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Security Matters

Issue 1 | November 2015

THIS ISSUE: **BALANCING CASUAL WORK WITH CARE,**
UCU'S VICTORY AT STIRLING, WINNING BETTER JOBS
IN ADULT EDUCATION, ORGANISING POSTGRADUATES,
UCU'S NATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER JOBS,
CASUALISATION AND BME WORKERS IN EDUCATION,
HOW DO UNIONS WIN FOR PRECARIOUS WORKERS?

Security Matters

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WELCOME FROM VICKY BLAKE, CHAIR OF THE ANTI-CASUALISATION COMMITTEE

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Welcome to our new look publication, **Security Matters**, put together by UCU and its Anti-Casualisation Committee. The campaign for employment security is a campaign for everyone, regardless of contract type: if you are on a casualised contract, know that we stand together to fight the abuse that casual contracts represent throughout tertiary education; if you are on a permanent contract, know that we fight for you to retain those rights and for those who work alongside you to obtain the same. If you're still thinking about joining UCU, we hope this issue makes you feel welcome and helps to introduce you to the work we do and how you can be a part of it. Our national days of action (on 19 November this year) serve to highlight the work we do which threads throughout campaigning and case work throughout the calendar.

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This issue brings together first-hand experiences of casualised work and 'anti-cas' activism, campaign ideas, research, practical advice and tips, and we hope it will help to inspire you whether you're a seasoned activist, just starting to find out more about how the union works, or somewhere in between. The campaign for secure employment for all staff is a positive one, and central to everything the union does. Secure employment allows staff to thrive and develop in a creative education culture that benefits staff, students and wider society – that's our aim.

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VICKY BLAKE chairs the UCU Anti-Casualisation Committee (ACC) which represents UCU fixed-term and hourly-paid staff and fights the use of casual contracts throughout tertiary education.

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Security Matters is produced by UCU and its Anti-Casualisation Committee. It features discussion of issues facing precarious workers in post-secondary education and reports on the union's work to win better, more secure jobs for education professionals

WE BELIEVE IN SECURE WORK FOR ALL STAFF

Welcome to Security Matters, UCU's magazine aimed at members on precarious contracts and our many branches campaigning against the casualisation of post-secondary education. In this magazine you will find discussion of some of the biggest issues facing the tens of thousands of staff on insecure contracts, alongside reports on what UCU is doing to tackle these problems and advance the interests of our members.

The fight for better and more secure jobs in our colleges, universities, adult education services and prison education sector is one of UCU's national priorities. Our sectors, no less than the rest of the economy have been restructured over the last 30 years. This has been a long, complex and multi-faceted process but one of its biggest features has been a mushrooming of casual contracts that has made chronic insecurity a characteristic of our workplaces. Modern HR departments have generated a dizzying variety of names for this workforce: sessional, term-time, hourly-paid, casual workers, atypical workers, fixed-term contract, variable-hours, zero-hours, hours-to-be-notified, the list goes on.

Whatever they are called, all casual contacts share some key common features – employers make little or no commitment to their workers while workers shoulder the risks of insecurity. This is what makes casual contracts so exploitative. This exploitative character is heightened when it intersects with other pre-existing inequalities in our society. In this issue, Dr Emily Grabham from the University of Kent reports on part of her research project, looking at how women on casual contracts in post-secondary education are being penalised by 'family friendly' rights that are constructed around traditional notions of the division of labour in nuclear families and that assume that people work in secure employment. Jim Thakoordin, from UCU's Anti-Casualisation Committee, calls for more work on the intersection of precarious contracts and racial discrimination, taking his cue from TUC research which pointed to black and minority ethnic workers suffering disproportionately from the restructuring of work after the 2008 economic crash.

While some of these problems will require partial or holistic political reform, trade unions like UCU have a unique role to play in delivering meaningful change for workers now. Through their ability to organise collectively and bargain for improvements, unions can change their workplaces for the better and increase the power of working people. In this issue, Professor Melanie Simms, an industrial relations academic at the University of Leicester, reviews the findings of her recent report into how UK unions have used their

collective strength to organise and negotiate for precarious workers across the economy. There are valuable lessons to be learned from here for union reps and members alike.

Looking more closely at our own sectors, Jonathan White, from UCU's Bargaining and Negotiations Department, reports on UCU's national priority campaign 'Stamp out casual contracts', highlighting the union's strategy and the growing list of significant collective successes being won by the union.

Michael MacNeil, UCU's National Head of Bargaining and Negotiations reports back on the union's long-running fight to show that the University of Stirling broke the law in treating its fixed-term contract staff differently during a redundancy exercise and explains the implications of this complex case. In the end, as he concludes, the law – particularly when it's being made by the current Conservative government – is not our friend and we're thrown back on our workplace power.

As well as pursuing collective agreements, UCU's reps spend a huge amount of time representing individuals and groups of members on casual contracts. Every day our trained reps take on individual cases for casualised staff, helping them make a case for permanence, continuity of employment, fair pay and treatment or tackling the abuses that come with precariousness. In this issue, Lesley Kane, from the Anti-Casualisation Committee, looks at the kinds of ways in which UCU can help individuals and groups of casualised staff in the workplace every day.

Finally, we feature a series of reports from the 'front line' so to speak, gathered from some of the reps doing amazing work in their own branches. These include: an inspiring report from David Ridley, anti-casualisation rep at Coventry University on his branch's attempt to organise and win recognition for highly casualised pre-sessional English teachers at a university subsidiary company; an account from Warwick University UCU's committee of how they defeated their management's attempt to create a similar subsidiary to contract hourly-paid teaching staff via 'TeachHigher'; a report on how UCU members at Hackney Learning Trust won their campaign to have hourly-paid staff offered fractional teaching contracts, and finally a roundup of stories from Scotland, focusing on the organisation of postgraduate teachers.

We hope you find this magazine interesting and inspiring. Whoever you are, we hope you are moved to take the next logical step in your union, whether it's reviewing your branch's casualisation campaigning, getting involved for the first time, or even simply doing that thing you've been meaning to do for ages and joining your union.

JONATHAN WHITE

Balancing casual work with care

Education workers speak out

DR EMILY GRABHAM FROM THE LAW SCHOOL AT THE UNIVERSITY OF KENT REPORTS ON HER RESEARCH INTO HOW PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT, FAMILY-FRIENDLY RIGHTS AND CARING RESPONSIBILITIES SHAPE WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE

