UCU Researchers' Charter

University and College Union

Academic research staff, often working on fixed-term contracts, on projects supported by short-term external funds or hourly-paid, can feel that their work and effort is not valued by the departments where they are employed. There are steps university departments can take to help overcome this problem.

1 Research staff should be kept up to date with any decisions about funding that may affect their post. Redundancy avoidance procedures should be in place so that when one project comes to an end, the employer should fulfil their legal obligation by making every effort to find alternative work for research staff, recognising that their skills are not confined to individual projects.

2 Research staff should be recognised as full members of the academic team and be afforded no less favourable treatment.

3 Research staff should be able to expect full recognition – in terms of author/co-authorship of journal articles, book chapters and conference presentations – for all the work they undertake.

4 Research staff should have opportunities to contribute to the preparation of or to prepare research funding bids. They should receive support from their department when doing this.

5 When starting in a new post, research staff should receive a work space, computer access, a staff card and a key to their office.

6 Soon after starting, new research staff should have received a full induction (see note 1).

7 Researchers should be integrated into the communication systems of the institution (see note 2).

8 Research staff should be provided with opportunities to attend conferences and join internal and external networks.

9 Careers advice should be given by the research team leader or other appropriate person. In particular: formative staff appraisals, advice about CPD, what are the criteria for promotion; how many papers they should expect to author or co-author during their contract; help to network with relevant stakeholders and funding bodies; presentation skills; grant-writing skills; advice on where to look for opportunities eg early career or post-doctoral fellowships.

10 Mentors should be widely available and training opportunities offered to support research staff.

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Notes

1) An induction should cover amongst others: their job role; who's who in the department; how to use the photocopier; how to send and receive post; how to access stationery; staff room facilities; training opportunities; room booking procedures; IT and library facilities; how to locate different parts of the College; departmental seminars and meetings. Induction meetings should also cover research ethics and the importance of academic freedom. Local procedures, for example probation and grievance procedures, should also be explained as part of any induction.

2) Within four weeks of starting a new post, details of each new staff member (at least name, job title and email) should be added to the department website, with subsequent changes updated promptly. Researchers should have a pigeon hole to receive their post. If this is shared, there should be a list placed nearby to identify the relevant individuals. Research staff should be kept informed of all department activities and changes relevant to them. This includes: meetings; seminars; social events; staff arrivals and departures; changes to photocopier codes and ordering procedures etc.

Useful links

UCU Researchers' email network
To join: www.ucu.org.uk/elists

UCU Training
www.ucu.org.uk/training

UCU Researchers' Survival Guide
www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=3228

Joining UCU
www.ucu.org.uk/join

UCU Anti-casualisation Committee
www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2973