

The Open University Branch
of the University and College
Union

October 2021
Issue 4



AL Newsletter

Bulletin for AL UCU members at The Open
University

Welcome to the October 2021 edition
of the OU UCU Newsletter for ALs.

As we write this newsletter, issues with our USS pensions are once again rearing their ugly heads. We covered pensions in the previous [issue of our AL newsletter](#). Branch Vice-President Kit Power interviews Sam Marsh (UCU USS negotiator) about the context in [two podcasts](#).

We are still looking for a suitable name for the newsletter, so any suggestions are welcome. Rather like the BBC, we hope that the newsletter will, “inform, educate and entertain.” We include a special tax tip that could save you hundreds of pounds. Any feedback on newsletter content is welcome.

STOP PRESS: UCU is holding a ballot of members from 18th October to 4th November on the USS and Four Fights dispute. Please check your address and other personal information are correct on [My UCU](#). Read all the latest updates on the UCU website: [USS dispute](#) and [Four Fights dispute](#).

AL Reps Committee Newsletter group

STOP PRESS: UCU Survey on AL recruitment. If you sought additional module appointment(s) for 21J, or recently sought TRA work we would like to hear about your experiences, [view survey](#). It's a short survey with 14 questions. (TRA: tuition related activities)



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Is your information up to date on My UCU?

Please email check your personal information is up to date on My UCU: [My UCU](#).

UCU Ballot on Industrial action coming soon

UCU is balloting its members at UK universities from Monday 18th October. This is in connection with the USS pensions dispute, but also on the Four Fights: pay, unsafe workloads, equality matters and casualisation.

The full details are here: <https://ucu.org.uk/article/11766/UK-university-staff-to-ballot-in-October-over-pay-and-pensions>

Our branch is looking for volunteers to help with contacting members to encourage them to vote in this important ballot. Please do get in touch with ucu@open.ac.uk if you'd like to find out more about this, or of course to volunteer.

The ballot opens on 18th October and closes on 4th November 2021.

Link to USS Pension modeller: <https://ucu.org.uk/ussmodeller>. Staff could lose up to 35% of their future pension accrual because of proposed changes. Find out what these changes would mean for your retirement by using the UCU Pension modeller.

Link to our Podcasts, Kit Power, Vice-President interviews Sam Marsh, one of the UCU negotiators in the USS dispute, there's very good explanations of the terms used in the pensions dispute: <https://ucu.open.ac.uk/news/podcasts->

New UCU resource on fighting casualisation

'[Fighting casualisation: what can I do?](#)' is a new UCU resource developed in association with members on casualised contracts and with UCU's anti-casualisation committee, providing ideas to all members on how they can support the fight against casualisation—from including colleagues in tea clubs, challenging management narratives, and supporting colleagues taking industrial action.

Have a look, share widely, and send us your feedback, ucu@open.ac.uk.





What do you want to read about in future issues?

Please email ucu@open.ac.uk with ideas for articles in future issues of this newsletter. You can either suggest topics you would like to read or articles you would like to write and contribute.

Ballot news

UCU is holding a ballot of members from 18th October to 4th November on the USS and Four Fights dispute, please check your personal information is correct on [My UCU](#). Read all the latest updates on the UCU website: [USS dispute](#) and [Four Fights dispute](#).

Jam tomorrow guaranteed – why the binding agreement on the AL Contract matters

For your UCU negotiators the decision by the University to pull the AL contract this year came as an utter shock, particularly after we had entered into intensive negotiations to make the new contract work in time for the original October 2021 implementation date. The weeks following the University announcement saw a webinar series in which a number of promises were made to ALs, but none of those promises felt thought out or coherent. This could have been a complete disaster for UCU members, leaving ALs without work or security. Our members had turned down other employment on the basis of the promises made by a university management who seemed to think little of pulling the plug on the most significant project to end casualisation in the sector.

Although that period was hard, it ended up as a triumph, this was down to the sheer strength of feeling shown by ALs, giving your negotiators the power to argue that promises meant nothing if they weren't backed up by a legally binding agreement. UCU is no stranger to employers telling us that whilst they would love to give us jam today...they just can't. But they will promise jam tomorrow. We are also no strangers to seeing the 'jam tomorrow' vanish in a cloud of weasel words with no substance. What the UCU members managed to achieve at the OU was something virtually unique in the sector – a promise that was enforceable. So, while it wasn't what anyone would have wanted, the binding agreement demonstrated the collective will of members holding management to account and ensuring that for once their promises will actually mean something. This was no mean feat and is an inspiring example to the rest of the union movement.