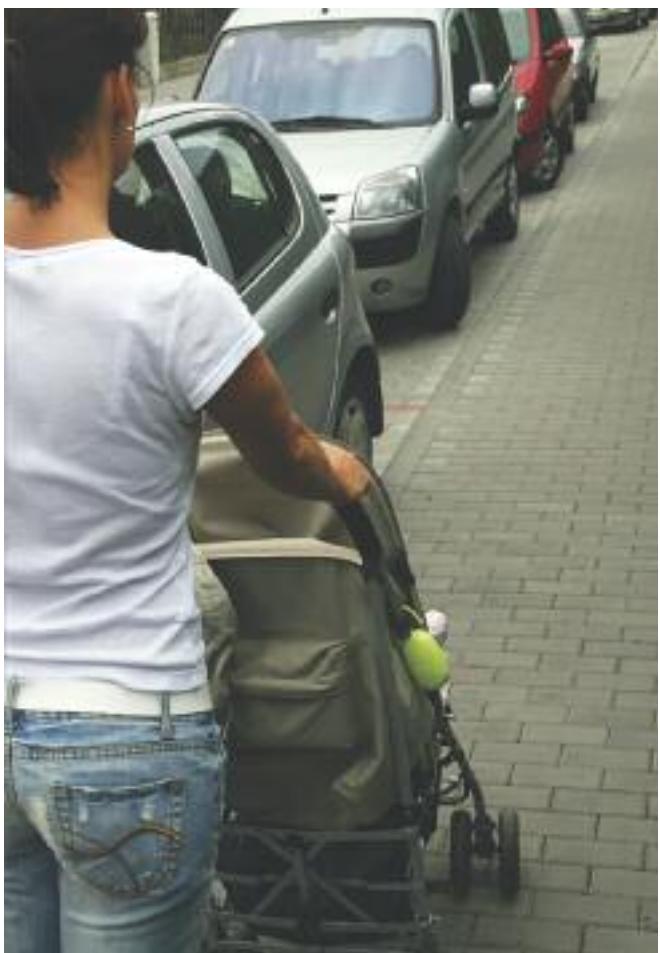
The UCU casual work campaign has led the way, nationally, in bringing casual work to the attention of workers, managers, policy makers and academics, and in calling for improvements to workers' conditions. Yet this task is made all the more complex because experiences of casual work vary depending on gender, immigration status and whether someone has a care obligation.

My research focuses on the experiences of women who care for children and other adults whilst working in casual jobs. 'Casual work' normally means work that is temporary, intermittent, not well paid or not well protected by legal rights. It can include bank work, agency work and 'zero-hours' contracts. Many of the laws giving people 'family friendly rights' still assume a male breadwinner earning most of the wages for a whole family, often with a financially dependent female second breadwinner. These laws are aimed at particular types of family: what we might term 'nuclear family' households in which heterosexual couples share financial responsibility for children, but in which, it is still assumed, women will take the hard decisions around work and income when children come along. Women's work and wages, in this model, are assumed to be dependent and marginal, even in the face of traditionally much higher independent employment levels amongst

working class and racialised women. As family friendly rights at work have arrived in waves from the 1970s to the present day, they have benefited women whose profiles most closely fit the norm: those in permanent jobs.

Yet, as the current controversies over zero-hours contracts and benefits conditionality show, casual work is the reality for many working women today. My current project, which has been funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, studies what life is like for women who don't have full-time steady work: how they manage their jobs alongside caring for children or for adults, what their work conditions are like. I'm interviewing women in casual jobs around the UK to understand how they manage, what they understand of their legal rights, and what seems relevant to them. The point of this research is to use women's own perspectives as the basis for proposing changes to employment law or policies to improve conditions for casual workers. Once the interviews are complete, I'll draw out the themes, compare women's experiences with the current legal position, and produce a policy report that will put the voices of casual workers front and centre in debates about the future of family-friendly rights.

Many of the women I've interviewed have casual jobs in higher and further education (HE and FE), such as very short term teaching contracts, bank work and ad hoc lecturing



positions. These women have shared extremely useful perspectives on what it's like doing casual work in HE and FE alongside caring for children, older children, elderly parents or children with disabilities. In the remainder of this piece, I'll set out some preliminary findings from the research, which is still ongoing. Some of the findings are not surprising, but other emerging themes shake up policy makers' assumptions about how casual work affects women. I'd love to know your perspectives. My contact details are at the end of this piece and if, after reading it you would like to be involved in the research, please get in touch.

1 Casual workers are excluded from family friendly rights,

with damaging effects on themselves and their loved ones. Arcane legal provisions actively exclude many women in casual work. For example, in order to make a request for flexible work, you need to have been working for your employer for 26 weeks or more (around 6.5 months). This obviously assumes women will be in permanent jobs. Yet my research has shown, many universities and colleges use one month and three-month contracts, meaning that it is very difficult for casual workers to build up enough time in

employment to even request flexible work. Another example is employment status: you need to be an 'employee' to claim maternity leave, which is quite difficult to figure out because the law in this area is not clear. Women in casual work often do not know whether they are employees. One woman went back to work on a short-term teaching contract three weeks after giving birth in order to prove her commitment to her department. She did this because she assumed she was not an 'employee' and hence unable to claim maternity leave.

2 Casual workers are not victims. Women in casual work are not victims and especially not so in HE and FE: they try to negotiate with employers, challenge their working conditions, ask for permanent positions and go to administrative colleagues for advice on whether they are being paid properly. This also applies to non-unionised women. But their requests for better conditions are repeatedly refused by management. This higher education worker speaks of her attempt to shift from casual teaching contracts to a permanent fractional position: *I ... went to the head of school and I said, you know, I would like to know what it looks like for the coming year and she said, well, we can't renew this contract and I said, well ... if I'm going to be asked to do the same teaching can we do it on a fractional contract rather than on an hourly contract, here are the numbers. She said, no. I said, I just want to be clear that it's at least half or less than half the pay to do it on an hourly contract and it's the same work I've just been doing. And, you know, she said, no.* What this and many other women's experiences show is that trying to negotiate better conditions on an individual basis often does not work. Instead, improving casual workers' positions will require universities and colleges to change the way they organise their own teaching provision and human resources management.

3 Casual work makes arranging care more complex. In contrast to the touted benefits of flexibility for people working casual or 'zero-hours' contracts, the uncertainty of casual work in HE and FE makes planning child and elder care very difficult. One worker reported spending upwards of three hours per week on planning childcare, transport, and fitting together her and her partners' schedules, due to varying working hours. Many workers have reported only finding out about having a contract, and often little else about the contract, only weeks before the beginning of term, making it impossible to be confident about paying nursery, childcare or after-school fees to cover their working time. Many workers, too, are given contracts only for term time, meaning that planning ahead to the next term and booking childcare is very difficult. And a key

problem is financial planning: workers have reported subsidising casual contracts with other sources of income or savings due to the delay between working and getting paid, and this impacts on their ability to pay for child care. Women often report that the vast majority or even, on occasion, all of their pay from casual work is used for child care costs, meaning that the decision to do casual work is often taken for career-development reasons and not improving their financial situation.

4 Women who have migrated to the UK face greater barriers. Women who are non-UK citizens have reported many added problems balancing casual work with care. Whilst many UK workers do not have family nearby, non-UK workers cannot rely on parents or other family members to cover care emergencies. When they do have help from family, non-UK citizens often face the added burden of helping with visas and paying flight and hosting costs for visiting family members. Universities often do not understand non-UK workers' visa situations and require documents that often are not strictly needed in order to work in the UK. This increases the stress of finding and keeping work. Many non-UK workers suspect that employers treat them differently because they 'know' these workers will feel less able to challenge any discrimination. The theme of dependency on partners also came up: women whose status in the UK is attached to a partner tend to feel more financially dependent, putting a strain on their relationship, sometimes undermining their own confidence, and affecting the types of work these women accept. Some women are aware that their own status in the UK is not as secure as their husband or children, adding to their sense of insecurity. These experiences show how migration laws, and universities' often overbearing and unnecessary interpretation of these laws, can combine with casual work to make life very difficult for female non-UK citizens.

5 Hope. Women go into temporary or casual work thinking that it is a path to a more stable type of work, or a career step, only to find that the way work allocation and hiring is structured in their institutions stops them from moving on. These women are not naïve, they have not set out to do something impossible, they are highly educated and motivated, but they are often unable to challenge how work is allocated within institutions because this is largely a structural and not an individual problem.

6 Guilt. The vast majority of women I have interviewed on this project report feeling guilty about balancing casual work with caring for others. As one worker put it: *Right now,*

I think I'm not caring very well, because with all the commuting and preparations and things like this, I feel very guilty that I don't, I'm not able to give them as much time as I think they need. Guilt has been so widely and persistently reported that it is impossible to understand it just as a feature of women's individual lives. I have begun to think about it as a kind of 'structural guilt': a set of emotions that results from women being pulled in different directions.

