

## Championing equality at UCU Congress and beyond

UCU's transitional year culminated in Congress, held from 30 May– 1 June. The first section of motions to be debated at the first meeting of Congress was equality, timetabled for two hours, within which all the relevant motions were debated and passed. Seventeen equality motions were taken in all, covering a wide range of issues. UCU is now committed, amongst other things, to do the following:

- foster the active participation of disabled members at every level of UCU
- develop its own equality scheme
- support the campaign to promote the use of Braille
- provide financial, campaigning and educational support to LGBT History Month
- lobby the government to extend the sexual orientation regulations to prohibit classroom teachers from negatively characterising LGBT people, identity and lifestyle
- issue advice on dealing with bullying and harassment of vulnerable members
- re-confirm affiliation to Unite Against Fascism and commitment to anti-fascist campaigning
- prioritise a campaign to remove the gender pay gap in FE and HE
- campaign against the Welfare Reform Act
- resist government pressure to 'spy' on Muslim students
- work for better treatment, educational provision and trade union support for migrant workers
- recognise that academic freedom is in the context of respecting the democratic rights and freedoms of others not to be abused.

Debate was both well-informed and passionate, but all the motions passed without opposition.

The next day saw an extremely well-attended equality fringe. Nearly a hundred delegates heard the chairs of the four equality groups explain the work each group had been doing during the transitional year, and plans for the year ahead. Basic information on the positive equality duties was given, and resources distributed.

The work of the four groups has been kept going during the transitional year by an ad-hoc arrangement where we held three 'equality days'. As from 1 June, the new formal structures will come into effect.

There will be an annual conference for each of the following groups of members: black, disabled, LGBT, women. The calendar for the next academic year has not been finally agreed yet, but the following are the most likely dates: disabled members, Friday 12 October; black members, Friday 19 October; LGBT members, Friday 26 October or Saturday 27 October; women members Friday 2 November. All conferences will be held at the UCU Britannia Street office, London. Each branch/LA is entitled to send a delegate to each conference, but the maximum size of the conferences will be 200, so it will be first-come, first-served. A branch circular will be going out shortly calling for nominations, and it is important that branches/LA's respond. Each of the four conferences will elect eight people to form a standing committee. The four standing committees will each meet three times a year, and provide advice on issues particular to the group of members they represent.

There will also be an equality committee of the NEC, made up entirely of NEC members, which will receive advice from the standing committees, and decide on equality policy and practice between meetings of Congress.

It is hoped that these structures will be sufficiently robust to allow UCU's equality work to be taken forward and flourish.

## Resources for the gender equality duty

By now your institution should have published its gender equality scheme (after consulting with you) and be starting work on its action plan. It seems that not all colleges and universities have done this, and many schemes that have been published are inadequate.

A useful tool for engaging with management is the updated agreement reached between the Association of Colleges and the FE recognised unions *Joint Agreement on Guidance for Gender Equality in Employment*. As well as traditional areas like recruitment and selection, this covers gender equality schemes, impact assessments, and all the new requirements brought in by the new duty. Although it is an FE agreement, HE branches/LA's should find it equally useful as a model policy. It can be found at [www.ucu.org.uk/genres](http://www.ucu.org.uk/genres).

Guidance has been produced by the Learning and Skills Network. A link to it can be found at [www.ucu.org.uk/genres](http://www.ucu.org.uk/genres).

Staff from the Equality Unit are happy to come and do a regional briefing on the gender equality duty if required.

## Developments in disability equality

The joint UNISON/UCU project, funded by the DfES to improve disability equality for staff in FE is coming to an end. It culminated in a wonderful conference, attended by over a hundred UCU and UNISON members, on 17 May.

The conference saw the launch of the toolkit on implementing the disability equality duty. This contains everything branches need to know about implementing the duty. It is currently being reprinted, and a copy will be sent to all branches with the next edition of this newsletter. In the meantime, it can be downloaded at [www.ucu.org.uk/disabres](http://www.ucu.org.uk/disabres).

A new initiative, led by NIACE, is the formation of The Commission for Disabled Staff in Lifelong Learning, with representatives from the various FE and HE quangos, and from unions. UCU is

represented by Paul Mackney, Sian Davies and Sasha Callaghan.

Drawing on the experience of The Commission for Black Staff in FE, a series of witness days for disabled staff in the post-school sector to talk about their experiences are being held in June. Two have already gone, but the final one in London is on 25 June. Information about the commission can be found at [www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2541](http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2541).

## Mind the gap – women in HE

In May, HESA published the statistics for staff employed in Higher Education throughout the UK in 2005-6. For academic staff, there have been very slight improvements in the position of women, but progress is agonisingly slow. There were a total of 111,410 full-time academic staff, of whom 36.6% were women (an increase of only .5% on the previous year). The proportion of women decreases in senior grades – women are 42.2% of researchers, 41.8% of lecturers, 29% of senior lecturers, and 15.8% of professors.

Gender pay gaps differed according to the type of higher education institution. The widest gaps were at universities established before 1992. The biggest gap on average, was at institutions belonging to the Russell Group. At the other end of the pay gap spectrum were the universities established after 1992 where there was a 6.8% gap on average. The narrowest gap, of 5.6%, was at higher education colleges and specialist higher education institutions.

