



Casual Workers and the Crisis

In a recent message circulated by the Faculty of Arts at the University of Nottingham it has been confirmed that their budget for Teaching Affiliates (those engaged in hourly paid casualised teaching work) is to be completely cut in the next academic year. This amounts to a mass lay off of the lowest paid, most precariously employed layer of teaching workers within the Faculty. We have since learnt that this is because the University has ordered each Faculty to make a 15% reduction in their budgets for the next academic year. We therefore expect that in the coming weeks and months we will see similar cuts hit casually employed workers across the University. The implications of such cuts are very broad: increasing workload for permanent staff (whose research time and funding is set to be cut); reduced module content and contact time for students paying increasingly high tuition fees; the loss of work for postgraduate researchers who have been told their careers depend on gaining experience in these teaching roles, and for whom this income often provides a lifeline. In addition, cleaning and service workers have been informed that furlough agreements are likely to be issued soon, signalling towards the University's intent to make savings across the board by cutting the lowest paid. This is part of a broad trend in education.

At Nottingham Trent University casualised teaching staff are employed directly (unlike at UoN where they are outsourced to UniTemps). They have yet to announce cuts, but if they do, it is likely they will fall most heavily on hourly paid lecturers, as well as outsourced cleaning and facilities workers.

Working and learning conditions at Nottingham Trent International College are even poorer, as precarious teaching workers here are outsourced to Kaplan International Pathways and therefore have worse contracts and conditions. The coronavirus-crisis here first meant that hourly-paid workers were forced to choose between health or wages after one case of COVID-19 was discovered, and the College failed to shut down immediately. After the College did close, most of the tutors employed through sessional and part-time contracts were sacked. However, students are still enrolled and full-time staff's workload has increased extensively. The company has rejected precarious workers' request to be put on furlough, leaving these workers, mostly migrants and/or those with families, unable to make ends meet.

Campuses should not be re-opened until it is fully safe to do so, and workers and students' welfare must be paramount in any such decisions. Universities are clearly worried about the financial implications of a prolonged lockdown, but we cannot allow the crisis to be used as an excuse for a complete lack of transparency and consultation, and to justify ideological decisions to attack the most precarious low-paid workers. As usual with these decisions, it will be women, migrant and BAME workers who will bear the brunt of the cuts. Workers and students should not be forced to pay the price for this crisis; the future of our work and education is at stake. Working conditions are learning conditions, we must fight for them now!



WHAT NEXT?

Organise!

Many of us are currently facing great difficulties as a result of the crisis, the University's attack on workers will only serve to compound this. Even though we are all in lock-down, it is important we continue to talk with our colleagues. We must demand that the University safeguard jobs and working conditions and, if necessary, draw on their reserves and reduce senior management and Vice Chancellor salaries to do so. We must also ask permanently employed staff to stand in solidarity with their casualised colleagues and refuse to do the extra work created by any potential dismissals.

Join the Union!

It is up to us to fight the cuts we are facing and, in order to do so, the voices of temporary, hourly paid and precarious staff must be heard within the unions. Teaching staff and PhD students can join the UCU (postgraduate student membership is free). Students can also urge their Student Union to support the work of the Anti-Casualisation campaign group. The majority of facilities and cleaning staff are represented by Unison and others by Unite. We need our unions to take decisive action and we must work to make that happen. Contact your union reps today.

Get involved!

Joining your union and speaking to colleagues is important, but we must be prepared to take action, now and in the future, to protect the rights, pay and conditions which have resulted from previous campaigns. The University wants to roll back these wins, but we must defend them and go further. Get in contact with us and the Anti-Casualisation groups already taking action:

Contact us: NottsUniWorker@gmail.com

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/NottsUniWorkers> Twitter: <https://twitter.com/NottsUniWorkers>

Contact the UoN Anti-Casualisation Group: AntiCasUoN@gmail.com

Contact your union:

UoN - UCU: <https://uonucu.org/> Unison: <https://www.facebook.com/uonunison/>

NTU - UCU: https://twitter.com/ntu_ucu Unison: <https://www.facebook.com/unisonNTU/>