

**To: Members of Senate, cc. Edward Astle, Chair of Board of Governors.**

Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> February 2020

Dear Members of Senate,

I am writing to you in my capacity as the Secretary of the University of Manchester branch of the University and College Union (UCU) to express the concerns many of our members have about recent comments made by the President and the Dean of Humanities about the precarious employment of GTAs and staff on fixed-term contracts.

As members of Senate, I and my colleagues on the UMUCU Branch Committee feel you need to know how much upset these comments have caused and how damaging this may be to collegiality and the ability of the University to retain the very best academic staff.

In addition, several members have expressed disquiet about, and asked what is being done with, the pay deducted from striking fixed-term contract researchers working on externally funded projects, which must amount to many thousands of pounds. We are concerned that, if not dealt with quickly and openly, the University may face questions from funders.

On behalf of the UMUCU Committee, I have therefore written to the President, Dean of Humanities and the Chair of the Board of Governors requesting responses to the following (with weblinks provided to various papers):

1. [A letter from UMUCU](#) concerning comments, which members have told us they thought unnecessarily dismissive, made by the President in her weekly update of 5<sup>th</sup> December about staff on fixed-term contracts (and for which I note the President, to her credit, apologised in a later message).
2. The [UMUCU GTA Committee's response to Prof. Keith Brown's message](#) criticising [Prof. Steven Jones' article in the Guardian](#) in which the Dean says GTA employment is "within fair and agreed terms and conditions". As the GTA Committee say, this and the tone of the Dean's message are unhelpful, dismissive and disheartening to those who are at the beginning of their academic careers. The Dean's reply to UCU and the GTA Committee may be found [HERE](#).
3. Concern, again passed on to the President, that the [University is profiting by deducting pay from striking researchers who are wholly or partly funded by external funders](#), such as UKRI, Research Councils, Foundations, charities etc. We wish to know what the University intends doing with these salary deductions and are suggesting they be put in a fund to benefit fixed-term contract research staff – for example by automatically extending researchers' contracts by the corresponding number of strike days. The alternative, of course, would be to return the deducted pay to the research funders.

Sadly, I also have to report that many of our members feel that comments like those referred to above indicate that the Senior Leadership Team is terribly out of touch with staff and do not understand the corrosive effects precarious employment has on staff well-being and the efficient running of the University – one of the key reasons, of course, why UCU members feel they have no choice but to take industrial action again. This sense of the SLT being out of touch with staff is also borne out by their low satisfaction scores in the last two Staff Surveys: the 2019 Survey found only 42% believe the SLT listen to and respond to the views of staff, down from 47% in 2017.

The above should, we believe, be of concern to members of Senate as the primary academic authority of the University, especially as teaching and research are about to be disrupted again by industrial action and the imminent announcement, following so soon after the M2020 and IT Services job losses, of more job losses related to the Student Experience Programme.

Yours sincerely,

Adam

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*“Power and Neoclassical Economics: A Return to Political Economy in the Teaching of Economics”*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. Available from:

<http://www.palgrave.com/gb/book/9781137553720>

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