

A Win for Low-Wage Workers on Campus, but It's Not Nearly Enough
Contract Worker Justice @SFU (CWJ)
Burnaby
Thursday, July 21st

For Immediate Release.

This week low-wage workers at Simon Fraser University, most of whom are women, racialized, and immigrants to Canada, have won a significant victory. SFU has committed to address the inadequate wages of the lowest-paid workers on campus by pursuing certification as a living wage employer. SFU has announced it will take a degree of responsibility for this workforce's wages and work conditions, and the university has also committed to "exploring the creation of a program that supports educational opportunities for contract workers and provides access to additional campus benefits."

Today's announcement is a first step, but does not nearly go far enough toward ensuring the fundamental dignity and rights of this workforce. While workers' wages may—or may not—be addressed within the next three years, SFU has stopped short of bringing food and cleaning services back in-house, so contract workers in these areas will continue to be excluded from the SFU community. The announcement is vague regarding the timeline for certification—at a time when with every single day that passes inflation erodes food and cleaning service workers' already low pay. There is no mention from SFU of how managerial bullying, inadequate sick days, and lack of vacation, pensions and benefits will be addressed. These problems are a direct result of contracting out, and in-sourcing this work will always be the most effective way to ensure that food service and cleaning staff enjoy the same rights and working conditions as the rest of the workers in our campus community.

The university has made its decision on the basis of a Deloitte report which, despite repeated requests, has not been shared publicly aside from an "excerpt" which was circulated with Tuesday's announcement. The report was produced without interviewing a single contract worker on campus, and the representative unions were only contacted after CWJ suggested Deloitte should be in touch with the workers whose lives and families are directly affected by this decision. The report also contains offensive and flawed allegations, such as that there will be an increased risk of "absenteeism" if food and cleaning services work is brought in-house and this group of workers receives more days of paid sick leave as part of their in-house employment. While the university has repeatedly stated that the report doesn't make recommendations, the authors have gone to great pains to identify the "risks" associated with insourcing. Given that [Deloitte makes much of its own income from contracting out](#), the report's lack of enthusiasm regarding insourcing was entirely predictable—and must have been obvious to the university when the report was commissioned.

SFU can and must do better by its low-wage, equity-deserving workforce. It is extremely disappointing that the university is taking only one very small step to address systemic racism, and systemic exclusion and their impact on the poorest workers on campus. Given an

opportunity to demonstrate leadership and vision, the administration saw it as acceptable to tackle one small part of the problem. CWJ has said from the beginning that the real fix for these workers' precarious employment, low wages, and inadequate benefits, vacation, and sick days is to take this work back in-house.

In March of 2021, we launched the Contract Worker Justice @SFU (CWJ) campaign by delivering a public [letter](#) to SFU Administration. The letter, signed by over 80 members of faculty, demanded that the university address the situation of contract food and cleaning services workers on campus by taking this work in-house. In partnership with this group of workers, who have bravely shared stories about their working and home lives, we have since documented the shameful inadequacy of their pay and benefits, especially compared to the same categories of in-house workers at UBC and UVic. We released the [preliminary findings](#) in January of 2022 and presented the results of the report, as well as our campaign's demands, to the Board of Governors later that month.

Contract Worker Justice @SFU will continue to advocate for and alongside low-wage and precarious contract workers on campus. We have built a powerful coalition of contract workers, teaching/research assistants, students, staff, and faculty. We have organized across the divides that separate workers on campus. We have created bonds that will not easily be broken.

If you would like to be involved: [<https://contractworkerjusticesfu.ca/getinvolved/>]