

...and related

THE NEWSLETTER FOR **ACADEMIC-RELATED STAFF** IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Representing administrators, librarians, computing and other professional staff in HE

In this issue:

- | | page |
|--|------|
| ● Chair's welcome | 1 |
| ● Annual meeting for AR staff | 2 |
| ● Recruiting AR staff and reps | 2 |
| ● Reflections on a historic day of action | 4 |
| ● Outsourcing: challenging the bottom line | 5 |
| ● UUK report on efficiencies in HE | 7 |
| ● Shared services update | 7 |
| ● Mental health update | 8 |
| ● Changes to working environments | 9 |
| ● AR members' profile: international officers | 9 |
| ● Report from Congress/HE Sector conference 2011 | 11 |



On the picket line at the University of Nottingham, 30 November 2011

work to contract... an alarm clock on every desk... a mass walkout to have lunch... leaving at the end of the day, *together*.

We live in difficult times, with attacks not just on pensions but on our jobs as well. In some university departments, the academic team find themselves struggling with continuous changes in working conditions, pressures due to increasing workloads, restructuring and redundancies. Will we have every school/department merged into a faculty structure or will we have every department merged into schools? Whichever of these your institution plans it will not bode well for AR staff.

The AR Committee is proud of its continuing achievements. We have made sure that our voice is heard by submitting motions and amendments to Congress and Higher Education Sector Conference. We also make our voice heard by sending delegates with full voting rights to Congress.

We have set out our objectives, adopted during 2011-12 (see below). We must achieve these objectives and set new objectives for 2012-13. But, in order to operate to our full potential and to ensure



WELCOME!

If it is December then it must be time for our third newsletter for academic-related staff *...and related*. I am writing this piece just 13 days after

the strike day on 30 November when UCU joined with sister unions, and almost two million public sector workers took action to defend their pensions. I am proud to note that academic-related (AR) staff joined their academic colleagues on picket lines all over the country.

The strike was preceded by several weeks of working to contract which helped members remember that they have a 'life' (not just a working life) – simple things like seeing their families in the evenings, having weekends away from work and not answering emails.

Members sent in stories from all over the country about how they had achieved maximum impact for

we are heard throughout UCU, we need to recruit more academic-related members and to encourage new people to stand for the Committee. As academic-related members, we represent so much talent in our universities. Your university may not call you academic-related now. Perhaps you are APM, PMA, Learning Support or IT. We are looking to recruit senior professionals such as you. Are you a student support or international officer, or human resources professional? Is your area of expertise in library work, computing or administration?

We need to ensure that the voice of academic-related members is heard and that your union is there to fight for academic-related staff across the country.

Patricia Hulme, Chair, Academic-related Committee

AR objectives for 2011-12 adopted by Committee

- Recruiting new and active members and raising awareness among academic-related staff
- Protecting terms and conditions of employment for academic-related staff
- Resisting de-professionalisation and outsourcing
- Playing a full and equal part in action and campaigning to maximise the impact of industrial action
- Dissemination of the academic-related manifesto
- Communication via newsletters and other outlets

Annual meeting for academic-related staff, 21 March 2012

It is time to start planning for the annual UCU members meeting for academic-related staff, to be held on Wednesday 21 March 2012 at UCU headquarters in London.

The meeting will provide an opportunity to debate the challenges facing the union in general and academic-related members in particular. This includes the Government's White Paper on higher education, strategies to defend jobs and build the union; and outsourcing and the wider marketisation of the sector.

One of our keynote speakers will be Professor John Kelly, Professor of Industrial Relations at Birkbeck College, University of London.

Put the meeting in your diary now and also remember

the following dates:

Deadline for motions – 29 February

Deadline for registration for the meeting and nominations to the Academic-related committee – 7 March.

Please note that the election of delegates to annual meetings, submission of motions and nominations for committees requires approval by a quorate branch meeting, or a quorate branch committee meeting, or a properly constituted meeting of relevant members.

A formal calling notice will be circulated at the end of January but branches/LAs should note these dates and ensure that their own meetings' calendar allows time for the branch to seek and elect delegates and nominations and approve motions.

Elections will be held at the annual meeting for five two-year terms on the committee, and we encourage nominations from all academic-related categories: library, computing, administrative and other professional staff. For further information on committee membership and all that it entails, feel free to contact any of the members of the committee (details on page 4).

