

The Open University branch of UCU
www.ucu.open.ac.uk

The Spark — February 2015



Collective voice — collective challenge

The recent announcement of further cuts has, understandably, increased the level of uncertainty and anxiety amongst our members. The impact of the proposed cost reductions is unknown but you can be assured that we will be demanding greater transparency and accountability from senior management.

Whilst we appreciate that the new fee regime in England has caused considerable difficulties for universities, particularly leaders in part-time study such as the Open University, we want to know how the institution has such a large unexpected deficit when it was always aware of falling student numbers. We need to be told what the impact will be on the institution's resources. Last year senior management took the decision to close the East Grinstead Regional Centre with an unconvincing business case produced after the decision had been taken. We are not prepared to see more poorly planned cuts disguised as reactions to this news.

Local UCU members feel that the current leadership has failed to listen to staff and that decision-making at the institution has become corporate rather than collegial. We hope the new vice-chancellor will take the opportunity of his appointment to rebuild trust with staff.

Branch reps have been asked to keep us informed of what is happening in each Unit. Our members are asked to do the same – **what is your HoU proposing both short term and long term and what impact will that have?**
Contact ucu@open.ac.uk.

A campaign group will be set up to run alongside the Regional Campaign so please let us know if you can spare some time to get involved and encourage others to do the same. Contact ucu@open.ac.uk.

Pauline Collins, Branch President

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USS dispute

UCU members voted in January to accept major changes to the USS pension from April 2016. This followed protracted negotiations and a 2-week boycott of marking and assessment. The OU took part in a briefing on new pension arrangements along with representatives from the other 68 universities after the vote; the settlement will also be discussed at a 'special sector conference' for Higher Education on 24 February. Members can find out about how the changes affect them by using the UCU modeller: <http://defenduss.web.ucu.org.uk/whats-my-pension/>. Some details (such as the approach to AVCs) are still to be clarified and therefore a full report on the debates in UCU and the wider context of this pensions dispute will appear in the next issue of Spark.

Caitlin Adams, Exec member and UCU rep for Arts faculty

On 3rd December 2014, the union submitted a petition to the Chair of the USS Board calling for the board 'to agree a fair method of valuation to reflect the underlying strength of USS' signed by more than 17,400 USS members to the USS institutions meeting in central London. Many branches also submitted the petition which called for 'a decent, guaranteed pension income for all' locally to their VC or principal.

<http://defenduss.web.ucu.org.uk/2014/university-managements-getting-the-message/>.

Pauline Collins, Branch President is fourth person from the left in the photo.



Current JNC discussion items

Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) — this is the negotiating committee with OU management that has a broad remit covering a wide range of employment related matters. The union side members of the JNC team is as follows: Pauline Collins, Branch President, Lesley Kane, AL - Hon. Secretary, Philip O'Sullivan, Regional/National Academic Staff Officer and we now have a fourth flexible place: either Bruce Heil, AL - Branch Vice President or Kate Servant, Central Academic-Related Staff Officer. If there are lots of AL issues then Bruce will attend the JNC meetings, but if there are more internal staff issues then Kate will attend instead.

Currently this Committee is discussing the following items:

- Staff Working Overseas
- Bullying and Harassment Policy
- Redundancy whilst on Maternity Leave
- Performance Improvement Plans (PIPS) and Sickness Support Plans (SSPS)
- Facility Time (paid time off for Union members to do union-related tasks)
- Procedure for Converting Fixed Term to Permanent
- Financial Situation (including student numbers) - an update from management.
- USS dispute—an update from management and union.
- Locations Review—an update from management.
- AL Issues - Non-core contracts projects, an update.
- Fixed term contract issues & changes to the Fixed Term Contract Policy.

JNC minutes are published on the OU intranet at this address:

<http://intranet6.open.ac.uk/governance/main/university-committees/formal-committees/ou-ouucu-joint-negotiating-committee?path=2015#documents>.

If you have any questions then please contact the branch office on 01908 6(53069) or by email on ucu@open.ac.uk.

UCU voter registration campaign 2015

As you would expect UCU is campaigning hard to put education at the heart of the Westminster general election campaign as we approach May 2015. You may also be aware that declining voter turnout is likely to worsen under the new system of individual registration and that this is particularly likely to affect students and younger workers (currently 30% of 18-24 year olds are not registered).

It's crucial to UCU that everyone with a stake in post-school education has a voice in the political process and that's why we've been working with the National Union of Students (NUS) and party neutral campaign group Bite The Ballot to engage our members and their students in a nationwide voter registration campaign.

Here are three ways you can help us ensure that prospective MPs and the next UK government are held to account on education:

- Download and distribute [our joint NUS/UCU leaflets and posters](#) to your colleagues and students.
- Contact [your local students' union](#) for details of campus registration stalls, rallies and events.
- Support [National Voter Registration Day on 5th February 2015](#) and help add 250,000 people to the electoral register. Please use tag #NVRD and promote [the #TakePower film](#).

With the general election just months away there is a real danger that thousands of our students and colleagues will not be registered to vote before the deadline 20 April 2015. Please help UCU give our members a voice in the corridors of power and support this important campaign.

Sally Hunt, UCU General Secretary

Further information: <http://ge2015.web.ucu.org.uk/>



OU UCU Casework stats – February 2015

Here's some statistics on the types of current cases the OU branch of UCU's caseworkers are working on plus the total number of cases over the last few years.

By Case Type		OU UCU number of cases logged 2009-2015			
Case Type	Current cases		Total	Resolved	Current
AL issues	18				
Health issue	12				
Fixed term contract	8	2009	61	61	0
Workload issue	5	2010	88	87	1
Line Management issue	4	2011	96	89	7
Grievance	4	2012	115	94	21
Bullying & Harrassment	3	2013	176	85	91
Pensions	2	2014	161	46	115
Job description	2	2015	66		66
Part-time issue	2				

Units with no UCU rep or Publicity contact

We still need to find UCU contacts/ reps in these Walton Hall units—please email ucu@open.ac.uk if you want to find out what's involved: BDU, Development office, Estates, Finance, HR & Student Services.

New UCU contact for Edinburgh

The branch would like to thank George Callaghan for being the UCU rep in Edinburgh for many years. George stood down at Christmas 2014, but we are really pleased to announce that Maria McCrea has agreed to take on the role. Thank you from the branch, Maria!

