SURVEY

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ucu
University and College Union

The impact of **social class** on experiences of working in post-16 education

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Executive summary

UCU conducted a scoping exercise to help better understand the ways in which social class, and the intersectional nature of class, impact members in the workplace. 3,987 responses were received from across the membership. Overall, almost half (49%) of respondents describe their current or former background as working-class, a figure that is lower than the 60% average across Britain.

This process has shown that UCU members, particularly those who are from a working-class background themselves, believe that social class impacts experiences of working in the post-16 sector. Negative impacts are felt most acutely by respondents from a working-class background; those who work in the higher education sector; and those with protected characteristics - suggesting an intersectional nature of discrimination.

Despite the survey highlighting the negative impacts members from a working-class background experience, it also found that those who do not identify as working-class were more likely to disagree with the existence of negative impacts of class on working experiences.

The report found that in addition to concerns about the impact of class on their own working experiences, respondents are also concerned about the student to staff pipeline. There is an acute awareness that establishing a career in the post-16 education sector is increasingly difficult for working-class students due to job precarity and casualisation, much of which typically occurs in the early career stages.

Further work is required to understand how UCU can drive improvement through policy, organising and bargaining in this area.

Key findings include:

- Over half (54.2%) of respondents from a working-class background agree that working-class staff face barriers in relation to recruitment at their institution. Two in five (41.9%) respondents from a non-working-class background agree.
- Over half (52.6%) of respondents overall, and three in five (61.1%) respondents from a working-class background agree that a working-class background presents a barrier to career progression at their institution.
- Just over half (50.5%) of respondents agree or strongly agree that a working-class background presents a barrier to feeling included.
- Nearly six in 10 (58%) respondents from a working-class background agreed that working-class staff face barriers in relation to networking opportunities at their institution compared with just over four in 10 (44.2%) respondents from a non-working-class background.
- Overall, almost a third (32.8%) of respondents agree or agree strongly that they have been disadvantaged or discriminated against in their career due to their accent. Just over four in 10 (40.8%) respondents from a working-class background agree.
- Non-working-class staff are more likely to disagree with the existence of barriers faced by working-class staff.

Recommendations

FOR THE POST-16 SECTOR

- Analyse institutional data to understand participation, progression and retention rates by social class at both staff and student level.
- Conduct primary research to understand perceptions of class impacts on an institutional basis.
- Integrate analyses of social class in equality, diversity and inclusion work.

FOR BRANCHES

- Host branch meetings to disseminate the findings of this report and explore themes and priorities for pursuit at a local level.

FOR UCU

- Explore creating a UCU task group to further explore the impacts of social class on experiences of working in the post-16 sector and identify working terminology and definitions which facilitate a cross-sectoral conversation on social class. This work could then identify a further set of recommendations.

- Conduct further research to explore perceptions of impact of class amongst members and in particular, adult and community education and prison education members to gain a better understanding of experiences amongst these members.
- Call on institutions to collect data and analyse social class background as part of an equal pay, recruitment and career progression audit.
- Explore appetite for UCU to support campaigns for social class to be listed as a Protected Characteristic in the UK's Equality Act (2010).

Introduction

> *... Not belonging is an embodied experience – you do not speak or look like those from other social classes, and I believe this tacitly infiltrates perceptions of competence, fit with a departmental cultural and even collegiality – all criteria for recruitment, promotion etc. Then there is 'confidence' and the requirement to put yourself out there – which contradicts everything you've been ever been taught about keeping yourself hidden, under the radar and not getting above your station. This creates a deep personal dissonance which requires a huge amount of emotional labour to overcome. I can see why people leave. The question is how to look at this without [resorting] to concepts like imposter syndrome which focus on the individual rather than the structures that engender these experiences.*
> **Working-class, 46-50, woman, North West England, higher education**

This report sets out the findings of a recent scoping exercise to help UCU better understand the ways in which social class, and the intersectional nature of class, impact members in the workplace.

UCU research in this area is important as it will afford UCU a better understanding of members' experiences and support UCU to be able to address discriminatory action and support better progression opportunities.

Much of the literature in relation to post-16 education and social class has been focused on students. Overall, there is very little on social class and its impact on the professional experiences of staff. Most recently, research by Douglass et al. (2021), using lower and higher social class terminology, found that poor wellbeing was twice as prevalent amongst lower social class staff and students compared with higher social class staff and students. They found that these findings hold across a range of measures of social class and across a range of wellbeing indicators such as inclusion, status and autonomy – indeed, social class accounted for 40% of the variance in wellbeing.[i]

This research is UCU's first examination of our members' experiences of class within the workplace and was intended to evaluate the need for an additional and deeper look at members' experiences. As such, in order to facilitate as broad and expansive an understanding as possible, a working definition of social class was not employed. However one class-specific term was used in the question 'is your current or former background working-class?', a question through which much of the data is assessed.

