

**STAMP OUT**  
**CASUALISATION**  
**IN CAMBRIDGE**

**CAMBRIDGE UCU**  
**2018**

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# #StampOutCasualContracts

This report was produced by Cambridge University UCU, with support from the Cambridge University branches of Unite and Unison.

The report is the result of discussions with staff and graduate students, freedom of information requests, and three surveys. 513 graduate students responded to a survey in 2017, and 108 TES workers and 140 hourly-paid staff responded to surveys in 2018.



## **Cambridge University – Time for action on casualisation**

Cambridge is a wealthy university that proclaims its global impact and international excellence. Yet it relies on an army of insecurely employed and underpaid staff to deliver teaching, research, administrative and many other roles. Cambridge UCU is campaigning to change this. Across higher education, UCU branches are pushing for action against the casualisation of university workforces. In Cambridge our branch is calling for:

### **Decent pay for casual teaching staff**

Cambridge undergraduates are taught by a host of casualised academics: college teaching fellows, postdocs and university teachers on fixed-term contracts, together with large numbers of college supervisors who are paid by the hour. The rates of pay for this teaching vary wildly and in many cases do not adequately reflect preparation time. College supervision rates have fallen behind inflation, while rates for University assessment have been frozen since 2008. It's not right that a university of such great wealth should rely on the exploitation of casual teaching staff. That's why UCU is campaigning for a fair pay rise for these staff.

### **An end to 'gig economy' contracts at Cambridge**

Shamefully, Cambridge University employs many staff on 'gig economy' contracts that deny them proper employment rights. Worker contracts issued by the Temporary Employment Service (TES) deny staff occupational sick pay, lock people out of decent pension provision and leave them vulnerable to being fired without notice. Yet these contracts are used to employ people across the university. UCU is campaigning to ensure that where people have regular and ongoing work, they are employed on proper contracts that give them employment rights, and that terms and conditions for short-term roles are improved.

### **Agreed action to tackle casualisation**

Across the university and its colleges, the use of insecure contracts for teaching and research is rife. Often these jobs are badly designed, boxing people into heavy workloads without giving them the time to develop their careers. Many are fixed-term, paid hourly, or with no contract at all. This creates real hardship for staff as well as instability and inefficiency in teaching. We're calling for the University and its Colleges to sit down with UCU and discuss reforms to ensure that staff get a fair deal from their employment, and that students get the teaching and support they deserve.

### **Action now**

This has gone on long enough. Vice-Chancellor Stephen Toope says, 'Our commitment to excellence in education, learning and research is uncompromising and lived out in practice every day in our lecture theatres and supervision rooms, our libraries and labs.' Yet precariousness undermines the pursuit of excellence for staff and students and is also lived out in practice in lecture theatres, supervision rooms, libraries and labs. It is unnecessary. Cambridge is one of the wealthiest universities in the UK. It doesn't need to keep staff on hire and fire contracts. Our message to the Vice-Chancellor and College Heads is simple: Make good your warm words and show that commitment to excellence in practice.

# The use of casual contracts at the University of Cambridge

## TES contracts

The Temporary Employment Service (TES) is a temporary recruitment service run by the University, which supplies many administrative staff, but also researchers, staff for the Disability Resource Centre, IT personnel, cleaners, caterers, and more. TES has employed **2573 individuals** at the University of Cambridge over the past three years.

TES staff are designated as workers rather than employees, which means that they do not have the same level of legal protection as other staff. For example, they are not entitled to a minimum notice period, to protection against unfair dismissal, to the right to request flexible working, to time off for emergencies, or to Statutory Redundancy Pay.

TES staff do not even have the same rights as general agency staff: they can't apply for internal vacancies, and are not entitled to 'equal treatment' after 12 weeks in the job (which can for example affect levels of annual leave entitlement).

