

FUTURE OF SOME REGIONAL CENTRES UNDER THREAT?

In April the University announced a review of the number of University locations to establish whether savings could be achieved by reducing the number of locations without any detriment to the quality of student support. In other words whether there would be any mileage in reducing the number of Regional Centres - it seems unlikely that Walton Hall will be closed down!

Both UCU and UNISON complained that there had been no advance warning of this review or an explanation of the context and that there was no mention in the paper announcing this review of any involvement of the unions, and the University proffered its apologies for this. Assurances have been given that this is at this stage little more than a feasibility study to see whether there is scope for a major review and that if the university decides to go ahead with such a review then there will be full and proper consultation.

It seems extraordinary that at a time when the University is facing increasing competition and needs to establish itself firmly as a local university throughout the country anyone could seriously contemplate withdrawing from any regions and UCU regards such a threat as very short sighted and something which has caused considerable anxiety to many staff in Regional Centres. Any feasibility study is likely to concentrate on things which can easily be costed and ignore more intangible things - including the impact on staff morale, the potential loss of many long serving and committed staff who could not or would not relocate, and the enhanced quality of student support as a result of the University's national spread. The University will decide in September whether to go ahead with a major review or whether this is not a

runner. If the former then UCU will vigorously defend the jobs of any members threatened by such a review.

National pay and redundancies

National pay negotiations continue to make little serious progress. As has been reported in a recent national circular, the employers have increased their offer to 0.5% but this has been rejected by all unions. UCU decided to take part in the single table bargaining machinery - a move which this branch among many others opposed - but so far there is no indication that a united front of all the unions in higher education is likely to make any difference in securing a reasonable pay rise - note that the teachers have got 2.3% and employers in FE have offered 1.5%.

Meantime the threat of redundancies is becoming more and more widespread across the sector, including in some well off institutions like Imperial. There is no threat as yet in the OU and steps like internal only advertising and a post pause will certainly help to delay and hopefully avoid any such threat. The union is seeking to secure a national agreement on redundancies but thus far has met with a brick wall.

A ballot earlier this year on proposed industrial action on both pay and jobs, which caused some controversy within the union, was suspended mainly because of some problems in the union's national membership record system, but UCU will need to consider in the autumn whether industrial action to secure a reasonable pay rise is worthwhile. There will be an opportunity for branch members to discuss this at the next branch general meeting, which will be held at lunchtime on 24th September, and the views of the branch will then be fed into consultation meetings that the union is holding the following week.

JUMPING THROUGH HOOPS: AL RECRUITMENT PROCEDURES

Having to reapply for a job that you have been happily doing successfully for a number of years is always frustrating and somewhat demeaning. Over the last few years I've watched with horror at the stress suffered by my partner and friends when they have been forced to undergo 'redeployment' in other public service institutions. But the situation of Associate Lecturers in terms of our employment continuity in the Open University is truly appalling and is consequently generating a considerable amount of ill-feeling. It is not just the frequency with which existing ALs have to apply for teaching posts, but it is the amount of time and unpaid work involved in the procedure that adds insult to injury.

Things have come to a head for me as this is the second year in a row that I've had to reapply for my job, as I tutor the university's first level courses in the arts and social science faculties (A103 being replaced by AA100 last year and DD100 with DD101 this year). In academia courses are constantly being renewed and rewritten. However, academics are not generally re-interviewed each time there is a change in the course they teach. Not so in the case of ALs. We have to formally go through the whole application process as if we were external candidates who have never worked for the Open University before.

Take this year, for example, in respect to the transition from DD100 to DD101. Existing tutors were encouraged to apply but warned that we needed to complete the application form in full, making sure that we provided evidence of how we met each of the course and generic AL person specifications. After applying we then received letters inviting us to prepare for interview tasks. This involved visiting the course website and using the material to prepare a tutorial exercise and an introductory message to a Moodle tutorial group. In some regions there were additional tasks internal candidates were expected to perform, such as marking an essay and a computer exercise.

Essentially existing ALs are being asked to jump through hoops! This is not just unnecessary it is humiliating. If we didn't meet the generic AL person specifications and couldn't write introductory letters, prepare tutorials and mark essays, why have the OU employed us in the first place? In addition to this there is the amount of time and resources spent by Staff Tutors and middle management on the whole process. Time and resources that one would think you be better spent else where in this period of financial crisis for the institution.

