

The Open University branch of UCU

The Spark — June 2012

Negotiations break down after UCU votes to resume industrial action

The UCU Higher Education Sector Conference decided by a narrow majority to reject the recommendation of the negotiators to continue the suspension of industrial action over USS and instead to reinstate action short of a strike - a work to rule - with effect from Monday 18 June. Details of the action which members are asked to resume can be found here: www.ucu.org.uk/circ/pdf/UCUHE155.pdf

As a result the employers have indicated that they are not prepared to continue with further talks to consider possible changes in the new USS scheme. A special Sector Conference to consider escalating action to force further concessions from the employers is to take place in September and the OU branch will hold a meeting before this conference to discuss what position branch delegates should take on this.

OU proposes to change leave year

The university is proposing to change the timing of the annual leave year so that it runs from August to July instead of from October to September.

The reasons for this proposed change are based on government changes in accounting and financial reporting practices for public bodies, which would mean that the cost of any outstanding leave at the end of the financial year would need to be accrued. The university estimates that not changing the leave year would cost over £20 million. It therefore would like to change the leave year to align it with the university's financial year with effect from August 2013 and therefore have a ten months leave year from October 2012 until September 2013.

A change in the leave year would mean changes in terms and conditions of service so would need to be negotiated with recognised unions including UCU. Although the Finance Committee was first informed of the probable changed reporting obligations in June 2011, and the University has since undertaken an analysis of the operational implications of changing the leave year, no formal proposals were made to the unions until early May 2012 and negotiations on these proposals have yet to take place.

UCU intends to examine carefully the university's rationale for changing the leave year as well as the implications and proposed transitional arrangements, since there will clearly be some problems in starting a leave year in the middle of a peak holiday period and in staff taking up a large part of their leave entitlement early in the leave year, if unexpected contingencies arise later in the leave year.

Mass redundancies in Business Development Unit

In early May the university announced the provisional decision to close down the bespoke business line in the Business Development Unit - BDU - leading to a possible loss of 24 jobs. The Bespoke Business area provides customised e-learning courses in continuous professional development and the university contends that the future market for such courses is likely to decline, such that the area is likely to make a significant loss in future years.

The formal consultation process with UCU has yet to get underway but UCU has indicated that we will be questioning the business case for closure and we will be pressing for all possible steps to avoid, reduce or mitigate any consequential redundancies.

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Vote no to final offer on pay

The UCU Higher Education Sector Conference voted to ballot all members in HE on the employers final offer - of a pay increase of just 1% - and to advise members to reject this offer as it represents a real cut in pay for the fourth consecutive year. If this offer is rejected then there will be a further ballot on sustained industrial action including strike action.

If you have not received details of this ballot please email ucu@open.ac.uk.

Congress ignores members views on reform in UCU

Despite overwhelming support for reforms in UCU proposed by the General Secretary, and in particular a reduction in the size of the National Executive Committee, the UCU congress voted by substantial majorities to reject these proposals and instead to establish a Commission on UCU democracy to be elected by and from delegates to Congress - a body which has shown itself to be reluctant to embrace reform or to take note of the views of members.

Merger of two units

Plans have been announced to merge OU Validation Services - OUVS - and the Centre for Inclusion and Curriculum. OUVS, which was set up in 1992 when the government closed the Council for National Academic Awards - CNAAs - which was then the only body with the power to award degrees apart from the then existing universities and which took over some of the residual functions of the CNAAs, was based in London until 2009 when it relocated to Walton Hall. The Centre for Inclusion and Curriculum is itself a merger of the former Centre for Widening Participation and the Centre for Outcomes Based Education.

Proposals for the new unit - as yet to be named - would mean a net reduction of seven posts, all staff in both current units have been offered the opportunity to apply for voluntary severance or - if 55 or over - enhanced early retirement and once applications have been considered, the university will assess whether to declare a formal potential redundancy situation.



Centre for Inclusion and Curriculum



Redundancies in Continental Europe

The consultation process between the university and UCU over potential redundancies in continental Europe is continuing, following the Council's decision in March to press ahead with the declaration of a potential redundancy situation and to ignore a UCU proposal to defer such a decision, to allow time for full consideration and consultation on all relevant issues. UCU has asked for an extension of the consultation period - which has to last for a minimum of three months - because of the complexities of the situation and the very different legal frameworks in the different countries in continental Europe in which the OU operates.

Meantime the Times Higher Education published a letter from OU UCU President Roger Walters which drew attention to the university's irregular and probably unlawful employment practices outside the UK over many years and argued that it was unacceptable to make staff suffer because the university had failed to put proper employment processes in place.

