

# EXCESSIVE WORKLOADS RUIN LIVES!

## The Vice Chancellor's 17 August email stated:

[T]he members of the University Board are working closely with Heads of Department to support their teams to adapt to the changes resulting from staff departures.... I recognise that there will be challenges in the short term as we adapt to the new staffing levels and to new and more flexible ways of working, including working across traditional boundaries."

It may be tempting to regard this as mere 'management-speak', but it is a deeply worrying statement. Crucially, there is no indication of any consultation or negotiation with campus unions, of what, in effect, appears to be an attempt to change working terms and conditions.

This is particularly worrying so soon after negotiation of the Framework Agreement - a very detailed, sometimes difficult process. HR and senior University managers were happy to proclaim the framework as a major modernisation of pay and grading structures. The grade descriptors provide a clear indication of the tasks and responsibilities employees can, and cannot, reasonably be expected to undertake at their grade and is designed to ensure equal pay for work of equal value. Staff can develop by undertaking tasks associated with higher grades, but only when there is a clear expectation that they will be appropriately rewarded through an ECA or promotion.

Does 'flexible ways of working' mean not only extra tasks but also tasks at a higher grade? The principle of equal pay for work of equal value must be maintained - the agreement is not something to be lightly disregarded at the first sign of trouble!

With substantially reduced staff numbers, effective management does not consist of trying to raise the burden on the staff still here. **It requires decisions about what not to do, as well as what to do.** The University makes much of its 'Work-life Balance' policy and says job loads should be reasonable and appropriate. So, if we are asked to be "flexible" and take on new tasks we need to ask "is this at my grade?" and "what should I now stop doing?"

**We also need to remind the University that stress from excessive workloads is a Health & Safety issue**

## The 2005/6 Framework Agreement specifies working hours for Grade 6 as "35 hours normally worked over 5 agreed days"; and for Grades 7, 8 and 9 "A nominal working week of 35 hours"

Naturally, there are many members who see their work as a more important part of their life than a mere contract of employment. There are those who are willing to work longer hours for career advancement, although, in theory, the University says (as it must) that it makes judgements about staff on the equal opportunities basis of what can be reasonably achieved within agreed working hours and staff should not be disadvantaged if family or other social responsibilities, or for that matter lifestyle choices, do not permit or incline them to work longer hours.

Now more than ever, the advantages of having an agreed working week have become more obvious, as members face pressure to increase workloads, or argue over SRDS outcomes and 'objectives', and even confront the 'performance improvement' agenda.

Agreed working hours are even more useful when the University will not negotiate a central workload agreement, so members face a wide variety of departmental formulas for balancing teaching, admin and research activities.

Today, with the whole HE sector demanding, in effect, unpaid 'productivity' increases by cutting staff without cutting any activities, even the most sceptical will presumably recognize the wisdom of having established the 35-hour week agreement.

There is an argument about whether it is moral to work excessive hours when others are losing their jobs or desperate to obtain work. Having the 35-hour week agreement makes that moral choice far more feasible than it was in the past. Colleagues who boast of working 70 hours a week are not generally influenced by the argument that they are effectively working for half the 'going rate' for the job.

**Perhaps they, and all of us, should now be more willing to abandon the free overtime in support of the jobs of fellow members!**

## WORKLOAD DROP-IN SESSION with Marianne Quick UCU Regional Support Official

Thursday 15 October 12.30pm-2.30pm UCU Office, 2 Hounsfield Rd (just up from HSBC)

### The SUCU Office has moved to:

2 Hounsfield Road (just up the road from the tram stop and HSBC)

### Contact details remain the same

ucu@sheffield.ac.uk Enquiries and personal case issues  
http://ucu.group.shef.ac.uk SUCU website

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This Bulletin is a campaigning newsletter published by the UCU Committee at the University of Sheffield. If you wish to comment on an item, to suggest a topic for coverage in future issues, or to contribute as a member, please e-mail [ucu@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:ucu@sheffield.ac.uk).

## UNIVERSITY JOB CUTS 320 STAFF LOST BY VSS - NOW WHAT?

**320 staff lost so far, and this won't be the end.** The majority of the losses so far are support staff (67 were academics) but it would be foolish to think this will not seriously affect learning, teaching and research.

