

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

The Spark — November 2013

National Claim 2013-14 update

Employers fail again – strike on 3rd December 2013

Negotiators from all the four unions in dispute - UCU, UNISON, Unite and EIS – met with UCEA, the body that negotiates nationally for your employers on 26th November. Our negotiators pressed the employers for an improved offer. I am sorry to say that UCEA refused, offering only to 'look into equality issues' if we accepted the pay cut offer that's already on the table.

In other words, the employers offered little or nothing in return for us accepting their pay cut. I think that is a disgraceful response to university staff. Now I have to ask you to get behind the unions again and support the one-day strike on **Tuesday 3 December**.

Why? Because with academic pay falling in real terms both against inflation and against other professions it is you and your families that are suffering despite the financial surplus in the sector. To see how far and fast our pay is falling [read UCU's briefing here](#).

We have to be clear - this dispute is completely unnecessary. The money to stop the decline in pay is there in university surpluses and reserves. **Your employer has made a choice that you and your family will suffer falling living standards while they hoard reserves and prioritise non-staff projects.**

Industrial action is now the only option. I know that taking strike action is a difficult decision, so it should be. But we must be clear. **Your employers carry the full responsibility for this situation and the only way forward at this point is through taking collective action.** We do this by negotiating wherever possible and by campaigning, including strike action, where necessary. Now, unfortunately, it is necessary.

This is also about your voice at work. These are tough times in higher education and our union has never been more necessary. Winning on this issue is partly about building the union's power to take action on all the other issues facing our members. **Please support the strike on Tuesday 3rd December.**

Sally Hunt
UCU general secretary

Academic and Research staff promotions

UCU was made aware of this consultation, by concerned members, less than one week before the deadline for responses and, having reminded management that 'Principles and Procedures under which promotion, additional increments and moves beyond efficiency bars are made (subject to powers of Senate)' are negotiable, we were given until the 20th November 2013 to submit a collective response.

We had an overwhelming response from members and would like to thank everyone for their feedback. Failure to consult UCU on proposals that have such a far-reaching effects on the academic life of this University, and our members, is unacceptable therefore a full process of negotiation in good faith is to begin immediately with a view to reaching agreement.

Pauline Collins, Branch President

STOP PRESS: The video file of our AGM on 26th November is now on the branch website: http://ucu.open.ac.uk/meeting_videos.



Inside this issue:

Strike day reports	2-4
Stress in the OU work place	5
ALs Eyesight tests	6
New leave system	7
Learning for life & UCU Law Extra	8
UCU Equality conference	9-10
ALs work to contract advice & AL views	11-12
Branch meeting feedback	13
Reps update	14
AL working group report	15
Letters	16-17
New Exec Committee and contact info	18

News from the Pickets at Walton Hall : 31st Oct 2013

The UCU strike on Halloween was the start of the action in support of the union's claim for a pay rise. We had pickets at the two main entrances to Walton Hall campus, and at some of the regional and national offices. UCU and UNISON members at the OU stood shoulder to shoulder in support of the unions claim for fair pay.

The posters were in place on various road signs and lamp posts by 7 a.m. and there were official pickets handing out leaflets to staff arriving on foot and by car from then on. On the East Gate our branch President, Pauline Collins, was most noticeable in (dare one say it?) a *striking* red coat!

The weather was good, so it was a pleasure to be there. Pickets greeted staff amicably, and thanked those who stopped for their interest and their messages of support. Some non-members asked for membership forms, so we look forward to welcoming them to serve on future picket lines.

Not every driver stopped to speak, of course, but most took leaflets. Many pedestrians stopped to ask about the action and the reasons for the strike, and there were some interesting discussions as a result.

Why did we do it? It was in pursuit of a higher pay offer after years of derisory "raises" that were in reality pay cuts. If successful, all staff would benefit from the efforts of the unions. We enjoyed it so much we are going to do it again on the 3rd of December! And we will keep doing it until management offer a higher pay increase. The fat cats who make these decisions are not on the national pay spine, and they negotiate their own pay rises, and, not surprisingly, they have had generous raises each year.

John Bennett, Exec member



Best outfit on a picket line goes to the North West!

Here's a picture of the picket line on 31st October at the OU in the North West. There were four UCU members in the end - no one from UNISON was able to join us. It was great that Naomi could come over (in skeleton outfit!) from Leeds as it meant that we could cover the second entrance at the times the bus arrived as well as the entrance used by cars. We covered 8am - 10.15am as there were only four of us and few people arrive for work after this time.

We had one new member of staff who had only joined UCU the day before and was unaware of the strike action who decided not to cross the picket line, and quite a lot of support from passing traffic, so a success I think.

Sarah Wilkinson, **Regional/national centre rep for Manchester**



Pictured from left to right: Elaine Walker, Hilary Partridge, Naomi Colhoun and Sarah Wilkinson.

Picket line at Leeds

A big thank you to all the R07 members who turned up to join the picket line on the 31st October. All in all we had a good turnout, ensuring that there were at least three people picketing at any one time throughout the morning. It was fairly quiet in Leeds due to it being half-term week, but I think we got our message across to regional colleagues.

Elvira Haeussler, regional/national centre rep for Leeds

Picket line at Nottingham

We had a successful picket in Nottingham on 31st October from 7.30 to 10am. UCU members were prepared with leaflets to hand out and the "Official Dispute" boards to prop up at the entrance, but it was very good to have a joint action with the UNISON branch who believe that a large proportion of Unison members were also on strike.

Certainly the car park was much more empty than usual even compared to the previous day so it was not a half-term effect.

Almost everyone going in was very friendly and sympathetic, and we explained the purpose of the strike, which some had not known about, while others were well informed. It was very good to meet lots of OU staff, some we did not even know - there is a quite large fairly temporary workforce in SRS at Nottingham.

Brendan Quinn, regional/national centre rep for Nottingham

Picket line at East Grinstead

Our regional/national centre rep at East Grinstead, Paula James, wore devil's horns for the picket line. The local newspaper photographer made a visit and he loved the horns along with the "What the Devil are they doing to our Universities" placard, although they missed the deadline for that week's issue of the East Grinstead Courier. There were 4 UCU members at the morning picket line - they got soaked through but received lots of hoots of approval from constantly passing traffic - and OU office staff took coffee out to them.