This drew a response from OU Director of Human Resources Nigel Holt which argued that ceasing to employ staff in continental Europe would have very little impact on the support for students there - most of whom are already supported by UK based staff - and which studiously avoided responding to the accusation of engaging in irregular and unlawful employment practices.



Roger Walters' original letter: www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=26&storycode=419964

Discussions on compulsory on-call arrangements resume

Discussions between the university and UCU on proposed changes to current Central IT on-call arrangements have resumed following recognition by the university that the proposed changes will affect the terms and conditions of service for some staff in IT and therefore need to be agreed between the university and UCU through formal negotiating processes. The discussions were suspended by UCU as the university was maintaining **that the proposed changes, which include moving from a voluntary "best endeavours" system to a more formal process for providing out of hours support, were simply a "minor variation" to existing terms and conditions of service which did not have to be formally negotiated.** UCU pointed out that this position was untenable and that in any event the university did not have any power to make even minor variations in terms and conditions of service without negotiating these through agreed formal channels. Affected staff in IT will be kept informed of the progress made with the negotiations.



TUC calls for National demonstration

The TUC has announced a national demonstration to be held in London on Saturday 20 October 2012, on the theme of "A future that works," this will call for a very different economic policy to that of the government, one that focuses on investment and growth rather than austerity and spending cuts. Further details will be announced later but there is a website at: www.tuc.org.uk/economy/tuc-21056-f0.cfm



OU UCU affiliates to Milton Keynes Trades Council

The OU branch agreed at a recent general meeting to affiliate to Milton Keynes Trades Council in order to build links with other trade unions in the Milton Keynes area and so co-operate with them on issues of mutual interest. We are entitled to send 6 delegates to MK Trades Council meetings and future meetings dates are as follows, all meetings take place at Bletchley Railway Club starting at 7pm: 21st June, 19th July, 16th August, 20th September, 18th October, 15th November and 20th December

Stop the cuts in the Open University

The petition which the OU UCU branch launched - with strong support from the Open University Students Association— to call on the government to stop the cuts in the OU has now reached over 53,500 signatures. It needs to get 100,000 by 11 November 2012 in order to open up the possibility of a debate in the House of Commons.

Trisha West has tried to gain support for this petition by writing a letter to her local paper, the Darlington and Stockton Times, see: <http://rss.precise-media.co.uk/email/82650/116284664.pdf>.

UCU urges branch members to follow her splendid example and write similar letters to your local paper.

The link to the petition is here: <http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/22316>.



AL Negotiations

Following the suspension of negotiations on a new AL contract reported in the previous issue of Spark, two further meetings of the AL negotiating group have taken place to consider what possible changes can be made in the current AL contract, pending the resumption of negotiations on a new contract.

The first of these meetings UCU reported on the provisional results of a survey of AL members of the branch on what they regarded as the key issues. By far the most important issue, members felt, was having to continually be interviewed for new modules.

The Group decided to set up a sub-group to consider workload management, including group sizes, job security and overall workload management, i.e. the criteria for managing reductions in workload and redundancy - with priority to be given to what could be achieved by the autumn of 2012. At the second meeting the Group considered management proposals revised in the light of a meeting of the sub-group and agreed that there was further detailed work to be done to come back to the Group in June 2012.

The Group also agreed that in future an agreed summary of each meeting should be reported on TutorHome and the intranet. The reports of the first two meetings can be found at these addresses:

23 April meeting: <https://msds.open.ac.uk/tutorhome/news3.aspx?m=4&y=2012>

17 May meeting: <https://msds.open.ac.uk/tutorhome/news.aspx#ns3>

Mileage rate to increase

The mileage rate for all travel on university business will be increased to 39.5p per mile, with effect from 1 August 2012, in the light of increases in petrol prices and in line with a previously agreed formula for indexing the mileage rate to petrol price increases.

New Exec member

We would like to welcome Jonathan Hughes, Lecturer in the Centre for Inclusion and Curriculum, as a new co-opted member of the branch executive committee, he has also agreed to be the UCU rep for that unit.

New rep in IT

We are pleased to announce that Kate Servant has taken over as the UCU rep in IT, now that Ray Brown has left the OU. Kate is a Systems Analyst in the IT Development section of IT.

OU UCU members rights cards

The Recruitment sub-group have produced a members' rights card listing your rights at work - the Branch Administrator, Deb, has now sent these out to all internal staff members in **most units. If you are a member in the Strategy Office, Student Services or the VC's office** then your card will arrive shortly. Please contact the office if you do not receive one and as long as the card is received well by internal staff, we will produce another version for our Associate Lecturer members. We would also welcome feedback on the card, so get in touch and tell us what you think? (Contact details on back page.)



