**Online Strike rally, day 3 Friday 3rd December 2021**

**(Zoom meeting transcript)**

10:00:40 Hello everyone and welcome. We just have a few more people joining us. So, we're going to take a moment and bring them all into the online room.

10:00:51 [Caitlin speaking:] This is our day three rally for the Open University branch of UCU.

10:00:57 People are continuing to join, so we're just going to wait another moment or two before we start formally.

10:01:15 So we still have a few people joining, we're just going to give it another minute. Thanks very much for your patience, we’ll start in just a minute.

10:01:38 Okay, welcome everyone. My name is Caitlin Adams, I’m the branch president of UCU at the Open University. And this is our day three online rally.

10:01:48 We're on strike over pensions, pay and a number of other issues including workload. But today's theme is job insecurity, and we've tied that as well to food insecurity because we know that for many people going from contract to contract or months without pay, that they can fall into food insecurity as well. So, we have a number of speakers lined up today.

10:02:12 And we'll be hearing I hope from Royal College of Art, from the University of Edinburgh picket line, we’ll be also exploring some information about local food banks and local being for the OU, all across the four nations.

10:02:27 Just some housekeeping points. First of all, we have enabled the chat so that the host can actually send messages out to everyone, but it's not fully functional for everyone else. If you've got any questions what we'd like you to do is put them in the Q&A,

10:02:41 and those will be picked up by the host, and we'll make sure that those questions get answered.

10:02:48 This event is also being recorded and the recording will be placed on our YouTube channel afterwards with a transcript as well.

10:02:57 In addition, during the recording itself, during the event, there is the live transcript closed Caption option. You can enable that, and you will get caption service throughout the event.

10:03:10 And equally if you don't find that useful you can turn that function off.

10:03:16 So I will now move on to introducing our first speaker today.

10:03:21 Our first speaker…

10:03:26 Apologies I'm just getting a bit of background noise so I'm going to try that again.

10:03:30 Our first speaker today is Louisa Hobbs from the Milton Keynes Food Bank, and we're so glad to have her here today. I just want to note that the food bank is not political and so her presence today is not an indication of any views on our disputes,

10:03:46 but we asked for some information about the local conditions in Milton Keynes, and the feedback. So over to Louisa, thank you so much for joining us.

10:03:56 And, yes, take it away.

10:03:59 [Louisa speaking:] Thank you, Caitlin thanks very much. And so, I think I will try and keep it brief. I'm just going to go through three main areas really what we do at Milton Keynes Food Bank, what our sort of main services are. A bit about who we help, and what we're seeing right now so current trends in the people that are coming to us for support, and a bit about what next, our plans for 2022 and then, and then about what we need more, and how we need people to help us in our plight.

10:04:33 And so what we do. Milton Keynes Food Bank is a large independent Food Bank, so we're not affiliated to any of the large food bank networks, we’re completely independent and, and our main services emergency food parcels that anyone that needs it.

10:04:49 So, we give food parcels out that last three days.

10:04:53 And so far in 2021, we've given out about 14,000 of these, and we expect to possibly give out as many as 2000 more in December.

10:05:04 And we also have something new that we've established this year called a top-up shop, which offers basic essential food items that are very low cost.

10:05:15 And we've had around we have around 250 visitors to that shop, which is held in three different locations.

10:05:23 And, and then we also offer food for other types of food distribution so people that cook hot meals, people that deliver food through different ways and we've given out about 35,000 items this year so it's quite a big organization, and we are doing a lot, across the whole of our area.

10:05:44 And so who we help them what we're seeing right now.

10:05:53 Last year was obviously a completely bizarre year, completely unusual year for everybody. So, what we've decided to do when looking at our facts and figures is compare more long-term trends about what's currently happening now compared to what happened not necessarily just last year but what happened in previous years as well. And the majority of people that we see so we've done a bit of analysis of the families and individuals we see the majority of people so about two thirds of people that come to the food bank,

10:06:25 we classify as being in crisis, so that means that, generally speaking, they are managing fine. So, they may be working, they may be working and claiming Universal Credit, or they may be on benefits but generally speaking, they're independent and they’re able to feed themselves and their families, but something tips over and just enables them, just it just makes them for a short while not be able to feed themselves.

10:06:55 The way that our food parcels work is that people can self-refer to us via our helpline up to six times in a year.

10:07:03 People are also referred by professional agencies, at which point, it's up to the agency to determine the needs, that might be more than six times a year.

10:07:12 But what we found is that the two thirds, the crisis people that we are talking about, mostly will use the food bank once, twice or three times. So, on the whole, it's not a long-term need, it's something that's just happened in their lives, and meant that they couldn't afford food that week, or that month.

10:07:33 Looking into the reasons for that there are several. So, we see people from all walks of life, there's no one standard type of feedback user.

10:07:43 And, but as I mentioned, people can be working or not, they can be on benefits or not, there is a large number of different reasons for it. And at this point in 2021 we've looked at it a bit more closely because there's been so many things that have happened.

10:08:00 And, and one thing I can say is that there has been a real increase in people with insecure employment at the moment. So, we've seen for example a number of nurses, and healthcare assistants who are working on a bank basis.

10:08:18 Who therefore get no sick pay, who then fall ill, whether it's Covid or whether it's flu or whether it's anything else and then don't get any money for a couple of weeks, then just find with no overdraft, no savings nowhere to go that they're just enabled for a couple of weeks to afford food.

