

Mileage rate to increase

After months of negotiations, the University has agreed to a formula which links the standard University mileage rate - currently 37.5p - to the price of petrol. When the University introduced a standard mileage rate several years ago to replace the plethora of different rates for different activities and for different staff, there was no agreement on how this rate would be varied over time to reflect increased motoring costs.

In the light of this formula the mileage rate will be increased to 38.5p from 1 August 2010.

CHERI to close

The University has decided to close CHERI - the highly prestigious Centre for Higher Education Research and Innovation - by 31 July 2011. The premises occupied by CHERI in the centre of London are to be sold.

CHERI, along with Open University Validation Services (OUVS), was established when the OU took over some of the residual functions of the Council for National Academic Awards in 1994 and many of its current staff have been with CHERI throughout its life.



Discussions are ongoing between University management, the staff of CHERI and UCU on the implications for CHERI staff of this closure. There will be redeployment opportunities for those able and willing to relocate to Walton Hall but this is unlikely to be an option for at least some of the staff for whom either travel to Walton Hall or relocation to the Milton Keynes area is impractical because of personal circumstances.

The University has delayed any steps to declare a potential redundancy situation - which would involve the threat of possible compulsory redundancy further down the road - and UCU has welcomed this as it allows more time for redundancy avoidance measures and for the staff to consider their options.

Enhanced early Retirement scheme

The University looks set to announce an enhanced early retirement scheme open to all members of internal staff who are legally eligible to retire - ie those aged 55 or over. This scheme, which is likely to be open for about three months in the autumn and early winter 2010, is broadly similar to the current provision for early retirement. It will require units to meet the costs of any early retirements but there will be provision for two years enhancement for anyone granted early retirement and it is expected that the University will be more disposed to agree to requests for early retirement than under the current arrangements.

Default Retirement age

UCU is calling on the University to abolish the default retirement age immediately, rather than wait until the end of 2011 - when it has already committed to doing so - or until it is forced to do so by changes in legislation.



Redundancy—know your rights!

The UCU branch continues to pick up rumours - and rumours of rumours - about redundancies in many areas of the University. There should be no redundancies unless the University has complied with agreements with UCU and its legal obligations. In some areas, including CHERI, OUVS, CWP, COBE and FELS staff involved with the PGCE - staff have been invited to discuss their intentions and this follows due consultation with UCU in the context of specific reviews. But on occasions we believe that redundancies take place without such consultation and we are determined to challenge this.

The definition of redundancy is rather complicated but in simple terms it is when a job or jobs cease to exist. And it does not matter if these are dressed up as voluntary severance - if the result is that the particular job stops being done, then that is a redundancy. If you know of any talk of redundancy or severance apart from in the areas above, and especially if pressure is put on you to take redundancy or voluntary severance, please contact us at ucu@open.ac.uk - don't assume we already know about this.



Consultation on Industrial Action - members' survey

National negotiations both on pay and on developing agreed proposals to improve job security in the sector have made virtually no progress. For the second year running the employers are offering a pay cut in real terms - their current offer is 0.4% which is well below inflation - and they refuse even to enter into negotiations on job security. UCU's national Higher Education Committee has therefore called a special meeting for early September to decide on how to progress the campaign on these issues and to consider the possibility of industrial action. In order to help the Higher Education Committee make decisions which are in tune with the views of members, it has commissioned a survey of the views of members.

The survey can be accessed at <http://www.ucu.org.uk/heconsultation2010>.

It is absolutely essential that as many members as possible respond to this survey - there are just 5 questions and it will take you 2 minutes to complete - so that the Higher Education Committee has a clear view of members' feelings, so please respond as soon as possible.

Ian Martin

It is with great sadness that the UCU branch has to report the sudden and untimely death of Ian Martin following a heart attack. Ian was a Staff Tutor in Maths Computing and Technology in the OU in the West Midlands and had previously worked in the OU in the East Midlands. He had recently become active in the branch and was the union's representative for the West Midlands Regional Centre. Ian was held in very high regard by many colleagues, both central and regional and by many ALs who came into contact with him. We extend our condolences to Ian's widow, Dianne, who is an Arts Faculty Manager in the OU in the South.

Uncertain Financial situation

The University awaits anxiously news of how the threatened government cuts in public spending are going to affect the OU. Cost cutting measures, including non replacement of many posts and normally internal-only advertising, are taking place across the University and a number of reviews are ongoing.