ALs do not have unlimited time either, and some have complained that the time they have spent on jumping through the recruitment hoops has affected the time they have available to get on with the real job, preparing real tutorials, etc. One AL applying for another replacement course commented "I got an interview invite this morning, and I'm expected to produce a 1.5 hour tutorial plan based on a Unit I haven't seen and which is only partially available as a taster on the course website. My first reaction was if I don't know how to plan a tutorial by now why are they still employing me? The second was why aren't the materials we would need to do the job properly available?"

Of course replacement courses do require ALs to master new subject areas and teach using new systems. This is certainly true of AA100 and DD101, which pioneer the university's new 'blended approach' with increasing use of IT, in particular the VLE, for the delivery of the courses. However, the recruitment process requires existing ALs to attend briefing sessions and training courses largely in their own time and without pay. For instance, in my region before formally applying to teach DD101 we were asked to attend a Saturday briefing session. Then, after the interview, we were invited to a weekend residential school and informed about the national DD101 briefing session in the autumn. There is also the expectation that we complete Moodle and moderators courses. All in all the whole process of reapplying to tutor this first level course amounts to several days unpaid work, and even after completing it all there is still no guarantee of being reemployed!

The obvious question to ask, apart from the off-loading costs onto ALs, is why does the Open University continue with such a grossly unfair procedure? What interests are served by humiliating the institution's core teaching staff in this manner? After all it will be existing ALs that will get these new courses up and running. It will be existing ALs that will hopefully make these new courses successful.

Dr Tom Saunders R08 OU UCU AL rep, June 2009

See next page for editorial comment:-

CDSA

Almost two years after an agreement on CDSA which ended a boycott of CDSA, examples of failures to abide by that agreement still arise and cause considerable friction between the University and the branch.

Two recent examples of this follow: -

In April it came to light that copies of CDSA reports had been provided to Internal Audit in complete breach of the confidentiality provisions of the agreement. The branch executive authorised a ballot on a renewed boycott of CDSA unless an agreement was reached which avoids this recurring and called in national officials to impress on the university the strength of the union's concerns. We have also asked the university to undertake that in future there will be consultation with branch officers if there is an Audit request for access to CDSA reports, with a view to attempting to find a solution that allows Audit to fulfill its obligations without breaching the agreement. IF it proves impossible to find such a solution then we will be in dispute – the union has no intention of compromising on the confidentiality of CDSA reports – but at least we will have tried to find an acceptable solution, which should often be possible. The university seems willing to settle with us on this basis, but we have yet to finalise such an agreement.

More recently an example of a unit level CDSA policy - in Marketing and Sales - which bears little if any relationship to the agreed University policy and is at variance with that policy - which it does not even mention - in several respects came to light. The Union has asked for that particular policy to be withdrawn forthwith and replaced by one which is consistent with the agreed University policy.

More positively, and after refusing to do so for several months, the university has written to all units urging them to check that any unit level documents on CDSA are consistent with the agreed University policy. We urge members though not to rely on local management to do this but to check your unit's policy and ensure it complies with the agreed policy which you can find on http://intranet.open.ac.uk/human-resources/information/cdsa/local_agreement_oub_uu_2007.doc (contd. on page 11)

AL Recruitment – editorial comment

In our redundancy agreement with the OU, it is noted that “a member of staff's academic qualifications and expertise which were relevant for one course may not be relevant for other courses in the faculty course profile”.

This is true, but what we did not expect to happen was that ALs who have done their jobs successfully for years would have to set about demonstrating from scratch that they meet the generic AL person specification for the job they already do. As far as specific course content is concerned it would also be reasonable to accept experience of having taught similar course content, plus relevant academic qualifications.

The amount of time required from the author of the article on page 2 during DD101 recruitment would also seem to be in breach of AL terms and conditions which refer to two days' per year of “pedagogic skills development.....wider than the teaching and conduct of a single course” since much of it was course specific.

Of course DD101 is only a fraction of a full time job and income, and if we multiply time and effort pro-rata then there would be several weeks of unpaid work for those applying for a full-time job with the OU. One wonders how much work the new VC did to get his job!

Taking the long view, we would expect the increasing need for ICT and software skills to be an argument for maintaining a stable AL workforce, even more so if preparations for new courses need to start months (or years) in advance. We believe it is time for a completely new system for re-deploying ALs.

No trade union can defend members' jobs selectively, for some and not for others. Fighting off the redundancies that are increasingly threatening the HE sector will require the solidarity of different categories of staff including ALs and hourly paid staff elsewhere. This isn't a good moment for anyone to have an ambiguous position on job security for other members.

