

Ms K Heaton  
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3<sup>rd</sup> September 2018

Dear Karen,

## **Tackling Teaching Assistant Casualisation**

### **1. Introduction**

As the University of Manchester is aware, the issue of the use of insecure contracts in the higher education sector now has a deservedly high public profile. Research has shown that insecure contracts have a detrimental effect on the wellbeing of employees and that any so-called 'efficiency gains' from casualised labour are a false economy that affects individual productivity, institutional memory, and student experience. This is a national priority issue for the University and College Union (UCU), and now also one for this branch at the University of Manchester. We believe that we have a common interest in improving the contractual terms of those whose work makes higher education possible.

While the issue of casualisation in higher education is multifaceted, this formal claim addresses the conditions of the University's Teaching Assistants. Teaching Assistants play a major role in delivering the high quality education on which the University of Manchester prides itself. They are at the cutting edge of research in their field and eager to pursue their professional development. However, their working conditions often mitigate against strong performance instead of supporting it: unpaid and in some cases insufficient training; drastic underestimation of the time required to fulfil the role; limited support from academic staff who may themselves be dealing with the effects of casualisation and unmanageable workloads; and mismanagement of basic administration such as the issuing of contracts and accurate pay. These problems compound the difficulties for graduate students who have often shouldered significant financial burdens to gain prior qualifications and/or in support of their doctoral programme.

In recognition of these challenges and given the important contribution that Teaching Assistants make, ensuring fair and equitable conditions for Teaching Assistants across the University is essential. If it is true that teaching experience is an asset for graduates seeking academic posts, the resulting enthusiasm and commitment from Teaching Assistants should not increase their vulnerability to unpaid labour or administrative neglect.

The University of Manchester has recognised these concerns through existing policies, including the Supplementary Agreement to the Agreement for the implementation of the JNCHES Framework Agreement for the modernisation of pay structures at the University

of Manchester [January 2013] (“the Supplementary Agreement”); and local School-level agreements or arrangements.

Ensuring institution-wide compliance with these policies will provide a starting point from which the working conditions of Teaching Assistants can improve.

## **2. Statement of intent**

Our claim is for the university senior management to agree a joint statement which:

- Allows for a joint review of working practices;
- Accepts the need for time-limited discussions;
- Provides leadership across and within faculties
- Commits sufficient resources (people and money) to achieve the objective of this claim.

## **3. Contracts and Pay**

The university should agree steps, including:

- Provide all Teaching Assistants with a contract of employment before the commencement of their employment;
- Contracts of employment to be transparent and accessible with sufficiently clear information regarding rates of pay for the different types of work undertaken;
- Payment for any work undertaken by Teaching Assistants to be made within one calendar month;
- Appropriate school-level resource provided to administer contracts and pay for Teaching Assistants.

## **4. Tackling unpaid labour**

The university should agree steps, including:

- All work undertaken by Teaching Assistants is paid work;
- A joint review of marking tariffs for Teaching Assistants, including a review of time paid per script (essay/exam);
- A school-level review of preparation time paid to Teaching Assistants, to agree minimum hours of preparation for every hour of teaching to reflect the work actually done in preparation and scholarship;
- A school-level review to agree minimum office hours/post-tutorial administration per week;

## **5. Training**

The university should agree steps, including:

- All Teaching Assistants to be paid for attending lectures and training required for the role;
- Training for Teaching Assistants to be improved, with experienced Teaching Assistants paid to be involved in the redesign and delivery of training.

## **6. Removing unequal treatment across faculties**

The university should agree steps, including reviewing the grades paid across and within faculties - with reference to the Supplementary Agreement - to ensure they are commensurate with the work being undertaken;

## **7. Agreement on provision of specific facilities time**

Current technical arrangements between the university and UCU limit the ability of those on part-time and casualised contracts (a large proportion of our membership) to access facility time for union duties, thus limiting their rights to equal treatment in regard to trade union participation compared with permanent and full-time staff. As part of our claim we wish to agree a process of paid-time for union duties for those who are unable to access union facility time via current processes.

Conducting effective negotiations on improving employment will also require a significant commitment of time from reps and in particular those on insecure contracts. Therefore our claim includes a call for agreement on a specific allocation of paid time off or, in the case of those who require it, paid time on, to allow our representatives to meaningfully participate in the processes around and within these negotiations.

## **8. Negotiating forum**

UCU submits this claim as a matter for negotiation. This is a matter pertaining to the pay, terms and conditions of academic staff in the main. As such, we want negotiations to be held between representatives of the UCU and university management alone, and in accordance with our Procedure Agreement. It is important that the negotiations are conducted in a timely fashion and that the objective should be to reach agreement by the end of semester 1 with implementation at 28 January 2019.

## **9. Terms of agreement to be incorporated into university policies**

UCU believes that the terms of agreement reached following negotiation should be incorporated into the university's policies.

## **10. Implementation, monitoring and review**

The provisions of the agreement reached should be disseminated in a manner that provides for uniform application across the university. Managers should be fully trained on the provisions of this agreement. The terms of the agreement should be subject to joint monitored and reviewed at 6 month intervals, or sooner at the request of UCU.

Yours sincerely,



**Martyn Moss**

North West Regional Official

(on behalf of the University of Manchester UCU Branch)