7 The daily commute. I've already mentioned that women report spending a lot of time planning their families' schedules to accommodate care, school, and work. Much of this planning is transport-related, involving train and bus schedules, booking train tickets in advance to obtain affordable prices, and making decisions about how far to walk to the bus stop and whether the school run can be fitted into a trip to work. Women in casual work appear, so far, to be particularly reliant on public transport. This has led an increased attention, in the project, on how care, work and transport infrastructure do or don't work together, although more work is needed to understand how casual work, transport, and family friendly rights interact.

Overall, what these women have taught me is that despite their courage, hope and persistence in standing up for their rights individually, we need more wide-ranging and structural solutions to improve the position of casual workers with caring responsibilities. Some of these solutions might include expanding rights so that they are available to a wider range of workers, not just employees on permanent contracts. Not all solutions, however, need involve changes to the law. The challenge we should pose to employers and future governments is making working and caring possible for all kinds of workers, not just those in permanent jobs. Family friendly rights do exist, and they are certainly not perfect, but at the moment they're only working for those women who are already relatively well protected in the workplace. This might mean that women who are in secure, permanent positions will have to accept and work to challenge the problems that their casual colleagues face. As one woman put it, speaking of the refusal of her (permanent) female colleague to accept the difficulties involved in a casual contract: *Where do you keep your feminism?* It's hard to look your colleague in the eye and ask her or him this question, but it's the first step to securing better conditions for carers in casual work.

[@balancingwork](mailto:e.graham@kent.ac.uk)

Balancing Precarious Work and Care project:

<http://www.kent.ac.uk/law/work-life-balance/index.html>

How do unions win for precarious workers?

MELANIE SIMMS, PROFESSOR OF WORK AND EMPLOYMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF

LEICESTER, TELLS US HOW BRITAIN'S UNIONS ARE ORGANISING AND NEGOTIATING FOR

THE GROWING PRECARIOUS WORKFORCE

Organising, representing and bargaining for precarious workers

Although most workers in the UK still have 'regular', full-time, open-ended contracts, various forms of insecure work are spreading into new areas of the labour market and affecting more and more people. Higher education is one sector where we have seen a considerable growth of casualised work in the past decades. Fixed-term contracts, hourly-paid work, sessional teaching and many other forms of insecure employment have allowed higher education institutions (HEIs) to flex their workforce in response to changing student numbers, government policy, staff absence and other uncertainties. These contracts usually also allow managers to make staff redundant much more easily than workers on standard contracts so they offer an advantage in turbulent times, often at the expense of stress and anxiety for the workforce.

These trends are evident in a wide number of sectors and are of concern to policy makers. The European Commission has therefore funded a series of projects looking at various aspects of these developments. We looked at what is often called 'precarious work' in seven EU member states: the UK, Germany, Netherlands, Spain, Slovakia, Italy and Denmark. We were interested in looking at sectors where precarious work has become more common with a particular interest in how unions and employers understood the key issues. We wanted to know whether they bargain collectively over these issues and how members (both union members and individual employers) viewed the challenges.

Our findings were surprising. Given the decline in unions in the UK over the past three decades, the research team here expected to find relatively little evidence of unions tackling these issues. But we not only found lots of examples where unions were taking them very seriously, but also examples of innovative campaigns to bring in new members and represent their interests. As a result, there are plenty of lessons to learn for all unions seeking to organise and represent casualised workers.

We established that there were often common challenges

unions faced and that these related not only to recruiting precarious workers into membership, but also to representing them effectively. At each stage of this process, there were significant barriers facing all unions seeking to bring these workers into membership.

Organising precarious work

Probably the single biggest challenge is not organising workers themselves, but overcoming the structural challenges presented in the sectors where precarious work is common. Small workplaces, isolated workers, and a tendency for employers to hire workers who have fewer alternatives within the labour market all contribute to unions struggling to organise precarious jobs.

The effects are complicated. Partly, these structural constraints make it difficult for unions to make contact with individual workers. Without that personal contact, organising campaigns can falter as it's difficult to recruit members and campaigners. People who work by themselves tend to have less strong ties to their colleagues which can make it difficult to see the common concerns they share, and can even make bullying, harassment and other problems less visible.

Workers who have fewer opportunities in the labour market have fewer options to move jobs, which increases the risk to them if they are identified as union activists. In other words, for many – although not all! – workers, it increases the chances that they may simply wish to 'keep their heads down' and not rock the boat.

Small workplaces and work teams exacerbate these problems for unions. It is resource intensive to target a large number of smaller workplaces when the alternative is targeting a large workplace where you know you can speak to a large number of (potential) members in one go. Small work groups also increase the visibility of activists meaning they can often be targeted by managers if they are seen to challenge decisions.

In other words, it isn't that precarious workers are necessarily harder to persuade of the benefits of union

representation, but that they work in places where it is hard for unions to get to speak to them and hard to demonstrate union effectiveness.

Representing new interests

If unions can successfully bring precarious workers into membership, there still remain some profound issues to consider. One is that the interests of these workers may conflict with those of other members. The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) is a good example here. As the numbers of healthcare assistants expanded in the 1990s, the RCN was initially reluctant to represent them because they felt they may undermine the terms and conditions of registered nurses who were the core of their membership. This position eventually changed when it became clear that healthcare assistants were largely unrepresented, and confusions about roles were causing problems within work teams. In short, the RCN decided that the most effective way to ensure nurses continued to have strong representation was to include healthcare assistants and to try to regulate their work.

It is not always clear that unions have the capacity to take that approach. New members often bring with them new sets of concerns and unions can sometimes struggle to find the resources to address these.

Bargaining for precarious workers

One of the strong findings of our research was that even where unions are open to bringing precarious workers into membership and have the capacity to represent them, establishing and extending collective bargaining arrangements can be difficult. The challenges vary between workplaces and sectors, but targeting precarious workers often means that unions have to try to extend bargaining arrangements to cover these groups. Where there are already strong bargaining arrangements – such as in higher education – this brings more difficult challenges than where bargaining has to be established for the first time.

What is common, however, is that employers are often very resistant to accepting these groups within bargaining arrangements and strongly resist efforts to improve their terms and conditions. In many respects, this is entirely logical as these kinds of employment contracts have often been created to avoid some of the costs associated with hiring workers on ‘standard’ or ‘regular’ contracts. This is widely seen across all of the sectors and all of the countries we studied. Overcoming the resistance of employers to improving the rights of precarious workers takes time and often involves compromise and trade-offs.

Overall, then, across the research projects, we quickly established that precarious workers themselves are no more or less interested in unions than other groups. In fact, their precarious working often mean they are keen to try to improve their situation. The major challenges for unions are common across all of the countries and they relate mostly to the structure of precarious jobs. In other words, it is the jobs that are hard to organise, represent and bargain for, not the workers themselves. This is an important insight because too often debate within unions tends to assume that it is precarious workers themselves who are hard to organise.

Our research also showed some important examples of where unions had overcome some of the challenges. Unite’s Justice for Cleaners campaign was modelled on similar campaigns in the US and aimed to secure bargaining rights for cleaners in business districts in London. It was a huge, high-profile campaign that secured an important expansion in membership and some new union recognition agreements. But it was resource intensive and difficult to sustain, meaning that some of the longer term successes have been more muted. Unions such as the RMT have been able to extend collective bargaining to precarious workers in some of the workplaces where they represent more secure workers. Again, this has involved long campaigns, complexity arising from having several employers involved in contract arrangements, and massive resistance from managers.