As a final point, we would add that employers have statutory obligations towards potentially redundant employees, and any potentially redundant member who is having problems should contact us at ucu@open.ac.uk

Changes for researchers

The University is proposing some changes in the job descriptions and titles of research staff and is launching a formal consultation process. The main reason given for proposed changes is to bring the OU into line with other parts of the sector. Details are being circulated to all research staff and the OU UCU branch is holding a meeting on Monday 7 September at 12 midday in the Systems Seminar Room to enable all research staff, whether members or not, to express their views on the proposals

Reviews affecting course managers

Two faculties, Social Sciences and Health and Social Care, are undertaking reviews which mainly affect course managers - as well as secretarial and clerical staff. Details of proposed changes in HSC have recently been circulated to the staff affected and a meeting of union members affected will take place shortly. Whilst initial proposals have been widely circulated in Social Sciences, the formal consultation process will not start until September and the branch will be in contact with affected members shortly.

Mileage rate

The University is refusing to enter into any serious negotiations on increasing the current mileage rate and continues to put forward a proposed formula which UCU has already rejected and which would mean no increase in the rate for the foreseeable future. The Union has put forward counter proposals and indicated that we will seek arbitration on this matter unless the University enters into serious negotiations soon.

AL Holiday Pay

There has been a little-noticed change in the law, which requires Bank Holiday pay to be paid in addition to normal holiday pay. The effect of this is that from October 2007, minimum holiday pay increased from 20 days to 24 days, and from 1 April 2009, it increased from 24 days to 28 days.

Six months ago we proposed a formula to management to allow this change to be reflected in AL salaries. So far, the only response has been that this change will be reflected (in an unspecified way) in the new AL contract, which will have an effective date of August 2008. There has been no offer to compensate ALs from October 2007 to August 2008.

Unless the University agrees soon to a resolution reflecting these changes in the law, UCU will take action either by initiating arbitration procedures or by taking out a test Employment Tribunal case, or possibly both.

Union goes to arbitration on allowances

The University continues to insist stubbornly that allowances for acting up in various positions - for example as Associate Deans - are not negotiable though the procedure agreement between the University and the branch clearly indicates otherwise. After months of fruitless negotiations the union has now invoked arbitration procedures which will involve ACAS but the University continues to prevaricate by delaying instigating these agreed procedures.

Union recognised for ALs outside the UK

The procedure agreement between the OU and the Union branch provides for the recognition of the branch for all Associate Lecturers without any exceptions. However the University has recently been maintaining that since the agreement was established before the OU employed ALs outside the UK, it did not cover such ALs. Agreement has now been reached that the branch does in fact represent all ALs subject to a protocol which recognises the need in some cases to change standard terms and conditions of service in order to comply with legislation in other countries, that there are pension arrangements which are comparable to those in the UK.

ALs - Retirement or redundancy?

It is very welcome news that the enriched criteria for retirement that the OU announced last November has resulted in more Associate Lecturers being allowed to stay on after their 65th birthday than was the case earlier last year. In many cases this was because they held an appointment on a course which had only one or two years left to run. It is also very welcome that the university pays redundancy to ALs over 65 on the same basis as for those under 65. This was a consequence of the same age equality legislation in 2006 to which the OU responded with enforced retirement at 65 for ALs, so it seems that not all aspects of it were bad after all.

It is now therefore a good idea for ALs who are approaching 65 to think about whether they wish to retire and to make their plans carefully. If you do want to retire you may be able to arrange the date so as to be made redundant and receive 1.5 weeks pay for each year of service up to a maximum of 20 years. You need to bear in mind that you are only redundant when you lose your last course, so if you have more than one contract you will probably need to resign from all except one, and that one should be the one that finishes closest to your chosen date. If there is a choice you should consider the salary for each course as well as other factors which may be important to you. It sometimes happens that student numbers fall and that redundancy is offered to ALs before the end date of a course. You need to consider what you will do if this happens. If you only have one remaining appointment you would be bottom of the list for compulsory redundancy, but may choose to volunteer. You can find more information about AL redundancy at <http://tinyurl.com/nmbnqo>

If you want to continue to work for the OU past the age of 65, the new criteria mean that the surest way to achieve this is to have a contract for a course with only one or two years left to run when you reach the crucial birthday. You can see the full criteria at <http://tinyurl.com/kj6crd>. However, earlier this year two ALs who were being forcibly retired at the end of DD100, appealed, arguing that they were disadvantaged compared to ALs who had contracts with only one or two years left to run. The university accepted this argument at the end of June, and has allowed them to apply for the successor course DD101. Some regions have sent letters to all ALs who are in this position inviting them to apply for new work. Any AL whose course has ended and who is being made to retire against their will should contact UCU for advice as soon as possible. The conditions attached to the application process mean that we still have some concerns that these ALs will not be appointed to new courses, so we will not be bringing out the champagne until we hear that they have been kept on, but this is certainly an important step in the right direction.

