

NEWSLETTER



AN INFORMATION BULLETIN FOR PRISON EDUCATION MEMBERS

SPRING 2013

WHAT'S HAPPENED IN THE LAST YEAR?

At its Annual Prison Ed conference, UCU took stock of developments in the last year. The Conference took place roughly half way through the first year of OLASS4. Although for some the start of OLASS4 was delayed.

The retendering process leading to OLASS4 brought some changes for members. Strode College a longstanding Prison Education provider has now lost its entire OLASS contract and the work has gone to Weston College- a newcomer to the sector. This means that in the South West, there is complete change. In London (now Greater London as prisons in Surrey are included in the geographical entity) the provision has gone to A4e and Kensington and Chelsea College are out of the sector. The situation in Kent and Sussex remains the same as the Manchester College keeps the provision as they do with the North West, Yorkshire and the Humber and North East Regions. However, TMC lost the West Mids region to Milton Keynes College who now have the contract for West and East Midlands and South Central. Lincoln College also lost all their contracts to Milton Keynes College. A4e kept the contract for the East of England region. Although they lost the work in the South West, they remain involved in 2 regions.

The work is now contracted to 4 providers: 3 FE colleges and 1 private contractor. The Manchester College still remains the largest provider with 43% of the (adult) provision.

Many members welcomed the change: those in the West Mids region were glad to no longer be part of the Manchester College and they as well as their colleagues in South Central were keen to move to Milton Keynes College. For many the move to A4e was not one they relished as this affected their pension rights adversely in spite of Government approved measured put in place.

OLASS4 is a major change for members as the rules have changed radically. Prisons are now 'clustered' within Regions i.e. the programme is about enabling the learner to progress in their learning journey as they go through the prison system. The emphasis is on beginning of sentence especially with short stays and those on remand and the end of custody as the offenders are preparing for life outside. This does not mean there is no provision for those on long sentences but resources are targeted to meet the individuals' needs. In addition, the funding methodology has changed to one where payment is on achievement and courses are now subject to the Guided Learning Hours principle, so quite a challenge for providers and for members. At the same time, prisons are going through huge changes with staff cuts resulting from the Fair and Sustainable programme, OU courses are no longer funded and 'working prisons' is being introduced.

Members had a lot to report and complain about on the day and Sharon Barrett Head of Learning and Skills, Co Commissioning at NOMS heard the moans and complaints and was able to hear directly from staff how things are not working on the ground in a way providers are sometimes reluctant to raise.

It is well known that UCU is totally opposed to the involvement of private companies in the public sector. Our opposition to A4e in that context goes back to when they first got involved. However, we have always made it clear that this did not mean we would not engage with them once they became our members' employer. The transfer of the London prisons to A4e was not without its complications and from the start UCU engaged with A4e about the issues of concern to our members. Without any collective bargaining system or consultation arrangements in place, and with A4e in principle not recognising Unions in spite of TUPE provisions, we have nonetheless been in constant discussions with A4e over the associated problems of the transfer as there were issues about the transfer and retention of some staff at senior management level and a number of outstanding individual cases to resolve. Overall these were resolved and a number of discussions took place with A4e over future working arrangements with them. We are pleased to report that progress is being made in respect of the recognition arrangements. We have developed a good and positive working relationship so far but much remains to be sorted out.

Early in the year, the Government announced the closure and partial closure of a number of prisons and this meant redundancies for members. Again all providers affected engaged with us in a consultation process and we were able to achieve some redeployments and save many jobs even if the consultation process, specially with TMC was not properly adhered to.

We have now reached the point where the curriculum changes under OLASS4 are being implemented and MKC have started the redundancy consultation process for one of the regions affected by the changes.

We will do our best to avoid compulsory redundancies and seek to redeploy as many staff as possible.

With the implementation of Fair and Sustainable in prisons, we have seen many instances of regime change and as a consequence members are seeing their daily working hours change to suit new prison regimes. It has not always been possible to handle these in a timely manner, very often because we have been notified of the changes a very late stage. But by and large we have been able to advise members so there has been no abuse of their working hours. Branch officers have played a key role in being able to advise members during these difficult times.

We may be reaching the end of the tunnel with the introduction of an exclusion procedure for Non Directly Employed (NDE) staff. NOMS have drafted a procedure that will be binding on all public sector prisons and should be used in private prisons as well. Although we have been involved very closely when this was being drafted, the final product currently doing the final rounds of internal consultation does not meet some of our basic demands. This new procedure- if it goes ahead- will provide some basic rules but it is likely UCU will not be able to sign up to it.

For our members working in Young Offenders Institutions, there is more change ahead and we will have to see what the future holds for them- will it be secure college, more retendering, new employers.....

Whatever the future holds, it is clear UCU remains the main Union that organises teachers, trainers, Learning Support assistants working in prisons delivering OLASS. Our membership remains steady with a steady increase which offsets those we lose through redundancies/retirements and resignations. We have seen an increase in the number of local reps and their presence on all UCU training events. We have regular meetings with NOMS/BIS/MoJ/SFA/EFA at the OLASS forum and are able to feedback members concerns and general views about developments in the sector.

