



Personal testimony - Newcastle Theatre Royal way of working

Eleven years ago, due to operational and organisational changes, Our workforce asked us to look into moving away from what was then the UKT / TMA BECTU agreement, and work towards drafting a house agreement that would in turn remove the payment of TMA get out premiums, premium payments on Sundays and Overtime. Initially this caused quite a shock to the whole organisation and resistance from both casual and full-time staff.

What followed was a month of quite intense negotiations but with a bit of hard work and determination we secured a deal that raised the basic pay of all staff and dramatically lowered the reliance on premium payments for unsocial hours.

These days Full Time staff work a 39-hour week annualised across the year, allowing greater flexibility, and a maximum for 26 Sundays per year, allowing better work life balance. Casual technicians and FOH staff benefit from an increase in hourly rate, double time for get outs, increase in wages during long running shows, Panto etc and now they make considered choices about working every get out available.

As explained earlier, our staff were very reluctant to take a "leap of faith" at first, but after the initial year they saw a huge change in work-life balance and the wages stayed roughly the same, if not in some areas improved.

Many of our casual technicians who have worked the shows all week now choose not to do the get outs, which in turn allows for more staff to be employed. If you were to ask any one of them now no one would revert to the old way of working patterns.

Like it or not the theatre model as it used to be is changing and indeed is in need of change, no one says these choices are easy, but I am here to say with a bit of forward thinking and hard work it can be done. If change is inevitable then I see my job as a Bectu rep to influence that change rather than sit back and let it happen.

Best

Stu Middleton Bectu Rep - Newcastle Theatre Royal