

Helping Hands Newsletter for Academic-Related staff

REPORT FROM MANCHESTER

Hi my name is Elaine Walker and I am an OU UCU rep and Educational Adviser based in Manchester.

The OU has many roles that don't happen in other Universities. This applies to the Educational Adviser job. This role recognises that our students are far more likely to need support with their studies. We work in partnership with ALs and Staff Tutors and offer broad support to those with complex needs throughout their studies.

Our guidance approach means that we work with the student, trying to get them to reflect and change, in order to find a way forward - we don't tell them what to do. We also act as internal advocates and problem solvers for students. This involves knowing who to talk to and making the case for something to be changed or an exceptional arrangement. We often find ourselves pushing at the boundaries of policy decisions. We help students who may be in a mental health crisis. Dealing with students in difficult situations can mean calls can be very challenging and stressful for us, so support is critical.

Manchester and Nottingham were the only regional offices in England to survive the closures that happened a few years ago. It was at the point of major change that I became a UCU rep. I was thrown in at the deep end! Co-ordinating with other UCU colleagues and taking action to try and ensure the best possible situation for our much valued colleagues.

With the Covid-19 crisis we decamped and quickly set ourselves up to work from home. This has brought a new range of concerns as a UCU rep relating to health and safety of working from home and more recently returning to the office. OU UCU has been actively representing our concerns and fighting so we only return to the office when it is safe to do so.



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WAYS YOU CAN HELP

During this challenging time there are a number of ways you can help yourself and your OU UCU branch:

- Make time for a quick chat with others and to attend informal UCU meetings. It's difficult to often get a sense of how everyone is doing at present with no casual opportunities for a quick chat. Making time to catch up with others and attending our informal branch meetings helps you remain connected with you colleagues.
- Keep OU UCU updated of what is happening in your unit
- As there are so many developments on going across the OU we really value you sharing these with your rep or the UCU office (ucu@open.ac.uk) so as we know how best to support everyone.
- Share this newsletter with potential OU UCU members. Show potential members how the branch is actively representing ALL staff interests. We value members from all grade 7 and above areas of the OU (UNISON is the trade union for Technical and Support staff) and we are always keen for more in Academic-related roles to be actively involved with our branch.



Our first Bring a Biscuit meeting took place in July!

BRING A BISCUIT

OU UCU Central Academic-related Staff Officer David Conway and OU UCU Manchester rep Elaine Walker held an informal online drop in session for Academic-related staff in July titled "Bring a biscuit".

Some really good discussion was had during the session from a range of Academic-related staff members from across the nations. It is currently planned to organise similar drop in sessions periodically again in future. Details will be shared when available.

BOOK CLUB

The next meeting of the OU UCU Book Club, open to non-members as well as members, is on 25th August at 6pm. Contact the office if you'd like the meeting request. Our book this time is *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (2018) by Robin DiAngelo.



BRANCH & INFORMAL DROP-IN MEETINGS 2020

Future branch meeting dates are as follows and all members are welcome to attend—these meetings are held via Skype for Business until we are allowed to return to work at Walton Hall campus.

Branch meetings: 15 September at 1pm, 15 October at 1pm and 25 November at 1pm

Informal drop in meetings: 14 August at 1pm, 18 August at 6pm (Adobe Connect) and 27 August at 1pm. The Outlook meeting requests have been sent to all members.

UCU NATIONAL NEWS - FUND THE FUTURE—TEN STEPS PLEDGE

Please visit the Fund the Future website and sign up to the pledge: <https://fundthefuture.org.uk/10-steps/>

The ten steps range from simple actions that take no more than thirty seconds, to more sustained, organised and visible forms of support. Some of them can be done with the support of UCU branches or head office; others we can do on our own or by getting organised with colleagues. Many of them can be done even if you're not a UCU member yourself. This is a new UK-wide campaign to protect jobs, secure government funding for tertiary education, and make sure that we emerge from this crisis with a better system than the one we entered it with.

Ways to help the campaign include:

- Writing to your MP
- Following us on Facebook and Twitter
- Sharing the website <https://fundthefuture.org.uk>
- Join one of the webinars that are taking place: <https://fundthefuture.org.uk/events/>

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JOIN UCU: www.ucu.org.uk/join

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CALM
AND
JOIN
UCU