Thank you from the branch

The branch office wishes to thank all OU UCU members who took part in a picket line on the strike day, 31st October 2013 — apart from the two picket lines at Walton Hall, there were picket lines at the following regional/national centres:

- Bristol—photo below
- Nottingham
- Leeds
- Manchester—photo on page 2
- Cardiff
- Edinburgh—photos on page 4
- Belfast—photos below
- East Grinstead.



Pictured from left to right: Chrissie Hughes, Philip O'Sullivan and Christina McCavana.



Pictured from left to right: Tony Coughlan and Jenny Webster at the picket line in Bristol.

Union members in Scotland showing smiles and solidarity on the picket line

UNISON and UCU jointly picketed the Edinburgh office in the fight for better pay. Leafleting was well received by passers by and non-union members. We will be following up with a recruitment drive for both UCU and UNISON.

Pickets and many others then attended a rally at Edinburgh University with staff on strike from all of the universities in Edinburgh.

Bruce Heil, AL rep for Scotland & Exec member



Pictured from left to right: Jamie Marshall, Carla Anderson, George Callaghan, Maria McCrea and Pete Cannell.

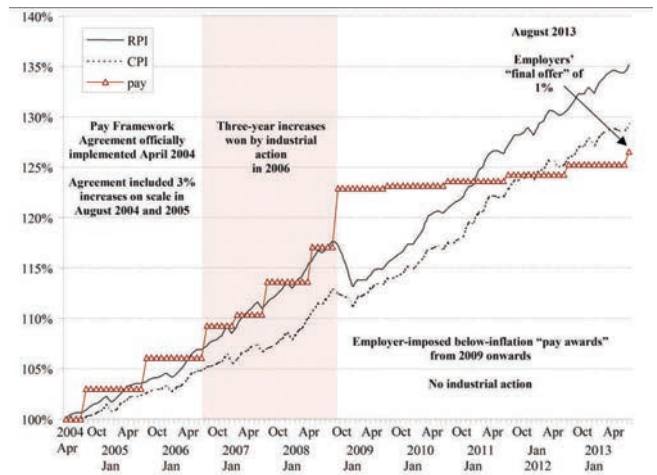
News from the OU in the North

UCU members at the OU in the North joined an organised rally attended by around a hundred workers from Newcastle, Northumbria and Durham Universities who gathered at Grey's Monument in Newcastle city centre in support of the campaign for **Fair Pay Now!** Most present had been picketing various entrances to their own places of work since the early hours and had received much support from students and passers-by. Unions represented included UCU, Unite and UNISON and leaders from each made good use of the PA system with rousing speeches set against the backdrop of all the Union banners draped around the monument.

The UCU has pointed out that academics, academic-related and University support staff have suffered a **real terms pay cut of 13% since 2008** as clearly illustrated in the graph. The UCU think that lecturers and other staff should be properly supported and remunerated. We believe that fair pay is an issue of fairness itself, to all staff not just some. The UCU reminds members to support the work-to-contract action as described at this address: www.ucu.org.uk/workingtocontract.

Disappointingly, despite the media presence with local TV stations capturing the proceedings at the rally, no reports appeared later in the press nor on TV or radio. However, in local newspapers *the Journal* and *the Chronicle* of the 14 Nov 2013, there was a reasonable sized item announcing the day of action on the 3rd December with an explanation about the dispute and the reasons for strike action.

Graham Storey, Regional/national centre rep for Gateshead



Graph created by the UCU branch at University College London: www.ucl.ac.uk/unions/UCU/campaigns/pay2013.png

Stress in the OU workplace

Throughout 2012, OU UCU was picking up on increasing concerns among internal staff about increasing levels of stress in the workplace relating mainly to changes in policies and procedures and increasing workloads. We also noted that a lot of members were coming to us for advice and support around stress-related health issues and sickness leave.

As a result of this, a group of branch officers collaborated to devise a short survey on stress and workload, the results of which seemed to confirm that the Open University had become a much more stressful place to work as a result, *inter alia*, of rapid processes of change and cost-cutting measures such as non- or slow replacement of staff turnover.

As reported in *the Spark* previously, the survey revealed that more than 84% of respondents feel that their workload has increased and/or that they have been required to accelerate their pace of work over the last two years. Most respondents to the UCU survey blamed new systems, reduction in resources, including staff and changes in methods of working for the increased pressures at work.

In view of this evidence of increasing levels of stress, OU UCU has consistently attempted to use the UCU/SSOM-Futures consultations to ask management to do more to identify stress and take steps to deal with its causes. In particular, we have urged management to adopt the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) 'Management Standards' for stress risk assessment, trialling these (at least initially) in Student Services.

The HSE standards, in summary, involve the establishment of a steering committee, enjoying the full support of senior management, charged with identifying and addressing causes of stress. The HSE standards require the use of evidence from the widest possible range of sources including surveys, exit and return to work interviews, sickness statistics, staff turnover patterns etc. Importantly, this is a cyclical process in which evidence of stress is continuously monitored. Where implemented properly, HSE management standards stress risk assessment has contributed to major reductions of stressors at work.

Further details about the HSE standards can be found on the HSE website here: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards>.

OU Management has rejected the idea of a steering group with union and management representation – considered central to a workable scheme by the HSE. However, they have agreed to the involvement of the Health and Safety Liaison Group in the work of identifying key stressors and roles and positions particularly subject to stress. **Please contact OU UCU if you are interested in becoming a Health and Safety rep for the branch, ucu@open.ac.uk or 01908 6(53069).**

What should I do if I'm becoming stressed? The HSE advises:

Try to identify the causes and what you can do to make things better. Ideally, tell your manager at an early stage. If your stress is work-related, this will give them the chance to help and prevent the situation getting worse. Even if it isn't work-related, they may be able to do something to reduce some of your pressure.

If the source of pressure is your line manager, find out what procedures are in place to deal with this. If there aren't any, talk to your trade union representative or employee representative who can provide advice on a range of work-related topics. Alternatively, you can speak to your HR department or Employee Assistance Programme/counselling service if either exists.

Many employees are reluctant to talk about stress at work, due to the stigma attached to it. They fear they will be seen as weak. But stress is not a weakness, and can happen to anyone. Remember: no employer should subject their employees to work-related stress, and this is an issue both you and your employer should take seriously.

