PRESS RELEASE

Bungee stretch campaigning event
Tuesday 27th September 2016 10:30am - 4:00pm
The Downs, University Park
University of Nottingham

Nottingham University Living Wage and Anti-casualisation campaign invite students and staff to see how far they can stretch

On Tuesday 27th September, students and staff from the University of Nottingham Living Wage Campaign are holding a free bungee run event to encourage involvement in their campaign to ensure that everyone working on campus is guaranteed at least £8.25/hour all year round. To highlight the theme of stretching to make ends meet, we’ll be inviting students and staff to attempt our bungee run – and to get involved in the campaign.

Andreas Bieler, Professor of Political Economy, said “As many students begin their studies at the University, we hope to raise awareness of our campaign to secure at least the Living Wage of £8.25/hour for staff working for the University. Many staff here have had to work from November to August without earning the Living Wage. The University’s recent pay award has finally caught up with the rate of £8.25, but staff are struggling to catch up with their living costs – and the University’s lowest pay rates will fall behind the Living Wage again when it is recalculated in November. We are asking the University to commit to becoming a Living Wage employer to give staff the security of knowing that they will be paid decently all year round.”

Nottingham University: £25 million surplus but unable to pay the Living Wage?

The quality of education is closely linked to fair working conditions of members of staff. All University employees should enjoy stability and continuity of employment. And yet, despite a surplus of £25 m in the years ending 31st July 2014 and 31st July 2015, the University of Nottingham hasn’t so far committed to becoming an official Living Wage employer.

The Living Wage is an hourly rate set independently and updated annually in November by the Living Wage Foundation (http://www.livingwage.org.uk/). It is calculated according to the basic cost of living in the UK, ensuring that employees enjoy a ‘minimum income standard’. The Living Wage is currently £8.25 an hour outside London. There are now more than 2,000 accredited Living Wage employers across the UK including universities such as Kings College London and the London School of Economics. The re-branding by George Osborne of the National Minimum Wage to a National Living Wage left millions of people
struggling to make ends meet as, at £7.20, it is still well below this independently calculated rate, and doesn’t apply to young workers.

During the course of 2015, we estimate that several hundred employees at the University of Nottingham were paid below the Living Wage between November 2015 and August 2016. Using the headcount of staff on each pay point, we roughly calculate that the maximum cost to the University in 2015-16 of raising the pay of all staff to the current level of the Living Wage (£8.25 ph) would be under £1 million. This represents only 4% of the University’s surplus in 2014/15 and only 0.32% of finance spent on staffing.

We appreciate that the University increased wages for its lowest paid workers to £8.25 as of 1 August 2016, but ultimately this means that workers will be on the Living Wage only for three months until November, when the Living Wage is again being re-calculated and increased. **We ask the University to commit to becoming an accredited Living Wage employer.** Members of staff need to be on the Living Wage for the whole year, not just three months in order to make ends meet.

**Casualised employment at the University: infrastructure before staff?**

‘Working as a Teaching Associate is not easy. It means constant worry about paying rent, bills and living expenses. It involves endless stress about where the next short-term contract will come from’ (Personal Testimony).

‘Casualisation is bad for staff and bad for education, yet it’s endemic in our colleges and universities’ (UCU, http://www.ucu.org.uk/stampout, accessed 12/01/2016). Research and teaching staff on casual contracts undermines the quality of education. These practices are widely spread in Higher Education in the UK and the University of Nottingham is no exception in this respect. Our campaign also addresses teachers and researchers on insecure contracts.

‘Sometimes, I would do my cleaning job in the middle of the night, take a quick sleep in the bath, then drive to do a full day’s teaching at Nottingham’ (Personal Testimony)

In December 2015, the local UCU association carried out a survey of researchers at Nottingham University. For 86% of respondents, lack of job security was a reason they had considered leaving HE.

Large parts of teaching at Nottingham University are carried out by casually employed teachers including postgraduate students as well as fully qualified academics who are employed for part of the academic year (fixed-term contracts) or for teaching particular modules, often working only on the basis of a letter of engagement without guaranteed hours.

The University has embarked on an ambitious investment project on infrastructure of £580 million from 2014-2020. At £96.5 million per year this is clearly above the Russell Group average annual capital investment of £62.4 million. While there is plenty of money for buildings, little is made available to put casually employed members of staff on proper contracts.

**We call for the University to agree in formal, collective negotiations with the University and College Union improved working conditions for casually employed staff members.**

For information on the campaign, contact Andreas Bieler, Vice President UCU UoN, at Andreas.Bieler@nottingham.ac.uk, Tel.: 07913737259, or Ed Marks, Student Societies contact, on 07982679931.

(For full details of our demands, see https://uonucu.files.wordpress.com/2016/02/sustainability-campaign-council-document-final.pdf)