### Is TES work genuinely temporary?

Over the past 3 years, **47%** of assignments in a single workplace lasted more than 3 months and **12%** (affecting **419** workers) lasted more than **9 months**. In total, **26%** of TES staff (**678** individuals) worked for over 9 months on 'temporary' contracts. Worker contracts are not good enough for these

extended periods of work. Guidance from University HR itself states: "Work paid through TES should be genuinely temporary. On-going work should be paid through a different arrangement, such as a fixed term contract of employment."

A survey of TES workers showed that **30%** of respondents did not feel that their work was temporary.

"The long term need for my work has been recognised by the institution."

"Same hours and tasks as 'regular' staff members, same meetings and away days, just a different badge"

### Daily conditions for TES workers

Some departments are not making TES staff welcome: workers describe "demeaning" treatment, which makes them feel "lower class", "like a nobody". Respondents also reported issues with work facilities, such as inadequate numbers of desks, constant hot-desking and a lack of suitable chair and computer set-ups.

TES workers often don't have a University card - a seemingly small detail, but with significant consequences. Not having a card creates difficulties accessing workplaces, using printing facilities, and prevents workers accessing University discounts, including for bus services. All survey respondents who expressed an opinion wanted TES staff to be offered a University card.



# HOW DO CASUALISED CONTRACTS AFFECT STAFF?

"It feels like you're a lower class of staff member."

"It has impacted on my stress levels"

"has severely injured my mental and physical health on a termly basis"

"I could be sacked with no notice at all. I have no rights at all but I have been trained to do this job."

"It is shameful that the Cambridge educational system depends on the exploitation of those in precarious employment."

"feel like a nobody"

"hourly-paid teaching is a form of employment which ruthlessly exploits its students."

"Psychologically demeaning and demoralising"

"There were times when I was very sick but I couldn't afford not to go into work"



Respondents also reported having to attend training in their own time, and that they felt that their lack of training was impeding the quality of their work.

Until recently, the TES handbook stated that workers weren't allowed to attend the University's Professional and Personal Development courses; only when queried by trade unions did it transpire that this was an error. We are glad that this error has now been corrected, but the fact that it occurred in the first place is emblematic of the problems with the TES system; the precarious status of these staff means they don't feel able to challenge poor working conditions.

**17% of respondents that replied to that question reported that working for TES had a negative impact on their quality of life; and 19%, a negative impact on their mental health.**

“zero hour contract nature of employment has meant significant and rapid changes in QoL (e.g. decrease in food intake or inability to pay for NHS prescriptions)”

“I'm scared if I complain...they'll change the rules so my hours will be reduced”

“the fear of getting sick causes a lot of stress”

TES staff are only entitled to Statutory Sick Pay, which means they can only claim sick pay if they have been off work for at least 4 days. This leads to some of them not taking time off when sick. **82%** of respondents who expressed an opinion on this subject wanted sick pay conditions to be improved.

## Inequality and precarity

TES requires staff to take an unpaid 4 week break every **9 months** to maintain their “temporary” status. There is no support, nor compensation from the University during this enforced break, which causes financial difficulties for staff.

TES contracts also don't count towards University service, and TES staff can stay on the same grade without pay progression, even after years of service. Long periods on TES can also lead to poor pension provision compared to University employees, and poor pension accrual is a recurring cause of worry amongst respondents. Staff have little or no control over which pension scheme they join, and are not consulted about changes in their pension arrangements.

These issues are of particular concern in light of the fact that **65%** of TES workers are women and **15%** are BME workers; both figures about a fifth higher than for University employees (51% women and 12% BME staff). The inequitable working conditions of TES workers thus raise serious equality concerns at the University.

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## Hourly-paid teaching

Hourly-paid teaching comes in many forms: predominantly supervisions (small-group ‘tutorial’ style teaching), but also seminars in colleges as well as seminars, lectures and laboratory demonstrations in faculties and departments. There are other associated activities such as exam marking and undergraduate admissions that are also commonly paid by hour or task. Rates of pay for teaching are per hour of contact time, although they may include compensation for otherwise unpaid preparation time.

