

Extra leave in return for changes in leave year

The UCU branch has negotiated extra leave in return for agreeing to a change in the University leave year.

The University wanted to change the leave year - including the study leave year - from the current October to September year to an August to July year. This was because of changes in public sector accounting systems. The University argued that this had made it vital to align the leave year with the financial year so as to avoid showing up outstanding leave in the end of year accounts. It is doubtful that the University's annual leave record-keeping system is sufficiently robust to have been able to evidence the amount of outstanding leave at the end of the financial year.

In order to make such a change, the University proposed a part leave year from October 2012 to July 2013.

Following lengthy negotiations the branch executive agreed to the change in leave year after securing an agreement which involves:

- a pro-rata leave entitlement in the part leave year now running, rounded up to the next whole day. For those who work full-time who would otherwise have been entitled to 27½ days leave, this will mean 28 days as a starting point.
- on top of this, an additional day's leave in the current part leave year.
- an extra day's closure at Christmas this year, which means the University will close on Friday 21 December 2012 and reopen on Wednesday 2 January 2013.
- an increased entitlement from the part leave year to the next full leave year to carry forward 15 days instead of the norm of 10 days.
- more flexibility in responding to requests for carrying forward additional leave and anticipating leave, including study leave, especially since the change from one leave year to the next will now take place during a peak holiday and conference period.
- a commitment to honouring already agreed study leave arrangements notwithstanding the change in the leave year.

This means that in the current 10 months part leave year, those who work full-time will have an entitlement to 29 days leave as well as an additional closure day.

Staff who work part time will have a pro-rata entitlement calculated on a similar basis. Internal part time staff should check with their unit, what their leave entitlement in the part leave year will be, if you have not already been informed.



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New Branch President elected

Pauline Collins has been elected unopposed as the next President of the OU UCU branch. She will take over from Roger Walters, who has been President of the branch for five years and who retires from the OU at Christmas following the AGM on 27 November.

Pauline has served on the branch executive for seven years in a variety of roles, most recently as Vice President. She has also been a member of the National Executive Committee for over four years and has recently become chair of the national Women Members Committee.

Pauline is based in the OU Belfast office where she works as a Community Partnerships Manager, her work has involved developing partnerships with schools, communities, workplaces and trade unions throughout Northern Ireland, to provide educational opportunities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. She is also a long standing Associate Lecturer and currently tutors on Openings though she has previously tutored on Social Science courses.

Lesley Kane, an AL from the South East region, has been re-elected unopposed as Hon. Secretary and there is to be a new Hon. Treasurer, Stephen Pattinson, an AL from the West Midlands region, who replaces David Knowles who is seeking election as an ordinary member of the executive.

Other officers elected unopposed are Bethan Norfor as one of the two Vice Presidents, Dorothy Calderwood as Central Academic-Related Staff Officer, Philip O'Sullivan as Regional/National Academic Staff Officer, Hilary Partridge as Regional/National Academic-Related Staff Officer and Judy Ekins as ALs officer. No nominations were received for the other Vice President, for Central Academic Staff Officer or for Equality Officer. The new branch exec will consider how best to fill these positions when it meets for the first time in December.

A contested election is taking place for twelve ordinary members of the executive committee and paper ballot papers must be returned to Popularis by 16 November 2012.



A future that works

Thousands of people took to the streets of London, Glasgow and Belfast on Saturday 20 October to march for "A Future that Works", a series of events organised by the TUC, the Scottish TUC and the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. There was a branch presence at all three events and branch banners in London and Glasgow. The march had a good and cheerful atmosphere which stands in marked contrast to the gloom of the recession. It is impossible to estimate numbers accurately but the trouble free nature of the events meant that the media down-played them.

