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# Supporting neurodiversity and colleagues on casualised contracts

A guide for every UCU member

# Introduction

This document has been prepared to be read in conjunction with:

Our guidance on neurodiversity on the workplace, developed with our Disabled Members Standing Committee (DMSC):

[https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/12406/Neurodiversity-Guidance/pdf/Neurodiversity\\_A4\\_guide\\_January\\_22.pdf](https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/12406/Neurodiversity-Guidance/pdf/Neurodiversity_A4_guide_January_22.pdf) (52 pages)

Our guidance on supporting colleagues on casualised contracts, developed in association with our Anti-Casualisation Committee (ACC):

[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](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)  
(7 pages)

Whilst it is important that neurodivergent members on casualised contracts are involved in the shaping of activities and campaigns against casualisation and in support of neurodiversity, the fight is one for all UCU members – however they are employed and whether or not they identify as neurodivergent.

Every UCU member can play a part in challenging casualisation and supporting neurodiversity in the workplace and we give you some ideas in the documents above and below – but this is not an exhaustive or static list. Please discuss and share these ideas in your workplace and if you have other suggestions, please let us know by emailing Jane Thompson [jthompson@ucu.org.uk](mailto:jthompson@ucu.org.uk) and Sharon Russell [srussell@ucu.org.uk](mailto:srussell@ucu.org.uk).

For more information about our Disabled Members' Standing Committee contact Sharon Russell: [srussell@ucu.org.uk](mailto:srussell@ucu.org.uk)

For more information about the ACC see <https://www.ucu.org.uk/fthpcommittee> and follow them on Twitter @UCUAnti\_Cas

# All

- 1.** Understand the social model of disability which looks at how society is organised and the social and institutional barriers which restrict disabled people's opportunities.  
See: <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/socialmodel.pdf> (13 pages) for further information.
- 2.** Educate yourself – both about the impact and levels of casualisation in your institution and about the importance of neurodiversity in the workplace. As well as the documents above (which include an explanation of neurodiversity and the language around it), UCU has a range of materials at: <https://www.ucu.org.uk/stampout> and UCU – Equality advice and guidance <https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/1940/Equality-advice-and-guidance>
- 3.** Recognise the positive impact of neurodiversity in the workplace. Recognise that high levels of casualisation both undermines neurodiversity and have a potentially disproportionate negative impact on neurodivergent staff.
- 4.** Be an ally! Speak up if policies, working practices or attitudes promote casualisation and/or undermine neurodiversity.
- 5.** Ensure tackling casualisation and promoting neurodiversity – and the intersection between the two – are given equal priority to other workplace issues – for example in staff meetings, when discussing a local UCU claim or when developing Congress motions.
- 6.** Recognise that the uncertainty and lack of structure that accompanies casualised contracts are bad for everyone but can be especially challenging for neurodivergent staff. Also recognise the additional layers of bureaucracy that neurodivergent staff face every time they move job and / or area.
- 7.** Whilst it is the responsibility of the employer to provide a safe work environment and provide any necessary reasonable adjustments, there are some things you can do to help colleagues feel welcome

and supported. This list is not exhaustive and we would love to hear your ideas:

## Communications

- Provide information in a consistent and explicit way avoiding jargon and metaphors.
- Avoid the inclusion of unnecessary information.
- Make information available in a written format – with other formats available on request.
- Where possible, use bullet points to convey important information.
- Consider the fonts and layout of printed materials. There's some helpful guidance about font size and style etc at:  
[https://cdn.bdadyslexia.org.uk/uploads/documents/Advice/Dyslexic-Employee/Dyslexia\\_Style\\_Guide\\_2018-final.pdf?v=1554827743](https://cdn.bdadyslexia.org.uk/uploads/documents/Advice/Dyslexic-Employee/Dyslexia_Style_Guide_2018-final.pdf?v=1554827743) (4 pages)
- Signpost key points in documents.
- Keep formatting as consistent as possible, for example avoiding the over-use of multiple typefaces and coloured highlighting.
- Communicate clearly, minimise distractions, check understanding and provide information in different formats, e.g. verbal, written, diagrams.

## Meetings

- Give sufficient notice and make sure that colleagues on casualised contracts are invited and are paid to attend.
- Make sure the timing of meetings are such that colleagues on casualised contracts are able to attend and / or consider holding meetings at different times / days or duplicating important meetings to maximise attendance.
- Clearly define the parameters of meetings (duration, method of asking questions, topic and whether break-out rooms will be used).