Associate Lecturer workload survey—provisional results

The UCU branch has received over 1000 responses from AL staff to its workload survey. Analysing the data will take some time, and we are still in the early stages, having looked at the responses from ALs on about a dozen modules so far.

Nevertheless, some common factors already seem apparent, and I hope the following provisional results will be of interest to members.

We do not think it will come as a surprise that on all modules looked at so far, on average ALs are putting in more hours of work than the hours paid for. However, some modules are requiring considerably more unpaid work than others.

We will start by looking at S104, which is middle of the range, in that ALs are paid to work 213 hours per presentation, but (on average) are putting in around an extra hundred hours on top. S104 illustrates several key factors causing underpayment, which we come across on many modules:

- i) The first and most obvious is that TMA scripts are taking much longer than the time paid for to mark and comment on. This has a big impact because processing and returning TMA scripts comprises the majority of the AL job on many modules. On S104 this averages at 1hr 45 minutes per script. This begs the question of how long a TMA script should take to mark, and we will return to this shortly.
- ii) The pay for general student support, outside of tuition hours and TMA marking, is governed by the SRP, or Student Related Parameter. On most 30 credit modules at levels 2 and 3 this provides for about 45 minutes per student for the entire module. For a 60 credit level 2 or 3 module it would be 90 minutes. At level one the SRP component of the pay is usually incremented by 50% compared to levels 2 and 3. In recent years many factors have increased the student related workload, not least increasing student expectations. More concrete factors are requirements to follow up any TMA non-submission; supporting students with queries about iCMAs or electronic quizzes; more elaborate welcome-on-board routines and greater traffic due to electronic communication. The student related pay is inadequate, especially on 30 credit modules on which (according to our survey responses) the average AL can spend three times longer than they are paid for.
- iii) There is no component of AL pay to cover staff development, other than half a day per year which in alternate years covers CDSA time. Yet ALs are spending increased time staying on top of their subjects, and keeping up with changes to module material which can now be updated more frequently in electronic format. Of the modules looked at so far, ALs' responses indicate time equivalent to between 5% and 12.5% of the total salaried hours on self-directed study to stay on top of their subjects. This is aside from staff development events and online courses in moderating, etc.
- iv) Another aspect of the job that ALs are expected to do as a "freebie" for the OU is all time spent communicating with our line managers, other ALs and module teams. This is further increased when ALs are involved in group tuition. And there is no paid time allowed for administrative aspects of the job such as reading about our student's additional requirements, or requesting special sessions. On the modules looked at so far, ALs appear to be spending time equivalent to between 4.5% and 12% of total salaried hours on communication with colleagues and other OU staff and structures, plus administration. Again, S104 is middle of the range at about 7%.

In the past we have been told by the OU that the meagre pay for (ii) should cover (iv) but it is clear from the responses of ALs that the pay for (ii) is insufficient these days to cover direct interaction with students.

- v) The loss of earnings in the calculation of pay bands - AL pay is still calculated on the basis of the "theoretical earnings" (basically the average piece work pay for a standard group with a small ICT supplement), then rounded down to the nearest probationer's salary. Rounding down across an interval of £450 can remove a significant proportion of the pay in the lower bands, up to 30% for band 1. This is disproportionate to the equivalent reduction in the higher bands. It reduces the hours of paid work, and increases unpaid hours. Early results of our survey suggest that it is a contributory factor leading to ALs on some modules in bands 1 to 4 putting in (on average) double the hours they are paid to work, as is the case on SK320.
- vi) A further defect in the salary banding algorithm is the old "Garbage In Garbage Out" principle. There appear to be few (if any) checks and balances on the parameters fed into the arithmetical process whereby module salaries are determined. We have some TMAs designated as less than a normal TMA workload to mark, when in fact it is taking ALs longer than a normal TMA should take. On most modules where ALs are expected to lead academic discussions in tutor group forums, there are tuition hours allocated for this, while on a few modules this appears to have been omitted.

Returning to the issue of how long a TMA script should take to mark, ALs are paid for around an hour and seven minutes for processing and returning a TMA script and filling in the PT3 form. In the old days, the OU said that ALs spent 45 minutes on a script. This may be because the old piecework rates recognised there were other aspects to the job (admin, staff development, communication with colleagues) that were not directly paid for, so there was allowance for some overheads.

Since then, cutting the number of TMAs on a module has become a mechanism for cutting AL pay, while the TMAs have become more complex to mark. The end result is that TMA scripts are taking longer than the time paid for (an hour and seven minutes) to mark, while the work done in (iii) and (iv) above remains unremunerated.

The end result is that it is commonplace for ALs to be putting in 50% over and above the hours they are paid for, and on some modules they put in 100% on top. We need real AL work time to be measured, and there must be a review mechanism for modules where the workload is clearly in excess of the pay.

The figures given above do not include time spent travelling to and from tutorials, which is considerable for some ALs, and does not include work or staff development that is not specific to a particular module.

Lesley Kane, AL and Hon. Secretary

Auto-forwarding email from the Outlook web application (OWA)

For many years Associate Lecturers were able to automatically forward their OWA emails to third party email providers (e.g. to Outlook.com or Gmail). The arrangement was convenient because Outlook is much more user-friendly than OWA, for example Mail merge allows for the emails to be personalised. Now ALs have to login twice to reach OWA.

One of the reasons given by the OU is "to protect against the loss of confidential data". This is a rather feeble excuse. When students sent us emails, they know these are going to be kept in our computers and that the computers can be hacked. Another reason given is that a "reply to your students from that system can be very confusing for your students as your emails will not be coming from an official OU email address."

This is not the case with Outlook that allows the setting up of emails with the OU address. The OU adds that "If you have configured your email to be sent from an external system and appear as though it came from your Open University address then it is highly likely to be marked as junk or rejected." This can easily be solved adding "Request a delivery receipt" and it has never happened to me. Finally, the OU states: "Student feedback indicates that they look for open.ac.uk email and sometimes miss email sent from other addresses." Since the launch of the Student Support Teams, some ALs have been asked by their students to use their private addresses because they are receiving so much irrelevant information that they delete open.ac.uk emails without reading them!

