meeting of the Branch Committee and we are very grateful to him for staying on as Warwick UCU's Pensions Officer, despite retiring over a year ago.

In November, UCU Head Office circulated a new briefing on pensions (UCUHE / 260). In it, they re-iterated UCU's opposition to both the methodology being used by the USS Board of Trustees to value the scheme, and their adoption of a potentially damaging investment strategy known as "de-risking". UCU called USS's approach "overly cautious" and "recklessly prudent". Six HEIs, including Warwick, Oxford and Imperial, raised similar concerns during last year's official USS consultation. Warwick's submission, as an employer, reads "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".

Unfortunately, these concerns were not sufficient to persuade the USS Board to adopt a different approach, at that time, but the debate is far from over.

Universities UK (UUK), who represent the employers, have unexpectedly agreed to an urgent review of the scheme's approach to funding. UCU's position is that "a change in valuation methodology is right for members, institutions and the scheme itself". It's not often that Warwick UCU and university management see eye-to-eye, but this is one of those occasions. If only other members of UUK could be persuaded to follow Warwick's lead!

Note:

The author of this article has chosen to revise the original text in light of the November briefing (UCUHE/260) and feedback from individuals named in the original version.

Professor Jane Hutton, UCU-nominated USS Director

We are delighted that UCU has nominated Jane Hutton, Professor of Statistics, as its USS Director. Jane spoke alongside Dennis at the University Assembly on Pensions in April and she clearly knows her stuff. Even more importantly, she is relentless in challenging the inaccurate and misleading information peddled by other so-called experts. We've always known there is no-one better able to hold the other USS Directors to account. It's nice to know that UCU has come to the same conclusion.

DPR...Warwick?

A new development and performance review (DPR) scheme was introduced at the beginning of 2015 without any consultation. The new form was far more managerialist than the previous one and we advised members not to use it. We also advised members not to apply for merit pay because this undermines the fundamental principle of equal pay for work of equal value.

The scheme is being revised for next year and, as promised, HR invited the unions to a focus group in early September. Warwick UCU reiterated its opposition to merit pay and highlighted the idiocy of combining professional development and competitive evaluation.

Who in their right mind would admit to a genuine weakness if the reviewer is simultaneously ranking them against their peers on a forty point scale? What is so ironic is that the HE sector is jumping on a bandwagon the corporate sector seems glad to see the back of.

Performance-related pay doesn't work, as research commissioned by UCU has clearly demonstrated (see - <http://www.ucu.org.uk/prp>). More and more big businesses are abandoning performance review (see - <http://www.newyorker.com/business/currency/the-push-against-performance-reviews>) because it's inefficient and ineffective. Step forward Accenture, Adobe, Deloitte, Gap and Microsoft ...

Calling non-academic members!

We want this newsletter to speak to all members, not only academics. If there's something we're missing, get in touch!

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Do you suffer with maths anxiety?

We need to address the UK's numeracy crisis, said the British Academy in an appeal to the government.

However, the role of maths anxiety and avoidance in holding back our nation's numeracy is not well understood by our policy makers. Maths anxiety is a widespread condition that stops many people developing skills they would otherwise be capable of learning.

Maths anxiety arises, as with other anxieties, from bad experiences of shame, trauma, or exclusion that sufferers would rather forget and avoid. In many cases, maths anxiety and avoidance, in members or in students, is adding to our workload and reducing our effectiveness.

Like short sight, maths anxiety can be successfully managed. People who learn to develop mathematical resilience go on to grow as much maths capability as they need to meet their life goals, rather than continuing to avoid maths.

However, those who are not given an opportunity to develop mathematical resilience are likely to come under increasing pressure; we already have maths anxious FE colleagues being asked to teach GCSE or Level 3 mathematics.

All our members are entitled to be re-included in mathematics, learn how to overcome anxieties and develop mathematical resilience.

Please consider:

- Becoming a coach for mathematical resilience (all you bring are good social skills, no maths required)
- Coming to the conference in November:

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ces/research/current/mathematicsresilience/november/>

UCU Congress and the Pay Claim

Two delegates from Warwick attended the 2015 Congress, armed with a motion opposing the redundancies in CEI, Life Sciences and the Medical School – which was carried unanimously - and flyers for the campaign against TeachHigher.

