

AUT Newsletter

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Pay

Some clarification on the pay offer. What was offered and refused was 3.3% from 1 April 2001 plus a further 1.1% if we agreed to extend the period covered by the deal to 1 August 2002. The purpose of extending the period is to make the settlement date for academic and related staff in the old universities coincide with the settlement date for all other HE staff, so that the employers can treat all types of staff as a single lump. 4.4% over 16 months equals 3.3% per annum, which is the smallest offer made in the public sector all year. The employers have said that they will improve the offer but that they want progress on a range of issues before making their next move. Negotiations will resume at a full session on 10 May but there will be a sequence of more private discussions before then.

HQ circulars

Research Activity and the RAE

The RAE return has now gone in. Queen's has entered 40 units compared to 47 last time round. The reduction reflects Queen's decision to enter only subjects expected to achieve a grade of 3a or above. It also reflects the closure of Geology and Semitic studies as well as the consolidation of formerly separate subjects into a smaller number of units. Of the 40 entries, all but eight are expected to achieve a rating of 4 or above. If all goes according to plan, this would imply that 70-80% of academic staff would be in departments rated 4 and above compared to roughly 50% last time round.

Right to the end, further instructions were being issued by RAE HQ as to which types of staff should or should not be included, and some very strong research staff may have been omitted because of this. The volume of staff being entered this time round is 80% compared to 78% in 1996. This looks like a very small change given that the improvement of research performance was the major objective of the Academic Plan. The explanation we have been given is that the attempt to achieve improved grades has meant that less than 50% of eligible staff have been entered in some schools in the Medical Faculty. Elsewhere in the university, the return is closer to the target 90% level.

We understand that staff in the Medical Faculty who are research active and excluded from the RAE for strategic reasons were earlier informed that they will continue to be eligible for research support including grants for attending conferences and sabbatical leave. At a recent meeting with the Vice-Chancellor's Committee, we sought confirmation that this would apply to all staff excluded from the RAE for strategic reasons. The University has since confirmed that *'academic staff omitted from the RAE submission for strategic reasons will not be treated differently from those academic staff who have been included. In practical terms this means that staff omitted for strategic reasons:*

- *will be entitled to apply and be considered for conference/research funds;*
- *will be entitled to apply and be considered, for promotion/advancement and/or be considered for discretionary payments under the relevant University schemes. In assessing such staff under those schemes, the normal University criteria will be applied.'*

We understand that a letter to this effect will be sent to relevant staff in due course.

Renee Prendergast

The AUT and the ILT

The AUT has always been concerned with professional matters as well as trade-union activities and, since 1996, we have been campaigning for a national system of professional accreditation of higher education teaching. In part this has been to counterbalance the heavy weight attached to research

when it comes to advancement in many universities. But we have always emphasised the special features of university teaching in that it was the imparting of clarity of thought and of higher level skills in an atmosphere of research and also training in research itself, and that there was a tradition of professional independence in teaching. Another feature is the number of academic-related staff who contribute directly to teaching and learning. The AUT has maintained that these staff should also be accredited at an appropriate level possibly together with accreditation of their other professional work. Our case for accreditation was both principled and pragmatic. What we had in mind was the establishment of an opportunity for all staff involved in teaching, directly or indirectly, to acquire nationally recognised qualifications through programmes of in-service training and development. We argued that, done properly, this could be of real practical value to the professional development of our members, as well as enhancing the status of higher education teaching and the profession in general.

AUT's evidence to the Dearing Committee included the case for accreditation. We had not argued specifically for the Institute for Learning (later ILT) which Dearing proposed, but the Dearing recommendations were very closely in line with our policy and we were able to welcome them.

