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£3,000 an hour for Amis

Exclusive: Yakub Qureshi
25/ 1/2008

AUTHOR Martin Amis is being paid an incredible £3,000 an hour - the same hourly rate as a Premiership footballer - to work at Manchester University.

Amis - who was signed up last year to teach creative writing - is receiving an £80,000 salary but is only committed to working there about 28 hours a year.

The M.E.N. discovered the figures using Freedom of Information legislation.

The university has recently been forced to shed up to 750 jobs - including lecturers' posts - to get itself out of £30m of debt.

About £10m of that debt was taken on to pay for the appointment of Amis and other top academics as the university pushes to be recognised as one of the world's top institutions by 2015. Today union leaders criticised the size of the salaries. Most visiting lecturers are paid between £20 - £50 an hour.

Amis, 58, was appointed professor of creative writing last February in what was touted as a coup for the city.

He is one of a number of high-profile figures to have been appointed. Others have included Nobel prize winners, economist Joseph Stiglitz and geneticist John Sulston.

As part of his duties, the writer runs a 90-minute seminar for students on the post-graduate writing course. But these tutorials run for only 12 weeks in the year - meaning his total teaching time is just 18 hours.

And, unlike other lessons in the course, his subject is not assessed, meaning he is not required to carry out any marking of students' work.

His contract stipulates he must make four public appearances and teach one session at the summer writing school - each of the five appearances lasting around two hours.

Commitment

The total annual commitment of seminars and appearances is 28 hours, although these hours do not include preparation or research time.

Other staff at the university expressed surprise at the massive hourly wage.

Dave Jones, senior Unite union organiser who represents 600 technical staff at the university, said: "We understand why people like Martin Amis are being sought by the university and recruitment is a competitive business.

"But I think those staff who are left after the various redundancies and early retirements need to know that there will also be investment into their careers as well, along with the new structure of the university."

Amis, whose father was the novelist Kingsley Amis, is widely regarded as one of the best writers of his generation and his books include *Time's Arrow* and *Money*.

The author, who lives in London and commutes to Manchester, declined to comment.

Since his appointment the number of students applying for the £3,000-a-year course this year soared by 50 per cent, from 100 to 150.

But the university denied that the arrangement was unusual for its professors who carried out research and other commitments at the university and said that his appearances did not take into account time spent researching for lectures.

A spokesman said: "The university is a research-intensive university, so writing and research must be factored into the salary of any academic. The amount of contact time with students and the general public represents only a proportion of any academic's salary.

"In addition, the salary paid to all new staff members in the Centre For New Writing will be funded by increased applications to the centre and the additional income those applications will create.

"Their presence in the centre confers direct benefits to students."

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I am not sure why MEN printed this story and still more puzzled that the nationals have run with it too. Surely anyone can see the £3000/h claim is total rubbish. I am a low ranking professor at the University of Manchester but according to the MEN's method I get paid about £500 an hour based on my teaching contact hours. But I have about 16 hours per week contracted to work on research grants and supervise half a dozen PhD students. On top of that marking, setting exams, designing courses and writing notes, administration, refereeing for journals, applying for grants, outreach to schools and of course research not paid for by grants. At any top university teaching contact is a tiny fraction of what an academic does.

To take the football analogy, it would be like costing the time on the basis of their time spent in possession of the ball, and ignoring everything else including training.

So while Amis is not a typical academic it is just as ridiculous to cost his full time salary on the basis of his teaching load.

But surely I am just stating the obvious. Are MEN and the other papers just making fun of people gullible enough to believe the tosh they are printing?

Smokey Burrito
28/01/2008 at 23:07

The comparison with footballers wages is not quite valid since the Premiership clubs are not offloading staff to balance the books. The examination invigilators, (to name but one trampled upon group) have not had a cost-of-living pay-rise for 5 years.

Mr Squimps, Fallowfield, Manchester
27/01/2008 at 18:46

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