



Annual Meeting for Staff on Casualised Contracts

Saturday 26 February 2022

Anti-Casualisation Committee Co-Chairs' Report

The Anti-Casualisation Committee is an advisory committee to UCU's National Executive Committee (NEC). The committee is made up of members elected at the Annual Meeting for Staff on Casualised Contracts, along with two representatives from the NEC (one from HE and one from FE). We also have a national official to act as secretary to the committee. As co-chairs, our thanks go to everyone involved with the work of the committee, both committee members and UCU staff who have worked so hard to support us.

This year has been extremely busy, despite the ongoing challenges that the Covid-19 pandemic is continuing to pose. We've achieved a lot this year, thanks to unprecedented levels of activism by both the committee, but more importantly by UCU members in branches across the country. We don't want to name names, but it feels like a groundswell of activism is building in this union and in the post-16 education sector. Members of the committee have been asked to speak at tens of branches setting up or ramping up their own grassroots anti-casualisation networks. There has been constant organising at a national level, with ACC running teach-outs in both HE and FE which were well attended, but also outside the ACC and UCU's formal structures, in grassroots campaigns like #CoronaContract.

In HE, UCU branches remain in dispute with employers over casualisation, equalities, workload, and pay stagnation (the 'Four Fights' dispute) and USS branches remain in dispute over proposed swingeing cuts to pensions. ACC has taken the firm position that these two disputes **must not be decoupled**. We have repeatedly pressed this point at Congress, Conference, Special Higher Education Sector Conference, the Recruitment, Organising and Campaigning Committee of the NEC (ROCC), and through our two committee members who sit on the NEC. We have also raised this informally with anyone who has asked for our opinion, and also with a couple of people who didn't ask.

There has been significant progress in **anti-casualisation campaigns in FE**. At Capital City College Group, the employer has agreed to open negotiations over Learning Support Assistant and Hourly-Paid Lecturer contracts. At Croydon College, wins include: a backdated 2% pay increase for all staff; 5% pay increase for learning support practitioners; learning and development routes into teaching roles; progress coaches moved onto permanent contracts; and restrictions on the use of external recruitment agencies to provide short-term urgent cover. At United College Group, the employer has agreed to maintain hourly-paid lecturers' existing contracts as well as the historical arrangements around payment for tutor groups, and to provide CPD for hourly paid lecturers. At Hackney ACE,

members have won permanent, fractional contracts for all tutors after a long campaign. At Petroc, members have won significant gains for part-time hourly paid lecturers including increased pay, improved annual leave provision, and moving many members to permanent fractional contracts.

We need to continue building on the gains in FE. The ACC has put together a number of initiatives to ensure that branches recognise the importance of fighting for the rights of all members. The committee is in the process of compiling themes and linking them to action, which may involve submitting motions for Congress. We are pleased to note from the initial registrations for the Annual Meeting that we have a larger number of attendees from FE than in recent years, and we hope to build this into greater representation of FE in the committee over the coming year. In particular, there is a need to **rebuild FE Branch Executives**, and to support existing branch officers, and we encourage FE members to consider co-option to the Committee to help us to build a project around this.

We ask that FE members send information about their priorities following the Annual Meeting, to inform the organising agenda of the incoming Committee.

We have been active in practically building UCU's **capacity to carry out effective industrial action**. We have supported the ROCC and ASOS (Action Short of a Strike) sub-committees of the NEC to address the needs of casualised members. We have seen strike pay reformed, detailed practical guidance issued on ASOS, and member communications directly addressing casualised members. This drew upon respondents to our social media survey, attendees at HE and FE teach-outs, along with discussions at pickets and member-meetings across the country. In particular it emphasised that anti-casualisation campaigning is not only for casualised workers themselves, so in addition to the opportunities and barriers to ASOS for casualised workers it addressed the same for line managers and non-line managing colleagues.

