

## UCU’s first equality conferences – coming up!

As required in the rule book, UCU will from now on be holding an annual conference for each of the following groups of members – black, disabled, LGBT and women.

Each branch/LA is entitled to send one voting delegate to each of the four conferences. Maximum capacity is 200, and places will be allocated on a first-come-first-served basis. Each branch/LA is also entitled to send in a nomination for each of the four standing committees. The four conferences will each elect a standing committee, to meet three times during the year. Motions can also be submitted by branches to each of the conferences.

The forms for submission of names and motions were sent out as a branch circular on 19 July. If you are a branch/LA secretary reading this, please ensure that any of your members who might be interested in attending any of these conferences, knows about them.

If you are an interested member who has not heard about this before, please approach your branch/LA secretary, and ask for action

to be taken.

Nominations forms have to be completed by the delegate/nominee, but also authorised by branch officers.

The conferences will all be held at UCU Head Office, Britannia Street, London, from 10.30 am – 4.30 pm. They will consist of a mixture of motions, speakers and workshops. It is envisaged that they, and the standing committees they elect, will be central to the equality work of UCU. This will only happen if branches/LAs get organised to send delegates.

Motions have to be in three weeks before the conferences, and names of delegates and nominees for standing committees two weeks before - see the box below for the timetable.

The contact details are different for each conference, but are set out on the forms sent to branches/LA’s.

If you have not already done so, try to ensure that your branch/LA is represented at all these events. This new structure can only work with your cooperation and engagement.

### Equality conference timetable

Conference	Date	Motions in	Names in
Disabled members	Fri 12 October	21 September	28 September
Black members	Fri 19 October	28 September	5 October
LGBT members	Sat 27 October	5 October	12 October
Women members	Fri 2 November	12 October	19 October

### LGBT TUC conference

UCU sent a delegation of 16 people to the LGBT TUC Conference at the end of June. The delegation was a mixture of experienced and new activists who worked well together, with many making significant input into debate. We made lasting impressions with well structured arguments including to our own motion on setting an agenda for liberation beyond equality set along heteronormative lines. Our amendment commit-

ted the TUC to supporting an LGBT oral history project. Based on a motion we had passed at UCU National Congress in May, our emergency motion criticising the limitations to the sexual orientation goods and services regulations, submitted with Unison, was voted in as the motion to go to the national TUC Congress.

Our candidate to the LGBT Committee, Patrick Williams, was elected.

## Who is responsible? A government hotchpotch of equality ministers

One of Gordon Brown's first acts on becoming Prime Minister was to announce the creation of a new 'Government Equalities Office' (GEO). It has always been a matter of concern in the equality arena that different strands of equality have been located in different government departments. With the coming into being of the single Commission for Equality and Human Rights on 1 October, and with the recent creation of a Department of Communities and Local Government (including the Women and Equality Unit) it looked as if some coherence would at last begin to emerge. However, apparently this has been a hotly-contested area of work, and the spread of responsibilities which has now emerged are more bewildering than ever.

The new GEO will be based in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The Women and Equality Unit will be moved from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to the DWP.

Harriet Harman, in addition to her other titles, will be Secretary of State for Equality, with responsibility for the GEO. Barbara Follett will have the title 'Minister for Equality'. Harriet Harman is also designated 'Minister for Women'.

The Office for Disability Issues will remain within the DWP, with Peter Hain as the cabinet minister responsible. Anne McGuire will continue to be the Minister for Disabled People.

The Prime Minister said 'Because of the links to the community cohesion agenda, race and faith issues remain located with the rest of the community agenda in the DCLG. (In fact, until very recently, they were in the Home Office). Hazel Blears is thus the cabinet minister responsible. Parmjit Dhanda has been appointed Cohesion Minister.

A sub-committee (of the Domestic Affairs Committee) on Communities and Equalities 'will bring together ministers from across government to discuss key policies on equalities'.

This will be chaired by Ed Miliband.

Any chance of consistency and coherence emerging from this mish-mash is about as high as expecting even government ministers to appreciate that 'equality' and 'equalities' are not interchangeable words.

And who is responsible for age or sexual orientation? Well, if they know, they're not telling us.

## UCU sexual orientation projects

Work to ensure good practice in sexual orientation equality continues whilst we hope, dare we anticipate, that the positive duties are extended to cover sexual orientation in the upcoming Single Equality Act.

Training on developing sexual orientation will be in

Manchester	4 October
Llandrindod Wells	30 November
London	6 December

Contact [eqadmin@ucu.org.uk](mailto:eqadmin@ucu.org.uk) to book a place at any of these. This training will be of particular interest if you want to develop or are involved in developing sexual orientation equality in your workplace. Sexual orientation equality network meetings are being organised to follow up this training.

Some of the people who have attended this training have been involved in making considerable advances in their workplaces. Alterations to some practices have meant benefit for all staff, thus proving that advances in equality is of benefit for all.

In November and December we will be running events to facilitate LGBT promotional activity in LGBT History Month (February). The first of these will be in Nottingham (9 November) run in conjunction with Nottingham Switchboard.

Running up to and during LGBT History Month will be the oral history project. The aim of this project is to record the role of unions in LGBT history. We are planning to run events in London, Birmingham and Manchester. It is in-

tended that the Manchester event will be a conference focusing on LGBT history with particular reference to education.

Other training will also be run in 2008.

If you want more information about events and training or if you wish to address issues around sexual orientation equality in your institution please contact Seth Atkin at

[satkin@ucu.org.uk](mailto:satkin@ucu.org.uk)

The first UCU LGBT Conference will be held in London on Saturday 27 October. If you want to attend please contact

[eqadmin@ucu.org.uk](mailto:eqadmin@ucu.org.uk) for a registration form which will have to be signed by your branch/LA secretary.