Hourly-paid work can be carried out by contracted and salaried members of staff, who do them either as part of their contracted responsibilities or as a form of paid overtime, but this is often not the case. Other types of workers, who might have zero hours contracts or no contracts at all, often lack basic employment rights such as sick pay, holiday pay, parental leave and pension contributions. Moreover, when academic work is paid by the hour, it is often the case that preparation and administrative time is underestimated in the pay rate, resulting in an overall very low effective hourly rate.

During the 2015-16 academic year, Cambridge Colleges paid a total of **4,586** supervisors to deliver a total of **236,563** hours of supervision. We estimate that around **34%** of these hours were delivered by workers without a salaried position (according to the University's own data, 23% of these hours were delivered by graduate students, and roughly a further 11% by "other" staff, which includes self-employed and academic-related staff). Less is currently known about the practices of departments and faculties.

Cambridge UCU conducted a survey in 2017 of graduate students, which asked them about their teaching conditions. A further survey in 2018 of people who perform hourly-paid teaching for the University included graduate students, postdocs, freelancers, and college and University-based academic staff. Between them, these staff teach most of the subjects which the University offers to undergraduates. These surveys highlighted a recurrent problem of underpay and overwork, which goes hand in hand with stress and a feeling of insecurity over future job opportunities.

## Stagnant rates of pay

Lots of assessment and examination work, including for many taught graduate courses such as MPhils is paid for by the University by the item, with rates set in the Ordinances.

**These pay rates have not changed since 2008.** Taking into account inflation, the real-terms payment rates have depreciated by over a quarter in ten years.

## Real Living Wage

The Real Living Wage is calculated by the Living Wage Foundation according to what employees and their families need to live. It is higher than the government's National Living Wage, and set at £9 per hour outside of London. Oxford City Council has also recently introduced an "Oxford Living Wage" of £9.69 per hour.

A high proportion of respondents from the 2018 survey stated that if the true amount of preparation time was taken into account, their effective hourly rate was less than the Real Living Wage of £8.45 (2017/18 rate) for all types of hourly-paid teaching: **56%** of surveyed staff performing assessment and examination work, and **39%** of supervisors. In our 2017 survey, we found that **15%** of respondents were in fact paid **less than the National Living Wage** (£7.20 at the time of the survey) per actual hour of work for supervision.

UCU welcomes the University of Cambridge's current application for Real Living Wage accreditation, but for this to be meaningful, the hidden underpayment of hourly-paid staff needs to be addressed.

