

Questions to ask at company presentations

In cases where management plans to outsource an existing service or plans to set up a new partnership with a private company, it may be that members of staff or even unions are invited to company presentations on your campus. Here is a checklist of useful questions to ask the company. The list is obviously not exhaustive and does not cover every situation, but it provides a set of questions to help you get started.

Staff pay and terms and conditions

- Are you aware of current pay and conditions of service for staff?
- Do you anticipate increasing/reducing current staffing levels?
- Are there any elements of the current staff terms and conditions that you feel you cannot replicate?
- If so, will you be producing a statement detailing what measures you intend to introduce to replace these or compensate for them, as is standard practice in these situations?

New employees

- How are pay and terms and conditions of employees determined?
- What perks or incentives are offered to staff?
- What is the company's annual leave policy?
- Does the company have a written sick leave policy?
- Does the company offer redundancy entitlements above the statutory minimum?
- What proportion of the workforce is on:
 1. permanent contracts?
 2. temporary contracts?
 3. contracts with employment agencies?
 4. unwritten contracts?
- Does the company expect unpaid overtime?

Pensions

- Does the employer currently run a pension scheme which has been assessed by the Government Actuary (GAD)?
- What pension scheme will the employer be offering transferred staff?
- Are the company's employees entitled to join an existing scheme?
- Is it an occupational pension scheme, money purchase or stakeholder?
- Does the employer's pension scheme have employee trustees?
- Are some employees excluded from the pension scheme?
- Do you run two schemes, one for new employees and one for transferred staff?
- How much are employees expected to contribute?
- How much does the employer contribute?
- Do you practice ethical investment policies in your pension fund?

Educational experience

- How many of your company's employees have previously worked in tertiary education?
- How many educational institutions have you contracted with before?
- Can you give examples of similar contracts to this one?
- What qualifications do you require from your staff and are you aware of how they compare with the sector?

Union rights

- Will you recognise UCU as the representative of academic and related staff?
- Do you encourage your employees to join a union?
- What are your employee representative structures, eg works councils etc?

Equal opportunities

- Does the company have a written equal opportunities policy?
- Has it run an equal pay audit?
- Does the company offer flexitime?
- What are the attitudes to work-life balance policies on part-time working, compressed hours, term-time working etc?
- Does the employer offer childcare assistance?
- Will the company honour existing childcare arrangements?
- Does the employer offer maternity, paternity, adoption and parental leave above the statutory minimum?

Training and staff development

- Does the company have a written policy on training?
- Does the company conduct annual audits of employees' training and development needs?
- What is the company's policy on internal recruitment and promotions?
- Do part-time staff have the same opportunities for training and promotion as other employees?