Hilary Partridge, Exec member

NB: UCU produces a Health and Safety newsletter—the latest issue is September 2013 at this address: www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/5/h/Health_and_Safety_News_70_September_2013.pdf.



OU UCU Health and Safety reps

The role of trade union Health and Safety representatives is not limited to safety but includes making representation to employers (in our case the OU) on general matters affecting health, safety and welfare at work. Health and Safety reps are entitled to paid time off work to carry out their duties. We want to hear from any members who are interested in becoming UCU Health and Safety representatives. For further information, please refer to our branch website: http://ucu.open.ac.uk/health_and_safety.

Eyesight tests for ALs

An AL member recently asked if ALs can claim for eye sight tests and we thought it would be useful to share the information with all our AL members. The following information is on Tutorhome at this address:

<http://www2.open.ac.uk/tutors/employment/your-health-and-safety#q13>.

With effect from Monday 7 December 2012 the university will be changing to a new eye test provider - Tesco Opticians. You will need to obtain an eye care voucher which will entitle you to a free eye test and a free pair of single vision glasses for VDU use only. Before you do this you are advised to complete the DSE Self-Assessment Checklist at this address:
www2.open.ac.uk/tutors/_data/documents/Display-Screen-Equipment-Assessment-Form-for-Associate-Lecturers-HSF035.doc.

To request a voucher, please click on the link <http://www.tescoopticians.com/Corporate> to enter the Tesco Opticians Corporate Eyecare system and follow these instructions:

- Go to the black box at the top marked Corporate eyecare and Register now your first request. Then Register now at the Employee sign-up. You will be asked to enter:
Your company: Open University
Your company password: openuni
- You will be asked to complete various details including your staff ID.
- In the box marked Department: please put Student Services
- In the box marked Line manager: please put AL Services
- In the Line manager email you should put the generic email for your appointing region/nation for example:
R01-TUT@open.ac.uk, R02-TUT@open.ac.uk etc.
- Once you have submitted your details you will find the Line Manager Voucher Process screen. You should then select the Screensafe voucher which entitles you to a free eye sight test and a free pair of single vision glasses for VDU use only.
- Click the Request voucher box. You will then be asked to Print voucher. Click on this and you will be told that your voucher has been requested from your line manager and you should contact them to request the voucher. The AL Services team will forward the voucher for you to print off.

You can then call the following number to arrange your test: 0844 800 5462, remember to say you are an OU employee. After 2 years, you can request another voucher and you can enter via the employee login on the bottom right corner of the screen.

If you live more than 30 miles from a Tesco optician

The university has chosen Tesco as a provider for eye tests. However, if you have in excess of a 30 mile round trip to attend a Tesco store with an optician, you can instead use a local optician and claim back the cost of the eye test. If the optician recommends that you need glasses for DSE use then the university will contribute up to £39 towards the cost of these glasses.

To claim the cost of your eye test and the cost of glasses for DSE use (if required) you should use the standard blue AL claim form and provide the following information:

- the number of miles for the round trip from your home to your nearest Tesco optician. To help process your claim please include the postcode of your nearest Tesco optician. This can be found at <http://www.tesco.com/storeLocator/opticians.asp>.
- Receipt for the cost of the eye test
- Receipt for the cost of the glasses for DSE use (if required). Please note that a maximum of £39 can be claimed
- Send your claim form and receipts to: AL and Teaching Services
The Open University, Hammerwood Gate, Kents Hill, Milton Keynes, MK7 6BY.

Under exceptional circumstances the OU will consider requests which fall outside this procedure; these requests must be approved in advance. Please email tutor-services@open.ac.uk.

New annual leave system—part-time workers

HR have confirmed that you can continue to 'make up' the time difference (or take unpaid leave) as an alternative to taking annual leave to cover any short fall between bank holidays/closure days and leave, in agreement with your line manager. The way to record it in ResourceLink is to only book the number of hours that should come out of your bank holiday leave, i.e.:

- if using bank-holiday / closure leave to cover the full day, you need to book leave for the full number of hours you would normally work on that day.
- if you are using a mixture of bank holiday / closure leave and making up any remaining hours, you need to book leave only for the hours that you are *not* making up. E.g. if you would normally work 7.4 hours, and you only intend to use 6 hours of leave for the closure day because you have worked an extra 1.4 hours on other occasions, you only need to book 6 hours of leave.
- if you are not using leave at all, and have worked the extra hours to make up the time, no need to book leave at all.
- if you are using unpaid leave, record the arrangement outside ResourceLink using existing procedures.

That should mean that you can continue to use the flexible arrangement that worked for you before under the old system. It does make it difficult to book all the bank holidays/closure days in advance, though, as you would have to adjust the hours each time you knew how much leave you would actually be taking. All of these options need to be discussed and agreed with the line manager, as before. We have asked HR to circulate this additional advice but they have agreed to update the Annual leave guidance document instead (mid October 2013).

The new leave system will enable managers to have much more control over how the bank holidays are covered. If the individual is going to use their leave/bank holiday entitlement they would book this through the system. If they wish to make up the time either partially or completely they will either not book anytime off in the leave system or they will book off the hours they are still using from the leave/bank holiday entitlement. If the Line Manager has agreed to allow them to take unpaid leave they will eventually book this through the new system however this has not been rolled out yet so in the meantime they will arrange unpaid leave in the same way as they do currently.

These changes were circulated in the OU Management Guidance documents: 2012-7 and 2013-16, you can request copies of these files from the UCU office: ucu@open.ac.uk or tel 01908 6(53069).

UCU Environmental Newsletter

The September 2013 issue of the Environmental Newsletter is out and available to download at the following link:
<http://www.ucu.org.uk/environmentalnews>

Bring your own device (BYOD)

Bring your own device is a term which refers to when employees use their personal computing devices (typically smart phones and tablets) in the workplace.

Permitting devices which you do not have sufficient control over to connect to the corporate IT systems can introduce a range of security vulnerabilities and other data protection concerns if not correctly managed.

New guidance from the Information Commissioner's Office explores what you need to consider if permitting the use of personal devices to process personal data for which you are responsible.

Further information at: www.ico.org.uk/for_organisations/data_protection/topic_guides/online/byod.