Changing presentations and AL appointments

Recent changes to presentation patterns on some courses have given rise to questions about the nature of AL appointments.

In spite of the way information is held on CIRCE and other OU systems (which obviously have to record which presentation an AL normally teaches) ALs are appointed to a course, and not to particular dates of presentation.

When presentation patterns change the assumption must be that ALs will move (with the students) to the new presentation pattern. In most cases there has been no intention by the university to do otherwise, but a small number of exceptions came to light last week. We are seeking a resolution of this problem on the basis that the end of a particular presentation is not the end of course life, and cannot be treated in the routine way that end of course life is treated.

When courses change presentation patterns it may be in the mutual interest of the ALs and the university for the ALs to be *offered* the choice of taking PC or MOLD status instead of moving to the new presentation pattern, if the new dates are not possible or will result in them being overloaded at certain times of the year.

But it is not the case that students disappear in large numbers because presentation patterns change. Even when courses go to alternate years (which can be quite inconvenient for students) we have retained 80% or more of the previous student numbers.

Changing presentation patterns are therefore not a large scale redundancy situation and should not become one.

If there are any exceptional circumstances that lead the OU to declare ALs redundant in different circumstances to those foreseen in current agreements and procedures, then the university needs to inform UCU about the redundancies and engage in a meaningful consultation process before notices of redundancy are issued.

Lesley Kane, Hon. Secretary

Is Bradford the font of all evil?

In the past few months I've noticed a worrying trend in how the OU are managing sick leave. Staff who have a lot of sick leave, and/or disability leave, and therefore have a high Bradford score are being targeted for management intervention.

In itself, having discussions with your (sympathetic) line manager about a higher-than-average sickness record, or Bradford score, needn't be a bad thing. Even a referral to Occupational Health, and AXA, isn't always something to be concerned about. Talking honestly with your manager is a good way to discuss what the problems might be, and get management involvement in addressing, or resolving them. A referral to AXA is a chance for you to have further discussions, and adjustments suggested.

However, not all of you have a sympathetic line manager, or senior management. The OU doesn't discriminate between "ordinary" sick leave and disability leave, so you can get hit with a double whammy. The OU doesn't always put the suggested adjustments in place. Sometimes the AXA report isn't even discussed with you, so decisions are made without reference to the one person who knows most about you – you.

As worrying all of this is, the worst thing is that you can do all the right things – **get doctor's certificates, work extra hours to make up at least some of what you've missed** – and still have trouble. The OU can agree that all your sick leave is genuine, realise there may be little you can do about it, and, importantly, assure you there are absolutely no performance issues (in fact you do a really good job, are a valued member of the team, one of the best in fact), and then hammer you with formal action.

Because measuring your sick days and Bradford scores is easy. Managing someone else's poor performance is really hard. If you're having problems with sickness or disability issues at work, contact the UCU office, contact details on the back page.

Meridian, Casework Manager

PLEASE NOTE

The Bradford Factor is a Human Resources tool used by many organisations to measure and identify areas of absenteeism. The theory is that short, frequent and unplanned absences are more disruptive than longer absences.

The formula for the Bradford Factor is: $E \times E \times D = \text{Bradford Factor Score}$

Where E is the number of episodes of absence and D is the total number of days absent in a rolling 52 week period.



Recourse—your charity, helping you to be well, work well

Recourse, formerly known as the College and University Support Network, provides its vital services, for free and in confidence to all those working in post-16 education. All our services are available 24/7, every day of the year. Services include a free Support Line where you can talk to trained coaches and counsellors, online InfoCentre with hundreds of factsheets on work-related and personal related issues and money advice and financial assistance.

Recourse
Supporting Education Professionals

Helping you, at work and at home

Recourse is here to offer you practical and emotional support if you are experiencing problems in your home life. It may be that you are having problems managing your finances, coping with bereavement or struggling with your relationship with your partner or spouse. Recourse can help.

We can also help you with issues you are faced with in your work life. Complementing the support offered to you by your union we can help you to deal with difficult relationships with colleagues, better manage your workload, improve your time management or deal with the impact of redundancies and change. Recourse can help.

HELPLINE NUMBER 0808 802 0304

Website: <http://recourse.org.uk/>

Researchers Survival Guide & FTC questionnaire

Copies of the UCU publication, the Researchers Survival Guide are available from the branch office or the PDF is at this address: www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=3228.