Lydia Richards, UCU Regional Official, Eastern & Home Counties and AL Contract Negotiation Lead



Report from ALs Officer: Judy Ekins

We are still recovering from the OU management pulling out of implementing the new AL contract in October this year. We have been trying to protect AL interests in the transition period.

We have a legally binding agreement that the OU will implement the new permanent contract in August 2022. This includes guaranteed job security and an increased FTE salary to be paid over 12 months from October 2021.

Some ALs, mainly those who teach only on the J presentation, may get a lower monthly salary than currently from October, even though the total over 12 months will be more than at present. We have negotiated a balancing payment of 1 day per J module presentation (paid at DL rates) to cover work expected in September and paid in September. The ICT and general expenses element, currently included in monthly salary, will all be paid up front in September. Thus all ALs currently teaching on J presentations will get an extra payment in September. This should mitigate a lower monthly salary for the year beginning in October. Each month's salary will be 1/12 of the annual FTE salary.

The FTE salary calculations were sent out at the end of June and included module teaching work and other Teaching Related Activities (TRAs), which were taken as an average over three years. (The timing of the letters means that the current calculations may not be fully up to date yet.) The calculation of this and how it will be used, especially in the transition period, in allocated work are still the subject of negotiation.

The University is belatedly recognising its obligations under the working time directive of a maximum 48-hour week (roughly 1.3 FTE), having done little to enforce this previously. Up to now it has sometimes given ALs additional appointments without considering their total workload including with other employers as the law requires. The OU now wants to end the problem of ALs with more than 1.3 FTE, but it is effectively blaming them for taking on additional work rather than accepting its own responsibility for this situation. The 2018 new contract agreement says that such ALs will get replacement work, but no new additional work. In practice there has been some variable practice so if you are affected please contact the office. There are ongoing negotiations on how we can sort this out in the future ensuring fairness but also preventing people from overworking.



...continued over

...continued Report by Judy Ekins

Following an increase in student numbers since October 2020, the University issued hundreds of temporary “Single Presentation” (SP) appointments, instead of more permanent “Every Presentation” (EP) appointments, over the objections of UCU. However, for SPs issued by March 22nd, we have negotiated that where ALs wish to have these converted, SPs will be changed to EP appointments, and included in an AL’s FTE provided this does not take the AL over 1.3 FTE. Alternative appropriate work may be offered for the same FTE if student numbers fall. As this is very complicated it has not been implemented consistently. If conversion of an SP will take you over 1.3 FTE you should be asked if you wish to give up other work such as TRA work. Members should contact the office (ucu@open.ac.uk) with any issues.

In the transition period, we have been keen to negotiate that appointment procedures for existing ALs be as light touch as possible. We have had some success. Appointability has been extended and taking on a second group on a module should not require a separate application. At module life end, ALs should be transferred onto replacement modules automatically wherever possible. Full applications should only be needed for additional work to the FTE given in June. It is now the OU’s responsibility to find suitable work to fill up your FTE. You should not need to put in applications to replace work you are losing.

The binding agreement included some areas for further negotiation so we are still working hard. Please let us know about any issues you encounter, if you feel that negotiated arrangements are not being implemented consistently, and we will try to sort this out.

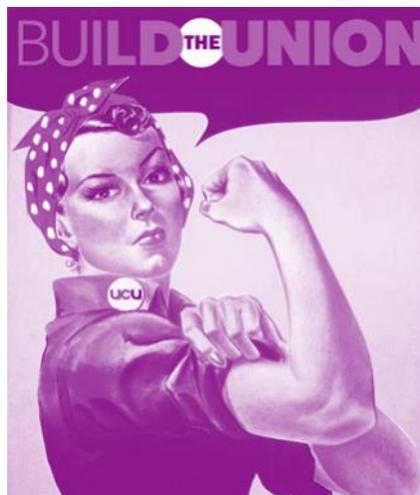
Judy Ekins, ALs Officer

JOIN UCU

www.ucu.org.uk/join

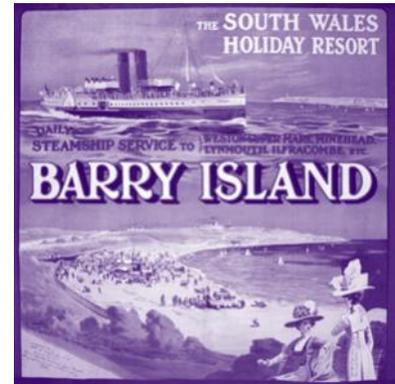
Or join by phone: 0333
207 0719*

*Lines open 9.15am-
4.45pm Mon-Fri.