- Make sure that venues / on-line events are accessible (for example by asking if there are any access requirements in good time as part of the invite and action-ing any requests).
- Provide photographic directions to difficult to find venues.
- Provide adequate breaks – an example could be to adjourn for 10-15 mins after 45mins.
- When using on-line platforms, ask people you are inviting whether the chat function is useful or a hindrance to them.
- When using on-line platforms, allow attendees to choose whether or not to have their cameras on.
- Use appropriate backgrounds when using on-line backgrounds. Keep backgrounds simple and, preferably, without any moving images.
- Make sure you have an agenda prepared and circulated prior to any meetings and don't expect colleagues to be able to deal with unexpected matters if they have not had time to plan.
- Offer the option for written statements to be read out at meetings.
- Offer recordings of meetings and training where possible.

## **General**

- Welcome all new colleagues in your team / department, including PGRs.
- Offer to show new colleagues around – either in person or virtually. This might just be in the department (how to access the printer, where to leave your lunch) but could be across campus (e.g. how the campus is laid out, where the best coffee is served, where can you find a quiet space to work). If colleagues are moving into a new area you could also talk to them about your experiences of living locally.
- Help explain to new colleagues how things work and where to find important things and people – not just the formal structures but any informal structures and networks that keep things running smoothly.

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- Offer to be a mentor to new staff (either formally or informally).
  - Be flexible and have patience with your colleagues. Be willing to engage and learn about issues and reflect on whether your casualised and neurodivergent colleagues have been truly involved in the team's work.
  - If you have your own office space and are able, offer to share that space with colleagues working in open-plan / communal areas (or who don't have a dedicated work-space) e.g. when you are working from home, teaching or otherwise away from your office space.
  - Understand that colleagues will interact with colleagues in different ways. Do not expect everyone to behave in the same way and be cautious about assuming reasons for the different ways colleagues interact. Remain open to sharing your experiences and supporting your colleagues on precarious contracts.
  - Regularly check-in with colleagues on casualised contracts – even if your paths do not often cross. Check they understand how things work, what is expected of them, that they are being supported by their manager, that they are not working excessive hours and are being paid on time. Point colleagues to sources of support or advice if there are any problems (or help if you can).
  - Recognise that academia can be a harsh and competitive environment for anyone but the constant struggles faced by staff on casualised contracts and neurodivergent staff can make life extremely difficult. Work collegially and be thoughtful about your language and manner when offering feedback to colleagues.
  - Support the creation of, and work with, Neurodiversity champions in the workplace.
  - Recruit colleagues to UCU (or point them to their appropriate recognised sister union, if it is not UCU). Talk to them about UCU and listen (and report back) any reservations they have about joining.

# UCU branch

- 1.** Make sure the branch recognises the social model of disability. This is a way of understanding disability which looks at how society is organised and the social and institutional barriers which restrict disabled people's opportunities. The social model argues that a person may have an impairment or condition, but they are disabled by barriers they face in society, which work in combination with their impairment or condition to restrict their access and rights. Ensure that this model is adopted by your employer too.
- 2.** Recognise the positive impact of neurodiversity in the branch and on its committee(s).
- 3.** Proactively pursue anti-casualisation and neurodiversity policies including the creation of Neurodiversity champions and adjustment passports.
- 4.** Make having an anti-casualisation officer (with paid facility time) on the branch committee a priority.
- 5.** Promote neurodiversity training for members.
- 6.** Welcome suggestions for changes in how you organise and run the branch to be more inclusive.
- 7.** Make sure that communications and meetings (including timing) are unambiguous and accessible to all members (see point 7 under 'All' above).
- 8.** Proactively offer reasonable adjustments for organising, e.g. plenty of notice and reminders for events, written agendas (not changed at the last minute), option for written statements to be read out at meetings etc.
- 9.** Make sure the layout and font of written communications is appropriate and well-structured and that key information is clearly signposted.

- 10.** Add casualisation and neurodiversity to committee / branch agendas and listen to precariously employed and neurodivergent colleagues about their priorities and how the branch can help.
- 11.** Consider a survey to find out the priorities of members, especially neurodivergent members on casualised contracts.
- 12.** Encourage neurodivergent members on casualised contracts to network locally and regionally.
- 13.** Recognise that engagement from members on casualised contracts and neurodivergent members is a positive force in the branch and can bring many benefits such as enthusiasm and reliability. However, also recognise that the circumstances for such members mean that their involvement may be patchy, with episodes of burnout and phases of over-commitment. Make sure work is spread out, help colleagues to say 'no' to avoid over-commitment and ensure activists get support from officers and any branch staff.
- 14.** All of these issues can be particularly pronounced during periods of industrial action: Sheffield UCU have shared guidance specific to industrial action and autism here: <http://ucu.group.shef.ac.uk/autism-and-strike-action-guidance-for-autistic-workers-and-ucu-branches>
- 15.** Promote our Casualisation and Neurodiversity documents [[https://www.ucu.org.uk/socc\\_materials#neurodiversity](https://www.ucu.org.uk/socc_materials#neurodiversity)] to all members
- 16.** Use the Anti-Casualisation and Neurodiversity Manifesto [<https://www.ucu.org.uk?mediaid=13560>] to develop a local claim