Methodology

This report examines the findings of an online survey that was open to all members of the union from across adult, further, higher and prison education. The survey was available between 15 March 2022 and 1 April 2022. There were 3,987 complete responses.

The majority of respondents (86.2%) work in the higher education sector. Almost 500 respondents (12.4%) work in the further education sector. There were fewer responses from those working in the adult and community 0.8% (n. 32) and prison education 0.6% (n. 25).

Across all findings, where there is a sample size lower than 100, we do not report these findings to ensure that the key findings are statistically representative. As such, the data for those from adult and community, or prison education has been aggregated into the main findings, but we are unable to draw accurate insights about the unique perceptions of these groups overall. However, the themes raised by these groups are included here and will be used to develop further exploratory work.

The breakdown for respondents with protected characteristics and other minority groups can be found in the annex of this report.

Social class identity

Overall, almost half (49%) of respondents said that they would describe their current or former background as working-class. Nearly two in five (38.6%) respondents said that they would not describe their current or former backgrounds as working-class, whilst 12.4% of respondents said that they were unsure. Working-class representation is thereby lower in the post-16 education sector than in wider British society where 60% of people say they are working-class – a proportion which has remained unchanged since 1983.[ii]

The findings point to there being a greater proportion of working-class members in the further education sector than in the higher education sector. By sector, nearly seven in 10 (68.2%) respondents from the further education sector are from a working-class background, whilst in higher education just over four in 10 respondents are from a working-class background. These findings correlate with a number of comments received in relation to the higher education sector being increasingly difficult to enter for working-class people. This was often linked to the increasingly casualised nature of contracts which will be explored later in this paper.

Figure 1: Would you describe your current or former background as working-class?

Value	Percent	Responses
Yes	49.0%	1,955
No	38.6%	1,537
Unsure	12.4%	495
		Totals: 3,987

Barriers to working life

Respondents were asked if they believe that staff from a working-class background face barriers at work specifically linked to their social class.

In all cases there was recognition that a working-class identity can present barriers to staff across a range of domains. These barriers are perceived quite differently by respondents according to their own social class backgrounds.

In all cases, respondents from a working-class background were more likely to agree with the presence of these barriers than their non-working-class peers.

Respondents working in the higher education sector were, in all cases, more likely to agree that these barriers exist than staff working in the further education sector.

Staff who do not identify as working-class are significantly more likely to state 'neither agree nor disagree' in response to perceived barriers and overall are more likely to disagree or disagree strongly with the existence of these.

Key findings include:

CAREER PROGRESSION

- Overall, over half (52.6%) of respondents agree or strongly agree that a working-class background presents a barrier to career progression.
- Three in five (61.1%) of respondents from a working-class background agree compared with just under half (49.5%) of respondents from a non-working-class background.
- Over half (53.9%) of respondents working in the higher education sector feel that social class impacts career progression. In the further education sector, two in five (44%) of respondents feel this way.

RECRUITMENT

- Overall, just over two in five respondents (43.9%) agree or strongly agree that a working-class background presents a barrier to recruitment at their institution.
- Over half (54.2%) of respondents from a working-class background agree that working-class staff face barriers in relation to recruitment at their institution compared with just over two in five (41.9%) respondents from a non-working-class background.
- Nearly half (47.4%) of respondents in the higher education sector agree that social class impacts recruitment at their institution whilst in further education the figure is over one in five (22.1%).

NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

- Overall, just over half (51.9%) of respondents agree or strongly agree that a working-class background presents a barrier to networking opportunities.

- Nearly three in 10 (58%) respondents from a working-class background agree that working-class staff face barriers in relation to networking opportunities at their institution compared with just over four in 10 (44.2%) respondents from a non-working-class background.
- Just over half (54.4%) of respondents in the higher education sector agree that social class impacts networking opportunities at their institution whilst in further education, the figure is over one-third (35.4%).

FEELING INCLUDED

- Overall, just over half (50.5%) of respondents agree or strongly agree that a working-class background presents a barrier to feeling included.
- Just over half (54.7%) of working-class respondents agreed compared with just over two in five (45.4%) respondents from a non-working-class background.
- Just over half (53.3%) of respondents working in the higher education sector feel that social class impacts how staff feel included. In the further education sector, a third (33%) of staff feel this way.