The university's finances are currently in a fairly healthy state though a programme of cuts is being implemented in order to meet future expected and already known funding reductions. It remains to be seen whether it will consider more draconian steps necessary when the full impact of the government cuts is known.



OU employee appears on UCU website

Heather Angelinetta a Project Manager in Student Services asked the branch office a question about her pension and she ended up agreeing for her case to appear as an Example on the UCU USS FAQs web page!

www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=4573&detailid=4645 Heather Angelinetta is age 24 and has been a member of USS since November 2006.

Heather is facing redundancy after almost 4 years on fixed-term contracts. In order to enhance her career prospects for the future, she has enrolled on a four year course at the University of Kent. Heather hopes to return to full time, permanent university employment but, if the employers' pension proposals were to be implemented, she would suffer a huge financial hit - Heather would:

- be treated as a “new entrant” in pension terms,
- lose her current “final salary” pension package,
- find herself paying more for a vastly inferior “career average” scheme,
- losing in excess of £130,000 in future pension expectations.



Academic-Related Staff Open Meeting

The chair of UCU's national Academic Related Committee, Patricia Hulme from Nottingham University, addressed a meeting of academic related staff in June which covered the impact of cuts on academic related staff, excessive workload, and outsourcing among other issues.

Research Staff titles, Open Meeting

All research staff have been invited to an Open meeting to discuss the latest proposals from the University concerning changed research staff job titles on Friday 30th July at 12.30pm in Central Meeting Room 1.

TUC training courses in Beds, Bucks & Herts

Central Bedfordshire College runs free courses for Trade Unionists:

TUC Diploma in Occupational Health & Safety: a one year day-release course for Trade Union Health & Safety reps, starting 21st September 2010.

TUC Diploma in Employment Law: a one year day release course for Trade Union Representatives, starting 23rd September 2010.

The courses can be done at the Central Bedfordshire college in Dunstable or at the Herts Trade Union Learning Centre in Watford. For further information please contact Mushtaq Arain on 01582 477776 ext 271 or by email marain@dunstable.ac.uk or by post:

M. Arain, Course Co-ordinator, Central Bedfordshire College, Kingsway, Dunstable LU5 4HG

The main way to obtain paid release is through the branch's facility time agreement with the Open University. Workplace representatives have a legal right to attend TUC and union approved courses without loss of earnings under the Employment Protection and Health & Safety legislation. This is strengthened by the ACAS Code of Practice on paid release for training.

TMA Marking time survey for all Associate Lecturers

I would like to say a big thank you to all the ALs who are taking part in this survey. The numbers continue to grow with nearly as many responses in the last month as in the previous two. The overall results are in line with previous surveys which the branch has run; that ALs mostly take an average of between an hour and a half and two hours to mark a TMA. However, this is the first time we have attempted to break this down by course and by TMA. You can see the results so far on our website at http://ucu.open.ac.uk/associate_lecturers. The spreadsheet is updated approximately monthly. The university is taking notice of the figures and we intend to continue to run the survey at least for the remainder of this year. Our aim is to get the OU to collect this data themselves, we think it is useful feedback for course teams, they should want to know if they are setting assignments which are difficult and time consuming to mark. It is also useful for ALs, they can compare their own marking times with others on the course and find out if they are much quicker or slower than their colleagues. If they are wanting to take on more work for the OU it is helpful to know in advance how long other ALs are taking to mark the TMAs of the course they are interested in.



If you are an AL and have not yet taken part in this survey, please join in. It is not just for UCU members. It only takes a couple of minutes to do, although you will need to log your time as you work through a batch of TMAs. You will find the survey at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/7XRHDYW> and the results of the survey so far are on our website on the Associate Lecturers page: http://ucu.open.ac.uk/associate_lecturers.

Sue Hawthorne, ALs officer

STOP PRESS: the Science Faculty have now taken the issue of TMA marking on board but would like to see more data & comments, so please spread the word that more ALs need to complete our survey at the address above.

No pay increase for ALs outside the UK

The university has refused to introduce any changes to the pay of ALs outside the UK despite changes in exchange rates, which appear to be long lasting and which have led to a real cut in the pay of ALs outside the UK. Further discussions are taking place around this issue and all affected branch members will be consulted about this shortly.