Learning for life — new UCU service

UCU have launched a new Continuing Professional Development programme 'Learning for Life'. UCU is now offering a range of CPD resources – free as a benefit of membership – aimed at supporting you, both in your career and for your own personal development. You can access the new programme by going to the 'Learning For Life' website at <http://cpd.web.ucu.org.uk/> where you can find:

- [downloadable learning resources](#) for education staff. The latest guides include 'How to write a good research grant application', 'UCU's guide to classroom management', and 'Voice care for teachers' – all written by experts in the field
- [CPD courses](#) in a range of accessible formats delivered near to your workplace by professional tutors
- [articles and up-to-date advice](#) as well as contributions and blogs from our members
- [UCU services and benefits](#) – information on the full range of services available to members as well as special offers.



'Learning for Life' will help you develop skills to get the most out of your career and we aim to help you develop excellence and confidence in teaching, learning and professional practice. In a fast changing sector we aim to bring you the most up-to-date information and support possible and will be regularly updating and adding to what is available so please watch this space! If you would like to contribute material or you just have something to say about CPD then please get in touch: cpd@ucu.org.uk.

Ed Bailey, UCU National Organiser

UCU launches UCU Law Extra

I am writing to let you know about a new service that the union is providing for members called UCU Law Extra.

How will UCU Law Extra help you?

As a member of UCU you will be able to access a range of everyday, non-employment related legal services at reduced rates¹, including:

- Wills
- Lasting Powers of Attorney
- Renunciation of Executorship
- Probate
- Severance of Joint Tenancy
- Conveyancing
- Re-mortgaging; and Financial mis-selling claims such as Payment Protection Insurance (PPI).



How is this being made possible?

We are offering this additional service through a new partnership with BBH Legal Services Limited, a legal firm that has a well deserved reputation for giving clear, straightforward advice to clients. They are a subsidiary of Thompsons Solicitors LLP, a firm with more than ninety years experience of standing up for trade union members. They are committed to the trade union movement and work solely for the injured or mistreated – never for the insurance industry, and never for employers.

What makes this service different is that both you and the union will benefit. While you will get access to legal services at reduced prices our partnership with BBH will also provide revenue to the union which we will use to help members at work.

How do I gain access to the UCU Law Extra Services?

You can access the range of legal services, or get more information, through the dedicated website, email and phone number below:

UCU Law Extra website: https://ucu.custhelp.com/app/ucu_law_extra

Email: UCUlawextra@bbhlegal.co.uk

Freephone telephone: 0800 012 6675

Don't forget! UCU Law Extra is in **addition** to the existing UCU Law offering which covers employment rights, personal injury and police enquiries. You can find out more about your [free existing legal benefits](#).

Sally Hunt, UCU General Secretary,

¹ The rates offered are less than those offered by BBH Legal Services Ltd to non-union members.

Inequality and discrimination in employment means aggression to our sense of humanity

Thoughts and memories from the UCU Equality Conference 15 November 2013.

UCU has conferences each year for women members, black members, lesbian/gay/bisexual and transgender members and disabled members. These have previously been four separate conferences on different days but for the first time this year they were brought together on the same day with each of the separate conferences meeting in the morning and then plenary sessions and workshops bringing together all the equality strands in the afternoon.

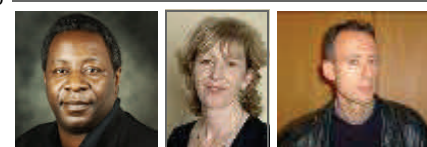
The OU branch of UCU participated in the UCU Equality Conference with significant participation from the floor (I counted more than 5 OU affiliated comrades in the meetings). I took part in the Black Members Conference in the morning and participated in the joint UCU Equality afternoon sessions: Equality bargaining, Keeping Equality on the Agenda and the Invited speeches by Melissa Benn and Peter Tatchell.

The speech that impressed me most was the one given by the TUC Race Equality Officer, Wilf Sullivan during the morning. Wilf used the morning debates as an impetus for a wider social and political critique of the UCU priorities and action plan. The morning debates and the motions discussed, focused primarily on the feeling of most black members that the 11,000 black members of UCU were under-represented in the structures and hierarchy of UCU, as well as in the branches. There was major discussion that the black UCU members, who worked as caseworkers and assistants to the unfairly treated black colleagues, were easily targeted and harassed or intimidated by administrators and thus were in need of more support by UCU legal teams and support structures.

Wilf started his discussion with the identification of the root of all evils in current employment related racial discrimination: the Neo-Liberalisation of Race (as pronounced in recent comments by the government on a more robust and liberally active multiculturalism) has, as a goal, the fragmentation of discrimination and the eventual victimisation of race-related differences under the banner of market-oriented education for strengthening social cohesion and consumerism. His demand for real and meaningful equality education at all levels of employment and in all schools (seconded by similar demands by the afternoon speakers, Melissa Benn and Peter Tatchell) is the only effective counter-measure that he sees to recent attempts of "transparency" through poor data and poor methodologies and the currently prevailing dogma of "only if you have money you can have access to law and justice". The key points from Wilf Sullivan's speech were further augmented and contextualised in the gender and sex related speeches in the afternoon sessions: both Melissa Benn (who highlighted the fact the currently female workers are victimised not only in their right to work but in their very essence: in their bodily awareness and in the form of a more general attack on the social role of motherhood) and Peter Tatchell (who protested against the blatant rejection of basic human rights in some Commonwealth countries).

What I saw as the common thread in all the discussions and speeches at the conference was an implicit and explicit understanding that promoting, supporting or allowing inequality and discrimination in the HE and FE sectors was a perversion of the meaning of education, and in essence an aggressive devaluation and impoverishment of our humanity. What all participants took home is an increased sense of responsibility to castigate and strongly protest against all forms of discrimination and inequality in the workplace. There was some discussion about the responsibility of local branches to do what they can to mobilise and increase the awareness in terms of equality issues in local members. **To further this aim, I would like to invite all OU branch of UCU members to contact me with issues that they would like to discuss further. Suggestions for improvements on how the OU branch of UCU should approach the Equality Issues agenda are most welcome.**

Costas Athanasopoulos, Branch Equality Officer



Photos: Wilf Sullivan, Melissa Benn and Peter Tatchell.

