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DUNDEE TO MEET PENSION STRAIN COSTS IN VOLUNTARY SEVERANCE DEAL

On 12 April Dundee University and Dundee UCU concluded lengthy negotiations over a voluntary severance package. Redundancy consultations will continue, on a joint campus unions basis, over the extent of the University's financial problems and other issues including redeployment.

The University will be offering a standard package of one year's gross pay to all staff accepted for voluntary severance. UCU Solicitors advised that, in terms of USS rules, members aged between 50 and 59 inclusive, would thereby become entitled to draw immediate pension on an actuarially unreduced basis and that this right could not be signed away. Since 7 December 2006 USS requires the employing University to meet the actuarial strain costs (Early Retirement Funding Charge).

In a helpful national precedent, Dundee University, having taken their own legal advice, now accept that it will not be possible to expect USS members in the relevant age band to forego their entitlement to unreduced pension. The University has therefore agreed to meet the strain fund cost in addition to the standard package of one year's gross salary.

Dundee UCU is not seeking extensive use of voluntary severance, especially as it is believed that natural wastage has already resulted in a significant number of frozen posts. DUCU has secured agreement that there will be a full financial presentation to the unions. DUCU will try to avoid unnecessary reductions in staffing and seeks a joint union/management overview of

the extent and pattern of both natural wastage and voluntary severance applications, so that both processes can be properly managed to minimise academic damage and problems of workload and stress.

BATTLE ENGAGED ON FUTURE OF JNCHES - The review of the national negotiating machinery (JNCHES) agreed as part of the 2006 pay settlement is now underway and a joint working group is due to report by mid-July. The employers have put forward a number of aims that they wish to see the review achieve and this includes a smaller committee, a procedure for dispute resolution and a single table for negotiating pay.

The trade union side has a longer list. We wish to see: a more stable and representative employers group on the committee, UCU in particular has called for a continuing role for JNCHES to keep the Framework under review, and negotiate revisions (such as longer pay spine) to ensure that the agreement remains relevant to the needs of the sector, and for JNCHES to play a greater role in securing delivery of national agreements.

Discussions between campus unions have resulted in generally agreed positions on matters such as trade union representation, employer engagement and the strength of national agreements. However, the question of negotiating pay in one or two sub-committees remains unresolved.

UCU is continuing to press for the retention of two sub-committees, but the other unions, in particular the support staff unions, wish to see pay negotiated in a single committee. The employers have suggested that without a single set negotiations over pay national bargaining may not be sustained. Malcolm Keight, Head of Higher Education, says, *'as long as academic and academic-related staff have to consider pay claims against a background of long-standing grievances over pay, it is hard to see how these can be resolved within a single table. The differences between national and local labour markets identified by the Bett report have not changed. Providing negotiations are kept within a clear framework it is perfectly possible to ensure that any differential movements negotiated nationally can be reconciled with equal pay arrangements of individual employers.'*

The next meeting of the JNCHES Review Group is on 17 May.

OFFICER POSITIONS FOLLOWING UCU ELECTIONS 2007 - General elections at UCU have now been completed. We promised in this issue to brief you on UCU's newly elected National Executive Committee (NEC), following the result of the elections of UCU in mid-March, first for UCU's General Secretary and that of the NEC. The executives who will take office

from 1 June 2007 at the close of UCU's first Congress are:

General Secretary: Ms Sally Hunt

President: Ms Linda Newman
(University of Sussex)

President-elect: Mrs Sasha Callaghan
(City Lit)

Vice President: Dr Alastair Hunter
(University of Glasgow)

Honorary Treasurer: Mr Alan Carr (Open University)

A detailed scrutineer's report on this year's electees and trustees can be found at: - <http://www.ucu.org.uk/elections>.
Meanwhile, the status quo regarding officer positions remains the same until 1 June when the transitional year comes to an end.

"TEESSIDE UCU PROJECT GETS £30 000 TUC GRANT - A collaboration between a university and a college branch on Teesside has been successful in winning a grant of £30 000 from the Northern Region TUC's Learning for All Fund (the branches asked for £40k but were awarded £30k). The project ran by Teesside University and Stockton Riverside branches will start in July and will aim to establish a

strong union learning rep presence within both institutions, to develop and establish a programme of courses which can be accessed by all staff and to identify and quantify staff learning needs. The project leaders, Vicky Rushin (UCU Learning rep at Teesside University) and Alan Chape (UCU branch secretary at Stockton, Riverside College) are aiming to target in particular, staff with non-traditional hours and unusual work patterns and to build on a previous NATFHE project, "Fair Play for Part-timers" aimed at encouraging part time staff to develop their skills.