The remaining group of ALs are those who have contracts with more than two years to run when they reach 65. So far as we know none of these has yet argued that they are disadvantaged compared to ALs who have contracts with two years or less to run, but we hope they will now do so. It is hard to see how the university could deny it. ALs in this position should therefore be kept on.

The OU's policy on compulsory retirement at 65 for ALs is in tatters. They are committed to abolishing the retirement age by 2011 anyway, and the only sensible thing they can do now is to put a stop to it immediately, and allow ALs, and other staff, the dignity of choosing their own retirement dates.

These issues are complicated and it is not surprising if you feel confused. The FAQs linked to from the criteria page mentioned above are helpful, but every case is different and if you are unsure how to proceed you should contact your UCU representative for advice. The list is at <http://tinyurl.com/mj8h5n>

Sue Hawthorne OU UCU branch ALs Officer

MEMBER RECRUITMENT – YOUR UNION NEEDS YOU!!!

UCU nationally is organising a membership drive and, now that the university has agreed to provide UCU with contact details of all the staff we represent – academic, academic related, research, and Associate Lecturers – all non-members* will receive a mailing, encouraging them to join the union.

But each one of you can help, too. How many people have you heard say they've "never got round" to joining the union, that "no-one asked". So we need you! Talk to your colleagues (long-standing or new) and encourage them to join. Point out the benefits of being part of a union, especially in these uncertain times, and that UCU is committed to maintaining and improving pay and terms & conditions.

REMEMBER, THE MORE MEMBERS WE HAVE, THE STRONGER OUR NEGOTIATING POSITION

And, while you're doing the talking, the branch recruitment & membership group are hoping to carry out the following actions to raise our profile at Walton Hall, in Regional Centres, and amongst ALs:

- having noticeboards in every unit, regularly updated
- recruiting departmental Reps in every unit / department
- getting Regional Centre Reps in every region
- getting AL Reps in every region
- holding "drop in" sessions in every unit - for current members and potential members

Achieving this will depend on **YOU** to:

- start off and / or maintain noticeboards in your area
- become a departmental or Regional Rep.
- take some Join the UCU leaflets for your work area from our newly re-opened office (or ask for them via ucu@open.ac.uk)

None of these things need take up a great deal of your time, unless you want them to – get as active as you want. But do get active!

INTERESTED? Then contact Meridian on 59523 or via meridian@open.ac.uk, or pop into my office at WH - Briggs 147

Meridian, OU UCU executive committee member

**apart from anyone who asked for their details not to be released to us*

New branch administrator

The UCU branch is pleased to announce that after a lengthy gap without administrative support, we will have a new Branch Administrator from the beginning of August, Deb Shann, who currently works part time in LTS, and part time for the local Labour Party. This should enable us to overhaul our membership records system and to provide a better service to branch members - as well as relieving pressure on the officers of the branch. Deb can be contacted by e-mail to ucu@open.ac.uk or on (01908-6) 53069.

AL Workload survey

I would like to thank all those ALs who took part in my recent survey on workload issues. I have not yet had time to do a full analysis of the results, but two problems have become clear.

Three quarters of respondents reported having difficulty meeting the two week deadline when they have more than one batch of TMAs to mark, owing to clashing cut off dates. More than two thirds are spending in excess of 6 hours a day in front of a computer screen to try to meet deadlines, and this has implications for their health and safety, as they report a variety of symptoms, including headaches and eye strain as well as other aches and pains. Most of these are not severe, and are not persistent, but it is clear that at least some ALs are going to have long term problems unless this is dealt with. ALs are entitled to a free eye test and basic glasses if they are needed for computer use see <http://tinyurl.com/plvep8> and UCU is currently attempting to negotiate with the university for better health and safety provision for ALs. (See *article on next page*)

I aim to try to identify common clashes in my detailed analysis of this questionnaire, and it may be possible to improve things for some ALs by making small adjustments to cut off dates, but clearly there are other considerations to take account of when fixing dates, and changes which improve things for some ALs may make things worse for others. UCU thinks there are some circumstances in which the university should extend the two week turn round for TMAs. We also think research should be done to find ways to improve the marking efficiency of ALs so that they spend less time doing it, and I would welcome suggestions from members on how this can be done.

The second problem is that about half the respondents report having a teaching commitment for 52 weeks a year, and a similar number have difficulty getting time off for a holiday. The comments on this were interesting, with some ALs having trouble getting time off when their partner is free, or during the school holidays. Others have free time only in the winter, which is not the most attractive time for going away, and some take only short breaks.

