

# **How to enhance UCU support for migrants working in post-16 education**

**UCU migrant members' survey  
results**

**November 2022**

# UCU migrant members' survey results: how to enhance UCU support for migrants working in post-16 education

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## Executive summary

UCU's Migrant Members' Standing Committee (MMSC) conducted a survey to help understand how support for migrant members could be enhanced. The survey was open between 23 June and 06 August 2022. There were 1,198 completed responses. The majority of respondents, 74%, were migrants while 24.4% did not define as a migrant and 1.6% preferred not to say.

The survey examined the most effective ways to communicate the support UCU offers migrant members. It also asked what additional support was needed at branch level and national level.

The process has shown that while both migrant and non-migrant members are aware of the wide range of support UCU offers, they are most aware of the guidelines for migrants regarding industrial action (63.7%) and legal support for migrant members (52%). Migrant and non-migrant members were least aware of UCU's Migrant Members' Standing Committee (20%) and Migrant Members' Conference (11.8%).

Migrant and non-migrant members were clear, they most often learnt about the support on offer was via UCU's website (31.1%) and Friday email (30.8%). Social media (8.8%) was the communication method least often selected as the way they were made aware of UCU migrant support, followed by a UCU rep or member (14.7%).

Members (migrant and non-migrant) were clear that, of the options put to them, the support they would most like to see at branch level (70.9%) was support for 'Bargaining and negotiating with employers to pay for related costs such as: visas, Indefinite Leave to Remain, Immigration Health Surcharge and citizenship applications.' While the most sought support at the national level (60.7%) was a 'Toolkit for branches to support migrant members at a local level.'

### Acknowledgments

The MMSC 2021/22 were instrumental in the production of migrant members' survey and without them, this work would not have been completed.

Special thanks to Dr. Robyn Orfitelli, Chair of the MMSC, Dr. Laura Loyola-Hernández, MMSC member, and Quinn Roache, secretary to the MMSC, for their help, feedback and written content included within the migrant members survey and within this report.

# Recommendations

## Communications

- UCU should run a campaign to increase UCU reps' and members' awareness of the support being offered to migrant members by UCU, especially:
  - Migrant Members' Standing Committee
  - Migrant Members' Conference.
- UCU should enhance the website and communications in Friday email as they are key routes for disseminating advice and guidance to members on the support available for migrant members.
- UCU should consider how to improve and embed social media communications, so they become a known route to and for distributing advice on the support for migrant members.

## Support

- The MMSC should develop support for branches on bargaining and negotiating with employers for costs related to visas, Indefinite Leave to Remain, Immigration Health Surcharge and citizenship applications.
- UCU should provide additional support to:
  - Challenging surveillance of international staff and students
  - Challenging employment discrimination.
- MMSC should develop a toolkit for branches to support migrant members at a local level, reflecting the priority areas of support mentioned above. There needs to be greater dissemination of guidance and advice as well as enhanced information on UCU's website.

## Introduction

This report sets out the findings of a recent survey to help UCU understand how aware migrant members, non-migrant members, and branches, are of the support UCU offers its migrant members.

It is based on a survey UCU ran for all UCU members but in which we were particularly interested in hearing from migrant members<sup>1</sup>.

The results of the survey will help UCU to evaluate the effectiveness of existing support provided to migrant members and what further support could be offered.

Alongside the survey findings is the MMSC's ongoing work to reclaim the term migrant so it is not seen as a smear or derogative term.

The need for this work was affirmed in responses to the email encouraging members to take part.

Several members responded with concern they had been mistaken as a migrant, highlighted they found that worrying, let UCU staff know in clear terms this had offended them and, in limited cases, were both hostile and disrespectful.

This has confirmed the MMSC's work to reclaim the term migrant should continue and that the committee should be active within this policy area.

The Migrant Members' Standing Committee organises on behalf of migrant members, as well as advising and making recommendations to the National Executive Committee, through the Equality Committee, on any issues arising specifically from or related to the interests of migrant members.

It is responsible for the organisation of the migrant members' annual equality conferences.

## Methodology

This report examines the findings of an online survey that was open to all members of the union from adult, further, higher and prison education. The survey was open between 23 June and 06 August 2022. There were 1,198 complete responses.

The majority of respondents, 74%, were migrants while 24.4% did not define as a migrant and 1.6% preferred not to say.