Figure 2: At your institution, do you think working-class staff face barriers specifically linked to their class in any of the following areas?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly	Responses
Recruitment						
Count	528	1,226	1,179	770	284	3,987
Row %	13.2%	30.7%	29.6%	19.3%	7.1%	
Retention						
Count	476	982	1,474	788	267	3,987
Row %	11.9%	24.6%	37.0%	19.8%	6.7%	
Pay equality						
Count	599	1,086	1,392	635	275	3,987
Row %	15.0%	27.2%	34.9%	15.9%	6.9%	
Career progression						
Count	740	1,356	1,091	557	243	3,987
Row %	18.6%	34.0%	27.4%	14.0%	6.1%	
Workload						
Count	535	790	1,623	742	297	3,987
Row %	13.4%	19.8%	40.7%	18.6%	7.4%	
Casualisation						
Count	652	1,075	1,454	557	249	3,987
Row %	16.4%	27.0%	36.5%	14.0%	6.2%	
Work/life balance						
Count	645	1,010	1,518	560	254	3,987
Row %	16.2%	25.3%	38.1%	14.0%	6.4%	

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly	Responses
Feeling included						
Count	757	1,256	1,202	532	240	3,987
Row %	19.0%	31.5%	30.1%	13.3%	6.0%	
Networking opportunities						
Count	799	1,273	1,205	488	222	3,987
Row %	20.0%	31.9%	30.2%	12.2%	5.6%	
Totals						
Total responses						**3987**

A number of respondents included commentary to highlight their experiences in this regard:

> *The college has a high proportion of teaching staff that are working class, however they do not seem to progress into the higher roles…*
> **Working-class, 41-45, woman, North West England, further education**

> *Issues of salary (including starting salary on recruitment), workload and progression are key issues to explore further.*
> **Working-class, 41-45, non-binary, London, higher education**

> *Networking. Even in prison education, I think working class staff are less likely to have their voice heard and progress.*
> **Working-class, 61-65, woman, South East England, prison education**

> *[I see a] lack of opportunity and lack of fairness of pay and promotion, including internally.*
> **Working-class, 56-60, woman, London, adult and community education**

> *Particularly for research roles and entry level lectureships: There is a strong and openly discussed perception in HE recruitment panels (usually from older, established academics) that the "best" applicants will have hopped from university to university all over the world, and that these applicants will have the most to offer in terms of "ambition" and "bringing in new ideas". Of course, the ability to prioritise your own career and travel freely in this way is often highly dependent not only on personal finances and contacts, but on not having a working partner, additional caring responsibilities, personal or family health issues etc. which can make frequent moving impractical. My personal experience is that it is very difficult to progress to an academic position as an internal candidate for this reason.*
> **Unsure of social class background, 31-35, man, Yorkshire & The Humber, higher education**

Contracts, terms and conditions

Respondents from a working-class background are more likely to report secure contract terms than their non-working-class peers.

Staff from a working-class background are more likely to report that they have a permanent contract (84%) compared with (79%) amongst those who were not from a working-class background. Similarly, respondents from non-working-class backgrounds are more likely to have a fixed term contract (14%) than their working-class peers (9.5%).

Figure 3: Please select your contract type (select all that apply)

	Yes: working class		No: non-working class	
Value	**Percent**	**Responses**	**Percent**	**Responses**
Permanent	83.9%	1,640	79.0%	1,214
Open ended (with an identifiable ‘at risk’ date but not fixed-term)	3.7%	72	4.6%	70
Fixed-term	9.5%	186	14.0%	215
Zero-hours	2.7%	53	1.8%	27
Annualised hours	1.0%	20	0.9%	14
Hourly-paid with guaranteed minimum hours	1.2%	23	1.5%	23
Term-time only	2.3%	44	1.6%	25

This finding is seemingly out of alignment with members’ experiences of barriers faced due to background, particularly in relation to casualisation. It may be that staff from a working-class background feel less able to take up jobs with casualised contract terms due to the financial precarity that is inherent with such contracts.

Whilst this survey has found fewer staff from a working-class background working on casualised contracts, this does not negate the impact of these types of contracts on these individuals. Respondents were clear that terms, conditions and contract types have negative impacts on staff and recruitment to the profession, particularly for working-class members. A number of respondents set out that poor salary and/or contract terms limit the potential to both enter and stay in the sector.

