

UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE UNION

UNIVERSITY OF SURREY BRANCH NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2013 ISSUE



Inside this issue:

Your guide to Academic Appraisals

Fixed Term Contracts

Academic Freedom and Statutes

Staff Survey Action Plan

Time off and Facilities Agreement

REF: ARE YOU IN IT?

Chances are that the answer to that question is 'no' and you are not being submitted for the Research Excellence Framework (REF). UCU estimates that less than half of the staff eligible for REF are currently expected to be submitted.

- Do you know who the internal and external reviewers were for the research work that you put forward for REF submission?
- Were they experts in your field?
- Did you see the feedback that your work received from both internal and external reviewers?

Again, chances are that the answer to some, if not all, of those questions is 'no'.

During negotiations over the Surrey REF Code of Practice, UCU argued for a 'No detriment if you're out; no advantage if you're in' clause to be included and we were successful. But the arguments we advanced about 'game-playing' in terms of the use of appointment policies to appoint early career staff who would only have to submit one or two publications for REF seem to have been ignored. We are aware of one submission which looks as though it will comprise only the Head of School with four early career staff. How can that be representative of the research activities, value and research impact of all the staff in that School?

UCU has expressed concerns about the lack of transparency in the Surrey REF process and has argued that, if management have confidence in their processes, then they should open the books. Lack of transparency exposes members to arbitrary decision-making and old rivalries (yes, academics have been known to be competitive and not exactly play by the rules of chivalry) so many members have talked to us about cases where they are being victimised or where bizarre feedback has been received on their work from external reviewers.



Do you want to find out the feedback received for the publications that you put forward for REF? Or who your reviewers were? Freedom of Information Act requests are the way forward. Go to

<https://www.gov.uk/make-a-freedom-of-information-request/the-freedom-of-information-act> or come and see a UCU Branch Officer for help.

We are continuing to campaign about the Surrey REF process so, if you have a case that you are concerned about, come and talk to one of your Branch Officer §



YOUR GUIDE TO ACADEMIC APPRAISALS

With appraisals for academic staff fast approaching, we thought a brief guide for UCU members would be helpful. Please see below for advice on what to do and what not to do and what the policy guidelines state.

Never sign your appraisal unless you accept what it states.

Once the targets and the appraisal are signed by the appraiser and appraisee, they cannot be amended by the moderator. If this occurs, you should raise this issue immediately.

According to the guidance notes for appraisals (p.10), the template of performance objectives 'will be personalised to individuals around a 4 box template..... allowing flexibility to set personal targets for non-standardised areas of activity'.

Targets for teaching should not just look at MEQ scores. Include your own feedback and any peer reviews, other teaching duties that you have been involved in and student numbers. If MEQ scores are low for a particular reason, this should be explained and

News in Brief

League Table News

A national survey conducted by UCU has named 20 universities that have the most serious problems associated with stress. The majority of these universities are post-92 institutions, along with others such as Birmingham, Exeter – and Surrey. Needless to say, a tea party has not been arranged to celebrate our position in this particular league table.



Temping Agency: Here to Stay?

Shareholders of Warwick University Enterprises Ltd, which owns the franchise for UniTemps, must be delighted that the organisation is now well established on campus. The franchising out of teaching provision is not supported by UCU, who believe that demonstrators gaining valuable teaching experience should be able to include employment by a University on their CVs instead of registration with a temping agency.



taken into account by the appraiser. If the target is an MEQ score in isolation, then consider writing the following sentence on the form: *'I object to the inclusion of an MEQ measure in principle given the statistical, subjective and qualitative issues surrounding such a measure.'*

Targets should be SMART (that is,

specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound). Do not sign up to targets that you do not think are achievable.

If there is a research target to secure specific amounts of funding during the year, then write on the form as follows:

'The inclusion of a set amount is not helpful in a target as precarious as grant funding and is not a SMART target given the limited amount of funding available, lack of available funding, the economic climate and the amount of competition for limited funds. I have no difficulty in continuing to make high quality bids and am fully agreeable to continue to devote a considerable amount of time to working at this for the benefit of the University. But I do not accept the imposition of a specific targeted amount which is highly likely to be unachievable in circumstances where that may be used as a negative reflection on the excellence of my performance in general.'

Research outputs are based on your best three over a rolling three year period. §



HIRE AND FIRE OR TRAIN TO RETAIN

Are you on a fixed-term contract or do you know someone who is?

UCU has pressed for such contracts to be made permanent and open-ended to give our members better protection and to ensure compliance with the law. University management have recently agreed that they should not be using so-called 'permanent' contracts which

have an end date inserted. Plainly such a contract is in reality a temporary contract.

Many UCU members, particularly research fellows, are on fixed-term contracts. This means that they have a contract with an end date. Usually they are hired for one year or two years and work exclusively on a particular

research project. However it is often the case that these members prove their worth and their contracts are renewed; their skills and expertise are valued and colleagues try to retain them so that they are not lost to the University. Everyone knows how long it takes to train staff and the key is to train and retain.