To stop ALs from forwarding automatically their OWA emails to third party email providers was a change in the working conditions made without any consultation with UCU. It could be the thin edge of the wedge about data protection. The next step might be that ALs will not be allowed to download students' data into their computers. The OU wants all the advantages and savings that going virtual brings, but does not want to run the risks that going virtual entails.

Lucila Makin, AL rep



Current AL Working Group discussion items

Associate Lecturer Working Group (ALWG)

This is a standing sub-committee of the JNC which deals with issues arising under current AL terms and conditions. The union side of the group consists of: Judy Ekings, Branch ALs Officer, David Knowles, AL & Vice President, Bruce Heil, AL & Vice President, Lesley Kane, AL & Hon Secretary and Pauline Collins, Branch President (observer).

Currently this group is discussing the following items with OU Management:

- AL Telephony
- Successor Modules
- AL Redundancy Criteria
- Changing Presentation Patterns
- ALs access to IT services
- TSA Guidance
- Non Core Contracts Project
- Teaching Opportunities for Post Graduate students
- Proposal to bring forward TSA by 3 weeks for 2015J
- AL Redundancies and lost appointments, analysis for 2015, to include the group size pay issue.
- Revised Recruitment processes
- Light Touch Redeployment between modules with similar Person Specs in response to fluctuations in student numbers
- Head of Unit internal reference form
- AL Salary banding
- Payments for marking Assessment (exams and ETMAs)
- Model Answers
- The policy on ALs moving Region
- Use of Disciplinary codes at Residential schools
- Payments for module briefings
- Compassionate leave for ALs
- Additional requirements for Students

If you have any questions then please contact the branch office on 01908 6(53069) or by email on ucu@open.ac.uk.

Regional meeting in Manchester

The Regional meeting in Manchester on 21st November 2014 went really well. I'm sure it was John and Paula sitting in the common room first and encouraging people to attend rather than the lure of the chocolate cake that meant we had 15 members of R08 staff attend! I had only sent the invite to UNISON/UCU members, but John and Paula invited a few other interested non-union members along which also gave us a chance to promote union membership.

I briefly introduced the UCU campaign around locations analysis, including circulating the UCU response and FAQs and then Paula talked about the East Grinstead closure. John then summarised some of the issues to consider if members face severance/redundancy, and also some of the management practices to watch out for! We finished with questions/general discussion.

It was a good way to get the ball rolling – there will be lots more to discuss after the locations analysis project team reports in January – so we may try and meet again then.

Many, many thanks to Paula and John for coming to Manchester and starting to get people engaged in the debates.

Sarah Wilkinson, UCU Rep at Manchester

Build our regions—together we are stronger

We held a lobby of the OU Senate meeting on 28th January 2015 and were pleased that 11 members joined us, see photo below.

We held another lobby of the OU Council meeting on 25th November 2014. We didn't have as many UCU members present as we had hoped for but thank you to Alison Penn, John and Paula James who drove up from Sussex to be at Walton Hall for 9.30am. We had a small article in the MK News and on their website as well as on the MK Citizen's website. The East Grinstead Courier published an article at the end of November when the East Grinstead office closed.

www.eastgrinsteadcourier.co.uk/members-Open-University-work-institution-prepares/story-25061631-detail/story.html

www.mkweb.co.uk/700-JOB-LOSSES-Union-members-gathered-outside/story-24683796-detail/story.html

www.miltonkeynes.co.uk/news/protest-at-open-university-in-milton-keynes-on-tuesday-1-6431724

Several UCU members posted photos of themselves on our Photo wall—have a look at: www.ucu.open.ac.uk/buildourregions



#BuildOurRegions

- Because they support and sustain our students
- Because they foster our local links
- Because they give the OU a national reach
- Because they are the heart of our community

The OU English Regions are under threat!

Show your support by tweeting your Rosie photo using the #buildourregions
Email: ucu@open.ac.uk Tel: 01908 653069
www.ucu.open.ac.uk/buildourregions

AL new contract negotiations



Negotiations have now started on a new AL contract. This follows a ballot of members with 95% voting in favour of restarting negotiations. The current intention is to conclude with a new contract this year.

The jointly agreed aim was announced at the start of talks and is to:

“Seek to create a new AL contract that is a standard fractional contract of employment, as used for other roles across the University. Such a fractional contract would normally be a permanent contract to deliver a range of learning, teaching and student support tasks by ALs as members of Student Support teams. The contract would not normally be linked to the delivery of tuition for a particular module but would, as with other University roles, define an employment relationship that would allow the balance of tasks that make up a defined Associate Lecturer role to flex over time, for an individual member of staff in response to changing student and curriculum needs.

ALs would be appointed to tutor within a significant part of a curriculum, subject or discipline area, and could be expected to receive staff development and training to allow them to tutor different aspects of that discipline as the University curriculum changes over time. Most other pieces of work for which ALs are currently separately contracted, such as monitoring, mentoring, contribution to module teams, etc., would become encompassed within these new contracts. The University will develop workload management mechanisms to ensure the fair distribution of work to ALs and to manage workload appropriate to the fractional contract the AL holds”.

It was also agreed at the start that the general AL role description, that was produced in 2008 (during the last set of negotiations for a new AL contract), should form a starting point for the AL role within these negotiations. It should be stressed that this role description outlined all of the duties that can fall within the AL role but that no AL would be called on to carry out all these duties.

The link to the 2008 AL role description is provided below and it would be good to get feedback on whether members think anything is missing from this general role description.

http://www2.open.ac.uk/tutors/data/documents/FinalALrole24-10-08_000.doc

There have been two meetings to date and we have focused on separating out the early discussions into 5 areas of work:

- The form of contract for fractional ALs and ensuring that there are minimal differences to any other University contract.
- The process of transfer to a new contract. We want to ensure agreement on this at an early stage. This process needs to be simple, without hurdles and applying equally to staff currently on many module contracts or single module contracts.
- The workload in fractional contracts. The core current AL Role and other duties that currently are contracted separately such as exam marking, monitoring and other DL or consultancy duties.
- The role description from 2008 on which both parties are seeking views and mentioned above.
- The need for specialist contracts to cover certain areas of work that could be outside the main contract. We would want to ensure that there are a minimum of these.

To support the negotiating team a reference group of UCU AL reps has been set up who will be consulted with during the negotiations and particularly when we get down to detail.