> *For the level of experience and qualification required, FE is now a low paid vocation, requiring staff to do additional hours at home marking and preparing lessons without pay. To what extent is this now a barrier to the employment and retention of people who are the main breadwinner or need a decent income as they may not have assets or private income to fall back on?*
> **Working-class, 51-55, man, North West England, further education**

> *...Fixed-term contracts and short-term research awards seem to assume that the recipient has a 'safety net': the financial stability to move around, make ends meet between contracts, continue regular mortgage/rental payments whilst funded for travel expenses only. This model assumes that everyone has parents/a partner able to support them; it is a model of academia as a genteel hobby, rather than a living.*
> **Unsure of working-class background, 26-30, woman, North East England, higher education**

> *Casualisation as disproportionately financially and psychologically damaging on us.*
> **Working-class, 31-35, woman, Scotland, higher education**

Attributes, discrimination and disadvantage

Respondents were given a list of 11 attributes and were asked to what extent they believed they have been disadvantaged or discriminated against in relation to each attribute. Here, there are stark differences in experience according to the social class of respondents. Overall, a substantial minority of respondents agreed or agreed strongly that they had been disadvantaged or discriminated against in their career due to their personal attributes. This was observed mainly amongst working-class respondents, and those working in the higher education sector.

Notable examples include:

ACCENT

- Overall, almost one-third (32.8%) respondents agree or agree strongly that they have been disadvantaged or discriminated against in their career due to their accent.
- Just over four in 10 (40.8%) respondents from a working-class background agreed compared with just over three in 10 (30.8%) respondents from a non-working-class background.
- Just over one-third (34.3%) of respondents working in the higher education sector feel that they have been disadvantaged or discriminated against due to their accent. In the further education sector, just over two in 10 (23.9%) respondents felt this way.

DIALECT (PRONUNCIATION, GRAMMAR AND VOCABULARY INCLUDING SLANG)

- Overall, just under one-third (28.6%) of respondents agree or agree strongly that they have been disadvantaged or discriminated against in their career due to their dialect.
- Nearly two fifths (37.7%) of respondents from a working-class background agreed compared with a just over quarter (26.6%) of respondents from a non-working-class background.
- Just under three in 10 (29.6%) respondents working in the higher education sector feel they have been disadvantaged or discriminated against due to their dialect. In the further education sector, just over two in 10 (21.7%) respondents feel this way.

FAMILY INCOME

- Over a quarter (26.5%) of respondents agree or agree strongly that they have been disadvantaged or discriminated against in their career due to their accent.

- Almost two-fifths (39%) of respondents from a working-class background agreed compared with just under one-fifth (23.9%) of respondents from a non-working-class background.
- Almost three in 10 (27.2%) respondents working in the higher education sector feel they have been disadvantaged or discriminated against due to their family income. In the further education sector just over two in 10 (22.3%) of respondents feel this way.

MANNERISMS

- Just over a quarter (25.9%) of respondents agree or agree strongly that they have been disadvantaged or discriminated against in their career due to their mannerisms.
- Just over two-fifths (40.2%) of respondents from a working-class background agreed compared with over one-fifth (22.7%) of respondents from a non-working-class background.
- Just over a quarter (26.9%) of respondents working in the higher education sector feel they have been disadvantaged or discriminated against due to their mannerisms. In the further education sector just less then one-fifth (19.1%) of respondents feel this way.

Figure 4: Do you believe that you have been disadvantaged or discriminated against in your career based on any of the following attributes? (Please select all that apply

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly	Responses
Accent						
Count	360	949	812	1,117	749	3,987
Row %	9.0%	23.8%	20.4%	28.0%	18.8%	
Clothing/style of dress						
Count	196	737	1,080	1,267	707	3,987
Row %	4.9%	18.5%	27.1%	31.8%	17.7%	
Dialect (pronunciation, grammar & vocabulary including slang)						
Count	293	849	860	1,228	757	3,987
Row %	7.3%	21.3%	21.6%	30.8%	19.0%	
Family income						
Count	312	745	929	1,223	778	3,987
Row %	7.8%	18.7%	23.3%	30.7%	19.5%	
Friendship groups						
Count	245	653	988	1,314	787	3,987
Row %	6.1%	16.4%	24.8%	33.0%	19.7%	
Hobbies or interests						
Count	174	532	1,032	1,414	835	3,987
Row %	4.4%	13.3%	25.9%	35.5%	20.9%	
Mannerisms						
Count	267	767	1,069	1,204	680	3,987
Row %	6.7%	19.2%	26.8%	30.2%	17.1%	

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly	Responses
Place of birth						
Count	307	653	930	1,281	816	3,987
Row %	7.7%	16.4%	23.3%	32.1%	20.5%	
Political beliefs						
Count	223	511	1,161	1,339	753	3,987
Row %	5.6%	12.8%	29.1%	33.6%	18.9%	
School attended						
Count	301	663	1,003	1,266	754	3,987
Row %	7.5%	16.6%	25.2%	31.8%	18.9%	
University attended						
Count	252	622	859	1,303	951	3,987
Row %	6.3%	15.6%	21.5%	32.7%	23.9%	
Totals						
Total Responses						**3987**

The following extracts detail comments received from respondents in the free-text boxes in relation to attributes, discrimination and disadvantage:

> *... For a while, especially when I was a student, I felt I had to disguise anything that would identify me as someone from a lower income family, but I am gradually starting to acknowledge that.*
> **Working-class, 36-40, woman, Northern Ireland, higher education**

> *Nobody mocks me for my speech or accent; I just don't get promoted.*
> **Unsure of social class background, 65+, man, Yorkshire & The Humber, higher education**

> *The fact that there are so few working-class academics and post-16 education staff, which leads to all the subsequent problems of representation, inclusion, a middle class culture being dominant, etc... have experienced numerous uncomfortable instances where classist comments have passed unnoticed or unchallenged.*
> **Working-class, 31-35, woman, north west England, higher education**

> *[T]he entire leadership team could only be described as middle class and have mostly taught more academic subjects despite it being an FE college teaching non-academic vocational subjects for the most part.*
> **Working-class, 46-50, man, East of England, further education**

> *I guess this is a special case but I have found at [INSTITUTION]... Often the first question you are asked at a college dinner is 'what school did you go to?' When I reply [...] comprehensive, there is generally a shifting of feet and some embarrassment and you find yourself at the edge of conversation. Nothing overt, but it's noticeable... I feel this places me at a distinct disadvantage in terms of obtaining extra funding... and also possibly even promotion/job opportunities.*
> **Working-class, 41-45, man, East of England, higher education**

Further exploration

Respondents were asked what aspects of the experiences of working-class staff in post-16 education they would like UCU to explore in more detail. A number of themes emerged.

SOCIAL CLASS TERMINOLOGY

Some respondents shared that 'working-class' terminology did not apply or was difficult to unpick in their own contexts, limiting their capacity to understand their own 'location' in class categorisation. This highlights that UCU will certainly need to establish an agreed terminology framework as this work is developed further.

> *I'm unsure what your definition of working class involves (it's such a nebulous thing) - are we talking background, upbringing, culture, or are we talking financial? I think a robust definition is necessary to make any conclusions.*
> **Working-class, 41-45, woman, Yorkshire & The Humber, higher education**

> *I think it's worth pointing out that "working class" isn't terminology that's commonly used outside of the UK. As an international member of staff, I think we sometimes fall outside of the traditional British class system and may not be well-captured by this language.*
> **Non-working class, 26-30, woman, North West England**

IMPACT ON PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES

Respondents were keen for UCU to conduct further research into how class impacts professional experiences in the post-16 education sector, for class impacts to be better documented/disclosed and for more support to enable an even playing field in relation to opportunities in the workplace. A number of respondents felt that class ought to be considered as part of an institution's equality, diversity and inclusion agenda, and a few felt that social class should be a characteristic protected by the law.

> *Positive experiences, positive interventions - so can learn from best practice.*
> **Non-working class, 41-45, woman, Yorkshire & Humber, higher education**

> *How discrimination functions; impacts on colleagues through anecdotal evidence; consciousness raising about the importance of the issue and its impact - giving us a vocabulary and a set of evidence to talk about it openly and put it on institutional EDI agendas; research into the complexity of class especially at University/FE*
> **Unsure of social class background, 36-40, man, Yorkshire & Humber, higher education**

> *Class is not a protected characteristic according to the Equality Act 2010, but it is a huge factor in discrimination and disadvantage in the university experience and needs to be protected just as much as the listed characteristics.*
> **Working-class, 31-35, woman, Scotland, higher education**

STUDENT-STAFF PIPELINE

Many members linked their concerns around representation of working-class staff to the widening participation agenda by raising concerns about retention and promotion both from a student perspective and a post-16 worker perspective. A number of respondents pointed to the student-staff pipeline and how factors such as student finance, funding, precarity and weakening terms and conditions reduce the potential for students from working-class backgrounds to progress to careers in the post-16 sector and stay.

> *[E]arlier in my career I had to turn down a position at a prestigious organisation that would have massively boosted my career, because the pay didn't cover rent, never mind anything else like student loan payments...*
> **Unsure of social class background, 36-40, woman, North East England, higher education**

> *...Leaky pipeline for working class undergrads, postgrads, PhD researchers, postdocs, etc. Lack of disposable funds for working class academics to make the international and institutional moves seemingly required of ECRs [early career researchers... the "hidden curriculum" (needs to be addressed very early on in academic training), which contributes to lots of issues like institutional support, networking, promotions, job applications, etc.*
> **Unsure of social class background, 26-30, woman, Northern Ireland, higher education**

Some respondents suggested actions employers should take to monitor pipeline concerns.

