

The Open University Branch
of the University and College
Union

August 2022
Issue 5



AL Newsletter

Bulletin for AL UCU members at The Open University

Welcome to the August 2022 edition
of the OU UCU Newsletter for ALs.

Welcome again to the OU UCU branch ALs’ newsletter. As ALs we have been very busy over the last year, dealing with Strike action, MDM, HTRA and FTE queries, while trying to do the best for our students in the continuing pandemic. One “landmark win” we have achieved is the implementation of the new AL contract on 1st August, recognized by Jo Grady as life changing in this [UCU press release](#).

There are still many issues which remain to be sorted or agreed between UCU and management. We want to thank our negotiators for the huge efforts to obtain a resolution to these, alongside the ongoing day to day work of the Branch

This issue of the newsletter includes some stories from the strike, revelations from the secret AL, and an article about being a caseworker. We are always looking for contributions for future newsletters, and would encourage anyone with an interest in editing to join our small team.



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Update your home address on My UCU?

We are expecting an industrial action ballot to happen in September, ballot papers will be sent to your home address. Please login to [MyUCU](#) and check that your home address is correct on there, or please email ucu@open.ac.uk and Deb will get your address changed for you.

Please consider updating your OU email address too, if it changed last year.

Sometimes this is useful if we need to contact members tutoring on a particular module or programme.

My UCU web address:

https://my.ucu.org.uk/app/utls/login_form/redirect/



The New Contract — Ongoing Questions

This article is written by a member who is not involved with the substantive negotiations with management. It is more by way of questions than answers about some unresolved issues.

This incomplete list explains why the UCU negotiating team are busy.

- ICT provision and expenses – negotiations began in March against a background of the failed MDM rollout. After an initial consultation of AL members (see email of 11th July) UCU's negotiators asked for some last minute changes, and believe we have a positive outcome. Members will hear more about this shortly.
- Additional Duties Contracts; progress is underway to resolve pay discrepancies due to lack of a proper holiday element.
- Payment for ALs who have to leave the OU after completing their year's work but before the end of the workload year.
- Skills Audit: will this allow ALs to demonstrate the full range of their skills, and to decide which modules they would be able to work on? However, implementation is only just starting and many ALs will not have their skills audit for many months. This makes workload allocation difficult, especially for ALs who have lost work due to modules ending or falling student numbers on the modules which they teach, and for ALs seeking to transfer to more appropriate career development teaching opportunities.
- Increasing or decreasing FTE when ALs' circumstances change.
- Applying for increases in FTE, and changing modules within FTE (i.e. without applying for increased FTE).

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What do you want to read about in future issues?

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

continued...The New Contract — Ongoing Questions

- TRA FTE for new ALs, and opportunities for other ALs (including recent joiners who missed the reference period) to have some FTE for TRAs if they want it.
- Agreeing to do work vs. having work imposed, in order to fill your FTE, within the workload year.
- Allocation of FTE for EMA and exam marking and payment for additional marking above the FTE.
- Booking leave, how and when must it be done, and when can it be taken; tracking whether Associate Lecturers have been able to take sufficient leave to support wellbeing?
- Working in more than one school or faculty; who will line manage?

Our UCU Regional Official, Lydia Richards, leads our local negotiating team for the new AL contract. She has written up her personal recollections of over a decade of negotiations, giving an account of the issues we faced. Her account can be found on our [branch website](#).

UCU's national campaign of pay and working conditions

UCU is preparing for another round of campaigning on pay and working conditions this autumn. For more information go to the [UCU Rising website](#).

Please watch and share the [campaign video](#).

This isn't a decision UCU has taken lightly, but as a result of a derisory offer in the face of 11.4% RPI and rising inflation.



On the Picket Line in Wales

This summer we are seeing rail workers and communications workers walk out over job cuts and low pay offers. Public sector workers in NHS trusts, councils and police forces are balloting and discussing action over pay as living costs spiral. We were out on strike earlier in the year: for a fair pension, recognition of heavy workloads, pay gaps, real terms pay cuts and against increasing casualisation across the sector.

We will soon be looking to Get The Vote Out (GTVO) again. We urge you to think about how unjust pension reductions and other problems with our working terms and conditions affect not only ourselves, also other workers whose employers are looking to cut rights and in-work provision.

Here in Wales, we at the Open University branch of UCU – led by Associate Lecturers with Student Support Staff colleagues, won a hugely sympathetic hearing from Senedd (the Welsh parliament) during strike action. Members of Senedd visited us on the picket, came out on the steps of the building to hear us lobby them and we had a joint invitation from the ruling Labour Party and Plaid Cymru to present at an event inside the building. We had public support from the one Liberal Democrat Member of Senedd, and the Conservative Shadow Minister for Education came to hear our representation of the problems we face. We had complete cross-party support.

While in England, there is an unsympathetic culture both for the Open University and for low-paid casualised university staff like ourselves, in Wales it is a different story. Here, fairness and social justice are not just words – equalities are built into the Government of Wales Acts, not instituted through separate legislation. A new upcoming Social Partnership Bill calls for fair work and socially responsible public procurement (that includes procurement of education from universities).

