

## **Joint communication: Interim arrangements for the planning and allocation of work to Sessional Lecturers and Academic Advisers for the 2010/11 session**

30 March 2010

Dear Colleague,

In 2007 the Government withdrew institutional funding for ELQ students - those studying for an equal or lower level qualification – with the result that the College lost about a third of its HEFCE teaching funding. Birkbeck then undertook a Strategic Review in order to find ways to mitigate this funding loss. Three of the outcomes of this Review were: the restructuring of the College into five new ‘super schools’; the mainstreaming of the Faculty of Lifelong Learning across those Schools; and the initiation of the Portfolio Review. This ongoing review of programmes of study is looking at duplication of provision and the viability of some subject offerings within the new environment in which we find ourselves. Consequently some streamlining of provision for the 2010/11 academic session will have to take place which may result in an overall reduction in the work that is available to Sessional Lecturers and Academic Advisers in some subject areas.

Aside from the impact of these particular challenges, UCU and the College’s management have, as part of the ongoing harmonisation negotiations, been looking at ways to minimise and manage the variation in hours of Sessional Lecturers and Academic Advisers that has been an ongoing feature of the employment relationship. A longer-term comprehensive policy on variation in hours for this staff group is close to agreement; however, in response to the very specific set of circumstances facing us now and the wish by all parties to protect jobs, interim arrangements have been jointly agreed for the planning and allocation of work to sessional staff for the 2010/11 academic session.

Where a Sessional Lecturer and/or Academic Adviser has established continuity in their employment\* that is in excess of two years (at October 2010), the College will strive, wherever possible, to offer hours for the 2010/11 academic session based on those hours worked in this current year. Where, however, this is not possible, every reasonable attempt will be made to mitigate any reduction in hours:

- by not recruiting/assigning work to new Sessional Lecturers and/or Academic Advisers where the work can be undertaken by those Sessional Lecturers and/or Academic Advisers already working at the College

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\* Continuity of employment (or service) is the duration that an individual has worked for an employer without a break in service, recorded by the date that the employment commenced. The College’s current working definition is that to have established continuity of service a Sessional Lecturer or Academic Adviser (in their separate employment) will have worked for a minimum of two full terms within a given academic year and for a period in excess of one year. In cases where an individual has worked for the College over several consecutive years and where this does not meet the criteria for maintained continuity in employment, reasonable attempts will be made to offer similar working hours for the 2010/11 session.

- by exploring whether work provisionally assigned to other staff (e.g. any whose hours it is anticipated will increase) can be re-assigned to those who face a potential drop in hours, to ensure the widest and fairest possible distribution of the available work to those able to undertake it
- where staff are engaged by more than one School or subject area and where their work will reduce in one area, by exploring the possibility of a temporary increase in the work offered in the other subject area or School, so that the overall number of hours can be maintained or any reduction mitigated
- by exploring the possibility of the allocation of a different working pattern to ensure that the total number of hours offered throughout the year is as close as possible to those worked in this current year
- the allocation of appropriate alternative work, as per the full range of duties outlined within the newly developed generic role profiles, where there is a requirement for that work to be undertaken.

If after undertaking this mitigating action it is not possible to offer hours at the same level as those worked in this current year, the College and UCU have agreed that a cap on the maximum reduction in individual hours will be set at 33.3% for this current planning cycle. The cap and percentage will apply to this planning year only and will be reviewed as per the longer-term comprehensive policy on variation in hours currently under negotiation.

The overall objective, as agreed here between the College and UCU, is to make every reasonable attempt to mitigate any reduction in hours to individual Sessional Lecturers and Academic Advisers, to ensure equitable treatment and to avoid the potential need for compulsory redundancies. Human Resources will be working with the Schools to support the application of this process.

Despite these efforts, the College needs to inform you that, even with this interim agreement with UCU, there is still the possibility of redundancies in some areas. Whilst this is to be deeply regretted we can at least report that the Governors have agreed a new redundancy policy and scheme for all staff which is substantially more generous than statutory provision. This enhanced provision will be applied to eligible Sessional Lecturers and Academic Advisers for the first time in cases where all attempts to mitigate reductions in hours within the 33.3% variability clause cannot be achieved.

If you have any questions on this communication or on the process outlined, please contact the Assistant School Manager for your subject area in the first instance. You may also wish to contact one of the representatives of UCU (all contact details on the following page).

Yours sincerely,

Professor Philip Dewe - Vice Master  
Mike Berlin - Joint President Birkbeck UCU

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