In London there was a feeder march for disabled people and this led to an interview on the BBC News Channel with Rob Murthwaite, a disabled UCU activist from London Metropolitan University, on the impact of the cuts on disabled people which you can see at this address: <http://youtu.be/n1LPstGiigI>

Further information about the demonstration is at: <http://afuturethatworks.org>



OU UCU members carrying a branch banner in Glasgow, 20 Oct 2012

Don't sign away your moral rights of authorship

A number of instances have been reported to UCU of pressure on academic staff to sign away their moral rights in relation to copyright. UCU advises any members asked to do this to politely but firmly decline and say they are doing so on union advice. If you are in any doubt or you get into any difficulties on this please email ucu@open.ac.uk.

Staff fee waiver

Discussions between UCU and the University on possible changes to the current provision for fee waivers for staff taking University courses have reached an impasse after UCU indicated that it would not agree to a change in terms and conditions of service, to make fee waivers dependent on management agreement that the course being studied was relevant to staff development and the University refused to recognise that in operating a limitation on the amount of fee waiver for internal staff, it is acting in breach of terms and conditions of service for all categories of internal staff.



Currently all internal staff have an unlimited right, enshrined in terms and conditions of service, to fee waivers for studying any OU courses, subject to previous satisfactory progress. Whilst ALs have a right to apply for waivers, in practice the norm has been to grant ALs fee waivers which allow them to study 75 credit points. For the last year or so however the University has been applying a similar limitation in fee waivers to internal staff.

Pressure to review the current provision has arisen from the changes in the funding regime and in particular differences in the level of fees in the different countries of the UK.

UCU has indicated that it remains open to discussing any proposal to provide for consistency between the treatment of different categories of staff and between staff in the different countries of the UK, but it will not discuss this until and unless the University stops operating non-negotiated restrictions in fee waivers, which are inconsistent with the provisions in terms and conditions of service.

OU UCU stalwart has now retired

Alan Carr has now retired from the Open University, Belfast office - he is now a retired member of UCU and will continue as the UCU National Treasurer and the leader of the UCU negotiating team on USS. Alan was first elected to AUT's National Executive Committee in 1992, and remained a member until the point of merger in 2006. His roles included chair of the employment committee and chair of the tactical action and campaigning committee. He served as AUT President in 1999-2000, and again the following year, filling a vacancy in the role of president caused by the death of David Green. He then became honorary treasurer of AUT in 2003, becoming joint honorary treasurer of UCU during the transitional year (2006-2007), and has been re-elected as UCU's honorary treasurer on three subsequent occasions (2007, 2009 and 2011). The OU branch would like to record its thanks for **Alan's dedicated service to our trade union. Alan will remain a member of the branch executive until May 2013, when his period of office as National Treasurer ends.**



Study leave

Academic staff are reminded that, following agreement between the UCU branch and the University, all Study leave accrued up to the academic year 2010/11 has been ring-fenced regardless of whether carry over was approved or not. We understand that not all line managers of academics or heads of departments are aware of this. More recently, the branch has been in discussion with the University about the circulation of lists of activities that might be undertaken during study leave. Such lists sometimes say that particular activities must fall within a **Faculty's research and scholarship strategy. The lists have no formal status and the requirement for study leave activity to comply with a Faculty's strategic goals may constrain academic freedom.** If your Study Leave application is refused on the basis that your proposed activity is not listed or does not fit a **Faculty's strategy, please** let us know by emailing ucu@open.ac.uk.

Sheila Tyler, Central Academic Staff Officer

Together we are stronger

Maintaining a strong union is the best way to ensure that you and your colleagues at the OU enjoy the best rewards and conditions in your work. The more members we have, the stronger we are.

So how about spreading the news for us?

You can tell colleagues that as a member of UCU the benefits include:

- unrivalled protection and representation at work
- help with pay and conditions of service
- access to trusted financial and insurance services provided by UCUPlus
- excellent legal services including our unique Legal Protection at Work scheme
- expert advice on your pension rights
- free indemnity insurance at work
- online employment and workplace advice from the UCU Support Centre
- professional advice and support via Recourse
- access to trained OU case workers
- branch specialists for Academic, Academic-Related, Research and AL issues.

Thank you for your continued support of OU UCU.

