

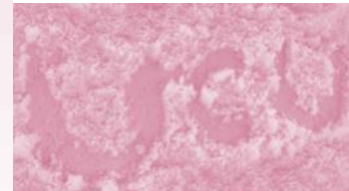
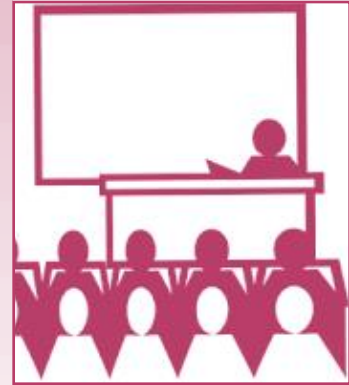
The Open University Branch
of the University and College
Union

February 2021
Issue 2



AL Newsletter

Bulletin for AL UCU members at The Open
University



Update on the new AL Contract

We are now in the year of transfer to the new contract. By Autumn this year (2021) all ALs will be on a permanent contract with the university, providing job security and an end to continual module interviewing.

To enable that transfer to take place negotiations between UCU and management continue around a range of issues to ensure that transfer takes place as smoothly as possible.

Firstly, we are working to ensure that the transfer FTE and our new annual salary, based on our module work and any historical tuition related activities, is accurate. Should there be any concern about an error then a review process will be in place to ensure any issues can be resolved before the transfer FTE is finally agreed. A similar process is being put in place for any AL who might wish to reduce their workload.

Secondly negotiations continue to ensure that the skills audit process works effectively. Through the skills audit process we will all develop a profile of our skills and subject expertise to enable any future work changes, for example at the end of module life, to be carried out as simply as possible.

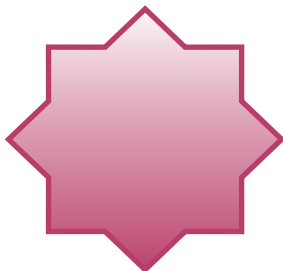
...continued over



Inside this issue

AL contract update	1 & 2
Branch President.....	3
SP Contracts.....	4
HESC reports	5 & 6
WiseFlow & BREXIT.....	7
Post-Xmas Inspiration	8
Secret AL	9
IHRA definition.....	10
Feedback & Contact us ..	12

be protected



...continued Update on the new AL Contract

A third area of work and negotiation is taking place, within a group of UCU and management, revising the processes and procedures for ALs. This is about making our procedures similar to those for other members of staff but recognising the differences in the ways in which ALs work.

Managing our workload will be different under a new contract. A fourth area of negotiation is developing the processes for workload management to ensure that workload for ALs is fairly managed and that processes for Staff Tutors and Student Experience Managers are as straightforward as possible. A key aspect of that will be ensuring that in the future STs have the tools to ensure effective AL workload management.

A further group is negotiating to ensure that in this transfer year any current issues are being dealt with effectively. For example, negotiations continue regarding the current use of single presentation contracts. The union is seeking that these contracts be translated to every presentation contracts so that they can be included within FTE where the AL wishes that.

Finally, work is taking place to provide clarity over how ALs are compensated for homeworking. The current expenses that are rolled up within module payments now need to be transparent and seen to meet AL costs.

Members with any concerns should raise them by email: ucu@open.ac.uk. Further information on the negotiating groups can be found in our [AL Contract newsletter, August 2020](#).

5 Key points about the New AL Contract:

- A secure permanent contract with a guaranteed salary,
- An end to interviewing for replacement work,
- A little extra money to correct some previous anomalies,
- Increased holiday time and time for maintaining academic currency,
- In contrast to other HE institutions, where casualisation is on the increase, the new AL contract reduces it considerably.

Bruce Heil, Branch Executive Member and AL Contract Negotiator

A Note from the UCU Branch President



We hope that most colleagues were able to get a change of pace over the Winter break.

Unfortunately, the current circumstances meant that many colleagues across the four nations were hit with lockdown measures and school closures in January, which we know have been challenging for parents and carers. UCU continues to highlight H&S issues across the university. As part of this we ensured that the contingency leave policy included ALs and the branch can provide casework support to anyone who needs help negotiating for this.

Associate Lecturers were hit with severe workload arising from a number of IT changes in November and December. Among those that weren't anticipated were the difficulties caused by the changes to Adobe Connect and the VLE, and knock-on effects from the new authentication system (replacement of SAMS). UCU joined forces with the AL Executive to seek changes to how VLE updates are handled in future so this doesn't happen again. We are also seeking payment for training in the use of the updated version of Adobe Connect and the extra work generated by the SAMS upgrade.

Much of the coming year will be devoted to the new AL Contract implementation and starting the changes in the university culture to make that a success. One problem is that at present oversight of AL matters is devolved to a number of university units, so there is no single person or office that looks after AL interests in a holistic way. This means that when changes happen, including IT and curriculum changes, workload implications for ALs are not always spotted in advance. Fixing this is a key goal of the year's work.