The law states that if such staff are on at least their second contract or their contract has been previously renewed and they have at least four years' continuous service, then they have the right to a permanent position. Yet the employer may try to argue that the use of a fixed-term contract is justified on objective grounds. University of Surrey management often try to make this argument, putting people on fixed-term contracts because they argue that the funding for the contract comes from a particular grant with a specified end date. Yet, some members find themselves on a series of fixed-term contracts which can go on for years



beyond the basic four year period, being paid out of a series of different grants. This is not acceptable and has many disadvantages for members, preventing them, for example, from bidding for research contracts in their own names.

Recent cases include a colleague who was first hired in 2006 and has had SIX contract extensions since then. There

is no way that such a situation could be justified! We are also aware that some departments are hiring *teachers* on fixed-term contracts. If these teachers' salaries come out of the pot of money that pays for all permanent staff, then really there can be no justification for the use of a fixed-term contract. It looks like an attempt to return to a 'hire and fire' approach.

The truth is that all salary costs come from a single source: grant money disappears into the great coffer at the centre of the University like all other income that the University receives. If management really want Surrey to be a research University, then it needs to put all its long-term fixed-term researchers on open-ended permanent contracts where they have the security to develop and are able to submit bids for research funding in their own names to grant-awarding bodies.

No-one should be on a fixed-term contract except for those special and truly temporary cases such as cover for maternity leave and sickness. UCU nationally is campaigning for proper open-ended permanent contracts for all staff including research staff. If you have a contract, which is fixed-term and you think you have a case for a permanent contract, get in touch with your local branch of UCU. §

News in Brief

Hup! Two, Three, Four!

As part of the Global Corporate Challenge, pedometers have been issued to members of staff to encourage health and fitness. It seems then that the University excels in giving staff their marching orders in more ways than one.



UCU Joint Membership

If you want to benefit from both UCU membership and that of another union or organisation, there is no need to duplicate costs. Joint UCU membership is available with BECTU, the British Dietetic Association, the Royal College of Nursing, the Royal College of Midwives, the National Union of Journalists and others. See the UCU website for the full list of joint membership deals available.



Why are the Statutes Important in Protecting Academic Freedom?

A View from Kent UCU who are also Fighting Proposed Changes to their Statutes

Why should academics have freedom within the law both to question and test received wisdom and to put forward ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions without putting themselves at risk of suffering any detriment in their employment, including their job, and any privileges which they may enjoy at the University?

Academic and academic-related staff do deserve special protection in their employment beyond that which is available under the general law in virtue of the distinct and precious role they play both in the university and in society. At the centre of their work is the expansion and transmission of knowledge and culture and the holding of society under critique. It has long been recognised that the corps of people who undertake this work in modern conditions require special protection.

This was understood by those who promulgated the Charters and Statutes of all the pre-1992 universities (which



define the governance of a university and provide detailed information about the running of a university in terms of its governance respectively). It is of course the whole basis of 'academic tenure'. Extra security in their employment is necessary to support the freedom of thought and expression and the independence of mind, which is crucial to the work of academics, especially as it is usually carried out over a whole lifetime. Indeed, that security is today more necessary than ever.

We should be careful about any attempt to reduce our understanding of academic freedom to a formula about testing and expressing opinions.

That is an important dimension, but we should also be aware that academic freedom may also be compromised in the pressures which derive from the day-to-day monitoring, auditing, directing and controlling of the work and working time of academics. This is where the procedures relating to discipline and dismissal – which are laid out in Statutes – often come into play and why they are so important.

In this view, academic freedom is something that flourishes or perishes in the whole life and fabric of an academic community. It is apt to flourish in an atmosphere where the role and status of the academic are understood and accorded due respect and protection. This does not imply an elitist understanding in the pejorative sense of that adjective. It does imply a proper consciousness of a high and serious calling and a pride in it. Recognising that the Statutes form a vital part of this protection is fundamental. Any move to amend Statutes that could threaten this protection should be resisted. §

Staff Survey Action Plan: Staff Well-being and the Elephant in the Room!

The results of the staff survey are back, which has prompted an update from the University to remind us that staff well-being is one of the key areas supposedly being addressed. Yet, in light of the continuing rounds of restructuring taking place across the University and with no assurances that the practice of continuous restructuring will end, how serious is the University about promoting staff well-being?

A systematic review that was published last year in *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* (a publication from the *British Medical Journal* group) found that of 17 organisations studied that were undergoing organisational change, employees in 11 of them had an increased risk of mental health problems. The methods used in the 17 studies were too heterogeneous to allow the authors to reach a conclusion about the significance of any link between organisational change and mental health but they highlighted a need for further study into the relationship between the two factors and noted the paucity of data available. Organisations willing to participate in such studies are perhaps rather scarce!