10:08:39 And another really big reason for food bank at the moment is high energy bills. So, we've always seen over the years, the debate between heating and eating, which is very real for some people that they're you know people will choose to choose to sit in the cold or to not put electrical meters in order to be able to feed their families, but with the high cost of energy at the moment that's absolutely soaring. Fuel as well so in terms of, you know, petrol or diesel for your car obviously is incredibly high lots of people that do rely a particular Milton Keynes on their cars to get to work it’s causing a problem as well and of course food costs have gone up as well.

10:09:25 The Universal Credit cuts in October, did have an impact as well. So, if you remember that the 20 pounds a week uplift that was instigated at the start of the pandemic was cut and came into effect in October. And that has had an effect.

10:09:42 So, in general, though it's very difficult to point at particular groups of people that might be affected, about two thirds of the people that we see may come along come for a parcel or two or three, and then usually get back on their feet.

10:10:04 And about a third, so the remaining third, is more of an ingrained problem. So, these are people who one, two or three parcels really isn't enough for them and it's much more of a long-term issue there's much more general poverty and deprivation, and this number has massively increased since last year's crisis. And it's a figure that were really quite concerned about.

10:10:34 And the reason we're concerned about it is the real danger of dependency, so we found with charitable handouts, so for example, food parcels, there is a point at which helping somebody starts to reverse.

10:10:52 And it can lead to a dependency on food which means that other problems which are causing the financial hardship are no longer being worked through, if somebody comes to rely on food.

10:11:07 So it's because of that. Third, because of that particular group of people who are really have become, certainly through the pandemic or other factors since, that we've set up those top up shops that I mentioned before, so the top up shops are set in three different locations in Milton Keynes, and we offer people the option to buy ten things for two pounds, so it’s still very basic food, it’s the sort of food you’d get in food parcels, but the idea is that it increases independence, step by step, so that by contributing to the food that you get from these services, you have more dignity, there's more, less of a reliance on a handout and more of an impetus to move on to the issue.

10:12:06 And as part of that as well we're introducing a lot of wraparound services. So, we've always looked at the sort of whole person, the whole family.

10:12:15 We know that food in itself is not the answer, it never is the answer. It's a sticking plaster if you like for an immediate need, immediate practical need.

10:12:26 But we are working with lots of other organizations that will offer sort of pop-up services pop up support to look at the wider issues surrounding the current need.

10:12:39 One of the things that we're really focused on at the moment I mentioned earlier household energy and the huge increases in costs of gas and electricity.

10:12:49 We're working with an organization that advises on keeping warm.

10:13:07 It's certainly some things which are as simple as making sure that there is… the drafts are blocked up and, but then it also goes down into sort of campaigning and advocacy, and around the really unfair situation where if you pay for it if you prepay your household energy, you're paying the absolute top whack.

10:13:13 So this is one of the things that we are really, really concerned about lots and lots of people that use food bank our tenants, they rent their accommodation and they have no choice they have to use a prepaid meter. And so, they therefore don't get any of the benefits of discounts that people who have direct debits have, so they already paying the absolute top whack so we're working with that provider to advise people on how they might move away from using those meters.

10:13:47 And so, those in a nutshell of the two different things that we offer.

10:13:52 We're always going to continue our emergency food parcels that's our main service.

10:13:57 But we, next year, are hoping to really establish further top up shops and as they've been incredibly popular. We're going to introduce a mobile shop, so that we can get around to some really far-flung places where it's more difficult for people to get through, and really push these additional services as well so that we can really help people to look at the whole of their situation and be able to help themselves out of it.

10:14:23 And in terms of what we need is two things.

10:14:26 I've not just noticed in the chat our website came up. The first thing is about spreading the word about our services, absolutely anybody can call our helpline.

10:14:34 And, and just talk to one of our advisors about their need for food, we have no other criteria than that.

10:14:41 And secondly, if you're not in a position where you need food and you might be able to support, we always have sections on the website to say about how you donate food, money, time or support us in other ways.

10:14:54 So, I think that was a good Whistle Stop, but thank you very much for listening. And please do look at our website.

10:15:03 [Caitlin speaking:] Thank you so much for that. It's fantastic to hear about that work, and obviously the Open University has staff and students all across the four nations and we'll be hearing a little bit later about the situation in the Leicester area.

10:15:15 But it was just fascinating to hear about that work, we're using today to encourage people who are able to, to make donations, and also just to raise awareness. So, we're all working toward a world in which perhaps food banks won't be necessary anymore, but meanwhile we need to do everything we can to support people in need. Thank you so much Louise I really appreciate that.

[Louisa speaking:] Thank you. Thanks very much.

10:15:38 [Caitlin speaking:] Okay, um, so for our next speaker is actually going to be coming to us, I hope, live from the University of Edinburgh picket line.

10:15:47 So this is a bit of an experiment for us please bear with us, but I'm hopeful that we might have the Open University’s own Pete Wood expect member and vice chair of the national anti-casualisation committee here online with us.

10:16:02 So I'm just going to pause there and just make sure that we've got him ready to come in.

10:16:10 [Pete speaking:] Are you there? Can you hear me, Caitlin?

10:16:11 [Caitlin speaking:] We can hear you. But what we can't at the moment, we can't see you, but we can hear you. So, go ahead.

10:16:21 Dear we've lost you I'm afraid.

10:16:26 Try one more time for us, please.

10:16:32 So we can see Pete but we're still having some sound problems. Sorry about that.

10:16:36 Can you try again.

