

The Open University branch of UCU — August 2020

The AL Contract Newsletter

Welcome to the first UCU AL Contract Newsletter. The aim of this newsletter is to give you a brief overview of the work that your UCU negotiators are doing to reach agreement with management on how the new contract will be implemented. It gives an overview of each of the main negotiating areas. For details and FAQs about the new contract, see <https://learn3.open.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=301036>. The central benefit to ALs is increased job security, and there are other improvements, such as additional leave days, bringing AL terms and conditions closer to those of other UCU staff.

As some of you know, it took many years to reach agreement with management on creating a new contract. Whilst that agreement covered many of the elements that would be included in the new contract, some finer details and process of implementation were still to be negotiated. Your UCU reps have been working with management on those next steps. None of this has been easy, not least because it is a huge change for the university and there are extremely complex details to work through. We have been ensuring that there are joint communications on the contract but it is clear that UCU members also need to know what the union has been doing on their behalf. We will update you as work progresses and will also be holding meetings to discuss the contract implementation in the Autumn.

One thing is very clear: UCU and the university management are absolutely committed to implementing the new contract for the 21J presentation and we will continue to work together in partnership to make this happen.

Staff Tutors/Student Experience Managers and Workload

UCU has been raising concerns about the workload pressures for ST/SEM colleagues for years, and the pandemic has only made that worse. As part of the broader UCU Workload Campaign we intend to conduct workplace (virtual) inspections with ST/SEMs to collect evidence about the impact of high workload on staff well-being, which is a Health and Safety issue. That should allow us to get to detailed recommendations for addressing this challenge. There will be more information about this in the Autumn.

It is also clear that the new contract will mean changes to the way in which the ST/SEM job is done. We have agreement with management that it will not change the role of ST/SEMs. However, there can be no doubt that changes to the way work is allocated and to the relationship with ALs will have a significant impact on ST/SEMs. We are working with management to look at these issues and any new training, procedures and policies in detail. We will also be holding an online ST/SEM UCU Conference to look at workload and working practices, as well as other concerns that our members have been raising. We anticipate this will happen in October and will send out details to members as soon as possible.

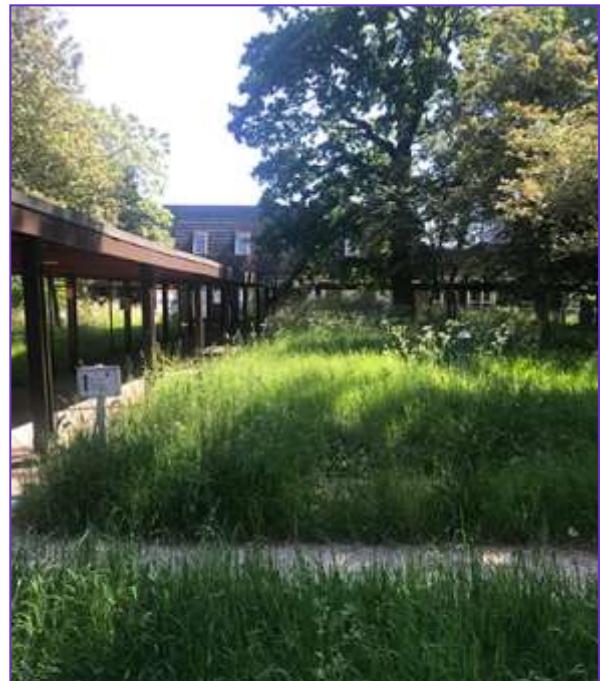




Transitions

The Transitions Group has been working to reduce the complexity of AL job applications and interviews in the period up to final transition to the new contract in October 2021. That has included relaxation of the geographical rules and removing the need for current staff to address a generic person specification. There is still a long way to go: for example, ensuring that staff who currently teach on a module retain their appointability should they wish to take on another group. Although this point was agreed it has currently run up against system problems. However, simplifying how ALs are recruited to modules before October 2021 will remain a top priority.

In the remaining time as we near the new contract, the group will also focus on the processes and systems that have to change with the implementation of the new contract. For example, an essential question is how and when new ALs will be recruited with an FTE in mind rather than on a module basis. There are also broader issues around cultural change as ALs are brought more closely into faculties and schools.