Unfortunately, the ILT has not developed in the way AUT had hoped, even though AUT has a small representation on the governing body of ILT. The accreditation process is extremely bureaucratic. My own experience on becoming a member of ILT based on prior experience is that it is a voluminous paper exercise relying heavily on two referees who need not have ever seen you teach. The material that ILT provides its members is heavy with jargon and highly theoretical. It does not provide the practical help that I had hoped for. The number of members of the ILT has grown extremely slowly and has only recently passed the 2000 mark. This slow growth has attracted the attention of the Government. Criticism of the ILT has grown within AUT culminating in motions passed at December 2000 Council. These resolutions instructed AUT Executive to bring proposals to May 2001 Council for an alternative system of accreditation, and the matter will be considered in a few week's time.

The idea is that, like many of the professions allied to medicine, the AUT should be a trade union with a self-regulatory professional wing under democratic control. We should aim, within an agreed number of years, to achieve the highest possible level of coincidence between membership of the union and membership of the professional wing, but they will not be identical. The expansion of our professional role and the establishment of a new accreditation system by the AUT would be a major undertaking for the association, involving the commitment of substantial resources. The AUT would have to answer the same questions about its necessity, value and practical benefits of accreditation that the ILT has dealt with so unconvincingly.

The proposals being debated have October 2002 as the target date for the formal establishment of a fully functioning accreditation system. After wide consultation with our members the results would be reported to a working conference in January 2002 which would start the detailed planning of the accreditation scheme. We would develop a professional manifesto for academic and academic-related staff setting out AUT's approach to staff development and accreditation and describing our concept of a self-managed profession committed to values of academic freedom, professional standards and inclusiveness. This would be followed by consultation on an outline accreditation scheme with members in spring 2002. The final proposals would be put to AUT Council in May 2002.

There is no doubt that the attempts by the Government and its agents to control the profession have been to our detriment and are deeply resented by members. Also if the AUT had influence over the professional labour supply side, then it would strengthen our hand as a trade union. **The proposals would mean a radical change in the AUT and your representatives would like to hear your views.** In particular we need to know whether a system of accreditation run by the AUT would be more acceptable to you or if you object to any form of teaching accreditation. The background and proposals are set out on the AUT web-site at www.aut.ork.uk/members/circularshtml/la7012.html Alternatively you can get a copy from Paul Hudson (ext 3157).

Bureaucracy in Universities

Our General Meeting approved the following motion for debate at AUT Council:

“The under-funded expansion of student numbers in the last two decades has meant a doubling of the teaching workloads of university staff at a time when pay has increased far more slowly than average earnings. The increased workload has been exacerbated by ever increasing regulation of the sector in various forms including QAA and RAE.

“This Council accepts that universities are publicly accountable and have an obligation to make efficient use of public resources. However, the degree of regulation currently imposed on the UK higher education sector has become unsustainably onerous and is not conducive to efficiency. It is diverting resources from proper uses in research and teaching. It is shaping teaching and research in ways which are not conducive to the health of either activity. It is imposing an unhealthy homogeneity on the sector when variety should be tolerated if not cultivated.

“Council calls on Executive to institute immediately an effective campaign aimed at the reduction of the unnecessary, intrusive and burdensome regulation of research and teaching in Higher Education. Council calls on Executive to provide regular reports to the membership on the progress made in this campaign.”

A recent report has estimated that £250 million per year is being spent within higher education on ‘accountability’ exercises. The worst offender is the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and some universities are threatening to boycott it. Major changes are taking place in the way the QAA assesses higher education. New subject reviews are being introduced in 25 Scottish departments during the current academic year before becoming UK wide from January 2002. However Scottish AUT members are reporting little reduction in bureaucracy. QAA claim that the new system will be “a lighter touch”, but the Government have recently announced plans to cut assessments by an extra 40%. This would be brought about by exemptions from the next round for those departments that achieve good marks. Our General Secretary, David Triesman, is a member of the Better Regulation Task Force. He says that the QAA would be unlikely to survive a review given the agency’s failure to fulfil any of the five principles of good regulation identified by the task force and backed by government.