10:16:47 I'm really sorry I'm afraid we are having some massive sound problems. So, if you don't mind Pete, we might have to come back to you in a minute.

10:16:53 Can you just bear with us and we'll see if our host can, I can help you to sort out those sound problems.

10:17:00 [Pete speaking:] Can you hear me, Caitlin? How about now?

10:17:07 [Caitlin speaking:] Oh, I can hear you. Yes, okay.

[Pete speaking:] Right, so I think that I just need to take out my headphones and pray. Can you see me?

10:17:10 [Caitlin speaking:] Well, we can't see you at the moment. But we can hear you, which is great.

10:17:15 [Pete speaking:] Is that all working?

[Caitlin speaking:] It's not working yet, let me, let me just check with them with our host. Okay. Rachel can you make sure that we can see Pete to? There we go.

10:17:26 [Pete speaking:] And it's all working.

[Rachel speaking:] It's all working, Pete.

10:17:30 [Pete speaking:] Right, okay. I'm going to start now. So, share at the appropriate moments, and also cheer at home to. Right.

10:17:40 Good morning, Open University. Good morning, Scotland. How are we feeling? I hope everyone outside is moving around, staying warm, and I hope everyone inside is tucked up and not checking emails, because that's the most important bit.

10:17:53 Right. I mean, right. I'm Pete Wood, I'm the co-chair of the UK-wide anti-casualisation committee. That's a group of UCU members elected as volunteers to advise the central union on the experiences and the needs of members on precarious contracts.

10:18:18 Thank you.

10:18:20 I've come to Edinburgh University to hear from our activists, and our members here on the picket and to ask them, are they planning to strike, and what they need, when we do action short of strike.

10:18:30 So that brings me to my first request of three: Go to the anti-casualisation committee on Twitter, which is @UCUanti\_cas and submit your experiences of action short of strike.

10:18:42 That's your barriers and your opportunities. We've got some responses, and we want to build this into a rigorous evidence-base for the next stage of action. That's @UCUanti\_cas.

10:18:57 Right, let's get to the good bit. Yes, strike dog. Right. Why else am I here? It's a story of two universities, and their fight for better pay, equality, workload and against casualisation.

10:19:10 That's the University of Edinburgh, where I'm standing and The Open University in Scotland where I'm an Associate Lecturer. Yeah, and totally cheer over me, go for it.

10:19:25 The Open University was previously the most casualised University with a base in Scotland. Over 80% of academic staff were on fixed-term contracts. Edinburgh was placed behind with almost 50%, and that's the 1920 Pisa figures, for those of you wanting citations, and we have no figures for academic-related or professional services, or I would have mentioned them as well.

10:19:42 So in the UK, only Oxford has more academic staff on fixed-term contracts. It seems pretty bad, and it seems like a pretty difficult position to get out of. But through standing together as a union, we've won improvements at both our workplaces. Supported by the Student Union, Edinburgh has taken a collective agreement, have shifted long term casualised staff onto fractional contracts.

10:20:06 They've won the right to professional development time. And they've won the right to annual pay progression.

10:20:14 At The Open University, where previously no associate lecturer would know if they’d get employed from one year to the next. After years of negotiations, we've won the fight for permanent contracts. From next year, we will have a permanent contract for our associate lecturers.

10:20:36 And that's because trade unions work, action at just these two universities has improved conditions for 10% of the UK’s fixed-term academics. Being part of the trade union is what made this change happen.

10:20:51 Staying part of the trade union is what will make it happen again.

10:20:54 And that brings me to my second request. Know that we can be successful, because we've already been successful. Know that we can be successful again, because we were successful in the past.

10:21:08 Hold the strike, and do not check your emails.

10:21:13 So what are we striking for today? We’re striking because 33% of all academic staff are on fixed term contracts. We’re striking because we don't even have figures for academic related and professional services colleagues.

10:21:30 We're striking, because we're overworked, we're underpaid, and because everything I've just said is worse if you're a woman, if you're an ethnic minority, or if you're disabled.

10:21:40 So when Covid hit last year, we didn't stop. We turned our universities upside down, and we moved our work online. Instead of thanking us, the UK’s universities have tried to lay people off. They've tried to curb pensions, and they've tried to ignore the Four Fights on pay, workload, equality and casualisation.

10:22:01 And that brings me to my third request to say: so shake yourself down, we get to the shout, shout back.

10:22:12 We're in the way of a car.

10:22:14 We're here today on strike. But the National Union of Students supports us. The students support us.

10:22:23 We need to tell the employers that we're not going to stand for it any longer. So when I say Four you say Fights, Four [Fights], Four [Fights], when I say a, you say pensions, a [pensions], a [pensions]

10:22:48 [Caitlin speaking:] That was brilliant. Pete, thank you so much for that. For that rousing report. It’s been fantastic to see you there.

10:22:57 Do you have anything else that you want to just let us know about, what's happening on the Edinburgh picket line today.

10:23:04 [Pete speaking:] Everyone is very, very happy. It's no longer snowing, it’s the first thing I can report. No, it's good. We've got people out, we've got a small crowd in kind of every building, it's a campus university so that's Social Science that I was in front of.

10:23:17 We've got people outside of the med school, outside the library, the business school was out in force with a red choir on Wednesday. Yeah, it's, it's pretty good. It's pretty good. And I think we're all, we're all up for this as you saw there like people.

10:23:34 People appeared in the background as I gave the talk, so I think you know what sometimes looks like a small pick it gets a lot bigger. As soon as people kind of realize what we're here for.