> *Analysis of retention rates of local socio-economic groups through the academic pipeline...*
> **Working-class, 36-40, man, North East England, higher education**

> *Monitoring of PhD recruitment*
> **Non-working class, 31-35, man, North East England, higher education**

INTERSECTIONAL IMPACTS

A number of respondents highlighted concerns about the interplay of their social class and personal identities. Here, members were keen to highlight the importance of recognising the ways in which discrimination can be intersectional and thereby compound experiences of discrimination and disadvantage. Respondents wanted to see more research to highlight how this can play out in the post-16 sector.

> *I feel being working class and having BAME and faith characteristics puts me at a major disadvantage when it comes to applying for promotion and developing my career.*
> **Working-class, 41-45, man, Yorkshire & Humber, higher education**

> *How class intersects with gender to ensure that women from working class backgrounds are sidelined for progression and given more administrative roles in academia (often managing large groups of students, providing pastoral support, managing resources and data) and kept away from research.*
> **[working-class, 41-45, woman, East Midlands, higher education**

> *I think the issues around career progression, which is completely linked to pay equity, workload, casualisation, work/life balance, inclusion, and networking, is a key issue that UCU could explore in more detail. I think UCU also needs to consider class backgrounds through an intersectional approach that also examines the impact that gender, race, and disability have on all barriers staff may face at post-16 educational institutions.*
> **Unsure of working-class background, 36-40, woman, South East England, higher education**

IMPROVEMENT AND SUPPORT

A number of sector-led improvements have already been described in this paper. Some members also set out forms of support which might support greater fairness and transparency . Themes explored included mentoring, better access to continuing professional development (CPD) and transparent networking opportunities.

> *… I have only really now started to unpick how my experience of university (both as a student and staff member) has been affected by being working class. There is a lot of 'assumed knowledge' that I have had to work very hard to catch up with, and that often made me feel inadequate.*
> **Working-class, 26-30, woman, North West England, higher education**

> *The main issue… support (finance and workload management) to help with further study (including PhD and research publication) as well as other forms of CPD.*
> **Working-class, 56-60, woman, North West England, higher education**

> *Making networking more structured and visible. Literally did not have a clue how to do this till a senior professor took me under their wing. I now mentor working-class and female academics to try and pay it forward.*
> **Working-class, 51-55, woman, Scotland, higher education**

> *For me, the principal disadvantages specific to my class background relate to a lack of experience and confidence around networking, a sense of feeling alien or out of place at times, and, most significantly, the financial challenge of bridging from undergraduate to PGR - i.e., the lack of funding at MA level, and then from PGR funding running out to the first post that is at least a year long, and gives you the chance to get on your feet. For me that gap was 18 months, but for many people coming into the profession now, that gap is much longer.*
> **Working-class, 41-45, other: mostly woman, but not always,**
> **Yorkshire & The Humber, higher education**

Conclusion

This initial scoping exercise has identified strong perceptions of disadvantage and discrimination faced by working-class staff in the post-16 education sector. This provides a strong mandate for UCU to undertake more work in this area. The recommendations set out at the beginning of this paper are proposed for the development of this work.

Appendix

SOCIAL CLASS, PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS AND MINORITY GROUPS

The following section sets out the findings segmented by protected characteristics and some minority groups. As already highlighted in the paper, these experiences must be considered with an intersectional approach as these characteristics do not exist independently of one another.

AGE

Responses were received from across the age spectrum with the greatest proportion of respondents represented among 51-55 year olds (16.6%) and 56-60 year olds (15.1%)

Half (54%) of older workers (age 60+) and mid-career (41-60 years old) (50.8%) stated that they are working. Fewer early career (age 18-40) respondents (43.3%) are working. The incidence of respondents answering 'unsure' reduced with age, such that 16.7% of early career researchers answered unsure, compared to 10.8% of mid-career workers, and 9.2% of older workers.

When considering the barriers faced by working-class staff by age, on average, the younger respondents are, the more likely they are to agree that working-class staff face barriers specifically linked to social class at their institution. This is the case across all factors explored.

- Recruitment (early-career: 54.7%; mid-career: 41.2%; older workers: 32%)
- Retention (early-career: 48.8%; mid-career: 32.9%; older workers: 24.7%)
- Pay equality (early-career: 51.1%; mid-career: 40.3%; older workers: 31.3%)
- Career progression (early-career: 61.8%; mid-career: 50.7%; older workers: 39.9%)
- Workload (early-career: 42%; mid-career: 30.8%; older workers: 24.1%)
- Casualisation (early-career: 57.9%; mid-career: 39%; older workers: 30.5%)
- Work/life balance (early-career: 53.4%; mid-career: 38.3%; older workers: 28.5%)
- Feeling included (early-career: 58.4%; mid-career: 48.6%; older workers :40.8%
- Networking opportunities (early-career: 58.7%; mid-career: 50.5%; older workers: 43.3%)

DISABILITY

14.8% of respondents said that they have a disability. 4.4% of respondents selected 'prefer not to say'.