A questionnaire was given out at the Open meeting for Researchers and we would welcome more responses from other OU staff on a FTC—please download and print the form and return to the OU UCU branch office, address on the back page. <http://ucu.open.ac.uk/news>



Fixed-term Contracts – collective action counts

The use of fixed-term contracts (FTCs) is an unhappy and widespread feature of HE with many staff on fixed-term contracts working in a state of permanent insecurity. Career development for fixed-term staff and proper workforce planning are often afterthoughts for management. Where funding is cut or comes to an end, staff on fixed-term contracts often simply just disappear from the payroll. Few fixed-term contracts are genuinely justified and "objective justification" can include shoddy and weak reasoning such as "specialist expertise" where such expertise is widespread. Here at the OU, these and other issues are very real for fixed-term staff.

But it's not all doom and gloom. The law on the use of fixed-term contracts is not ideal, but successful cases taken by UCU nationally have worked to undermine the status quo of the persistent use of fixed-term contracts in HE. Whilst there is long way to go, agreements reached locally and nationally with UCU are helping to bring an end to insecurity.

The basis of the law is that each fixed-term contract can only be used where there is a genuine "objective justification" for doing so. If you have had a renewed contract over a four year period, you are entitled to regard your contract as permanent unless there is a genuine objective justification. Fixed-term staff also have the protection from less favourable treatment in comparison to permanent colleagues doing the same work. The law is far from ideal, but asserting your rights and pursuing a solution to job insecurity through UCU does work.

Here at the OU, your branch are making inroads. UCU are actively engaged in assessing the objective justification for the use of FTCs across the University and are seeking permanent contracts where staff have had a contract renewed over a four year period. Representation of members in FELS has recently resulted in number of former fixed-term staff being offered and taking up permanent contracts. UCU has started a dialogue with the University about the management of research careers where funding is typically insecure. There are a lot of issues to take on, but the experience in FELS demonstrates that a collective solution can be found.

Crucially, your branch is also embarking on the re-negotiation of current FTC policies in the light of the prevailing and (gradually) improving legal situation. Amongst other things UCU will be seeking:

- to transfer from FTC to permanent contracts after (at most) 4 years' service;
- a clear procedure for the management of fixed-term contracts including clear scrutiny of "objective justifications";
- resources and practical implementation of bridging funding where funding for posts is dependent on fixed-term funding;
- breaking the link between fixed-term funding and fixed-term posts;
- a clear strategy for career development for fixed-term staff.

We know that application of policy and the law can be patchy and that to be effective, legal rights need to be asserted. Your branch need your help to bring about change. If you are on a fixed-term contract, you need to know your rights in the current policy and in law. If asserting those rights is proving difficult, or if you feel that you are being subjected to less favourable treatment, you need to get in touch.

And don't forget, if you're not a member of UCU, we can't help you.

To find out more, or to join UCU contact the Branch Administrator, contact details are on the back page.

Ben Monks, UCU Regional Support Official



OU UCU Open Meeting for Researchers, 1 May 2012

Roger Walters, President of the OU branch of UCU, opened the meeting by introducing Jane Thompson, a UCU National Official in Higher Education. Jane works on issues in research careers, FTCs and casualisation of staff. Priorities for UCU have been:

- to gain secure employment for researchers;
- supporting research careers;
- building sustainable careers for research staff;
- trying to gain recognition for researchers as full academics.

The purpose of the meeting was to get our members views and how we can start a dialogue with the UCU branch to progress the improvement of the use of FTCs at the OU.

The picture across the UK is that the percentage of fixed-term contracts in use for research staff is on the decline, however in 2010 70% of research staff were on a FTC, the figure for the OU is 78%. These figures vary massively by institution, eg Cambridge University has over 90% of research staff on FTCs whereas University College London has only 9%. (HESA) There are a number of reasons why some institutions get away with using more FTCs than they should, including: -

- Attitude of senior management, eg this is the way it's always been;
- Fixed term nature of research funding;
- Research council procedures;
- Culture.

The UCU have always held that fixed-term funding should not be used as a "blanket" objective justification for keeping staff – especially researchers – on fixed term contracts. Jane spoke about the legal case of Ball v Aberdeen University 2008 – where Andy Ball had been on a number of FTCs and the court ruled that the employer, Aberdeen University, could not use the end of funding as objective justification for keeping him on a FTC. www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=3340

Issues for staff on FTCs

- not being able to get a mortgage if you are on a FTC rather than a permanent contract.
- Problem applying for funding in your own name if you are not a permanent employee of the University – the research councils don't directly say that you can't as that would go against the spirit of the FTC regs, but they make it difficult.

Improving security of employment means more than securing an open-ended/permanent contract, it means:

- Staff being treated as an integral part of the University community;
- Ensuring that resources are managed in such a way to avoid redundancy situations;
- Breaking the employment link between individual research projects and individual researchers;
- Having systems in place to redeploy staff as and when necessary.