Students may not be aware of the fact that all academics rely heavily on support staff in both departments and central services. When academics are asked to perform more non-teaching duties it can only result in less of their time being available for students.

It is too early to know exactly what will happen in departments when teaching begins, and of course it will vary from department to department. Campus unions are currently attempting to analyse VSS data in order to try and identify any particularly hard-hit areas or departments.

UCU are very concerned about how the university plans to cover the gaps in teaching without compromising quality. We can see the potential dangers and are already receiving information from members on ways some departments appear to be

trying to cope. Some of this feedback is very worrying.

No firm guidance, expectations or advice appears to have been forthcoming to help deal with this issue, so we all need to be vigilant of requests or demands placed upon us by Heads of Department or Service Managers.

You should not agree to unreasonable and excessive workloads in order to cope with a situation the university has created. If you feel you or your colleagues are being subjected to any intimidation or bullying to take on excessive or unreasonable workloads, please contact [ucu@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:ucu@sheffield.ac.uk)

UCU will fight to ensure the University does not compromise either staff or students as a result of their job cutting exercises. We are working closely with all campus unions (including NUS), to try and reverse the University's short-sighted trend of cost-cutting by huge staff losses.

**The damage caused by this strategy should not be acceptable to anyone - not staff, students or parents.**

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## Our New UCU Regional Support Team see page 3



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## Hourly Paid: University wins prestigious award – but back-tracks on promises

### Work goes on within the university to assimilate hourly paid teachers onto the same pay scales as those of us who are on open ended or fixed term contracts.

You will remember that UCU, on behalf of all campus unions, negotiated an agreement that set the ground rules for this assimilation. The agreement has been recommended to other universities as an example of 'good practice' and the Universities Personnel Association awarded the Atypical Workers Project Team the highly esteemed HR Excellence Award in Higher Education, 2009 for this piece of work.

During the negotiations an assurance from the university that the 'bank worker' status was an inappropriate status for anyone involved in teaching enabled us to sign up. We are extremely concerned that in a number of departments this assurance has not been honoured.

### Are you a 'bank worker'?

If you have been given "bank worker" status on regularisation, then you should consult your HoD without delay. This category is intended for very short-term working and certainly not for a semester's teaching. You will see on the SUCU website the employment benefits denied to these workers who, the university says, are only entitled to the statutory benefits to which hourly paid workers have been entitled since 1998, and not those negotiated on your behalf over many years.

It is important that 'atypical' staff understand the terms and conditions under which they are now working, how holiday is calculated, how duties have been assessed, and how the

scale point, grade and rate of pay has been calculated. It is also essential to fully understand how the fractionalised contract has been arrived at. Teachers, tutors, teaching associates, teaching assistants etc should be given the appropriate, agreed 'multiplier' of contact hours, to allow for preparation and marking etc.

Appeals on any of these issues can only be made within one month. Please take time to read the signed Framework Agreement and, if you feel that you are not being treated in accordance with it, then you should raise this matter with your HOD with some urgency. Historically hourly paid staff have been reluctant to challenge their working conditions as they felt so vulnerable, but failure to do so now will leave them in a precarious position since, unlike colleagues they are working alongside, workers can be dismissed with just one week's notice and receive no redundancy payment.

### Holiday Pay

Many hourly paid part-time staff have been unaware that they have been entitled to holiday pay since 1998 or that, as pay for holiday should be transparent, it is unlawful to include holiday pay in the hourly rate.

### How to get Help

UCU will help members to secure the correct contract, to receive all the working benefits they are entitled to and continue to work to improve conditions of service for all.

If you need advice on this or other employment issues email [ucu@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:ucu@sheffield.ac.uk).

## Annual Women Members' Conference '09 November 14th

Come and join us at the annual conference on 14 November from 10.00hrs – 16.30hrs at Carlow Street, London NW1.

The conference is open to all UCU women members and is free of charge. The theme is the resurgence in feminism and in addition to an external key note speaker (to be confirmed) there will be a number of workshops. These will include 'Campaigning and Activism in UCU', 'Gender Equality', 'Duty in Education', 'Black Feminism' and 'End Violence Against Women'.