The negotiating team is Lydia Richards, UCU Regional Official, David Knowles, Judy Ekins and Bruce Heil with Pauline Collins observing. The reference group is currently Lesley Kane, John Peters, John James, Isabella Muzio and Tim Parry.

There will be regular communication of progress during these negotiations and of course any outcome will be subject to a final ballot of the members. If anyone has any particular query please get in touch. (01908 6(53069) or uco@open.ac.uk.)

Bruce Heil, Vice President

AL negotiations consultative ballot—December 2014

We would like to thank 20% of our members for voting in the consultative ballot over re-starting negotiations on a new contract for ALs. The results were:

I agree for the OU branch of UCU to start negotiations on a new AL contract:	94.5%
I do not want the OU branch of UCU to start negotiations on a new AL contract:	5.5%

'TTIPING' OVER THE CORPORATE EDGE

We will hear much about 'national sovereignty' in the lead up to the General Election. Yet both present coalition parties are declaring their full support for negotiations that amount to the most dramatic challenge to European nations' sovereignty and democracy - the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).

So what is there to fear in TTIP? Firstly, TTIP is much, much more than a trade deal. TTIP discussions, between the USA and the European Union (EU), go way beyond the free trade mainstay of tariff reductions. They carry implications for environmental standards; marketisation of public services (including health and higher education); worker rights and wage levels; and strike at the very heart of national democratic processes. If the treaty is passed by the European Parliament and ratified by the House of Commons, very few areas of life in the UK will be unaffected. And it's all in the interests of multinational business.

"...the greatest single transfer of power to transnational capital that we have seen in a generation."
John Hilary, War On Want

Neo-liberal economics, which should have taken a death blow from the 2007-8 financial collapse, is back with a vengeance in TTIP. Consider some of its key elements.

TTIP will promote 'convergence'. This means, for example, EU food standards, higher than in the USA, can be brought down to American levels. Genetically Modified (GM) food, the un-labelled norm across the Atlantic, is strictly labelled and hence generally absent from EU shelves. Bleached chicken meat and hormone-fed beef, widely sold in US supermarkets, are just two products banned from sale in Europe. If TTIP is ratified, such EU food controls may 'converge' to American standards. These products and others, will be imported and consumed or used in European food production. Consumers will have no say in that.

Clearly American food processors and agri-chemical multi-nationals would love to open up Europe to their currently banned or un-labelled products. They will use the TTIP negotiations on 'convergence' to achieve that.

In the area of finance, it's generally recognised bank regulation in the USA, since the 2007-8 credit crash, is tougher than that applied to European bank activities in the EU. 'Convergence' opens the door for the less-regulated European finance sector to argue American legislation should be watered down to Euro levels.

And they will have a hefty TTIP mechanism on their side - the Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) system. ISDS will allow any investor, usually a commercial business, to lodge a compensation claim asserting government action has impacted on their profits. Staffed by litigation lawyers and outside national legal systems, ISDS panels will pass judgement on investors' claims. And they are there for the use of aggrieved 'investors' only. States cannot take companies to ISDS panels.

"There is a strong suspicion that US companies, with their notoriously litigious approach, will use ISDS to put the frighteners on elected governments."
The Observer business review

The ISDS approach has already been used in bilateral (one nation to another) trade agreements and can un-democratically challenge elected governments. Philip Morris, the American tobacco giant, is suing Uruguay for \$25 million, for the health hazard warnings the country has introduced on cigarette packets. The claim comes under a Uruguay-Switzerland bilateral trade treaty. Although headquartered in the US, Philip Morris's Swiss subsidiary is the aggrieved 'investor' here - the company's 'Trojan Horse' against the wishes of an elected government. And to add insult to injury, U.S. senators from tobacco-growing states, have even warned the European Union that smoking controls it's considering, could endanger the drawing up of TTIP!

Likewise, the Swedish energy company Vattenfall is suing the German government for an estimated US\$ 6bn because it has plans to close two nuclear plants, part of its policy to move away from nuclear power generation following the Fukushima disaster.

If you wanted to convince the public that international trade agreements are a way to let multinational companies get rich at the expense of ordinary people, this is what you would do: give foreign firms a special right to apply to a secretive tribunal of highly paid corporate lawyers for compensation whenever a government passes a law....

The Economist magazine

And a great concern in the UK are ISDS panels employed to promote further NHS privatisation. Particularly by US health businesses, if they feel they are not allowed to gain a greater slice of National Health services and budgets. The Royal College of Nursing has consequently expressed "...very real concern ...that this will adversely affect patient care..".



....continued over

... continued 'TTIPING' OVER THE CORPORATE EDGE

Likewise 'convergence', backed up by the threat of the ISDS system, may lead to lower standards in higher education as American 'education providers' seek to extend their UK activities. Threatening compensation claims against government if it sought to limit their operations may be all that would be necessary for them to get their way.

And the prospects for job creation and wage levels under TTIP are questionable. An existing bilateral trade treaty has provided the grounds for the Veolia company to sue the Egyptian government for loss of profits. Why? For raising the country's national minimum wage. Not a reassuring example for the British Trades Union Congress (TUC).

The TUC has pointed out the Canada-EU Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, (referred to as CETA), which is proceeding ahead of TTIP, also contains ISDS provisions. CETA's mechanism for dealing with fundamental breaches of workers' rights provides in contrast, only for "...a formal report from a commission of eminent experts". The TUC concludes this is "Not exactly a bankable alternative".

UCU believes ... (TTIP) poses a profound threat to public services in general, including education, leaving them wide open not only to greater privatisation but making it harder for any future government to regulate foreign private sector companies operating in our public services.
UCU briefing paper



The corporate battalions are having a field day in the TTIP negotiations, carried out in secret sessions in Brussels between corporate lobbyists and the un-elected civil servants of the EU Commission. The European Parliament, with its elected members (MEPs), will however have to vote on acceptance of the treaty. It has already been surprised by the reaction of its citizens. Opposition is particularly strong from Germany and Austria (both have high food and drink standards) and is also mounting in France and Denmark.

A million citizens' signatures against TTIP have been gathered and more are needed. MEPs have been lobbied in Brussels by their constituents, including recently from the UK (see pictures).

But 2015 will be the critical year for both TTIP and CETA. Both treaties may come before the European Parliament by year end. Both need to be thrown out. The consequences of their enactment will strike a blow against environmental standards, worker rights and conditions. Both will constitute further means for privatising public services and swelling the power and coffers of trans-national corporations against democratically-elected governments. Much is at stake.