UCU Equality Conference—15th November 2013

This was my first visit to a UCU Conference and I couldn't have felt more welcome and part of a vibrant group of people. It was really good to see that the Union's passion for Equality has not been diminished by the dire economic stringencies of the Coalition Government. As educationists we are creators of values and thus equality should be a priority. I could see that some delegates were disappointed by the economies forced onto the organisers in having one workshop slot for the four areas of conference but I was pleased to join the Women's conference whilst Black members, Disabled Members and LGBT Members had to prioritise their allegiance.

'Women making a difference' made me personally focus on my role as an educator and I joined the Women in the Curriculum discussion group to look at how the curriculum challenges or embeds sexist stereotyping. As a lifelong feminist I am quite aware of the vigilance needed over language, and having worked for the Open University for many years their adherence to gender neutral language has always been well guarded but this still has to be promoted as part of Teacher Training as slippage is all too common. Challenge on Equalities comes even from Ofsted and I came away from this session with my awareness heightened as to the questions I should be raising.

The two speakers, Melissa Benn and Peter Tatchell, conference had organised were of the highest quality and eminently appropriate whilst the wide choice of workshops made the choice difficult for the afternoon sessions. I returned to an issue that as an employed person has dogged me all my life-life and work time demands - which I now see troubling the existence of my children's family life 40 years on. It was good to see some strategies are working to our advantage but as with all of our Equality aspirations there is still work to be done.

Tricia French, AL

Redeployment in cases of potential redundancy

With re-organisations of units becoming increasingly common, the process for redeploying potentially redundant staff increasingly concerns us all, and the university needs to get this right.

UCU has put forward the following points to management in order to open a discussion on this.

1. The investigation of opportunities for alternative duties should not be encapsulated within the unit, but should include suitable work in other units.
2. The redeployment register should include all staff in need of redeployment, including fixed term and permanent staff who are potentially redundant. Each staff member who is placed on the Redeployment Register will be interviewed by the appropriate HR advisor. The purpose of this interview is to establish a full skills profile of the individual, any training needs, and the categories and types of jobs that are likely to be suitable.
3. Departments with vacant posts should give prior consideration to staff on the redeployment register before considering other applicants. Prior consideration involves considering the member of staff against the Person Specification for the vacant post. In order for a match to be established the staff member must normally meet most of the essential criteria for the post with appropriate training if required. A suitable match will usually be at the same grade, and with appropriate consideration given to personal circumstances, location etc.
4. Once a match has been established then the individual(s) will be offered an interview prior to any other candidates (except for other redeployees).
5. If there are redeployees who are potential matches for vacancies, all other advertising of the posts will be put on hold.
6. The normal assumption should be that redeployees possess the skills required for their current jobs, and that they meet the parts of the person spec which overlap with the requirements of their current posts. An interview may be necessary to establish that they meet other aspects of the person spec for the new post.

These points were drawn up with the process for academic and academic-related staff in mind, but we would expect the same principles to apply to ALs.

Lesley Kane, Hon. Secretary

Associate Lecturers — OU UCU work to contract advice

As you know, as part of a national campaign on pay, UCU members are now working to contract. In the case of a home-based workforce, such as ALs, this inevitably poses the question of what we can do to take part in the action.

ALs are part-time, and the number of hours you are paid to work per presentation depends on your module's salary band. These are listed at the end of this email, and the numbers are actual hours of work, having already subtracted the holiday component. It is in the nature of the AL job that some weeks you work many more hours than in other weeks, but after the first few weeks of a module presentation, for example when you are marking the first batch of assignments, you should have a fairly clear idea about whether your actual hours are going to exceed your paid hours.

If this is the case, we suggest you look at ways of cutting down your hours of work, and please feel free to come back to us for further advice on this if necessary. If you have a few struggling students, then instead of working significant unpaid overtime to support them, you should consider referring them to Student Support, or requesting a special session for a student. A special session can cover telephone tuition, or detailed discussion by email, as well as face-to-face, or OU Live. When you fill in the request from TutorHome, you should say that the student is having serious difficulties with (whatever it is) and that it will seriously affect his/her future studies if this is not addressed. If the student is in danger of failing the module feel free to say so. You can also say whether you can do the special session yourself or not.

Other things to bear in mind are:-

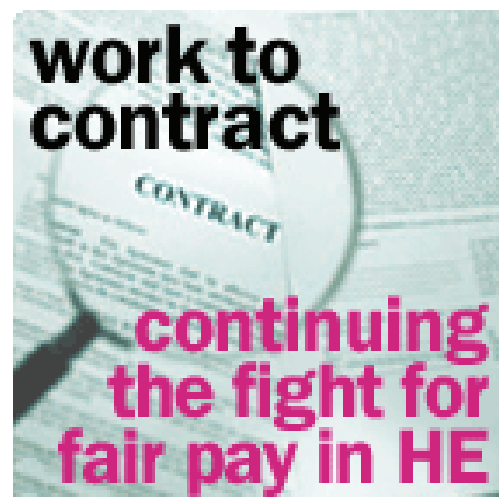
- i. You can refuse to accept late TMAs unless an extension was agreed (but it's fair to warn students first if this isn't your norm).
- ii. You do not have to return TMA scripts until the 10th working day after cut-off, or 10 working days after receipt if they arrived late.
- iii. You do not have to log TMA extensions on TutorHome unless the extension is for more than 3 weeks.

AL paid working hours per presentation

Band 1	57.72	hours
Band 2	79.92	hours
Band 3	102.12	hours
Band 4	124.32	hours
Band 5	146.52	hours
Band 6	168.72	hours
Band 7	190.92	hours
Band 8	213.12	hours
Band 9	235.32	hours
Band 10	257.52	hours
Band 11	279.72	hours
Band 12	301.92	hours
Band 13	324.12	hours

Please email ucu@open.ac.uk if you want any further advice.

Lesley Kane, Hon Secretary



Working to contract—views from an AL member

The recent call for action on the part of the Union has posed a difficult dilemma for me. I work as an Associate Lecturer for the Open University, and my fixed term contracts are negotiated separately. I have no problem taking a day's strike action in support of full-time permanently employed comrades, although the loss of a day's salary from my small income is hard. United we stand; I have had plenty of support from the Union and am more than willing to give back. When it comes to working to contract, though, it's more difficult.