Graham Mawdsley NEC member representing prison ed members and Secretary of the TMC Branch has played a key role not only as a Branch Officer but as NEC member he has ensured the interests of members working in prisons has been on the UCU agenda

SURVEY SHOWS HIGH STRESS LEVELS

UCU surveyed prison educators and the results show that we suffer from high stress levels, long working hours and a poor work/life balance. The full report, 'A Punishing Regime', can be found here: http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/8/b/ucu_punishingregime_prisonstress_mar13.pdf

This survey was undertaken by UCU with the intention of gathering data to inform local and national negotiations to tackle occupational stress and improve work-life balance for those working in prison education. UCU has produced a stress toolkit, which is available at:

<http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2562>

The timing of this latest piece of research will allow UCU to raise with the 4 providers issues around workload specifically for prison educators as part of the Union's national workload campaign.

JOIN UCU

With all the current uncertainties, including OLASS 4 changes, there has never been a better time to join your union.

Our reps work in prisons and provide support to members – backed by full-time regional and national officials, and an excellent legal service.

Branches negotiate with management on a range of issues.

We campaign to protect education provision and funding, and raise prison education issues.

We are committed to negotiating a staff exclusion policy and oppose regular re-tendering.

Through Recourse UCU provides 24/7 support. Membership rates start at £2.58 per month and tax relief can be claimed.

For more information visit:

www.ucu.org.uk/whyjoin

YOI CONTRACT CONSULTATION

UCU has responded to this consultation is available on the Prison Ed pages of our website www.ucu.org.uk

PAY

UCU, along with other unions, have rejected the AoC's offer in reply to the Unions' 5% pay claim. For more details:

<http://www.ucu.org.uk/fepayengland>

UCU NATIONAL PRISON EDUCATION CONFERENCE GRAHAM MAWDSLEY NEC PRISON ED REPORTS

UCU recently held a well-attended annual prison education conference. Reps from all four providers, A4e, Manchester, Milton Keynes & Weston Colleges, were present. Sharon Barrett (Head of Learning and Skills, Co Commissioning, NOMS), was the guest speaker who spoke about clustering arrangements, partnerships & working prisons around the OLASS 4 agenda. Sharon took questions following her presentation and members delivered searching questions that hit the key strategic issues. UCU meet regularly with NOMS, SFA & BIS and it was refreshing to hear that concerns we had raised on your behalf previously were on course to be addressed and whilst every question could not be answered on the day it is very useful to put these types of questions to persons in positions of influence and a means by which we can effect change.

Branch organisation was then discussed. UCU's Manchester College and Milton Keynes prison education branches regularly meet management to negotiate on a range of issues. Each branch has a committee backed by an extensive rep network and members are consulted about issues to raise. Weston College reps are looking to strengthen their organisation and A4e members are keen to get organised once recognition discussions are completed.

We ended the day by saying goodbye to a longstanding rep, David Tyler, who was thanked for his many years service to UCU. David became a local rep under Kent County Council and he worked unstintingly for members in his own prison but across Kent, A4e and later TMC.

The full report is on the Prison Ed pages of the website www.ucu.org.uk

INTERESTED IN BECOMING A UCU REP OR CONTACT?

We need more members to become reps and contacts - especially as there will be many changes associated with OLASS 4. It means that we will be stronger as a

It means that we will be stronger as a union, more likely to achieve improvements and better able to support our members. Where we have reps and contacts we often have higher membership and members are better informed about issues in their workplace.

Being a UCU prison education rep or health and safety rep involves: letting members and potential members know what UCU is doing and let your union know about any relevant issues); recruiting colleagues (the best way is by talking to them, we also produce newsletters and other material); and supporting colleagues with individual concerns. Full training is available (see www.ucu.org.uk/training) and support is provided, including from your branch executive and other UCU reps through an e-mail network, and from regional and national UCU officials. You will receive time off your usual duties to undertake these varied and fulfilling roles.

Being a UCU contact involves: distributing information occasionally eg newsletters, leaflets or posters. You don't provide individual support to members, receive training or get time off your usual duties but you and your colleagues would be in a much more informed position as a result. You can let us know of any issues that affect you and your colleagues whilst your branch executive and national officials will keep you updated and can answer any questions or queries you may have. The role may involve an element of recruitment too.

If you are interested in either the role of a rep or contact please contact organiser Ronnie Kershaw at rkershaw@ucu.org.uk

AVOIDING BREACHES OF SECURITY

Staff at one prison were recently reminded about following all prison security rules and instructions.

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Our health and safety rep has responded to this as some prison education staff are letting prisoners through doors and gates - and it is not always the case that there is an officer on call to help with taking prisons around into and out of classes etc and with the pressure to fill classes many staff are doing things they should not.

Please make sure members are reminded of their obligations and also make sure that education UCU members are not put in a situation where managers are putting pressure on them leading to a breach of security.

UCU ACTIVITIES ROUND UP

There is now a UCU Prison ed Branch for every provider and branch officers at Milton Keynes and the Manchester College have been taking more and more responsibility for dealing with local issues and raising collective issues with their employer centrally via their branch committees.

For example the prison closure redundancies at TMC, MKC and a4e were handled by Branch officers with support from UCU regional offices and national officials as required.

Casework is now largely dealt with by local reps or Branch officers with back up and support from regional and national officials depending on circumstances.

A facilities agreement has been signed with MKC and TMC has finally decided that there is a need for a Prison specific Health and Safety committee. The College has also agreed to review the trainers' contract and the Union side is led by Trainer reps.

UCU remains the only organisation that brings together the practitioners responsible for the delivery of the programmes below management level. UCU provides a forum where staff from the same employer have the opportunity to meet and share information and discuss new practices and initiatives - at no cost to the staff. UCU remains the only organisation that involves the staff (its members) in i.e. staff who are at the receiving end of instructions to deliver new programmes without being involved in any of the discussions around not