STOP TTIP and CETA NOW!

What you can do to stop TTIP

- Sign the European Citizens' Initiative To Stop TTIP : get the petition up to 2 million signatures: <https://stop-ttip.org/sign>
- Add your voice to the No TTIP coalition: the coalition involves campaign groups and trade unions, and this site lists upcoming events and actions you can get involved in: <http://www.nottip.org.uk>.
- Get involved in campaigns against TTIP by War on Want and Global Justice: <http://www.waronwant.org/campaigns/trade-justice/ttip>
<http://www.globaljustice.org.uk/campaigns/trade>
- OU Anti-TTIP contact: Roger Rees, Social Sciences - roger.rees@open.ac.uk.

Roger Rees, Social Sciences

TUC & Equal Opportunities Review Annual Conference - 23rd Jan 2015

This annual conference is a must on every activist's calendar. Presented by the country's top legal eagles it gives grounding in the basics of Equality Law while at the same time emphasizing where the frontier battles are being fought. Finally, the audience is made up of like-minded trade union activists hungry for the knowledge they need to combat discrimination in the workplace.



It's a long day and not for those new to being a shop steward but if you have some experience at representing members already then this really is a great course. Held in London at the TUC headquarters you pick up on the traditions of lay union members (the backbone of any union) being determined to use the law to defend members' interests.

This year there was a particular emphasis on age and sexual orientation discrimination, key issues for UCU membership. UCU sent plenty of staff but real value can be achieved by sending more enthusiastic volunteer shop stewards as it will give you the knowledge to sniff out discrimination right in your own workplace and then pass up the line to the UCU Legal Department. So, visit the TUC website and sign up for an email alert for next year's conference, as the conference gets sold out every year and they start advertising in the previous November. See you there next year!

Kevin McNerney, AL rep

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has written [a report](#) on what progress is being made to put the rights in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (the Disability Convention) into practice in the UK. The UN Convention reaffirms disabled people's human rights. It sets out how Government's should ensure those rights are protected. This report brings together the available evidence, research, legal casework, treaty monitoring and policy work as well as disabled people's views and experiences, to set out the key issues that disabled people face in the UK today.

The UN Disability Committee is expected to examine the UK's compliance with the Convention in 2016. This report will help set the agenda (the 'List of Issues') for the examination. This report will help disabled people and others get involved in monitoring and reporting on implementation of the Disability Convention. The EHRC want disabled people, disabled people's organisations and others with an interest in the Convention to give us their feedback and views on [this report](#).

Now is the time for disabled people and their organisations to influence the UN examination process. If you would like to give feedback and comments on the report please contact: CRPDEnquiries@equalityhumanrights.com
By post: Correspondence Unit, Arndale House, The Arndale Centre, Manchester M4 3AQ

Please also send any comments to the UCU Disabled Members Standing Committee by emailing: hcarr@ucu.org.uk.

Penguin made from a Rosie head scarf

Thanks to a member of staff in the Bristol office who made a penguin out of a Rosie head scarf. She has given it to Liz White, our Regional/National Academic-Related staff officer—we are very impressed, great work!



Want to come to the OU and help change yourself, or the world?

Great! As long as you're a bloke...

"We promote educational opportunity and social justice by providing high-quality university education to all who wish to realise their ambitions and fulfil their potential."

"We are committed to promoting equal opportunities for all, and close monitoring makes sure that we live up to our ideals."

Both of these quotes are taken from the University's [mission statement website](#). They are worthy aims, and I'm sure most staff are committed to them, working hard in our roles to do our bit. Except senior management, it seems - and they should be ashamed of themselves.*

The 2013/14 annual report (subtitled 'life-changing learning') was published at the beginning of January, and I clicked through to the website to take a look. I was scrolling through the document to see what was in it, but it wasn't the content that struck me it was the blatant gender bias that jumped off every page. And believe me, I didn't go looking for it - I didn't have to.

Where are the women? And, more importantly, where are the women taking active, rather than passive, roles in the world shown?

I mean no disrespect to any of the individuals (men or women) featured, but:

- out of 34 photos of people, there are 20 that feature men, and 12 that feature women (and two of men and women together).
- of the 13 OU academic staff featured, 11 are men and only 2 are women.

There's a male-centric bias to the activities shown - men with chainsaws, men and football, a formula 1 racing car, men working on space equipment, men in hard hats, men monitoring industrial equipment. Women on the other hand are shown in far more passive roles - reading, drinking tea, drawing, sticking things.

You might ask why you should be concerned, but I believe that this report, by being approved for release, is showing blatant sexism - and those attitudes will quite possibly be affecting your career now and in the future.

The truth is that women are still not equal in our society. A recent [study](#) by Oxford University found that the biggest single factor affecting career or pay was gender - with women trailing men. Other studies show that not only do women get paid less for doing the same job, there are some jobs they just don't seem to be getting - you know, the big, 'important' ones such as non-executive directorships (or building space rockets, apparently).

The OU should be helping to challenge and change these stereotypes, not only by enrolling students of whichever gender onto courses and qualifications, but by articulating to students, staff and the outside world that they don't buy into the status-quo. Because using machismo, 'no girls allowed' marketing is doing just that. We all need role models, but based on the latest OU annual report, women's roles should still be based in the early part of the twentieth century. And at the moment, the OU seems to be telling its female academics, students, and the world that women's research and teaching is so poor that it isn't worth talking about.

Promotional material shouldn't just show us where we are, but where we want society to be.

*Because someone pretty senior had to sign off on that report prior to it being released. Which one of you was 'monitoring' that?

Meridian, UCU rep for Social Sciences

The OU annual report is at this address: www.open.ac.uk/about/main/mission/annual-reports.

Oxford University study on the careers gender gap: www.ox.ac.uk/news/2015-01-13-study-reveals-careers-gender-gap-university-graduates.



UCU Casualised Staff meeting, 13 Feb 2015

This year's annual meeting took place on Friday, 13th February, and it was the most interesting national UCU event I have attended in several years.

The fun started with an announcement that John McDonnell MP, scheduled as guest speaker, was unwell and unable to attend. He had asked Jeremy Corbyn, Labour MP for Islington North, to stand in at the last minute, and the agenda was being re-ordered so his contribution could be the first item on the agenda because he had another commitment later on.