Teesside University Branch Chair, Terry Murphy, said that it was an exciting project particularly in the collaboration between union branches in different sectors. *"This shows the identity of interest between College and university members of UCU and the benefits of the two sectors of the union working closely together"*, he said.

SURVEY ON FOLLOW UP ISSUES TO THE FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT - UCU is currently engaged in a survey of all pre-1992 universities that have implemented the Framework Agreement and Memorandum of Understanding. The aim of this research is to ensure that UCU has a picture of what is happening in each institution and maintains a national focus to prevent employers using local arrangements to undermine national pay bargaining. The survey is quite detailed, covering issues such as bargaining arrangements, hourly paid staff, job evaluation and equal pay audits. We hope to present interim results at the inaugural UCU Congress in May and the full findings later this year.

We need your help in order to gather sufficient data so that it can be presented at Congress. If your branch/local association has reached agreement with your employer on the Framework, you should shortly be contacted by your Regional Office or one of the HE team about the survey. If you would like to make sure that your university is included, please contact us to arrange an interview so that we can gather the data for your university. Please get in touch with Moray McAulay on 0207 670 9700 or email mmcaulay@ucu.org.uk.

UCU+ UCU is steadily evolving a new package of benefits for members. You can find details of these in the April edition of UC and on the web site at: - <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2095>

**A DEVELOPING ACTIVIST NETWORK (DAN) EVENT FOR NEW MEMBERS
FRIDAY 11 – SATURDAY 12 MAY:**

Only a few places left on the DAN event for new members taking place from Friday 11 May – Saturday 12 May. If you've joined the union and you want to know more about how to become more active, to learn about UCU and about helping to make a difference in your workplace, then this event is for you. The course will be based in central London. Attendance, refreshments throughout the day and accommodation are all provided free of charge and reasonable expenses will be paid on an evening meal on Friday 11. Priority will be given to newer members and those who have not previously attended training events. Please note that this event is, in the first instance, being run for members in HE but there are plans for a similar event for FE members.

To register for this course, fill in the online form at the following link and you will be sent more details, including a full programme and directions, closer to the event:

<http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=1974>

VACANCY - USS DIRECTOR SOUGHT

The rules of USS require the association to appoint three directors to the Management Committee of USS Ltd; one of these three-year appointments falls vacant in September 2007. Any member who is interested in being considered for this appointment should contact Geraldine Egan Pensions Official on 0121 634 7387, minicom 0121 634 3389, or email pensions@ucu.org.uk or write to **UCU Birmingham Office, 2nd Floor Alpha Tower, Queensway Suffolk St, Birmingham B1 1TT**, for further details and application forms. Closing date for applications 18th May 2007.

WE NEED YOUR HELP: Remember that campaigning against private sector encroachment depends on early and accurate information. Many members have come forward to assist us with this, but we always need more information. If you are aware of any attempts to discuss such deals at your university or if you have been part of transfers or new ventures in the past and you have information about the quality of provision or pay, terms and conditions etc., that can help us campaign, please contact us. Your messages will be treated in confidence. Email jstephens@ucu.org.uk

- Use the Campaign Resources – members are encouraged to visit the anti-privatisation campaign pages to see the materials available. In addition to the recently posted generic two-sided A5 'Stop Privatisation' flier and examples of locally adapted campaign material for Oxford Brookes, we have posted a campaign resource pack (as launched at the first anti-privatisation seminar). The pack includes examples of media coverage, a UCU guide to working with the press; advice on local campaigning, involving members and key skills development; guidance on negotiations and detailed information on relevant legislation. The new pack can be found at: <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2064>
- Book an anti-privatisation seminar - UCU's national campaigns team has developed a specialised anti-privatisation training seminar which was piloted on February 28 in London. Branches and local associations are already sending in requests for the seminar to be

delivered at their institutions. If you want to host a similar event at your institution, contact Justine Stephens, Head of Campaigns at jstephens@ucu.org.uk as soon as possible.