Correction—the Spark April 2010

In an article in the last edition of SPARK: http://ucu.open.ac.uk/the_spark

I said that the OU had agreed to provide an email address for ALs to give their comments on their DALs feedback, if they wish to do so, in the interim period before the full performance review system is up and running. In fact, there will be no special email address for this, and ALs should contact their staff tutor for the course in question if they wish to record comments on DALs feedback.

Sue Hawthorne
ALs officer

OU branch website: ucu.open.ac.uk

The branch website has a “What’s new” page so you can see what has changed recently on it: <http://ucu.open.ac.uk>.

- Photos have been added of most of the Executive Committee: http://ucu.open.ac.uk/branch_committee, there is one page for the Officers and another page for all the ordinary members.
- A UCU video called “A day in the life” has been posted on the news page and shows some of the work of UCU.
- A second set of results from the branch TMA marking time survey for all ALs has been posted on the ALs page.

New OU UCU Branch banner

It was decided at a recent Exec meeting that we needed a new banner, the old one still has the old union name of “Association of University Teachers.” The new banner has now arrived and so any member wishing to take part in a protest march or rally is welcome to take the banner along, please contact the office on 01908 6(53069) or email ucu@open.ac.uk.



New Reps for our Branch

We are pleased to welcome the following new reps that have volunteered since the last issue of Spark, thank you to them! For a full list of all reps, please go to our website: <http://ucu.open.ac.uk/people>

Walton Hall

Arts Faculty:	Carol Gillespie
FELS:	Daniel Allington
LTS:	Roger Moore
Student Services:	Heather Angelinetta (until October 2010)

Regional/National centres:

Yorkshire	Elvira Haeussler
South East	Martina Gibbons

21st June 2010 United for Education Day of Action

UCU branch officers held a recruitment table in the Wind tunnel on 21st June, the 5 Unions joint day of action, along with UNISON. UCU and UNISON collected a total of 230 signatures on the petition which has now been returned to UNISON Head office, to be presented at the next round of pay talks. At the time of writing, the online petition has had 8298 people sign it, further information on the website:

<http://unitedforeducation.org.uk/sign-the-petition>



Report on Disability TUC, 19-20 May 2010

Thirteen delegates, drawn from further and higher education, attended this important conference, including Roger Walters, OU UCU Branch President. Motions ranged from public sector cuts, mental health, disability rights and public transport. UCU proposed a very important motion on disability hate crime. After a controversial and vibrant debate in which the delegate lined the motion to the report 'getting away with murder' it was passed unanimously. A delegate from UCU ensured that early motions linked with the attacks upon trade unions and the right to strike



In addition, UCU proposed an emergency motion concerning the imminent threat of the closure of the University of Bristol's centre for Deaf Studies. After a vibrant debate this motion was passed by the conference.

UCU Delegates participated fully in debate, formally questioning sections of the TUC report concerning lifelong learning, the use of Braille information and public sector cuts. The delegation abstained from voting on Remploy pending a debate regarding UCU policy regarding sheltered work places and suggested remittance of a motion about assisted suicide.

The collective nature of union action regarding such issues as Fit for Work notes was highlighted by a UCU delegate. UCU was asked to second a motion from the NUT regarding dignity and respect for disabled people and the lack of action by public bodies on the issue of establishment.

A powerful and international input was made by a union delegate from Columbia TUC. This evoked a standing ovation from the entire delegation.

A motion on assisted suicide proved controversial. As a result of delegation discussion a UCU delegate asked for the motion to be remitted to the TUC committee for a more complete motion which included the complexity of the issue. Because the motion was not remitted UCU and other unions voted against the motion. The vote went to a count and was passed. The final motion concerned accessible public transport. UCU participated in the speeches and the motion was passed unanimously.

Sasha Callaghan, past president of UCU was elected for the TUC committee. Congratulations to her!

Pat Roche TUC Delegation Leader

UCU Teacher Education Network

UCU is trying to revive teacher education as an area of activity for the union. Both AUT and NATFHE had very lively teacher education committees who considered policy issues in this area. Of late activity has fallen away, and we believe that the time would be good to raise the union's profile in this area.

UCU invites any UCU teacher education members to contact either John Offord jofford@ucu.org.uk or Dan Taubman dtaubman@ucu.org.uk. We are looking for UCU members who would wish to join in the first instance an electronic network. We are hoping to organise a UCU event on teacher education in the autumn. This would, amongst other things, try to bring together all the issues around teacher education that are of interest and concern to UCU members.



Dan Taubman, UCU Senior National Education Official

ALs—do you have a large student group?

