

Durham Teaching Assistants Value Us Campaign

1970's	Nursery nurses and auxiliaries paid TTO and claim unemployment benefits in holidays. DCC change to annualised salary. Neville Hancock confirms this and adds unions took case to high court to restore TTO as holiday benefits supplemented meagre wage.
2005	Durham County Council Agreement on the grading structure for school classroom support staff SEN Allowance for staff 'whose work is wholly or mainly' working with children with Statements of SEN. Support staff regarded as full-time if employed 10 sessions for 32.5 hours during the school term. Available for 190 contact days plus 5 days p.a. 'The movement to a fully qualified workforce is supported by both the Authority and the trade unions.' Any staff with 4yrs + experience not possessing qualifications required for post had to become qualified within 3 years of implementation (by 1st April 2007). Unqualified staff with less than 4 yrs experience paid at Grade 1.
2012	DCC Local Collective Agreement Single Status Council used the Local Government Single Status Job Evaluation Scheme (Gauge) for all Green Book employees. Most TAs have little recollection of this process – it is felt that it was an exercise in keeping people on the same pay, rather than an a proper evaluation of the job. However, the SEN allowance was scrapped so many TAs lost almost £1200 a year. Term Time Only working was not addressed at this time – a Unison official agreed that it was 'deliberately pushed into the long grass' to deal with at a later date. We have also been told the same by a supportive Councillor who said it was felt that the loss to TAs would be too big to be acceptable. It would also have had an adverse effect on the equality impact survey at the time. Deputy Leader of DCC (Alan Napier) agreed at an informal meeting on 21/7/16 that the problems we are having now stem from the 2012 Agreement and that we were sold out by the unions. We voted on this agreement (it was very close) but think we were advised by union to accept it. We feel now that we were mis-sold these contracts as DCC must have known about the possible equality issue of TTO (other councils had dealt with it years before) and deliberately didn't address it. Alan Napier told me in July he only became aware of the issue '12-18 months ago' – if he didn't know, HR and others in the Council must have.
Jan 2013	New contracts based on 2012 Evaluation. These contracts have an hourly rate (first time any of us had seen this). Mine was £11.29 and FT Annual Salary £19,126.
Summer 2015	Rumours start to circulate about possible changes to TAs terms and conditions
Oct 2015	Unison bulletin advised of a Review of Classroom Based Support Staff to 'revisit contracts' with a view to calculating pay on TTO basis. Headteachers receive briefing to share with staff (although some don't).
2.11.15	Helen Pace (TA) sets up a facebook support page for TAs.
11.11.15	DCC send letter re 'Proposed Variation of Local Collective Agreement 2004'. Sets out loss of pay, extra hours offered (although subject to agreement by HT) and offers 'compensation' for early agreement. Compensation is one year's loss of salary, i.e. not compensation, simply delaying implementation of salary loss for a year. 1 st Consultation opens.
23.11.15 – 1.12.15	Unison hold local meetings for TAs. These are very rowdy and many leave feeling frustrated and uninformed. We are told to keep working as we have been as, if we start only working the hours we are paid for, it could be deemed 'frustration of contract' and we could be disciplined as it would be unofficial industrial action. We are told that 'it is highly unlikely, that a Labour Council would impose these changes without agreement. On the facebook support page there is a lot of heated discussion and complaints that information was inconsistent at different meetings.
7.12.15	1 st consultation closes.