So what have we learned? Representing precarious workers is not only about getting them into union membership. In some respects, that is the easy part. The hard graft of working to identify the issues that are important to them, and then getting those issues onto a collective bargaining agenda take years and often decades. Unions like UCU and Equity have been doing this for a long time, and show that unions can be successful. But they have to be constantly vigilant because the nature of precarious work means that the turnover of activists is high, and employer incentives to undermine union representation are strong.

Unions have always struggled against poor employment practices to help workers identify their common interests and bargain to improve them. Our work identified examples of innovation in all of the countries we studied. By and large, unions are not hostile to organising and representing precarious workers, but the challenges are considerable and the gains are always at risk of being undermined. Unions around the world can – and do – learn a lot from each other to help them address these challenges and expand their representation of such important groups of (prospective) members.

UCU's national campaign for better jobs

JONATHAN WHITE, UCU BARGAINING AND NEGOTIATIONS OFFICIAL, GIVES AN OVERVIEW

OF THE UNION'S NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR WINNING MORE SECURE CONTRACTS

Over the course of two decades at least, the post-secondary education sectors have worked to create an army of precarious labour to deliver a growing proportion of their activities. According to our estimates, around one third of teaching staff in further education are employed on hourly-paid contracts, while 60% of colleges reported to us that they used zero-hours contracts for teaching. Almost 60% of teaching-only staff in higher education are on time-limited rather than permanent contracts. Many of these contracts are only one year in duration. According to the Higher Education Statistics Agency, there are 75,000 staff on highly casualised 'atypical' academic contracts, the overwhelming majority are engaged in undergraduate teaching, while our own *freedom of information* request found at least 21,636 university teaching staff with zero-hours contracts. The research conducted in our universities continues to be done by people with little chance of a sustainable career in higher education. 67% of research staff are still on fixed-term contracts – more than 10 years since the fixed-term regulations came into force. Our research indicates that around a third of these are contracts of 12 months or less.

UCU believes that the sector's reliance on casualised labour represents a scandalous failure. Totally unnecessary hardship, anxiety and fear are being inflicted on tens of thousands of people working in our universities and colleges because the sector is too lazy to take its responsibilities seriously and embrace proper workforce planning. But casualisation is also a timebomb for providers. Our members on hourly-paid contracts tell us that because their hourly rates don't reflect the work they do, they are under constant pressure to work unpaid or to cut corners with student and learner support. Researchers tell us about the time and money wasted by the process of applying for grants, the turnover of highly skilled research staff and the pressure to tailor projects around short-term results rather than intellectual rigour.

Universities and colleges can only get away with this for so long. That's why we urge them to work with us to create better jobs. But when rational discussion and the arts of persuasion fail, we have to use pressure instead.

Turning up the political heat

UCU's national strategy for tackling casualisation involves working to raise the public and political profile of casualisation in our sector and then turning this into pressure and leverage to support targeted campaigning, organising and collective bargaining at local level. The political profile of zero-hours contracts has provided a useful context for this strategy and UCU has worked hard to keep the issue in on all politicians' radar. Ahead of the general election in May 2015, we lobbied the Labour Party and worked to support Gateshead MP Ian Mearns's private members bill aimed at abolishing zero-hours contracts. During our national day of action on 5 November, 1200 members wrote to their MPs urging them to support this bill. Maintaining this pressure is no easy task given a Tory administration bent on promoting privatisation, deregulation and wedded to flexible labour markets as a way of cutting the wage bill. Nonetheless, since the election, we have continued to put pressure on the Tory administration, highlighting in particular the contradiction between their emphasis on high-quality teaching in HE and the endemic casualisation that stops our staff being able to do their jobs properly.

Our campaign has won coverage in the national press with articles in the mainstream press, while we've continued to build an impressive social media presence. The union is also playing its part to lift the issue of precarious work up the agenda in the wider trade union movement. In our own education sector, UCU was instrumental in raising the need to fight for better more secure jobs among worldwide education unions organised through Education International. At home meanwhile, it was UCU that moved a motion calling on the TUC to prioritise precarious working in its campaigning and to organise a national lobby of Parliament. UCU is determined that one of the loudest messages that politicians and the press will hear from us will be that they must begin to tackle precarious work in post-secondary education. We will not let this issue drop.

Collective strength used for collective wins

For all the effort and resource we put into our campaigning, what distinguishes us from organisations like 38 Degrees, for

example, is that we organise and bargain collectively to win improvements for our members through recognised negotiating machinery. At a national level, the returns to be won from this are fairly slim. As employers increasingly turn away from national agreements, we need to ensure that we are nationally helping branches to organise and negotiate effectively at local level. Nevertheless, one outcome of the higher education pay settlement in 2013 was a commitment to produce a joint report on casual work in the sector with the employers. Negotiating a jointly agreed wording on this was difficult, with employers determined to keep the options of using 'flexible' labour. But we made some progress in getting them to agree that there were advantages to greater job security and negotiating with the unions. While modest in its statement, this guidance to institutions adds to the noise in the sector telling institutions that change must come.

If we want to deliver for casualised staff now, however, our key lever is the local collective agreement. With colleges and universities pitched against one another in greater competition, our strategy is to focus resources on winning progress in key institutions which we can then use to try to bargain up their competitors. Our case has the virtue of simplicity because it is based in truth. If you want to be a high quality provider, you need your staff on decent and secure contracts. With institutions particularly vulnerable over their use of zero-hours contracts, we are rightly targeting big users. And we're registering successes. Edinburgh and Glasgow universities have reached agreements with us that have practically eradicated zero-hours contracts and are reducing casualisation in other forms. Two other target universities are close to reaching agreement with us. In FE, Wiltshire and City of Bristol colleges recently agreed to move their zero hours and agency staff onto fractional part-time contracts and others are set to follow suit soon.

We're using these advances as a lever to raise the wider issues of casualisation with other institutions. For instance, under pressure from UCU, Oxford Brookes recently introduced an improved, though not agreed, policy enabling hourly-paid staff to transfer onto fractional part-time contracts. Bournemouth University is in negotiations with the union now over the same issue.

UCU is also renewing its focus on research staff. We recently conducted a *freedom of information* request on Russell Group universities to try to expose what is really happening to researchers in our 'elite' universities. We also conducted a survey of researchers themselves, asking them how short-term funding and contracts affect the quality of the knowledge they produce. Watch this space for the results

soon. Universities are great at passing the buck on this issue and blaming short-term funding for their unwillingness to embrace measures that create longer contracts and greater employment stability. Our aim is to start to ratchet up the pressure on our elite universities to look again at this issue. Watch this space for more soon.

The importance of unified and integrated campaigns

Nationally, we're putting a lot of resources into the campaign for better jobs, because we know it's one of the biggest issues facing our union. But we also need to make sure that this is a priority issue for our branches. No one should underestimate the dimensions of this task. Our hard-pressed branch officers are facing an onslaught of issues. It can be hard to find the time and breathing space for strategic campaigning on casualisation. But if we don't do this, the risk is that our branches will find themselves speaking for a diminishing section of our workforce. Similarly, it's vital that campaigning on casualisation is integrated into a united branch strategy. It would be far too easy for splits and divides to open up that institutionalise secondary differences of interest that obscure our greater commonality in face of the employer. Nothing would make our employers happier. That's why the victory won by the UCU branch at Warwick University and the organising work being conducted at Coventry University Group, both detailed elsewhere in this magazine are so inspiring. In both cases casualisation has been embraced as an issue by all sections of our membership and made a central part of a unified branch campaigning and bargaining agenda, pulling in support from all parts of the union, including regional and national officers. That's how we win tangible victories.

