

July 2008

H&S concerns over compost

There are considerable health and safety concerns that affect members in Landbased education. Members that deal with horses, farm animals and anything else that bites, kicks or acts unpredictably are at a higher risk of injury. Now it seems that compost could be hazardous for horticulturists.

The medical journal The Lancet reported that a man aged 47, died despite hospital anti-fungal treatment. He developed severe breathing problems after working with rotting wood and plant mulch.

The spores from an airborne fungus called *Aspergillus* may trigger a relatively harmless allergic reaction or a much more serious infection that begins in the lungs. Most people are naturally immune, but those with a weakened immune system can become infected. *Aspergillus* is more widespread in autumn and winter.

Reduce the Risk

- Check with your H&S rep that your college has completed a risk assessment.
- Go to the UCU website www.ucu.org.uk for general information on H&S and risk assessments.
- Wear a dust mask to reduce risk when moving large quantities of compost, bark-chippings or grain.
- Keep vulnerable people, the very young, elderly, out of the area when moving the materials.

Landbased at the Royal Agricultural Show

The UCU Landbased Education Committee will once again be at the Royal Agricultural Show at Stoneleigh on **Friday 4 July 2008.**

Come and meet us for tea and coffee or, if it is warmer (and drier) than last year, perhaps a cold drink.

We meet at the **NPTC building on the Showground at 11.00am.**

Later in the afternoon we visit the college stands and say hello to any UCU members who are staffing the stands.

UCU Congress Manchester 2008

It was an all round thumbs up for the 2008 UCU congress in Manchester. Despite one or two last minute hitches, ably resolved by staff, it all went very smoothly. Plenty of excellent fringe meetings, trade stands and constant tea and coffee on tap (no you didn't need it to stay awake!) The debates brought out the issues and were often lively and passionate. The education minister Bill Rammell, addressed congress and took a number of very pointed questions from the floor.

Motion

There were no Landbased motions to this year's congress but Bernice Daly seconded the motion supporting solidarity with education unions in Africa.

The motion focussed on support and local initiatives aimed at education trade union development in Zimbabwe. Bernice drew on her experience as part of a delegation to Tanzania whose purpose was to look at ways of developing educational links as part of a fair trade in vocational skills.

Hosted by the Vocational Education Training Agency VETA the delegation visited 10 centres over a considerable distance.

Almost at the end of the visit, Unison and UCU representatives dropped in unannounced at the trade union head quarters in Dar es Salaam. Surprised, but

delighted, the TUC General Secretary invited them to return after the next meeting. Officials from a range of unions representing workers in health and education, local government and transport were at the subsequent meeting. Unison and UCU described the purpose of their visit to Tanzania and the formation of Fair Trade in Skills. When asked their perception of the major challenges to the vocational education sector, the Tanzanian unions identified two factors: the small percentage of the employers' levy going to VETA and a lack of training centres in some parts of the country.

Bernice highlighted to congress the very limited and outdated resources that both educators and unions had to work with and stressed the very real benefits that solidarity and links could and do have.

Dates!

Put them in your diaries and arrange the time to attend. Meetings are a great chance to find out what's going on in landbased education generally and in the union. Go on make some time to come along!

Calendar of meetings for 2008/9 (all meetings are held on Friday 11am – 4pm)

Date

Venue (all venues to be confirmed)

19 September	Royal Agricultural College
21 November	Britannia Street
27 February	Manchester/Birmingham
8 May	Coleg Sir Gar
July, TBC	Royal Agricultural Show Stoneleigh



Want more info or want to let us know you are thinking about coming?
Email Christiane on cohсан@ucu.org.uk

Venues

You can see that the venues for our meetings move around the country. This is to encourage attendance! So find the venue nearest you and make it a date! If you are very close you could come for part of the meeting.

Your travel expenses and subsistence for the meetings are met by UCU.

Nominations will be needed!

The term of office for the current Landbased Education National Executive Committee member is coming to an end. Nominations will be sought.

Do you want to know what might be involved? Ask Bernice or Christiane who will be willing to answer any queries or information you might need.

Bernice says, "I really can't tell people enough about how valuable the experience of being a member of the executive has been to me. The skills and the training I've gained, the opportunities that have opened up for me, and the benefits that I've been able to give back to members and to students. "

Having changed jobs Bernice is no longer eligible to stand so the committee is very eager to hear from all who might be interested in putting their name forward. An opportunity not to be missed!

What does the landbased committee do?

At the meetings Bernice reports back from the meetings of the National Executive and the Further Education committees

Landbased Education

We have reports from the UCU corporate member on NPTC, from the UCU rep at Lantra and a regular report from Dan Taubman UCU official responsible for educational matters in FE. We receive reports from some (not enough!) branches and from some (not enough!) regions.

As a committee we can feedback to Lantra, NPTC and other bodies our concerns and the issues that affect UCU members employed in Landbased education.

Can't attend a meeting but want to send a branch report? Contact Christiane Ohsan with your report and she will see that it is tabled at the next meeting.

Salaries and workloads

Anecdotal evidence appears to suggest that landbased educators in landbased colleges are less likely to be on the recommended scale and are more likely to be lower paid. Is this your experience? And how is your workload? Landbased educators are often expected by employers and by line managers to put in longer hours sometimes on a weekly basis. What is your experience?

Employment issues

Matters and concerns that affect all UCU members and how they impact on landbased members. For example, a current concern is the changes to teacher training and CPD. Back in 2001 the committee was able to advise UCU officials on the consequences for staff in colleges fully or partially closed due to foot & mouth disease. The last outbreak in early 2007 was watched with considerable trepidation.

Equality

In addition to legal changes, issues over the last few years have included; gang masters and the cockle pickers tragedy, women and ethnic minorities in colleges, migrant workers and bullying. Equality is an area that many landbased members want to know more about. The Equality unit at UCU has a great resource centre with lots of help for equality officers and anyone who needs information. You can find the resource centre on the UCU website www.ucu.org.uk

Health & Safety

The members of the committee work in Landbased colleges and know the risks

and the dangers associated with teaching students entering the agricultural and horticultural industries. Even the seemingly safe flower industry has a number of risks associated with the toxicity of flowers handled on a daily basis.

From the HSE website

"Agriculture has one of the worst fatal accident and occupational ill health records of any major employment sector. While the industry accounts for only 1.7% of the workforce in Great Britain, it accounts for 16% of the fatal injuries to workers (latest 2005-06 statistics) and has a prevalence rate of self-reported illness which is significantly higher than the average for all industries".

If you have a health & safety problem

From the UCU website

"Your local safety representative at departmental, site, branch/LA, college or university should be your first port of call for any health or safety query or problem. Elected by the union locally, they have the knowledge, are able to access training with paid leave, get paid facility time and have direct access to the union's officials and health and safety advice line. They are part of the local procedures agreed with your management, with statutory rights, to deal with health and safety."

College & University Support Network



The College and University Support Network (CUSN) offers support services to all staff in further and higher education and their families, including:

- **Counselling:** confidential, solution-focused counselling on personal and workplace issues
- **One-to-one coaching:** personalised practical and emotional support via a secure email system
- **Information, advice and support material:** news, guides and factsheets on relevant topics such as well-being, work-life balance, workload problems, stress management, coping with bereavement, and dealing with difficult people
- **Financial assistance:** a needs-based grants and loans programme
- **Money management advice:** individually tailored strategies to address financial difficulties, restructure debt and secure benefits
- **Signposting to relevant organisations:** the information you need to take the next steps to a better future.

All these services can be accessed online at **CUSN's website** or through a 24/7 telephone support line, on **Freephone 08000 329952**.