Jeni Aldridge, member of Recruitment, Organisation & Campaigns Committee



Remote participation in branch meetings

The branch is at last developing plans to enable members to participate remotely in branch meetings. For some time most meetings have been webcast via the OU stadium website but that only allows those not physically present at a meeting to view and listen to it but not to take part in votes or speak.

It is planned to provide for remote participation via Elluminate - a facility known to many ALs and to some internal staff, especially those based in faculties. A test run at the last branch meeting identified some technical problems and also highlighted difficulties in the conduct of a meeting with remote participants but the system is being tested further and it is hoped to have the facility up and running by the time of the AGM on Tuesday 27 November; further details will be circulated in due course.



Our Elluminate room is located at this address: <http://learn3.open.ac.uk/mod/ouelluminate/view.php?id=26122>

The Spark — pass it on

A member has suggested that all OU UCU members should forward this new copy of Spark to a few non-members — please forward to anyone you think would be interested in reading our news.

The Branch Administrator, Deb Shann, sends colour copies of Spark to a few members who leave it in their shared areas/ common rooms — if you can do the same please contact her on 01908 6(53069) or ucu@open.ac.uk.

Out of office message

If you use out of office messages in MS Outlook then why not give yours a standard signature like the one below — currently being used by one of our Exec members.

Not a member of UCU? It makes sense to join! Find out more at www.ucu.org.uk or email ucu@open.ac.uk

UCU Pre-92 HE Special Conference on USS – 13 Sept 2012

The Special Conference took sensible decisions, by overwhelming majorities, on the key issues before it.

The time for negotiation and the time for action

Conference recognised that the “work to contract” action was not putting sufficient pressure on the employers to force concessions. It also recognised that marginal escalation would fail and that members would not be prepared to contemplate seriously disruptive and coercive forms of action unless and until all attempts to seek a negotiated settlement had been exhausted.

USS

Conference therefore agreed to resume the suspension of action on the basis of a commitment from the employers to resume negotiations on all of the issues between us. The suspension will be maintained for as long as serious and constructive negotiations are taking place with a view to reaching an acceptable settlement by early 2013.

Negotiating objectives

Conference recognised that previous conference decisions had left UCU without a clear or coherent set of objectives, making it impossible to reach a negotiated settlement to the dispute. Conference therefore agreed to re-affirm the clear set of objectives **which the UCU had set itself in May 2011 and which the Union’s negotiators had been pursuing until talks broke down following the resumption of action in May 2012.**

The objectives are to:

- de-risk USS through the introduction of an acceptable CARE scheme for new entrants
- close the gap between the value of the CARE and final salary sections by negotiating improvements to the CARE scheme which would secure broad comparability with TPS, including the removal of inflation caps.

Work to contract action

Conference recognised that the work to contract action was valued by many members as a valuable safeguard against excessive workloads. Conference therefore instructed the HE Committee to issue guidelines on workloads and to consider re-launching work to contract action as part of a separate campaign on workloads.

Further information at: <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=5799>

Workload pressure survey

In response to evidence of increasing pressure of work on many staff, the OU UCU branch has decided to launch a survey on workload of internal staff which is being organised by representatives of central and regional/national and academic and academic-related staff.

At this stage the survey will not involve ALs because of their very different working conditions and circumstances, but our AL reps committee will be asked to consider whether to undertake a parallel survey.

The survey will be run in conjunction with national initiatives on workload, with a possibility of working to contract - see last paragraph in the above article.

**Tackling Stress
Tackling Workload** UCU Anti-Stress
and Bullying Week
19-23 November 2012

Using your phone in an emergency

Did those of you who are members of internal staff know that you can use your phone, even if your computer is sleeping - because you have not used it for a while - provided you have left your PC switched on and not turned it off altogether. So in case you need to use your phone in an emergency - perhaps because you are suddenly ill or suffer some form of attack or fit or perhaps because you are disturbed by intruders and at risk of being attacked by them - it is sensible to turn on your PC as soon as you get into the office and not switch it off again until you leave, even if you are not going to use it for a long period, since you may not have time or the ability to log on in order to use the phone in an emergency.