Of those who identified as a migrant, 51% said they were a European Union national, 44% said they were a national from a country outside of the European Union, 5% said they were a UK national and 1% preferred not to say.

The majority of respondents to this survey (86.3%) work in higher education. Almost 200 respondents (12.6%) work within further education. There were fewer responses from those working in the adult and community education 0.6% (n. 9) and prison education 0.6% (n. 9). Notably, this pattern is more extreme among migrant respondents on non-permanent contracts, 95% of whom were in HE, compared to 4.7% in FE (n. 13), and 0.7% in adult and community education (n. 2). This pattern may reflect a distinction between the average length of insecure contracts in HE and FE, combined with visa restrictions on contract length imposed by the Home Office.

This report will not report on findings where a question has a sample size lower than 100. This ensures that the key findings are statistically representative.

As this is the case, the data for those from adult and community, and prison education, has been aggregated into the main findings, as we are unable to draw accurate insights about the unique perceptions of these groups overall. However, the themes raised by these groups are included and will be used to develop further exploratory work.

In addition to the aggregated data analysis, three subgroups of respondents were identified and their results were analyzed separately: migrant members on permanent contracts; migrant members on insecure or non-permanent contracts; and non-migrant members.

The breakdown for respondents with protected characteristics and other minority groups can be found in Annex 1 of this report.

## **Contract type**

We asked respondents what type of contract they had.

Migrant members were less likely to say they were on a permanent contract (75.5%) when compared with non-migrant members (85%).

Migrant members were more than twice as likely to say they were on a fixed term contract (15.4%) compared with non-migrant members (7.2%).

The differentials for other types of contracts including open ended, zero hours, annualized hours, hourly paid with guaranteed minimum hours and term-time only, were similar.

The question highlighted that more needs to be done to ensure migrant members are able to access permanent employment.

	All	Migrants	Non-Migrants
Permanent	77.7%	75.5%	85%
Open ended (with an identifiable 'at risk' date but not fixed term)	4.9%	5.7%	3.1%
Fixed term	13.4%	15.4%	7.2%
Zero hours	3.3%	3%	3.6%
Annualised hours	1.2%	1%	1.4%
Hourly paid with guaranteed minimum hours	2.0%	2%	1.9%
Term-time only	2.2%	2.1%	2.5%

**Table 1: contract type**

## Support awareness

One of the reasons for running this survey was to understand what support members were aware UCU offered its migrant members. We asked, 'Which of the following ways UCU supports its migrant members are you aware of? (Select all that apply)'

The results highlighted that migrant members were most aware of the guidelines for migrants regarding industrial action (66.9%) but less aware of all other forms of support: less than half of migrant respondents (47.7%) knew of the legal support UCU offered to migrant members; just over a third (35.2%) knew of the guidance on immigration for migrant members; less than a quarter (23.6%) knew of the FAQs for members in relation to various aspects of the immigration process; and only one in five (19.2%) are aware of the Migrant Members' Standing Committee.

In all areas except for guidance on industrial action and the annual migrant members equality conference, non-migrant respondents report greater awareness of the support offered than migrant respondents. This, combined with the general low awareness of the current support offered to migrant members by UCU, demonstrates clearly that there is work for UCU to do in reaching members in this area.

	All	Migrants	Non-migrants	HE	FE
Legal support for migrant members	52%	47.7%	67.1%	50.3%	69%
Guidance on immigration for migrant members	39.9%	35.2%	52.3%	38.6%	41.4%
Guidelines for migrants regarding industrial action	63.7%	66.9%	53.7%	66.3%	36.2%

	All	Migrants	Non-migrants	HE	FE
FAQs on for members in relation to various aspects of the immigration process	25.5%	23.6%	31.5%	24.4%	31%
The Migrant Members' Standing Committee	20%	19.2%	21.5%	20%	17.2%
The migrant members' annual equality conference	11.8%	12.1%	10.7%	11.6%	12.1%

**Table 2: support awareness**

## Effective routes for communicating about support

UCU also wanted to understand the most effective routes for communicating with members on, and about, the support available to migrant members.

To obtain this information we asked, 'How did you learn about the support on offer?'

UCU's Friday email and UCU's website were the top two ways both migrant and non-migrant members learnt of the support on offer with around 30% of members from each group selecting those options.