Some ALs have already resigned from courses because of this problem and others take a laptop away with them so they can keep up with forums and emails, or even marking. This rather defeats the aims of a holiday.



UCU has already raised this with the university. Under the new contract arrangements for ALs to take holidays should be made explicit with cover provided where necessary. In the mean time, if you are having problems finding time when you can have a holiday, you should discuss your plans with your staff tutor, who should be sympathetic. If they are not you should contact your UCU representative, see <http://tinyurl.com/mj8h5n>

Sue Hawthorne OU UCU branch ALs Officer

Dals Update

UCU has asked management for ALs to have the right to record their own comments on their DALS feedback, and they have agreed. The necessary changes to the system are already being implemented, and we hope will take effect before the next round of DALS in the autumn. We would like to hear from members how DALS is working for them.

Shortfall in National Insurance contributions for ALs

There is an article on page 4 of the latest Snowball explaining this problem, which was originally raised by UCU member Marcus Davison, and we thank him for his persistence in uncovering this anomaly. We welcome the university's assurance that this will be sorted out in a way that does not involve ALs in additional payments, but we are pressing them for a specific undertaking that they will make good contributions and pensions for members who have already retired or who will be retiring before the administrative process is complete.

HSE takes action on stress

Anyone who is concerned about work related stress may be interested in the article at <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=407358> . The HSE has issued an improvement notice on Liverpool Hope University on work related stress. The local UCU representative is quoted as saying "We need to be confident that good policies will turn into good practice. What does concern us is that while the university is developing policies to help combat undue stress, it is simultaneously developing policies and practices which only add to it."

ALs and Display Screen Equipment (DSE)

It is now three years since our union branch submitted the document at http://www.oubucuforum.org.uk/attachments/ETMA_and_Associate_Lecturer_Workload_and_Expenses_v4.doc for consideration at the Joint negotiating Committee with management. Amongst other things the document pointed out that the advent of electronic tma marking necessitates an increase in ICT expenses because "The hours spent in front of the computer screen become significant enough that Health and Safety needs to be taken seriously. At this point a proper workstation including 5-point chair, etc. needs to be set up"

While there are now a few signs of movement on this (See David Knowles' article on page 9) it has to be said that progress has been very slow and - literally in the case of a few unfortunate individuals - painful. We have been contacted by several ALs who have suffered RSI type injuries, as well as a few who have suffered exacerbation of existing conditions. One of these told us:-

"Last summer I consulted an osteopath with musculo-skeletal problems, which he traced to overuse from the mouse. Little wonder when it required over 1,000 ticks to mark a comprehension! However, I suspect that problems began with Lyceum. This requires holding down the mouse to speak (ie several minutes at a time) during lengthy tutorials with no break.....Because of pain, which still continues, I have resigned from one of my 3 groups and taken leave from the second."

and another:-

"I'm just recovering from another incident of very debilitating back strain which is likely to have been brought on by too much eTMA marking and computer use associated with OU work.I agreed to complete the remainder (of the etmas) in hard copy which the region printed off for me"

We are hoping there will soon be a proper system in place for AL workstation assessments, and that it will be comparable with the Cardinus system used by other staff. Health and safety is the one area where a two-tier system is particularly unacceptable. The health and safety requirements necessitated by electronic marking should have been costed and assessed as part of the package when the OU decided to go in the direction of electronic marking.

It is true that in the past ALs have made limited use of their domestic equipment, such as televisions and radios for OU purposes, but this was very limited use - typically no more than an hour a week - which did not interfere with other domestic / family needs. The use that ALs now need to make of their computers is on a completely different scale. Our survey of AL members last summer showed that many were spending 20 hours a week in front of their computer screens when marking tmas, and a few had spent 40 hours or even more at the busiest times. Apart from the hours at peak times, there are other reasons why some ALs feel they need a dedicated computer for the AL job. In my case I don't consider it appropriate to keep students' work on the family computer, which my teenage children and their friends have access to.

Realistically, having a dedicated computer means setting up a dedicated workstation, with an adjustable chair, and a footrest for those who are not tall enough for their feet to reach the floor comfortably (unless the table height is adjustable).

(contd. on next page)

ALs and DSE (contd. from page 8)

The current position of the OU, on a DSE self-assessment checklist on a little visited page of TutorHome at <http://www.open.ac.uk/tutors/employment-info/pages/practice/Yourhealthandsafety.htm> is that it is the responsibility of ALs to pay for their own health and safety equipment if they make sufficient use of DSE as ALs to be regarded as DSE users for health and safety purposes. An adjustable chair and a footrest (if necessary) are listed in schedule 2 of the Display Screen Regulations, and it therefore seems to us that the OU is on thin ice here with regard to Sections 9 and 33(b) of the Health and Safety at Work Act, the full text of which is available at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/legislation/hswa.pdf>.