10:23:45 And why we're standing, why we're standing our ground.

10:23:50 [Caitlin speaking:] That's brilliant and we know from the National Union of Students that when they polled before the action, 73% of students were actually in favour of the strike and understood the issues, and I reckon that figure has actually gone up because of all the publicity about what it is we're fighting for. So it's just lovely to see staff and students out there. A reminder to our members that that we did have a picket at Edinburgh on our first day on Wednesday, which had the best attendance we've ever had, and huge amount of support from local people as well, and passers-by. Pete any final words on the fight for job security before we sign off

10:24:29 [Pete speaking:] Two things, yeah. The thing the students, from all the ones we've met, the students understand that stressed and overworked academics don't provide a good learning experience and they are in support of us.

10:24:41 And with regard to casualisation, go on the anti-casualisation Twitter, that's @UCUanti\_cas, fill in our survey on what you would need to happen to be able to take your hours back to your contracted hours, how would you do action short of a strike in your position. We're really looking to get that data together so that we can all push forward as one in the next stage of this.

10:25:10 That’s all, thank you very much.

[Caitlin speaking:] That's brilliant. Thank you so much, Pete. Thank you. And thanks to all our colleagues from social sciences in Edinburgh there as well.

10:25:17 Okay. So, our next item is actually our colleague, Ben, who is on the picket line with the Royal College of Art. Royal College of Art, recently did a major strike action locally over casualised staff.

10:25:35 And so, so my hope is that we're going to be passing over to Ben and company to talk about, to hear about what has been happening there. And we are, obviously, this branch supported Royal College of Art, we're with you in the struggles.

And it looks like we've also got Vicki Blake, who is the UCU president. And at the moment you've got your camera turned so all I can see is people looking a bit sideways.

10:26:04 So can I ask you, there you go. Okay. Brilliant. So, so over to you.

10:26:26 [Vicky speaking:] Hello! So we’re outside RCA, I’m Vicky Blake, our UCU president

I’m Rhian Keyse, I’m the other co-chair of the national anti-casualisation committee, very good to see Pete, unfortunately, he said everything I was going to say

So, I would just I would stand here and say everything that he just said, entirely valid, please fill out that survey, please get in touch with us, please follow us on Twitter.

10:26:41 And please come to our annual meeting in February and where we elect the new committee and set our priorities for the next year.

[Vicky speaking:] And we've also got strikers from RCA here, so I'm going to hand it just… it’s a bit low-tech here. Hold on, hold on, hold on.

10:26:47 [Susanna speaking:] Hello everyone, great to be linked up to you, sending lots of solidarity from South Kensington today. I'm Susanna, a member of the RCAUCU and we're out here again, I guess yes, day three of the national strike.

10:27:02 This is also I'm sure you’re aware, this is, I guess, fifth week of striking over the past few months for us because we've been striking, we've been out for our local strike through October, November and I just want to send a huge amount of love and solidarity from our crew. And so we're 100% behind you as well and take so much inspiration from the OU setting such a precedent with this action and, and the results, and I guess you know we're all here for the same reasons, obviously, but casualisation being at the core and the center of this, and we will mostly ensure so much experience and being sort of hands of… yeah, hellish casualisation contracts, context, conditions, all of it.

10:27:51 Anyway, I'm sorry I can kind of mumble on. Yes, but I'm gonna hand back to Vicki, and absolute solidarity, as always, and see you all, digitally or in person.

10:28:06 [Vicky speaking:] So before I give the phone back to its owner, I want to show you the best banner ever so hold on.

10:28:13 So, can you see this, and casualisation now. It's sparkly. And it's giving that message loud and clear. And I think just everything that you guys been doing at OU, we take inspiration from you across the movement. And on which note, I'm going to hand you over to Ben, who's on some kind of amazing tour of pickets.

[Ben speaking:] Nothing more to add, I don’t think. It's a wonderful to see the RCA out again after, as Susanna said, their three weeks of strike, and the inspiration the OU has given to the sector in tackling this feels really crucial.

10:28:53 [Caitlin speaking:] That's great. And is there anything else that we can do to support the RCA in its ongoing efforts around ending casualisation.

10:29:02 [Ben speaking:] So I think they are due to go back into negotiations next week. There's lots of details on the RCA UCU website and their Twitter handle, and I think they're still, I believe, taking donations to the strike fund, and they will need that, hopefully not, but potentially in the forthcoming actions as well. So, give them a follow on the social media and check their website for the latest updates.

10:29:31 [Caitlin speaking:] That's wonderful. Thank you so much, thank you to Ben, Vicky and everyone, just great to hear directly from the front line as it were.

10:29:41 And it's a very nice segue as well to our next item which is a focus back on our own AL contract. So, I think one of the things that we have to remember is that this has been a very long haul.

10:29:55 And we're not quite there yet. For most of us who are currently still involved in negotiations and the implementation of the contract, we know that it's been a very rocky road and it continues to be rocky right now, partly because the university made an agreement with the union, and then basically didn't fund the implementation properly. And it's only just now that that's coming together, but we've got two of our negotiators to remind us about that long road, how we got here, what it's actually going to mean for people. And what we can do next.

10:30:27 So our speakers on this are Bruce Heil, one of our long-time negotiators and member of the SEC and Isabella Muzio also an Exec member and negotiator. Bruce is an associate lecturer in in the STEM faculty and Isabella is an associate lecturer in Philosophy.

10:30:45 So I'm going to hand over I think to Bruce first. Is that right, or would you both like, Bruce first thank you go ahead Bruce.