Recruiting academic-related staff and reps

Academic-related members are no longer just administrative, library and computing staff. They are alumni officers, fundraisers, learning assistants, events managers, careers officers – you get the picture.

What is your branch doing to recruit these staff?

This is an increasing section of the workforce we are failing to engage, many of whom do not come from unionised workplaces. Many may not even be familiar

**Are you an academic-related member of staff?
Your union needs YOU!**



with the concept of trade unionism and collective action. Our branches and the AR Committee must work harder to identify and recruit these staff. These staff do not know which union they should join. For many, Unison may be appropriate but, if they are on UCU grades (at institutions where UCU usually represents these grades) and do not belong to a union, you can recruit them.

Being part of the union will enable them, quite rightly, to feel a part of the academic team. When they want to engage in workplace debate or are in need of support but don't know where to go, we need to make sure that our wider membership is handing them a membership form or telling them to join online (<http://join.ucu.org.uk>). Many are excellent, experienced organisers and campaigners, and can bring that expertise to the branch. Many are younger than some of us and we need them to keep UCU responsive to the changing needs of our members.

On 30 November our picket lines saw a marked increase in new, younger members. Most teaching was cancelled but a careers fair went ahead. When it comes to industrial action we are always told that IT staff could bring the university to a standstill. Maybe that's the reason we're always outsourced first? If the library can't open, this has a huge impact on university life but both of these things will be largely internal to the university. What if alumni events had to be cancelled turning potential donors away? What if careers fairs have to be cancelled so external bodies have to be postponed or, better, turned away at the doors. Do vice-chancellors want that kind of press? This kind of action can only help to make our campaigns more effective and more difficult for university management to keep contained within the campus.

Academic-related staff are at the core of many university activities, and where we have the strength of membership we should make sure they take a full part in branch activity and industrial action. By bringing cross-campus services to a crawl, or better yet to a stop, we will hugely increase the impact of industrial action. As AR staff we often feel we are in the firing line when it comes to restructuring and mergers, but being part of a wider strategy of industrial action participation in these areas could increase the impact of our action.

The Academic-related Committee recommends every branch has at least one academic-related rep. Not only is this more likely to engage AR staff in branch

activity and make them feel a more integral part of UCU, but it will bring new ideas, more hands to share the work and, often, very competent committed people.

Dan Arthur, LSHTM, Vice-Chair, Academic-related Committee

For more on the important role that we play, take a look at our academic-related manifesto:

http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/d/b/ucu_acrelmanifesto.pdf

Spread the message!

Please pass this newsletter on to other academic-related members (or potential members).

Encourage them to join or get more involved!

To join UCU see:

www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2283

See also the UCU webpages on academic related matters: <http://bit.ly/17s7ZF>

To be added to the academic-related mailing list, for hard copies of this newsletter or the manifesto, or if you have any questions on academic-related matters contact Stefano Fella, National Industrial Relations Official (with responsibility for academic related matters), sfella@ucu.org.uk

Also contact Stefano if you have ideas for articles and/or wish to contribute to a future edition.

To contact the Academic-related Committee, either to get more involved or to talk about recruiting academic-related staff see the committee list overleaf.



Membership of the Academic-related Committee 2011-2012

Patricia Hulme Chair patricia.hulme@nottingham.ac.uk	Nottingham	Administrator category
Dan Arthur Vice chair dan.arthur@lshtm.ac.uk	London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine	Computing category
Eileen Tilley Vice chair iss069@bangor.ac.uk	Bangor University	Library category
Greg Howard g.howard@bham.ac.uk	Birmingham	Administrator category
Nick James njaj1@hotmail.com	Oxford Brookes	Library category
Dom Kingsmill-Stocker d.p.j.kingsmill-stocker@lboro.ac.uk	Loughborough	Computing category
Lesley McGorrigan l.mcgorrigan@leeds.ac.uk	Leeds	Administrator category
Kate Purcell k.purcell@bbk.ac.uk	Birkbeck	Library category
Gordon Watson g.watson@strath.ac.uk	Strathclyde	Computing category

NEC representatives (Two members of the Academic-related Committee are appointed by NEC)

Joe Gluza joe.gluza@ucs.cam.ac.uk	Cambridge
Roger Walters R.J.Walters@open.ac.uk	Open University

A historic day of action!