9.12.15	DCC meeting. Owen Temple (Lib Dem Councillor) tables motion to withdraw the proposals. Labour Councillors line up speakers to run the clock down. (http://owentemple.mycouncillor.org.uk/2015/12/09/dirty-tricks-another-dark-day-in-labour-run-durham/)
17.12.15	Unison send out bulletin with strongly-worded response to proposed changes to classroom support staff.
22.2.16	Revised proposal from DCC. Only difference from original proposal is that salary loss will be phased in over 3 years (called 'compensation' in the proposal). Start date for implementation 1.9.16.
2.3.16	Durham TAs hold 1 st local support meeting at Sacriston, organised by TAs via fb support page.
24.3.16	2 nd Consultation closes. Unison hold indicative ballot.
8.4.16	Durham TAs hold a Solidarity demonstration outside County Hall. This is organised via the fb support page and hundreds of TAs turn up. http://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/14415607.Strike_action_warning_as_hundreds_of_Co_unty_Durham_teaching_assistants_protest_over_contract_changes/
11.4.16	Result of indicative ballot: 66% return, 95% reject proposal.
25.4.16	Unison bulletin: Unison's position is that we await a final decision from the Council on their next steps. Should Council decide to impose new contract ... Unison will ballot you for industrial action.'
16.5.16	DCC vote on proposal to dismiss TAs on 31 st December 2016 and re-engage on 1 st January 2017 on new contract. 33 Councillors sent apologies; 7 declared an interest and withdrew; 57 voted for proposal (all Labour); 18 voted against (Lib Dem & Independent); 4 abstained (Conservative).
23.5.16	DCC send out S188 letter to terminate & re-engage. Durham TAs hold a local support meeting at Willington.
3.6.16	Unison issue bulletin complaining about involvement of Trades Council and urging members not to make comments on social media or in the press.
9.6.16	Durham TAs hold a Solidarity Rally at the Miners' Hall, Durham. Organised via fb support page and hundreds attend. https://socialistworker.co.uk/art/42896/Weve+fire+in+our+bellies+say%C2%A0Durham+teachin+g+assistants
13.6.16- 20.7.16	DCC hold group & individual meetings in schools. Unison and other union members attend all meetings. At our school, the ATL rep (4 members in school) was not allowed to attend the group meeting but attended individual ones. ATL reps at other schools were allowed to attend group meetings.
16.6.16	Unison bulletin issued, announces that 'a ballot for industrial action has been approved by our General Secretary, to be held in September if no acceptable resolution is reached before then'.
18.6.16	Durham TAs start compiling a list of school contacts to ensure that information reaches all schools.
22.6.16	Durham TAs hold an open meeting to elect committee members. Meeting advertised on fb support page. Committee is named 'County Durham Teaching Assistants Activists' Committee'.
29.6.16	Neville Hancock sends an open letter to County Councillors saying 'Trade Unions believe this (retainer payment) will gain overwhelming support and acceptance from the majority of Teaching Assistants'. Retainer payments have been brought up at HR meetings and during consultation but TAs have never been consulted on this option. Unison have not replied to requests as to what this assumption was based on.
4.7.16	Durham TAs hold a local support meeting at Lanchester.
5.7.16	Meeting with Unison & CDTAA Committee members. Unison wanted explanation of what CDTAA Committee is and advised 'it has not legal standing or negotiating powers. Called us a 'splinter group', we explained we can't be a splinter group as we represent ALL 2700 Durham TAs, no matter what union they belong to or if they aren't union members. We are there to support other TAs, provide information and build public and political pressure. There can't be a 'conflict