Now if you did not know this, then you are probably in the great majority of internal staff and that is because the University management has proved completely unable to communicate this simple stark but absolutely crucial information effectively.

When the Microsoft Lync software - which links the telephone handset to PCs such that you cannot use your phone if your PC is switched not on - was first introduced, after totally inadequate piloting, which did not include any academic staff; UCU pointed out this serious problem to management and pressed for urgent action before a tragedy occurred. Some months later we were told there was not a problem because it is possible to use your phone when it is sleeping - but very few people realised this and so may sometimes not switch on their PCs, or switch them back on after returning from a meeting or lunch, until they actually need to use their PC or phone. Hence the need for proper advice to staff to always have their PC on sleeping when not in use.

After a further delay the response was a lengthy item on the intranet entitled 10 things you did not know about LYNC in which this crucial and potentially life saving advice was buried. This was then followed many months later by a bland piece on the intranet home page - which of course rapidly slipped off the front page and which did not fully stress the importance of the information. intranet.open.ac.uk/ouintra/story.aspx?id=24344

The inability of the management to convey sharply and starkly such critical advice over a protracted period is at best woefully inept and at worst criminally negligent. Will it take an attack on someone who has switched off their PC or even more tragically someone collapsing with a heart attack to stir someone from their complacency over this matter - we hope not of course, but that is a very likely consequence until and unless the management takes this matter and their responsibility to ensure a safe working environment very much more seriously than they have thus far.

The interim AL agreement

It is still early days, but we are getting a number of queries including "Are we paid for CDSA now?"

The answer to this question about CDSA is that ALs should, from now on, get half a day's pay per year for staff development. In your CDSA year this is intended to cover the time you spend on CDSA. In other years you may be asked to use it for something else.



We are still waiting for the details of the merit scheme to be worked out, that will give some ALs access to the discretionary salary points at the top of the Academic 2 scale, and we hope it won't be long until this is in place. The university will do this as part of the agreement.

ALs who have lost October appointments at less than three month's notice this autumn should have MOLD status until October 2013 in order to look for another course.

This autumn we had a number of students arriving late in their tutor groups. A few of our members have communicated to us that their salary has not reflected the late arrivals. The OU normally does a second headcount at six weeks to pick up on late arrivals, and has agreed to look at individual cases in which late allocations are missed due to the natural drop out rate. If this happens to you, and your late allocations are missed and this affects your salary, please get in touch with us at ucu@open.ac.uk and we will speak to management about your case.

In most faculties, the fall in student numbers wasn't as severe as was feared, partly because there are still a number of transitional students taking level 1 courses. This means that relatively few small groups below 80% of normal size for 85% of standard salary were run in most faculties.

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...continued The interim AL agreement

The number of small groups by faculty are FELS (90), HSC (48), MCT (47), Arts (35), FBL (29), Social Science (14) and Science (11). Three quarters of the small groups run were at level 1. Normally the OU does not run groups below 80% in size, and without the temporary agreement to run small groups some of the tutors with these groups would have lost their appointments. It is hard to know exactly how many more losses there would have been without the temporary agreement, but there would probably have been several in each region in FELS, and at least one in each affected region in the other faculties. At the moment we believe the temporary agreement is the best way through a difficult situation.

Extra pay for taking more students kicked in at 115% of standard group size this October, which is at 23 students if the standard group size is 20. We do not think the university fulfilled its promise to be more lenient in allowing personal leave of absence (LOA) (which might have been an alternative to small groups in some places) for ALs, and this is picked up in the article on the new AL redundancy criteria.

Lesley Kane, Honorary Secretary

The new AL redundancy selection criteria

We have had a fair amount of input from members about the new criteria. UCU does not sign off redundancy selection criteria, and has not done so for some years. However, we had asked OU management to provide some protection for ALs against suffering multiple losses of modules. We think the majority of staff regard this as fair, and this has been included in the new criteria.