This newsletter is being put together following the magnificent November 30 mass public sector pensions strike so I'm taking this opportunity to congratulate all our members who made it a historic day.

The reports received by UCU showed fantastic levels of support for the strike in universities and colleges and huge attendance at local rallies: 4,000 in

Bradford, 10,000 in Leeds, 10,000 in Sheffield, 15,000 in Birmingham, 20,000 in Liverpool, 30,000 in Manchester and up to 50,000 in London. Schools, offices, colleges and universities on that day were either closed or deserted.

The marches and rallies were crammed with flags and union banners from right across the public sector. This was the first time I've ever seen the West Yorkshire Police office staff UNISON banner.



Left: Picket line outside the School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, central London. Right: Academic-related committee member, Lesley McGorrigan, at Leeds University on 30 November

Most of the speakers at our rally were women, who are the majority of public sector workers, and they all stressed that this was just the start of a fight that we plan to win.

Fine art staff and students were the best organised department on our campus: 15 staff, eight PhD students, six students, two ex-students and two children participated in their picket, with theatre and face paint. They decorated the windows of the Fine Art building and made placards saying 'We're striking' in twenty languages.

Many members will be thinking about the crucial question: 'what next?' in the pensions battle.

I've sat in a number of academic-related committee meetings where our members point out that some forms of action UCU proposes exclude most AR members. Assessment boycotts are often cited as an example.

Assessment boycotts can be really powerful when rigorously adhered to and they do involve the bulk of the UCU membership, though not many AR members. The last marking boycott jointly organised by AUT and NATFHE in 2006 was robust and won an improved pay deal from the employers.

The collective response from vice chancellors since then has been to threaten pay-docking for partial performance with the added warning that pay may even be deducted at the rate of 100% for partial performance! Understandably, this has made some members more reticent to propose this sanction.

What 30 November showed us is that striking involves all our members, including academic-related ones. Every time we've taken strike action at Leeds, library members have formed the biggest contingent of the picket rota. Striking is an action that can also unite us with colleagues in the other campus unions when we coordinate our activities. 30 November demonstrated our collective strength and also showed a massive level of support for the public sector. If we build on this, 2012 can be a happy new year.

**Lesley McGorrigan, Leeds University,
Academic-related committee**

Outsourcing – challenging the 'bottom line' approach

There can be few academic-related members who do not have a strong opinion on the outsourcing agenda in our workplaces. We are very much in the frontline of moves to outsource IT, administration, library and student services, but it does not only affect us and this should unite all members to stand with us in fighting this creeping threat.

Outsourcing is the inevitable consequence of revenue-centred management (RCM) – a term first coined in the US in the 1970s. One only has to look at the cases of USC and Michigan to see how this turned out. In both these cases RCM was eventually rejected as leading to academic departments vying for revenue streams and cutting as many costs as possible. We are not yet at that level but, with RCM being effectively recommended in all but name by the



Those who champion outsourcing rarely mention the background costs...

government's funding strategy, we may well soon be. In the UK, the Times Higher reported in 2008 on the dangers of outsourcing in universities and identified the potential loss of academic control that it would cause.

The argument often used is one of balancing the bottom line and what an external provider can offer for less money than it is being done for in house. This is often persuasive if taken solely in two dimensions. High profile examples are in the case of IT provision where large companies such as Microsoft and Google can offer extensive back-end infrastructure to give a slick feature-rich cloud based solution that requires little outlay at a university local level. This appears to be vindicated by think tanks such as Policy Exchange claiming that universities could shed £3bn by outsourcing their archaic in-house ways and what might at first sight appear to be studies published online eulogising outsourced solutions that are often sponsored heavily and/or hosted by the very company that has benefited from them.

Such solutions look attractive to managers who frequently are neither the principal users nor the support lines of such services and cannot be relied upon to know just what the differences between the options are.

