

Improvements for telephony staff on Universal Credit Full Service

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Universal Credit senior leaders have announced significant improvements for members working in telephony in Universal Credit Full Service. These improvements followed strong indications by members in Walsall of a determination to take industrial action if there were no improvements in the working conditions of Case Managers.

Telephony problems

PCS members in UC Full Service Service Centres have reported to the GEC that they were being asked to staff the telephones for far longer periods than they could manage. As a result important case management work was being neglected. This in turn meant that claimant journal entries were not being dealt with in good time leading to frustration with the service offered and claimants making even more calls.

Case managers were originally led to believe that they would be working the equivalent of one day per week on the phones. However the two half days that they were scheduled for turned out to be two 5½ hour periods. Additionally they were being called up on to telephone duties several times per week in addition to the two 5½ hour periods. This had a serious impact on the levels of stress experienced by members working in this area who felt they were not able to offer a reasonable level of service to claimants.

Car park meeting

24 members in Walsall Service Centre sent testimonies to the GEC relating the impact of spending far too much time on the phones. These statements were sent to UC management. The members made it clear to their PCS representatives that they were prepared to take strike action. Of the 92 originally canvassed 85 said they would take industrial action over the telephony issues. The site reps called a very well attended car park meeting. At that meeting there was a show of hands where 86 of the 88 members in attendance indicated that they were prepared to take strike action.

Improvements in telephony

Following the car park meeting in Walsall UC senior management have announced that case managers will no longer be required to be on two “half” day rotas and that they should spend no more than 7 hours 30 minutes per week on telephone duties, adjusted pro rata for those working part time. Telephony duty will now be organised in shorter slots of between 30 minutes and 2 hours on a Monday, and between 30 minutes and 1 hour 30 minutes from Tuesday to Friday. In addition it was announced that 130 FTE of staff ring-fenced for telephony would be released back to Case Manager duties.

Make FTAs permanent

The GEC has called for the remaining 20 FTA staff in Walsall to be made permanent, (along with all other FTAs in DWP Operations). There is clearly plenty of work for them to do and the permanent members of staff fear that if these staff leave as planned at the end of April their workloads will become unmanageable.

Action gets results

The GEC believes the clear message from members in Walsall that they were prepared to take strike action to in order to get changes in their working environment was a key factor in securing improvements for Case Managers working in UC Full Service.