

OLASS contracts start in remaining six regions

On 31 July the OLASS contracts for the remaining six regions in England will start. For many members the changeover will have been relatively smooth, transferring from one college to another or from a private company to a college.

Unfortunately, for many members this will not be the case and they will be leaving the employment of a college or local authority to be employed by a private company.

In this latest round one new private company- Fern will be involved in prison education and Tribal and A4E increase their presence in the sector with A4E winning the contracts for all the Kent County Council prisons, the Kent prisons from Amersham and Wycombe College, a majority of prisons from City College Norwich and a couple of prisons from Matthew Boulton College. A4E now has an involvement in 30 prisons in England.

Members and UCU generally are unhappy with the involvement of private companies in the public sector. The biggest concerns have been the arrangements for staff in the Teachers Pensions Scheme and the recognition of the union for collective bargaining purposes.

Although this transfer took place under TUPE legislation, pensions are not covered. There are government arrangements which stipulate that where there is a public sector transfer such as this and there is a final salary scheme the new employer has to offer a comparable pension scheme. With regards to recognition, again under TUPE this transfers automatically and therefore our ability to continue to represent members collectively for bargaining purposes is protected.

From the outset UCU indicated to A4E that these were the main areas of concern and this was also reflected in the 'roadshows' they organised. Our initial request was that they should join the TPS. When we found out that they were ineligible to do so, we requested the other option be 'current added years' (CAY) but asked that they compensate the staff for the employer's contribution. CfBT had done it and we saw no reason why A4E should not but they turned us down eventually offering four different options to staff.

The LSC knew of UCU's position as we formally made this request to them but still A4E would not agree.

At a meeting with UCU on 20 July they said they would talk to their board about it. However, at this meeting they agreed that UCU would be recognised as per the current arrangement

with each provider subject to further talks in the future. We were pleased about the recognition but extremely concerned and unhappy about the position on pensions.

In the meantime members in the Kent Sheppey cluster prisons had organised a petition and we arranged for this to be circulated and also encouraged members to contact their local MP. In addition, Roger Kline Head of UCU's Equality and Employment Rights Department wrote to Bill Rammell Minister of State for Education about the unsatisfactory situation on pensions.

A4E met the LSC on Wednesday and Thursday this week and on Friday morning their CEO for the Southern Region confirmed to UCU that they had agreed to pay the employers contribution under CAY arrangements to enable TPS members to stay in the scheme if this is what they prefer.

This is a major breakthrough. With the support and active participation of members we were able to influence the company. It is a good start and it shows that members have to be directly involved to influence decisions about their employment.

These contracts are for three years as they all end in 2009 when in principle there will be a new round of tendering. The LSC may choose not to go down this road but we do not know. **It is imperative that UCU is able to influence this process and the key to this is our organisation on the ground.**

What you can do:

- **Circulate this newsletter**
- **Put it up on notice boards**
- **Pass it on to known non-union members**
- **Sign up new members to the union**
- **Find yourself a local representative**
- **Keep in touch with the union**

We will be issuing regular bulletins/newsletters - make sure you are on our contact list. For more information contact your local officers.

The regional office contacts for the new employers are:

Mary Cooper- all Kent prisons, South East Including Isle of Wight email mcooper@ucu.org.uk

Mike Moran – East of England prisons email mmoran@ucu.org.uk

Colin Gledhill - all City College Manchester prisons email cgledhill@ucu.org.uk

Russ Escritt - West Midlands prisons email rescritt@ucu.org.uk

Christiane Ohsan, National Official email cohsan@ucu.org.uk

You can find out more about the Current Added Years Scheme by requesting leaflet 721 from the Teachers Pension Agency at www.teacherspensions.co.uk/ or by ringing **0845 6066166**.