The Secret AL: By Your Leave

Under the new permanent contract we will get more annual leave, but still not as much as our other permanent colleagues. We weren't very agitated about that: many ALs don't take proper holidays anyway, so what's the point of having more? In effect, the increase in holiday entitlement simply means an increase in pay. But UCU is also negotiating about cover arrangements, because in future the intention is that we can have proper annual leave just like other staff categories.



Some ALs are unaware that we have always been entitled to take holiday (where this doesn't interfere with duties), sick leave, maternity leave, compassionate leave, and if necessary during the pandemic, contingency leave.

Under the new Core Systems Replacement programme, we will be able to book our leave online; there'll be a record to show we haven't taken it and the university will monitor this as part of its duty of care. One colleague asked: How can we book leave while showing that we are still available to our students? The CSR team was bemused; fellow ALs knew what she meant—but also that if you are available to students, you are not 'on leave'!

I've had colleagues who insisted on marking while recovering from major injury (to the marking arm). It's difficult to book proper leave when teaching J and B/C/D/E presentations, and therefore one is technically on call all year. We feel a strong sense of mission with OUR students, who are keen to study and improve their and their families' situations. We're reluctant to let another tutor take on our carefully nurtured groups; they might give the students incorrect referencing advice!

We teach tutorials in the evenings, Saturdays and even Sundays and Bank Holidays. An exhausted tutor is not giving best support to OUR students. One (rare!) benefit of Group Tuition Policy is that we have a group of colleagues to take over while we have a break. The permanent contract should make it easier to take leave. In this transition year, make sure you look at taking time off where feasible. It might only be a Staycation – but we all need good time out.



The contract: where to now?

It's brilliant news that we have managed to get a new contract for ALs. Hopefully this will now be implemented without any further ado and any remaining issues can be sorted soon.



The main purpose of negotiating the new contract has been to provide ALs with security of income. We have always known there were things to pick up in future rounds of negotiation, such as a promotion route. UCU's negotiators pushed harmonisation of benefits with those of academic and related staff as far as they could in the financial environment of 2015-2018, and knew this was a work in progress. As we move forward into this new world, new challenges will still arise and as a union branch we still need to work hard to ensure any issues thrown up by the new contract are sorted in a fair and equitable way.

Among key issues to be revisited are:

1. The indicative list of Tuition Related Activities is a starting point for this year but there are already some obvious problems arising from treating it as an exclusive list. And does longer term scholarship work need to be excluded from FTE even when it is compatible with our AC2 grade? These sorts of exclusions will encourage ongoing use of small contracts when the point of the AL Contract is to end this casualisation.
2. ALs do not know how representative work such as sitting on university committees will be paid, even though other staff categories are allotted time from their role. This could affect the willingness of some ALs to put themselves forward for this important work.
3. The VC talked about trying to create a culture where all are equal. Moving forward we trust he will support further harmonisation of benefits such as annual leave to bring ALs in line with other staff.
4. There should be opportunities in the future to move between modules and undertake interesting project work that used to be paid as additional duties. The approach to FTE increases in future must be transparent and fair, and allow ALs to grow and develop.
5. The calculation of AL worktime is based on some very old and outdated calculations about contact hours and assessment time. Schools and module teams have adapted these (or not) in varying ways to accommodate new kinds of work. For some ALs this means a large gap between paid time and actual time. The university will have to work with the union to address this and the reality of AL overwork.

Branch Executive Committee

Eric Bowers

We have recently said farewell to Eric, who retired in July after working for the OU for 50 years. Eric wrote course books in the 1970s, such as S22, Comparative Physiology, and S323 Ecology. You can get a flavour of these early courses at Comparative physiology: [Unit 1 - Open University Digital Archive](#).



Eric is a long-standing Union activist. He had been an AUT/UCU AL rep since the 1970s and was a valuable member of the Branch's Executive Committee for decades. In 2020 we were grateful to see him at the picket line in Cardiff, supporting the next generation of OU colleagues fighting for equality and fair pensions. Throughout his very long OU career Eric was always known for generosity in mentoring new colleagues and helping them build their confidence. Outstandingly kind and unfailingly polite, he brings his sense of social justice and fair play to all occasions. We hope he will enjoy his retirement as much as we in the branch have enjoyed his company over these many years.

Farewell and thank you to these members:

Philip O'Sullivan has been on our Exec Committee, the UCU Ireland rep and a member of our JNC team for over 10 years. Philip has now stood down from our Executive Committee and as one of our caseworkers. The branch has thanked Philip for his service to the branch and to UCU, with a small gift.



Hilary Partridge retired from the OU at the end of September, Hilary has been an Executive Committee member, a UCU AL rep and one of our caseworkers for many years. The branch has thanked Hilary for her service to the branch and UCU, with a gift.