Overall, 15% of respondents identified as having a disability. 48.9% of these respondents identified as having a working-class background, on a par with the overall rate for respondents.

In relation to barriers faced by working-class staff, disabled staff and their non-disabled peers, 'strongly agree' or 'agree' according to the following differentials:

- Recruitment (54.2% vs 41.9%) a 12.3 percentage point differential
- Retention (48.4% vs 34.1%) a 14.3 percentage point differential
- Pay equality (51.8% vs 40.4%) an 11.4 percentage point differential
- Career progression (64.9% vs 49.9%) a 15 percentage point differential
- Workload (42.9% vs 31.1%) an 11.8 percentage point differential
- Casualisation (55.7% vs 41.3%) a 14.4 percentage point differential
- Work/life balance (51.9% vs 39.5%) a 12.4 percentage point differential
- Feeling included (61.8% vs 48.3%) a 13.5 percentage point differential
- Networking opportunities (62.5% vs 49.9%) a 12.6 percentage point differential

ENGLISH FIRST LANGUAGE

English was the first language of 85.1% of respondents, whilst it was not the first language of 13.3% of respondents. 1.6% of respondents selected 'prefer not to say'.

Respondents whose first language is English, are more likely to describe themselves as working-class (50.2%) than respondents whose first langue is not English (41.2%).

Here, there are examples where there is a greater perception of barriers faced by working-class members amongst respondents for whom English is a first language. This ties in with the comments made by a number of respondents that the concept of social-class is deemed uniquely UK-specific terminology.

In relations to 'agree' or 'strongly agree' perceptions of barriers faced by working-class staff, the differentials for respondents for whom English is a first language and for those for whom it is not are as follows:

- Recruitment (44.1% vs 44.3%) a -0.2 percentage point differential
- Retention (37% vs 34.6%) a 2.4 percentage point differential
- Pay equality (42.1% vs 44.2%) a -2.1 percentage point differential
- Career progression (52.8% vs 52.4%) a 0.4 percentage point differential
- Workload (32.5% vs 38%) a -5.5 percentage point differential
- Casualisation (43.8% vs 42.3%) a 1.5 percentage point differential
- Work/life balance (41.3% vs 44.5%) a -3.2 percentage point differential
- Feeling included (50.8% vs 48.7) a 2.1 percentage point differential
- Networking opportunities (51.9% vs 52.9%) a -1 percentage point differential

ETHNICITY

The majority, 87.1% of respondents were white. 9.7% of respondents were black. UCU uses the term 'Black' in a political sense to refer to people who are descended, through one or both parents, from Africa, the Caribbean, Asia (the middle-East to China) and Latin America. It refers to those from a visible minority who have a shared experience of oppression. The word is used to foster a sense of solidarity and empowerment. 3.3% of respondents selected 'prefer not to say'.

49.8% of black respondents are from a working-class background, the same figure for white respondents is 48.4%. Black staff far more likely than their white peers to agree or agree strongly that they face barriers specifically linked to their class. Notable examples include:

- Recruitment (53% vs 43.2%) a 9.8 percentage point differential
- Retention (45.1% vs 35.8%) a 9.3 percentage point differential
- Pay equality (55.6% vs 41.2%) a 14.4 percentage point differential
- Career progression (63.1% vs 51.7%) an 11.4 percentage point differential
- Workload (48.4% vs 31.8%) a 16.6 percentage point differential
- Casualisation (51.6% vs 43.1%) an 8.5 percentage point differential
- Work/life balance (51% vs 40.7%) a 10.4 percentage point differential
- Feeling included (53.4% vs 49.4%) a 4 percentage point differential
- Networking opportunities (60.2% vs 51.3%) an 8.9 percentage point differential

GENDER AND GENDER IDENTITY

51.8% or respondents were women, whilst 42.5 were men. 1.3% of respondents were non-binary. 0.9% of respondents selected 'other'. 3.5% of respondents selected 'prefer not to say'.

94.9% of respondents were the same gender as assigned at birth, whilst 1.4% of respondents were not. 3.7% of respondents selected 'prefer not to say'.

Identification as working-class varies significantly by gender and gender identity. 50.9% of men who responded identify as working-class. Amongst non-binary respondents[1], the figure is 32.1%; women 47.1% and those who selected 'other – write in[2]' 52.9%. Responses segmented by gender assigned at birth also reveal strong variation across respondents. Amongst respondents who identify as the same gender assigned to them at birth[3] (GSAB), 49.1% identify as working-class. Amongst respondents whose gender is not the same as assigned at birth (GNSAB), the corresponding figure is 31.6%.