As a further rider on this, ALs who already suffer from musculo-skeletal problems should not be told to go and buy themselves an adjustable chair, because it may not be right for them. Their needs should be properly assessed by Occupational Health in the OU, or by Access to Work, see http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/Employmentsupport/WorkSchemesAndProgrammes/DG_4000347

Even if the law were neutral on whose responsibility it is to provide legally required health and safety equipment - and we don't believe it is - requiring employees to pay for their own work equipment is effectively a deduction from the hourly rate of pay we are entitled to under the national Framework agreement. The OU UCU branch has registered disagreement with the OU's position on this, opening the way to possible arbitration in the autumn.

We are quite sure the OU would not dream of requiring MK-based staff to pay (for example) for their own footrests or five-point chairs, and in fact for at least 30 years or more the provision of health and safety equipment necessitated by one's employment has been universally the responsibility of the employer. If a legal loophole is found in this provision it will almost certainly result in more people dying at work in Britain, and this is something we do not feel that the OU, our national university, should be any part of. The problem could be sorted out for considerably less money than is currently being thrown away as a result of the OU's intransigent position over salary sacrifice.

ALs do not work at home out of choice, but because it is the only option for the vast majority of them. Like other organisations that employ homeworkers, the OU saves a considerable amount of money that would otherwise be spent on the provision of premises, heating, lighting, etc. The proportion of AL work that is done at home continues to increase with the advent of electronic tutorials and the reduction in face-to-face tuition. My AL work is 100% home based on one course I tutor, and over 90% home based on the other.

As a final point, it is worth re-iterating something that has been known since Victorian times - that people work better in a comfortable working environment. It is in the interests of the university and its students as well as ALs for proper provision to be made.

Lesley Kane (OU UCU branch AL health and safety rep)

Who is your DSE coordinator?

Did you know that your region had an AL DSE coordinator? No, neither did we, but here is a statement on this from management. They seem genuinely surprised that take-up is low!

“Each regional/national centre has an AL DSE coordinator who has undertaken training on DSE assessments and is familiar with how this may relate to an AL. The AL DSE coordinators undertake this work in addition to their substantive role and in most cases are members of staff based within the AL Services Team.

The role was introduced in November 2007 and a review of the service provided revealed that take up was low.”

If you would like help from your local coordinator, you should ask your staff tutor. If for some reason you would prefer not to deal with this matter via your staff tutor, you can approach the coordinator direct, but of course you have to find out who it is first, and there is no list available.....

David Knowles (OU UCU branch treasurer)

UCU National Congress

The UCU National Congress and Higher Education Sector Conference took place in Bournemouth at the end of May. The OU branch sent a full complement of five delegates as well as two observers, and four branch members who were also members of the outgoing National Executive Committee also attended.

Successful OU branch motions included a Congress motion reaffirming opposition to the government's ELQ policy and Sector Conference motions on the workload of part-time staff, and on employers' misusing contracts for services. These motions are on our web site at http://ucu.open.ac.uk/motions_resolutions.

An OU branch amendment on single table bargaining was defeated and a branch amendment calling for a ballot of all members before any action was taken relating to a boycott of Israeli universities and colleges was not accepted onto the order paper because it raised an entirely new issue - a ballot - not covered in the original motion. That entirely spurious pretext - which was upheld despite a challenge from the OU branch - did not fool anyone that the real reason was that those who are intent on pursuing the boycott agenda know full well that they would never win a ballot on this.

The substantive motion on Palestine was passed despite a clear warning from the General Secretary that due to legal advice she would have to advise the incoming President that it was null and void.

Though inevitably and sadly some sections of the press gave the impression that we all spent three days discussing Palestine, the congress and sector conference agendas were packed full with a wide range of issues of educational policy.

Roger Walters OU UCU branch president

Academic Related Staff – Making a difference in Higher Education

The expertise and experience of academic-related staff supports the development of research, teaching and learning, and student support. We are therefore an integral part of higher education today, tomorrow and in the future. It is no surprise then that we are just as central to UCU both locally and nationally. Our union is strengthened by the membership and actions of its academic-related members who experience many of the same problems as academic colleagues.