Casualisation is not going away. With the recombination of our sectors being speeded up by area reviews in FE and the entry of new providers with even more casualised workforces in HE, our task will only become bigger. And the Tory government's vicious Trade Union Bill is set to make our lives harder still. Yet despite all this, the terrain is always contested and our union continues to win victories that tip the balance of power, change the dynamics and which make a real difference to people's lives. We need the combined collective strength of the union more than ever and that strength will only grow if more staff on casualised contracts join the union and become active in their workplace branches. So, if you know someone who isn't a member of the union, pass them a copy of this newsletter and urge them to sign up today. And if you're thinking of doing something more for your union, think about becoming a local contact for casualised staff in your area.

UCU's victory at Stirling

MICHAEL MACNEIL, UCU'S NATIONAL HEAD OF BARGAINING AND NEGOTIATIONS,

EXPLAINS WHAT THE UNION'S SUPREME COURT VICTORY OVER STIRLING UNIVERSITY

DOES AND DOES NOT MEAN FOR STAFF ON FIXED-TERM CONTRACTS

In higher education the bosses often consider themselves to sit at the more enlightened and progressive end of the employers' spectrum. They do, however, preside over obscene levels of casualisation, with ridiculous numbers of zero-hour teaching contracts and with 67% of research staff on fixed-term contracts.

Some, but not enough, of the employers are negotiating with us to try and address an unfair system that has been cemented into institutional thinking over years; whereas others are actively trying to turn the screw further. Sadly, the University of Stirling is in the latter camp. Basically, Stirling thought that the unions had no right to be consulted over the dismissals of staff on fixed-term contracts. For UCU, the principle of equal treatment for a vast part of the workforce in post-secondary education was at stake, so the union fought this case.

After six years of fighting through four courts, UCU emerged victorious. On Wednesday 29 April, the Supreme Court handed down a judgment that overturned the findings of both the Employment Appeal Tribunal (EAT) and the Inner House and which definitively stated that Stirling University broke the law in 2009 by failing to include fixed-term contract staff in its collective consultation over redundancies.

The essence of Stirling's case, supported by the EAT and the Inner House findings, was that when an employee made a decision to take on a fixed-term contract, their subsequent dismissal would cease to be a redundancy in law and would instead be for 'a reason related to the individual concerned'. In effect, they argued, these employees were not being made redundant. This meant, Stirling maintained, that such employees were not covered by the legislation on the statute books at the time, which imposed the duty to consult in the case of collective redundancies numbering more than 20.

The Supreme Court did not agree. In its judgment, the court explained that in arriving at their decision the judges had looked at two issues in particular: the historical intent of the people framing the relevant legislation and whether it was reasonable to characterise the dismissal of a fixed-term

employee as a dismissal for some reason relating to them as an individual as a consequence of their decision to accept a time-limited contract.

With reference to the first issue, the court found that when the contested piece of legislation on redundancies was drafted, Parliament's intention was to widen the definition of a redundancy situation to capture time-limited contracts and business restructures. Therefore it was not plausible to imagine that Parliament had envisaged a definition that would have excluded anyone who accepted a fixed-term contract.

Secondly, the judgment found decisively that the dismissal issuing from the end of a fixed-term contract is a redundancy regardless of the fact that the employee 'agrees' to it. Instead, the Court stated, the question turns on the employer's decision not to renew a contract and 'whether the reasons for the failure to offer a new contract relate to the individual or to the needs of the business'. The ending of a research project, the judgment said, 'would not be a reason related to the individual employee but a reason related to the employer's business.'

Of course, the immediate impact of this case is strictly limited by the fact that while all this was working itself out the university employers association, disgracefully, took the opportunity to lobby the Coalition government to amend the legislation specifically to exclude fixed-term contracts from the calculation of the number of redundancies that trigger the duty to consult with unions. But this judgment is still important. Firstly, the argument that accepting fixed-term contracts constitutes a reason relating to the individual has been dispatched. Secondly, Stirling broke the law as it stood at the time and the way is now open for the union to make a claim for up to 90 days' pay for the members it supported. But, as importantly, it's a huge moral victory for the union. We stood up for fixed-term contract staff and defended their right to equal treatment to the hilt. UK university employers, to their shame, have used every opportunity possible to deny that right. Our view is that the law as it stands now is wrong and we will push for a future government to address this.

Representing precarious workers in the workplace

LESLEY KANE, FROM UCU'S ANTI-CASUALISATION COMMITTEE, DETAILS SOME OF THE WAYS THAT THE UNION HELPS INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS EVERY DAY IN THE WORKPLACE

For casualised staff, joining a trade union is not always an obvious thing to do. They may feel like visitors, semi-outsiders in their institutions, and some may wonder if the union can do anything for them. Representing individual UCU members when they have problems with their employment is a fundamental part of what UCU branches do. Problems arising from casualised employment are inevitably more difficult to deal with, but even in these cases there is often something that can be done, as the following examples illustrate:

1 Two lecturers have been teaching for more than four years on a succession of fixed-term contracts in the languages faculty of their institution. They write to the university requesting confirmation of permanency, in accordance with the fixed-term employees regulations. They receive a response saying they are still fixed term because there is an objective justification, which is that they are employed to cover a period of 'peak workload' in their departments. Their UCU branch requests information about staffing levels, workload, projected staffing levels, and work planning in the two departments, and after several meetings involving UCU, HR and the faculty, they are given permanent contracts.

2 An hourly-paid teacher on a variable-hours contract is given notice of redundancy, because there are not enough students for her. Another hourly-paid lecturer is also made redundant. But on querying how many students are enrolled on the module she teaches, the numbers are not, by comparison with other modules, so low as to justify two redundancies. A UCU caseworker is assigned to help her, and a compromise is reached whereby she will resume work on the module with the next student intake.



3 A young researcher is about to go on maternity leave, during which her fixed-term contract will run out. She has applied for several internal vacancies, including a permanent academic-related post, managing and developing web-based systems for the university. Her research involved web-based networking systems, so she is well qualified. She is already on maternity leave when invited to interview. The UCU branch raises the case with HR, pointing out that, in accordance with the maternity regulations, she should not have to undergo competitive interview. It should only be a matter of deciding if the job is suitable for her. She is clearly qualified, so she is offered the post and accepts.

Even if your contract offers you little or no security, the support of fellow union members can make a big difference in the front line. We are more likely to be able to help you if you join UCU in good time, rather than waiting until the axe is about to fall.

If you are not already a member, please consider joining us, to support our struggle against job cuts, and for proper contracts and job security for all staff.

Organising precarious workers at Coventry University Group

DAVID RIDLEY, ANTI-CASUALISATION REP AT COVENTRY UNIVERSITY UCU, REPORTS ON A GROUNDBREAKING CAMPAIGN FOR PRECARIOUS WORKERS IN ONE OF THE GROWING SHADOW WORKFORCES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Pre-sessional English (PSE) teaching has a shadowy presence within the contemporary university. Set up to get international students who do not meet the language entry-requirements (the infamous IELTS scores) up to the desired level, these courses are extremely lucrative, with close to a thousand students in total enrolled at the biggest provisions over the duration of a summer. At an average of about £500 per week per student (with students given the option of studying for 5/10/15/30 week courses), we are talking about an income of well over £1 million in a single summer for many universities.