UPCOMING - UCU INAUGURAL CONGRESS 2007 UCU's inaugural Congress Meeting will take place from 30 May to 1 June at the Bournemouth International Centre. Although the deadline for registration was 11 April, delegates can still register, as soon as possible, using either the online registration site or the hard-copy forms available either on the registration site or the UCU website. It is also imperative that LAs/Branches book accommodation as soon as possible for their delegates, either via the registration site, when registering online or with the Bournemouth accommodation bureau (details on the UCU/registration websites), to ensure that requested accommodation is available. Delegates can be registered online at <https://asp.artegis.com>, using Login: UCUCong07 and Password: UCUMemb07 (both case-sensitive). More on the Congress on UCU website at <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2001#timetable>.

CONDITIONS DATABASE - How can I find which universities have good maternity leave and pay? Where can I find out about length of probation at other higher education institutions? How good is my university's car mileage rate?

Answers to these – and many other – questions can be found on UCU's online higher education employment conditions database. The database, which is available to members via the 'pay and conditions' section of the UCU website - see <http://www.ucu.org.uk/> - was set up last year in a joint project with the independent Labour Research Department, which is responsible for hosting, developing and updating the information.

The information in the database has been taken from university websites. The initial focus of the database was to build up information from universities. Now the database is being extended to cover higher education colleges. Where websites don't have or don't permit access to employment conditions information, the LRD obtains this under the Freedom of Information Act.

The database covers around fifty topics to do with working time and leave, allowances, contracts and family friendly policies. Information can be presented by topic or by institution. An aim of the database is to be interactive, with a news section, and a feedback facility for comments and amendments.

Stephen Court, UCU's senior research officer, says: *'As well as providing information on conditions, I hope that the database can enable UCU branches to negotiate improved working conditions. A recent study of maternity leave and pay showed very good practice in several institutions, as well highlighting poorer practice in others. Negative publicity resulting from the study prompted a couple of institutions to rethink their policies.'*

- **CHANGES TO MATERNITY PROVISIONS**

Changes to legislation last year have also now come into effect and women are now entitled to 39 weeks Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) (and Statutory Adoption Pay).

In addition, the length of service requirement for additional maternity leave (AML), which is unpaid, has been removed, so all mothers who are employees will qualify for AML and will be able to choose, to take up to one year off work.

These statutory changes should act as prompts to branches and local associations to seek improvements to their own maternity and adoption provisions. There is wide variation in the provision of maternity leave and pay across the sector and you can see how your University compares with others by using the UCU's conditions data base as previously mentioned.

EQUALITY DUTIES - Back in February (in Circular UCU/7) the Equality Unit circulated a checklist for branches and local associations to complete about their institution's progress in implementing legislation which places a positive duty on public sector bodies to promote equality.

Please ensure that your branch / local association has completed and returned this check-list to your regional office. It's important we get a picture of whether or not institutions are complying with their duties across the UK HE (and FE) sector, so even if your institution hasn't done anything – please let us know.

The original circular is available to members on the website at

<http://www.ucu.org.uk/circ/html/ucu7.html> or
<http://www.ucu.org.uk/circ/rtf/ucu7.rtf>

FIXED-TERM CONTRACTS - After years of campaigning against casualisation of

employment in higher education, UCU has some good news to report.

In 2005-6 the proportion of research-only academic staff in the UK on fixed-term contracts was 85%. That sounds a lot, but it was down from 89% in the previous year, and 91% in 2003-4. This follows nearly a decade when only around 6% of researchers had permanent contracts.

In July 2006 the European Fixed-Term Employees regulations came into full effect, limiting the use by employers of successive fixed-term contracts. It is likely that the regulations will considerably reduce the proportion of staff working on fixed-term contracts.

Among higher education institutions, there is a wide range in the proportion of researchers on fixed-term contracts. At the Scottish Agricultural College and Robert Gordon, Greenwich, Bristol and Sheffield Hallam universities, more than 50% of researchers have open-ended contracts.

By contrast, at Cambridge, Teesside and London South Bank universities, and the London School of Economics, fewer than 1% of researchers have a permanent contract. However, according to the Times Higher Education Supplement of 9 March, the LSE said: 'We are in the process of moving all staff who are on fixed-term contracts over to open-ended contracts.'

Overall in 2005-6, 41% of UK academic staff were on fixed-term contracts. 59% of teaching-only staff, and 12% of teaching-and-research academics were also on fixed-term contracts.