Income Tax Allowances

Most of us have just been sent a tax return for the year ending 5 April 2001. People with very simple tax affairs may not be sent one, but if you wish to claim the allowances described below you will have to ask for one; this is a mixed blessing as you can be fined £100 if you fail to make a return by the next January. The AUT are not tax advisers and what is given below is not an authoritative statement of the tax law, but it is a description based on successful claims made by people employed at Queen’s. You may have to enter into discussions with the local Tax Inspector, but modest claims are rarely disputed.

The most useful claims are under “Expenses you incurred in doing your job” and you should carefully read pages EN6 to EN8 of the notes. You will see that travel costs other than commuting to your permanent workplace can be claimed to the extent that they are not reimbursed by your employer.

There are no fixed deductions for expenses, but you are also entitled to a deduction for certain fees you must pay to carry on your profession; or annual subscriptions to professional bodies that are approved by the tax office and are relevant to your work. These include the AUT, the ILT and most academic societies. For the AUT it is $\frac{2}{3}$ of the *national* subscription (excluding any political fund contribution) which counts as a professional subscription. For those paying the full rate subscription for the whole year this is £70.56 for annual payers or (because the subscription changed during the tax year) £69.06 for monthly payers, but HQ advice is to put down the full subscription (£121.08 annual or £118.83 for monthly) and let the tax office sort it out.

The next heading is necessary expenses you incur solely in doing your work and the tax office may dispute how *necessary* they are. You might claim for academic books, software and journal subscriptions used for your work. You might claim for the expenses of a conference to the extent that they are not paid for by QUB or by a grant. Many academics successfully claim for a study at home. Since QUB provides you with a place of work, how can you claim that a study at home is necessary? Well, even if QUB provides you with a private room (and some do not get this), many people may have access to it and it may not be secure enough for your expensive books and equipment or for exam setting and marking. Also you may have difficulty working undisturbed. Furthermore the timetabling of homework and exam marking may require you to work late into the night and so it is only practical that the work is done at home. If you have earnings from, say, A-Level marking or from consultancy, then this is an additional reason for a study at home. If you have x habitable rooms in your home (excluding bathrooms, halls *etc.*) and you use one of them as a study, then you could claim $1/x$ of the total cost of your rates, heating, electricity and cleaning.

Finally, what if you have received some back-pay and that extra money has carried you over a tax threshold such as into the 40% tax band? Ordinarily you are taxed in the year in which the money is paid rather than when you earned it. In some cases you might have paid less if you were taxed in the year in which the money was earned. In these circumstances you should quote the tax law (S.202B T.A.): “Emoluments are taxed when received (S.202A T.A.); receipt occurs on earlier of (S.202B T.A.) (a) payment date; (b) date of entitlement to payment;”.

Work Related Car Journeys

It appears that car insurance is second only to car parking charges in inciting the interest of members. You only know how good your car insurance is whenever you have to make a claim, and members have been telling me of their experiences. Not holding a CURRENT test certificate for the car will invalidate the insurance, so keep a check of when it needs to be renewed. Also check your coverage for the Republic of Ireland, as many cheap insurances provide cover only for the UK or require prior notice of travel to a European country including RoI. If you regularly give someone a lift to work and accept some “petrol money” you may also be invalidating your insurance, and should consult your broker.

Even if you have the proper insurance for work related car journeys, you can still suffer loss. If you have an accident you will have to pay the excess charge specified in the insurance and, through loss of your No Claims Bonus, pay out extra in succeeding years. This is a personal loss suffered by you even though you were performing university duties. For this reason, and for the others mentioned in our previous issue, we will see if there is any way in which the University can provide insurance cover for these duties that they want you to perform.

Snippets

- We are asking all the Northern Ireland political parties for a statement of their higher education policies and intend publishing them close to the General Election.
- AUT’s own General Election manifesto is available on www.aut.org.uk/campaigns/election.htm
- Any disabled member interested in being elected to the national Equal Opportunities Committee should contact HQ by 2 May.
- The AUT now has a joint membership agreement with the **Society of Chiropodists and Podiatrists** with regard to SCP members employed in institutions of higher education.

Paul Hudson