In relation to barriers faced by working-class staff, 'agree' or 'strongly agree' responses are as follows:

- Recruitment (men: 43.3%; non-binary: 69.8%; women: 44.5%; other: 41.2%; GSAB: 43.9%; GNSAB: 66.1%)
- Retention (men: 34.3%; non-binary: 60.4%; women: 38.3%; other: 32.4%; GSAB: 36.4%; GNSAB: 52.7%)

- Pay equality (men: 37%; non-binary: 66%; women: 46.6%; other: 41.2%; GSAB: 42.2%; GNSAB: 57.9%)
- Career progression (men: 48.3%; non-binary: 75.5%; 56.1%; other: 50%; GSAB: 52.6%; GNSAB: 66.6%)
- Workload (men: 29.9%; non-binary: 52.9%; women: 35.7%; other: 35.3%; GSAB: 33.1%; GNSAB: 49.2%)
- Casualisation (men: 40% non-binary: 71.7%; women: 46.1%; other: 44.1%; GSAB: 43.3%; GNSAB: 68.4%)
- Work/life balance (men: 37.7%; non-binary: 60.4%; women: 45%; other: 35.2%; GSAB: 41.6%; GNSAB: 44.4%)
- Feeling included (men: 46.5%, non-binary: 69.8%; women: 53.8%; other: 50%; GSAB: 50.4%; GNSAB: 59.7%)
- Networking opportunities (men: 48.1%; non-binary: 71.7%; women: 55%; other: 47.1%; GSAB: 51.9%; GNSAB: 61.4%)

MIGRANTS

77.9% of respondents were not migrants, whilst 18.5% of respondents were. 3.3% of respondents selected ‘prefer not to say’.

Amongst respondents who are migrants, 37% are from a working-class background whilst 45.7% say that they are not. 17.3% of said that they were unsure. As already highlighted, a number of non-UK born respondents feel that the terminology around class is not transferrable to their own contexts.

The following results highlight the differentials between migrant members and UK-born members in relation to agreement or strong agreement that working-class staff face the following barriers in their institutions:

- Recruitment (51.8% vs 42.3%) a 9.5 percentage point differential
- Retention (41.3% vs 35.5%) a 5.8 percentage point differential
- Pay equality (48.2% vs 41.3%) a 6.9 percentage point differential
- Career progression (56.8% vs 52%) a 4.8 percentage point differential
- Workload (40.2% vs 31.7%) an 8.5 percentage point differential
- Casualisation (49.7% vs 42.5%) a 7.2 percentage point differential
- Work/life balance (47.8% vs 40.4%) a 7.4 percentage point differential
- Feeling included (54.9% vs 49.8%) a 5.1 percentage point differential
- Networking opportunities (55.8% vs 51.3%) a 4.5 percentage point differential

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

79.2% of respondents were heterosexual. 15.3% of respondents were LGBT+, comprising of the following: asexual, 1.1%; bisexual, 6.8%; gay 3.3%; lesbian, 1.9%; pansexual, 0.9%; and 'other' 1.3%. 11.8% of respondents selected 'prefer not to say'.

44.7% of respondents who are LGBT+ are from a working-class background, a slightly lower figure than the overall figure of 49% for all respondents.

LGBT+ respondents who are working-class are much more likely to agree or agree strongly that there are barriers faced by working-class staff than their heterosexual working-class peers. The findings are as follows:

- Recruitment (57% vs. 43.6%) a 13.4 percentage point differential
- Retention (50.4% vs. 36.9%) a 13.5 percentage point differential
- Pay equality (59.2% vs. 48.2%) an 11 percentage point differential
- Career progression (70.2% vs. 58.9%) an 11.3 percentage point differential
- Workload (56.7 vs. 40.3%) a 16.4 percentage point differential
- Casualisation (57% vs. 44.7%) a 12.3 percentage point differential
- Work/life balance (55.8% vs 46.7%) a 9.1 percentage point differential
- Feeling included (58.8% vs52.6%) a 6.2 percentage point differential
- Networking opportunities (61.8 vs 56.1) a 5.7 percentage point differential

Notes

[i] Dougall, Isla, Mario Weick, and Milica Vasiljevic. "Social Class and Wellbeing Among Staff and Students in Higher Education Settings: Mapping the Problem and Exploring Underlying Mechanisms." Journal of applied social psychology 51.10 (2021): 965–986. Web.

[ii] Curtice, J., Phillips, M. and Clery E. (2015), British Social Attitudes: the 33rd Report, London: NatCen Social Research, available online at: www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk
https://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/latest-report/british-social-attitudes-33/social-class.aspx

[1] n<100, as such these figures apply to this survey alone and cannot be extrapolated to the wider population.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

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