

Pay campaign 2006 - Action short of a strike: advice for heads of department



We are very appreciative of the strong support for our pay campaign and industrial action demonstrated by AUT members who are heads of department. In some universities heads of department are being put under pressure to assist management in various ploys aimed at undermining the action short of a strike. AUT members are resisting this pressure. Here are some points to remember if you are a head of department in that position.

Reallocation of assessment work

Some heads of department are being told to reallocate to non-union staff work boycotted by our members. In some cases, this includes approaching postgraduate, research, part-time or retired staff to undertake marking on a casual basis.

Our student assessment boycott includes all aspects of the process including all administrative work associated with assessment. Allocation of marking or examining duties clearly falls within the lawful industrial action being conducted by the union. **AUT heads of department should therefore refuse to reallocate assessment work as part of their participation in the action short of a strike.**

Identification of individuals taking part in the action

Some head of department members have been put in the invidious position of being asked by university management to report individual AUT colleagues participating in the action, and, in some cases, to make assessments of the amount of time normally spent by such members on assessment duties. This is obviously management attempting to prepare the ground for punitive pay deductions and the victimisation of individuals.

AUT does not believe that such tasks form part of the duties of university heads of department or constitute “reasonable instructions”. Heads of department faced with instructions of this nature should point out that these are properly matters for the university’s HR department and that as AUT members supporting the action themselves they have a conflict of interest which should be respected.

Local associations should call AUT heads of department together and organise a common response to pressures of this kind. If management nevertheless persists in pressuring or threatening any of our members LAs should immediately contact their full-time official for further advice.

Reporting on the impact of the action

Some heads of department are also being asked to provide details of the impact of the assessment boycott in their departments. We would advise members to supply that information in general terms and not to identify individuals. AUT has already told members taking part in the action short of a strike that they have no obligation to volunteer information about their action, or to give advance warning of participation, or to give any detailed information about the coverage or impact of their action. If members follow this advice, heads of department will in any case be limited in the amount of detail that they will be able to provide to the university centrally.