

## MUNFA Fall 2019 Survey Report

Last year, in anticipation of a round of collective bargaining in 2020, MUNFA sent a questionnaire to all Academic Staff Members (ASMs). The principal aim was to support the work of MUNFA committees – particularly the Executive Committee and the newly formed [Priorities and Proposals Committee](#) – in developing a set of core bargaining priorities by asking members about their workplaces and working conditions, with a view to identifying critical challenges and areas for improvement. As [announced](#) last month, however, MUNFA and the university have agreed that, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, neither party will initiate collective bargaining during the current year, and the earliest bargaining could begin is May, 2021. As a result, we have not had an opportunity to report on the results of the member survey in the manner we anticipated, that is to say, as part of collective bargaining preparations.

In this brief report, therefore, we describe key results from the survey. While the global pandemic has obviously altered the context in countless important ways, we continue to see the survey results as an important source of insight regarding members’ basic priorities. As we advised members when we circulated the questionnaire, we also aim to follow-up the 2019 survey in the future in order to track how members’ attitudes change over time.

As we describe in more detail below, the results of the survey indicate a high level of commitment among members to the values of the public university. Notable member priorities include protection of tenure and academic freedom, and improving the working conditions of contract academic staff. Huge majorities of members want MUNFA to publicly advocate for increased university funding and autonomous university governance, and equal numbers are prepared to engage in job action, including a strike, when necessary. The results also indicate a high level of satisfaction with MUNFA’s service to its members.

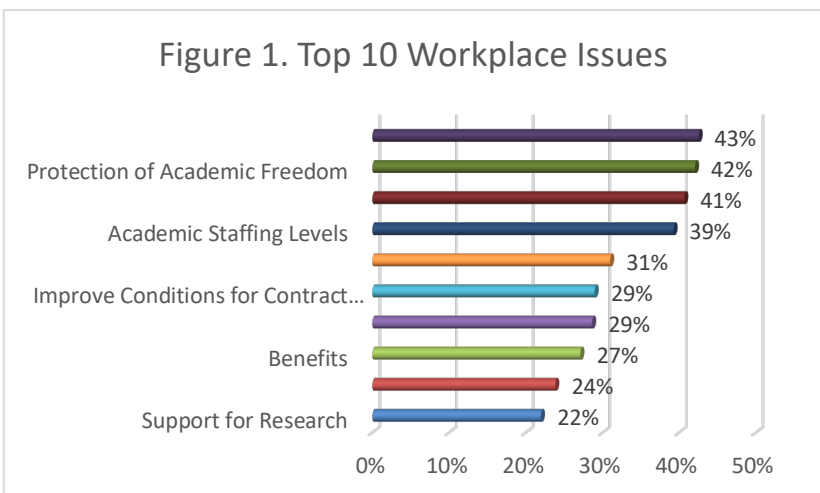
### Who responded to the survey?

Although a voluntary survey, we were very pleased that 238 people responded, accounting for roughly a third of our membership. On the whole, respondents reflected our demography very well along such lines as age, years of service, and rank. In particular, we note that the respondent rate by home faculty/school was highly reflective of the membership profile as a whole.

Unfortunately, term-appointed Academic Staff – i.e., those working on time-limited contracts – were badly underrepresented. While they make up nearly 14% of the MUNFA membership, less than 5% of our respondents were Term appointees. Of course, in part, this pattern simply reflects the nature of their appointments and the more transient relationship with the union it implies.

### What kind of workplace do MUNFA members want?

A key question in the survey asked members to identify up to 5 of “the most important issues for MUNFA to focus on improving”. Figure 1, which reports the top 10 issues mentioned, indicates MUNFA members share a desire to be supported as scholars, with 43% putting the “overall teaching and research environment” among their top-five issues.



The next three priorities, in terms of frequency of mentions, attracted nearly equal attention from members and are closely related to the top priority: protection of academic freedom (42%), protection of tenure (41%) and academic staffing levels (39%).

A substantial percentage of MUNFA members also said that they want better conditions for contract Academic Staff Members: nearly 30% listed this issue among their top five, and nearly a fifth put it in the top three. This response stands out given the underrepresentation of contract ASMs in the sample, noted above. Other concerns that featured among the top 10 issues mentioned include workload, wages, benefits, equity and diversity, and support for research.