Collective action

One way to move the issue forward collectively is to negotiate a FTC and redundancy avoidance policy with the employer. Leeds and Bradford Universities have committed to a new policy of only using FTCs for up to 3 years. Jane spoke about the importance of staff on FTCs working together to challenge their position, rather than people having to tackle the issue alone.

Research Concordat

The Concordat for researchers is an attempt, by funders and employers to agree a set of principles for the management of researchers' careers. UCU believes that all institutions should follow the Concordat, but do not think it goes far enough in tackling the main problem for researchers: the lack of security. It is a condition of obtaining research grants that employers are following the concordat. <http://bit.ly/JT8PCo> Jane spoke about the REF which has a new environment section with a "people element" – which supports all types of researchers to have a sustainable career.

OU Branch work on FTCs

Lesley Kane updated the meeting on what now happens in the OU branch, where we meet monthly with HR to review all staff who are within 6 months of their FTC ending and are at risk of redundancy. If you are a UCU member and think that the OU is not doing enough to renew your FTC, don't wait until your contract is about to expire, contact the OU branch at the start of that 6 month period.

....continued over

OU UCU Open Meeting for Researchers continued

Although we have a FTC policy at the OU with criteria for the agreed use of a FTC – the OU has gone from bending those criteria to stretching them to destruction! We are about to inform the OU that we want to renegotiate a new FTC policy. Lesley spoke about the issue of redeployment where each OU unit operates as if it were a separate employer, when there are over 30 OU units. So staff in small units often have less chance of being redeployed than those working in a large unit such as MCT. We want HR to take proper responsibility for redeployment and we want to work with the different research groups within the OU to get them to establish links with each other, and make it easier for research staff to move from one piece of work to another and one unit to another, where possible.

Roger then opened the meeting to questions from the audience.

Q—Does UCU nationally have any statistics on the cost of using FTCs within universities?

Answer: **No we don't currently have an overall cost of the use of FTCs—Leeds University wanted to reduce the number of people being dismissed due to FTCs ending and engaged with UCU to try and make changes. A large proportion of the cost were the resources involved in supporting staff through the dismissal process and if more staff were on permanent contracts, these resources would have been saved. Jane suggested that we could make a Freedom of Information request for the statistics on how many people has the OU dismissed, how much have they paid in redundancy payments and what was the cost of recruitment for researchers in the last 12 months?**



Q—Is there a reason why UCL is able to operate with permanent research staff rather than FTC research staff?

Answer: **No Jane can't see any structural reason why UCL can conduct research with permanent staff, when the OU, Oxford and Leeds have most of their researchers on FTCs. Jane mentioned a Vitae report by Liz Oliver on institutions responses to the FTC Regulations and she found that some institutions moved everyone onto permanent contracts (eg UCL); some did nothing (eg Oxford and Cambridge) and then some in the middle made a few changes.**

Q—What's the major benefit of having a permanent contract if you have the same rights when on a FTC?

Answer: *There is a cultural benefit where institutions do treat permanent staff differently to those people on FTCs. Teams or departments tend to think that FTC people won't be around forever and so are less part of the team than permanent staff. There are issues in obtaining a grant in your own name when you are on a FTC rather than being permanent. Access to financial services is harder when you are not in permanent employment. Roger confirmed that at the OU, you are more secure on a permanent rather than a fixed-term contract and that is not right, we are trying to get that changed.*

Q—Research projects are affected when staff leave at the end of their FTC, and there is a problem of applying for grants when **your contract end date is imminent. The OU doesn't like research staff to apply for a grant if the money will arrive, after they have left.**

Answer: Jane emphasized her earlier point that the OU needs a FTC policy that supports the careers of research staff, rather than putting obstacles in their way. Research Council rules are difficult enough without local OU practices that make it even harder. Jane asked the audience to send evidence of these local problems to the OU branch of UCU, in order that they can try to deal with them.

Copies of the UCU publication, the Researchers Survival Guide are available from the branch office or the PDF is at this address: www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=3228. A questionnaire was given out at this meeting and we would welcome more responses from other OU staff on a FTC—please download and print the form and return to the OU UCU branch office, address on the back page. <http://ucu.open.ac.uk/news>

The webcast of this meeting is still available on the Stadium website at: <http://stadium.open.ac.uk/stadia/preview.php?whichevent=1921&s=1>

Breast is best...but best understood?

Though perhaps less well recognised in the mainstream equality and diversity agenda than others, breastfeeding is an issue that organisations are now expected to take notice of when drawing up their equality impact assessments.

