



Supporting Casual Employees

Not all the provisions of the collective agreement will apply to casual, temporary or wage employees, but they are full members of AUPE and deserve your full support.

By Merryn Edwards
Communications Staff

In the past, employees working on a casual basis used to be called “relief” workers, and collective agreements contained stringent language governing when they could be called to fill in for regular employees.

Today, employees may remain as casuals for long periods of time, and casual employment has become increasingly common. For example, 9,116 AUPE members employed by Alberta Health Services were listed as casual as of April, a figure that represents almost a quarter of AUPE’s total membership at AHS.

For some workers, the ability to accept or decline shifts as they see fit is appealing. Others may see accepting a casual position as their only option, although they would prefer the broader rights and entitlements

that come with regular or full-time employment. Regardless, Union Stewards should be ready to support members working on a casual basis and be able to advise them wisely.

Who are casual employees?

Casual employees are defined primarily by the fact their employer is not required to provide them with ongoing employment, even in cases when they may have worked full-time hours for an extended period of time.

Casual employees are also distinct from part-time or temporary employees. Part-time employees are often considered regular employees, entitled to all the provisions of the collective agreement with the exception that many benefits such as paid sick days, vacation, health benefits and insurance are usually pro-rated according to their rate of full-time equivalency. Temporary employees may also be able to access most or all provisions, with the exception of those articles dealing with termination of employment, since it is understood their employment relationship will expire at the end of a temporary period.

As with any other issue, the starting point for Union Stewards to understand the rights of casual employees should be to check the relevant collective agreement. Most collective agreements will have specific provisions outlining the unique terms and conditions of employment for casual employees or specifying which provisions of the contract do not apply to casuals. The Government of Alberta (GOA) agreement does not use the term casual, but rather refers to “wage employees,” and the master agreement outlines which provisions they are excluded from in Article 4.

In some cases, casuals are compensated for their exclusion from certain entitlements through provisions such as increased vacation pay instead of paid vacation days. They may also be entitled to access other provisions once they reach a certain threshold of hours worked. For example, GOA wage employees who work 1,450 hours within a twelve-month period are entitled to six paid sick leave days in the subsequent year, and, after 2,850 hours worked within a two-year period, their employer is required to provide notification (or pay in lieu of notice) if their employment is terminated.



Become a Union Steward

Learn new skills, support your co-workers and help strengthen your union by becoming a Union Steward. Start by enrolling in the prerequisite courses, including *Introduction to your Union*, *Contract Interpretation*, *Introduction to Occupational Health and Safety* and *Basic Conflict Management*. If you like what you have learned in those courses, you are ready to sign up for *Foundations for Union Stewards*.

The next session of prerequisite courses and *Foundations for Union Stewards* will be offered at various AUPE offices from September to December. Registration for this session begins in August.

For more information or to enrol, call the Member Resource Centre at 1-800-232-7284.



How can Union Stewards support casual employees?

Like all other union members, casual employees have a right to union representation. They can request your assistance if they are required to meet with their employer for disciplinary or other meetings that could impact their employment, if they believe their rights under the collective agreement or other legal statutes are being violated, or if they just want to learn more about AUPE.

However, the tools Union Stewards have to support casuals may be more limited, especially in situations where the grievance procedure excludes arbitration in the case of casual employees. Challenging termination in particular is unlikely to succeed, but Union Stewards can most certainly play an important role in supporting casual members with other serious concerns such as harassment and discrimination, occupational health and safety issues or workers' compensation matters.

For those casual employees who would

prefer to move into regular employment, Union Stewards can also offer helpful advice and interventions. For example, by encouraging casual members to apply for internal job postings or helping to inquire about what the employer's intentions are for a position, especially in cases where a casual or waged employee is filling a leave, Union Stewards can help casual employees move into more stable employment. Casual employees will usually carry over their seniority when they move into a new position.

Union Stewards can also help members working on a casual basis access the full range of benefits and services available to AUPE members. AUPE makes no distinction between members based on their employment status when it comes to accessing benefits such as member discounts or educational and leadership opportunities. Encouraging more members with casual employment status to get involved in the union will help AUPE better represent the particular concerns of this unique group of workers. ■



HAVE QUESTIONS?

CONTACT YOUR MEMBER SERVICES OFFICER

CALL 1-800-232-7284

Have your local/chapter number and worksite location ready so your call can be directed quickly.



DID YOU KNOW?

A GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE NEW ONLINE REGISTRATION PROCEDURE

AUPE strives to empower its members through knowledge, offering a full slate of courses to help achieve this goal. Coming this fall a new online registration course will be rolled out to make signing up for education courses easier than ever. Here's a quick look at some of the functions that will make registering a breeze.

THE NEW ONLINE REGISTRATION WILL...

- Enable you to register yourself in AUPE courses through the AUPE website
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- Walk you through registering for courses and ensuring appropriate prerequisites
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- Countdown the number of spaces left in a course
-
- Keep track of your course registrations
-
- Allow for automatic waitlists
-
- Notify you of new courses in your area
-
- Contain your education history
-
- Store copies of all AUPE Education certificates

ONLINE REGISTRATION AT A GLANCE

- Sign in to the online registration system available at www.aupe.org using your member number
-
- Select course and date (the system will ensure you meet the necessary prerequisites)
-
- Receive acceptance email a few weeks prior to the course
-
- Confirm your attendance and attend course

Steward Notes is published by the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees to provide information of technical interest to AUPE Union Stewards, worksite contacts and other members. Topics deal with training for union activists, worksite issues, disputes and arbitrations, health and safety, trends in labour law, bargaining and related material. For more information, contact the editor.

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The goal of Steward Notes is to help today's AUPE Union Stewards do their jobs effectively. To help us, we encourage readers to submit story ideas that deserve exposure among all AUPE stewards.

Story suggestions for Steward Notes may be submitted for consideration to Communications Staff Merryn Edwards by e-mail at m.edwards@aupe.org. Please include names and contact information for yourself and potential story sources.

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