OUBUCU Branch meetings

All UCU members are welcome to attend Branch meetings, the dates are all on our branch website:

<http://ucu.open.ac.uk/events>.

The AL Reps Committee is always happy to have new members who may follow in Eric's footsteps. If you are interested contact ucu@open.ac.uk to find out more.

Guidance on tax relief

Working from home means you should be eligible to claim tax relief. There's a full explanation here (including changes during the pandemic) and guidance on how to claim: [Martin Lewis: Working from home due to coronavirus, even for a day? Claim TWO years' worth of tax relief.](#)

Claim tax relief for working from home HMRC: [working from home guidance.](#)



Support for trans and non-binary Associate Lecturers

UCU is committed to trans inclusion. Recently at UCU request the university has offered access to specialist counselling for trans, non-binary and non-gender-conforming staff. If you would like to learn more or take advantage of this offer please contact UCU and we will put you in touch with the appropriate People Services contact.

As a union, UCU is committed to trans inclusion. Please contact the union on ucu@open.ac.uk if you need support or advice.

<https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/10177/Statement-reaffirming-UCUs-commitment-trans-inclusion>

UCU Survey on AL recruitment

If you sought additional module appointment(s) for 21J, or recently sought TRA (tuition related activities) work we would like to hear about your experiences, [view survey](#). It's a short survey with 14 questions.

Link to share: https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=VdQuDg-WAEG-06jl_ZgWhbX8xvgOt6dChb3xLOhrFQ1UMVhaV1MwVTc1NUo5Tk85MEExOENGMkVHMS4u

Upcoming UCU Training/Continuing Professional Development

Decarbonise and decolonise webinar, Thursday 14 October at 2pm, [view information on the UCU website](#).



UN CLIMATE
CHANGE
CONFERENCE
UK 2021

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ITALY

UCU is offering an 'Introduction to climate education', 'Embedding climate education in the curriculum', 'Decarbonise and Decolonise' and 'Running climate learning events' as a programme. Each is a stand-alone session. Email gpickard@ucu.org.uk to be informed when new sessions are announced. The Running Climate Learning Event will support members in taking action within their own institutions in the build up to [COP26](#). The workshop will share examples of similar initiatives, promote idea-sharing amongst members and signpost UCU resources and opportunities to help run a climate learning event at your institution.

Rep Training: help build the branch [view information on the UCU website](#)

- Challenging and handling redundancies: October 2021
- Challenging sexual harassment in the workplace: December 2021
- Health and Safety 1 - induction: November & December 2021
- Risk assessment: a safe way of working: October 2021
- UCU Rep 1 - induction: October 2021
- Green New Deal bargaining: November & December 2021 (Scotland and London)

Training is quite flexible if you would like to attend in a UCU region close to where you live. Although the OU branch is classified as being in the UCU Eastern and Home Counties region, due to the OU Campus in Milton Keynes, the aim is to get people trained alongside local activists. Check the main [UCU training website](#) for options. For some courses, such as Health and Safety, you may be able to receive paid training time.

OU Branch of UCU AL reps committee, 2021-2022

Some members of our AL Reps committee sit on the Editorial Board of this newsletter. The Newsletter is primarily written by ALs for ALs. As a UCU communication, it does stress the progressive traditions of the Labour and Trade Union movement but also provides a space to discuss and debate issues of interest. We may label articles 'Opinion pieces' or 'Based on personal experience' or similar. The Editorial Board reserves the right to make changes to articles but will seek the consent of authors for any major changes when doing so. Please note: articles by local authors are written by ALs unless otherwise specified.

Current members of the Editorial Board: John Pearson, Cath Brown, Hilary Partridge (retired 30 September), & Anita Pilgrim.

Our AL Reps committee meets regularly to discuss current AL issues. The committee has standing orders on our [branch website](#). The UCU AL Reps committee is organised by OU regions & nations. Please contact the UCU office at ucu@open.ac.uk if you are interested in becoming an AL Rep.

Current members of the AL Reps' Committee:

Region 1 (London): Isabella Muzio
Region 2 (South): Jason Phillips & Penny Oderberg
Region 3 (South West): Richard Bradbury & John Pearson
Region 4 (West Midlands): Cath Brown
Region 5 (East Midlands) Nottingham: Gerry Stroud & Almut Gadow
Region 6 (East of England): Sarah Armstrong

Region 7 (Yorkshire): Peter Piper & John Peters
Region 8 (North West) Manchester: Tom Saunders & Peter Templeton
Region 9 (North) Mike McNulty & Joe White
Wales: Anita Pilgrim
Scotland: Jeremy Roebuck & Costas Athanasopoulos
Ireland: Bruce Heil
Region 13 (South East) Lesley Kane
Branch ALs Officer Judy Ekins

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