Casework Coordinator Notes

**Introduction**

For those not aware of the work that UCU does, a lot of work goes on behind the scenes helping individual members with issues they have.

We help, advise and represent on a variety of different work-related issues.

The cases vary and can cover:-

1. Appraisal issues and advising on whether an Appraisal should be signed if the Appraisee disagrees with the Appraiser
2. Capability – whether an issue with MEQs or Research outputs
3. Problems with flexible working requests
4. Advising on acting as a witness and what to expect.
5. Promotion – how to respond to a rejection and appealing, the responsibility of HR, timescales, outcome and followup
6. Restructuring and potential job regrading.
7. Harrassment
8. Grievance cases – either being bought by a member of against a member.
9. Leaving the University and negotiating a Settlement

**So why do things go wrong?**

Mistakes can be made.

For example, if a member is called into an “informal” meeting re Capability, Sickness etc it must take place in a private neutral environment – and not in the middle of a busy coffee shop!

There is an obligation on the Line Manager to follow the meeting up with notes that are then agreed by the person called to the meeting. If any action or supervision period is required this must be made clear.

In a Stage 1 meeting the member has a right of representation. This will usually be at local level – although we may be contacting Regional Branch officers for advice if needed. However if things progress to a Stage 2/3 we can involve the Regional officers in the meeting if necessary. The aim however is to stop it going that far!

**So, you have a problem – what do you do?**

A Case Coordinator or Colette Maxfield, Branch Administrator, will send out a Casework form so that the member can give brief details of what the issue is and what category it falls into. The member will also be asked if they would prefer to be contacted on a private email address.

The case is assigned a number and it is suggested that this is used in the subject title of an email. This enables retrieving paperwork relating to specific cases easier and filing.

After the casework form has been filled in we will often have an initial private meeting with the member. Sometimes we refer the case to one of our committee members who is knowledgeable on employment law, pensions etc.

If a member needs a UCU rep. to come to them to a meeting we can find someone suitable to the case and brief the UCU rep. on the situation. Often the rep will have a meeting with the member prior to the meeting. This does depend on the timescale which is often quite short. The rep will type up their own notes of the meeting and agree their accuracy with the member. This is very useful when comparing the notes with that of HRs.

In more difficult cases we can use the experience and advice of the Regional Branch officers.

We do have access to Legal advice although often the problem is stopped before it gets that far.

**Important – please note that you do have to be a paid-up UCU member for 3 months before we can get you Legal advice if it is found to be necessary.**

We usually try to give advice from our Committee members shortly after someone becomes a member. Other UCU branches have different policies on this – some may make you wait one month or more.

Bear in mind that our priority **is** to our members and the work is quite time-consuming so, unfortunately, it is not possible to give “informal advice” to non-members due to the workload we already have.

We keep all paperwork re a case in order to build up a pattern of events and a timeline of correspondence. This helps us if the case develops as we can spot mistakes made where procedure has not been followed and try to get something resolved early.

We are also categorising the cases to see if there are, for example, more females than males getting turned down for Promotion, how many cases of Harrassment/Stress etc we are dealing with and any trends that are coming up. This is particularly important given the recent news on Athena Swan.

**Recent Successes**

In the past year we have been successful in getting a grievance dropped against a senior member of staff;

Helped with a potential regrading situation resulting in the person affected not being downgraded

Helped with several requests where flexible working was refused. In one case there were no grounds being given by HR and little time was given for appeal. We got the appeal time extended and agreed by HR and then advised the employee who subsequently negotiated a flexible working solution satisfactory to employee and Line Manager.

Negotiated Settlement Agreement or got a better agreement than was originally offered by the University where an employee decided to or was invited to leave.

**How can you help yourself and help us to help you?**

* It sounds obvious but, if a Line Manager agrees something verbally with you or you disagree about something do follow this up in writing and keep a note of the dates of the correspondence. It does help to build up a record of correspondence in case the issue escalates.
* If there is a timescale to be followed for a response from your Line Manager or HR , ie, during a restructuring consultation period or appeal following a promotion rejection make sure you know what it is and that you both keep to it. Do not be afraid to ask for a response if non is forthcoming or an extension on a decision process if the reason for the extension is reasonable.
* Do check the University website re their Policies and Procedures –they do change and it is worth keeping up to date on them!