	of interest' as we are all fighting for the same thing. (Notes from this meeting are available if required)
July 2016	TA requests for forms to become Unison Stewards are refused.
9.7.16	Durham TAs march at the Miners' Gala, the first group of TAs to do so. The idea came from the 17 year old daughter of a committee member and Davey Hopper agreed to it straight away. We were told we were the biggest collective to march at the Gala since the Miners' strike and we received huge support from the crowd and speakers (including Jeremy Corbyn, Davey Hopper, Dave Prentis and Tim Roache). We were applauded all the way from the balcony to the field, which is very unusual, and many spectators stood up to applaud as we walked past. http://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/get-sorted-jeremy-corbyn-supports-11592486
20.7.16	3 rd round of consultation closes.
20.7.16	Durham Unison have a meeting with Derby TAs. Durham TAs found this out via contacts in Derby AFTER the meeting.
21.7.16	Durham TAs hold a Solidarity demonstration outside County Hall on first day of the summer holidays. 500+ TAs turn up. 4 committee members try to deliver a letter to Simon Henig (Council Leader) but are denied entry. A supportive councillor takes a TA and the letter into County Hall and has an informal meeting with Alan Napier (Deputy Leader) and Councillor Jane Brown (Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services). Alan Napier advises he 'has a fiduciary responsibility to protect tax payers from the possibility of equal pay claims'. He voted for fire and rehire with reluctance and would 'take our hand off' if we could come up with a proposal that would remove or avoid the legal risk to the council. (Letter to Alan Napier in response to this meeting available if required) http://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/durham-teaching-assistants-demand-action-11645852
28.7.16	Lib Dem Councillor Owen Temple posts on his blog that DCC have called an extraordinary meeting of the Council for 14 th September, the only subject matter being Teaching Assistants.
2.8.16	Durham TAs organise a twitter storm and get #ValueUs into the top 10.
12.8.16	Durham TAs hold a picnic at Wharton Park to celebrate the anniversary of the 1 st Miners' Gala, which was held at the Park in 1871. https://mobile.twitter.com/MetroRadioNews/status/765158437294669824?s=04 http://www.durhamadvertiser.co.uk/news/14681679.Teaching_assistants_hold_solidarity_picnic_in_Durham_39_s_Wharton_Park/
17.8.16	TAs who have applied to be Stewards are invited to a meeting . They are advised by Neville Hancock (Branch Secretary, Durham) that their applications have not been ratified at branch meeting as there is a concern that their position on the CDTAA Committee is a conflict of interest. Only 2 of the 6 TAs are on the committee. Unison have based this on an (obsolete) committee code of conduct which was only available on the private fb support page. As before, we explained that there can be no conflict of interest as we are all (supposed to be) fighting for the same thing. We are told that our applications should be ratified at next branch meeting in September. (Notes from this meeting and letter in response to meeting are available if required)
18.8.16	A Durham TA organises a family fun day and raises £1700 for the campaign.
23.8.16	Article in Northern Echo denying that extraordinary council meeting on 14 th September means the Council will back down. Article says that ACAS 'held talks with the parties on Jul 27'. Despite several phone calls and emails to Unison, we have not been able to confirm this. http://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/14699796.Durham_County_Council_39_standing_firm_39_in_teaching_assistants_dispute_as_Acas_offers_help/
Early Sept	DCC publish their formal response to the 3 rd consultation process.
14.9.16	Extraordinary Council meeting about TAs. Council vote to put forward a 'new proposal'. The pay cuts stay the same, the only difference is that the 'compensation' (pay protection) will be 2 years

