

The Open University Branch
of the University and College
Union

November 2022
Issue 6



AL Newsletter

Bulletin for AL UCU members at The Open
University

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

Please share this newsletter with any non-union colleagues – especially as it is Join a Union Week. We will be taking the biggest strike action in UCU history on Thursday 24th, Friday 25th and Wednesday 30th November.

There will be in-person pickets at all of our offices except Belfast each day, and we also will be joining UCU colleagues from other branches for a national rally at King's Cross in London at 1pm on the 30th November.

We will be sharing much more information about the strike and pickets, the hardship fund, and the impact on different categories of staff and student, in the coming days – watch this space. In the meantime, you can find out more about the strike on the national [UCU website](#).

If you want to join the London rally, please email ucu@open.ac.uk and we can update you when we've agreed a meeting time and place.

Branch website: <http://ucu.open.ac.uk>
Branch Twitter: <https://twitter.com/oubucu>
Branch Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/openuniversityucu>



Inside this issue

Introduction	1
AL contract update.....	2
ICT and expenses.....	3
DD102.....	4
Pay gap and IT issues...	5
Secret AL.....	6-7
Contact information....	8



Please email ucu@open.ac.uk if you would like one of our new canvas bags.

Update your home address on My UCU?

Please login to [MyUCU](#) and check that your home address is correct on there, or email ucu@open.ac.uk and Deb will get your address changed for you. My UCU web address: https://my.ucu.org.uk/app/utills/login_form/redirect/membership%



AL Permanent contract – update

The formal implementation of the permanent employment contract for ALs was an enormous achievement, widely celebrated across the union community, particularly by national UCU and the Trades Union Congress.

Staff gained job security and better working terms. However the opportunity to address many of the issues which have historically slowed down our ability to deliver teaching effectively were not picked up by the university. Frustrated threads in the AL Common Room continue to show up the lack of robust management procedures to support us and our Staff Tutor/Student Experience Manager colleagues.

- Skills audit roll out is being done on a school-by-school basis. Management plan to have this ready for 2023J, but with student numbers dropping UCU believes this needs to happen sooner.
- Travel Distance Fee – removed without consultation with the union. UCU views long distance travel to teach as part of our working time, and is negotiating accordingly. (If you have concerns about this, you can currently have your face to face tutorial transferred to an online one.)
- Workload report – there remains a pressing need for a way to map and adjust workload where ALs have not got sufficient TRA FTE to cover all their duties, or are experiencing work overload and want to adjust their FTE. UCU is also concerned that not all “negative availability”, i.e. work above FTE, is being recognised.
- After concerns raised by UCU, the Additional Duties Contracts for Associate Lecturers have been improved so that holiday hours are correctly calculated and paid. UCU is concerned about recent use of Limited Engagement Worker contracts which should not be used for staff and which do not provide properly for annual leave.

ICT and expenses

What do you want to read about in future issues?

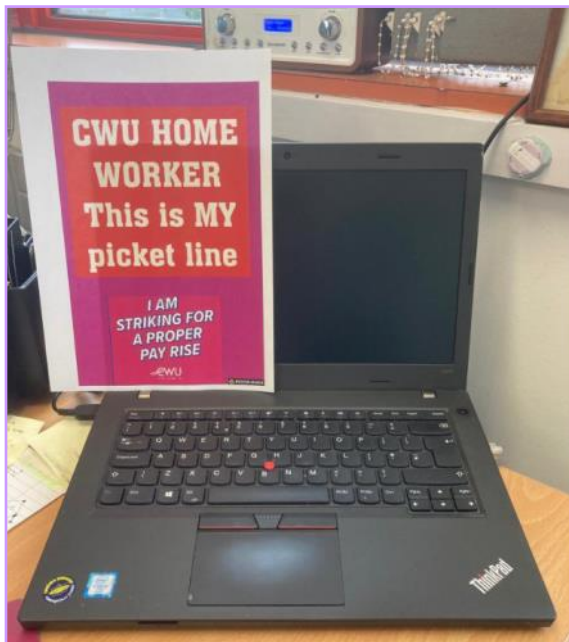
Please email ucu@open.ac.uk with ideas for articles in future issues of this newsletter. You can either suggest topics you would like to read or articles you would like to write and contribute.

Branch negotiators established a robust agreement with management about financing our information and computing technology needs. When this was put to ballot by AL members, a majority of over 97% showed they recognised this as a good package for us as homeworkers who rely extensively on our computing equipment in our work.

- ALs will have a choice: OU provided equipment or purchasing our own and claiming up to an equivalent cost.
- The agreement allows for future negotiation and a joint review between UCU and management after 2 years.
- Suitable computers purchased from January 2021 can be claimed for.

There are still some issues under discussion with the university about homeworking expenses and arrangements (see below on costs for broadband).