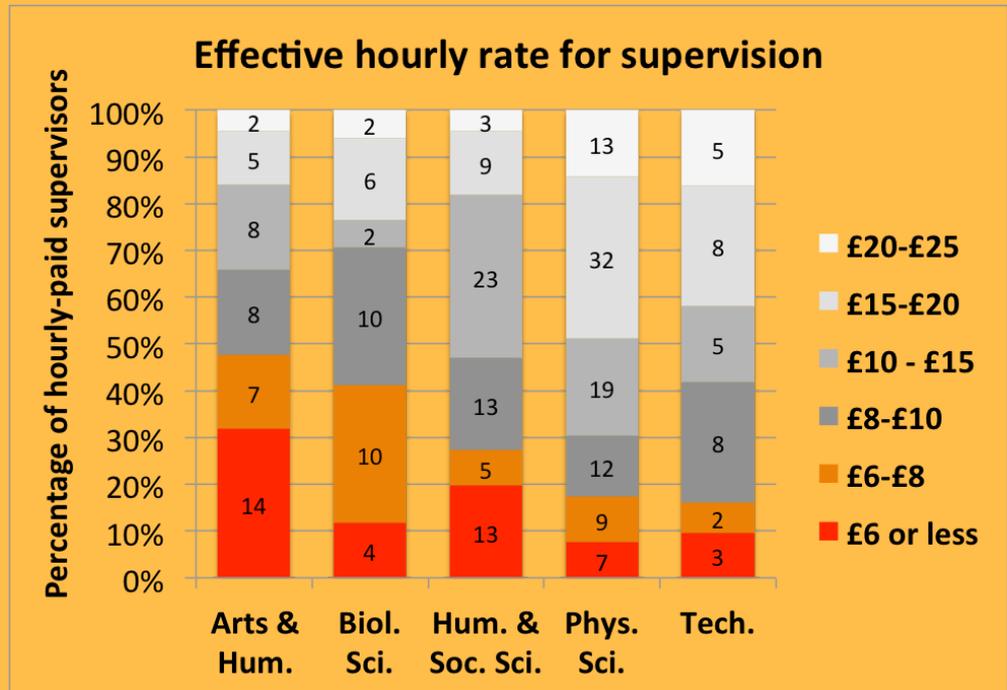
## Precarious work and finances

High workload and stress were often cited by respondents to describe the impact of hourly-paid teaching on their life and work. **59%** of



# UNDERPAID AND OVERWORKED

"I was overworked and underpaid for two years and I was exhausted and depressed."



"the pay is insulting"

"Universities depend on hourly-paid teaching but do not recognise the consequences for the people who have to pursue it."

"Why pay someone properly when they do the job on the cheap & they're eminently replaceable anyway? ... This is shabby & shameful."

"Not enough money for food or to pay the rent"

"I'm constantly short of money"



"I very much enjoy the actual teaching, but the rate of pay is appalling, and the amount of work my Department expects supervisors to do outside of the actual paid supervising time is extremely high."

respondents to the 2018 survey indicated that they took on more hourly teaching than they would want to out of financial necessity.

Adding to the financial difficulties caused by underpayment, it can take several months for payments for hourly-paid teaching to come through - for example, payment for supervisions only happens at the end of each term. It is therefore unsurprising that 77% of respondents from the 2018 survey wanted to receive payments quicker.

A majority of respondents to the 2018 survey do not have any form of contract for the hourly-paid teaching they undertake (75% for college-paid teaching and 63% for University-paid teaching). Uncertainty about future teaching opportunities was often cited as a source of worry, and 58% of respondents indicated that they took on more hourly-paid teaching than they would want for fear of losing future teaching opportunities.

### Preparation time

Preparation time required for teaching varies greatly depending on the subject taught and the career stage and employment status of the teacher. Based on our 2017 survey of graduate students, an average of 4 to 5 hours of preparation is needed for each hour of supervision in POLIS, Music, Classics and Architecture, and 2 hours for each hour of supervision in Engineering, Education or Psychology. There is currently no mechanism in place to take into account this variation in hours worked. Many permanent staff benefit from a 25-50% reduction in stint expectations (the number of allocated tasks) in their first 3 years of employment, to reflect the greater onerousness of teaching courses for the first time. We believe similar recognition

should be integrated into the terms of employment for all staff.

### Career progression

Only 12% of respondents from the 2018 survey felt that the quality of their teaching was taken into consideration as part of their career advancement. Moreover, 77% of survey respondents felt their future job security was bad or very bad. While several respondents hoped that teaching could have a positive impact on their career, many reported that the high teaching workload didn't leave enough time for research.

“I wish I'd chosen another career”

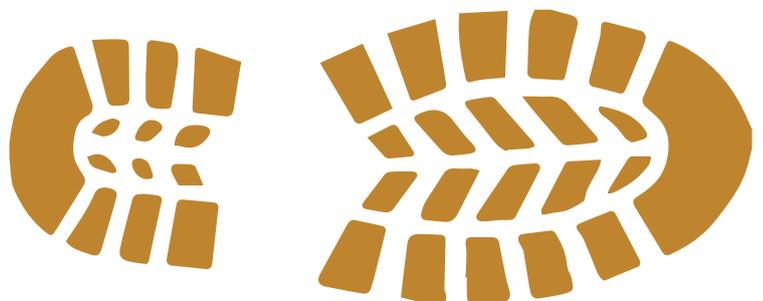
“When you are on hourly rates, you don't have a career.”

“I am resigned to not progressing.”