It is interesting that those championing outsourcing talk incessantly about efficiency and streamlining when many of the background costs to outsourcing are rarely mentioned. The fewer back-end support staff there are, the greater the likelihood of academics having to involve themselves in liaison with any third-party provider. Many companies will start with student-facing services in order to get a foot in the door before aggressively campaigning for staff

services under the guise of unifying all services. But, as Pam Tatlow CEO of Million+ has noted, it is highly unlikely that outsourcing and shared services can provide the budget savings required.

It is not the primary function of a university to make money. Therefore where a service may have added value that doesn't translate to the financial books, this may be offset by the quality and bespoke nature of what it provides and those it supports. We must not forget that companies are in the business of making money. Their service provision will only ever be at the point where more can be exacted than invested.

Hence, if a university runs its services efficiently there should be no gain at all in outsourcing them. Support staff in universities have fundamentally one customer, the university, even if this may be split into many individual and collective users. We know our users by name and the enigmatic requirements they frequently have. We are very often able to go the extra mile to solve the 'while you're here...' problems all for the minimal outlay of another cup of tea!

Companies like Microsoft and Google are global enterprises supporting small, medium and large organisations with a variety of needs and must therefore take a mean approach to the services they can offer. What may be good for University A may not be for University B, and the potential users of services good for all universities may be dwarfed by the needs of TNCs or MNCs and are therefore a drop in the ocean in terms of the overall customer base. Support for university users simply cannot be bespoke as it is not matched by the revenue from it. Attractive deals that look snazzy and inexpensive in the short-term have punitive exit clauses to ensure that the company will recoup its initial investment.

There is also the issue of intellectual property if data is stored off-site. Student email could be considered less of a risk but if one's research work were at stake people might take a more questioning view. Given that all companies based in the US are subject to the Patriot Act there are areas of study that the US Govt might be very interested in. A possible offsetting of this concern might be to shift the storage of this data to somewhere outside the US. Would you know the data protection laws of the Cayman Islands?

You might like to think that universities' senior management would look holistically upon such issues

and take a greater holistic 'university' view of this rather than simple short-term bottom line considerations, but are you prepared to bet your career on it?

**Dom Kingsmill-Stocker, Loughborough University,
Academic-related committee**

The Government White Paper and the UUK Efficiency and Modernisation Task Group



The UUK report mentions IT and student accommodation as areas likely to deliver quality and efficiency improvements if outsourced...

The Government HE White Paper on Higher Education published in June suggested (among other things) that higher education institutions (HEIs) could do more to promote cost efficiencies and pointed to the work done by HEFCE in areas such as procurement and shared services. It also referred approvingly to the work of the Universities UK Efficiency and Modernisation Task Group. The UUK report published in September refers to 'significant potential for outsourcing and the development of strategic relationships with the private sector to deliver services'. It proposes 'strategic co-ordination of higher education procurement' in order to realise the 'full potential of the sector to use its size and purchasing power to generate additional savings.'

The report makes a number of recommendations around improving transparency of costings of operational functions; benchmarking to drive efficiency savings; collaboration among HEIs in procurement (based on a model already utilised in Scotland); work to estimate the costs of regulation to the higher education sector; and the establishment of a high-level panel to monitor efficiency savings in the sector.

On shared services, recommendations included the development of guidance to identify a series of

'noncompetitive' areas where more extensive sharing of operational services can be developed and promoted, and the consideration of options for partnership outside of the sector – such as with other public sector bodies – where this is appropriate.

Noting the 'significant opportunities for institutions to employ outsourcing to deliver efficiencies and improve service quality, particularly (for example) in aspects of ICT provision and student accommodation', the report also recommends that institutions should ensure that partnership approaches to outsourcing are considered as a normal part of their strategic planning.

The full UUK report can be accessed here:

<http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Publications/Documents/2011/EfficiencyinHigherEducation.pdf>

HMRC consultation on VAT exemption for shared services

One obstacle to the shared services agenda identified by the Government White Paper was the VAT charge which prevents institutions from sharing costs with each other. Thus, parallel to the White Paper consultation, the Government launched a HMRC consultation on implementing the EU VAT cost-sharing exemption. This was a highly technical exercise, concerned primarily with the detailed technicalities of implementing such an exemption, rather than the principle of shared services themselves.