Congress voted for a consultative ballot aimed at rejecting the 1% pay offer. Members later displayed insufficient appetite for sustained industrial action so the 1% offer has been noted (not accepted). Further details can be found here:

http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/s/f/uc_u_henews41_oct15.pdf

Congress also voted to resist the government's 'Prevent' anti-terror strategy, which calls on educators to 'spy' on students.

Toning it down

In a welcome change of heart, the marketing department have decided not to condone lying after all. In March, they produced guidance on how to write in the correct "Tone of Voice". The document immediately attracted widespread criticism and some hilarious spoofs in outlets as diverse as The Poppletonian (The Times Higher) and the London Review of Books.

Some of the advice was merely trite - "keep it positive" - but some was completely at odds with what we teach students about academic writing and the importance of not over-claiming.

Following a meeting between Warwick UCU and Ian Rowley (Director of Development and External Affairs) and Helen Pennack (Director of University Marketing), the guidance was extensively re-written and its intended audience clarified.

Nice to know university management does listen to Warwick UCU, if only occasionally.

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 out 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

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TeachHigher: a retrospective

An hourly-paid tutor reflects on the campaign

The first time I ever heard of TeachHigher it was a minor footnote on the minutes of an academic committee.

Sat with other casual staff in the History department discussing our strategy for the following year, someone just happened to notice the suggestion that 'a new academic services department' could take over the management of casual teaching.

It was a fairly innocuous comment. At that point, we had no idea of just how much time we would spend talking about TeachHigher.

At first, we simply asked questions: what was TeachHigher, what would it involve, how would it impact on casual staff, and would we as a union and as individual casualised staff be able to have any input into the direction or shape of the project?

In a sign of things to come, we were met with a wall of dismissive silence. At times, it seemed that TeachHigher was the best-kept secret on campus. In fact, when a senior member in History quizzed the Vice Chancellor, he claimed to know nothing about it. Yet, as the year rolled on, worrying details about what the imposition of TeachHigher would mean began to emerge as the scheme entered its pilot phase.

The response was phenomenal, managing to unite both staff and students from all across campus in opposition to TeachHigher. A packed open meeting made our position clear and unanimous.

We began to plan for a national demonstration on Warwick campus, and then, without warning, TeachHigher was cancelled. Almost as quickly as it had slipped into our consciousness, TeachHigher had disappeared.

The defeat of TeachHigher was a monumental achievement. When I cast my mind back, there are simply too many people to thank for their energy, passion and solidarity. Yet the struggle for better pay and conditions for casual staff continues.

La lotta continua...

With a new academic year beginning, numerous new and continuing hourly-paid tutors have been filing into meetings with payroll to discuss teaching contracts.

Already we are beginning to hear tales of uncomfortable responses to direct questions about whether tutors will be classed as employees of the university or not – a central issue of the TeachHigher campaign.

Had an experience you would like to share with us? Get in touch!

BREAKING NEWS - CONSISTENCY, WHAT CONSISTENCY??!

Weeks after the start of term, information was finally published on the Sessional Teaching Project website making it possible to compare rates across different departments. Someone giving a lecture for PAIS, Philosophy or Sociology will be paid for five hours of preparation, whilst someone giving a lecture for the Centre for Lifelong Learning will be paid for just one. A Teaching Assistant in Maths will be paid at Grade 5 for their contact hours but Grade 4 for their admin, preparation and marking. How on earth did the Academic Resources Committee not notice these anomalies? Check out the STP frameworks on the right-hand side of the webpage: <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/humanresources/stp/>

Join us

The defeat of TeachHigher shows the power of grassroots organising through your union. With the status of hourly-paid tutors still up in the air, and redundancies in three departments last academic year (Centre for Lifelong Learning, School of Life Sciences and Warwick Medical School) demonstrating the will of senior management, it has never been more important to take part in the union and secure your stake in the university. UCU has members, full- and part-time, from all areas of the university, including academics, researchers, administrators and librarians. Joining couldn't be simpler: just go to joinonline.ucu.org.uk and follow a few short steps. It could make a big difference to your future, your colleagues' futures, and the future of HE.

Do you have a story to tell?

We aim to send out this newsletter six times a year and want all members to feel that they have a stake in it. If you think you have a story to tell, some interesting news, an idea for an item or perhaps a suggestion for something that would be worth following up, please get in touch with us at: administrator@warwickucu.org.uk
Please ensure that you mark your email **NEWSLETTER**