“My career's probably irreparably damaged as I haven't had enough time or energy for research”

### Allocation of teaching

More than half of respondents from the 2018 survey received most of their hourly-paid teaching work by knowing the person who assigned it - and less than a third received any by either being part of an official list of supervisors, or replying to a call for teachers. A more equitable way of accessing teaching opportunities could thus have positive consequences for both hourly-paid teachers as well as for Directors of Studies and other staff in charge of allocating teaching.



We acknowledge initiatives run in a few departments to implement a centralised system to allocate teaching hours and would like to encourage the Collegiate University to put in place such a system, incorporating best practice, in all departments, faculties and colleges.

### Support from the Collegiate University

Comments from our 2018 survey indicate that varying degrees of support are given to hourly-paid teaching staff by faculties and departments. **37%** of respondents rated their workplace and office facilities as bad or very bad. There was also clear support expressed by respondents for a number of possible improvements to their working conditions: **84%** would like an easier system to book rooms for teaching, **83%** would like more contact with peers teaching a similar subject, **73%** would like better access to facilities (such as coffee and tea) while teaching, and **69%** would like to have access to a room to prepare their teaching. Moreover, **33%** of respondents to our 2018 survey indicated they were not routinely informed of changes that are made to the Tripos(es) they teach.

"The environment in which we teach - at worst windowless spaces a little larger than a broom cupboard, and clearly regularly repurposed, with zero relevant facilities - is dispiriting and incommodious for supervisors and students alike."

### Impact on students

These conditions are having profoundly negative effects on teachers, but it was also apparent from comments in the 2018 survey that the demoralising conditions in which hourly-paid teachers work (overworked, underpaid and with inadequate support) negatively impact students. These issues will only become more pressing with the introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), which measures and compares teaching standards across universities. For this reason, explicitly stating the hours of preparation time that are paid for, and improving the integration of hourly-paid teachers in the colleges or faculties where they teach, would be beneficial for students as well as teachers.

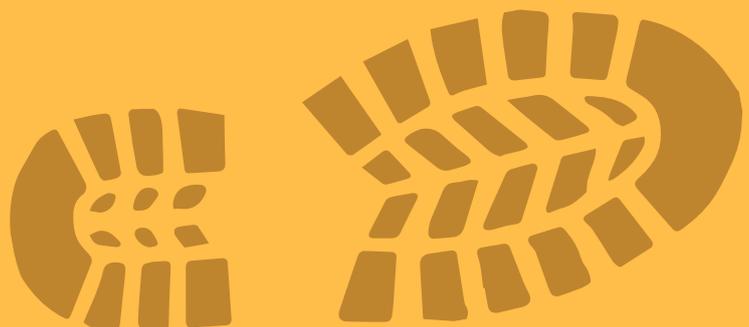
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The University states that it "offers a comprehensive reward package to attract, motivate and retain high performing staff at all levels and in all areas of work. Recognising outstanding contribution and achievement is essential in maintaining and developing the University's reputation as a centre of international academic excellence." Our findings in relation to TES staff and hourly-paid teachers suggest otherwise.

Cambridge UCU welcomes the recent positive engagement from the University of Cambridge on these and other issues. We look forward to continued work to improve conditions for staff and students so that we can build a collaborative working environment that works for all.

## Cambridge UCU call for the University of Cambridge to:

- convene a joint working group to address points raised in this report and our recent claim;
- complete initial work by March 2019;
- raise rates for hourly-paid teaching to restore lost value, then peg rates to the national pay scale;
- review preparation hours required for hourly-paid teaching and agree a University-wide rate;
- develop a fair and transparent framework for the allocation of teaching and proper support for hourly-paid teaching staff;
- negotiate an agreed recommendation over the appropriate base rate for college supervision and an agreed recommendation over preparation time for supervisions;
- agree a new policy on the appropriate use of TES contracts and review current TES contracts with the aim of moving staff onto appropriate employment contracts wherever possible;
- improve terms and conditions for staff remaining on TES contracts;
- agree a specific allocation of paid time off or, in the case of hourly-paid staff, paid time on, to allow our representatives to meaningfully participate in the processes around these negotiations.





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