The least successful route to hear about the support on offer was UCU's social media accounts, particularly among FE respondents, followed by a UCU rep or member.

While many of the route's UCU uses to communicate its support are successful it is clear UCU cannot rely on social media campaigns to distribute advice and that more needs to be done to make UCU reps and members aware of the support on offer so they can, in turn, share what support is available. The use of UCU's website, in particular, will be discussed later in this report.

	All	Migrants	Non-Migrants	HE	FE
A UCU rep or member	14.7%	15.7%	11%	14.3%	17.5%
Your branch	22.2%	22.5%	22.1%	23.8%	11.3%
UCU's website	31.1%	29.9%	34.3%	31.6%	27.5%
UCU's social media	8.8%	8.2%	11.6%	9.5%	1.3%
UCU's Friday email	30.8%	31.3%	27.9%	30.3%	35%
Another way – please specify	21.3%	21.6%	20.9%	21.4%	21.3%

**Table 3: routes for communicating support**



## Enhancing UCU's support

We also used this survey to understand how best to improve the support on offer to migrant members at branch and national level. For this part of the analysis in particular, we compared responses across several subgroups: members in HE, FE, migrant respondents, and non-migrant respondents. Migrant respondents were further divided into those on permanent contracts and those on insecure, non-permanent contracts. These groups did not differ in their overall rankings of responses, and so their data has been collapsed in the tables below. However, our qualitative analysis of responses considered contract type, and we highlight several specific consequences of precarity for migrants in the following sections.

### Branch level

To understand what members thought would be helpful at branch level we asked respondents, 'How could your branch enhance its support for migrant members?' Respondents were asked to select their three preferred priorities.

	All	Migrants	Non-Migrants	HE	FE
More casework regarding immigration issues	27.3%	26.9%	29.1%	27.5%	25%
Supporting migrants with advice, for example with advice around industrial action	42.2%	41.9%	41.8%	41.3%	54.2%
Bargaining and negotiating with employers to pay for related costs such as: visas, Indefinite Leave to Remain, Immigration Health Surcharge and citizenship applications	70.9%	74.6%	54.5%	73.4%	50%
Challenging surveillance of international staff and students	49.6%	52.2%	37.6%	51.5%	31.3%
Challenging employment discrimination	49.4%	48.3%	53.4%	48.5%	59.4%
Specific meetings with migrant members	27.5%	27.2%	29.1%	26.9%	34.4%
Other - please specify	9.8%	9.9%	8.5%	9.9%	8.3%

**Table 4: enhancing branch support**

## Immigration-related costs

In almost every subgroup of members considered, there was a clear prioritization of bargaining and negotiating with employers for immigration related costs such as visas, IHS surcharge, ILR and citizenship applications for themselves and family members.<sup>2</sup> Rising immigration fees intersect with existing gender, race and disability pay gaps, and clearly pose a pressing issue to both migrant members, and to reps supporting them.

As expressed by one participant: *"[I] dislike having to pay to be employed (ILR, surcharge)."*

A majority of migrant respondents expressed stress related to the financial toll that comes with having to pay out of pocket for these fees, and some participants indicated they or their colleagues had lost job opportunities because of not having enough money to pay for immigration related fees, upfront. Several participants noted the interaction of rising fees and precarity.

One non-migrant respondent said *"This is compounded by short, fixed term contracts meaning rather than paying 1-2 years at a time, they keep having to renew visas every 6 months causing a lot of extra money to be paid out by the individual."*

A migrant member on a precarious contract noted: *"In my institution only creme de la creme gets their visa paid which means more and more inequality."*

It seems clear that a bargaining toolkit around immigration related costs is a priority for members, crucially, in conjunction with an increased push on government by UCU to abolish these fundamentally exploitative fees.

As stated by one respondent, UCU should be *"Negotiating for more support in covering these costs (to the universities) and in lowering these costs (to government)..."*

## Challenging employment discrimination

The relative ranking of the second, third, and fourth ranked priorities for support varied; however, all subgroups indicated a desire for increased branch support with 'Challenging employment discrimination', and this was the highest priority for FE respondents.

Multiple respondents raised concerns of being victims of xenophobia ranging from macroaggressions from colleagues doubting that migrants have experience to work in UK HE or "complimenting" migrants' English, to blatant xenophobic statements such as "migrants shouldn't be allowed to steal jobs".

