

# Disabled Members'

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## **1. Disabled Members' Conference Report**

The UCU Disabled Members' Conference 2011 was held on the 25<sup>th</sup> November at UCU HQ in London. The conference gives UCU's disabled members the opportunity to shape the agenda, elect their representatives, and meet up and share ideas and experiences. It was chaired by Pat Roche, Chair of the Disabled Members' Standing Committee.

Sally Hunt, General Secretary of UCU gave an introductory speech, calling the "Hardest Hit" march opposing cuts affecting disabled people the most powerful of all the anti-cuts demonstrations. Looking ahead to the nationwide strike on the 30<sup>th</sup> of November, Sally made it clear that it was not just a dispute about pensions, but to defend the assault on everything the coalition Government is attacking. Public Sector job cuts affect disabled people in many ways. If you have a disability you may also be in other equality groups affected by the cuts. People are already being put below the poverty threshold by cuts to DLA. Mental health support is slowly vanishing. Support for disabled people using transport is being cut. Hate crime is increasing, in part because of Government rhetoric. With all this in mind, Sally spoke of how now is a crucial time to be part of the trade union movement, and to use the tools we do have

at our disposal. The most important of these is the Equality Act, and the fastest growing area of legal cases coming into UCU are disability-related claims. Institutions often only pay lip service to their obligations under the Equality Act, and so activism, collectivism and vigilantism are key. Sally took a number of questions and then thanked the attendees for coming, and looked forward to hearing the outcomes and recommendations that resulted from the day.

The elections for five places to the DMSC take place each year at the Conference. Pat Roche led the conference in expressing thanks to the members of the Disabled Members' Standing Committee who would not be standing again next year, Andrew Mathieson, Judy Ekins and Norman Jemison. They have offered valuable service to the Committee and to UCU's disabled members. Elected to the two year seats were Helen Weber, Terry Duffy, Joel Petrie, Lesley Mansell and Sharon Sweeney. There were two one-year seats available. Elected to the one year seats were Jim Thakoordin and *<name removed on request>*.

Pat Roche gave her Chair's report, reporting on the activities of the DMSC over the last year. There have been lots of briefings and training delivered over the past year surrounding the Equality Act and the Public Sector Equality Duty. Members of the DMSC also attended the Hardest Hit March. Pat expressed disappointment that not one MP came out to engage with marchers. Pat reported that new mental health guidelines were published by UCU, and that UCU's motion on mental health was chosen to go to the TUC. Pat also reported on the continuing success and popularity of the disabled history wall chart, the campaign on welfare reform, ongoing efforts to work closely with other unions and current work on developing guidelines for disclosing a disability.

UCU welcomed Richard Rieser to speak to the conference. Richard is the founder and co-ordinator of Disability History Month and has a wealth of experience in campaigning on disability issues. Richard reported that UCU were one of the first unions to get involved in Disability History Month, which now comprises of many organisations. He gave a fascinating talk on disability history, the PowerPoint presentation of which is now available on the UCU website at the following location: [http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/powerpoint/2/1/Disability\\_History\\_Month\\_Presentation.pptx](http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/powerpoint/2/1/Disability_History_Month_Presentation.pptx)

We would like to thank the attendees and speakers that made the day such a success, and we hope to see even more of you there next year. The 2012 conference will be held on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November, so watch out for information about how you can attend being released in the Autumn.

## **2. Disability History Month – Your Feedback**

**Disability History Month 2011** ran from the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November to the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December. UCU had a strong presence throughout the month with members of the Committee attending the pre-launch and launch of the month. Over 3,000 **wall charts** were donated to the month. UCU attendees were impressed by the breadth of experience and the diversity of the speakers at the launch events. Richard Rieser, coordinator and organiser of DHM was the guest speaker at the Disabled Members Conference.

We'd love to hear feedback from members of any events or activity that you or your institution participated in to mark the month, or any ideas you may have for this year. It would be great to see Disability History Month continue to grow, and awareness of disability history continue to rise in our institutions.

Please send your feedback to James Taylor at [jtaylor@ucu.org.uk](mailto:jtaylor@ucu.org.uk)

## **3. Spartacus Report**

A new report, entitled "Responsible Reform" (nicknamed the "Spartacus Report") examining the proposed changes to Disability Living Allowance was released at the beginning of the year, and attracted a significant amount of interest. The abstract reads:

*"This report, written by disabled people themselves, and based on an analysis of some 500 responses to the UK government's consultation on its planned Disability Living Allowance (DLA) changes and cuts, illustrates that the coalition's proposed 'reforms' lack both support and credibility. 'Responsible Reform' shows that the government's DLA consultation breached the government's own code of practice and was "highly misleading". The material used here has been made public only as a*

*result of disabled people requesting to see it under the Freedom of Information Act.*

*Key findings include:*

*\* 98 per cent of respondents object to the qualifying period for benefits being raised from three months to six months*

*\* 99 per cent of respondents object to Disability Living Allowance no longer being used as a qualification for other benefits*

*\* 92 per cent oppose removing the lowest rate of support for disabled people.*

*In all three cases, as well as many others, London's Conservative Mayor, Boris Johnson, has also objected to the proposed changes. The Welfare Reform Bill will be disastrous for sick and disabled people, says joint author Sue Marsh. It is not too late for a government rethink"*

Unfortunately [the Bill](#) was passed on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March 2012, meaning Personal Independence Payments will now replace the current Disability Living Allowance.