	<p>instead of 1. If the offer is accepted, it will be implemented by agreement in April 2017 so TAs will not be sacked to impose changes.</p> <p>Durham TAs hold 'silent protest' outside County Hall: messages and details of pay loss were attached to the railings outside County Hall and 1 protester stood on the steps with the TA banner as Councillors arrived for the meeting.</p>
15.9.16	Unions begin indicative ballot on new proposal.
19 & 20.9.16	CDTAA Committee hold 5 local cluster group meetings across the County to discuss the Council's latest proposal and gather messages for the silent protest.
21.9.16	Durham TAs hold Solidarity Rally at Miners' Hall, Durham. Speakers: Alan Gilmour (Durham Miners' Association), John Gilmour (NUT), John Burgess (Barnet Unison), Graham Easterlow (ATL), Megan Charlton & Lisa Turnbull (CDTAA Committee), Kathryne Wray & Dave Ayre (Durham Trades Council). Unison were invited to attend/speak but did not reply.
25.9.16	A coachload of Durham TAs travel to the Labour Party Conference in Liverpool. They meet John McDonnell, Angela Rayner and other MPs and union activists. They receive huge amount of support everywhere they go and are welcomed as THE Durham TAs.
September	GMB and Unison reps visit schools. Advice is often conflicting, with some reps telling TAs to reject as industrial action is the only way to improve the offer and others saying it is a 'done deal' and you might as well take the 2 years' pay protection (compensation).
28.9.16	<p>Unions announce results of indicative ballot:</p> <p>Unison: 1686 ballots sent 72% returns / 78% reject / 21.6% accept / 4 spoilt papers</p> <p>GMB: approx. 200 ballots sent (can't get accurate info) 74.2% returns/ 53.5% accept / 46.5% reject</p> <p>ATL: 160 ballots sent 84% returns / 86% reject</p> <p>Unite: 1 member, they accepted the proposal.</p> <p>GMB agree new deal with Council for their members, no strike ballot.</p> <p>Unison & ATL move to ballot for industrial action.</p>
2.10.16	8 Durham TAs attend the anti-austerity march in Birmingham. They are asked to lead the march and receive huge amounts of support from the public and trade unionists from around the country. Megan speaks at Unite the Resistance rally after the march.
4.10.16	DCC send letter to Head Teachers advising them of the outcome of the ballot. The letter is hugely misleading as it implies there is a split between TAs of different unions. It does not mention numbers: i.e. 1846 TAs are in the 2 unions which voted to reject the offer; approx. 201 TAs are in the unions which voted to accept. The letter advises that Unison members will be treated in a different way to GMB and Unite members. It does not mention ATL.
7.10.16	Group of TAs meet Roberta Blackman-Woods, MP for central Durham. She has meeting arranged with Simon Henig at end of October (this is subsequently cancelled by Henig).
12.10.16	<p>Unison rally at Redhills. Dave Prentis, Liz Snape, Clare Williams speak (& Megan). No Q&A session.</p> <p>Unison hold pre-meeting with CDTAA Committee (Unison) members. DP states that basic strike pay will be topped up so that nobody is put off taking strike action for financial reasons and that TAs will 'not be starved back to work'.</p>
15.10.16	TAs hold peaceful protest on Framwellgate Bridge, Durham. Give out leaflets and explain our situation to public – lots of support.
19.10.16	Unison strike ballot results (1755 ballots sent out). 64% turnout, 93% vote for strike action.
21.10.16	ATL strike ballot results (122 ballots sent out). 61% turnout, 84% vote for strike action.
22.10.16	Lisa & Megan speak at Salford Unison Development Day. Salford donate £500 to our campaign.

24.10.16 - 27.10.16	'Silent Vigil' outside County Hall. Single or small groups of TAs protest outside County Hall in 1 hour slots from 8-4, Monday-Thursday. Within less than an hour of the post going on fb, all of the slots were filled.
25.10.16	Megan speaks at NHS Footprints March rally at Redhills.
26.10.16	Megan speaks at UCU meeting at Newcastle University. They do a collection and raise £73 for our cause.
26.10.16	Unison TA stewards meet with Neville Hancock & Helen Metcalf to plan strike action.
28.10.16	Demo outside County Hall 8-12. DCC receive letter advising strike action will be Tues 8 & Wed 9 November.
7.11.16	1 st day of strike action. 80 picket lines across County Durham. Strike data sent in by school contacts for committee to collate.
8.11.16	2 nd day of strike action. Demo outside County Hall followed by walk down to Redhills for rally. Over 1000 people there. Redhills packed to the rafters with chanting, singing, cheering TAs. Speakers include President of ATL, Clare Williams, Dave Prentis. Our Lisa Turnbull raised the roof with a heartfelt speech about the support we have received and the impact on ourselves and our own families. Dave Prentis promised to back us financially to ensure we win this important fight as it is of national, as well as regional, importance.

