

College pays out for stressing out lecturer

A college lecturer has been awarded £159,000 in damages in a stress compensation case against Bradford College.

The judge at Bradford County Court found that art and design lecturer Kate Rawnsley suffered depression and anxiety resulting from the negligence of her employer. Kate, a member of the union UCU, was awarded damages by the court after Bradford College was found to have failed in its duty to protect her, with work-related stress eventually causing her to leave her job. In the summer term of 2011, Kate was told her course would be relocated in September to a different room she considered unsuitable for art students.

In July 2011, Kate wrote to the Dean of the college to notify him that the relocation proposals were affecting her health. The judge said Kate's emails represented actual notification to the college that she was suffering, or likely to suffer, from stress-related ill-health. The Dean however took no action, with UCU saying he failed to meet with Kate, did not inform her line managers of her concerns about the relocation, and did not refer her to occupational health services who would have undertaken a risk assessment. She was subsequently moved to the new room.

In failing to take any action, the judge said that the Dean had not followed the college's own policy with regards to stress or acted as a prudent employer. UCU regional official, Julie Kelley, said: "This case shows how important it is for colleges to follow procedures that are in place for dealing with workplace stress." She added: "Our member could so easily have been supported when she first raised her concerns in emails to the college but, as the judge found, those concerns were swept under the carpet and the net effect was very severe for her health. She came to the union desperately in need of support and UCU has guided her through a lengthy legal process which has resulted in a substantial award for her.

We hope this case acts a warning to other colleges not to dismiss staff when they raise concerns about stress at work."