As expressed by one migrant respondent, *"It's difficult to pinpoint overt discrimination but it exists in casual comments and questions, eg have you been educated in the UK? The question is about the quality of education that migrants have received and therefore their ability to do a good job and right to be in the job and the country"*.

A key element brought up in the answers was fear of speaking up against bullying and/or discrimination due to fear of having their visa sponsorship revoked: *"The hardest thing about being on a visa is that you cannot 'vote with your feet' - because your visa ties you to your job, you essentially must bear any abuse, bullying, harassment, unfair conditions or poor treatment."* This puts migrants who are currently working in the UK on skilled visas which require specific institutional sponsorship in a vulnerable position, especially if they are being harassed by someone within their work and/study place.

## Surveillance and industrial action

HE migrant members ranked 'Challenging surveillance of international staff and students' higher than FE migrant members and non-migrant members, while the exact reverse prioritisation holds for 'Supporting migrants with advice for example with advice around industrial action.' This reversal may not be unrelated to the difference in awareness between HE and FE staff of resources around migrant rights in industrial action, and reflects a need to ensure that dissemination of support materials is equally effective for all groups of members.

In the area of surveillance, respondents remarked on how employers have taken on the role of border guards by monitoring attendance.

As stated by one respondent: *"I do not like the way that migrant students are treated differently around attendance. This may not be intentional but it's inappropriate. I remember how offended I was as a Phd student when those measures first came in in the UK. They made me feel marked as different. I do not want to be part of border control in my job now as a lecturer."*

These types of policies disproportionately affect migrants from racially minoritised communities, and an important theme seen in many responses was that employers and colleagues needed to know more about the ways in which hostile environment policies affect people in diverse ways depending on where migrants are from.

For example, members expressed how, until August 2022, colleagues were unaware some people had to report to police stations. Passport holders from countries including Afghanistan, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco, Peru, Sudan and Turkey, are just a few examples of those that needed to register with the police if living in the UK for more than six months.

*"Surveillance of international staff and students is a horrendous, racist policy. I am an Irish migrant so have free movement but find it utterly appalling that other international staff and students do not have the same luxury. I am embarrassed that universities have not pushed back against this more."*

There is a clear need for increased support of migrant members by branches, but high rep workloads, also mentioned by many respondents, means that this must be directly facilitated by UCU more centrally, which will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

## Enhancing UCU's support: national level

To understand what members thought would be helpful at national level we asked respondents, 'How could UCU national enhance its support for migrant members?' Respondents were asked to select their three preferred priorities.

	All	Migrants	Non-Migrants	HE	FE
Workshops on case work regarding immigration issues and employment	36.3%	34%	46.2%	35.5%	45.6%
Toolkit for branches to support migrant members at a local level	60.7%	58.7%	69.5%	61.2%	60.2%
Bi-annual meetings with in-house immigration lawyers	32.7%	35.5%	20.3%	34.3%	19.4%
Dissemination of existing guidance and advice for migrant members	52.1%	52.6%	48.2%	53.1%	43.7%
Emails specifically with migrant member topics	33.2%	37.2%	16.2%	34.2%	26.2%
Enhanced information on the UCU website	40.2%	39.1%	45.7%	39.3%	48.5%
Enhanced information on the UCU local branch website	18.9%	19.3%	15.7%	18.9%	19.4%
Further information related to migrants and industrial action	21.1%	22.9%	13.7%	20.8%	21.4%
Other - please specify	7.2%	7.3%	5.6%	7.3%	5.8%

**Table 5: enhancing national support**

By a substantial margin, the first preference of all groups of respondents was a 'Toolkit for branches to support migrant members at local level'. This priority strongly matches those

expressed in relation to branch level support, and suggest that a toolkit of local casework and bargaining materials should form an immediate priority for UCU.

Across groups, the second and third priorities were 'Dissemination of existing guidance and advice for migrant members' and 'Enhanced information on the UCU website.' These directly relate to improvements in communication addressed earlier. As of summer 2022, the MMSC and UCU equalities team have begun incorporating a limited set (2-3/year) of all member emails focused on migrant equality and immigration related issues, with this survey comprising the first. It is hoped that these more focused communications on a single issue might help flag existing resources, and indeed, 37.2% of migrant respondents selected this as a priority area of support. There is also current work being done to centralise links to UCU's website resources for migrants into a single hub, and these responses suggest that this work should be prioritised.