10:30:53 [Bruce speaking:] Yeah, I'll, I'll give a bit of background and then Isabella can say more about what the overall benefits of this should be. As Caitlin said, this has been 10 years in the making and we're not quite there yet, but I think we are almost there.

10:31:10 Looking back 10 years ago, roughly 10 years ago. I think the contract that the university was using with ALs was becoming politically unsustainable. To have 7000, as it was then, 7000 ALs, the frontline staff of the university, the ones that dealt directly with the students, to have them all on casualised contracts, I think was becoming politically unsustainable for the university. Internally, there was increasing frustration from the Al community, and that was evident on the forums, in staff development events and any other opportunity that ALs to raise their grievances.

10:31:52 There was an attitude then, and still, to a certain extent now, of them and us. Communications from university, often referred to the staff of the university and associate lecturers, and that was an increasing frustration for the AL community, but not only those, you know, that sort of manifestation of the problem. There was increasing frustration at having to regularly reapply, be re-interviewed for the job that you might have been doing five years, 10 years, 15 years, 20 years. And those interviews were becoming increasingly more rigorous and that that frustration of having to reapply and be re-interviewed for your job was becoming completely unsustainable.

10:32:40 In addition to that, the Al workforce had been changing from the early days of the OU when most ALs had full time employment elsewhere. And it was an extra bit of work that the ALs did for the university, that had been changing over the years.

10:33:01 And increasingly, a layer of ALs were partly dependent or completely dependent on the OU for their income. And, and that was becoming very clear to the university, else that needed that OU income, couldn't get mortgages because it was casual, it was a casual contract and casualised income.

10:33:27 All of that was becoming unsustainable. So, 10 years ago, we kicked off negotiations. Why has it taken 10 years? I just want to highlight one or two things.

10:33:36 When the story of this is written there's a lot more to be said. But I want to highlight one or two things about that.

10:33:43 Firstly, we kicked off those negotiations, but very quickly, they were derailed. The austerity government that came in after the 2008 financial crisis, that austerity government raise tuition fees, and that had an immediate impact on the OU.

10:34:06 We lost a good layer of students, and we lost a good layer of ALs as well.

10:34:13 And so, the negotiations had to be suspended for a while. While the OU, if you want, regained its stability, but once that happened, we got back into negotiations again.

10:34:30 But then there was an internal shock. There was a vice chancellor of the University that had to be got rid of. The Union had to put efforts into dealing with that problem rather than the contract.

10:34:49 But again, once that person had gone, we got back into negotiations again.

10:34:47 And by 2018, we had the basis of the contract that we could put out to ballot.

10:34:55 That went out to ballot, and it was overwhelmingly as expected.

10:35:00 So the four years, or the nearly four years now since 2018, we've been working through the implementation of that contract. And again, there has been a shock, and external shock from Covid.

10:35:11 And then the internal shock of the Vice Chancellor’s Executive delay in the implementation of that contract this year. And I think what was really important was that they got a shock back from the AL community that when they announced it, they thought it would just be accepted.

10:35:30 And it wasn't accepted, the backlash from the AL community was quite incredible. And I think that, you know, if I want to make three or four points about what is sustained this all the way through.

10:35:43 I think firstly it's been the pressure internally, from the Al community continually raising their grievances throughout this period, I think.

10:35:59 Secondly, we've had a good team of people that have stuck together throughout this on the UCU side. And if I've got one frustration, it is that on the management side, their people have continually changed over that period.

10:36:12 And we've had to re-educate them into what this was all about. I think thirdly, that when you do get into this sort of long-term negotiation, you need patience, and you need the systems, and you need to be able to accept that these shocks will occur sometimes, and you just have to work through them.

10:36:33 And then finally, you need a good set of number crunchers. And I think, neither Isabella or I are those number crunchers, but David and Lesley and our team have been absolutely essential to doing the number crunching and, if you like, embarrassing the university, and at times they've had to take the university through the figures to get them to understand what this is all about.

10:36:55 So that's a bit of the background I want to stop at that, and I'll hand over to Isabella.

10:37:04 [Isabella speaking:} I’m just trying to figure out where my unmute button is on zoom.

10:37:07 Um, yeah thanks Bruce, I'd really just like to take note of the significant step forward that the contract, actually represents for ALs, and as an example potentially for the whole sector.

10:37:19 So it's often, I think it's easy to forget that, often, when caught up in the details. When caught up in the details in particular of the setbacks, the delays have happened with the new contract, the frustrations, the attempts by management to unpick things.

10:37:35 So I've been involved in these negotiations for well over seven years now. I never expected it to take this long. And as Bruce pointed out, one of the things that has made this take so long is that we've had to continually argue the same points over and over again with a continually changing set of characters on the management side. So, it's been extremely frustrating and difficult, but I think that the work on the new contract has been a really good example a classic example of union work, more generally, so it can be difficult, it can be slow, it's full of frustrations, obstacles, it requires pressing ahead the same points the same arguments over and over again with new people all the time, but progress is made, and progress can be made and significant progress even as we've made on this new contract. So, I think that's really important to remember and I highlight, at least three key benefits for ALs and others and, you know, Bruce can add to them if, if you like.

10:38:49 First of all, job security. This is a major step forward for ALs, and it’s the main reason why we have this new contract, why we negotiated this new contract. So, the fact that ALs can now rely on their income, they know what their income will be from year to year, is a significant step forward.