Regardless of whether the culture in which you work is actually making you ill, it is still likely that you will be kept awake at night by the thought of being dispassionately manoeuvred from the 'keep-in' to the 'kick-out' list the next time your department is inevitably restructured. Lack of control, role



ambiguity and uncertainties about the imminence and duration of restructures have all been shown in empirical studies to have a negative impact on employees and minor stresses can increase the risk of mental health problems.

It may be true that the Higher Education sector has to respond to external pressures by shifting to a commercial business model: this is the reason used to justify continuous

TIME OFF AND FACILITIES AGREEMENT

For more than two years, UCU officers have been in discussion with management regarding a formal time off and facilities agreement. This would allow nominated Branch Officers to have formal time off for trade union duties, such as time to represent members and negotiate terms and conditions. Until now there has been no formal agreement and UCU Reps have had to seek permission to take time to conduct union business or, as often as not, complete these tasks in their own time. Finally, we have just concluded lengthy negotiations to enter into a formal time off and facilities agreement whereby UCU will be allocated 1 FTE (Full-Time Equivalent), to be distributed between Branch Officers and Committee Reps. This will give us more time to represent members on the various workplace issues that face us all.

restructuring. However, this does not inherently involve adopting a brutal and soul-less culture of change that generates so much negative impact and poor morale. UCU will continue to fight the restructuring-happy culture with our **'No Change – For A Change'** campaign. §

Get the **strength** of the union around you

Staff on casual contracts have been going through one of the most difficult periods in all areas of post-16 education. Cuts in staffing, changes in contracts, redundancies and excess workloads have forced many staff out of teaching. Casualisation of lecturers is a growing phenomenon. The policy of the UCU is to resist cuts, redundancies, unreasonable workloads and the excesses of casualisation. We are opposed to zero-hours contracts and exploitation of our members. We will continue to fight for fractionalisation and job security for all our members.

UCU has made massive inroads in unionising staff on casual contracts, but this gain has been alongside the loss of many long-term members. UCU is therefore calling on all UCU members, regardless of contract status, to join in the campaign to increase union membership and density. The union's strength is in its membership. The greater our number, the stronger we are.

We need your support!

Anti-Casualisation News is a useful resource for current and potential members. It is written by members working in the casualised sector to inform and support fellow colleagues. We know that many of our colleagues are isolated and do not have as much access to information like full-time and permanent staff. It can be difficult to connect with some colleagues on casual contracts, so the newsletter can be a useful information and organising tool.



The Day of Action, 6 March, at the University of Essex

UCU members and activists want to hear what you have to say about local concerns and events, as information sharing can be empowering through ideas, support and good practice in organising at the workplace. We are also interested on your views on how UCU can take the anti-casualisation campaign forward beyond our successful Day of Action.

UCU is achieving success for our members every day, while the government is determined to privatise and marketise education. UCU believes that well paid and resourced teachers, lecturers, researchers and academic-related staff are the key to success for our students, communities and economy. UCU needs your active support too.

Please help us to build the strength of our union and to promote solidarity and improvements in education by contributing to our newsletter, recruiting new members and engaging in UCU activities.

Jim Thakoordin, Bedfordshire ACE
Co-editor of Anti-Casualisation News

GETTING RESULTS FOR HOURLY-PAID LECTURERS

The Higher Education Committee's Hourly-Paid Ratification panel have recently approved two new policies negotiated at Manchester and Birkbeck that deliver improvements for hundreds of hourly-paid lecturers (HPLs). Both agreements ensure that pay is determined

through job analysis/evaluation, that pay and other terms and conditions are linked to that of permanent salaried staff, that pay is provided for preparation, marking etc, that HPLs be provided with adequate contracts and have access to incremental pay progression. They also make clear that

zero-hours contracts are not to be used. Both of these policies took a long time to negotiate and required a lot of hard work from the branches involved. They are also not perfect – negotiated agreements rarely, if ever, are. However, the progress in these branches is testament to the fact that with a committed branch and the involvement of HPL members themselves, improvements can be gained. §

Join the UCU/Become a Branch Rep

The University and College Union is the largest trade union and professional association for academics, lecturers, trainers, researchers and academic-related staff working in further and higher education throughout the UK. Encourage colleagues who are not members of the UCU to join us! For more information about how to join, go to <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2283> or contact one of the Branch Membership Secretaries, Leslie Blake or Adrian Coyle (see the list of

current Committee members for contact details).

The University of Surrey Branch of the UCU is always interested to hear from members who would like to become more actively involved in the Union's activities. We are always eager to hear from members who are interested in becoming a UCU Branch Rep: training will be provided. For more details, contact the Branch Chair, Rob Fidler (see the list of current Committee members for contact details).

For more information about the University of Surrey UCU Branch, see <http://surrey-unions.webs.com/>

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Administration
Marking student essays
Contact time
Lecture preparation
Grant application
Next publication
Weekend work



Excessive workload leads to increased personal stress and gives us less time to support our students.

It's time for action to reduce workloads NOW!



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