

# Long hours

## Eyes half shut

**Amie Tridgell** (below) from the locations branch introduces the union's campaign against long working hours

**B**ECTU's Eyes Half Shut campaign against abusive working hours launched at a major union event during Union week on 18 October (see page 18) The union's research report, titled *Eyes Half Shut*, produced by BECTU assistance national secretary Paul Evans and Prospect head of research Jonathan Green, was circulated and BECTU urged everyone to sign a petition. The petition will then be sent along with the report to the employers including the APA, BBC, C4, ITV, major studios, PACT and Sky.

The report was introduced alongside information about the PACT feature films agreement in the understanding that the two go hand in hand – the agreement being a step in the right direction.

The campaign came as a response to feedback from BECTU members about the negative effects of long hours. The five of us on the panel talked through reasons we had got involved and some of the issues that arisen from the survey results.

One member of the post-production dept spoke about how he had enforced on himself a lunch break and



**Lights.  
Camera.  
Caffeine...**

**#eyeshalfshut**  
stamp out long hours for film & TV crew  
Sign the petition at [bit.ly/eyes-petition](http://bit.ly/eyes-petition)

**More campaign info at [bit.ly/eyeshalfshut](http://bit.ly/eyeshalfshut)**

leaving on time, and he found he got the same amount of work done as a colleague working overtime each night. I was keen to stress that for me this campaign is not about avoiding hard work, it is about being more efficient. I don't think we should be wearing our long hours as a badge of honour. Of course, there will be days when a long day is unavoidable, but

we can, by best practice, try and make that occasional rather than the norm.

There are steps we can all take especially to dispel the 'playing chicken' atmosphere that can exist in some offices where no one wants to be the first to leave! HoDs can lead by example here: if it isn't necessary to have all the department there, then send some people home.

The report doesn't tell us anything we don't know – long hours are not productive, they have a negative effect on your physical and mental health, and on your life in general. So we need to address the almost macho culture surrounding hours – the onus can be on us to change our behaviour as much as production to change our contracts.

But a final thought: a US line producer Robert Schneider conducted an experiment. He budgeted a US\$40-million below the line studio feature twice, once for 12-hour days and once for eight-hour days. His eight-hour day budget showed a saving. He says: "I wanted to dispel the notion that working shorter, more humane hours meant increased costs. I've suspected for a long time that on many films it is cheaper and more efficient to shoot basically straight-time days than to shoot extended hours that are inefficient and paid for at premium rates."

If people have particular stories about feeling unsafe at work from over-tiredness I would be interested to hear them. ●

They say show biz is like no business, well it's true. In no other business would you be expected to work 18-hour days, travel half-way across the country for a 7am call to finish at midnight and then do it all again the next day.

I've been an organising official for about a year with BECTU, and I've had two people call me to say they had accidents driving to or from work, because they're so tired of working 12+ hour days for weeks on end. I've heard of people being given notice after

raising valid health and safety concerns, and established professionals say productions are heaping so much work onto them and cutting back on resources forcing them to work from morning until bed time, and they can't keep up it.

"Who needs sleep?" some of the younger members. The human body does. In an article in *The Guardian*, sleep scientist Matthew Walker's sleep studies show that sleeping for only six hours a night for extended periods increases your likelihood

of cancer, Alzheimer's disease and my favourite fear factoid – "after just one night of only four or five hours' sleep, your natural killer cells – the ones that attack the cancer cells that appear in your body every day – drop 70%."

London Production Division Annual Forum, post-production and art dept branches have all raised this issue. Which is why members have launched the Eyes Half Shut campaign, to increase awareness of these issues and affect change.

We have launched a petition,

calling on the big producers and studios to come together with BECTU and other unions to form a commission to discuss how we improve the long hours culture. You can help by signing and sharing [www.bit.ly/eyeshalfshut](http://www.bit.ly/eyeshalfshut). You can also wear the #eyeshalfshut badge, share posters and petition cards in your workplace or with colleagues. To order a campaign pack with the *Eyes Half Shut* report email [ecollin@bectu.org.uk](mailto:ecollin@bectu.org.uk). ●

**Emily Collin**