The gender pay gap has declined slightly, from 15.6% in 1999 – 2000 to 14.1% in 2005-6, but at this pace of change it will take several generations to remove it completely. The framework agreement should be making an impact if properly implemented, but the effect is small as yet. Hopefully, the requirement to deal with pay gaps in the gender equality duty will start to improve matters soon. Branches/LA's should be making full use of this in establishing the extent of the gender pay gap in their institutions and finding ways of addressing it.

## The BNP and Bath University

Members may have already seen the news story about the intended visit of BNP leader Nick Griffin to a student society at Bath University of 14 May. It turned out that the student trying to organise the visit was the head of the BNP Youth Wing.

The university at first refused to ban the visit on the grounds of defending freedom of speech. However, after a vigorous campaign conducted by UCU both locally and nationally, and supported by many others including the NUS, they decided to ban the visit on public order grounds.

Although UCU was delighted at the outcome, we would argue that the reasons for denying Nick Griffin a platform go way beyond public order issues. Universities and colleges have a duty of care to their staff and students to provide a safe working environment.

The BNP, with Nick Griffin as its mouthpiece, preaches a message of intolerance towards black, Jewish, Muslim and gay people, and a strong BNP presence on campus can lead to a climate of fear.

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 makes it a requirement 'to promote good relations between people of different racial groups.' The presence of people preaching racial hatred on campus is incompatible with this requirement. Academic freedom, important though it is, does not extend to infringing the rights of others to study and teach in a safe, non-abusive environment.

## Consultation on the Single Equality Bill

On 12 June the government published the findings of the Discrimination Law Review. They are consulting in the context of a single equality bill. UCU will respond by September, but members may be interested to see the proposals for themselves. They can be found at [www.communities.gov.uk](http://www.communities.gov.uk).

## News in brief

- The Office for National Statistics latest review shows that 65% of public sector workers are women, but in the private sector they make up only 41% of the workforce. The pay gap in the public sector is almost 10 percentage points less than in the private sector. In the public sector 30% of the workforce are over 50, and only 6% are under 25. In the private sector, 27% of the workforce are over 50, and 16% are under 25. The proportion of ethnic minority workers is the same in both public and private sectors, at 8%. Public sector jobs make up 20% of the workforce.
- The EOC has won a judicial review against the Department of Trade and Industry. A judge ruled that the amendments to the Sex Discrimination Act do not adequately implement the European Equal Treatment Directive. The government will now have to improve the legislation relating to harassment and to pregnancy-related discrimination.
- UCU is developing its sexual orientation project. Regional events have been arranged on 5 July in Birmingham and 12 July in Newcastle. Events in London, Manchester and Exeter are being planned for September.
- In the meantime, on our initiative a Forum for Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Equality in Post-School Education has been established, with representatives from a wide range of bodies.
- The outcome of the ECU/UNISON/UCU project on bullying and harassment is a publication called *Dignity at Work – A Good Practice Guide*. It can be found at [www.ucu.org.uk/eqres](http://www.ucu.org.uk/eqres).

## Quotation corner

'UCU will stand against the rising tide of Islamophobia and instruct its members not to spy on Muslim students.

'UCU will be resolute in opposition to the BNP and other fascist organisations because one BNP leaflet on campus is one too many.

'And the issue is not one of polite academic debate: it's about organised political violence and intimidation of racial minorities and lesbian and gay people.

'We cannot just ignore fascists and hope they will go away. As Yevtushenko said: "silence is sometimes a disgrace."

'We have an obligation to ensure that hope conquers hatred and respect replaces racism.'

**Paul Mackney**

(From his farewell speech to UCU Congress, 31 May 2007)

## UCU at TUC equality conferences

UCU sent a delegation of around 16 to the Women's TUC in March, the Black Workers' TUC in April, and the Disability TUC in May. At each conference, our delegation made a considerable input into debate.

Our motion to the Women's Conference was on reinvigorating the women's rights agenda. This theme was picked up at the very successful fringe meeting of A Charter for Women which we organised. Equal pay and child care continued to dominate the main conference agenda.

At the Black Workers' TUC, the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade was high on the agenda, with 'Work in Freedom' as the conference theme. Our motion was on demonisation of the Muslim communities.

Workshops, guest speakers and Linton Kwesi Johnson all dealt with the legacy of slavery and the lessons for today. A TUC campaign for a memorial day for slavery was launched.

The Disability TUC was overshadowed by the previous day's announcement of the closure of the Remploy workshops. Jim Murphy, the Minister with responsibility for disability issues faced some tough questioning from delegates. Our motion called for opposition to the Welfare Reform Act, and was very well received.

Our candidates for the TUC equality committees were successful in all cases. UCU will be represented by Mary Davis on the Women's Committee, Gargi Bhattacharyya and Patrick Williams on the Race Relations Committee and Sasha Callaghan on the Disability Committee. The LGBT Conference follows at the end of June.

## Get in touch

Please send any views, letters etc for this publication to [eqadmin@ucu.org.uk](mailto:eqadmin@ucu.org.uk) For queries in relation to anything in this email, please use the following contacts. To contact the Equality Unit for more information about:

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