[University guidance on ICT and General Expenses.](#)



DD102—ongoing employment for ALs

Some years ago, decisions were made about how FASS students would undertake Level 1 courses. One key effect of this is the likely partial or total exclusion of DD102 from Psychology qualification routes. Given 70% to 80% of current DD102 students are registered on Psychology qualifications, this is expected to lead to a substantial fall in student enrolments from 2023J onwards. The likely impact on DD102 student enrolments will clearly affect ALs since roughly 250 currently work on DD102. It is estimated that only about 15% of these could make a direct transfer to teach Psychology courses.

There is obvious concern in the context of financial challenges highlighted by the VC even though the new permanent contract should make it easier and clearer how staff can be redeployed. This is a test of how the union and managers can work together to ensure stable staffing in the face of changes to student numbers. There are meetings with People Services and faculty managers about DD102 and we'll update as soon as we know more. We know all ALs, not just those potentially affected, will be watching closely to see how the permanent contract will support staff.



A Pay Gap for ALs!

One of the big changes we saw in the published pay gap data is for the first time we saw an AL pay gap (for both gender and ethnicity). The reason we have been given for this is that FTE (Full Time Equivalent) was decoupled from additional work. To be more specific – as we understand the time element in the calculation for the pay gap was based on nominal FTE not including any time for additional work, but the earnings included *all* earnings including for additional work. Because we had more white, male ALs taking on additional work we saw, despite all ALs being on the same salary scale, a pay gap.

This may explain the data if true – it does not excuse the data, and indeed we will be asking the OU hard questions about this data, requesting if we can see what the actual additional duties assignment gap is (surely pretty high), and for the OU to investigate why white and male ALs appear to be getting more additional work than others in the first place.

IT upgrades, reasonable adjustment for disability and Dragon

It emerged in our recent IT drop-in consultation meetings that ALs with disabilities are in some instances struggling to get the university to support provision of the appropriate software (in particular, Dragon Professional Voice Recognition software). We have been pursuing this with the university. If you are affected by this or similar issues getting reasonable adjustments made to support your work, please contact the office. We would like to hear your experiences and if you have an ongoing issue we can provide a caseworker to help: ucu@open.ac.uk.



The Secret AL

Secret AL might like to know that some of our AL Reps have been fighting hard to get us ALs proper homeworking support, for some years!

Healthy online working

For most of us, the main benefit we looked for from the permanent contract was job security. To know what would be in my pay packet each month year on year seemed like a fairy tale dream in our one child, two cat household. There were lifechanging benefits to being a permanent employee, and an additional benefit was access to wellbeing support.

We ALs have always had access to the Employee Assistance Programme for free counselling sessions. Maybe we have also had access to advice about setting up our work space and I just wasn't aware of it, but awareness of a service isn't all that's needed for us to access it.

Working on a precarious contract, waiting with baited breath every few months to see if the Great and Good are going to graciously continue to grant us salaried work, makes us cautious about flagging issues. I personally have shoulder and back pains and eye problems picked up during the intense period of pandemic working. These have been ongoing for a couple of years. I wanted advice – but was anxious I might be thought troublesome to manage if I raised these problems, and I didn't know where to go to ask about them.

I was also so overloaded with work that I never had half an hour to spare (will be joining the picket to protest about this among other issues!). When the invitation to take part in a mandatory Healthy Working module popped up, I ignored it for several months. I think I had about four reminders.

Finally, recently, I had “30-45 minutes” when I remembered the module and managed to undertake it. I was of course rolling my eyes with sarcasm at being made to do a healthy online working exercise in conditions which I was perfectly aware were unhealthy and badly set up, and online. I muttered constantly about the need for some kind of human tutor for things like this!

I did learn a few useful things from the exercise, and although I lied valiantly about the amount of trip hazards round my working space (loose wires, piles of sewing projects, textbooks, cheap detective novels), I was honest about the angle of my laptop and what kind of chair I use. Having completed the survey, I thought I would contact my line manager, and see if – now that I am a permanent employee, Occupational Health could talk to me about what kind of setup might help me to overcome my back problems.

...Secret AL continued

But lo! before I managed to contact my manager, I had a message asking me to make an appointment to talk about my working conditions. An actual human tutored me through my needs. She was expert, helpful and friendly. She outlined several low-cost solutions to suit my working habits. She said I can call her any time to talk through my working setup.

Gosh, the amount of support on offer, it was almost like being an Open University student!

So when the reminder about the Healthy Working module comes through, it is worth setting aside the time, completing it honestly and accessing the opportunity our employers have provided to talk through any issues in your setup with a real expert human. And now I'm off to book next year's annual leave on Success Factors. 🙌



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/>

Like and Follow OU UCU on Facebook and Twitter

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

<https://twitter.com/oubucu>



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