# Managers (anyone who directly line manages or supervises staff, including PIs)

1. Adopt the social model of disability which looks at how society is organised and the social and institutional barriers which restrict disabled people's opportunities.
2. Champion neurodiversity in the workplace as a positive force.
3. Familiarise yourself with any neurodiversity policies that you have in the workplace. If there are none, ask why not and request that the employer works with the recognised trade unions and any relevant staff networks to develop one.
4. Make sure that you have an understanding of neurodiversity, casualisation and their intersection, as it pertains to your role as a manager.
5. Make sure your team understands neurodiversity and the impact of casualisation and the intersection between the two.
6. Make sure you include all staff in communications, events, meetings, training etc. (formal and informal), including staff on casualised contracts. Make sure that staff on casual contracts are paid to attend meetings.
7. Make sure that communications and meetings (including timing) are unambiguous and accessible to all members (see point 7 under 'All' above).
8. Proactively offer reasonable adjustments to all staff, e.g.
  - flexible working including home-working
  - access to quiet spaces
  - flexible deadlines

- Offer support and advice to staff on how to improve their chances of having a contract renewed or being moved to a permanent contract and support them in doing that. However, do not make promises / statements about what will happen at the end of a contract that you may not be able to honour or are outside of your control.
  - Communicate clearly that important decisions will not be made at social events, that there is no expectation to attend such events and there is no detriment in choosing not to attend.
  - Offer regular one-to-one meetings to discuss and prioritise tasks.
  - Help staff identify and access training needs.
9. As much as possible, allow team members to play to their strengths and don't push staff into roles / activities that they will find difficult or problematic.
  10. Allow adequate time for tasks, giving staff more time if required. Allow flexibility in the order and way tasks are completed.
  11. Make sure that you implement any reasonable adjustments in a timely manner and that systems are in place to ensure the adjustments are in place for all circumstances (i.e. don't require someone to have to make repeat requests each time you e.g. have a meeting).
  12. Promote the use of 'Adjustment Passports' within the institution and across different employers, see [https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/10225/Reasonable-adjustment-passport/pdf/ucu\\_adjustment\\_passport\\_apr19.pdf](https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/10225/Reasonable-adjustment-passport/pdf/ucu_adjustment_passport_apr19.pdf) (28 pages). Offer to work with any member of staff to develop (and keep up to date) such a passport and quickly implement any adjustments that are in an existing passport for new staff.
  13. Make sure all staff receive a comprehensive induction, backed up with written materials, as soon as possible after they start work.
  14. Make sure all staff have a written contract of employment which sets out their duties and their terms and conditions of employment.

- 15.** Make sure staff understand (and have in writing) how their pay is calculated and how much holiday they are entitled to.
- 16.** Do not give staff more work than they can reasonably be expected to complete in their paid time (taking into account any reasonable adjustments).
- 17.** Make sure staff know (in writing) how to access their annual leave, where to find the grievance procedure, the process for reporting sickness absence, how to make a flexible working request, etc.
- 18.** Recognise the impact of casualisation on your staff and wherever you can, move staff to more secure contracts.
- 19.** Consider how working practices can undermine a neurodiverse workforce paying particular attention to workloads, the sensory environment, workplace design, provision of breaks and the availability of quiet spaces.
- 20.** Ensure all staff have access to a workstation and a quiet space and can work from home when that suits them (subject to the needs of the service).
- 21.** Ensure that working arrangements are known and predictable.
- 22.** Do not make unnecessary changes to the work environment or working practices. If you have to make changes make sure these are explained well in advance and put in writing. These should also be negotiated with the union if necessary.
- 23.** Keep in regular touch with staff on casualised contracts to make sure they understand what is required of them, that they are able to carry out their work within the hours they are paid and that they have everything they need to undertake their role.
- 24.** If you are involved in payments in any way, prioritise processing and payment of staff on casualised contracts. If staff require timesheets to be approved before they are paid, make sure you process their timesheets in a timely manner. Check staff are being paid on time and, if not, chase it up.

- 25.** Be thoughtful about how you manage staff and how you provide feedback.
- 26.** If you are involved in recruitment make sure the process is open, fair and well understood. Avoid inappropriate and irrelevant personal characteristics in job specification e.g. 'team player', 'outgoing personality' or judging candidates on how they present at interview. Consider providing questions in advance of the job interview to shortlisted candidates.
- 27.** Welcome redeployed staff to your area of work and encourage colleagues to do the same.