

AUT Newsletter

Produced by Belfast Association of University Teachers

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General Meeting

1.05 p.m. on Wednesday 9 March
in 211 Peter Froggatt Centre

National President, Angela Rodger,

accompanied by Assistant General Secretary, Matt Waddup, will speak on the

Proposed Merger with NATFHE.

Your Local Officers will also briefly report on

Local Pay and Grading.

We will also consider any business for AUT National Council.

Local Progress on Grading

The major work at present is on Job Profiles. These may not sound very exciting, but they are vital for the future grading of your present post and for promotion. The process of job grading is that Belfast AUT and QUB management will have to agree set of generic job profiles for numerous academic and related roles. These will describe under various headings what the job typically involves and the qualifications and skills required. These job profiles will be given a score using the Hay job evaluation process. Each new pay band will have a range of Hay scores associated with it. These pay bands and associated scores have not yet been locally agreed, but we have a good idea of what they will be for Senior Lecturers and Lecturers and their academic-related equivalents. However, a good deal of negotiation will be needed over the pay bands for research assistants and academic-related grades 1 and 2 as these will share pay bands with technicians and senior clerical staff.

Until agreement has been reached on pay bands and associated scores Belfast AUT will not agree to job grading proceeding. When it does, every individual (apart from professors and ALC grade 6's) will be matched to the generic role profile that they most closely fit. (Appeals are allowed.) They will then take the grade associated with that generic role profile and will be paid according to its pay band. They will move to the nearest pay spine point which is greater or equal to their current pay. The exception is if someone is down-graded compared to the present, but even these will have salary protection (red circling) for up to four years. QUB management has assured us that down-grading will be very rare for academic staff, but will give no such assurance for academic-related staff.

We have just received from QUB management draft generic role profiles for most academic and research jobs and expect to have draft generic role profiles for academic-related jobs soon. A lot of work has to be done to see that these are a fair reflection of what is involved in each job. The ones that we have seen so far appear to be a compendium drawing on the nationally agreed Generic Role Profiles, QUB Promotion Criteria and Southampton University Job Family Profiles. The result is a formidable list. A profile is an illustrative list of exemplars, but a lack of ticks against so many headings could be misinterpreted, and we would therefore like to rationalise the list. Even when

expressed in local wording, our grades should match in job size the generic academic grades described in the Framework Agreement. By piling together several different sets of requirements the QUB proposals have increased the job size and made it more difficult for an individual to match a grade. We will have to address this in negotiations. We would welcome your comments and relevant job profiles can be obtained from Paul Hudson (ext 3157).

This work has highlighted the lack of clarity in QUB about what constitutes Scholarship, Contribution to the Community or Outreach and how the standards in these should vary with grade.

Do not think that the use of job profiles is a one-off event that can be forgotten once the trauma of regrading is over. The QUB promotion criteria will have to be brought into line with the grade profiles.

We will also have to develop criteria for the payment of accelerated increments or discretionary payments to all types of staff. According to the Framework Agreement the system for the award of these “should be fair consistent and transparent” ... and “demonstrably equally available to all staff who meet the criteria”. And the same goes for market force payments and honoraria.

Associated with grading is the standardisation of holidays and hours of work, if any, for each pay band. These are particularly important to manual staff whose overtime and special payments often make up an vital part of their pay, and manual staff may take a long time to hammer out an agreement. QUB management say that they wish to put forward their local interpretation of all aspects of the Framework Agreement to all types of staff at the same time. They originally gave mid-March as the time for this offer, but the timing may be slipping. Because of the common pay bands and associated conditions, agreement between management and several unions is necessary on many aspects. Your AUT Officers will do our best to achieve the target of implementation of the Framework Agreement by August 2005, but that date looks like slipping. And No, we have not forgotten about backdating.

Paul Hudson

Childcare at Queen's: Prohibitive Prices to Hit Staff

Childcare provision at Queen's has been the subject of a long-running debate. At a QUB Women's Forum in 2000 it was noted that although the quality of QUB childcare was “excellent”, the level of provision was “atrocious” and the costs “extortionate”. It appears that little has changed. The crèche staff continue to offer excellent childcare, but the number of places for QUB staff still remains the same (24 full-time), despite the Gender Initiative continuing to publicise widely the inadequate provision and the need for investment in additional facilities. If costs were extortionate back in 2000, what is now being proposed is downright scandalous.

Here is the detail. The monthly fee in 2003-04 was **£420** per child per month. This year the fee has risen to **£476** without explanation. But much worse is to come. From next September, the proposed fee will be **£656** per child per month, a further **38%** rise.

Not only does £656 represent ‘unaffordable’ rather than the ‘affordable’ childcare promoted in the government's National Childcare Strategy, but, crucially, it is wildly out of line with any reasonable benchmark you care to take. The local profit-making private sector averages just under £500 per month, with UU at £420, while university crèches in GB vary from lower fees (such as £360 in Liverpool and £372 in Glasgow) to just under £500 in more expensive areas such as Oxford and Cambridge. Prices comparable to QUB's proposed rate are rare and mostly London-based.