Both UNICEF and the National Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) recognise **that attention to breastfeeding has been overlooked. UNICEF's 'Baby Friendly Initiative' has been a major force behind raising the profile and importance of breastfeeding across the world. Its Seven Point Plan has been used to educate the healthcare professions in how to promote breastfeeding in the community.**



The EHRC has now sought to make breastfeeding awareness a part of all aspects of the community, and to protect and promote the obligations of organisations, not just healthcare, to develop policies and practices that will support parents and prevent workplace discrimination.

But how well has the OU adopted this advice? In recent discussions between the OU central management and UCU, it has become apparent that far more needs to be done to support people who are breastfeeding. The OU are receptive to development of this work and invite comments – directly or via the UCU – on how to take forward this important agenda.

In spite of this, talking to members in the workplace, it is often not clear that staff at all levels are aware of their obligations in this area. Do you?

The duties and expectations are far reaching. Not only are employers and employees not to discriminate, but they are supposed to prevent discrimination in any form. Employers are meant to promote breastfeeding and provide support to the fullest extent, that parents determine what is right for their families within the bounds of maintaining business operations. Of course, breastfeeding is not for everyone, and there too, there are duties to prevent discriminatory behaviours and respect the rights of the individual choice.

The text below 'New law in force: a model policy' outlines some of the key points that will be part of a new policy, and demonstrates to some the degree to which breastfeeding is protected under new legislation. The content is taken from the EHRC website, where there are a range of resources available to help and guide staff in this area. The ECHR advice pages can be accessed at: www.equalityhumanrights.com/advice-and-guidance

The OU is now working to develop a policy in line with this guidance around breastfeeding and to ensure that managers receive training in this area. Advice on any aspect of handling these issues is available from the Equality and Diversity team at the OU, and, of course, through UCU.

Jonathan Jewell, OU UCU Equality Officer

New law in force: a model policy

- **Inform all employees of the rights provided under the employer's policy as part of equal opportunities training or the induction programme in order to foster a positive attitude towards breastfeeding.**
- Inform all pregnant employees of the benefits of breastfeeding and their rights under this policy.
- Perform a risk assessment in relation to all employees who plan to continue breastfeeding after their maternity leave.
- Identify a named manager who will be responsible for performing the risk assessment and who should be given notice of **the employee's intention to continue breastfeeding or expressing milk on her return to work.**
- If necessary, adjust the working hours and/or conditions of breastfeeding employees, in consultation with each employee.
- Permit breastfeeding employees to take additional breaks of up to one hour per full working day to feed their baby or to express their breast milk. If the employee prefers, this hour can be taken to shorten her working day.
- Make available a private, comfortable and appropriately equipped room for breastfeeding employees to feed their baby or express their milk.
- Specify a fridge where breast milk may be stored securely and specify a location where expressing equipment can be stored.



OU UCU successes at the Open University, 2007-2012

We would like to be able to add more items to this timeline—if you can remember older successes that are thanks to the OU branch of UCU, please get in touch with the Branch office, contact details on the back page.

2009-12 – Supported over 300 members with personal casework

2010-12 – National UCU campaign to reject the employers' proposals for changing the USS pension scheme.

2010 – Getting the OU to review its Maternity Leave policy with regard to women on Fixed term contracts.

2010 – Recommendations to improve flexible working have been agreed and will lead to an enhanced policy and procedure in the future.

August 2010 – Mileage rate increased to 38.5p per mile when staff claiming for driving expenses.

Summer 2010 – Associate Lecturer UCU officers can now claim facility time and be reimbursed for time spent on union activities.

January 2009 – present day – Union gets clarification on Study leave scheme and helps Academic staff to take their study leave.

November 2008 – present day – OU UCU work with the OU to improve the procedures on Flexible working.

October 2008 – 5% pay rise for all staff.

July 2008 – present day – OU UCU work on a new contract for ALs, negotiations have now resumed (March 2012) and some improvements will soon be agreed.

2008 – present day – OU UCU work on improvements to the Bullying & Harassment policy.

2007 – Improvements to the CDSA scheme for all internal staff

OU branch now has a Twitter account

The OU branch of UCU has just opened a Twitter account in order to send instant news and comments to our members—so far we don't have any followers. If you want to follow us then search for @OUBUCU on Twitter.



Publicity contacts needed

A UCU representative in every department/faculty across the Open University would give the union even greater visibility and strength. In the first instance it would only involve making sure there is a UCU poster and an application form holder on all of the notice boards in all OU buildings.

As you know, nationally the University and College Union is the acknowledged and respected leading higher education trade union, whose strength comes from its local branches and active members within individual institutions. The collective voice of members within a university can contribute to the ethos of the institution; a local branch that has a full complement of officers, and departmental and specialist staff group representatives is highly effective.