The Open University enjoys great support in Wales, as its social mission and ability to reach those in situations of deprivation has excellent fit with Welsh Government aspirations to lift families out of poverty. However Welsh Government does not look kindly on the delivery of this mission via casualisation, low pay and the slashing of pension benefits

....continued over

Jenny Rathbone
Talking to @UCUWales picket outside @OpenUniversity
@ANLecturer @oubucu
£3,000 pa pension after 25 years in higher education
totally unjust



Jenny Rathbone, Member of Senedd, with Anita Pilgrim, picket co-ordinator at the OU in Wales—March 2022.

...continued On the Picket Line in Wales

which will throw many of us back on government for financial aid in our old age.

Compared to other universities, we have a higher proportion of staff who have worked on part-time, lower paid contracts – both as Associate Lecturers and our academic services staff developing and providing the huge range of module materials we rely on for our teaching. Therefore we have a higher proportion of staff vulnerable to the shocking slash in pension provision, and facing difficulties with low pay rises compared to the spiralling cost of living. We have more staff on the edge of seeing our working terms and conditions as insufficient reward for our hard work.

The President of the National Union for Students in Wales also came to support our cause, and to help us make the case that without good working terms and conditions, high quality staff will leave the Higher Education sector, meaning a good learning experience can no longer be guaranteed to students. Every couple of weeks I seem to hear from another colleague who has decided to go – our management say a lot about developing good staff recruitment, but don't seem to realise what poor retention is costing them.



Associate Lecturers on strike lobbying Members outside Senedd, with staff from Swansea and Cardiff Universities.

JOIN UCU

www.ucu.org.uk/join

Or join by phone: 0333
207 0719*

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



The Secret AL: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

I was musing on how this job compares to others I've had.

The good

One of the best things, for me, is that apart from tutorials, I don't have to be at a specific place at a specific time – if I want to go out for a walk on a sunny day, or meet a friend for brunch, I can. I have a fair bit of autonomy in how I schedule my work, and management is very light touch. It does give me a thrill still when I help a student “get it”, or just support them through a difficult patch. And tutorials, at their best, can be great fun – yes, even when online. And however much the OU annoys and frustrates me at times, I do still believe it's a force for good in society – I still get that warm feeling from being part of that.

THE GOOD
THE BAD
AND THE UGLY

The bad

Until now, it was the lack of security, and things like, as a J and B AL, not being able to take an actual holiday including not checking work emails. I'm hoping the new contract sorts the latter as well as the former.

The lack of connection with other ALs is a real shame too ... dare I mention the regional centres, where we could actually meet up at local events? This must be a particular issue for ALs who are new to the university – how do they get to know colleagues for the mutual support almost everyone wants at their workplace?

The ugly

The worst thing is the lack of respect for us in too many circles. Being “othered” – as demonstrated so clearly by continuing use of the phrase “ALs and staff” phrase – is symptomatic. I was sad to see in the post-strike form we had to fill in, that it seemed all “the powers that be” think we do is mark and give tutorials; seeing that personal (rather than “personalised”) support we offer students so under-valued by some drives me crazy.

The lack of value given by some to our insights into the student experience is a particular bug-bear too – you'd think that given the institutional focus on student success, contributions from student-facing staff would be actively solicited ... but nope, doesn't seem to happen much, does it? And the agenda from some to want to put us back in our box if ever we demonstrate interest in moving outside being a “marking monkey” is very telling. Will this faculty integration move attitudes on? Crazy dreamer that I am, I keep hoping it will.

Becoming a UCU Caseworker

Many years ago, as a NATFHE Branch Secretary, I was involved in several cases where I needed to support Union members with their problems with management. The cases I remember best were the following:

- Two colleagues who had been supporting BTec students with a T-shirt printing company as part of their practical work, were accused of financial improprieties.
- A Science teacher had put incorrect information on his application form, and was threatened with dismissal.
- A technology teacher was accused of sexually harassing students.

These were all at the same FE College. Whatever the rights and wrongs of the cases, all the members needed support in resolving the issues. And that is where the caseworker comes in. That was in the past, and I had not been involved in similar activities for many years as a Union rep, although more recently I had helped in an eviction case and an unfair dismissal. But when the OU branch asked for volunteers, I agreed to do the training.

The actual workload for the training is not too onerous, involving 3 morning sessions online plus some preparatory and follow up activities. When you have completed the training you get a certificate. And there is some facility time paid for. But that is not the main benefit. For yourself it provides insight into the working of the university, particularly aspects of Human Resources (People Services) such as Disciplinary and Capability procedures. You are not becoming an expert in these matters, just competent in knowing where to start when faced with an issue, and practicalities about dealing with it, while supporting the colleague in their response. You start with a mentor to guide you through the processes, so are not left to flounder.