Caitlin Adams, Branch President

Single presentation contracts



Judy Ekins, ALs Officer—contact Judy via the UCU office: ucu@open.ac.uk

Single presentation contracts

The University issued a lot of single presentation AL appointments for the October 2020 presentation, a process to which the Union did not agree. If you, or anybody you know, received a single presentation appointment for a 20J presentation, please get in touch with our AL Officer, Judy Ekins

j.m.ekins@open.ac.uk.



Reports on UCU HE Sector Conferences

September 2020: Following a summer of emergency responses to COVID, branch delegates met on 30 September to decide democratically on its long-term activities. Although called a 'conference', this is more analogous to an Emergency General Meeting to decide and set UCU's policy on Higher Education for the academic year.

Conference voted for a variety of measures to fight the return to unsafe workplaces, the cancellation of unnecessary face-to-face teaching, and improved support on health and safety and employment rights. Additional action for disabled members, on workloads and on funding was also supported.

Successful motions included calling for Graduate Teaching Assistant work to be integrated into national employment frameworks, that postgraduate researchers be made members of staff, a national redeployment agreement and additional effort for stamping out fixed-term contracts. The longstanding precarity of all three groups has been highlighted through their difficulty in securing furlough support. This comparison emphasises again the significant benefits secured through the new AL contract being a permanent staff contract.

Overall, motions building on the improved but non-binding 'expectations' offered by employers after the industrial action on pay, workload, casualisation and equality (aka Four Fights) were passed seeking a firmer commitment from employers. UCU committed to researching effective methods of industrial action. The motions passed at this conference can be seen at https://ucu.org.uk/hesc_sept20.

December 2020: Delayed but not stopped by coronavirus, branch delegates met again, to decide non-emergency policy for the remainder of the year (to May 2021). Unsurprisingly, Covid was a common theme, whether that was health and safety, equalities, or the financial fall-out for pensions and pay. General themes were that motions mandating specific negotiating aims or tactics were remitted or fell, with successful motions giving UCU's negotiating teams and NEC the leeway to react as they see fit.

.....continued over

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/>



....continued Reports on UCU HE Sector Conferences

Notably this included calling for the investigation of potential multi-year pay bargaining.

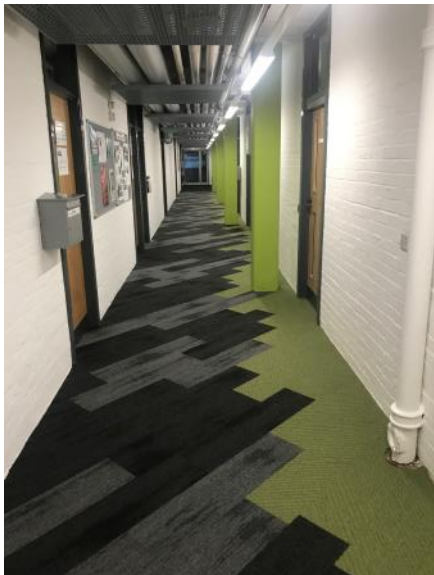
Beyond Covid, commitments were made to focus more resource on local fights. This maintains the importance of national bargaining, but somewhat shifts the focus to ensuring that employers' national commitments to anti-casualisation, equality, pay-gaps and workloads are actually implemented locally. In parallel, multiple motions raised the importance of recruiting and supporting casualised and Academic-related and Professional Services (ARPS) colleagues, given their moral, strategic and tactical importance. (ARPS and the casualised work in universities, are growing in number, marginal in UCU representation, and have valuable expertise in defending all our conditions.)

Environmental issues saw a quite radical proposal to end the use of flights for journeys that can be accomplished through 24 hours of travel by alternative means. That would require a transformative shift to tele-conferencing in Europe, as a 24-hour train starting in Edinburgh will get most of the way to Moscow, Gibraltar or Bucharest.

If this sounds interesting, take part! 2021 Congress is May 29-31, and branch delegates will be asked to self-nominate in February/March.

Further information at: <https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/3414/Annual-congress--sector-conference>

Pete Wood, OU UCU Exec Committee member



The Unions corridor in Wilson Building has been decorated, the old wooden cupboards have gone and we have new carpet tiles—Deb wishes they were UCU pink!

JOIN UCU

www.ucu.org.uk/join

Or join by phone: 0333
207 0719*

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

Book Club meeting

Friday 26th February at
6:30pm, open to mem-
bers and non-
members.

The book is *How to Be
an Antiracist* by Ibram
X Kendi.

The book can be found
at this address, it's not
available as an eBook.

<https://bit.ly/3okSSgQ>

Email ucu@open.ac.uk
for the meeting info.