Jeremy Corbyn MP spoke about the history of industrial relations and the increasing use of zero hours and other atypical contracts from the Thatcher years onwards. Contributions from the floor focussed on the effect of long-term insecurity of income and employment. A working lifetime on zero hours or unfair variable hours contracts damages health and welfare and impacts on one's family members, and cases were reported of psychiatric disorders being caused or exacerbated by the stress. While Jeremy Corbyn was in favour of banning zero hours contracts, it was reported that another Labour MP, recently contacted by a member who is writing a book about the topic, had a more ambiguous position.

In his summing up, Jeremy Corbyn MP spoke about his work with community based mental health organisations, where work place stress and employment insecurity were recognised contributors to mental health problems. He also offered to contact the Labour MP who had not offered clear opposition to the use of zero hours contracts.

There was a panel session with a lawyer from Thompsons Solicitors and Kaye Carl, (a lay member who has helped bring several successful cases). There was a very interesting question and answer session about making use of the Fixed Term Regulations and the Part Time Workers Regulations.

Later in the morning we had the annual report on the work of the Anti-Casualisation Committee, elections to the committee, and debate on motions that had been submitted to the meeting. The report is at this address: http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/9/n/ucu_anticasannualreport_1415.pdf and the motions can be found at this address: <http://www.ucu.org.uk/circ/html/UCU629.html>. All three of the OU branch motions were passed unanimously, and a black delegate speaking in favour of our motion on anonymous student feedback clearly felt current practices invited discrimination. There were three delegates from HE elected to the Anti-Casualisation Committee: Christina Payne (London Met), Lesley Kane (OU) and Sam Morecroft (Sheffield). Stephen Murray (Bradford College) and Jim Thakoordin (Bedfordshire ACE) were elected for FE.

We had a choice of three workshops in the afternoon. I was interested in "Women and Casualisation" but in the end I decided to attend the workshop on effective campaigning and bargaining at local level. This was the best attended workshop with the room overflowing, suggesting this topic is in urgent demand.

A wide range of tactics were discussed ranging from political campaigning, bringing legal cases, to industrial action. On the political front a delegate argued that the trade union movement could not expect much from the modern Labour Party, in spite of a few good people like Jeremy Corbyn MP, who were a small minority. It was also argued that UCU needs to be better prepared for local industrial disputes involving casualised staff, and that local industrial action, where viable, should be added to our list of possible tactics.



Lesley Kane, Hon. Secretary

Further information on the UCU Anti-Casualisation committee: <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2973>.

Eric Wade—Exec member and former Branch President

Eric Wade has been seriously ill and there's further information on the Student Services intranet.

<http://intranet6.open.ac.uk/student-services/main/news/eric-wade>

UCU Equality Conference—November 2014

The Conference took place in Manchester on Friday 14th November with a welcome from Mary Jennings, Chair of the UCU Equality Committee and Sally Hunt, the UCU General Secretary. Sally outlined the political climate 5 months ahead of the General Election as going against worker's rights in all sectors. Sister unions are also under attack. There has been an increase in equality cases taken up by UCU head office but not a corresponding increase of members who self-declare themselves as belonging to the equalities protected groups.

Elizabeth Lawrence, President of UCU, in her address to the Conference added a few more parameters; there is a need to link social and professional life of workers in the HE and FE sectors: equality should be protected in professions and society at large. It is to further this aim that UCU has intensified its particular campaigns to fight against all forms of Racism, Homophobia, Fascism and in all quarters of British society. Elizabeth stressed that it is a legitimate trade union policy to take a wider equality agenda; in order to successfully meet the demands of this agenda more UCU equalities concerned activists are needed to check and confront equalities monitoring reports and red-tape which intensifies adverse living conditions (increased mental health risks and social and financial deprivation).

The main speeches were given by Dr Nathaniel Adam Tobias Coleman from University College London and Sally Brett, TUC Senior Equality Policy Officer. Both addressed equality issues of great concern to all UCU members. Nathaniel provided a very interesting theoretical basis for a rejection of all departmentalization and segregation of equalities issues within social categories; these sometimes act as boxes with safety controls that make our understanding, imagination and creativity poorer, in terms of solving effectively and successfully important equality issues.



Nathaniel suggested a different take on the Equality Issues solution making mechanisms in both UCU structures and British society at large: we should put the interests of a black lesbian woman with disabilities at the centre of all our concerns and then see how our discourses can develop. He believes that it would be better to have a UCU Equality Conference of four days, each day addressing a specific group of concerns; and allowing all participants to familiarise themselves with all the debates irrespective of the specific group they self-identify themselves with; this, he suggested, might be a better solution to address Equality issues by an organisation such as the UCU. In this way, a UCU member who is a black lesbian woman with a disability, for example, can go to all the debates that interest her and not have to choose between the four different concerns which are most important to her. He described how Black women's struggles were self-defeated by a lack of intersectionality in their approach.

In her address, Sally Brett mentioned the difficulties that women face in their equalities struggles and analyzed how poorly the established legislation tried to deal with these issues. Third party harassment practices, lack of rigorous monitoring policies, lack of awareness of key issues in Employment Tribunals and their reduced powers now to make wider recommendations together with the new policy of forcing the Employment Tribunal applicants to pay for having their cases considered, make the life of all workers, who are unfairly dismissed, more difficult and make our whole society permeated with a sense of injustice and corruption in institutions and policies. The Conference ended with separate discussions in the afternoon, with each self-identified group having its own discussions. I participated in the Disabled Members one. The Chair and all present offered warm wishes to our former President Roger Walters for a speedy recovery and thanked him for his serious involvement and hard work addressing the concerns of the UCU disabled members at large.

Costas Athanasopoulos, Equality Officer

Further information: <http://www.ucu.org.uk/equality>

Alan Cadogan

The Branch has been informed that a former OU AL from the Science faculty in Bristol, Alan Cadogan has passed away. Peter Piper from our Exec committee had this to say about Alan: "I knew Alan quite well both from the Science Faculty and when he was the chair of AL Committee. He was a great bloke and a fantastic tutor which is why we were annoyed when he received an outstanding teaching award from the OU and was then made redundant because he was 65!"

Locations Analysis – what is the threat to Regions?

Frequently Asked Questions prepared by UCU members in the Regional Campaign team.