On **Get The Vote Out (GTVO)** we issued extended feedback to national officials and NEC on GTVO messaging, including the importance of highlighting that votes are by headcount, not by hours worked. This emphasises that part-time employees and PGR GTA members have an equal importance in decision making, and indeed must vote for the ballot threshold to be met. We also made other, more confidential, submissions.

We highlighted a key priority in strike and ASOS **messaging to focus on the purpose of ASOS**. In the committee's opinion there is a great need for education and communications on why it matters. That is to a) minimise the ability of the employer to recover work lost to industrial action and b) maximise additional disruption as part of the dispute. As such, ASOS must increasingly be treated seriously and supported as industrial action, not just something we do between strikes.

Looking at the **media environment**, tertiary education anti-casualisation has been featured in multiple newspapers and news broadcasts. It has also emerged as an increasingly unavoidable part of the discourse on academic social media, particularly during the strikes last December. Members of the committee have been central to supporting this, putting their experiences forwards in the media and working with journalists in the background, supported by officials' sterling work including the updated HE precarity report. Since we have started using social media more intensively we have gained followers every month, with some threads on twitter gaining almost 75 thousand views. **Please do retweet, like and tweet back**, it helps build our strength and allows us to get the message out.

HE statistics of the year have been that 33% of all HE academics are on fixed term contracts – over 68% of research-only staff, almost 50% of teaching-only staff, and with ARPS casualisation not even

fully recorded. This is nothing to celebrate. However, there has been a fall (from 4170 to 3545) in the number of academic staff on zero hours contracts being reported, which is something to celebrate. We have been repeating these headline figures at every opportunity, we sense that the union at large is becoming aware of the scale of casualisation, and they tend to get the greatest views on social media. The accompanying **message of the year** is that casual employment is not a 'rite of passage', and that whilst guidance can be issued on mitigating various types of casualisation (e.g. ASOS on casualised contracts, faster payment of casualised workers), the clearest mitigation is to focus on eliminating casualisation through moving staff onto permanent contracts.

FE casualisation data is not collected or released by the government in the same way that it is in HE. Officials have been lobbying the DfE to address this issue. Supported by FE members of the committee, UCU would aim to update and progress data collection via Freedom of Information routes in the coming year.

Private providers in HE have been a priority area of work, with multiple members of the committee working to support branches to organise, achieve founding recognition agreements and pursue local claims. We have successfully raised the profile of this issue at the NEC, securing strong support across all political or strategic persuasions of the union. This work is essential to prevent our conditions from being undercut, and the HE members would also like to thank the support from FE members with expertise in organising private providers.

The establishment and growth of the **PostGraduate Researchers (PGRs) as staff campaign** was welcomed and supported by the committee. This grassroots campaign, now supported with additional dedicated UCU staff time, has seen significant growth in our membership and activism amongst PGRs. This campaign has established training and mentoring for activists, including on submitting local claims. The national campaign has been addressing UKRI as well as individual employers, UCEA or UUK, with the government's 'R&D People and Culture Strategy' recognising precarity as a barrier to R&D and there will be a 'New Deal' for PGRs starting with a UKRI consultation.

Action to address casualisation of **research-only staff** has been a further strand of work. Here we are trying to boost activist networks, develop specific campaigning recommendations and gather more information on the employers' new tactics. Much effort has been put into establishing how far 'open-ended' contracts with an 'at risk' date represent an improvement over Fixed Term Contracts, and establishing mechanisms for boosting the 'open-ended' without the 'at risk'. We have had meetings with branches to gather information. Our interim suggestions for next year's strategic actions are in one of the annual meeting's motions, and we expect that the campaign will continue to develop next year, including to issue guidance more specifically addressing the Research Concordat and its mechanisms. Further action is also likely to include linking up with the Academic-Related and Professional Services (ARPS) committee to address the increased casualisation of staff linked to research-funding, as well as mounting casualisation in an area of the sector that traditionally has a lower union density.

The ACC also submitted HESC motions opposing cuts to the ODA and Global Challenges research budget, including working with the Black Members' Standing Committee to discuss measures to resist the cuts to a funding stream that is likely to disproportionately impact on BAME research staff. This informed our support for UCU's work on decolonising tertiary education.