Walton Hall departments: we are still looking for members to act as a point of contact in many Walton Hall units/departments, the only task you would be asked to do is to put up posters/publicity in your department. (Full list of WH departmental reps at ucu.open.ac.uk/people)

AL Regional Reps: there are vacancies for AL regional reps in London and in Ireland. (Full list of reps at ucu.open.ac.uk/al-reps)

Regional/national centre reps—we are still looking for UCU members to act as a rep in Oxford, Gateshead and East Grinstead. (Full list of regional/national centre reps at ucu.open.ac.uk/people)

If you are interested in taking one of these roles, please contact Deb Shann on 01908 6(53069) or email ucu@open.ac.uk or call into Room 015, Wilson C block at Walton Hall.

You will see below a check list of items that you may or may not be able to do to help the OU branch of UCU – we know that everyone is very busy but we want to hear from you, even if you can only offer to be the person in your unit who is willing to receive UCU publicity, it all helps! Please either print and complete the table and then return it to the address on the back page, or just send the information by email to ucu@open.ac.uk.

NAME:	YES
I would be willing to put up posters in my area/building. Please specify your area or building.....	
I would be willing to send a recruitment email round to all the eligible non-members in my unit or sub-unit. Please specify your unit or sub-unit <i>(If you offer to do this Deb will send you a list of all eligible staff who are non-members in your unit or sub-unit and model text for the email.)</i> Please specify your unit or sub-unit	
I would be willing to be named as a union Departmental rep for my unit or sub-unit. Please specify your unit or sub-unit	
I would be willing to have my name on a standard “invite to join” letter to new eligible staff in my unit or sub-unit. <i>(If you agree to do this Deb will send you the standard letter and regularly tell you which new staff in your unit or sub-unit this had been sent to – you would not need to write to them yourselves.)</i>	
I would be willing to follow up on new eligible staff a month or two after they had received the above letter, to ask them if they had considered joining UCU.	
Do you have any other ideas for recruiting new members that you can share with us?	

Questor's curiosity corner

Our new columnist Questor takes a light hearted look at some of the developments at the Open University.

Float like a butterfly sting like a bee

The OU's first Chancellor, Lord Crowther, defined the vital characteristics of the then fledgling OU as being "open to people, to places, to methods and to ideas." This is rather good. From the outset the university was set up to be open to people. In the nineties the drive to internationalise things was gaining pace so it was open to new places. Distance learning, or more the OU's hybrid of it, was a new method, and of course all universities should be open to ideas. So far, then, so good.



Since then of course much has changed. Student fees were introduced by that nice Mr Blair, then trebled, and last year nice Mr Clegg performed a U-turn to allow the coalition to treble them again. Higher education is being "marketised" and the OU will be tripling its fees for October this year. And now the College of Law, which provides the OU's law modules, has been sold to private equity firm Montagu. Clearly the OU is missing a trick here. Is it not time to add a fifth door to the mission statement? Open to offers?



It's that time of year and the intranet has been carrying calls for teams in the annual six a side cricket competition which so lights up the summer months at Walton Hall. What better way to spend a May or a June lunchtime at the OU than to watch the game unfold from the pavilion veranda, beer or wine in hand, cheering on your department, section or faculty? Ah, the timelessness of an English summer. But alas no more. Since last September the pavilion bar has been shut at lunchtime, and this despite a 1200 signature petition asking for it to remain open. Why such a mean spirit?



More on the intranet. It was comforting to read there that "forthcoming movements in the VCE presented an opportunity to look at roles and responsibilities going forward". No doubt immeasurably better than doing so going backwards.



In his excellent column for the estimable Daily Telegraph, Doctor's Diary, Dr James Le Fanu regularly airs a reader's conundrum and invites others to share their experiences if they have a similar condition which is not easily explained. In this vein a Mrs Trellis of north Wales asks why so many things in the OU are being "further enhanced", ranging from the catering services to the VLE platform, and wonders whether this has any effect on staff morale. I too invite readers to share their experiences.

Questor



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 Spark Editor

Can I ask you whether the union is actively investigating the workload problem on the new module TU100?

The module is advertised as taking on average 7 hours per week to tutor but TMAs are taking so long to mark that all of this time is being taken up by marking, leaving no time for moderating tutor group forums and dealing with individual queries by students let alone timetabled tutorials and keeping up to date with what's actually in the module. One of the problems with the length of time it is taking to mark TMAs is as a consequence of the duplication of effort required in separating different categories of feedback as prescribed by the tutor guide. This has also been criticised for its lack of detail as well as its failure to cross reference what is being asked for with the relevant pages from the vast module website.

