

Letter on external research funding and deduction of wages for tenured members of staff who are taking strike action

We are writing as tenured members of staff who are members of UCU and who are taking industrial action whilst engaged in research projects funded by UK Research & Innovation research councils and other funding bodies. Our salaries, for the proportion of our time we spend on these projects, are paid to the University by those funding bodies and, in addition, the University charges those funding bodies overheads.¹ When our pay is deducted for striking, the University retains those funds (much as it retains student fees from those students whose classes have been disrupted by the strike).²

In short, the University profits from us going on strike, while we have pay deducted.

The University is very interested in academics winning research funding, which is a significant contribution to University funding, in part through reallocating funds that would otherwise pay our salaries, and in part through the substantial contributions made by overheads to the University's running costs. It is also very interested in the contribution that funded research makes to the Research Excellent Framework (again making a significant direct contribution to University funding, as well as indirectly through enhancing the University's reputation).

The University appears less interested in reducing the precarity of our colleagues on fixed term research contracts, without whom that research would not be possible. It was notable, for example, that Professor Keith Brown, Vice-President and Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, in his recent missive on precarious employment did not mention temporary research contracts at all, or include research staff in his breakdown of temporary staff in the Faculty ([Message from the Dean – February 2020](#) and [Reply from GTAs to the Dean of Humanities](#)).

A [recent UCU survey reported that](#) 70% of the 49,000 researchers in higher education are currently employed on fixed-term contracts (as are 37,000 teaching staff). While research funding is time limited the University shows very little interest in creative solutions to reduce the job insecurity this causes. Our University of Manchester colleague Sarah Darley wrote recently in the Guardian about the serious impacts that insecure, short-term contracts have not only on personal life and mental health but also on career development and the quality of research itself ([I'm striking because insecure academic contracts are ruining my mental health](#)).

As the University is profiting from funds obtained from funding bodies intended to pay our salaries and overheads while we are on strike, we would like to suggest that this money is earmarked by the University for a fund to benefit fixed term research staff. For example, this funding could be used to extend the contracts of fixed term researchers.³ If the University declines to set up such a fund we would like to ask the University what it intends to do with the profit it is making from deducting our salaries?

¹ Technically this refers to DA, Indirect and Estates costs. We are not referring to salary costs of researchers on fixed term contracts (Directly Incurred Staff costs), which are only charged against actual spend and so not claimed by the University for those DI staff who are on strike.

² We are not aware of any mechanism through which the University reimburses funding agencies, and we are not aware of any communication regarding this issue from the University to funded researchers or for that matter to funders.

³ If this would take those contracts beyond those project's agreed funding period this would seem to be a reasonable grounds for extension. It is commonplace, for example, for development of publications to continue beyond the funded life of a project, often causing difficulties for researchers no longer employed on those projects. If contract extensions were not possible, funds could be used to benefit fixed term researchers in other ways, for example funding conference attendance and other career development activities.