WiseFlow: Ongoing Concerns

It is still of concern that the facility for offline marking in the new TMA system, Wiseflow, has not yet been confirmed as the latest issue of OU's Snowball newsletter relates: <https://intranet.open.ac.uk/snowball/97-november-2020/etma.php>.

The university is working with Wiseflow to consider appropriate adaptations to the system, but we do not yet have the reassurance that this will be addressed.

As far as UCU is concerned, the ability to do offline marking easily, with a batch-upload function, is an absolutely fundamental requirement for ALs to do their jobs. The new system should not make our role as ALs in any way more difficult than it currently is. UCU continues to maintain a focus on this crucial issue and hopes to have a positive update for members soon.

BREXIT and Immigration: UCU Support

EU27 colleagues (except from Republic of Ireland) will need to apply for settled status by June if they haven't done so already.

UCU recently sponsored a Q&A session with Bindman's law firm and the recording is available to watch [here](#).

UCU members also have direct access to individual immigration advice. You don't have to go through the branch for this. See this website: <https://ucu.org.uk/legal#immigration>

We know that changes to immigration status are distressing and difficult. Whatever happens with treaties and borders, we support our international colleagues.

Update Post-Xmas Inspiration: Small Axe and Sweet Liberty

If you have time in between marking and tutorials, or need a break, consider catching up with *Small Axe* directed by Steve McQueen on BBC iPlayer. This includes an excellent account of the voluntary Saturday schools run by parents, teachers and others worried about the effect of mainstream education on their children in the 70s. It showcases the best aspects of humanity in a creative and caring activity. But the series also tackles the justice system as seen in *Mangrove*. The racism seems shocking now even though it was only 40-odd years ago. The scene where one of the black defendants shreds the idiotic evidence of the police officer is a joy to behold. What it made me think about, however, was that we still know of racism and discrimination in the criminal justice system and wider society – just think about Grenfell or Windrush. At least this series shows when people fight back, small (and sometimes not so small) victories are possible. (A fuller discussion of the *Small Axe* series by OU staff including contributions by ALs can be found on Yammer at: <https://bit.ly/38ysE4O>)

If you also want to read some amazing detail about a really inspiring woman the place to go is *Sweet Taste of Liberty* by W.Caleb McDaniel (2019, Oxford University Press). You can read about the book on the authors own website: <http://wcaleb.org/book/sweet-taste-of-liberty>

However, for a brief foretaste this book concerns the story of a long-forgotten (until now) legal case in the USA (*Wood v Ward*, 1879). Henrietta Wood was born into slavery but freed by her owner. However, in 1855 she was abducted and sold back into slavery, being finally freed after the American Civil War. She sued her abductor for \$20,000 damages and years later won but was only awarded \$2,500 (Worth approx. \$500,000 today). This still stands as the largest US award as restitution for slavery. Imagine the guts and bravery this took, this is a real story of heroism and it will inspire you through the dark days of winter.

Finally, a reminder that OpenLearn has recently launched a new Race and Ethnicity Hub. With support from the OU's academic community and Black and Minority Ethnic Network, the hub will be constantly evolving and growing with new content being added regularly. It's hoped that it will be a 'living' page, which will offer up-to-date reactions to current affairs. Please explore the [Race and Ethnicity Hub](#) and share through your own channels.



The Secret AL — Voluntary Work

As I wrote this, September was easing itself off and the weather was turning distinctly Autumnal. I nearly had a heart attack when the online tutorial timetable that I am asked to check appears to have me down for 6 different things before breakfast (I exaggerate but not a lot) until I realise all the module tutorials are on here and the actual allocation will be a fraction of this.



I also then find myself being offered a 'voluntary' session on Cite Them Rite. Someone (braver than me) did ask if it was to be paid and were told quite clearly not. More and more of our time seems to be taken up with such 'voluntary' activity. At these points I wish to scream back – everyone clapped for the NHS workers, but they pointed out that did not pay the bills. Great to be teaching concepts like equality, justice and diversity bearing in mind we are expected to do some parts of this as 'voluntary' activities.

I tried to have a look at the Cite Them Right material, but it pointed me to a website and at that point I got quite lost, as I imagine will a lot of students. I sometimes feel like I will tell my students that where they used to put the last comma, they should put a semi-colon and if they have any more queries please look at the site and contact the library. But I expect I will get dragged into it on some level. All those degrees and years of study including trying to make some sort of sense of post-modernism to be able to tell students they need a semi-colon rather than a comma. The more worrying aspect of this is that it is alleged we have to pay for this website (after the free pilot) and some rather large sums are being bandied around. Surely it could be asked why they did not get some ALs to update the existing Harvard system instead. They could do with the money following all this 'voluntary stuff' they are 'expected' to do.