Currently I only have one contract. In fact, I'm out of contract until next year so anything I do now for students or management is out of contract. I am desperate to increase the number of modules I'm contracted to teach, the tiny income I receive for one contract – and which I only get for part of the year – wouldn't be sufficient even if I didn't have a young child to feed and clothe, never mind pay for school trips. Saying I am working to contract and not popping my head up to look bright and eager for work every now and then is just not a possibility.

....continued over

...continued from page 9

I've been watching the Union's work raising awareness about zero hours contracts with keen interest. For about five years I worked zero hours contracts, delivering up to seven modules at a time for three different universities on hourly paid rates (don't even ask how little that is). I showed up at meetings I was not paid to attend, I spent long hours ensuring marking was delivered back to students on time. I even contributed to departmental research programmes, although not contracted to do so. Finally I came to realise that when they look to employ a new lecturer, management look at publications not at whether you have delivered on heavy teaching loads for years with professional competence and without grumbling. I gave up my teaching to focus on writing up some of the research I have done.

Not my Open University teaching. The OU do pay a reasonable rate for flexible work, teaching for them gives you access to an enormous online library including journals in the field, although as an Associate Lecturer you are not allowed to claim affiliation to the OU if you manage to publish anything. Most of all, with the Open University you get a small cohort of students: keen to learn, from backgrounds which have not previously encouraged their study skills. You can do some fantastic teaching with the Open University. I had an email just the other day from a student who was experiencing life at the sharp end when under my tutelage. Now she has finished her degree with a good grade; she wrote to thank me for the support and guidance I'd given her, without which she said she would not have got through: "little me from a council estate with a degree!"

I'm sure many suppose we Associate Lecturers have good secure working conditions. However we are just as insecure as those on zero hour contracts.

I think it's been about five years now that the Union and University have been negotiating to try to agree terms and conditions for permanent posts for Associate Lecturers. I cannot say how much that would mean to me; unless you've been in insecure employment for more than a decade as I have, you won't know. Every year I fear that the student numbers will be down, there will be a reason to make me redundant. Every year I hope there will be some more teaching and that I'll be given sufficient contracts so that I can get some kind of living wage. Even if I earned enough money, mortgage brokers would look dubiously at the irregular and fixed term payments from my contracts so I'm pushed into rented housing.

I was made redundant three times in the last five years, although to be fair to them only twice by the Open University – only to be re-employed on a fresh contract at the last moment. The last time I was made redundant, I had prior consideration for the module which was replacing the one module I was teaching. I was being made redundant so there was a legal responsibility to redeploy me onto that new module. My manager claimed I did not demonstrate appointability for the new teaching on grounds so spurious that even the head office admitted he had done something wickedly wrong; unfortunately he acted within the rules so I was left hanging until a different manager picked me up for a different set of modules. I had started to look at jobs stacking shelves in supermarkets, although I would've had to lie on my application and pretend I had no doctorate and probably no undergraduate degree either. (Those jobs are quite difficult to get too, unfortunately.) I know that if that manager is on an interview panel I won't get the teaching, for personal not professional reasons which are not even very clear to me. Recently I have had a sympathetic manager. There is no way I can afford to risk losing her support by saying: "sorry, I'm working to contract. I won't be looking at my emails or answering questions about the upcoming tutorial dates, because I'm not contracted to do so at the moment."

A colleague once made a profound remark about universities as employers in a commercialised academia. He said, they think of the product they sell as the degree or the qualification. The product they sell is actually the lecturing staff. Yet university management treat lecturing staff as if we are lazy and need forensic monitoring, they put little effort into supporting and developing people who often willingly work time and a half to provide top class world-beating degrees. I always feel particularly surprised that the Open University aren't more concerned to retain longstanding experienced Associate Lecturers. The OU can offer students closely supervised academic support from highly qualified and committed teachers, on a degree costing about a third of one year's tuition at a traditional university. They haven't managed to sell that to prospective students, I get asked: "but is an OU degree as good as one from XX university?" I think it is often actually better! I just hope to get the opportunity to work with a few more groups of students to show them how much better.

Anonymous



Feedback on branch meetings

Branch meetings are an important way for members to understand and influence the work of the union. We would like to increase the turnout, so we asked for feedback from a member who had recently attended a branch meeting.

Are you a regular attender of branch meetings?

I don't come to these meetings very often, but this time I had a particular issue that I wanted to raise. I am not very interested in politics and the main item on the agenda was discussion of motions for congress, so I didn't expect to find it very relevant to me. I hoped to raise my issue under Any Other Business at the end of the meeting.

Did you find the meeting open and welcoming?

Yes, very. There were a lot of people there from the Executive, who clearly knew much more than I did about the issues under discussion, but I felt that my opinion was respected and valued.

Did you find the meeting interesting?

As I said, I didn't have high hopes of enjoying a discussion on congress motions! However, this turned out to include some very interesting topics which are relevant to most of us, e.g. the possibility of industrial action. I think many more members would have been there if they had realised these subjects would be under discussion.

There were also a number of reports from representatives of different groups, and I felt that some of these could have been shorter. It is interesting to hear about what is going on, but the meeting was only an hour long and I would rather spend more of it on open discussion, to give everyone the chance to be actively involved.

You mentioned timing. Was the meeting at a convenient time for you?

It was during a lunchtime – it has to be really for everyone to be able to get there – and a number of people were eating packed lunches during the meeting so that was fine.

One thing though: I don't have flexible working hours so I had to leave at a fixed time, whether the meeting had finished or not. At one point it looked like I would have to go before we even got on to Any Other Business, which was the only place where I could raise my issue. If there were an early agenda item for 'points from the floor', it would be easier for those of us with fixed working hours to ask questions and raise issues.

What 3 things would you change to improve Branch meetings for ordinary members?

1. On the agenda, include a description of the topics to be discussed. This would give people more information about the 'motions to congress' type items.
2. Include a 'points from the floor' item early on in the agenda, for ordinary members to raise issues. Members who can't attend could raise issues in advance for this item too.
3. The branch meetings are the main opportunity for ordinary members to discuss issues, so it is important that everyone can take an active part. Can more reporting be done outside the meeting (e.g. short written reports sent in advance), leaving more time free during the meeting for open discussion?