The UCU Academic-Related AGM took place in March 2009. Two OU delegates attended to debate issues of importance to academic-related staff. The welcoming address included a summary of the discussions around the proposed new JNCHES bargaining arrangements. Delegates were updated on the Points Based System for Immigration Control and its impact on academic-related staff. The meeting passed a range of motions and the Head of Campaigning, Organising, Recruitment and Training briefed delegates on the progress of the National Organising Plan and use of the Manifesto for academic-related members. The Manifesto is a valuable tool, which concentrates our minds on the key issues and member demands and copies are available at http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/s/8/ucu_armanifesto_08.pdf

The Academic Related Committee has taken every opportunity to highlight the role and concerns of AR staff both in UCU and within our Universities. There was also a commitment to continue to monitor, analyse and publicise the implementation of the framework agreement for academic-related staff, and to provide advice to the higher education committee on how UCU should respond to any disproportionate affect on all members within our group. The message was clear, the more organised we become, the more effective we are within our union. Two workshops created the space for in-depth discussion on a number of key issues including:-
(contd. on next page)

(Academic related staff meeting – contd. from previous page)

1. Recruitment, organising and the role of academic-related staff in industrial action

The key areas identified around which academic-related staff could best organise and take forward campaigning activity at a local level were career development, progression and continued professional development.

2. Workload protection and negotiating

Workloads, the impact of redundancies and increasing demands being made on staff with no additional resources were the key challenges highlighted. Materials developed by the Workloads Working Group will provide branches with a toolkit for negotiations with management on protecting work-life balance.

The Open University branch of UCU will continue to highlight the key issues for OU academic related staff locally and nationally and will campaign alongside the national AR committee to ensure a specific AR perspective to the declared priorities relating to pay, conditions and job security within the National Organising Plan (NOP)

Pauline Collins

OU UCU executive committee and NEC member

CDSA *(contd. from page 3)*

Essential features of the agreed policy include the right to request an alternative appraiser to the one proposed by management, that all CDSA reports should be confidential and only available to the appraiser, appraisee, and head of unit, and there should be no link between CDSA and promotions or rewards except that an agreed CDSA report may be provided to support a submission for promotion or a reward.

If you have any concerns about your unit's policy or practice on CDSA and especially if you think it is not consistent with the agreed policy then please let the branch know by emailing ucu@open.ac.uk

Roger Walters (OU UCU branch president)

UCU Equality Conferences

UCU has four equality conferences later this year. These enable members who self define yourselves as in one of the four equality 'strands' to meet colleagues in other institutions, discuss key issues, and help formulate union policy relating to each area. The branch will be able to send two delegates but additionally any member who self defines as being a woman, LGBT - lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender - disabled or black may attend provided there is room,

The four conferences are as follows: -

- Women Members - Friday 13 November
- LGBT Members - Saturday 14 November
- Disabled Members - Friday 20 November
- Black Members - Friday 11 December

If you are interested in any of these conferences, make a note for your diary now. Further information including details of registration will be circulated in September.

Intellectual Property Rights

UCU is committed to enhancing and protecting the professional standing of academic staff and to ensuring fair rewards for their work.

Central academic staff members will be interested to know that the branch therefore plans to hold a meeting about intellectual property rights, which is a topic of increasing importance, especially in view of the easier access to material provided by the web. UCU nationally has established a working group on this issue and the meeting will be attended by a member of this group and a senior full-time official who is working on this.

The provisional date for this meeting is the afternoon of Thursday 12th November. Confirmation and further details will be circulated later.

ANTI-CASUALISATION MEETING 27 FEBRUARY 2009

(formerly the Fixed Term & Hourly Paid Staff Committee)

Committee goes from strength to strength!

From what in the past could be regarded as a Cinderella committee (at least in terms of AUT) the Anti-Casualisation Committee is now assuming increasing importance, not least as nowadays the broad sector of FE, HE and adult (including prisons) education now ranks alongside catering as one of the most casualised sectors of the UK labour market.

With this very much in mind, these very constituencies packed the hall in the former NATHFE headquarters for their annual meeting of activists to improve the lot of the most poorly represented group of all our members and this was also followed by a lively fringe meeting of interested delegates at National Congress later in the year.

The national meeting heard from Andrew Harding of UCU how it was already pledged to push Government hard to implement the full protection of the new Temporary & Agency Workers Directive, also from a research academic in this area, Dr. Hazel Conley (herself a former Chair of the Committee) on a graphic case of vulnerable unionists being let down by their union on less favourable treatment for fixed term & P/T workers and hence the difficulties of organising this group of workers. Perhaps most graphic of all, however, was hearing the problems of Kate Clayton, an agency lecturer where fear of losing one's employment was very real for those brave enough to become a union member, let alone an activist. Researchers also described how they could be left high and dry, when contracts were perfunctorily terminated.