10:38:57 It's not just that but, as Bruce mentioned, the having to reapply for your own job.

10:39:03 That was extremely time consuming for people so it added a whole extra level of stress, not just about ensuring your income, but having to apply not only for your own job in your own field but often, all kinds of other AL work that maybe you didn't think you were particularly suited to but just to try to secure that income and, you know, make sure that if you lose something you still have something to fall back on so this extra workload and stress of having to continually reapply for your own job.

10:39:32 And I think that not having to do that, apart from security of income and the not wasting all that time is the, sort of the change in the kind of respect that this demonstrates from the university towards ALs and I mean that in a kind of a concrete step forward and respect, not just warm words having great relationships with your colleagues, and so forth but the institution, recognizing that you are actually good at your job, and they're not putting you through this kind of ritual humiliation of having to prove yourself again and again to the same people that you can actually do your job. So, I think that these, the job security is a step forward in income security, in stopping you wasting from all this time reapplying for your job,

10:40:19 and a concrete representation of a different relationship between the university and greater respect towards ALs members of staff.

10:40:29 Another step forward, and the fight continues on this because we haven't equalized ALs and other members of staff on this, but it's a step forward on paid annual leave for example we've moved forward on that that's ALs have, will now have seven extra days of paid annual leave pro rata which is not quite the same as we're not, we haven't got to quite equivalence with other members of staff but it's a step forward and it's something to continue arguing for.

10:40:56 And then the third.

10:40:58 Sorry.

10:40:59 The third significant change I think is that we, we managed to get some paid time for ALs to maintain their subject expertise so for academic currency and this they didn't have before.

10:41:12 I don't think it's adequate time and there's a constant attempt from management to erode this, to wind it back, to use that time for other things, but the fact that we now have in the new contract paid time in particular for AL-led academic currency is not just, I think, important in the sense of, it's paid time for activities that ALs do and have to do and have always had to do to be good at their job, but it's also a marker and an acknowledgement by the university, that the kind of division between teaching at higher education level and scholarly activity is an artificial one, and that ALs, if they are to do their teaching work adequately, they do need time to maintain their subject expertise.

10:41:56 And so this is a marker for that and something again that we can build on.

10:42:00 So speaking of building on I think that one of the other things a new contract brings is it sets the stage for the next things to negotiate because of course the contract isn't perfect, it doesn't achieve everything that we wanted or everything that we need, but it sets the stage for further negotiations on holiday leave, on making sure that the academic currency time that we have is adequate of course to defend what we've achieved so the job security, make sure it doesn't get unwound but also, it makes possible certain conversations and negotiations that weren't possible with people who are on precarious contracts. So, for example, we can start talking about things like giving ALS opportunities for career progression.

10:42:41 You can't talk about that kind of thing or negotiate on that kind of thing when you're talking about staff that's on a totally precarious contract where the university doesn't even know if they're going to be employing them again next year, why would they talk about career progression? So I think that, basically the work is not over, there are still things to negotiate and protect and to defend, so to defend the job security, make sure that none of the things that we've achieved get eroded or wound back, but also to make further progress for ALs and of course, more generally as a union with four other staff on these four fights so I think that what the, the AL contract really is in the end, is apart from a huge achievement fails on all in all these levels, it's an excellent example of really what unions can achieve as the first speaker was saying that what unions can achieve what we can achieve collectively.

10:43:35 So, you know, we're going to keep going. This is just the beginning but it's really important to, to take note of the significant step forwards because I think unions make progress sometimes it's incremental and sometimes it's in big jumps.

10:43:48 This has taken a very long time, but it has created a big jump and a big step forward, I think for ALs, and hopefully for other members of staff so let's you know keep going and solidarity everyone and this is all worth it and this is a great example of that.

10:44:05 [Caitlin speaking:] Thank you so much Isabella and Bruce. It was, it was difficult to hear about the long road that's been travelled down to get here, but also an excellent reminder as Isabella said there at the end, about how important it is to just keep on keeping on, with things that are, you know, with these fights with these struggles, they're not necessarily won overnight but it's going to make such a difference.

10:44:36 We now have almost 5000 Associate lecturers, this is going to make a massive difference to them. And, and as Bruce and Isabella both said as well. it makes a huge difference to the culture of the place to an egalitarian culture which actually lives up to the Open University values.

10:44:46 This, the fact that we've had so many precarious staff has been such a stain on the university for such a long time, so it's great that we're, we're coming toward the, that initial goal of finally getting permanence and security for so many people.

10:45:01 The other thing that your discussion made me think about was the way the divisive nature of this, the way that sometimes permanent and stable staff, become, are told and become convinced perhaps that their stability and they're good conditions depend on this pool of casualised people, and that's certainly something that we heard from our colleagues at Birkbeck recently, where they're also looking at how they can improve conditions for their precarious stuff.

10:45:33 And they, you know, they're there, they're having to find ways to make sure that people really fully understand the links between these things, so it's two things.

10:45:41 First, penny wise, pound foolish, that if you actually have a casualised pool of labour you cannot call upon them to do quite as much as you can, your permanent staff.

10:45:49 So from a university perspective, there are all sorts of ways in which you're automatically shooting yourself in the foot, if you, you know if you're trying to give work to people in these precarious situations.

10:45:59 And then second, the sheer amount of effort and work it takes to maintain precarious work, which is actually wasted effort, and the very, very good example that we had there of people being required to undergo interviews, over and over again despite being, you know, members of staff who've been working for the university for years and years, and yet we still had a process where everyone was required, and it wasn't just the people going through those interviews, it also totally wasted the time of all the ones conducting those interviews and administering them.