Moreover, a potentially positive development in the form of the introduction of a government salary sacrifice tax incentive scheme has been worse than negated by the extent of the fee rise and by the fact that QUB plans – totally immorally in our view – to claw back 25% of the savings intended by

the government for parents. This equates to roughly £54 per month per child. Lines are also being deliberately blurred between staff and student provision, to the detriment of the staff who will be paying more to allow for the 33 week contract for students; the staff fee will be set so as to cover the full costs of all the student places (two thirds of the total) during the 15 weeks when they do not pay, since they do not use the service. Surely it is not the responsibility of the staff parents to subsidise the crèche in this manner.

In short, even taking into account government tax incentives, staff will pay out on average **£150** more per month per child (families with two children or more will find this prohibitive), a rise of over **40%** in terms of what actually goes out of our pockets, against a pay rise of less than 3.5%. The effect on families will be serious, both financially and emotionally, where children may have to be removed from the crèche. But perhaps more significantly for Queen's, the potential effect of the implications of such fees on women's career patterns in the University flies in the face of Queen's rhetoric on gender equality. It undercuts all the good work of the Gender Initiative and is in direct conflict with government policy.

We ask again that QUB reconsiders the situation; the staff parents have never asked for subsidies and have always been happy to pay fees which cover the costs of our OWN children's care. We are a committed and reasonable group of staff who just want some honesty and transparency from the University, and a fair deal. We expect nothing less from a 21st century university with much-trumpeted 'family-friendly' policies.

AUT users of the Crèche

Senate and the "Vision"

C Northcote Parkinson was a university administrator and he drew on that experience when he formulated his famous Law: "Work expands to fill the time available for its completion." So it was with the special meeting of Senate, QUB's governing body. Senate had from 11 a.m. to its lunch to consider the Vision and it duly filled the time. Most lay Senators did not claim to understand the detail, but they did latch on to the promise to make Queen's a research-led university which they accepted as being a good thing. Some, with varying degrees of sympathy, opined that change is always disturbing and that often some people resist it. One regretted that the document contained no celebration of what we did well. Another perceived that the Vision required the staff to work harder. Senate decided that the Chair of Senate should be consulted before the Management Committee acted on its behalf. Otherwise the Vision, as amended by Academic Council, was duly passed.

Only one footnote — because of difficulties in deciding what are the relevant constituencies, the candidates to be the new Deans will not on this occasion have to pass a test of acceptability to their subordinates.

Paul Hudson

Snippets

ECIT. When the Institute of Electronics, Communications and Information Technology was set up in the Titanic Quarter some QUB staff moved their main place of employment there. Could any AUT members who regularly work at ECIT please contact Paul Hudson on ext 3157.

Redundancies at Brunel. AUT's National Executive unanimously authorised a ballot for industrial action at Brunel University in support of members threatened with compulsory redundancy. The management there declared a redundancy exercise for 60 academic staff which targets staff who are "not research active." The 60 job cuts amount to almost one in eight of the academic staff at Brunel and will affect almost every school across the university. Brunel management have been trying to force through these redundancies as quickly as possible, ignoring collective agreements negotiated with AUT. The University announced that up to 30 of the proposed redundancies will be compulsory. Members at Brunel have been vocal in their criticism

with 94% of members voting in an online poll that they had no confidence in Brunel's senior management.

Unpaid Overtime. Teachers and Lecturers are the workers who put in the most unpaid overtime according to a TUC analysis of the Labour Force Survey. This ongoing survey, conducted by National Statistics, asks 60,000 households each year about their working patterns, including how much unpaid overtime they do. The calculations assume a normal working week of 40 hours and six weeks holiday a year and show that the average weekly unpaid overtime done by teachers and lecturers is 11 hours and 36 minutes. But, as the data is based on self reporting, and as many such staff have contracts that do not specify working hours, the TUC believes this may be an underestimate of their unpaid hours. It is strange that such unpaid work and the productivity associated with it is ignored by the Government and the employers when making pay comparisons. The local implementation of the Framework Agreement will require that all staff on the same pay band have the same basic hours and the same overtime arrangements. This will mean specified total hours per week for AUT members who move onto pay bands shared with technicians and senior clerical staff. However the higher pay bands are likely to be offered with no specified hours, and we would like to hear your views on this.

Raising the Voice of Professionals and Specialists. AUT is conducting an on-line survey jointly with Prospect, the union which organises engineers, scientists and specialists in the public and private sector. The object is to ensure that the voice of professional and specialists is heard in the run-up to the general election. We also want to find out what motivates you in your professional life, how you view your prospects and your aspirations for the new Parliamentary term. You can access the survey through www.aut.org.uk/index.cfm?article=1084

Manifesto for Academic-related Staff. This document was approved by the annual meeting of academic-related staff. It describes the role of academic-related staff and aims to strengthen the ties to academic staff. It can be read on www.aut.org.uk/index.cfm?article=1053 and comments can be made to a similar address with 1053 replaced by 937 or to Gerry Cleary (ext3116).

Election of AUT National Executive Members. There is a minor error in the ballot paper mailed to you. The word "three" appears instead of the word "five" in describing how many 3-year vacancies exist.

Paul Hudson based on AUT circulars