Building on these experiences, the newly formed Committee have now determined their priorities for their 3 groups of members, namely,

- Fixed term lecturers, academic related and researchers
- Staff on hourly paid, zero hours, agency & services contracts
- Post-graduate student staff

Activity in the current year will attempt to concentrate on the following broad areas,

- Information & Communication, via, for example,
(promoting the Hourly Paid Survival Guide being an important piece of work)
- Collective Bargaining and Collective Action

(working with the relevant committees & officials and research councils to ensure the explicit inclusion of fixed-term, hourly paid and agency staff.)
- Use of the law

(supporting branches in taking collective grievances and Tribunal cases)

All in all, I think this will be a really active year for the Committee, and for these our most vulnerable constituencies.

*Michael B. McNulty.
(Vice Pres. OU UCU branch, and member of the UCU Anti-Casualisation Committee)*

Becoming active

We are looking for members to volunteer for any of the wide variety of roles below. In most cases members being trained for these roles should be allowed time off work.

Union Learning reps

A learning rep is a union rep who is trained on advising members on learning needs and opportunities.

AL Regional reps

These are points of contact, and local representatives for ALs, and collectively they function as the AL regional reps' committee, which plays an important role in advising the branch executive committee on matters relating to AL employment. We are looking for a regional rep for R01, and for assistant reps in all regions except R05, R07 and R08. The assistant reps job is to help the regional rep, and stand in for him/her at the regional reps committee when necessary.

Health and safety reps

At the moment we have only three H&S reps, one AL, one regional staff member and one on MK-based. Ideally we should have one in every region and in every department at MK, as well as several AL H&S reps. Anyone who has a knowledge and/or interest in health and safety issues would be invaluable. Time off work for training and other functions is a statutory right.

Department or unit reps at MK

We are interested in hearing from anyone who is willing to serve as a point of contact for the union, and/or maintain a noticeboard for members.

Contacting the branch

If you have any problems to do with your employment, or if you want to draw any more general issues to our attention, please email us at ucu@open.ac.uk

Or write or phone

OUBUCU
Room 015
Wilson C Block
Walton Hall
The Open University
Milton Keynes
MK7 6AA

Phone: (01908-653069)

College and University Support Network

The College and University Support Network (CUSN) offers support services to all staff in further and higher education and their families, including:

Counselling: confidential, solution-focused counselling on personal and workplace issues

One-to-one coaching: personalised practical and emotional support via a secure email system

Information, advice and support material: news, guides and factsheets on relevant topics such as well-being, work-life balance, workload problems, stress management, coping with bereavement, and dealing with difficult people

Financial assistance: a needs-based grants and loans programme

Money management advice: individually tailored strategies to address financial difficulties, restructure debt and secure benefits

Signposting to relevant organisations: the information you need to take the next steps to a better future

All these services can be accessed online at CUSN's website at <http://www.cusn.info/> or through a 24/7 telephone support line, on **Freephone 0800 329952**

OU UCU Branch General Meeting on 24th September

We have a general meeting at 12:30 on 24th September on OU campus at Walton Hall. A full agenda, including the precise venue (i.e. the room) and any motions to be discussed, will be circulated before the meeting.

Any motions members wish to put to the meeting for consideration on 24th September should be sent to ucu@open.ac.uk by or on 19th September.

The national pay negotiations and threats of redundancies in many HE institutions are certain to be items for discussion, and will be fed into consultation meetings that national UCU is holding the following week.

YOUR EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Officers:-

President: Roger Walters (r.j.walters@open.ac.uk)
Honorary Secretary: Lesley Kane (lhk4@tutor.open.ac.uk) (AL)
Treasurer: David Knowles (AL)
Vice Presidents: Cicely Havely (*retired*); Mike McNulty (AL)
Equality Officer: Maria McCrea (R11)
Central Academic Staff Officer: Donia Scott (MCT)
Associate Lecturers Staff Officer: Sue Hawthorne (AL)
Regional Academic Staff Officer: Judy Ekins (R05)
Central Academic-Related Staff Officer: Chris Bollom (OUBS)
Regional Academic-Related Staff Officer: Andrew Wright (R07)
Past President: John Bennett (Soc Sci)

Ordinary executive members:-

Eric Bowers	Meridian	John Peters
Peter Hamilton	Bethan Norfor	Roger Rees
John James	June Payne	Eric Wade
Malcolm Jenner	Peter Piper	

Ex-officio members:-

Alan Carr (UCU national treasurer)
Pauline Collins (UCU NEC member)
Angie McConnell (UCU NEC member)
Peter Lee (NUJ father of chapel)