Module team members have been really helpful in explaining the pedagogy behind the changes to the marking strategy on TU100 as well as the rationale for not providing more detail in the tutor guide, but they don't appear to accept that TMAs should take longer to mark as a consequence of the changes and have suggested that the reduction in detail should have reduced the workload not increased it. This is not borne out by the experiences of many of the tutors on the module.

While the number of unpaid hours may not be a problem for someone who has only the one contract or has little work elsewhere, when the workload on this module is compounded with clashing deadlines and perhaps other modules with similarly understated hours per week it is no wonder that ALs with such commitments are struggling to meet expectations.

Although time reading the module is excessive as well, this will reduce for us next year but if the tutor guides continue in their present form and feedback requirements are unchanged, TMAs will continue to take as long to mark in future presentations.

Sharon Dawes, AL on TU100

Please note: the Branch ALs Officer, Judy Ekins has emailed all OU UCU AL members (30 May) who tutor on TU100 to gather further evidence of the heavy workload, before we talk to the University.

Dear Spark Editor

Recent debate over the termination of contracts for Open University staff resident in Continental Europe often focuses, understandably, on the approximately one hundred Associate Lecturers. However, there is also a network of twelve Country Coordinators in the major European countries. A few are employed by Universities or other partner institutions, but most of us are employed directly by the OU.

Our role combines several functions. We act as a source of local support for students - who are often unsure of how to negotiate a UK HE institution. Until recently being prevented, we co-ordinated local examination arrangements, recruiting and briefing invigilators, and ensuring high standards. We also promote a sense of the OU community in-country, putting students in touch with each other and perhaps moderating country-specific forums.

On a miniscule budget, we also promote the OU, and consistently maintain or increase student numbers. We are also present in local networks, both national and ex-pat, to represent the University in our countries. We have extensive local contacts, in Embassies and Consulates, British Council offices, educational institutions, and professional and corporate associations.

We believe that as a group we hold a unique set of skills. All of us speak at least two languages, some of us four or five. We have strengths in intercultural competences, and informed understanding of varied local contexts throughout Europe, built up over many years. All of this gives a truly international presence to the University, and substance to our support for OU students and graduates. A few examples: in Germany, we have close links with Hamburg University; in Greece the Coordinator helps our graduates negotiate the recognition process when requested; in Italy, the Coordinator is prominent in British Council and British Chamber of Commerce activities; in Austria, the Coordinator has close links with various business corporations and Business School outreach. In Spain, the Coordinator has taken part in meetings at Ministries on issues of support for our students in prison and over academic recognition. And so on, in each of our countries.

We are convinced that our expertise, local knowledge and skills cannot be supplied by OU staff located in the UK. In the radical re-organization of regional offices in England and the restructuring of student support services along functional and curriculum lines, we feel that the particular needs of non-UK resident students will be neglected. We have not been consulted on the impact the decision will make on students and enquirers in our countries. We feel the OU is wasting the resources we offer, especially ironic at a time when UK HE institutions are increasingly looking to Europe for outreach.

Kate Fitzroy, Open University Coordinator in Spain



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Your Executive Committee 2011-12

- President: Roger Walters (r.j.walters)
Honorary Secretary: Lesley Kane (l.h.kane)
Honorary Treasurer: David Knowles (d.w.knowles)
Vice Presidents: Pauline Collins & Bethan Norfor
Immediate Past President: N/a as Roger Walters
Equality Officer: Jonathan Jewell
Central Academic Staff Officer: Sheila Tyler
Central Academic-Related Staff Officer: Sue Pearce
Regional/National Academic Staff Officer: **Philip O'Sullivan**
Regional/National Academic-Related Staff Officer: Hilary Partridge
Associate Lecturers Officer: Judy Ekins
Ordinary Members:
Jeni Aldridge
John Bennett
Eric Bowers
Anne Brown
Dorothy Calderwood
Gill Clough
Axel Hagermann
Sue Hawthorne
Bruce Heil
Jonathan Hughes
Malcolm Jenner
Mike McNulty
John Peters
Peter Piper
Eric Wade
UCU National Exec Committee Members:
Alan Carr, Pauline Collins, Lesley Kane & Roger Walters
Father of NUJ Chapel - vacancy

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.

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.



Canvas bag



Mouse mat



UCU mug



A5 notepad



Lanyard



Pens



Publicity posters

Branch meetings 2012

Future scheduled branch meeting dates are as follows:

27th September 2012, 12.30pm in the Berrill Lecture theatre

AGM, 27th November 2012, 12.30pm in the Berrill Lecture theatre