The conference is a great opportunity to meet other women in UCU and have a say in shaping union policy around gender issues.

More information to be publicised shortly.

Meanwhile, if you wish to register your interest now, please contact Charlotte Nielsen in the Equality Unit:

[cnielsen@ucu.org.uk](mailto:cnielsen@ucu.org.uk)

**PERSONAL SUPPORT FROM SUCU** Please remember, if you have recently joined UCU you should know that we cannot get involved in issues that started prior to you joining. UCU HQ will not offer legal support to individuals during the first 3 months of membership and this branch has a similar policy of a 'waiting period' to discourage people from joining only when they have need of assistance.

## Meet our new UCU Regional Officers...

### Mark Oley

I'm the regional official for the HE sector in the Yorkshire & Humberside Region. Prior to taking up the post in March I was the regional support official for UCU in Wales.

I was employed by the AUT in 1999, based in Birmingham (first as an organiser, then a researcher) after completing my BA and MA at the University of Warwick (like Marianne, as a mature student). Leaving school with very little formal qualifications I am a 'fan' of the work our members undertake, as higher education fundamentally changed my life!

Prior to that I worked in the NHS and was the branch secretary of the NALGO Birmingham & Solihull Health Branch - entering university through NALGO's extremely advanced TU education programmes.

I enjoy film (*Cinema Paradiso* being a real favourite - **must** be the Directors Cut), reading (Chomsky, Edward Said and Malcolm X), comedy (the late, great Bill Hicks - lucky enough to see him live), theatre and music (I'm a **completely** unreconstructed Joy Division fan and, in more recent times, Sigur Ros).

Oh yes... I'm also one of those sad '*cricket is life, the rest mere incidental detail*' people.

### Marianne Quick

I originally hail from a family of trade union activists brought up in Liverpool. I moved to Sheffield for my secondary education and graduated from Sheffield Hallam University in 2001 as a mature student following a most enjoyable (if not educationally focused) youth.

Since graduating in 2001 I have been an active union member, working in FE and HE as an hourly paid lecturer, a Development Worker in community education projects and most recently as a Senior Lecturer in Psychology in Higher Education. I was also chair of the North West UCU regional HE committee for 2 years. Therefore I have first-hand experience of cross-sector working and the various challenges facing UCU members today.

For the past 5 years I have lived and worked in Merseyside and now find myself back on the sunny side of the Pennines where I live with my teenage daughter.

I'm genuinely excited about, and looking forward to, working with UCU members and activists in the Yorkshire & Humberside region.

The new regional team has been long awaited and deserved by members. I'm sure we won't disappoint!!

### Geoff Brown

I have been a UCU regional support official, working three days a week, since June 2006 with never a dull moment since.....

My background is as a student activist in the late '60s, joining UCU's predecessor at Bolton College of Education in 1972, going on to teach in schools and colleges and the then Manchester Poly where I was the rep for the hourly paid.

I have been a trade union tutor for thirty years based in Manchester and working in Britain and abroad, most recently in Pakistan; and continue to teach and do project work. I've been secretary of Manchester Trades Council for the last five years.

Married with two grown up daughters, I try to relax - with mixed success - by swimming, walking, reading and going to the movies.

### Angela Weiss

Hiya, I'm the Temporary Regional Administrator for the Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Team. Originally from London I've been living 'Up North' for a little over three years. My previous career history includes administrative work for UNISON as well as five years as a Stage Manager. I enjoy going to the gym, travelling, reading, eating and drinking.

## NEW UNION BANNER

### At long last we can unveil our new SUCU union banner to go

Its taken a while to get this sorted out and admittedly it isn't as well crafted as the old one, but you can't argue it isn't striking and it weighs a lot less.

It is available for use at appropriate events and requests to borrow it should be made via [ucu@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:ucu@sheffield.ac.uk).



### DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Wed 01 Oct 2009  
Mon 23 Nov 2009  
Mon 8 Feb 2010  
Tue 9 March 2010  
Fri 23 April 2010  
Wed 9 Jun 2010

### SUCU GENERAL MEETINGS

University House  
1.00pm – 2.00pm