A few comments on the situation at the moment:

DCC claim in the media that the majority of TAs will 'only' lose 10%. I pointed out at the meeting with Alan Napier & Jane Brown on 21/7 that this was only if TAs were offered the extra hours and were able to work them. Pay should be compared on a like for like basis, i.e. on same hours as our current contracts and, therefore, pay cut is 20-25% (depends on number of years' service). Jane Brown has also been quoted in the press as saying TAs will 'not see a reduction in weekly wage'. I told her that, although this is technically correct (if you compare a week in term time on the old and new contract), it is deliberately misleading as our salary is divided into 12 equal parts so we will receive less money each month and, therefore, each week.

Some Headteachers have not offered the extra hours; some have said they can guarantee them this year but not in the future (so staff could lost more money next year); in one school TAs were required to put a business plan to governors to show the benefits to the school of increasing their hours; one HT told staff 'remember I decide whether or not you get the extra hours'. Where extra hours have been offered, some TAs are not able to do them because of family commitments or, if they do them, will incur extra childcare costs. In some schools where TAs are paid extra to cover Breakfast and After School clubs, HTs have said this will be part of their extra hours so staff will lose additional pay.

DCC & Unions have been suggesting that TAs request an individual regrading if they feel their duties go beyond their current grade. This is divisive and will increase, not decrease, pay inequality as some Headteachers will regrade and some won't. Unless you are near the bottom of your pay scale, the increase will not offset the losses of the new contracts. We have been pushing for a full regrading for all TAs, based on the fact it was not done properly in 2012 and that we are on lower scp's than TAs in many other areas.

In the beginning, Unison appeared to consider CDTAA Committee a threat, despite our constant assurances that we are trying to work with them to achieve the best deal for all TAs. After constant pressure by us and through social media, Unison are now fully behind us. They have put out a strongly-worded statement with the strike ballot and Dave Prentis is coming to address a rally in Durham on 13th October.

We have built up a mailing group of school contacts for the majority of schools in County Durham by putting out posts on Facebook and asking people to contact anyone they know in schools that don't have a contact. A team has now trawled through the websites of the remaining schools to find addresses and names of TAs and we have written letters to arrive at the start of the new term telling them about the campaign and asking them to be a contact.

CDTAA Committee and rank and file Durham TAs have organised local support meetings, 2 solidarity demonstrations, a solidarity Rally (with another to come in September), marching in the Gala, a picnic, a fun day, Durham TA car stickers & merchandise, a mailing list of school contacts (sent out 4 bulletins plus other information so far), coverage in local press, radio and TV. We have met Jeremy Corbyn, Angela Rayner, local MPs & councillors to further our cause. We have also met a journalist from a national paper and hopefully that article will be published next week.

Many TAs already lost almost £1200 a year when SEN allowances were scrapped and pay increases have been minimal for many years. If the current proposals go ahead, many TAs will be forced out of the profession. DCC will lose experienced, dedicated, professional staff and who will they replace them with? What effect will this have on the schools and children of County Durham? When a 21 year old asked HR at the consultation meeting 'Recruitment and retention are important issues in HR; what are DCC doing to keep me in this profession and recruit others like me?' The response was 'nothing'. She had recently taken out her first mortgage, based on the salary promised in her contract: she is now not sure if she can keep the house. At the other end of working life, a 60 year old who has worked 3 jobs for most of her life, is terrified she will lose her council house. She currently has £400 a month to live on after bills and she will lose £200 a month. A 40 year old single mother relies on a £100 a month hand-out from her parents' pension and that's before the cuts. She is responsible for safeguarding in her school: she has to ensure other people's children are safe but cannot support her own. Another TA will lose £295 a month AFTER tax and doesn't think she will be able to stay in the job she has done for 30 years. These are not one-off examples, they are representative of all TAs. We have been trying really hard to get our story out there as, when you do, people are shocked. They don't understand what our job involves (NOT washing paint pots) and they don't understand how a (Labour) Council can treat their staff in this way. Whatever DCC say about 'fairness and equality', what they are doing to us is morally indefensible.

Some TAs have received warnings for being involved in the campaign and one has had a visit from the police for a totally innocuous tweet.