



## **AN OPEN LETTER TO STUDENTS FROM UCU UNIVERSITY OF BRADFORD LOCAL ASSOCIATION**

Dear Students of the University of Bradford,

I am writing to you on behalf of those that are currently taking part in industrial action in support of our demands for better working conditions for staff.

### **What is the dispute about?**

The Four Fights dispute has separate strands covering Workload, Precarious Contract Arrangements, Gender Pay Equality, and Pay.

**Workload** – You are probably aware that at Bradford staff levels have fallen over the last five years. There are several reasons for this, but fundamentally this has a detrimental impact on the ability of your tutor to support you in your studies. Many staff combat this by working long hours way beyond that for which they are contracted, and for no more pay. Working 60 hours plus a week to keep on top of workload is not uncommon across the sector.

Whilst staff recruitment has alleviated the worst of this, the fundamental failing of too few staff to adequately support our students remains, with staff having to work long hours unpaid to cover that deficit.

**Precarious Contracts** – A large number of academic staff (~3,500) in HE are employed on so called “zero hours” contracts. Approximately ~40% of teaching focused staff are on hourly paid contracts and >65% of research focused staff are on fixed-term contracts. Staff on those arrangements cannot guarantee their income, making it difficult to get a mortgage or even to be confident that they can provide for their family. They are paid only for contact time with students; preparation for that delivery is done at their own expense.

**Pay Equality** – Recent assessments indicate that female staff are paid on average 16% less for the same job despite having the same levels of achievement and experience as their male colleagues. The gap between Black and White staff is 17% and the disability gap 9%.

**Pay** – Since 2008 successive pay settlements have been below even the lowest levels of inflation. This means that as you read this the real terms value of salaries is just around 75% of its value in 2008, even before the current cost of living crisis. Despite this the employer has refused to discuss pay in any meaningful way and has ‘imposed’ a settlement on staff that has been rejected by UCU and its members.

### **What do we want?**

On the first three strands of the dispute UCU is demanding binding commitments and a timetabled plan to end these unsatisfactory practices. Previous attempts to resolve these matters have been unsuccessful; this time UCU believes that it has the mandate to force the employer to stick to promises that it has previously reneged upon.

On the issue of pay, UCU expects the employer to return to negotiations to reach a settlement that offsets our devastating loss of earnings.

### **What about students?**

The marking and assessment boycott is the next phase in this long running dispute that commenced last year with periods of strike action.

I hope you will recognise that this lawful action is not undertaken lightly and is done despite your tutor's commitment to you and your success.

Most importantly please understand that this is not an attack on you and your peers, rather it is an attempt to get the employer to see sense and recognise the critical importance of the relationship that exists between you and your tutor.

### **What can I do?**

We ask that you support your tutors by lobbying the University to support a fairer deal on all strands of the Four Fights dispute. You may want to write to the Vice Chancellor ([S.Congdon@bradford.ac.uk](mailto:S.Congdon@bradford.ac.uk)) to show your support and be vocal on social media in support of the UCU Rising campaign. Above all, make sure your tutor knows that you understand the incredible pressures that they are under and why action is being taken.

UCU believes that the resolving of this dispute is crucial in allowing its members to get back to the job they do best and that they most love – supporting you and helping you achieve your maximum potential.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Dr Zak Hughes – LA President