The people teaching on these courses, however, neither get a fair proportion of this income, nor do they get treated in a way that befits such highly qualified, highly experienced professionals. Given the extremely short-term nature of the courses they teach, contracts extend literally to the first and last day of teaching, with no guarantee of being offered a job the next year round. As pre-sessional teaching often stops in the autumn (unless universities offer January starts, in which case there is probably an autumn pre-sessional too), these teachers lead a nomadic existence, moving from university to university, or in many cases, from country to country, trying to find work to get through another year.

At Coventry University, PSE staff returned this summer to find that they would no longer be employed by the university proper, but through a subsidiary trading company called CU Services Ltd. CU Services had originally been set up as an external (and internal) training provider, providing services on a small scale to local businesses and organisations. Under guidance from the Charity Commission and HM

Revenue and Customs law, universities can set up these subsidiary companies to make a profit as long as this profit is redirected into its 'primary purpose' (ie education). However, it seems that by moving teaching into this subsidiary, PSE staff are not entitled to the same employment conditions as academic staff employed by the main university.

For example, upon returning, PSE teachers found that they were no longer eligible for the Teacher's Pension Scheme (offered an AVIVA one instead, saving the university 7% on contributions), were on permanent probation (as they weren't employed long enough, and continuous employment through the main university was not recognised), and therefore not to accumulate holiday and sick pay (and losing any they had previously). Aside from this loss of comparative conditions, and low relative pay (which has been the case for PSE staff for a couple of years at Coventry University now), CU Services workers were no longer covered by the bargaining agreement between UCU and the university. It is fine for PSE teachers to become individual members of the union, but they cannot engage in collective bargaining and cannot be represented for collective grievances.

The existing Coventry University UCU branch became involved because our casualisation rep happened to also be a PSE teacher. Having worked there before, he was contacted by the returning teachers, who were rightly furious at the changes that had happened since leaving. But of course, there was little that the CU branch could do, due to the movement of teachers outside the existing agreements. Serendipitously, our rep also happened to bump into Michael MacNeil and Jonathan White at the Warwick University meeting following the success of the TeachHigher campaign. It turned out that they were very interested in the issues of

subsidiaries and changing corporate form, and they had had their eye on Coventry University for a while. We agreed to meet to discuss how the situation could be approached most effectively by UCU, and thus, through a ‘synergy’ of interests, the CU Services campaign was born.

The first step was to gather the support of PSE staff for a potential recognition campaign, which would attempt to (ideally) include CU Services teaching staff within the existing agreements either voluntarily or through the existing legal right to recognition. This campaign involved getting as many people as possible to sign a petition to say they supported such a campaign, and as many people to become UCU members as possible. Although relatively straightforward in principle, casualised teachers are notoriously difficult to unionise, and PSE teachers are among the most extremely casualised and vulnerable of all higher education workers. Many PSE teachers have families to look after, and in some cases as a single parent, some have precarious VISA agreements to keep on the right side of. This creates a situation where people are terrified to be seen to cause any kind of trouble, as this could cost them their livelihoods.

Taking this context into account, it was decided that the best way to proceed was cautiously and patiently. The most effective strategy initially was to talk with people in a variety of non-threatening situations, in group meetings, one-to-one, basically as much as was physically possible to reassure them that no one could be picked on for supporting the campaign, and that becoming a UCU member was a legal right and was in fact stipulated as such in the CU Services contracts. PSE teachers were already angry and had collated some impressive evidence of grievances by the time we met with Jonathan White who, upon looking at this evidence, decided, with ‘cautious optimism’, that the CU Services campaign could be successful and important. But there was still a lot of trepidation about taking the issue to the next level, confronting the university regarding its treatment of subsidiary workers through the union.

An important turning point was setting up an open meeting with Joe Rooney, the regional branch development and recruitment officer, to talk to PSE teachers in a neutral setting (in the Student’s Union ‘Hub’, with free coffee) about signing the petition and joining the union. In order to placate PSE teachers’ fears about the union, we spent a couple of weeks negotiating with the Director of the PSE for this event to be publicised officially through staff meetings. Although this wasn’t directly successful, as not many people came to the meetings with Joe, a strange thing happened: after the meetings we started receiving many

emails of support and offers of help with the campaign. Whether or not people could actually come along, the symbolic effect of the meeting was to legitimise and make visible both the union as a representative body taking an interest in the PSE teachers’ situation, and also the campaign as a whole, which until that point had operated at a kind of subterranean level.

After this, campaign success accelerated. Another very successful strategy which helped was taking the people who had shown strong support for the campaign and asking them to represent the union by asking people to sign petitions and join. One of the logistical difficulties faced was that half the teachers worked 9am – 1pm, and the other 1pm – 5pm. This meant that one half of teachers never saw the other half, except for fleeting meetings in room changeovers. By asking key, enthusiastic people in each cohort to take the campaign forward, all PSE teachers could be approached in a personal, and frankly efficient, way. As the numbers came in only a few days later (bear in mind the story so far covers only about a month!), we had overwhelming support in the form of petitions, and an increase of membership density.

This incredible support and success in such a short time has indicated to the union and that the CU Services recognition campaign for PSE staff is well worth taking forward. We are currently planning the next steps, but in the meantime, an ‘informal committee’ of PSE staff who are also UCU members has been set up, and this committee is putting together a document that reflects the grievances that PSE teachers have, and what it is that they want improving. In order to make sure this document represents PSE staff more widely, an electronic survey has been sent out to collate the opinions of all the teachers, UCU members or otherwise. Membership density is also increasing daily, in line with each small step forward.

For us on the Coventry University UCU branch committee, the key success of this campaign has been its commitment to democracy, in tapping into the pure ‘people power’ of the workers who actually have to deal with the conditions that need changing, and who want to be a part of that change. In a general climate of universities’ increasing democratic deficit, with outrageously overpaid management making decisions without any apparent thought for the people they will affect most, the CU Services campaign has shown that people are willing to fight for respect at work, and that there is a limit for even the most vulnerable and casualised higher education workers.

Winning better jobs for workers in adult education

A REPORT ON THE SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGN TO WIN MORE SECURE CONTRACTS FOR ADULT EDUCATION STAFF AT HACKNEY LEARNING TRUST

These are difficult times in further and adult education. Swingeing cuts to the adult skills budget, to ESOL funding and the government's area reviews of FE college provision are creating uncertainty and a level of mayhem in the sector. And that brings with it massive demands on branch officers.

It can be a challenge to keep proactive campaigning and negotiating on the agenda. Yet casualisation in further and adult education remains a massive and growing issue. According to UCU estimates almost one in three teachers in our colleges and adult education services is paid by the hour. Zero-hours contracts are rife and as our 'Making Ends Meet' survey revealed, precarious work is creating real material hardship.

In spite of this, with sufficient organisation and determination, it is possible to win collective successes that increase job security, even in the most casualised workplaces. UCU members at Hackney Learning Trust, an adult and community education service in East London, have just managed to win the case for proper fractional contracts. What makes this more inspiring is that they had to build a branch and win recognition rights to do it.

As Amy Jowett, one of the leading UCU reps at Hackney Learning Trust recalls, 'in 2012, we were all on hourly-paid fixed-term contracts. There was no recognised UCU branch, only a collection of members in the ESOL department who had had consistent hours of work and who had just helped the department get a 2 in an Ofsted review'. That year, the ESOL tutors got together to compose a case for moving staff onto fractional contracts, initially within the ESOL team.