UCU put in a joint statement to the consultation with UNISON, who share UCU concerns over the shared services agenda in HE. The submission briefly outlined our concerns that shared services initiatives will lead to job losses, cuts in terms and conditions for staff and the possible establishment of 'arms length' companies to manage shared services which are privately outsourced. We suggested that the application of a VAT exemption should be contingent on certain safeguards: that any body set up to manage the shared services should have transparent and accountable governance structures and remain in the not-for-profit sector, and that the exemption should not apply if the management of the shared services is outsourced to a private for-profit company, or if private for-profit providers are included in the shared services consortium.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in the Autumn Statement on 29 November 2011 that the

Government will introduce the VAT cost sharing exemption in the Finance Bill in 2012.

Details can be found here:

<http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/budget-updates/march2011/draft-tax-finance-bill-2012.htm>

Outsourcing case studies – let us know what’s happening at your institution

We would welcome examples and case studies from academic related members on how outsourcing or the shared services agenda has impacted on your institution. Please send any examples, cases studies and information to Stefano Fella: sfella@ucu.org.uk

Members with mental health conditions need U(CU)



It is vital that there is an infrastructure in place to support vulnerable members with a mental health condition which is often hidden

Further to the resolution at congress I proposed on a Mental Health Working group which followed on from the Academic-related Committee motion HE41 in 2010, I am pleased to say that the group is now set up on paper and scheduled to have its first meeting in January. I am grateful to have been asked to sit on this group and will report back the work we are doing. I see this as a stride forward for the union and am glad that we are in the forefront of tackling the problems faced by colleagues across our sector who have mental health conditions and hidden disabilities.

The importance of having directed mental health strategies both within UCU and in our workplaces is especially prominent at the moment with current levels of unemployment reminding many of us of the recession in the late 80s/early 90s. I recently heard

a discussion on Radio 4's *All In The Mind* pointing out that according to government figures only 40% of employers would employ someone who had declared a mental health condition. This is contrary to study after study which shows that in almost all cases mental health conditions are not an impediment to full-time work and that employment is conducive to recovery from many of the symptoms.

However as ‘Bradford factor’ sickness absence policies sweep across our institutions those with mental health conditions are far more likely to find themselves discriminated against than those without. The nature of the trigger procedure produces a disproportionately negative impact on those with mental health conditions who are far more likely to have brief recurrent absences than prolonged periods at a single time. It is unlikely that those requiring dialysis or cancer treatment would not be accommodated as it would be seen as a necessary part of their condition. In fact someone recovering from a serious operation may require more absence in a single period than someone with mental health conditions needs over several years and yet one will lead to the trigger on multiple occasions whereas the other will not and is often exempted from the policy entirely.

Many institutions have specific policies in place for conditions such as cancer and the exemptions that can be made at managerial discretion. Are those with mental health conditions going to be discriminated against because their condition can neither be seen nor cured?

As pressure on budgets leads to pressure on staff we are likely to see greater squeezing of those who take days off due to illness and conditions. The balance of trust has shifted very much to a ‘guilty until you prove yourself innocent’ one. It is vital that those with mental health conditions especially those undeclared have the protection the Equality Act affords and that there is at the back-end an infrastructure that can help these members and non-members at a time when they may be particularly vulnerable.

In our universities many of us will be able to find the policies for the treatment and management of students with all manners of health conditions including mental health and hidden disabilities. However, the same constructive guidance is conspicuous by its absence when it comes to affording staff the same courtesy. It is just as vital for branches to try

to ensure that managers in their institutions have clear guidance of how to avoid discriminating against all staff with protected characteristics and I hope the Mental Health Working Group will be able to help and advise on ways we may do this.

**Dom Kingsmill-Stocker, Loughborough University,
Academic-related Committee**

Changes to working environments and the impact on academic-related staff

Motion HE36 adopted at HE Sector Conference in May 2011, was tabled by the Academic-related Committee and originated in a motion adopted at the annual meeting for academic-related staff in March 2011. It referred to changes to working environments and the detrimental impact on academic-related staff, treated as mere 'units of production'. We would be interested in hearing from academic-related members who have been negatively affected by changes to their working environments or other new practices introduced by university management. Has this happened to you, or have you had to deal with the consequences of these changes as a branch rep? What lies behind these changes and how have you responded? Has local UCU intervention helped? If so, what were the outcomes?