We submitted a paper to UCU's **Sexual Violence Task Group**, highlighting the ways that precarity and other forms of marginalisation intersect with gender violence in the workplace. We welcome

the acknowledgement in the Task Group's report that casualised workers are more at risk of sexual violence and harassment, and we look forward to the next steps in the union's work to tackle these issues, including implementing its own policy and updating members on progress, as detailed in one of the motions to the annual meeting.

Our **pilot Teach-Out programme** has had positive effects on grassroots organising and education. Given the small size of the committee we were unsure whether hosting online meetings would be worth the effort – and we are glad to report that it probably was. The teach-outs are based on a lightweight, hour to an hour and a half's online call, with short items and discussion split between members of the committee and knowledgeable panellists (e.g. President, National Negotiators), supported by promotion in the Friday email and social media. Aiming to build capacity in branches, the teach-outs explained the current status of industrial disputes and discussed how members could influence the next steps, with an emphasis upon building understanding of how to engage with the national structures (congress, conference, special employment and equalities committees).

The **HE Teach-out** in August successfully attracted a number of activists from outside the 'usual suspects', many of whom have remained active and in contact. The findings from the discussion sessions informed the committee, were submitted to the NEC, and informed the drafting of amendments for SHESC that were the most popular votes at that conference. These highlighted the detrimental effects of casualisation on casualised and permanent workers, on pension opt-out, and resolved to allocate additional resources and communications focus to this.

Our **FE Teach Out** focused on building understanding of the barriers and solutions to organising the 'Cinderella service' of colleges, communities, prisons, private companies and the third sector. Nearly 50 members registered to attend or submitted information via the pre-meeting survey, which is a higher level of engagement with FE members than we have seen at recent annual meetings. Multiple members of the presidential team attended the evening, with the full findings submitted to the NEC to steer upcoming actions to build UCU in FE. To build awareness of the teach-out and increase activism in FE the committee contacted all FE Branches. This also secured the co-option of an additional FE member to the committee.

ACC has supported the **Union-building CPD** put on by UCU. The committee has been heavily involved with the development of the CPD programme, including (or since) its movement away from individualistic career-building and into collective, progressive action. There have been a range of CPD courses offered, including one on anti-casualisation itself (sometimes offered as a PGR-focused anti-casualisation course). They offer a bitesize introduction to members' rights, opportunities for organising and trade union powers for those who might not be familiar with either environmental or trade union activism. For example, the 'Decarbonisation and Decolonisation' course leads to an introduction to collective bargaining, branch organising, rep protections and local claims. Such CPD creates no-commitment, low visibility opportunities to increase involvement with the union. They are useful for building UCU's activist base while taking into account intersectionality, given that these bitesize courses are particularly useful for precarious or marginalized staff, and for early career, new-to-unions or younger members.

Climate emergency anti-casualisation has proven a relatively successful avenue for successful action and widening participation in trade unionism, with the ACC supporting these measures. Our emphasis has been that successfully mitigating and adapting to climate change in tertiary education requires staff to be on secure contracts, with the institutionally-funded time required to develop new working practices, expertise and curriculum. This fights back against framings that the climate emergency can be addressed through the voluntary, unpaid, or between-contract actions,

particularly by casualised workers, or grandfathered in through replacing established staff with casualised early career or climate specialist employees. Our last Congress motion ensures the UCU policy on climate change centres anti-casualisation. 'Decarbonise and Decolonise' framings have been a cornerstone of HE strike teach-outs, one of the more popular CPD sessions, and has gained significant support from students. At the Trades Union Congress a UCU motion (motion 11) on the same, supported by presentations at the TUC fringe by members of the presidential team, the General Secretary and the ACC co-chair, has successfully committed the labour movement to embedding and securing funding of education for sustainable development across the education system and trade union education by 2030, building the foundations for further action.