When we saw the final version towards the end of August there were some aspects that surprised us and caused concern on the union side. In particular that after promising to be more lenient over granting personal leave of absence (LOA), the new redundancy selection criteria **made it more difficult to do so without risking one's career. The result was that at a time when having a few more ALs take LOA in order to cope with a (hopefully) temporary dip in student numbers in some faculties, we had fewer than usual taking LOA.** We will be pursuing the matter of what now happens to those who did take LOA in good faith after the communication on TutorHome earlier in the summer.

We also question whether there should in fact be a penalty in terms of redundancy points for taking a year's LOA for approved purposes. Our staff tutor members tell us that amongst the most common reasons for AL LOA are that it is the AL's PhD thesis year, or for serious illness in the family.

Increasing someone's chance of being made redundant when they become better qualified is bizarre, and doing so when someone takes a year to care for a terminally ill relative is not the way we would expect a compassionate employer to behave. As home workers ALs do not get the same support from social services and charities (e.g. Macmillan) when caring for seriously ill relatives. If someone is present in the home it is not treated in the same way as if a vulnerable person would be left alone while family members are at work. In these circumstances a decision to take a year off can be a responsible decision in the best interests of students.

For the first time the criteria penalise ALs who are redeployed to a course after its first year, and this works in the opposite direction to job protection. One reason the replacement of M150 and T175 with TU100 produced few redundancies is because we were able to advise those who were able and willing to apply for vacancies on maths courses such as MST121.

UCU was also hoping that the protection against multiple losses would be on equal terms (i.e. count for as many points) with the experience criterion. Currently the experience criterion counts for between 1 point and 6 points, while multiple losses protection counts for between 1 point and 4 points. Protection against multiple losses is intended to protect ALs against a sudden loss of significant income.

The criteria are applied sequentially, and this means that a decision can be taken on disciplinary record alone, which we feel is **disproportionate especially in the case of a first warning. A few disabled ALs have flagged up that the "wider contribution to the university" includes activities not under the AL contract that some disabled AL staff would have difficulty doing, e.g. residential school.**

Another change is that the criteria no longer take account of the number of appointments an AL has. However, from the statistics we have been provided with by the university, the number of ALs who have lost their only appointment due to falling student numbers has been slightly lower at 31 in October 2012 than it was at 35 in October 2011.

Lesley Kane, Honorary Secretary



Branch website receives praise

The branch recently received an email from Simon Parry, a Senior Consultant with Infobo, a Project Management/web agency — Simon has written an article for the Labour Research Department titled: “10 of the best examples of union branch websites” and the OU branch of UCU website is listed in that top 10.



Simon says “Hosted on a sub-domain of the Open University website, this site has a clear navigation structure and up-to-date information. The site even has videos of meetings, although you’ll need to work at the Open University to have access to these.”

To see the full article, please visit: www.infobo.com/trade-union-branch-local-websites/

No industrial action on national claim

There is to be no industrial action by UCU on the joint unions’ national claim in higher education, despite the employers offering a final pay offer way below inflation for the fourth year in succession and despite their refusal to engage in national discussions about the gender pay gap or a provision for disability leave.

This follows a ballot for industrial action which showed that only 44% of those who took part were willing to take part in strike action, although a majority - 70% - were willing to take part in action short of a strike. The national negotiators - who had been authorised by the Higher Education Committee to take a decision on action following a careful assessment of the ballot outcome and of the decisions of other unions - took the view that such action was unsustainable since any seriously disruptive action had the risk of retaliatory measures by the employers - up to and including full salary deduction for partial performance - and without the ability to then call full strike action it would be impossible to sustain such action in the face of such threats. It is also believed that many members voted for action short of a strike under the misapprehension that this would be risk free, but any action would either be ineffective as it would not cause enough disruption to force a rethink by the employers or would lead to severe retaliation. Furthermore no other union had even contemplated action short of a strike.