A clear third area of importance is to continue and expand UCU's legal support around immigration. This is evidenced in migrant respondents support for 'Bi-annual meetings with in-house immigration lawyers' (35.5%), which while not a top three pick did have a good level of support. This area further being highlighted as important with non-migrant respondents very slightly prioritised 'Workshops on case work regarding immigration issues and employment' (46.2%) in their top three choices.

## **Building a sense of community**

A clear theme which emerged in the text responses is the need to build solidarity and community amongst migrant members, who feel isolated and anxious as they navigate the hostile UK immigration system and hostility from their employer. This has a huge impact on migrant members' mental and physical health:

*"The hostile environment makes me feel isolated. It would be good to have specific meetings and communication to help know that that is not the case."*

It is often not considered how many migrants also must deal with the material and emotional toll of current sociopolitical situations in their home countries:

*"There is no recognition of the mental health toll that migrants from the global south face given the wars and/or severe economic circumstances that our families and people go through back home and sometimes the inability to go visit them. The double standard was evident with how universities dealt with the war on Ukraine versus other contexts (e.g. Palestine, Afghanistan, Syria, to name but a few contexts)."*

Without a doubt, the lead up to Brexit and the aftermath of the UK leaving the European Union has had an immense impact on EU members. This has contributed to high levels of

stress, anxiety and discrimination among EU members: *"Brexit has been the second most stressful experience of my life"*.

While joining and seeking union support might seem a logical way to build this solidarity, some migrant respondents, particularly those on insecure contracts, expressed being hesitant to join union activities, including industrial action and their local branch, out of fear this will be used against them by their employers and/or the Home Office:

*"Assure us that we will not be used as scape goats when we participate actively in industrial action due to our immigration status"*

*"I feel vulnerable joining industrial action as a migrant and non-British"*

With regards to industrial action, a small percentage of migrants vocalized not participating in industrial action because of having recently paid immigration related costs, saving up for them and/or sending money to loved ones abroad. This illustrates a clear need for UCU and local branches to reassure migrants about their legal rights to participate in industrial action, with detail that reflects the wide range of potential forms of industrial action, as well as national and local strike funds available to members to help mitigate the cost of taking part in industrial action.

Overall, it is of the highest priority that UCU supports the building of a sense of solidarity, welcome, and belonging among our migrant members, at both a local and UK wide level. Migrant specific meetings, in branches with the capacity to organize them, and focused communications to all members on migrant issues, represent clear pathways to this, but equally important is the creation of resources to educate caseworkers who support migrants, and consistently seeking feedback from migrant members on the efficacy of these materials and ways to extend and improve them.

## Conclusion

This survey has identified clear preferences from both migrant and non-migrant members alike on how/where they access information about the support available to migrant members and what support they are most aware of.

It has also highlighted the support members would most like to see UCU provide to its migrant members. The Survey has provided a strong steer for UCU to undertake more work in these areas. The recommendations set out at the beginning of this paper are proposed for the development of this work.

# Annex 1

Equality characteristics of those responding to the survey.

## Gender

Man	- 39.9%
Woman	- 54.3%
Non-binary	- 2.3%
Other	- 0.3%
Prefer not to say	- 3.2%

## Gender the same as assigned at birth

Yes	- 94.7%
No	- 1.4%
Prefer not to say	- 3.9%

## Ethnicity

White	- 69%
Black*	- 21.3%
Prefer not to say	- 4.8%
Other	- 5.2%

\*UCU uses the term 'Black' in a political sense to refer to people who are descended, through one or both parents, from Africa, the Caribbean, Asia (the middle-East to China) and Latin America. It refers to those from a visible minority who have a shared experience of oppression. The word is used to foster a sense of solidarity and empowerment.

## Disability

Disabled	13.4%
Non-Disabled	81.1%
Prefer not to say	5.5%

## Sexual Orientation

Heterosexual	66.5%
LGB+	18.4%
Prefer not to say	15.1%

## Age

18-25	1.2%
26-30	7.0%
31-35	16.1%
36-40	20.4%
41-45	18.5%
46-50	13.5%
51-55	10.2%
56-60	7.3%
61-65	4.0%
65+	1.8%