Update on progress of 2021 Annual Meeting Motions

1. Defend the Four Fights - University of Sheffield. Incorporated within ACC's Motion HE4 to 2021 Higher Education Sector Conference, which was carried..
2. Teaching Fellows and casual contracts - Imperial College London. Incorporated within ACC's Motion HE4 to 2021 Higher Education Sector Conference, which was carried.
3. Sustainability is a Casualisation Issue - The Open University. Developed into ACC motion 30 at 2021 Congress, carried.
4. Understanding Casualisation by Learning Technology - The Open University. Developed into ACC's motion 26 at 2021 Congress, carried. (Not subsequently developed)
5. Fighting 'subject to funding' contracts - Anti-Casualisation Committee. Incorporated within ACC's HE4 to 2021 Higher Education Sector Conference, which was carried.
6. Fighting Casualisation in Private Education Providers - University of Sheffield International College (USIC). This was taken to 2021 Higher Education Sector Conference by USIC as Motion HE33, but was not taken due to lack of time on the day. It has subsequently been passed by NEC.

Motions 1, 2 and 5 contain detail not included in HE4. They have informed subsequent ACC actions, including the teach out / consultation

Guidance documents have been published or re-promoted by UCU staff, often with ACC involvement, including:

'What Can I Do?' https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/11773/Fighting-casualisation---what-can-i-do-a-guide-for-every-UCU-member-fighting-casualisation-in-the-workplace/pdf/ucu_fighting_casualisation_guide_sep21.pdf

Guidance for PGR students: https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/12260/Postgraduate-researcher-guide-to-strikes/pdf/ucu_PGRs_strikes_guide_Dec21.pdf

Appendix 4 of Challenging Redundancies Document
https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/3076/Challenging-redundancies-in-higher-education---A-UCU-briefing-document/pdf/ucu_challengingredundancies_apr13.pdf#page=56

Bargaining for better research careers: https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/7267/Bargaining-for-better-research-staff-careers-A-UCU-guide-for-negotiators-Oct-19/pdf/ucu_bargainingbetterresearchcareers_oct19.pdf

Updated Researcher Survival guide: <https://www.ucu.org.uk/researchersurvival> or https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/4832/UCU-researchers-survival-guide/pdf/ucu_researchers-survival-guide_aug21.pdf

What Can I do? (which includes a part for research managers pages 5&6) https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/11773/Fighting-casualisation---what-can-i-do-a-guide-for-every-UCU-member-fighting-casualisation-in-the-workplace/pdf/ucu_fighting_casualisation_guide_sep21.pdf

Agency Workers guidance: <http://www.ucu.org.uk/circ/pdf/UCUBANAB27.pdf>

Holiday pay for hourly paid staff: <https://www.ucu.org.uk/circ/pdf/UCUBANAB24.pdf>

Updated Precarious Work in HE report: https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/10899/Precarious-work-in-higher-education-Oct-21/pdf/UCU_precarity-in-HE_Oct21.pdf

Conclusion

It has been a real bumper year for the ACC in terms of commitment, enthusiasm, and concrete gains. As co-chairs, we extend our thanks to the outgoing committee for their energy, ideas, and hard work, as well as to the UCU staff supporting our work over the year, in particular but not limited to our Committee Secretary Jane Thompson, David Bussell, and Sue Bajwa. We also commend the groundswell of anti-casualisation activism across the regions and nations, noting the achievements of branches across the post-16 education sector. We have done a lot this year to increase engagement with precariously-employed members and to support activism. In the coming year, we hope that plans to introduce new communication strategies with regions and branches will be implemented by the incoming committee, to further build and support anti-casualisation activism. Only by communicating and organising with branches can the ACC fulfil its role, to ensure that the full range of casualised workers experiences are understood and empowered by our union. In particular, we hope that our efforts to build participation among FE members will continue to bear fruit, and we reiterate here our request and hope that FE members will send information about their priorities to the Committee following the Annual Meeting, to inform the organising agenda of the incoming committee and help to build and support branches in FE.