No other union is taking strike action except for the Educational Institute of Scotland - EIS - which held a one day strike on 23 October. EIS has a very tiny number of members in higher education.

It is likely now that the employers will impose a 1% pay increase.

UCU branches including the OU branch will be taking up the equality issues in the national claim at a local level. It is believed that the gender pay gap, whilst very poor across the sector, is relatively reasonable in the OU. The branch will be pressing strongly for a provision for disability leave - a mechanism which separates out disability-related absences from work and ill-health absences, and which would reduce the scope for institutionalised disability discrimination.



UCU academic-related newsletter

UCU now produces a national academic-related newsletter — you can see the current (May 2012) and past issues at this address: <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=5174>

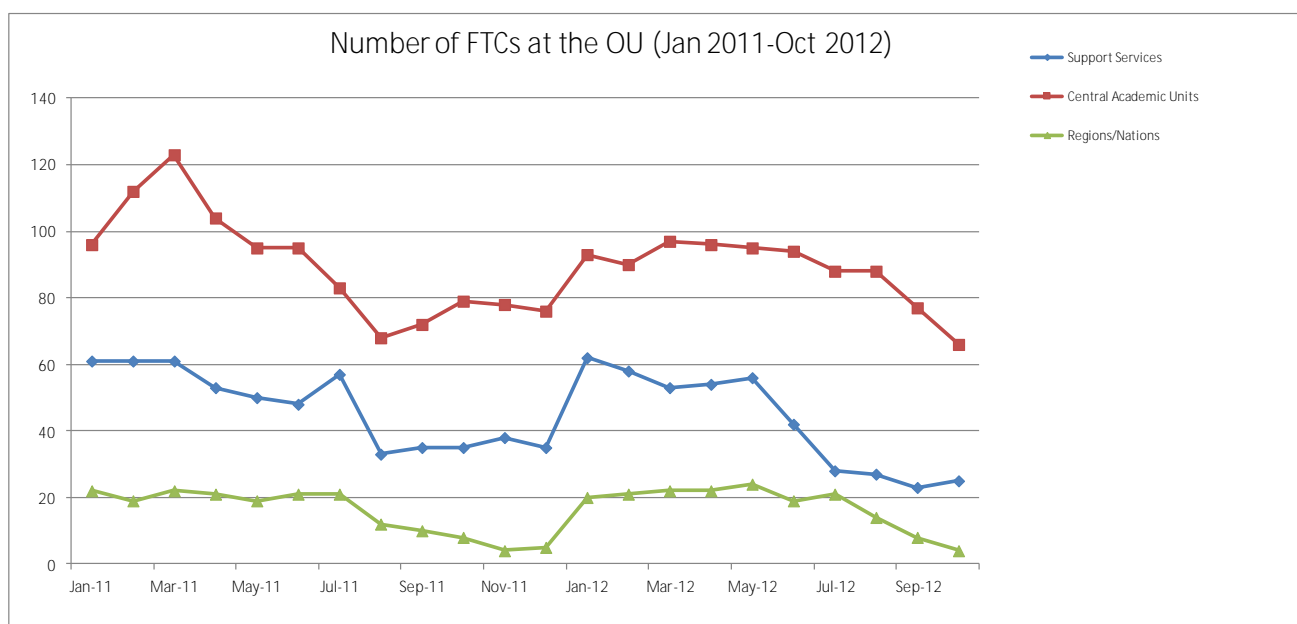


If you would like to be included on the distribution list for this newsletter, please email Stefano Fella at UCU Head office: sfella@ucu.org.uk.

Fixed term contract successes

We are very pleased to announce that two members of OU staff who were both on fixed term contracts (FTCs) for at least four years have now been made permanent members of OU staff. The UCU branch meets monthly with HR to discuss all OU staff who are on a FTC and the branch office logs the number of staff on a FTC each month, see graph below.

If you have been on a FTC for four years then you have a legal right to request permanency. For further information please visit: <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=3545> or contact the branch office on 01908 6(53069) or ucu@open.ac.uk.