10:46:28 And that was part of what finally made the breakthrough. As Bruce said when figures were explained to the university about just how much time and effort was being wasted.

10:46:36 So this is these are lessons we can take some of our other fights as well. And I just want to say thank you again to Bruce and Isabella for reminding us about this, you know, about this victory.

10:46:46 It's not a full victory yet, it's, it's been slow it's been hard. We continue to, you know, we continue to struggle. But, but it's just such a good reminder, and also to hear from our other colleagues, including at RCA and University of Edinburgh, that this has been an inspiration for others, because the OU is so big that this this victory is actually reshaping our sector, and has the potential to do that if we keep on pushing on our Four Fights.

10:47:12 So thank you again so much. One of the reasons that we actually focus today on not just job and security but also food insecurity was two things. One was hearing from some of our staff.

10:47:28 Both historically and even currently about some of the difficulties that they faced. About 75% of our associate lecturers were on nine or ten-month contracts, which meant there was always that fallow period over the summer.

10:47:41 And, and some colleagues have referred to that and the difficulty of trying to make ends meet. Also, we knew during the Covid period that international students, up and down the country and some other students as well were relying on food banks for help.

10:47:58 And, and finally we know that our Open University students, some of them are really in a very difficult situation, that's part of why we've requested, and it's been agreed that any pay docked by… any paid for this strike action is going to the student support fund of the Open University.

10:48:16 And so, knowing that we want to highlight what we as a union can do to reach out across our four nations community, remind people about the existence and need of food banks at the moment while we continue, all of us, I think together to work toward a world where they won't be needed anymore.

10:48:35 So our next speaker is a special guest from Leicester, we've got, Lindsay Broadwell from Leicester City Council. And, in addition to her council work she does a huge amount of local fundraising and awareness raising about food banks, Lindsay, over to you.

10:48:54 [Lindsay speaking:] So, thank you very much and thank you to Chris for inviting me and thank you for everyone to have me on today I hope I’m coming through okay. I'm currently in London, just about to attend some business. So, I'm in public and it's a little bit noisy right now but…

10:49:09 As some of you might have seen, I have a little mascot with me, and there's sort of a dual purpose for this because firstly I fish bikes out of the trash… but secondly, I myself have had periods in my life when I've had to go diving in dumpsters for food, I have literally been feeding myself from the trash that companies like Tesco, Aldi, ASDA are throwing out and they now have locked dumpsters to stop people from doing that. So, food insecurity is something I have personally experienced, you know, despite the privileged upbringing I had.

10:49:37 And so, one of the things that struck me when I first became a counsellor is, you know, while there's a lot of case work from Western Park it's generally, sort of, quality of life stuff is sort of things like you know making sure that bins on the park are emptied, it's dealing with dog’s mess. When you're looking at places like New Parks and Braunstone Frith, though, the sort of case work that comes up as is matters of basic survival and an awful lot of that is met currently by food banks, two of which to in my ward currently there's one in new parks and there's one in New Parks and there’s one in Braunstone Frith.

10:50:09 And so over the course of the pandemic. I have to date raised about 8000 pounds for the food banks, so I've raised 1000 pounds in one fundraiser, 2000 in another, 3000 and I'm currently about two thirds of the way through raising another 3000.

10:50:25 So, to be honest it's something which has been taking up an awful lot of my time just trying to ensure that, you know, people are being fed and an awful lot of the cause of this food insecurity is insecure contracts, it’s work which may be taken away at a whim it's people who you know are constantly in a situation of endless precarity and this depends on food banks and the charity of others in order to survive. And, you know, I made no secret of the fact that you know I am a socialist of the municipal strategy. I think that you know food is a basic need that should be taken care of by you know the public sector the right to food is a basic human right and should be guaranteed but right now it isn’t.

10:51:06 So what I've ended up doing is for each one of these fundraisers I've been running I've had a different challenge for each one. And this most recent one I've challenged myself to ride a century an imperial century which is 100 miles on a Brompton, which, as I'm sure you know Chris will probably tell you an awful lot about those, but they are fantastic bikes, but they are tiny and they are meant for, sort of like small journeys within cities not this kind of distance but it's something which, on the one hand you know I'm very enthusiastic about doing I think I'm good at fundraising, I think, you know, it's a skill I've developed you know getting the outreach getting people to support and share and donate when they can, and just you know finding consistent sources of funds, over and over again and when.

10:51:49 Even when official sources are not forthcoming but it's something at the same time, I sort of almost like you resent having to do. Because at the end of the day you know there are people in my ward who essentially are still alive, just due to charity due to handouts, in one of the richest countries in the world there is no shortage of wealth, not in this country, not in the city. And, you know, it's an active political choice that we're in this situation.

10:52:27 While my agency may necessarily be limited, I’m not the kind of person who if I see a problem, I can’t just sit to one side and say well that's not my problem, I'm not going to deal with it. So I've been doing, essentially everything I can to try and meet the need, and although I may grumble at times it's something I'm very proud to do and it's something I will continue doing for as long as I'm able. So, I had a little bit earlier which sort of did such train of thought running in my mind and that's about the vexatious process of, you know, constantly re-interviewing staff to, you know, staff we've worked for university for years and years and years.

10:52:50 And there's something fairly similar when it comes to securing funds for the food banks, so you can't just have a line of funding that’s stable. It's like you do this, we know you do this.