After some initially positive meetings, senior managers at the service announced that fractional contracts were 'going against the grain nationally' and discussions stopped. At this point, the UCU members realised they needed to

build a proper branch and win the right to be recognised for negotiations. Using the fight for fractional part-time contracts as their mobilising issue, an informal committee recruited more members and mapped the use of contracts across the adult education department. This work won them partial recognition and set them up for the next stage, a push to be recognised to negotiate.

In 2013, the branch sent a letter to management, signed by all the teaching staff, stating that they wanted UCU to be able to negotiate for them, including around the issue of better part-time contracts. In the face of this unity, full recognition was finally granted, but senior managers still refused to move on the issue of better contracts. The branch had to up the ante using all possible means. As Amy recalls, 'We raised our campaign at every possible opportunity. We went to offices, sat on desks, talked to people who could influence our SMT and explained that we'd reached an impasse. Eventually, the head of HR agreed to come to negotiations and they said they were considering fractional contracts on a fixed-term basis.' In doing this, the reps were able to have confidence in the support of an active and growing branch.

In 2015 following talks supported by the London UCU regional office, the service confirmed that it would be offering fractional contracts to all staff.

All collective agreements are messy affairs, reflecting a power struggle, and this one is no different and there are plenty of problems to be ironed out. Nonetheless, Hackney ACE branch are rightly proud of what they've achieved.

In spite of the toughest funding environment, a determined membership focused on a long-term strategic goal was able to organise and demonstrate its collective strength so as to successfully put the argument that high-quality provision depends on tackling precarious contracts.

The defeat of TeachHigher: Serendipity and strategic alliances

WARWICK UNIVERSITY UCU'S BRANCH COMMITTEE REFLECT ON THEIR SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGN AGAINST TEACHHIGHER

On 2 June 2015, management at the University of Warwick announced that 'ongoing scrutiny of TeachHigher has become a distraction and TeachHigher should be disbanded'. Warwick UCU members greeted the announcement with a mixture of joy and disbelief. TeachHigher was set up as an employment agency, in all but name, to try to ameliorate the obvious problems being generated by the university's extensive use of casualised teachers and researchers. It was disbanded before it had recruited a single worker, and the campaign against it offers some useful lessons about what it takes to persuade university management to do the right thing.

In 2013/14, the University of Warwick directly employed 2,130 academic staff on open-ended or fixed-term contracts. They also used the services of a further 2,725 'atypical' academic members of staff. None of these people had a contract of employment and many had no formal specification of what, exactly, they were being paid to do. Because these arrangements were decided by individual heads of department, there were huge inconsistencies and inequalities. The university argued that TeachHigher would address these deficiencies by developing 'a fair, transparent and consistent approach' to the recruitment and remuneration of casual staff. Although Warwick UCU was supportive of this broader aim, we organised against TeachHigher for two reasons. Firstly, the temporary worker agreement initially posted on the TeachHigher website threatened to worsen most people's working conditions, not least by giving the university the right to dismiss them at any time without giving a reason. Secondly, we were worried that, in the longer term, TeachHigher would institutionalise the casualisation of academic work, and thereby facilitate a sector-wide expansion of this type of exploitative contract. We were particularly concerned that Warwick was intending to sell TeachHigher to other universities as a franchise, akin to Unitemps, their existing employment agency.

In spring 2015, Warwick UCU began to organise against TeachHigher. The campaign sought to raise awareness about the negative effects TeachHigher would have on workers

nationwide, and to mobilise resistance against its imminent introduction at Warwick. It was greatly helped by two instances of fortuitous timing. Firstly, the 2015 UCU Congress took place a few weeks into the campaign. This meant Congress could pass a motion opposing TeachHigher and that our two Warwick delegates could distribute flyers about an upcoming demonstration and garner support from other UCU branches around the country. Secondly, a University of Warwick open day was scheduled for two months after the start of the campaign. This gave us just enough time to work with other groups to organise a demonstration for the same day. Shortly before both events were due to take place, management decided to disband TeachHigher. The thought of an unknown number of demonstrators coming face to face with prospective students and their parents probably played a part in this decision.

As well as capitalising on pre-existing events, we also built a wide range of strategic alliances, within and beyond the university. We worked with sessional teaching staff and full-time colleagues as well as student groups to organise across campus. As a result of this work, the Student Union passed a motion opposing TeachHigher, as did a number of academic departments. In one department, 68 people (including several professors) signed an open letter to the head of department and the head of administration protesting at the lack of consultation. In another department, 22 of the 23 graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) signed a letter saying they would boycott TeachHigher in the coming academic year. Some of the GTAs were UCU members; some were part of a self-organising collective called the Hourly-paid Group; some had a foot in both camps, as they put it. Solidarity doesn't get any stronger than this.

Beyond our own institution, we worked with other groups committed to highlighting the issue of casualisation, including FACE (Fighting Against Casualisation in Education). We enlisted the support of neighbouring UCU branches who publicised the demonstration and pledged to send delegates. We also drew upon the expertise of staff in the UCU regional and national offices. For instance, Michael MacNeil, UCU's

National Head of Bargaining and Negotiations, wrote to the vice-chancellor saying it was 'an issue of national importance for the whole union'. We worked with UCU's press officers and grassroots activists to orchestrate maximum media coverage, which included articles in outlets from Times Higher Education to Vice.

We deliberately used evidence and detailed argument with just a sprinkling of speculation. Throughout, we offered concrete alternatives, calling on management to halt the pilot, engage in meaningful discussion and place hourly-paid staff on fractional contracts that give them the same pay,

conditions and rights as those on open-ended contracts.

Because of our organisational efforts and the solidarity we received from groups across the country, TeachHigher was disbanded in June. In August, we started what promises to be a series of meetings between local and regional UCU representatives and university management. We have also been invited to join the user group which will provide feedback on the pilot being trialled in six departments during 2015/16. There is still a long way to go to ensure all workers on campus receive decent wages and fair treatment and but, at least, both sides are now taking steps in the right direction.

Casualisation and black and minority ethnic workers in education

JIM THAKOORDIN, VICE CHAIR, ANTI-CASUALISATION COMMITTEE, WRITES ON THE NEED TO EXAMINE THE INTERSECTION OF PRECARIOUS WORK AND RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

While there are disputes over the exact extent of precarious work in the UK economy, it is certain that there has been a significant growth in casualised, precarious and relatively low paid, low status work since the financial crash of 2008. This type of work is associated with poverty, inequality, exploitation, lack of progression, financial and social destabilisation and uncertainty.

One of the most pernicious forms of precarious work is the zero-hours contract. According to the Office for National Statistics, 38% of employers in education report making use of zero hours contracts. UCU's own survey and report in 2013 indicated that 53% of universities and 61% of colleges use lecturers on zero-hours contracts.

As yet, there is no research on the precise gender and race composition of the zero-hours workforce. Neither is there any such research on the community of precarious workers within FE and HE. This is unacceptable in itself and it represents a problem in pursuing our equality agenda. We can get a sense of the potential issue though by looking at wider developments in the UK economy.

Recent reports have indicated that women and black and minority ethnic (BME) workers are being disproportionately affected by the growth of casualised employment. Analysis by the TUC of data gathered through the Labour Force Survey reveals that between 2011 and 2014 temporary working

increased by 25.4 % among BME employees. During the same period, temporary working increased by 10.9% among white employees. By autumn 2014, nearly 300,000 or 10.6% of BME workers were employed in some form of temporary employment, an increase of more than 60,000 since 2011. The TUC report, titled 'Living on the Margins', comments that 'In Britain there is more poverty in every ethnic minority group than among the white British population, and the TUC believes that a major cause of this poverty is race discrimination faced by black workers in the UK labour market. The lack of access to employment and to training and promotion opportunities has also consistently undermined the financial wellbeing in the UK.'

