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Time to Tackle Excessive Workloads: A Threat to Quality and Health

Whenever members are asked to name their major concerns at work – excessive and demanding workloads always features high on their lists. Not only does an excessive workload have detrimental impacts on work life balance it also threatens the ability to consistently deliver a quality service to students. -"Give us the time to teach" is a common refrain.

At its worst, excessive working hours can have a detrimental effect on health. Our national stress surveys indicate year on year increases in levels of stress experienced by UCU members because of workload demands.

UCU has embarked on a nationally co-ordinated campaign to address this situation. Last October we wrote to colleges asking them to confirm that they have already or will, adopt the terms of a 3 year old national agreement which is designed to address the issue of excessive working hours.

Disgracefully, to date we have not had any response whatsoever from most colleges. The colleges that have replied, generally fail to address the most important part of the agreement – to simply commit to carry out risk assessments of current working hours and duties to ensure they are not resulting in a negative impact on the health and safety of staff.

The agreement does not prescribe a specific formula of working hours such as maximum teaching hours. It provides a flexible framework procedure to enable local agreement to be achieved on tackling any excessive workload demands that are identified.

Unfortunately the refusal by most colleges to even acknowledge the need to at least investigate working hours does suggest a dismissive attitude towards national agreements and even more seriously to their legal obligations to protect the health and welfare of their staff.

We have written again to colleges seeking their commitment to conduct risk assessments and hope for a more positive response by the beginning of February. However where colleges continue to ignore our request or refuse to adopt reasonable measures to address the situation, we will be calling on members to support a campaign including industrial action short of strike, to ensure the agreement is honoured by employers.

We will keep you and your branch informed on the stance taken by your employer.

2013/14 Pay Claim

Whilst workloads continue to rise, pay levels remain far from satisfactory. FE has escaped a full pay freeze over the last two years and we have pushed back any strings attached to national pay award recommendations. The facts remain however, that in the last four years:

- Prices have gone up 14.6% (RPI)
- Average pay for full time FE lecturers has gone up just 0.9% (A real terms pay cut over four years of 13.7%)
- FE lecturers continue to be paid on average 5.7% less than school teacher colleagues to teach the same students. (ASHE)
- While over just two years 2009 – 2011 College principals average pay rose 5 times faster by 4.7%

FE trade unions will be submitting a claim to the national employers by the end of this month, for a 5% pay increase for 2013/14. Union negotiators will also be meeting shortly to discuss a plan of action behind the claim and the UCU national FE committee will be finalising next steps at its meeting in early March. Further information for members will follow.

Staff on Casual Contracts Annual Meeting - Friday 15 February 2013

The UCU's annual meeting for Staff on Casual Contracts will be held on Friday 15 February 2013 at Carlow Street, London, NW1 7LH from 10:30 - 16:30. Refreshments and a light lunch will be provided.

The meeting will hear reports on the work of UCU in relation to staff on casual contracts, including those on fixed-term, hourly paid

and agency contracts and will have the opportunity to discuss motions submitted by branches and local associations. These motions will be used to advise the NEC about the views of our members on casual contracts, including fixed-term, hourly paid and agency members. There will also be a number of speakers and workshops and plenty of opportunity to network with colleagues

Registration details can be found at: <http://www.ucu.org.uk/2751>

Registration - Deadline Friday 1 February 2013

Recruit a colleague – build the union!

As the cuts in post-secondary education continue to bite, the pressure on our union to recruit continues. UCU has launched a major national campaign to build recruitment involving branches, regions and every member.

You can play your part by recruiting a colleague in your workplace. One simple and fun way to do this is to check your email inbox, open up the weekly campaign update tomorrow, and every Friday, and use the personalised link in that email. Just email this link to a friend or colleague with a message urging them to join.

If they use it to join online, you will be automatically entered into a draw for a John Lewis hamper and will have the chance to join Karen Bushell from the A4E Prison Education Branch, our most recent winner from last year. It's not the only way to build the union, but it helps and it's already bringing in hundreds of new members, so give it a go today.