

## Durham UCU's local claim and Durham University's responses

<b>JOB SECURITY</b>
<b>Request February 2025: Rule out compulsory redundancies.</b>
<b>Updated requests July 2025:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Rule out compulsory redundancies until the end of calendar year 2027.</b></li><li>• <b>All voluntary severance measures should be truly voluntary and not under the threat of potential compulsory redundancies.</b></li></ul>
<b>University response (last updated November 2025):</b> <p>The University continues to operate in a volatile financial context where many external variables are unknown and out of our control. International student recruitment remains unpredictable, with a significant downturn in the Chinese market and at postgraduate taught level. There are also new challenges to our operating environment, such as the proposed international student levy, which will act as an additional tax on the University's income.</p> <p>We have been open and transparent with colleagues throughout the recent voluntary severance process, so staff members were able to make an informed decision about whether voluntary severance was right for them.</p> <p>Due to the ongoing financial challenges facing the sector, we cannot rule out redundancies in the future if they were needed to ensure our ongoing financial sustainability. In the event that we do need to manage staff costs in future as a result of the financial challenges, we would first discuss this with our trade unions, and we would look to achieve any savings by voluntary means wherever possible. We are committed to engaging with colleagues from the outset where there are further changes to our financial outlook.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Rule out further job losses as a result of staff cost cutting, including protecting fixed-term and casualised staff and roles.</b></li><li>• <b>Increase the job security of existing hourly paid staff by moving them onto fractional contracts.</b></li><li>• <b>Develop a dedicated mechanism for trade-union scrutiny and negotiation of any changes to the use of fixed-term contracts (FTCs) (e.g. hiring on FTCs rather than permanent contracts; FTC redundancies) following past or future organisational change, including the recent VS schemes.</b></li></ul>
<b>University response (last updated November 2025):</b>

We are mindful of the concerns of staff on non-substantive contracts.

We have a number of staff on fixed-term contracts, normally because the funding supporting their employment is time limited from an external source or they are engaged on a particular project. We have agreed policies and processes in place related to fixed-term staff. We ensure that appropriate support is offered to staff as part of our processes.

We have previously done valuable work with our trade unions to agree our Casual Working Principles, which we continue to abide by. This includes a default arrangement of employment contracts for staff, such that the only casual staff in the University are on very short term or limited arrangements. We engage less than 5 staff on zero hours contracts and those staff that are on these arrangements have expressed a preference to continue on this type of contract.

The day-to-day hiring decisions of the University are not a matter upon which we will negotiate.

We do not consider it appropriate to offer 'protection' to some staff groups above others, for example enhanced protection for casual staff if that would mean concentrating potential staff cost reductions on substantive staff.

#### **Request: TU-negotiated measures like pooling and bridging funding to decouple research staff job security from individual grants**

##### **University response (last updated November 2025):**

Bridging funding would be an additional financial commitment on an ongoing basis. This request would have to be met from existing staff costs and could be at a significant cost.

Where research staff are on fixed-term contracts, we have agreed policies in place to offer them support and, where relevant, to consider suitable alternative employment.

#### **MANAGEABLE WORKLOAD**

##### **Requests:**

- **100% workload (35 hours a week on average or pro rata) is the limit and fair.**
- **TU-negotiated workload models for all salaried and hourly-paid staff.**

**Updated in July 2025 to:**

- **Develop a mechanism, using existing empirical workload data where available, to ensure past and future organisational changes, including the recent VS rounds, do not result in workloads which measurably and/or routinely exceed the contracted working hours of 35 hours per week (pro rata). This includes changing 'nominal hours' on grade 7+ contracts to actual hours as for other grades.**
- **Establish routine negotiation with trade unions on restructures, re-alignments, and changes of roles, responsibilities, and related business processes as a result of organisational change. This should be supported by a timely process to ensure roles are appropriately graded following those changes, giving particular attention to grade slippage and erosion.**

**University response (last updated November 2025):**

We understand the concerns of colleagues in relation to workload across the University.