UCU has become increasingly concerned that the OU is exploiting arrangements designed to allow some flexibility on group size, to save money on the tuition salary bill. Under the current contract the university is allowed to give ALs groups of up to 129% of students with no accompanying increase in salary. This means a group of up to 19 students where the group size is 15, or up to 25 where the group size is 20. There is no doubt that the extra students mean a real increase in work for the ALs affected.

The system is not supposed to allow line managers to impose extra students without consent. Where the number of students registered for a course in an area seems likely to exceed the number which will give the ALs contracted to teach the course a standard size group, line managers should contact the ALs concerned and ask if they are willing to take a larger group. It is rare for line managers who do this to point out the implications for the ALs concerned in terms of salary and workload. The next step should be that ALs who are willing to take extra students are given a group large enough to attract a salary upgrade. This is 20% for a group in the range 130 – 150% and more for larger groups, see http://www.open.ac.uk/tutors/employment-info/pages/salary-and-benefits/additional_student_allowance.htm for full details. ALs who are not willing to take extra students should receive a standard size group. Of course, we understand that it is not always possible to do this, sometimes the number of students registered can not be so easily distributed among the available ALs. This is why the provision to allocate up to 129% was agreed to, but a further safeguard is that ALs should not be given groups in this range year on year. If this is necessary then the university should accommodate extra students by appointing more ALs to teach the course.



We believe that the university is not keeping to these arrangements, but instead in some regions and faculties is routinely filling groups to 129%. The possibility of saving money in this way has been openly discussed at some faculty meetings. UCU gets information on group sizes from the university. It is impossible for us to analyse all the figures, the latest spreadsheet runs to 2483 rows, but some examples are enlightening. W301 had 19 groups in the 2010B presentation. Twelve were in the range 100 – 129% and none over 130%. S104 had 79 groups, 33 in the range 100 – 129% and only 4 over the 130% threshold for a salary increase. For the most recent presentation of Y156 in March, there were 38 groups, 3 at 100% and 35 in the range 100-129%, with none over 130%. It is hard to see why this is necessary as there are no geographical considerations with Openings courses, all support is delivered individually by telephone and students are allocated randomly. Even if each AL has only one extra student, as the standard group size is 16, the OU has saved the costs of two groups. We have made the group size reports for the last year available on our website, so that you can check what is happening on your courses in your regions. See http://ucu.open.ac.uk/associate_lecturers

What can be done about it? We have expressed our concerns to management and they have agreed to provide better information when they ask ALs if they are prepared to take extra students. You should check the standard group size for courses you teach and note if you have extra students in current presentations. If you don't know the standard group sizes you can find out at <https://msds.open.ac.uk/tutorhome/coursepayments.aspx>. You have had extra students if this number was exceeded at any point during the course; the number at the end of the course is irrelevant. If you are asked if you want a large group, you have a number of options. You can say no, and if you have had extra students in the previous presentation of the course you can point this out and remind your line manager that you should not be given extra students year on year. If you are willing to take on extra students you can make the proviso that you want enough to trigger a salary increase i.e. 130%, not 129%. We understand that it can be difficult for ALs to say no to their staff tutors, although colleagues who have refused extra students have generally had a sympathetic hearing from line managers. If you need advice about this you should contact UCU at ucu@open.ac.uk. We also want to hear from ALs who are given extra students without being asked, or after having refused, or in successive presentations. We will be seeking volunteers to raise formal complaints (grievances) with the OU in the autumn. You can find out about the grievance procedures at http://www.open.ac.uk/tutors/employment-info/pages/policy/al_terms_conditions.htm. We do not normally encourage anyone to take out a grievance as the process is time consuming and exhausting, and rarely ends in an outcome...

ALs—do you have a large student group continued

that any of the parties concerned regard as satisfactory, but we believe that in these cases the issues are clear cut and we will be seeking compensation for affected ALs.