## Trade unions and the law

Two recent legal judgements have been of considerable positive significance for trade unions. As previously reported, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled in February that the train drivers union, ASLEF, was within its rights to expel a member on the grounds that his membership of the BNP was incompatible with his membership of ASLEF, that he was likely to bring the union into disrepute, and that he was opposed to the objects of the union. This decision overruled the view of the British Employment Appeals Tribunal that ASLEF had broken the law in expelling their member. The ECHR held that 'the right to form trade unions involves, for example, the right of trade unions to draw up their own rules and administer their own affairs'. In this context, it is relevant that UCU's rules include:

'2.5. To actively oppose all forms of harassment, prejudice and unfair discrimination whether on the grounds of sex, race, ethnic or national origin, religion, colour, class, caring responsibilities, marital status, age or other status or personal characteristic.'

The government is now consulting about how they should amend trade union law to comply with the judgement of ECHR. The options they suggest are very limited however, and UCU in its response has urged them to take this opportunity to revise 'a number of unnec-

essary and onerous restrictions on the ability of a union to regulate its membership.'

It remains to be seen how the government will comply with the ruling of the ECHR.

The other significant case was that of GMB v Allen and ors. This case concerned the ongoing saga of equal pay in local authorities, and the implementation of 'single status' agreements.

A group of women employed by Middlesbrough Metropolitan Borough Council had historically been paid less than men doing equivalent work, and thus were in a position to claim up to six years back pay. However, in negotiating a single status agreement with the council, GMB had to balance the interests of the group of women against the interests of staff whose job was downgraded and would therefore require pay protection. Bearing in mind the limited financial resources of the council, GMB struck an agreement where the women would receive 25% of their back pay.

Allan took a claim of sex discrimination against the GMB and the employment tribunal found the GMB guilty of indirect sex discrimination. However, on appeal, the Employment Appeals Tribunal held that the settlement of the claims was a legitimate aim and a proportionate approach and found that there was no unlawful discrimination.

How the ongoing saga of multiple equal pay claims in the public sector and the question of back pay will finally be resolved, or what is the right approach to take is open to discussion. What is clear is that if the finding that not pressing for maximum back pay made the union guilty of sex discrimination had been upheld, many unions besides the GMB would have been in dire financial straits.

Until the government recognises that meeting equal pay claims in the public sector requires considerable extra funding, there may sometimes be a choice between pressing for full back pay, or bankrupting a public authority.

## Forthcoming events

- 'A Charter for Women', which UCU is very involved in, will be holding its second conference on Saturday 20 October, from 10.30 am – 4.30 pm, at the Black Country Living Museum, Dudley, West Midlands. UCU will fund fifteen women members to attend. If you are interested, contact Kate Heasman [kheasman@ucu.org.uk](mailto:kheasman@ucu.org.uk)
- JNCHES (the negotiating body for HE) is providing a series of fully-funded joint training seminars on equal pay reviews. The invitations have gone to heads of HEI's and HR directors, asking them to nominate HR managers and trade union representatives to attend the events. The aim of the seminars is to help institutions to undertake equal pay reviews in line with the JNCHES guidance, and in partnership with trade unions. The dates and locations of the seminars are:  
Durham – 09 October  
Manchester – 11 October  
London – 06 November  
Cardiff – 08 November  
Edinburgh – 06 December  
If you work in HE, and your HR department has not contacted you yet about these events, make clear that you want a UCU representative to attend.
- Following the success of the UCU Northern Black Members Network -we are looking to establish similar networks for black members across the country.  
The networks are opportunity to both receive and offer support to black colleagues. Longer term the aim of the regional networks is to increase black activism at all levels within the union and raise awareness of the issues facing black lecturers.  
For more information please contact [cnicholas@ucu.org.uk](mailto:cnicholas@ucu.org.uk) or call Chris Nicholas on 0207 7520 1037

## News in brief

- The case of Richard Kirkwood, the lecturer forced to retire at 65 from London Metropolitan University, will now form part of Age Concern's case to the European court, calling for the scrapping of mandatory retirement ages.
- The TUC's Union History website is looking for contributions from union members about personal experiences of fighting for equal pay. If you have a story to tell, log on to [www.unionhistory.info/equalpay/tell](http://www.unionhistory.info/equalpay/tell).
- The Commission for Equality and Human Rights will come into being on 1 October, on which dates the CRE, EOC and DRC will cease to exist. Contact details are: CEHR, Kingsgate House, 66-74 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6SW, 020 7215 8415, [www.cehr.org.uk](http://www.cehr.org.uk)

## Quotation corner

'Either the union extends protection to the vulnerable or the employers will extend the vulnerability of the protected.'

*A UCU activist in an email discussion group.*

## Get in touch

Please send any views, letters etc for the publication and any administrative queries to: Pauline Bartlett or Trade Coals at [epad-min@ucu.org.uk](mailto:epad-min@ucu.org.uk) tel 020 7520 3225.

For policy matters, contact one of the following:

Kate Heasman at [kheasman@ucu.org.uk](mailto:kheasman@ucu.org.uk)  
Chris Nicholas at [cnicholas@ucu.org.uk](mailto:cnicholas@ucu.org.uk)  
Charlotte Nielsen at [cnielsen@ucu.org.uk](mailto:cnielsen@ucu.org.uk)  
Seth Atkin at [satkin@ucu.org.uk](mailto:satkin@ucu.org.uk).