A significant project to address workload issues is already underway across the University. This project is overseen by the Workload Steering Group, which has trade union membership, including UCU. Any ideas related to workload could be raised within that Group. We are committed to seeking appropriate solutions in collaboration with staff across the University.

Workload following voluntary severance is being considered closely in each department. Colleagues are encouraged to raise any concerns with their line-manager, HR, or a TU representative. We will continue to develop ways to monitor workload and welcome feedback.

The University is implementing a new framework for academic workload allocation across the University, setting requirements for departmental workload models. The purpose of the framework is to fairly and transparently allocate the workload associated with the delivery of core education and research activity between academic staff. The Framework was agreed at Senate on Tuesday 24 June 2025. UCU has membership on the working group responsible for its implementation.

Contracts at grade 7 and above are contracted to work what is referred to as a “nominal working week”. This means the minimum contracted hours of work per week is 35 hours, with staff expected to manage their time to complete their duties. This is a standard approach adopted across much of Higher Education (albeit in many institutions the nominal working week is higher than 35 hours) and senior roles in other sectors. We do not intend to revisit this position.

Where the University engages in matters which require formal collective consultation, we will always work with our trade unions. Where there are changes, such as realignments which involve a significant number of colleagues, we will inform our trade unions.

We also have in place clear policies around grades and potential re-gradings.

## **A DEMOCRATIC UNIVERSITY**

**Request: Recommend to Council that all four TUs are invited to nominate representatives to Council with full voting rights**

**University response (last updated November 2025):**

University Council is made up of independent trustees who do not act on behalf of specific constituencies. They are obliged to act individually and must not be conflicted. This means our recognised Trade Union representatives cannot attend on behalf of their members.

Any member of staff can apply to be a staff member of Council. If they were appointed, it would be in their capacity as an individual.

**Request: Honour TU recognition (implement agreements, open comms, engage cost-saving/cost-neutral TU proposals)**

**University response (last updated November 2025):**

We work with our trade unions in a transparent and open way and respect the benefits of partnership working, while recognising that there will be issues upon which we do not agree.

We are receptive to trade unions' proposals, including where they are cost neutral, but we must take into account matters such as the proportionality of implementation and suitability, for example whether they align to our governance arrangements.

## **PROMOTIONS FOR EVERYONE**

**Request: Formal promotions procedure for Professional Services staff and appeals procedure for all promotions.**

**University response (last updated November 2025):**

We do not have a promotions process for professional services staff, which is the same as all other universities. We operate within a job evaluation scheme and therefore roles in Professional Services are aligned to the work that needs to be undertaken and are graded accordingly.

If we were to have a formal promotion process for all Professional Services staff, this would cause grade and cost inflation, along with equal pay issues. We have explained this to our trade unions on many occasions.

However, there are many opportunities to apply for internal roles at the University, and we have recently been prioritising vacancies for internal candidates. Where possible we also encourage departments to consider offering development roles, which allow staff to progress to a higher grade, if they meet specified criteria. During academic year 2024/25, over 200 PS staff progressed to a higher grade.

We have a process to consider changes in grade where duties have changed due to business need. We also have many opportunities and programmes for career development in Professional Services, including our DU Professional initiative.

#### **PAY SPINE REVIEW**

##### **Requests:**

- **Open local negotiations.**
- **Commit to local implementation.**

##### **University response (last updated November 2025):**

We have given all campus trade unions the terms of reference to begin this work. However, this cannot be undertaken in isolation of our financial sustainability and any ongoing national work on the pay spine for Higher Education. When UCEA progress work on the pay spine, it would not be sensible to duplicate work at Durham or to discuss changes at Durham which may then need to be undone. We will continue to discuss this with our Trade Unions.

It is in the interests of all colleagues that we engage collaboratively and do so within the context of a very challenging financial context.