

# NEWSLETTER



AN INFORMATION BULLETIN FROM MILTON KEYNES PRISON EDUCATION BRANCH

SPRING 2013

Welcome to the second branch newsletter. You will have all had the UCU Prison Education Newsletter, which covers all those in OLASS. This newsletter is for Milton Keynes College (MKC) employees. MKC provides education in over 30 establishments. Our branch can bring any major issues straight to the senior management team to ensure they are dealt with promptly and effectively.

## UCU's Milton Keynes Prison Education Branch Committee

Your branch committee are;

Matthew Fisher - Chair - HMP Onley  
Rachel Barnes - Vice Chair - HMP Birmingham  
Gina Hillsdon - Secretary - HMP Winchester  
Marion Pitt - Equality - HMP Stocken  
Martin Keighery -ULR - HMP Bullingham  
David Farrah - H&S - HMP Ranby/Lincoln  
Debbie Ballard - Membership - HMP Glen Parva

## Recent Meeting

The committee met with Sally Alexander (Head of Offender Learning, MKC) and Alison Wayman (Head of HR, Offender learning, MKC) on 19/04/13. A number of issues were discussed and we have reported on them in this newsletter.

## Pay and Increments

We asked if there was any news on a pay rise and/or increments. We were told that any increase was at the discretion of the Board of Governors. We emphasised that many staff had not had a rise in 2 or 3 years. Some staff had not had a rise in over 4 years, depending on their previous employer. In the wake of OLASS 4 and new funding methodology; the governors are delaying their decision until they are more certain on affordability. MKC said they are keen to reward staff and they are looking into the affordability of doing so.

The college did reiterate their promise to honour incremental payments of those members whose establishments who have moved over to MKC in August last year. Their reason for not doing so at present has been the complexity of all the staff's differing employment contracts. We are told that back-dated incremental payments are imminent!

## OLASS 4

The main item on the agenda was OLASS 4. We were blunt and told MKC that staff did not think OLASS 4 was working and staff often found the emphasis was on quantity while sacrificing quality.

Members in some establishments had been given targets for achievements but were beset with under-subscribed classes, over-subscribed classes, prisons not sending inmates, GLH and students being on the wrong courses. These factors resulted in difficulties reaching targets. Often the way the targets had been introduced was unsatisfactory and had been, on occasion, threatening.

MKC agreed the funding methodology is "challenging" and informed us that this had been raised on a cluster and national level. MKC stated that they had been lobbying the government to try and improve things. They said it was very much a balancing act, ensuring there are sufficient learners to make a class viable, but not too many to make learning impossible. They did say that if there are not sufficient students then classes may be cancelled, but staff should not be being threatened with this fact.

#### **OLASS 4 (continued)**

MKC have been trying to identify where the blockages/difficulties are in order to rectify them, where possible. They are committed to making OLASS 4 work, but are aware this is not an easy task. Please let us know of problems you may have encountered so we can raise it with the college and attempt to improve things!!

#### **Tutor/Learner Ratios**

Following the discussions about OLASS 4 we asked if there were any set guidelines for ratios. We had concerns that in some establishments, classes had too many students on the register and asked for clear guidance on this matter. MKC said it is dependent on the risk assessment for each classroom, in each establishment. The union thought it was important for staff to know these figures in the interests of safety and quality of teaching and learning. The union asked if this information could be clearly communicated to staff. MKC said this information should be available to all staff. If this information is not readily available in your establishment please let us know.

#### **Staff arranging their own cover and annual leave**

This question keeps cropping up, and the answer is still the same....

MKC told us it is the responsibility of the managers to arrange cover. Anyone being asked (or told) to do so needs to let us know.

MKC have appointed a new HR manager with responsibility for OLASS. She will be looking at drawing up guidelines for annual leave processes. This document will be shared and discussed with the union before distribution to managers. Hopefully, once this is complete, the processes will improve across the board.

#### **Regime changes**

We asked if MKC had been informed of any changes to the regime in any establishments. Sally Alexander told us that if they are informed about any changes, the college try to influence these changes and find a "creative solution". She said that it is not always possible and sometimes the prisons impose changes. She said she was not aware of any imminent regime changes apart from those already in progress.

#### **HR surgeries**

MKC said that the regional HR advisors (HRAs) will be basing themselves in prisons on a regular basis, to build relationships with staff in all establishments. MKC have said they will try to ensure that establishments are informed of the dates HRAs will be onsite so that staff have the opportunity to arrange a meeting if required.

Alternatively, MKC stated that the HRA's are happy to deal with queries on the telephone or e-mail. If you need the contact details for your HRA, your union rep should have this information.

#### **Contracts**

The branch asked MKC about the variety of contracts that staff have and whether they intended to standardise the different contracts. MKC said this was not their intention. They will be doing some road-shows in the coming months to address any issues and/or confusion on the way managers are implementing contracts. If you have any specific questions about your contract or the way it is being implemented you can ask your HRA or ask your local rep.

