

Report of the Annual Meeting for Casualised staff on Saturday 22nd January 2025

Prepared by Kevin Daws, members of UCU's Anti-Casualisation Committee

The Annual Meeting of Casualised Staff had a very interesting Agenda with some excellent motions which stimulated good debates, as well as a good panel of speakers along with some interesting and informative workshops.

The one disappointment on the day was that we had only received 3 nominations for the Anti-Casualisation Committee (ACC) – one from FE and two from HE. As a result we sought members to co-opt to the Committee. We still have 1 FE place left – if anyone is interested (and especially if you work in Prisons) please contact jthompson@ucu.org.uk.

There is no doubt that the ACC is making progress through working with the different regions and nations within the UCU structure.

The North West has been undertaking a lot of work around organising casualised staff and developing communications between members, branches and the region. A lot of credit for this work must go to Ben Pope.

Similarly in the South West, they held a well-attended Equalities and Casualisation event at the beginning of February which was ably organised by Jeff Pocock and his team. This event emphasised the integral link between Equalities & Casualisation. The event was quickly followed up by their first South West Anti-Casualisation newsletter. They have also set up a South West Anti-Casualisation Whats App Group. They are planning an in person or hybrid event in Plymouth and also intend to hold a Migrants and Casualisation event in partnership with the South West Equalities Committee.

In the London Region Christina Paine is building a team of members to work on casualization issues and raise the profile of those issues across London. She has set up a London Region anti- casualization network to join casualised workers across the region together to plan actions and provide information and solidarity. London Region now has a growing team of reps and they are working to grow the network. They also aim to map contracts and equalities across the region

We do want to build a network of Regional Anti-Casualisation Officers as well as a comprehensive network of Branch Anti-Casualisation Officers – does your Branch have an Anti-Casualisation Officer? If yes, please contact the committee. If not, if you are employed on a casualised basis, have you thought of becoming your Branch Anti-Casualisation Officer?

Does your Region or Nation have an Anti-Casualisation Rep? If not, could you offer to do this?

Debate on Motions

The Annual Meeting debated and agreed 6 motions which are listed below:

3 motions were submitted by City of Bristol College

- Equalities & the Casualisation of work
- Recruitment and retention of casualised members in Further Education
- Casualised employment and structural racism

2 motions were submitted by the University of Edinburgh

- Protect casualised staff amid budget cuts and redundancies
- Demand transparency on the extent of casualisation in HE

1 motion was submitted by London Metropolitan University

- Fair Facility Time Agreements for National Anti-Casualisation Work

All of the motions were debated and agreed before the lunch break

Workshops

After the lunch break we held 3 workshops but unfortunately I only have the notes from 2 of them. Workshop 1 was 'How will the Employment Rights Bill affect casualised members and how can we use it in the fight against casualisation? There should be a lot of information and briefing available about this once the Employment Rights Bill becomes law.

Workshop 2 - Launch of the Researcher manifesto and how to use it to win more secure contracts for research staff

Thanks to Shivanti Lowton for a copy of her notes

4 key points

Point 1

Breaking the link between an individual job and a specific piece of grant funding, to include exploring a pooled resourcing model.

Point 2

A statement about moving to a situation where genuine open-ended contracts are the norm and reducing the use of fixed-term contracts and open-ended contracts with an identified 'at risk' date.

Point 3

Agreements on a policy on the use of fixed-term contracts

Point 4

Agreement on processes and systems to support continuity of employment and avoid the risk of redundancy at the end of a funded research project

The manifesto is calling on or requiring University employers to work with UCU to:

1. implement policies that improve the security of employment of research staff with a view to breaking the link between an individual job and a specific piece of grant funding. This will

include exploring a pooled resourcing model and the transfer of research staff to genuine open-ended contracts that are not linked to funding periods.

2. move to a situation where genuine open-ended contracts are the norm, reducing the use of fixed-term contracts and / or open-ended contracts with an identified 'at risk' date. Agreeing a target with our local UCU branch for such a move over the next 12 months. In the transitioning period we will ensure that any fixed-term contract (or the time before an 'at risk' date) is no shorter than 24 months, other than in agreed instances such as parental leave cover.
3. reach agreement with UCU on a policy on the use of fixed-term contracts that avoids use of such contracts other than in agreed, specified and time-limited circumstances e.g. for parental leave cover.
4. agree processes and put systems in place that support the continuity of employment and minimise the risk of redundancy at the end of a funded research project. E.g. proactive and meaningful redeployment, active bridge funding and extended notice periods and (as a very last resort) enhanced redundancy pay. This will include provisions for staff who are pregnant, taking maternity leave, taking adoption leave or taking shared parental leave during their redundancy protection period. These approaches should be integrated and should feed into the overall commitment to improve the security of employment with a view to breaking the link between an individual job and a specific piece of grant funding.
5. work with UCU to create development opportunities and secure career paths for our research staff.

