

## UNISON Newcastle City Branch - Administrative Review 2015

### **1. Introduction**

Newcastle City UNISON Branch directly employs administrative staff to support the organising work of the Branch Officers. The staff have always been employed on the same terms and conditions as those staff directly employed by UNISON, but the staff are **NOT** UNISON employees.

Where necessary, the staff terms and conditions can be amended, varied or replaced through negotiation with the staff and their trade union. All Branch staff are encouraged to join a trade union (ACTS).

The Branch Secretary (BS) is their line manager and responsible for all matters relating to their employment.

The last administrative review was proposed in January 2008 and implemented in April 2008; this reduced the number of administrative staff from 4 to 3, and a member of staff left on voluntary severance.

### **2. Current Structure**

The Branch currently employs 3 members of staff:

- Sue Praszczalek, Branch Coordinator, Grade 6, point U18, salary £31,788; 35 hours per week (full time).
- Dorothy Brock, Administrative Assistant, Grade 9, point U9, salary £20,990; 27.5 hours per week.
- Gemma Robson, Administrative Assistant, Grade 9, point U9, salary £20,990; 32 hours per week.

### **3. Branch Budget 2015**

The Branch budget for 2015 makes provision for an annual staffing salary of £85,885 from a total branch budget of £228,000 (38%). In addition, the branch covers the release costs of a number of Branch Officers £94,300 (41%). This leaves approximately £48,000 for all other branch expenditure (21%).

In January 2013, Branch Committee took the decision to create a dedicated fund to cover potential future redundancy costs on the basis of a reducing membership and the likelihood that the existing administrative resource would not be necessary. The fund amounts to £13,000.

The BS notified the Branch Committee members that the existing Branch administrative resource should be reviewed on the basis of reducing membership, reducing administrative workload and budgetary pressures.

The members of Branch Committee were concerned that compulsory redundancy would be an option, but were reassured by the Branch Secretary that the Branch would not be making any member of staff compulsorily redundant.

The BS met with all the Branch administrative staff and clarified the budget situation, and informed them that a full review of administrative tasks would be undertaken. They were also informed that no compulsory redundancies would be proposed.

The BS advised the administrative staff to speak to their trade union representative, and the BS met with the admin staff's trade union representative on 6<sup>th</sup> February to agree the parameters of the administrative review.

Weekly meetings between the BS and all administrative staff started w/c 9<sup>th</sup> February.

#### **4. Administrative Review – Workload Context**

In 2008 there were more than 7000 full members in the Branch; currently the Branch has a membership of 6130 full members.

The Branch Secretary changed in 2012, and this resulted in a significant reduction in the administrative support required by the incoming Branch Secretary (current).

In addition to the above factors, since 2012, the BS has monitored the administrative workload and the following is apparent:

- All current Branch Officers carry out the majority of their admin duties themselves.
  - Typing, filing, producing presentations and reports etc.
- There is a degree of duplication in admin functions.
- There was spare capacity within the existing admin resource to take on admin support for Newcastle University Branch, (January 2013 – ongoing).
- Admin absence for annual leave, sickness or early morning or evenings did not compromise the functioning of the Branch.
- A clear, planned communication strategy is in place, limiting any additional burden on the admin staff (where mechanisation and technology only cover some of the process).

To ensure the above observations are correct, the administrative staff have been engaged in weekly meetings with the BS and given the opportunity to comment on workload issues.

#### **5. Voluntary Severance Request**

At the end of February, one of the administrative staff made a request for voluntary severance, the BS agreed to consider the request once the member of staff formalised the request in writing.

A formal voluntary severance request was received by the BS on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2015.

All administrative staff were spoken to w/c 2<sup>nd</sup> March and informed of the voluntary severance request; no additional severance requests have been received.

Where more than one voluntary severance request is received, the decision to support one against another would be taken on the basis of several factors:

- Existing skill set and Branch requirements
- Contribution to the Branch
- Severance Cost

In order to calculate the potential severance sum, and on the basis that no voluntary severance policy existed in the staff's terms and conditions; the Branch Secretary met with the staff trade union representative.

It was agreed that any voluntary severance request would be paid at 2 x statutory minimum, in line with the Branch's aspirations for UNISON members. This agreement does not create a precedent and any future request would be considered on its merits.

## **6. Administrative Review – Post Voluntary Severance Request**

In order for any voluntary severance request to be supported, the impact on the remaining administrative staff and the smooth running of the Branch had to be assessed.

Building on the actions in point 4, a decision was taken to end the administrative support to Newcastle University from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2015; there will be a consequent reduction in administrative workload.

The weekly meetings with the administrative staff have focussed on any issues with potentially reducing the administrative function to 2 members of staff.

The administrative staff have not raised any concerns that are not able to be addressed, and have been assured that there will be no increase in duties or hours.

Cover for annual leave has been addressed.

## **7. Voluntary Severance Costs**

The costs associated with supporting the voluntary severance request are **£7265.70**. This sum can be accommodated by the amount set aside for Branch redundancy purposes.

## **8. Budget Savings**

If the voluntary severance application is approved, there will be an in- year saving of £10,340 and a reduction of £20,680 in the budget for 2016. The Branch will need to "top up" the redundancy fund to ensure we have sufficient funds to cover any potential future redundancy; this will be done as part of the 2016 budget process.

## **9. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The reduction in administrative staff will not have a significant impact on the remaining staff, and any impact will be addressed in advance of the reduction or monitored and dealt with post reduction.

The saving on salary costs will allow the Branch to support the retention of Organising Officers which is vital to ensure that members are adequately supported, but also to give capacity within the Branch to organise and expand our support to the Community & Voluntary Sector, and to continue our support for school based staff.

**On this basis, the Senior Branch Officers recommend that the voluntary severance request is supported and takes effect from 30<sup>th</sup> June 2015.**

PGJ

Paul Gilroy  
Branch Secretary  
11<sup>th</sup> May 2015