Four new publicity contacts and new rep in Ireland

We are pleased to report that we have found four new publicity contacts and one new regional/national centre rep for Belfast:

- Chris Hartley, MCT for the Venables building.
- Ben Mestel, MCT for the Alan Turing building.
- David Clover, MCT for the Jennie Lee building.
- Rachel Oubaha has agreed to be the publicity contact for the Oxford regional/national centre.
- **Philip O'Sullivan has taken over the role of national centre rep in the Ireland office, in place of Alan Carr, who has retired.**



A UCU representative in every department/faculty across the Open University would give the union even greater visibility and strength. In the first instance it would only involve making sure there is a UCU poster and an application form holder on all of the notice boards in all OU buildings.

As you know, nationally the University and College Union is the acknowledged and respected leading higher education trade union, whose strength comes from its local branches and active members within individual institutions. The collective voice of members within a university can contribute to the ethos of the institution; a local branch that has a full complement of officers, and departmental and specialist staff group representatives is highly effective.

OU branch of UCU casework & the role of a rep

At its away day event earlier this year the OU branch of UCU discussed items relating to the branch's most important function: helping its members with their issues in the workplace, or as we call it casework. All of our caseworkers are trained and although we have a quite a few of them not many of them are based on the Walton Hall Campus. The away day event agreed to nominate Meridian as the Branch Casework Manager and together with other caseworkers, we are currently supporting around 40 of our members with issues. In 2011 we ran three casework training events and have not organised any this year **but we will be doing so again next year, 2013.** The "job description" for a UCU rep is shown below and although we have several "reps", **only those who have completed the casework training are qualified to support members.** We would like to ask that all members request a caseworker via the UCU office rather than approaching the caseworker directly, contact details are on the last page.

Our Hon. Secretary and AL's Officer tend to handle all of our Associate Lecturer queries but we do have some AL caseworkers who are keen to gain experience in supporting fellow members.

The main role of the reps and activists is to sustain the branch, this can be broken down further into five main areas, namely:

Recruiting: attending new staff inductions and following up new staff after induction; identifying existing non-members.

Organising: **talking and listening to members' and non-members' views and** finding out their problems and concerns, possibly organising around issues of concern to members; identifying areas with low levels of membership (the branch does regular membership mapping); educating and informing members on issues of importance to them; encouraging members to get involved; encouraging members to attend and participate in branch meetings; identifying, supporting and developing other activists; distributing leaflets and UCU publicity; encouraging, supporting, training and organising others to do all of these things.

Representing members: Member representation can be either collective or individual. This involves: keeping up to date with procedures, agreements, policies and contractual conditions at your workplace; keeping up to date with where to find information if you, or members, should need it.

Collective representation: **attending branch, department or open meetings to listen to members' views and help them make** decisions about the course of action; taking up issues with management or the Human Resources department.

Individual representation: interviewing individuals to listen to their views and help them decide a course of action; providing or obtaining support, advice and assistance to individuals; accompanying or representing members at meetings or hearings with management.

Campaigning: Campaigning can be on local, regional or national issues of importance to UCU and may include broad campaigns (so long as they do not contravene UCU policy) – for example against racism or privatisation – and community or other union campaigns.

Other tasks: keeping in contact with your Regional Support Official. Ours is Lydia Richards in the UCU Eastern & Home Counties region; keeping in contact with other unions in your workplace, eg UNISON; keeping records and notes of individual casework.

Deb Shann, Branch Administrator



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 OU UCU branch

I've been on the committee of Aberdeen branch of UCU for 10 years, have served on the JNCC and am a personal caseworker. Sometimes I wonder how and why I got involved...and then I remember.

I joined the AUT, as it then was, whilst a probationary lecturer – probably as some kind of perceived insurance policy, but also **because one of my colleagues was a local activist and made me aware of "what the Union did"**. Initially membership was the full extent of my involvement. It was a relatively quiet period and staff numbers around me were increasing. No need to worry, surely – after all, the Union is only there for the bad things in life - right?