The full manifesto is available here https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/14731/Research-staff-manifesto-2025/pdf/Researchers_Manifesto_Jan25.pdf and the accompanying Branch Guidance is available here https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/14732/Research-Manifesto-branch-guidance/pdf/Researchers_Manifesto_Guidance_Jan25.pdf along with more detailed information.

Workshop 3 Anti-casualisation and equality. Why fighting casualisation is an equality matter

Notes provided by Christina Paine

Integral Overlap Between Equality Strands and Casualisation

Key Facts & Context

- Marginalised workers are disproportionately in insecure jobs
- Disabled workers, women, Black and minoritised workers, and those with caring responsibilities are overrepresented in casualised employment.
- 2019 data: Disabled workers were significantly more likely to be in insecure work.
- Pay gaps and career injustice are worsened by structural barriers, including discriminatory recruitment practices.
- The costs of insecure work hit disabled workers harder, deepening financial and workplace inequalities.

Challenges of Long-Term Insecure Work

- Once in a casualised contract, it is difficult to transition to permanent employment.
- Casualisation reinforces systemic inequalities, worsening existing disadvantages.

- Employers exploit legal loopholes to maintain insecure contracts.

Key Questions & Discussions

1. How can we stop insecure work?

- The gig economy and capitalist market conditions have normalised casualisation.
- Precarious employment is deeply entrenched in society, education, and knowledge-based industries.
- Key structural issues:
 - Lack of respect for knowledge workers.
 - AI and misinformation shaping job security.
 - Regional economic divides affecting access to stable jobs.
- Potential Solutions:
 - National Conditions of Service: Secure contracts across the education sector.
 - Stronger Legal Frameworks: Employers must be held accountable.
 - Addressing Underemployment: Tackling the economic conditions that force workers into precarious roles.

2. How can we achieve true equality for workers?

Equality laws exist but are not enforced properly.

- Key barriers:
 - Inequitable treatment of marginalised workers.
 - Underfunded education sector contributing to job insecurity.
 - Lack of legal penalties for employers who violate equality laws.
- Demands for Change:
 - Stronger enforcement of equality laws
 - Harsher penalties for non-compliance.
 - Legal accountability for employers.
 - Investment in workplace accessibility: Fully accessible buildings and workplaces.
 - Collective action & worker power: Ensuring leadership is held accountable.
 - Economic reform: Government policies (e.g., Rachel Reeves' economic plans) must consider disabled and casualised workers.

3. How do we make employers follow the Equality Act?

- Current gaps:
 - Employers can easily justify discrimination with weak legal defences.
 - Lack of access to justice for casualised and marginalised workers.
 - Public awareness of employment rights is low.

- Proposed Actions:
 - Stronger penalties for violations of the Equality Act.
 - Higher legal standards for justifying insecure contracts.
 - Public awareness campaigns: Informing workers of their rights.
 - Increased legal representation: Ensuring access to justice.
 - Strengthening the Public Sector Equality Duty to enforce fair employment practices.
 - Leveraging Equality Legislation in Bargaining to improve protections for casualised workers.
 - TUC-led, cross-union approach to tackling casualisation.

4. Barriers to Fighting for Equal Terms

- Casualised workers often fear retaliation for demanding better conditions.
- Some victories in equality campaigns have led to job losses, rather than improved conditions.
- The reform vs. revolution debate:
 - * Reformist approaches risk minor improvements without structural change.
 - * A revolutionary shift is needed to eliminate casualisation entirely.

- Call to Action:
 - UCU must lead a national strike for casualised workers.
 - National Conditions of Service must be enforced to guarantee fair treatment.
 - Stronger enforcement of equality laws is essential to making real change.

- Final Notes & Next Steps
 - Linking this discussion to the Anti-Casualisation Committee.
 - Collating data on the loss of casualised workforce due to poor conditions.
 - Building cross-union solidarity through TUC and sector-wide initiatives.

This is just an overview of the Annual Meeting for Casualised Staff but we want to feed back on a lot of the positive things that came out of the meeting including:

Highlight the huge overlap between Equalities & Casualisation

The Researcher Manifesto, which we are delighted, was launched at the Annual Meeting

Hopefully many of the motions agreed at the Annual Meeting will appear on the Agenda of UCU Congress or the relevant HE or FE Sector Conference

How you can help

If you would like to help organise casualised workers so that they can have a more effective voice please let us know.