Your responses and comments in relation to the above questions should be sent to Stefano Fella: sfella@ucu.org.uk

Profiling academic-related members – international officers

The academic-related category covers a swathe of professional staff operating in myriad of roles in higher education, many of which have become more prominent in recent years. Some of the people employed in these roles may not initially realise that UCU is the union that represents them. It is important that we spread the message that UCU represents them and that they can, and should, play an active part in the union. We are seeking to profile members employed in different academic-related roles, and begin in this issue by taking a look at the international officer role. If you have any ideas for other roles that should be profiled and (more importantly) can provide us with such a profile, please get in touch (contact Stefano Fella: sfella@ucu.org.uk).

Travelling overseas

Working in international education is increasingly becoming the new standard across the UK higher education sector. Following the Browne report and the tuition-fee hike for domestic students, each university is now under increasing pressure to develop a unique competitive advantage, and to differentiate on the quality and 'brand' of the student experience. The scope of the 'student experience' encapsulates more than just the academic experience; it includes the delivery of formal support services, and the full spectrum of activities, communications and cultural interactions experienced by the student.

More than ever, traditional assumptions regarding the student experience are being challenged, and the intricate fabric of experience is being broken down into individual components of experience. These components are being identified and formalised, processed managed, resourced and transformed into deliverable service options. More than ever, domestic students will ask 'what do I get for my money?' and universities will be expected to articulate their response in terms of differentiated services, the value proposition, and the university brand.

For many universities, internationalisation has become the new standard in brand-building. Attracting international students now has a strategic value, in addition to the obvious financial value, and has been positioned as a competitive element in structuring the domestic student experience, from the curriculum and the classroom, to the social environment and the sports centre. Domestic student engagement and interaction in all things international is regarded as one of the core values of UK higher education, an essential criterion in developing global citizens, and the competitive advantage in employability and career development.

But this new internationalisation needs resourcing. In the same way that developing academia and research requires academic resourcing, developing internationalisation requires professional resourcing, recruiting highly skilled operatives who are able to deliver quality international services in an international context. For many universities now, there is increasing pressure to expand the virtual cross-university international office, to include internationally skilled professionals in every student service section throughout the university: marketing, communications,

careers, personal counselling, immigration, catering, finance, social and cultural activities, library and academic facilities...

With such renewed focus on internationalisation, for both strategic and financial benefit, universities are quickly developing an appetite for recruiting internationally skilled professionals, to support the expanding international agenda. For young, highly skilled graduates with a passion for travelling, the expanding internationalisation agenda offers exciting prospects: the opportunity to work in an international office and play a role in driving internationalisation; the opportunity to engage with all things international – students, colleagues, activities, and communications; and of course the opportunity to travel. Jobs to die for.

And die we might. Do you know how many international officers were caught up in Mumbai bombings? Do you know how many international officers were caught in the lock-down in Bangkok? For my own part, I was trapped in Saudi Arabia for an extra three days, in addition to my scheduled 10 day itinerary. I called my employer on Sunday evening (probably in tears), but there was no response. I spent the next three days effectively under house arrest because as a woman in Saudi, I was not allowed out of the hotel on my own, not allowed to use the hotel swimming pool, and not allowed to eat in the hotel restaurant. Whilst my visa sponsor spent three days trying to negotiate a political deal for my exit out of Saudi (instead of paying the £2,000 fine), my employer remained silent. Exciting, testing and sometimes downright despairing, international officers work in challenging environments, often with little support from employers.

But employer demands remain unrealistically high. Long working hours, high-adrenalin, 'all-consuming jobs', erratic working hours and inconsistent schedules, huge expectations to be able to 'think on your feet' and respond flexibly; as international officers we are touched with the perpetual notion that our employers 'own' us. When I travel overseas I take the notion that I only own my sleeping hours and if I choose to sacrifice these meagre hours in favour of calling home, watching a movie or going out for a meal, then I will always be happily tired.

But what about all those young and enthusiastic international officers who embarked on the treadmill of the 'glamorous career', only to get married, have



Issues such as work-family balance have been neglected for too long by employers in the case of staff who regularly travel overseas

babies and in some cases, end up as single parents? Well, we continue. And more amazingly, our employers have not even noticed.