#### **Training**

The committee told MKC that many staff felt they had little or no access to training. This was especially true for sessional tutors. Those sessional tutors that did have the opportunity to go on a training course were often doing so at their own expense and/or with no financial reward from the college. Alison promised to look at this and see what could be done to improve training opportunities for staff.

#### **Contact UCU about your issues**

That sums up the last meeting. If anyone has any issues, do not hesitate to contact your local representative or the branch committee. The next meeting planned with the college is at the end of July. If you have any major issues that you would like the committee to raise on your behalf please get in touch.

***Prison Closures***

Earlier this year the Government announced the closure of a number of prisons. This affected some prisons where MKC runs the OLASS contract. The College immediately engaged with UCU over the statutory consultation process to avoid/mitigate the job losses. Branch Officers supported by the UCU Regional Office were involved in the collective consultation process at College level and Matthew and Gina represented individuals facing redundancy.

Through this and, with a management committed to do their best to avoid job losses, UCU was able to help many members and some non members in either being redeployed or sorting out their redundancy compensation payments. It was not possible, in all cases, to save all jobs - either because staff could not transfer to other prisons as the travel made it impossible or because of other personal circumstances. The process was not completely smooth. UCU played a key role in assisting individuals in securing the correct redundancy payments as we found that some of the personnel information transferred from TMC was not accurate or even complete. The Union also represented members where the process was not carried out fairly or within the terms of the redundancy procedure put in place by the College.

UCU would have wished to be able to save every job but this was not possible. However, the Union's involvement meant that those who need assistance, advice and representation received it, even if it meant that Gina and Matthew had to travel all over the place to do this. This shows how important it is to have local reps in every establishment so that the Union is able to help members in these difficult times.

***OLASS 4 Redundancies***

The process of implementing the new OLASS4 curriculum and programme has started and the first region to be affected is South Central. Following a series of consultations with the prisons, NOMS etc the College is ready to introduce the new programmes. These changes have led to the proposed loss of approx 65 posts but the creation of approx 67 posts. Final figures are not yet available as there have been last minute changes as some staff have resigned or retired. On paper at least, there should not be any compulsory redundancies but unfortunately not every 'new' post is suitable for individuals who are losing their old post.

Once again the College is consulting with UCU. Branch Officers and reps have supported members. Gina Hillsdon and Tina Farrow have covered most of the meetings where members needed assistance and/or representation. The College is looking at redeploying as many staff as possible. There are some difficulties, especially as some VHL staff are losing hours and new hours are on a different grade and less pay e.g. trainer rate or ALS support grade. UCU is monitoring this very carefully as although we are pleased that the overall job losses may be mitigated, individual members are facing some significant loss of earnings.

Thanks to our involvement, the College is able to ensure that there is consistency in the approach that each establishment is following as we report back where we find discrepancies or different practices.

Members affected by this current round are urged to contact Gina Hillsdon or Christiane Ohsan if they need help and support.

This is only the beginning of the review of the curriculum under OLASS4. The College is looking at the other regions and we expect to have to support and assist many more members as they too face changes and possible job losses under the new contract.

## Why Join UCU?

- With all the current uncertainties, including the OLASS 4 changes, there has never been a better time to join your union.
- UCU is a national union with almost 120,000 members
- Our prison education reps work in prisons and provide support to members – backed by full-time regional and national officials, and an excellent legal service.
- Milton Keynes UCU prison education branch negotiates with management on a range of issues and regularly keeps members informed.
- Nationally UCU is committed to negotiating a staff exclusion policy and we oppose regular re-tendering.
- UCU raises members' issues with Government ministers, MPs and relevant professional bodies
- Through Recourse UCU provides 24/7 support: counselling on work and personal issues; advice on stress, workload and dealing with difficult people.
- Financial and insurance advice is provided by Endsleigh. There is a cost free compensation scheme for any work-related accident or disease.
- Membership rates depend on how much you earn. They start at £2.58 per month for those earning less than £5,000 per year. Tax relief can be claimed on a proportion of your subs.

You never know when you might need us.  
Join UCU today

For more information visit: [www.ucu.org.uk/whyjoin](http://www.ucu.org.uk/whyjoin)

## Your union needs you!!

Where we have no reps or even a contact, it will be challenging to be able to help and assist members. We need volunteers to come forward either as rep or contact as a matter of urgency. The Branch officers have limited time to help and assist and sometimes meetings take place on the same day which makes it impossible for us to cover every department and help every member. Help from members is vital.

Your union is better able to represent and support members in prisons where we have reps. It involves helping members with individual problems, raising issues with managers and keeping members and potential members informed about UCU, plus letting your branch know when issues arise. Full training ([www.ucu.org.uk/training](http://www.ucu.org.uk/training)) and support is available.

Alternatively please consider becoming a UCU contact – this role involves distributing information and making your branch aware of issues. You don't help members with individual problems or raise issues with your manager.

Please contact your branch if you are interested in either role.

All this work shows how important it is to be a UCU member. Please pass on this newsletter to non members encouraging them to join UCU.

The next newsletter will be out in approximately 3 months.