10:52:59 Here's a consistent funding, year after year, you have to apply for grants you have to reapply, and the bureaucracy is charitably it could be called challenging, personally I'd be inclined to call some of it vexatious because there is a limited pot of funding to go around and they put these bureaucratic barriers in place so that they can limit the number of applicants that get to the process at all.

10:53:25 And so what I've ended up doing is I'm sort of just like you know, I just want to raise money, no strings attached. I trust you to use this appropriately.

10:53:34 And so that for the last you know year now is what I've been doing at various stages. So honestly you know I've seen the power of community I've seen the power of unions first-hand you know I do my best to drive that forwards, and honestly, it's something I'm proud of and if anybody has any particular questions from the floor, and it's been like trust me, particular I'd be very happy to answer. So, yes, and before I say that actually I did want to say I dropped by the pickets at Leicester University on Monday.

10:53:59 And sorry it wasn't Monday it was Tuesday my head can't count. But I want to say that you have my full support I think your demands are eminently reasonable I wish you success and if there's any way I can help please do let me know.

10:54:09 So, if anyone has any questions about me about the work that I do, please do ask away.

10:54:13 Thank you.

10:54:16 [Caitlin speaking:] Oh, thank you so much for that. And, you know, thank you for your solidarity and your support and thank you of course for everything that you're doing. It was great to hear about it.

10:54:25 Sadly, you know, the need, the need should not be there but, as you say, something where we do, we can.

10:54:34 We're, we're a bit tight on time, so I'm going to go ahead and say a huge thanks again to Lindsay and we're now going to be moving on to some final reports of the last few days activity, including this morning, we had an Open University branch picket at Manchester. So, hoping to see a few photos of that, as well as a bit of a reminder of some of the other online and physical pickets that we've done over the last couple of days, and then we'll see, we'll see everyone out with a bit of music at the end.

10:55:06 So Chris. Can I ask you to, to put up our slideshow please.

10:55:14 Okay

[Chris speaking:] So I’m successfully sharing

[Caitlin speaking:] Yep, yep, you are, so that's brilliant.

10:55:30 [Chris speaking:] I've been putting these together, sort of, in real time during the meeting so we've got some pictures from yesterday some from today we've we had cats in the audience yesterday.

10:55:30 Also yesterday, and this is a picture taken from University of Northampton where Kate was there, meeting Joe Grady I think it's a lovely picture.

10:55:38 Yesterday I think so far of the strike the Edinburgh crew yesterday the Open University offices just managed to get that that really beautiful picture there and I feel that we all should cherish that as one of the best picket pictures I've seen in this particular strike. And our comrade Lee Raye, they’ve been going around picketing in the countryside because the Open University is everywhere, so all over South Wales, in a mobile, virtual picket, so picketing nature, as well, this is one of the characteristics of this branch isn't it? we are everywhere, we are ubiquitous. And then as well as setting up all this stuff around in London that’s perhaps I think the best banner.

10:56:14 This is where we're, we're really good because, you know, we've got mathematicians, we've got engineers, we've got art historians, and so. So Ben has just got this beautiful ‘*la lutte continue*’ placard. I feel we need to cherish this one maybe, see if we can get it put up in the office so when we're next in Milton Keynes we can see it and remind ourselves of this moment.

10:56:33 There was also around the Goldsmiths demonstration yesterday, which marched on on Lloyds Bank branches. And good pointing out that it's the banks that are currently in control.

10:56:42 This is this morning our own picket outside the OU offices in Manchester, so we had a presence there, so we were there making sure that The Open University doesn't forget that we've got tickets in the regional staff.

10:56:53 And then also we had this is on AL Nic Snarey’s Twitter feed, she was relying on a virtual picket by Optimus Prime, that messy Optimus Prime.

10:57:04 And then we've also had Vicki shouting out for our OU representation on the picket in London. Quite a lot of shout outs of comrades for tickets of various different parts of the country about always nice to see some of you people on here.

10:57:18 I think we’ve done ourselves proud with OU on tour and we need to give ourselves a pat on the back about that.

10:57:25 I'm now going to try and share Malcolm’s song, but I'll hand you back to Caitlin while I try and get that one set up and she can, you know, introduce, explain the context for this particular one.

10:57:39 [Caitlin speaking:] Okay, thank you. First, we just have a reminder that starting at 11:15 we have a members-only meeting.

10:57:46 And that's chance for us all to, to talk about action sort of a strike and building the branch. So, so if you're a member online today please do consider joining us for that, and we look forward to seeing you.

10:57:59 So, when we came up with our food insecurity theme for the day and Malcolm Atkins who is a singer, recorded a song, and then I understand that family members got together and have actually helped to make a wonderful video based on previous years’ photographs, so we're going to see that just a moment.

10:58:17 I also have a message of support from Cambridge regional college, which sent their solidarity this morning at wanted everyone to know that the FE world is also completely behind us and understands our disputes and our struggles.

10:58:35 So Chris Do we have a video?

10:58:39 Let me just make sure that we're actually showing the sound, this time around.

10:58:52 Put your thumbs up if what you could hear the sound.

[video and song play]

[Caitlin speaking:] Thank you so much to Malcolm and Malcolm’s family. It was amazing to see those scenes from previous disputes. Very similar on USS and the Four Fights around the four nations, including our Northern Ireland office, Scotland, Wales and all over. Brilliant, thank you so much. So I’m going to close off things now. Again, members only join us from 11:15. Thank you for being here today. Please take care everyone. Bye for now.