

**Rt Hon. David Gauke MP**  
Secretary of State for Justice  
Ministry of Justice  
102 Petty France  
London  
SW1H 9AJ  
United Kingdom

Friday 3rd May 2019

**RE: Cuts to prison education in the North of England**

Dear Mr Gauke,

I am writing on behalf of the University and College Union (UCU) to seek an urgent meeting with you to discuss a number of issues of concern in relation to prison education, specifically relating to the impact of new commissioning arrangements on staff.

Following the introduction of the Prison Education Framework (PEF) contracts, the provider Novus has placed 176 prison educators at risk of redundancy across the North of England. The cuts are attributed in large part to the reduction in value of the education contracts which Novus operates under the new commissioning arrangement. In the North East, for example, the value of their contract has reduced by 26%.

The upshot of the Novus proposal is that over 100 experienced prison educators, and all the expertise that they bring, are set to be lost from our prisons at a time when the sector is already struggling to retain staff. Cuts on this scale will have a significant impact on the availability of high-quality learning opportunities for offenders, and seem highly imprudent at a time when prisons are reporting record levels of assaults and self-harm.

I would therefore urge your personal intervention on this matter to encourage Novus to reconsider these job cuts and rule out compulsory job losses, as well as to examine the impact of new prison education contracts on the level of provision available.

UCU also has significant concerns about a number of issues relating to the health and safety of our staff in prisons, and the potential for the new contract arrangements to compound existing problems in this area.

We would appreciate a meeting with you at your earliest convenience to discuss these matters further.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Cottrell  
Acting General Secretary