The same colleague knew that I was reasonably adept at putting together web pages, so he persuaded me to do this for the local branch. I had not actually realised that this meant I would end up on committee! So, at the first ever (A)GM I attended, I was voted onto committee. I have a very clear memory of that first GM – with other members all speaking eloquently – but **what shocked me was the very low number of people in attendance. Not something I could criticise, as I'd never been before, but I assumed that somehow more people would be "doing something". Who those people were, I'd never thought.**

So to the committee. I remember sitting through the first few meetings trying to make sense of the many initials and acronyms that were thrown around – it was very confusing. The attendance even at committee was rather low. I attended **when I could (which is all that's asked), and tried to get to grips with all that was going on. It took a while, but soon I developed an understanding, not just of the initials but also of the issues. The more I understood, the more I couldn't understand why others were not keen to get involved.**

It was also apparent that the "scientists" were in the minority on the committee at that time. This was not an issue in itself, but I saw the importance of a wide representation as the University was such a heterogeneous entity. It was also a great point of being on the committee – meeting people from across the University, and hearing different points of view.

This latter point is very important. I could say it was good to meet some "like-minded individuals" but this is not true! The great thing is that the committee is not some single-minded entity, following slavishly a single agenda. The committee these days is much larger and represents probably a wider range of staff. There are disagreements, there are arguments, but I have made some great friends and received some excellent training too. Our common purpose is representation, and representation is very difficult when people don't engage. I really get upset when people say to me "the Union doesn't represent me" or "the Union didn't do this well" – my answer is always the same:

"Well then - why don't YOU get involved?"

Jan Skakle, Exec member at the University of Aberdeen branch of UCU

Dear UCU (from an email to the branch office)

It's disappointing that my email vote couldn't count in the recent Branch meeting. I'm thinking that if people in regions/nations did this, it would only take a minute or two to count them up at your end if people put for/against in the email subject line. Could this suggestion be passed along to whoever is on the working group as an option for them to consider until some other system is in place, please?

Failing that, we could always ask those in MK to render a rousing chorus of "We shall not be moved" at the start of each meeting – that alone would be worth tuning in for!

OU UCU Member in Yorkshire regional/national centre



Your Executive Committee 2011-12

Please note: the Exec Committee listed here operates until the AGM on 27 November 2012, for changes to the Exec see article on page 2.

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- President: Roger Walters (roger.walters)
Honorary Secretary: Lesley Kane (l.h.kane)
Honorary Treasurer: David Knowles (d.w.knowles)
Vice Presidents: Pauline Collins & Bethan Norfor
Immediate Past President: N/a as Roger Walters
Equality Officer: Jonathan Jewell
Central Academic Staff Officer: Sheila Tyler
Central Academic-Related Staff Officer: Vacancy
Regional/National Academic Staff Officer: **Philip O'Sullivan**
Regional/National Academic-Related Staff Officer: Hilary Partridge
Associate Lecturers Officer: Judy Ekins
Ordinary Members:
Jeni Aldridge
John Bennett
Eric Bowers
Anne Brown
Dorothy Calderwood
Gill Clough
Axel Hagermann
Sue Hawthorne
Bruce Heil
Jonathan Hughes
Malcolm Jenner
Mike McNulty
John Peters
Peter Piper
Eric Wade
UCU National Exec Committee Members:
Alan Carr, Pauline Collins, Lesley Kane & Roger Walters

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.

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.



Canvas bag



Mouse mat



UCU mug



A5 notepad



Lanyard



Pens



Publicity posters

Branch meetings 2012

Future scheduled branch meeting dates are as follows:

AGM, 27th November 2012, 12.30pm in the Berrill Lecture theatre

Webcast at: <http://bit.ly/LKJNOO>

Elluminate room address for OU UCU meetings:

<http://learn3.open.ac.uk/mod/oulluminate/view.php?id=26122>