Oh well, the first batch of marking has well and truly arrived. Thank goodness it is not on Wiseflow software. If we had to upload them all separately (as Wiseflow currently requires) it would take the best part of a day – more voluntary work.



Fit for purpose? The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism and its application in Higher Education

In October 2020 Gavin Williamson, Secretary of State for Education, asked universities to adopt the IHRA working definition of antisemitism, with the threat if they did not do so they could lose funding and potentially their degree-awarding powers ([The Guardian 2 December 2020](#)). This is an area of controversy because of disagreements over the use of this definition and concerns that it may conflate criticism of the Israeli state or government actors with antisemitism. ([IHRA website and definition](#)). UCU policy, developed after a through motions passed at Congresses in 2017 and 2018, is that this definition when used with the indicative examples is not appropriate for Higher Education institutions because it may limit legitimate debate. ([UCU congress motions](#))

Universities are not immune to anti-semitism, or to other forms of racist racial discrimination and harassment. Whatever the views on the definition, there is no debate about the need to address deeply embedded institutional and structural attitudes, including antisemitic tropes and all forms of anti-semitism.

History and purpose of the definition

According to the lead author, Kenneth Stern, the working definition was originally drafted as a tool for monitoring antisemitism over time in Europe. But its application in institutions, potentially in disciplinary processes in relation attitudes and practices, is much more problematic.

For universities the critical problem is that the adoption of the definition could curtail the freedom to speak, research and teach on topics directly or indirectly relating to Israel/Palestine. As Stern himself has written, when the Trump administration sought to impose the definition in US university settings, "I'm worried that faculty, who can just as easily teach about Jewish life in 19th-century Poland or about modern Israel, will probably choose the former as safer" ([The Guardian 13 December 2019](#)). The description of Israeli laws and policies as racist, or of the Israeli state as practicing a form of apartheid, have already been targeted with claims of antisemitism, as has support for the Palestinian campaign for boycott, divestment and sanctions. The concern is that the threat of disciplinary processes dampens or prevents appropriate free speech on controversial topics, and this effect will be stronger if Universities adopt the definition and associated examples.

....continued over



...continued Fit for purpose?

Senate voted to remit a decision to its next meeting after wider consultation with the OU community.

The papers for the Senate discussion are not confidential:

<https://openuniv.sharepoint.com/sites/governance/senate/SitePages/Home.aspx>



OU Branch of UCU AL reps committee, 2020-2021

All members of our AL Reps committee sit on the Editorial Board of this newsletter. Our AL reps committee meets regularly to discuss current AL issues. The committee has Standing Orders on our branch [website](#). Our AL Reps committee is organised by OU regions, and we have two vacancies in the East of England and Ireland, please contact the UCU office: ucu@open.ac.uk if you are interested in becoming an AL rep.

Current members of the Committee: Costas Athanasopoulos, Eric Bowers, Richard Bradbury, Judy Ekins, Bruce Heil, Lesley Kane, Mark Kirby, Mike McNulty, Isabella Muzio, Hilary Partridge, John Pearson, John Peters, Jason Phillips, Anita Pilgrim, Peter Piper, Jeremy Roebuck and Gerry Stroud.

Feedback on the first newsletter

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, we are planning to send 3 issues per year. You can either suggest articles you would like to read or articles you would like to write and contribute.

PLEASE NOTE:

Unless there is a named author, all articles are by ALs. Anonymity is used to protect against victimization.

Just to say thanks so much to the AL Reps for the newsletter - it's really helpful to have all AL issues updated in one place, really clear format, and great to hear the story/experience from the AL, which I can relate to! I also wanted to take this chance to say thank you so, so much, for all you are doing to negotiate on our behalf, and the financial support/recognition you won for us over Covid impacts, e.g. the pay in place of the 2 days' holiday and the fulfilment of pay for our EMA contracts.

I'm sorry that I don't have the time to be more directly involved...but I have been so grateful for all of your efforts, and it really makes me feel supported while working at the OU. ALs get our work and contributions recognised at the OU to a far greater extent than the previous university I worked at (on a casual contract) - any training, we were just expected to do in our own time, including for work we might or might not end up getting contracts for. With AL contracts, additional tasks were just thrown in randomly, and we were expected to absorb this. That (in my experience!) this does not generally happen at the OU is, I am in no doubt, in large part because of the continued and active presence and pressure from the OU's UCU branch, so thank you once again!"

CONTACT US

Open University Branch of University and College Union

Email: ucu@open.ac.uk

Telephone: 01908 6(53069)

Branch website: <http://ucu.open.ac.uk/>

Like and Follow OU UCU on **Facebook** and **Twitter**

<https://www.facebook.com/openuniversityucu>

<https://twitter.com/oubucu>



JOIN UCU: www.ucu.org.uk/join or join over the phone: 0333 207 0719, lines open 9.15am-4.45pm Monday to Friday.