Skills Audit

The Skills Audit is the central process that will enable the new contract to work. The aim of this audit is to provide a profile of an AL's capabilities and areas of expertise. Then if workload changes are needed, appropriate module teaching/additional duties can be allocated to the AL. For example, this might happen at the end of module life. The conversation between an AL and their line manager can also identify whether any development might be needed to enable the AL to move to another module.

Working out the full process and systems for the Skills Audit is the focus of this negotiating group. Further work is needed to finalise the overall approach with more testing before the Skills Audits can begin to take place in early 2021. There will also be a need to prioritise which ALs must go through the process early if their work is changing, versus those for whom the audit can be delayed until after transition since they have no changes to workload. A phased approach to this through the transition and after will help to spread the work for STs/SEMs and make it manageable for everyone.

Staff Tutors: Training and Development

UCU is currently negotiating a number of new employment policies to support the introduction of the new contract. Many of these will be simple amendments of current policies. However, some are new and will provide a much clearer and better framework for all parties. For instance there is a brand new disciplinary policy being negotiated which will align better with that for other staff, as well as a new 'capability' policy. To support Staff Tutors/SEMs, UCU is in discussions with management about the training and development that will be needed to ensure that everyone who will use the policies is familiar with them and given an opportunity to explore how they will work. We are expecting a programme of training and development to be rolled out in the late Autumn. We are also in discussions with management about ensuring appropriate time is allowed in ST/SEM workload plans to ensure staff can take part. We will keep you updated on this when we have details.



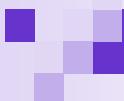
Workload Allocation

One of the most important elements of the new contract is how to allocate workload to maintain the FTE of each AL. Previously it was the responsibility of ALs to look for other work if they lost a tutor group or if a module was coming to an end. After the new contract starts it will be the university's job to look at workload gaps and help match the expertise of an AL from their profile to appropriate alternative work, agreed during their skills audit with work to be done, including any agreed additional duties.

UCU has been aware of ST/SEM concerns about the creation of a system to support the allocation of work under the new contract. Unfortunately, the design and implementation of a suitable system is running late for a variety of reasons, including delays in getting the right resources in place. Most importantly, up to now there has been little consultation with the people that need to use the system about how it should be designed. Taking on board those concerns, UCU met with the University Secretary and the Deputy Vice Chancellor to ask that immediate resources should be released to support the development of this system and ensure everything is in place for the new contract.

ALs will be transferring to the new contract with guaranteed hours to cover their current module appointments held in Spring 2021 when the size of the new part-time contracts will be determined. A large majority of ALs will still be teaching the same modules in 2021/22, which should help mitigate some of the work initially needed for new workload allocation. UCU is also considering if there is a need to handle the administration of additional duties* separately in the first year, to make workload allocation more manageable in the front line, whilst still providing the ALs with the security of employment that we were promised and deserve. Your UCU negotiators continue to push hard to represent the views of all members in designing a system that will create a foundation for the fair allocation and maintenance of work and employment for ALs. It is absolutely vital that we (and the university) get this right to make it workable for everyone.

* Note: As well as paid hours for module tuition, the new part-time contract will include salary for regular and substantial work done on additional duties (e.g. EMA/exam script marking, critical reading, monitoring), based on an average over the last three years. The details of how this will be calculated are still under discussion.



This newsletter is meant for anyone interested—please share!

Ways You Can Support the AL Contract Implementation:

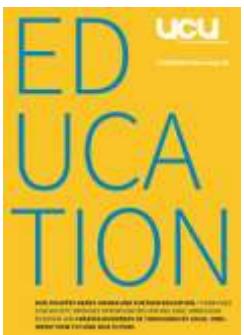
- Chat to colleagues about the benefits of the contract and union membership
- Attend informal drop-in sessions or members' meetings to keep up to date with UCU developments
- If your module is changing, alert OU UCU by emailing: ucu@open.ac.uk
- Follow our branch on Facebook and Twitter

Together we can ensure a positive working environment for our ALs and all colleagues across the four nations.

Fund the Future

Join the UCU campaign to protect jobs and secure government funding for tertiary education.

For more information and details about ten steps you can take to make a difference, please visit: <https://fundthefuture.org.uk/>



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