You can download the report at the following location:

[http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/files/response\\_to\\_proposed\\_dla\\_reforms.pdf](http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/files/response_to_proposed_dla_reforms.pdf)

Read a Guardian report about the reaction to the report here:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2012/jan/17/disability-spartacus-welfare-cuts-campaign-viral>

UCU responded to the initial consultation and is intending to respond to current consultations on Personal Independence Payments.

#### **4. Hidden in Plain Sight**

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has published its final response to its enquiry on disability related harassment, "Hidden in Plain Sight". UCU responded to this enquiry. You can download a copy of the report, the executive summary, and the briefing at the following location:

<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/legal-and-policy/inquiries-and-assessments/inquiry-into-disability-related-harassment/hidden-in-plain-sight-the-inquiry-final-report/>

## 5. Fulfilling Potential – Consultation Response

Fulfilling Potential is a consultation document from the Office for Disability Issues on improving the possibilities for disabled people in the UK. The Disabled Members' Standing Committee recently agreed a UCU response, stating that the cuts in financial and social support for disabled people make the aspirations of this report unachievable and insulting. You can read the document here:

<http://odi.dwp.gov.uk/docs/fulfilling-potential/fulfilling-potential-discussion.pdf>

And read the UCU response here:

[http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/docs/s/2/DMSC148\\_-\\_Fulfilling\\_potential\\_Report.docx](http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/docs/s/2/DMSC148_-_Fulfilling_potential_Report.docx)

## 6. ECU: Furthering disability equality for staff in HE

In June 2010, the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) and the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education commissioned research from the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education and De Montfort University, into the experiences of disabled staff in higher education institutions (HEIs) in the UK.

Published on 17 September, the report '**Enabling equality - furthering disability for staff in higher education**' contains a range of recommendations set against 10 themes considered influential in shaping staff experiences in the workplace. These include promoting good policy and practice in the sector; and tackling disparities and inconsistencies between policy and practice, and understanding and awareness; creating the right conditions for disability equality including reasonable adjustments, funding and zero tolerance of discrimination and harassment; taking a positive approach to mental health; and improving engagement with disabled staff.

During the course of the research 333 disabled staff completed questionnaires; 32 disabled staff participated in focus groups; interviews with equality and diversity and human resources managers based in HEIS with high levels of disability declaration were held; and HEI information databases analysed. The material generated by these activities, while limited by its sample size, was nevertheless considered, by the report authors, to have provided rich and detailed insights into the experiences of disabled staff.

A copy of the report can be downloaded from the ECU website at

<http://www.ecu.ac.uk/enabling-equality-furthering-disability-equality-for-staff-in-HE.pdf>

### **Supporting UCU's disability equality objectives**

The report contains several positive messages which could prove helpful for branches and local associations working to advance disability equality bargaining objectives with employers. These include recommendations for employers to:

- Work with Trade Unions to promote disability equality across all aspects of policy and practice;
- Address the differences in the treatment of disabled staff and students;
- Consider creating a separate disability leave policy and consulting the trade unions in its development;
- Consider the role of disability leave in relation to submitting research to the Research Excellence Framework (REF).

Branches and local associations are encouraged bring the report to the attention of members, and promote use of its recommendations, though casework and in liaison with HR and other managers.

## **7. More disabled people in politics?**

If the House of Commons were reflective of the people it represents, at least 65 MP's would be disabled. The real figure is of course significantly lower. The Government has announced plans to encourage more disabled people to consider getting involved with politics. Read a Guardian report on the plans here:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2011/may/04/disabled-people-electoral-representation>

## **8. Congress 2012**

This year's UCU Congress runs from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> of June in Manchester. The Equality Unit will be running a joint equality fringe meeting on the Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> of June from 13:00 – 14:00. The speaker is yet to be finalised, but the theme of the meeting will be equality and negative stereotyping in the media, a particularly pertinent topic in the current economic climate, especially to disabled people, who are constantly stigmatised and attacked in the mainstream media. If you are attending Congress please do come along and take part in the debate. UCU's guidelines on disclosing a disability are currently in publication, and will be launched at Congress.

**If you would like to be added to the UCU Disabled Network and receive updates on disability issues, please contact [eqadmin@ucu.org.uk](mailto:eqadmin@ucu.org.uk) with your email address.**