- **Students are now supported by curriculum based SSTs instead of regions. What relevance do regions have for a good student experience?**

Student Support Teams (SSTs) are based in regional centres. If these were all relocated to Walton Hall, there would be a risk to business in terms of reduced capacity, loss of staff expertise (R13 closure is already demonstrating this) and thus the student experience. Regional centres are needed to provide capacity and balance of provision across the English regions. It is not either SSTs or Regions: it is SSTs and Regions.

A good student experience is not only based on staff support from SSTs. It is very influenced by the relationship with their tutors. The tutors are in turn supported by Staff Tutors and Regional Managers and these are based in regional centres. This quality of relationship relies on some local and personal contact eg through recruitment, quality assurance, line management and staff development. In addition, the staff at the OU, both tutors and their managers, reflect the localities and regions from where students come.

- **Doesn't the increase in online learning, and decrease in face-to-face tuition mean that regional offices will become redundant?**

The amount of online learning offered by the OU has certainly increased, and this has enabled us to reach and interact with students in exciting new ways. However what makes the OU unique as a university, and underpins the consistently excellent experience of our students, is blended learning. By having ALs located in the regions and offering face to face tuition in addition to online and telephone feedback we maximise our students' opportunities for learning.

It is true that there has been a decrease in the face to face component of learning in recent years. And the amount varies across programmes. It remains vitally important in arts, social sciences and other subjects where human relations and their interpretation are crucial. But even in 'hard' science and technology, which might on the face of it appear to be less dependent on F2F, it's still very important. In Maths, Science and Computing for instance F2F is offered on all first year and many subsequent year modules too.

Participation has varied over the years between 20 - 30%, recently it has been nearer 20%. This level is very significant though and it's clearly an important part of that mix which we call blended learning. What's more the sheer availability of F2F provides important security for our students. And in some cases it has clearly helped students to continue on modules which they would otherwise have withdrawn from.

- **Many external regional initiatives such as AimHigher have been abolished, so why would the OU need a regional externally facing presence?**

It is true that the externally facing activity in English regions has been cut over the last two years, but this has been driven by internal OU decisions as much as by government policy. The regional presence is important in supporting work-based learning and striking local partnerships to further access and widening participation. This includes, for instance, developing progression routes for part time students in local FE colleges. The experience in Scotland has been that such links can provide excellent access opportunities for FE students but that the local presence is essential to maintain and update the links.

Looking ahead, a regional focus on economic development is increasingly likely to be a fall out from the next election so the OU regional locations will be in an excellent position to engage with this. Furthermore, the recent Department for Business Innovation and Skills National Strategy for access and student success in higher education suggests a renewed role for national and local education provider collaboration. Widening participation policy and funding is in constant change: if we lose the regional centres we will not be in a position to respond to changes in policy as they arise.

- **Financial pressures on the OU mean that savings must be made, surely cutting regions must be cost effective?**

The Review of Regional Centres in 2009 concluded that it would be costly and not lead to an improved service to students. It is now argued that with SSTs this has all changed.

Firstly, SSTs have not been fully bedded in nor have they been evaluated. Secondly, the University is undergoing massive changes resulting from the introduction of a full cost fee system, and making the switch to qualification-based study. The systems are already creaking at the seams. Further massive change would be very risky to business. Thirdly, the changing context and likely move towards regionalisation in England, and associated funding streams, means that keeping Regional Centres is even more important. Finally, the Union's critique of the business rationale to closing R13 Office in East Grinstead, showed that it would lead to considerable losses (£1.326m to close offices and relocate to R01) and continuing excess costs, plus the loss of considerable staff expertise or 'human capital'.

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/299689/bis-14-516-national-strategy-for-access-and-student-success.pdf

OU UCU Regional Campaign team members

Outgoing Exec members

The branch has lost six Exec members at the AGM in November 2014 and they were commended and thanked for their service to the OU branch of UCU. Meridian, John Bennett, Hilary Partridge, David Houpt, Nicolas van Labeke and Chris Bollom have all stood down from the Exec Committee. John assures us that he will still be available for any future picket lines!

Nicolas van Labeke

Nicolas was Research Associate at the Institute of Educational Technology (IET). Nicolas has been a Fixed-Term Contract researcher for over a decade, in various HEIs across the country, and an active member of UCU since its inception, as an ordinary member, departmental rep or branch officer depending on circumstances (and workload).



Hilary Partridge

Hilary was a Study Support Adviser in the North West Regional Office located in Manchester, and she is also an AL on a number of social science modules. In the early 90s, when Hilary was working as a lecturer at Manchester University, she was active in the AUT particularly in relation to issues around fixed term contracts, and she was a member of the Manchester University Branch AUT executive until she left to join the Open University.



David Houpt

David has been an Associate Lecturer for eight years working in the Business School teaching three modules. Before that he enjoyed a long career in FE. As a long term NATFHE member he was, at one time or another, branch chair or branch secretary in the colleges he worked in.



Chris Bollom

Chris joined the OU as an AL in 1984 and full time in 1989. He joined AUT in the mid 1990s. Prior to the OU Chris worked at Charing Cross and Westminster Medical School in London. He had been on the Exec since 2000, as an ordinary member and Academic-Related Officer.



Meridian

Meridian has been with the OU for 14 years, first in Arts, and now in Social Sciences, at Walton Hall. Currently, she is a Curriculum Manager, and has been the faculty Residential Schools Administrator. She has been a union activist for many years, both here at the OU and in previous jobs. She is a caseworker, has been Honorary Secretary of this Branch, and previously she acted as membership secretary and as the union member to a committee dealing with pay and conditions.



John Bennett

Before joining the OU as a course manager in Social Sciences in 1987, John worked at the University of Edinburgh in The Unit for the Study of Government in Scotland. John's first trade union membership was in the TGWU; later he became a NALGO member; and, finally he was in the AUT until UCU was created. He joined the Executive 12 years ago, and has served as an ordinary member, Honorary Secretary, and as President.



Counter-Terrorism and Security Bill



UCU members should be alerted to the Counter-Terrorism and Security Bill, especially its dangers for academic freedom as well as civil liberties in general. See highlights below from various websites. For several years the 'Prevent Violent Extremism' programme has been criticised for creating an Islamophobic police state; now its quasi-voluntary measures will be given a statutory basis. For background, see Cage UK (2014) *The Prevent Strategy: A Cradle to Grave Police-State*, www.cageprisoners.com/our-work/reports/item/7693-the-prevent-strategy-a-cradle-to-grave-police-state.

