

## **PRISON EDUCATION CONFERENCE 2010**

### **REPORT of UCU's Work**

**OLASS3** dominated the work of the Union for most of the last year as the contracts were being re tendered for. Although the LSC met their timetable of deciding who to award the contract to by the end of March 2009, they were challenged by one of the unsuccessful bidders and nothing happened for a few months while they sorted out the problem.

The decisions for the South West and part of London were not affected by this but for the vast majority of members this meant more uncertainty.

While A4e lost Kent and Haverigg they retained their work in the SW and gained a few more. Mercia Partnership lost Liverpool and Kennet. Lincoln College is now a bigger player alongside Strode College, Kensington and Chelsea College (KCC), Milton Keynes College and the Manchester College –TMC (now responsible for 76 establishments.)

In London the 'successful' bidders for one of the 2 Units pulled out because they did not find the level of funding acceptable and the transfer was delayed until 1 October when Kensington and Chelsea College agreed to take on the 3 prisons.

Eventually the LSC confirmed the decision to award the contracts very late and the TUPE consultations started with the minimum amount of time to meet TUPE regulations in relation to handing over information to the new employer.

As a result there were lots of problems in the first payroll for the Manchester College staff as this is where the greatest numbers of staff were affected. Many staff did not get paid at all or were paid at the wrong salary. It became clear very soon that The College did not have everything in place to cope with such a huge intake of staff and it became extremely difficult to resolve the problems.

### **UCU organisation**

In the light of the changes relating to the 'new' employers, the union reviewed its organisation and created new prison ed branches for the KCC and TMC. Changes and adjustments were made for the A4e branch and they are now one branch covering East Anglia and the South West.

We now have a system where regional offices give support and assistance to members working within their patch sometimes advising reps and sometimes representing members where there are no reps.

Membership in prison ed has also increased considerably and we have made great improvements to the number of local reps that we have. Reps have also attended UCU training in greater numbers. However there are still large areas where our organisation is relatively weak.

We also now have 'email networks' for reps in the new branches. Our membership records still need to be tidied up as TMC has subcontracted work to other colleges.

Members who used to deliver IAG have also moved to new employers.

## **DISPUTE**

This last year also saw the first non pay dispute in prison education when members at Oakhill STC took a one day strike in a dispute with TMC over the College's failure to address numerous complaints of bullying and harassment

## **EXCLUSIONS**

We raised with the LSC and at Ministerial level our concerns about the absence of an exclusion procedure which is fair and reasonable. Eventually NOMS became directly involved and we submitted a draft procedure to them. They, in turn, had been working on a procedure which they presented to us in June as part of a consultation exercise. Although we met their deadline for responding we then heard nothing from them until earlier this year. Their procedure was unacceptable to UCU and at a meeting in February we explained our reservations. The meeting was positive and we wait to see whether they have taken on board our comments.

There have been a number of exclusions in the past year and although some of these were resolved satisfactorily, in far too many cases we have seen instances where lack of information from the prison service hampered our ability to obtain a fair outcome for members. We have also seen many cases where governors are refusing to reinstate members even when their employer has cleared them of any misdemeanour.

## **NEW DEVELOPMENTS**

By and large OLASS3 has been introduced without too many problems in most places. The curriculum offer has changed and the paperwork increased considerably and members have complained bitterly about this. The systems are more rigid and management ask more of their staff because of the funding methods. However at the Manchester College things have gone horribly wrong.

## THE MANCHESTER COLLEGE (TMC)

Within 3 months of taking over, TMC realised that there were huge funding problems and budget shortfalls. So they decided NOT to pay the 1.5% pay increase to OLASS staff. They then started negotiating for more funds from the LSC but in November decided to give notice to pull out of the contracts for the North East and South East regions. Eventually the LSC agreed there were unforeseen and unanticipated problems and made £1.9m available to keep them afloat for the current financial year. However, the College says they need to make £5m savings and currently are consulting the Unions on redundancies and other measures to make these savings.

They have worked out that they would need to make 450fte staff redundant to make the £5m savings but decided not to. Instead they plan to make 250 staff redundant in OLASS, mostly on the teaching side. They intend to make up the difference by worsening the terms and conditions of staff by increasing teaching hours, reducing holidays and reducing the Sickness Scheme.

So far they have made savings of £1.1m from the pay freeze, have received £1.9m extra from the LSC, but are still looking for £5m. In addition they have imposed changes to working practices and in some places have capped the number of hours for sessional staff.

Consultations have been extremely difficult and unsatisfactory overall. Reps have not had their facility time agreed or reinstated in all cases.

Members at the TMC face the worse situation prison ed members have had to face in many years and if TMC succeeds in changing contracts as they propose this spells bad news for others and for the work delivered by members generally.

**The coming year:** the situation will not be any easier given the pressures on budgets as well as reviews by the YJB. UCU needs to continue to recruit new members and ensure that we have reps in every establishment in order to enable us to look after members' interests. In addition the union needs to develop its health and safety work in prisons.

UCU's work centrally has been supported by staff in the policy, parliamentary and external affairs and press departments as well as the campaigns unit. In addition Keith Mallinson, NEC member has been involved in key discussions with the NEC. The Further Education Committee received regular reports of the overall situation as well.