I have not yet dealt with a case on a formal basis, but I know there are frequent cases being handled by the branch. So, I am happy to be added to the list of volunteers and would encourage others to do the same.

UCU member's quotes

1. Thanks so much, it's amazing how fast things move when the UCU is copied in to an email!
2. Nothing like adversity to bring folk together. Shame it takes it to show some folk the strength of united purpose for progress, not just defence of one's own interests.

Upcoming UCU Training information

All Locations

[Workload rep training 1: introduction to the workload campaign and the role of the workload rep](#) Autumn, date TBC, open for registrations of interest.

[Workload rep training 2: workload campaign in action: undertaking workload inspections and investigations](#) Autumn, date TBC, open for registrations of interest.

Members are invited to attend any event in England. If several members from the OU were interested in a course the branch could make a request for it to be run in Northern Ireland.

Scotland (we can probably send members to the online courses)

[Mental health is a trade union issue](#), September 15 & 22. Online, Scotland (two half days). Why mental health is a trade union issue, and how to ensure working practices support equality.

[Your union, your voice: a taster course for activists](#), 14,16, September 2022, Online, Scotland (two half-days). Learn more about, and perhaps get more involved in UCU.

[UCU reps induction: 26 August & 2,9,16, September 2022](#), Online, Scotland. For new reps/caseworkers and activists who will be undertaking this role in the near future. Paid time off may be available

Upcoming CPD (can be attended using OU Professional Development time)

If you would like to join the pool of UCU members who review new courses at the pilot stage, please email Glen Pickard (GPickard@UCU.ORG.UK) or speak to Peter.wood@open.ac.uk about taking the Union Learning Representative training.



Comments from AL members about the new AL contract

“What a fabulous achievement, at this time of all times too. Well done.”

“Thanks for everything OU UCU you are always there for us if we need support.”



“I'd like to say a big thank you in return. This would not have been possible without the support of UCU. Many, many thanks for supporting each AL in the OU.”

“And a big "thank you" from this UCU member to all present and past branch officers, negotiators and regional officials. In a context of increasing casualisation of employment practices throughout the HE sector and the economy generally, the scale and importance of the victory represented by the move to permanent FTE contracts for ALs cannot be overstated. A "moment in history", indeed, and one that we can be proud of as we ready ourselves for future struggles.”

“Please extend my thanks to the whole UCU team - stronger together.”

“I sincerely thank the OU UCU branch for making this a reality. Previously I would receive SV1 and SV2 letters annually; with a family to support the stress was agonizing. This year I have felt more positive about being an AL than ever before and finally feel secure in my career. Being an AL at the OU is the best job in the world, and I finally feel like I can enjoy it.”

“And thank you to all in UCU
Warmest wishes. “



Farewell and Thank you to three UCU members

The branch is sad to report that we are losing three long-standing UCU members in September: Bruce Heil and Jeremy Roebuck are retiring from the OU and Kate Hawkins is leaving the OU for another job.

Bruce has been a member of our branch executive since 2009 and a UCU AL rep since 2007 when the AL reps became an elected committee. Bruce has helped hundreds of members over that time as one of our caseworkers. Jeremy joined the branch in 2013 and has been an excellent AL rep and caseworker, helping lots of members with their issues. We have received glowing reports about Jeremy's work as a caseworker and we are very grateful to Bruce and Jeremy for all their service to UCU and for the support that they have given to UCU members.

Kate joined the Exec committee in 2018 and has been the UCU rep in Marketing and now MarComms since 2015; Kate is a stalwart UCU picket and has supported all the industrial action since she has been a member of our branch. The branch is very grateful to Kate for all her work as a UCU rep and Exec member, we wish her well in her new job.



OUBUCU Branch meetings

All UCU members are welcome to attend Branch meetings, the dates are all on our branch website: <http://ucu.open.ac.uk/events>.

The AL Reps Committee is always happy to have new members. If you are interested contact ucu@open.ac.uk to find out more.

OU Branch of UCU AL reps committee, 2022-2023

Our AL Reps committee meets regularly to discuss current AL issues. The committee has standing orders on our [branch website](#). The UCU AL Reps committee is organised by OU faculties and nations for the first time in 2022. Please contact the UCU office at ucu@open.ac.uk if you are interested in becoming an AL Rep.

Current members of the AL Reps' Committee are shown in the table on this page and the branch is very pleased to have several new AL reps this year.

Faculties	Reps
Access	John Pearson & Andrew Hoan
FASS	Penny Oderberg Mike McNulty Costas Athanasopoulos Jenny Kermally Tom Saunders Richard Bradbury Mark Kirby James Brownbridge Gillian Jack Fiona Essig Isabella Muzio Peter Templeton Joe White
FBL	Almut Gadow & Jason Phillips
STEM	Peter Piper John Peters Lesley Kane Matthew Rickard
WELS	Gerry Stroud & Anita Pilgrim

CONTACT US

Open University Branch of University and College Union

Email: ucu@open.ac.uk

Telephone: 01908 6(53069) or Deb Shann on S4B

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

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University and College Union

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