UCU members should be mobilised to oppose the Bill or at least the Part 5 measures (see below). Even after the Bill becomes law, such motions will help to alert members, stimulate debate and perhaps galvanize non-cooperation with the duties.

Some key points for UCU branch motions:

1. Support/sign the petition, <http://stopthebill.co.uk/petition/>
2. Propose that Congress oppose the Bill or at least Part 5, which most affects educational institutions.
3. Co-sponsor a Congress fringe meeting on the Bill, counter-terror powers in general, and the Prevent programme.
4. Sponsor university-level public meetings on these issues, with external speakers.

Speakers can be invited from national organisations and campaigns, e.g. Cage UK, Liberty, IHRC, Rights Watch UK, CAMPACC, etc.

Les Levidow, UCU member

Further information:

UCU has its own petition against the entire Section 5 of the Bill at this address: <https://campaign.goingtowork.org.uk/petitions/defend-academic-freedom>

UCU factsheet: www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/0/q/ucu_counterterrorismbill_factsheet_dec14.pdf

UCU website article on the Counter-terrorism & Security bill: www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=7393

Help saving the International University College of Turin

226 students from 55 countries, mostly from the global South, have been received at the IUC of Turin in the last seven years to attend a high-quality master course in Comparative Law, Economics and Finance. Worldwide renowned academic figures (Calabresi, Gerber, Kennedy, Halevi, Teubner, Toporowski, etc.) together with brilliant young scholars have taken part to this small interdisciplinary community that chose as its pivot the critique to the dominant ethos of the homo economicus.

Studies at the IUC have consequently been free for all its deserving students, but this applied testimony against today's commoditization of education - which we have conceived instead as a commons - and more generally of all human relations and social principles has irritated many, and many have been the obstacles and impediments to overcome. In the last three years, contributions were reduced by 70% by our different sponsors, and for 2015 we simply do not have the money to guarantee the survival of our militant academic project.

The IUC has become in a very short time a truly international and transnational experience, and it is today a commons that must be preserved. We are asking you to help us preserve it. Do help us with this extraordinary effort of fund-raising in these first few months of 2015. Certainly, you know wealthy people or institutions that can help by funding some scholarship, some specific research or simply donating to the IUC. Please think for a moment to those who may be in your near or far circle, without shyness contact them, explain to them why you think it is important to keep alive the mission of the IUC and why you thought of them. Remind them that donations are encouraged by the tax system. If you encounter any interest let us know so we can contact these potential donors that we need now more than ever.

We have hundreds of friends and alumni: if everyone identifies contributions or donates we will have recovered an amount that will allow us to conclude our academic year. We can do it!

For donations: <http://iuctorino.it/content/help-saving-iuc>

Sent to the branch by a UCU member

Letters to the Editor

Spark welcomes letters from branch members on any issues likely to be relevant to the branch. Please email your letter to ucu@open.ac.uk to appear in the next issue.

Dear the Spark

I am glad to hear these negotiations (for a new AL contract) will restart and support this move by UCU. I didn't vote because I was away from home and my UCU number was required. That's not something I carry around with me. It might have stopped others voting as well. Is there another way of verifying votes which you could use in a subsequent election? It might improve turnout.

Best wishes

Dr. H Mathers, AL member

Branch reply— If we do another consultative ballot then we will send each member a unique code to enter, rather than asking you to input your UCU membership number.

Roger Walters, new address

Our former Branch President, Roger Walters has now moved, his new address is:

Brampton View Care Home, Brampton Lane, Chapel Brampton, Northampton NN6 8GH

The phone number is 01604 850700.





Your Executive Committee 2014-15

The Open University branch of UCU

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Phone: (01908) 6(53069)
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Web: www.ucu.open.ac.uk
Twitter: @oubucu

Need help?

One of the most important services provided by UCU is support for individual members experiencing problems in their employment, or with other members of the University. If you want any advice on employment related problems, please email ucu@open.ac.uk. Any such emails will of course be treated in strict confidence.

UCU resources

The following resources are available for any member who wants one, please call into room 015, Wilson C block, Walton Hall and collect one or email ucu@open.ac.uk and we will send one to you—it all helps to raise awareness of the Union.

- Hessian bag
- Mug
- Lanyard
- Pens
- Mouse mat

President: Pauline Collins

Honorary Secretary: Lesley Kane

Honorary Treasurer: Stephen Pattinson

Vice Presidents: David Knowles and Bruce Heil

Equality Officer: Costas Athanasopoulos

Central Academic Staff Officer: Jonathan Hughes

Central Academic-Related Staff Officer: Kate Servant

Regional/National Academic Staff Officer: Philip O'Sullivan

Regional/National Academic-Related Staff Officer: Liz White, co-opted Jan 2015

Associate Lecturers Officer: Judy Ekins

Ordinary Members:

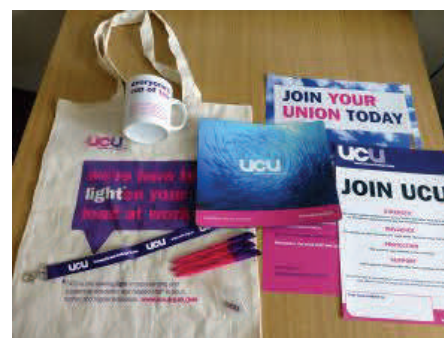
Caitlin Adams
Jeni Aldridge
Eric Bowers
Gill Clough
John James
John Peters
Peter Piper
Eric Wade

Photos of these people are on our branch website: www.ucu.open.ac.uk.

UCU National Exec Committee Members:

Lesley Kane and Roger Walters

Father of NUJ Chapel - vacancy



Branch meetings 2015

Future branch meeting dates are as follows and all members are welcome to attend—these meetings are held in Room B232, 2nd floor Wilson B block, the AL representation meeting room. You can take part remotely by using MS Lync or MS Attendee, please contact the branch office for instructions on how to set this up.

Thursday 12 March 2015 at 12.30pm
Thursday 30 April 2015 at 12.30pm
Wednesday 23 September 2015 at 12.30pm
Wednesday AGM, 18 November 2015 at 12.30pm