This poses all unions, including UCU, with major challenges to ensure that they are tackling racial discrimination as well as the casualisation that creates precarious work. We have to make sure that we embody the union movement's slogans that 'an injury to one is an injury to all' and 'unity is our strength'.

UCU is currently mapping out a project to begin work on examining the position of black and minority ethnic staff in further and higher education in more detail. Part of this work will involve trying to pinpoint more accurately the intersection of casualisation and racial discrimination in our workplaces, with the aim of informing the work of our branch activists.

Organising Postgraduates

Examples from Scotland

POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS ARE A DISTINCT INTEREST AMONG CASUALISED STAFF.

THIS REPORT FROM UNIVERSITIES IN SCOTLAND SHOWS HOW ORGANISING WITHIN UCU CAN BRING SIGNIFICANT GAINS THAT BENEFIT ALL CASUALISED STAFF, INCLUDING THE POSTGRADUATE TEACHING COMMUNITY

As universities have sought to diversify their income streams, many have hit on what they consider to be a winner by increasing their recruitment of postgraduate students. Universities have been recruiting increasing numbers of postgraduates into research careers. Between 2007/8 and 2012/13, the number of postgraduate research students in the sector increased by almost 20%. At the same time, the support regime on offer to such students has deteriorated, making supplementing their income by taking on teaching ever more necessary. From the point of view of universities looking to 'free up' their research stars and game the Research Excellence Framework, this growing pool of potential labour offers a great way of getting its undergraduate teaching done on the cheap. Postgraduates have a distinct interest, combining their roles as students looking to develop their skills, often with the aspiration to build an academic career, with their function as teachers. As students, they need support from NUS. As people delivering teaching in our universities, they need support from UCU as the trade union that negotiates for all university teaching staff. It was in recognition of this distinctive interest that UCU and the NUS joined forces to create the Postgraduate Charter, a set of common demands on universities calling on them to ensure that they treat their postgraduates fairly, both as students and employees. As part of their work to organise and negotiate for the various groups of casualised teaching and research staff, UCU branches have also begun to encourage and support organisation among postgraduate students, with thriving groups emerging across the sector. Two recent reports from groups in Scotland demonstrate what is taking place around the UK. At Glasgow Caledonian

University a postgraduate group has just been set up and is making impressive organisational strides. This is their report, in their own words:

'Despite being established only last December, we have worked incredibly hard to build our membership, with encouraging results. By emphasising our solidarity with fellow students and reaching out to build a community of PGs within the university, we have been successful in almost trebling our membership – increasing it from a small cluster of activists to a large and active community, which offers a safe space to discuss concerns and provides a source of motivation to campaign for the rights of PG members. A number of factors have contributed to our organising success; fortnightly meetings with follow-up socials, a deliberative, engaging and inclusive, participatory structure, and regular recruitment drives which target new and existing students that have attracted the support of PG students and researchers, whilst simultaneously encouraging university decision makers to recognise and engage with our growing presence and influence on campus.'

'Just one example of our recent activism has been our efforts towards securing proper contracts and paid teaching for PGs. The effectiveness of UCU action in this area was partly as a consequence of the clear need to supplement existing official university channels in representing our interests. Having submitted a range of recommendations and demands to recent internal consultations on PG rights and conditions, we are optimistic that our new found influence and strength in numbers will contribute towards a favourable agreement between the university and our members. Such success will serve to reinforce our presence and our resolve to continue to campaign for our members' interests, demon-



strating that there is indeed power in the union. Other upcoming activities include a ‘know your rights’ workshop which, in keeping with our recent motion passed at UCU Scotland conference (to establish a cross-institutional PG community), will provide a further opportunity to extend a warm welcome to all who wish to attend and participate.

‘This session’s recruitment drive has just been launched with the release of our brand new recruitment and campaigning resources, the content of which was the result of open discussion between members and has been collaboratively designed by all within our PG community. These materials will be distributed to the wider GCU PG community as part of our many planned recruitment sessions, and are being used to support our broader strategy to engage with both researchers and staff across the campus in order to be increasingly responsive to their needs and issues.’

At the Universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, emerging networks of postgraduate students have formed part of a growing membership among casualised teaching staff for some years now and they have been part of the vibrant wider UCU campaign to tackle the scandalous use of zero-hours contracts. Glasgow UCU have recently successfully negotiated a new policy that lead to GTAs being employed on proper part-time contracts rather than zero-hours or atypical worker contracts and the branch is working to build its recruitment and organisation among GTAs on the back of this agreement.

The University of Edinburgh was an early mover on the issue of zero-hours contracts, agreeing with UCU in late

2013 that it would end their use and move staff onto contracts that guaranteed hours. However, work on ensuring that staff are moved onto contracts that ensure proper continuity and predictability of employment is ongoing, and slow. The UCU branch at Edinburgh continues to press for faster change and greater job security for all casualised staff. As part of this work, the branch is supporting the growth of its postgraduate and postdoctoral researchers network. This group has been active for some years now and has its own network of dedicated reps. The reps organise social gatherings and ‘know your rights’ sessions for tutors. They’ve also notched up a couple of very significant gains by applying pressure through their departments, including winning pay for marking in one of the biggest areas of the university. Just recently, they also won agreement that another area of the university would ensure that their postgraduates were properly paid for training sessions and meetings.

Casualisation is a phenomenon that affects many different parts of our university communities, often in different ways. That’s what makes our UCU branches so important. Our branches are places where we can unify the interests of everyone on precarious contracts and avoid our employers playing groups of workers off against one another. Across the university sector, UCU’s strategy has to be to try to build unified campaigns that can ensure that postgraduates are properly paid for their work while at the same time, working to decasualise the jobs on which academic staff depend for their livelihoods.

Why you should join your union today



1

With almost 110,000 members, UCU is the largest trade union in post-school education. If you are an academic, lecturer, trainer, instructor, researcher, manager, administrator, computer staff, librarian or postgraduate from a university, college, prison, or training organisation, UCU is the union for you.

2

We know that making working life more secure is a priority issue for our members. We are working hard – and successfully – to raise the profile of precarious employment with the Government, MPs and the press, making sure that our employers are under public scrutiny.

3

Because we are a trade union, we have the unique ability to negotiate collective agreements that benefit all our members. That's why UCU negotiates for staff to be transferred from precarious hourly-paid and fixed-term contracts to open-ended, fractional or full-time contracts.

4

Because of our collective and individual work, many thousands of staff have been moved to more secure employment. Find out more about our successes at our campaign website: www.ucu.org.uk/stampout

5

When you join the union, you will enhance our power to speak as the collective voice of casualised staff in education. Your local branch will be stronger and so will the national union. The more you get involved, the stronger we will all be.

As an individual member you can get advice and representation from experienced UCU reps, supported by full-time UCU officials and employment law specialists where necessary. But don't leave it till you have a problem at work to join.

6

UCU members also get access to 24/7 counselling, financial assistance and advice through our partnership with Recourse. Find out more here: <http://www.ucu.org.uk/recourse>

7

We know that precarious work is often low paid, so our subscription rates are adjusted to reflect your earnings, starting as low as 99p per month. You can also claim tax relief from a proportion of your subs.

8

Student membership is free and open to those training to teach in post-school education, including PGCE students and postgraduates (not employed) planning a career in higher education.

9

Don't wait any longer. Join your union today: join.ucu.org.uk or call 0333 207 0719

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JOIN AT: join.ucu.org.uk

OR CALL: 0333 207 0719*