Do you agree? What would encourage you to attend more branch meetings? Please let us know at ucu@open.ac.uk or on 01908 653069.

OU UCU branch member



Help build the union—forward the email

Please forward *the Spark* email to a friend or colleague who is not currently a member of UCU, encourage them to visit www.ucu.org.uk/join and JOIN UCU today. Together we are stronger.

BUILD THE UNION

UCU reps update

Meridian, our UCU rep in Social Sciences and a member of our Exec has agreed to be the UCU rep in the Audit unit and the Vice Chancellor's office. We are still looking for a UCU rep in the following OU units at Walton Hall, please contact the branch office if you work in one of these units and could be a rep or publicity contact:

- Business Development Unit
- Development Office
- Estates—thank you to Matt Griffin who has been the UCU rep in Estates since before 2009—we are now looking for a UCU member to replace Matt as the rep or publicity contact.
- Finance
- HR.

Any UCU member can register to be a "UCU contact" at this address: <http://btu.web.ucu.org/volunteer> and it does not matter if your OU unit already has a rep.



UCU offers retired membership

Are you retiring soon? Did you know that you could retain many of the benefits of full UCU membership by becoming a retired member:

- You can keep in touch with national and local UCU by continuing to receive the weekly campaigns emails as well as branch communications.
- retain the discounts on benefits and services negotiated for UCU members. You may actually have time to make better use of some of them
- maintain contact with UCU's experienced advice on superannuation matters
- You can continue in membership of your present branch/local association or join the UCU central group (please see note below about the central group*).



Retired membership is open to any member of UCU *retiring* at the minimum age limit and to any member who shall have so retired at an earlier age under the Premature Retirement Scheme, or on account of permanent disablement under ill-health provisions.

In order to retain full membership entitlements, particularly in connection with their employment, members of staff who are taking early retirement but continuing in part-time university or college employment are advised to continue in full membership (at a reduced subscription rate, if appropriate). Contact the Branch office to request an application form or it can be found on the Rules and Forms page of our branch website: <http://ucu.open.ac.uk/rules>.

* *Following a change to UCU's rules, regional retired members' branches will, in future, be created for retired members who do not retain their branch membership. When these become established, your membership will be transferred from the central group to the appropriate regional retired members' branch.*

The Spark — pass it on

Please forward this new copy of *the Spark* newsletter 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 *the 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.



Report from the AL working group

The AL working group exists to deal with AL concerns that can be resolved within the current contract and has the task of updating aspects of the current contract that may be considered necessary. The group makes recommendations to the Joint Negotiating Committee for approval.

The group now includes a representative of faculties in addition, on the management side, to representatives from AL Services and HR. Issues needing broader agreement in faculties will be taken back for further discussion. This is currently happening with AL appointment issues as noted below. The group met in September and November 2013.



AL Appointments

A main area of work has been in trying to resolve a number of AL appointment issues that are time consuming and a real frustration to ALs. This includes the following items.

When presentation patterns change there is a need to ensure all ALs teaching a particular module will be reallocated to the new presentations in a way that reflects the anticipated student numbers. If there is a shortfall of ALs then normal recruitment procedures will apply and if there is a shortfall of students then normal redundancy procedures for fluctuating student numbers will apply. We have provided an overarching statement to be added to scenarios provided by HR. We will return to this in December following further consideration by HR and the Faculties.

Guidance on the use of single presentation contracts has been agreed in the working group and discussions on this are continuing with Faculties.

We have proposed extending the period of appointable status from the current limited period to the full life of a module, to limit the need for a full re-application should a group not be available at the start of a module. There are concerns from the faculties about this, particularly around ensuring the currency of ALs on modules that are part of professional qualifications and discussions with faculties continue.

We have proposed a form of words that would define a successor module and would enable ALs to be transferred from the previous module directly onto the successor module without the need for applications and interviews. Some reskilling and new subject knowledge might be necessary but this would be no different to what is required of staff in a conventional university. Both sides wish to reduce the time spent on continual re-recruitment and selection and discussion continues.

AL Terms and Conditions and the AL Code of Conduct

We have agreed wording to clarify the 10 working days turnaround time for TMAs (both paper and eTMA) and this is now posted on Tutorhome at www2.open.ac.uk/tutors/employment/al-employment-policies.

Agreement has been reached on minor changes to the Terms and Conditions that reflect changes within university structures and discussions continue to finalise changes to the Grievance and Disciplinary procedures to bring them more in line with the corresponding procedures for internal staff.

Access to Lync

We have indicated that access for ALs to the internet based telephony system, Microsoft Lync would enable better communications between staff within the university and with students. This is under consideration.

ITE Tutors

We have been seeking to normalize the pay and conditions of ITE tutors that sit outside the main contract and ITE tutors have now received the appropriate pay increase and associated back pay that brings them into line with mainstream ALs. This issue of salary progression is still under review. However, it has just been announced that the university is withdrawing from the PGCE programme, so the future of ITE tutors is now in doubt.

Set Books

As reported in the last issue of *the Spark* it has been agreed that the University will provide these for ALs for all modules where required and we are waiting for this to appear on TutorHome.

Response times to student queries

As a result of an enquiry from a member in FBL it has become apparent that there may be inconsistency in what response times to student queries faculties may expect from ALs. This is under consideration.

Future Meetings

In future meetings we will be seeking to resolve the AL appointment issues outlined and will also be considering what implications the implementation of SSTs may have for ALs and AL workload.

AL working group team: Bruce Heil, David Knowles, Judy Ekins & Pauline Collins

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,

Many thanks for the latest Spark newsletter (Sept 2013). I just want to take this opportunity to thank you for your tireless work. I am an AL and affiliated member because I have my full affiliation with another institution. The latest edition of *the Spark* covers a lot of things I am interested in and concerned with, and I am simply pleased that these issues are taken up by you and pursued seriously. I just would like to list a few things in response to *the Spark*:

- ICT cost: With emphasis on online tuition, I have been bothered about this. It seems maintenance of good, stable internet connection is my responsibility in order to carry out Elluminate teaching which, I do not think, adequately covered by whatever component in my salary as an AL;
- Fractional contract: I very much appreciate your efforts on this front. I think it is important for many ALs for whom OU earning is the main source of income to formalise this arrangement;
- London weighting: I have been wondering why Region 1 ALs do not receive pro-rata London weighting.