Most universities aspire to a common standard in HR policy, designed to respond to traditional role functions. Within these frameworks, family-friendly policies are delivered in terms of 'flexible working' and often feature concessions such as working from home, reduced number of hours, and re-distribution of working hours throughout the working week. But such policies are a ridicule for an international officer. I have stood at an airport departure gate, about to embark on a £7k recruitment visit to Nigeria, only to receive the dreaded call that my child is sick (and even worse, asking for me).

I was also travelling extensively overseas when my marriage disintegrated, my husband 'entertained' the cleaner, my dog died, my mother was taken to hospital, and in more fortunate circumstances, my daughter had her first school concert and sports day, my brother got married, and my mother celebrated her 70th birthday party. For better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, how sad I am to have missed these milestones in life. My employer did not know. Of course I told my employer but my employer did not want to hear, and did not want to know. So I called UCU.

I explained to UCU about the pressure that my job had put on my marriage; I told them about the phenomenal pressures and anxieties I had as a single parent, trying to secure childcare for my daughter whilst overseas; I told them of the poor response from my employer, where family values are interpreted as a weakness, and a threat to corporate values; I told them how I had devoted 15 years of my

life to my various university employers and through lack of strength on my part, I had neglected my family.

UCU listened. Even at a time when employees are advised to consider themselves lucky to still have a job, there is UCU support for colleagues such as I. Whether you are an academic, or an academic-related member of staff, if you travel extensively and regularly overseas you will understand that issues such as health and safety, and work-family life balance, have for too long been neglected by employers. Worse still, by championing these values you may well be accused of 'lacking commitment' or displaying a poor standard of professionalism.

If you ever have to challenge your employer on grounds of health and safety, or a work-family life balance, then rest assured, UCU will represent you.

Emma Heathcote, UCU academic-related member, University of Birmingham

UCU has produced guidance for UK HE staff posted and travelling overseas:

www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=4368

and negotiating guidance for branches:

www.ucu.org.uk/circ/UCUHE103.pdf

We recommend that branches/LAs negotiate agreements covering such staff, using these guidelines.

Report from UCU Congress/ HE Sector Conference, Harrogate May 2011

The Academic Related Staff Committee submitted, and had accepted, four motions in total, one to Congress, 1 composite to Congress and two to HE Sector. In addition we submitted a number of amendments both for HE Sector and Congress. All motions were successful and carried with a healthy majority (see below).

As in previous years the Committee hosted a fringe meeting. This year our topic was *The Back Office on the Front Line*. Our primary speakers were:

- **Simon Renton, incoming UCU Vice-President/Chair of Higher Education Committee.**
- **Sheila Banks, PCS Regional Chair and President of the Leeds Trades Union Council.**

Even though we were vying for delegates against

high profile fringe meetings it was incredibly well attended. Delegates attending the meeting were not necessarily academic-related staff but more and more HE staff are becoming aware of attacks on the 'back office'.

The Fringe meeting at Harrogate was only the third time the AR Staff Committee has elected to use its fringe meeting to address an issue of significant importance to union members as a whole. If the 'back office' is attacked then the slack will have to be taken up by the 'front line'.

All the Motions submitted to Congress by the Academic Related Staff Committee were well received, and a number of committee members were able to speak to other motions and wave the flag for Academic Related staff at the same time. We managed to get the full five minutes on our motions but the amendments (though adopted) fell foul of speaking time constraints. Personally I would like to thank all the committee members who spoke to motions and amendments, and assisted in the fringe meeting. UCU staff also worked tirelessly, as usual, to ensure smooth running over the three days and are due a great debt of thanks.

Patricia Hulme, Chair, Academic-related Committee

AR motions adopted at Congress:

- **Motion 10. The back office – on the front line – Academic-related staff committee**
- **Motion 75 (Composited with motion from Disabled members Committee). Mental health and hidden disabilities in the workplace**

Also AR Committee amendments were adopted on Motion 8 - Building UCU; and Motion 19 – Voluntary redundancies

AR motions adopted at HE Sector Conference:

- **HE36 Changes to working environments**
- **HE38 Partnership working and shared services between universities**

Also AR Committee amendments were adopted on HE4 – Disclosing an impairment at work; and HE11 – Voluntary redundancies.

The texts of all motions adopted at Congress and HE Sector Conference can be found here:

<http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=5221>