Taken together, these responses are consistent with a strong, collective commitment and deep belief in the importance of the public university: MUNFA members care about their work and want to do it well. Members want to fulfill our special obligation to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador through our work as scholar-educators as well as possible. But we can only do so if our leaders understand the importance of maintaining and building a strong, comprehensive, provincial university. It is vital that our senior administration and our provincial government understand that the strength of these priorities for MUNFA members.

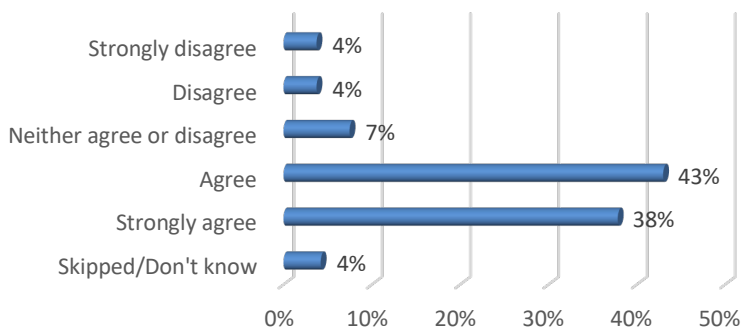
### What's MUNFA's role?

Another important focus of the survey was to understand what members think about their union. What should MUNFA be doing? How well is MUNFA doing the things it does?

Asked “[i]n general, how satisfied” they were with MUNFA’s work, two thirds of respondents said they were somewhat or very satisfied. Reflections on the quality of MUNFA’s service to members were similarly positive. Asked to evaluate the union’s service to members in terms of a series of adjectives, from 62 to 82% of respondents agreed MUNFA was accessible, responsive, informative, effective, professional and compassionate.

We also asked questions about our “public advocacy” work. Unsurprisingly, given the workplace priorities identified above, the issue that MUNFA members most want their union to advocate for is increased funding for public post-secondary education: 82% agree that this should be a top focus for the union. Members also think MUNFA should actively oppose government’s interference in MUN’s operations: 80% agreed that “reduc[ing] government interference with university autonomy” was an advocacy priority.

Figure 2. "There are times when job action, such as a strike, is necessary."



Public advocacy aside, one of the main things MUNFA and all unions do is negotiate and defend the terms of employment for their members. In this regard, a key resource is the threat of job action, a fact that MUNFA members clearly recognize. More than four-fifths (81%) of respondents agreed that there are times when “job action, such as a strike, is necessary”. This result is especially striking given how well the sample represents the union’s membership demographically and in terms of faculty/school.

Overall, the results for questions concerning views of the union itself suggest MUNFA is in a strong position to advocate for its members. Members are highly satisfied with the union’s activities, both in general and with respect to specific criteria, like accessibility. Members want their union to advocate for a well-funded and autonomous

university. Perhaps most importantly, MUNFA members understand that the union's ability to achieve gains depends on the power of collective action.

### **What's next?**

While the pandemic has shifted MUNFA's focus over the past months, in this and our other work we have been guided by the member priorities identified in the survey. In our [efforts](#) to address members' concerns arising from the university's response to the pandemic, we have highlighted, among other things, members' concerns about the institutional support they need to teach and conduct research under these changed conditions and fair treatment for contractual faculty. Relatedly we recently went to arbitration over work done by term appointees during times when they are not formally employed by MUN. In consequence, Memorial must now provide access to library, email/internet and other services needed for course preparation as soon as an offer of employment is accepted and must also pay term appointees who are asked to create and/or grade a deferred exam after their contract ends.

We also recently submitted our response to the province's [Public Post Secondary Education Review](#), in which we emphasized members' commitment to a comprehensive, autonomous and well-funded public university, capable of fulfilling its vital role in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Looking ahead, MUNFA's work will continue to be informed by the survey results, and indeed, we expect future surveys will build on the current findings. Please keep an eye out for a survey invitation sometime in the coming 6-12 months! As we continue to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic, and anticipate the possibility of collective bargaining next year, it is critical that members stay connected with MUNFA – through surveys and other means.