I have been very lucky with my Staff Tutors and have not had any issues with them. I would imagine, though, others might not be so lucky as I am. I am sure your work is appreciated by a large number of ALs.

Best wishes

OU UCU member

A reply to *the Spark* email — September 2013

Many thanks OU branch of UCU - much appreciated. Pleased (very in fact) to know that *the Spark* lives on - shades of my former time teaching history at the Havering College. Can't promise that all my students were quite as excited when I explained the Lenin link - but I certainly was!

Kind regards for keeping me posted.

John Cowin, AL 1981 to 2010 teaching the OU in Region 6.

Dear Editor

In the September issue of *the Spark*, it was reported that Senate had agreed to a review of the promotion criteria for academic staff. Since then, a working group has produced a consultation document, which was circulated for comment, with a very short amount of time for responses. It also seems that UCU was not formally consulted about the proposed changes, which is very worrying.

Apart from concerns about the way in which these changes are being considered, the substance is also worrying. Almost everyone seems to agree that the current procedures and criteria for promotion are not fit for purpose. It is almost impossible for staff to know what they need to do in order to demonstrate that the vaguely defined criteria have been met. This leads to a perception of unfairness. However, the proposed new criteria seem to set the bar for promotion at such a high level that many staff will feel that promotion is beyond their grasp. It is all very well to set a 'wish list' of what academics should be doing in the best of all possible worlds, but in the real world most of us are struggling to cope with increasing demands and workload. How many of the OU's current senior staff would meet these new criteria?

I wonder whether the people reviewing the criteria have taken account of the impact of the current criteria on staff morale and retention, or the likely impact of the new criteria? Some of us were willing to work at the OU, even if we could earn more elsewhere, because we were committed to the institution and our students. This commitment is harder to maintain when academic salaries are not keeping pace with inflation. Younger staff should represent the future of the OU, but if there is little prospect of internal promotion they will go to other institutions. Or they will stay, feeling demotivated and under-valued by their senior colleagues who were lucky enough to be promoted under the previous system, or appointed externally to senior positions. That can't be good for the OU's future.

OU UCU member

UCU Strike day reactions

I think the idea of a strike over pay is a poor way to get attention at the OU since most academics work from home most of the time and their striking would go unnoticed. Also many people who feel strongly about the issue are not happy to strike and it is difficult to strike effectively within current legislative curbs. A petition that all OU staff could sign calling for an end to the pay squeeze, whether union members or not, whatever their status, that could be presented to the VC would be more effective. To be faced with a very long petition on the subject from staff within the institution would surely have a greater and more immediate effect. I would sign such a petition.

Anonymous

We have been discussing the action short of a strike. As you might expect colleagues are unsure as to what form this might take – because many of our contracts are very baggy (for example evening and weekend work is routine). We would very much like some guidance from the branch; ideally with specific examples. In the meantime I have directed members to the UCU website and asked that they add an auto-response to their email.

Examples of members questions include:

“if one works in a team of six and one is off sick how might one say no to taking on the absent persons workload – because work is pooled”. ?

“does absence include not covering for sick leave”?

“what back up and support will we have in place for people who refuse to do a task”?

Helpful suggestions include getting OUSA on-board; creating a list of work to rule tasks specific to UCU members in nations and regions which could be shared.

Anonymous

OU units have sent this or a similar version to all staff in their units/faculties:

We are also required to complete a log identifying staff who refuse to undertake specific activities as a result of industrial action short of a strike. Please let me know if this is the action you are taking.

UCU's view is that if you are performing your normal duties but not undertaking activities over and above that, the employer has no justification for deducting your salary. UCU will challenge any attempts to make deductions from staff who are following the work to contract. Check out our full guidance at this address: <http://www.ucu.org.uk/workingtocontract>.

Your reply should therefore be:

“I confirm that I am participating in current industrial action organised by UCU, in the form of 'working to contract'. UCU advises me that because I am fulfilling all reasonable contractual duties, the employer should not make any unauthorised deductions from my salary.”

Just to say good luck with the industrial action - I tutor on DD307 so we are currently between presentations, and I've nothing to go on strike from, but I will still count myself as being on strike that day! (My main job is in FE in Glasgow so I'm too far away from a regional office to lend my support, and I'm an EIS member, so we are not on strike).

Anonymous



The Open University branch of UCU

Room 015 Wilson C Block,
The Open University,
Walton Hall,
Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA
Phone: (01908) 6(53069)
email: ucu@open.ac.uk
Web: www.ucu.open.ac.uk

Need help?

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

UCU resources

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

- Hessian bag
- Mug
- Lanyard—new OU branch ones just arrived!
- Pens
- Mouse mat
- Publicity posters



Branch meetings 2014

Future branch meeting dates are as follows and all members are welcome to attend:

Tues 11th March 2014 branch meeting at 12.30pm, room to be advised - motions to Congress (deadline is 14 March 2014)
Tues 29th April 2014 branch meeting at 12.30pm, room to be advised - Congress amendments (deadline 2 May 2014)
Tuesday 23rd September 2014 branch meeting at 12.30pm, room to be advised
Wednesday 19th November 2014 AGM at 12.30pm, room to be advised

Your Executive Committee 2013-14

President: Pauline Collins

Honorary Secretary: Lesley Kane

Honorary Treasurer: Stephen Pattinson

Vice Presidents: David Knowles and Meridian

Equality Officer: Costas Athanasopoulos

Central Academic Staff Officer: [vacancy](#)

Central Academic-Related Staff Officer: Kate Servant

Regional/National Academic Staff Officer: Philip O'Sullivan

Regional/National Academic-Related Staff Officer: [vacancy](#)

Associate Lecturers Officer: Judy Ekins

Ordinary Members:

Jeni Aldridge
John Bennett
Eric Bowers
Gill Clough
Bruce Heil
Eric Wade

David Houpt
Hilary Partridge
John Peters
Peter Piper
Nicolas van Labeke
1 ordinary member [vacancy](#)

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

UCU National Exec Committee Members:

Pauline Collins, Lesley Kane and Roger Walters

Father of NUJ Chapel - [vacancy](#)