The university has argued that it needs to make savings, and giving ALs one or two extra students is a good way to do this and to save jobs. We do not understand the job saving argument, it seems to us that giving extra students to ALs actually costs AL jobs. In the latest report of the finance committee to Council in May, it was reported that the OU made a surplus of £19.3 million in 2009/10, which was £10.3 million more than expected. The money came from three sources, the first of which was higher than expected income from student fees as higher than expected student numbers “had a lower than proportionate increase in direct student costs”. (<https://intranet-gw.open.ac.uk/ism/central-secretariat/cm-c.htm>). Student registrations are this year reportedly about 20% up on last year. We do not argue that the OU saved £10.3 million by getting more work for the same pay from ALs, but we do believe they can afford to do the decent thing and accommodate extra students by giving enough to trigger a pay rise to ALs who are willing, and making more AL appointments where necessary. They do not need to make savings by giving large numbers of ALs one or two extra students without extra pay. ALs are not the only members of OU staff who contribute to these savings, but they are the most numerous. Taking one extra student is equivalent to 4% extra work for the same pay – this is based on the OU’s own figure of 20% salary increase for 30% extra students, where the standard group size is 15. Most ALs already work far more hours than they are paid for, as the time spent marking TMAs is around twice what the university allows for in salary calculations (see the marking survey results on our website http://ucu.open.ac.uk/associate_lecturers). Each extra student increases this burden, and it is time to call a halt.

Say no to extra students for no extra pay!

Sue Hawthorne, ALs Officer



Vacancies in our Branch

The post of **Central Academic Staff Officer** is vacant on the OU UCU Executive Committee.

Regional/National centres—we are still looking for a UCU rep in South West, West Midlands, East of England and the North regional/national centres.

Walton Hall Department/Faculty reps—we would like a UCU rep in the following departments/faculties.

Audit	Faculty of Science	Maths, Computing & Technology faculty (MCT)
Centre for HE Research & Info (CHERI)	Finance	Open Broadcasting Unit
Centre for Outcomes Based Education (COBE)	Human Resources	OU Students Association
Centre for Professional Learning & Development (CPLD)	Institute of Educational Technology (IET)	OU Worldwide
Communications	Knowledge Media Institute (Kmi)	Vice Chancellor’s office
Development Office	Library Services	

If you are interested in taking one of these roles, please contact Deb on 01908 6(53069) or email ucu@open.ac.uk

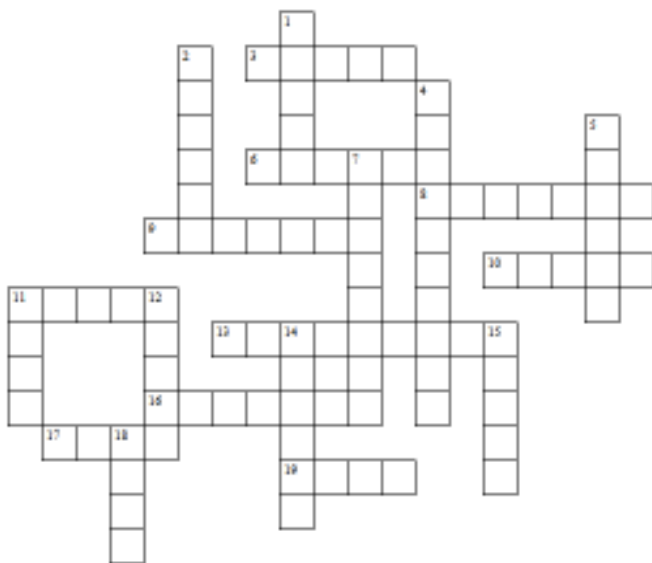
Updating your personal information



The recent USS email from Sally Hunt highlighted the fact that UCU did not have a correct email addresses or one at all, for some members. Our Branch Administrator, Deb has now been through the membership list to update all email addresses but we would like to take this opportunity to ask you to update the information that we hold on you. You can either use the form below and return to Deb Shann, Room 015, Wilson C block, Walton Hall or send an email to ucu@open.ac.uk giving your information.

SURNAME:	TITLE:
FIRST NAME(S):	UCU MEMBERSHIP NUMBER: (If known)
STAFF CATEGORY, please tick all that apply:	
<input type="checkbox"/> ACADEMIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ACADEMIC-RELATED
<input type="checkbox"/> RESEARCH	<input type="checkbox"/> ASSOCIATE LECTURER
<input type="checkbox"/> MANAGEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> POST-GRADUATE
<input type="checkbox"/> PERMANENT	<input type="checkbox"/> FIXED TERM CONTRACT
WORK PLACE INFORMATION	
DEPARTMENT/FACULTY/UNIT, please specify:	
BUILDING NAME:	
<input type="checkbox"/> WALTON HALL	<input type="checkbox"/> REGIONAL/NATIONAL CENTRE
CONTACT INFORMATION	
WORK PHONE NUMBER:	
WORK EMAIL ADDRESS:	
PERSONAL EMAIL ADDRESS:	
HOME PHONE NUMBER:	
HOME ADDRESS:	
SUBSCRIPTION PAYMENT METHOD:	<input type="checkbox"/> DIRECT DEBIT
<input type="checkbox"/> CHEQUE	<input type="checkbox"/> DEDUCTION FROM SALARY
WOULD YOU BE INTERESTED IN TAKING A MORE ACTIVE PART IN THE UNION?	
<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO

Crossword — the Spark July 2010



ACROSS

- 3 Sweetcorn
- 6 Elementary my dear...
- 8 Important OU visitor in June 2010
- 9 Southern European Country
- 10 Taunt
- 11 Garret
- 13 Important MK building opened in 1999
- 16 Urgent or pressing
- 17 European mountain range
- 19 Not pretty

DOWN

- 1 Mr Claus
- 2 Plant, Lens Culinaris, having flat seeds used in cooking
- 4 Location of UCU congress 2010
- 5 Fussy
- 7 Red
- 11 Sulphuric or Acetic
- 12 Quotes
- 14 New name for Refectory
- 15 Ways out of a building
- 18 Small green veg

Crossword Solution — the Spark April 2010

ACROSS

- | | | |
|----|--|---------------|
| 2 | Country where Lima is the capital | PERU |
| 3 | Country where Carlos Teves (footballer) was born | ARGENTINA |
| 4 | 3rd word in HEFCE | FUNDING |
| 5 | What sort of tree has been planted near Walton Hall? | MONKEY PUZZLE |
| 7 | Apple's latest gadget | IPAD |
| 8 | World's top university according to THES | HARVARD |
| 11 | People on thrones | ROYALTY |
| 12 | President of Afghanistan | KARZAI |

DOWN

- | | | |
|----|---|-------------|
| 1 | Where are Angel falls? | VENEZUELA |
| 2 | Animal that was on OU Christmas card | PENGUIN |
| 5 | Vehicle for up to 15 passengers | MINI BUS |
| 6 | Which birthday is Eastenders celebrating? | TWENTY FIVE |
| 9 | Flower for St David's day | DAFFODIL |
| 10 | Type of equation | QUADRATIC |

Pass to a colleague— 4 easy ways to join UCU!



- Join online at: www.joinonline.ucu.org.uk
- Download an application form and post it to the address at the bottom of the form: www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/e/n/ucupapplication.pdf
- Phone 01908 653069 and ask our Administrator to send you an application form.
- Email ucu@open.ac.uk and request an application form be sent to you.

YOUR EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (2010)

President: Roger Walters (r.j.walters) x 58810
Honorary Secretary: Lesley Kane (lhk4@tutor.open.ac.uk)
Honorary Treasurer: David Knowles (d.w.knowles)
Vice Presidents: Mike McNulty & Alan Carr
Immediate Past President: John Bennett
Equality Officer: John Bennett
Central Academic Staff Officer: vacancy
Central Academic-Related Staff Officer: June Payne
Regional Academic Staff Officer: Judy Ekins
Regional Academic-Related Staff Officer: Pauline Collins
Associate Lecturers Staff Officer: Sue Hawthorne

Ordinary Members:

Chris Bollom
 Eric Bowers
 Gill Clough *NEW member
 Bruce Heil
 Phil Hill
 John James
 Malcolm Jenner
 Maria McCrea
 Meridian
 Bethan Norfor
 John Peters
 Peter Piper
 Ceri Phillips
 Ian Stevenson
 Eric Wade

NEC Members:

Alan Carr
 Pauline Collins
 Angie McConnell
 Lesley Kane
 Roger Walters
 Father of NUJ Chapel - vacant

NEED HELP?

UCU Caseworkers are here!

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 Open University branch of UCU

OU UCU
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 Web: <http://ucu.open.ac.uk>

STOP PRESS: UCU mug available for any member who wants one, please call into room 015, Wilson C block and collect your UCU mug! It helps to raise awareness of the Union.



What do you think of the paper copy of Spark?

Please send us your feedback on this edition of SPARK. The executive committee of the OU branch of UCU made the decision to publish this edition on paper as well as online. Copies will be given out to members on campus and in the regions/nations, and mailed to all AL members. We hope that more people will read it in this format, and pass it on to non-members. It costs £1000 to do this in colour, and £500 in black and white. Is this a good use of our funds? What do you think? Let us know by emailing ucu@open.ac.uk