

## Ill disciplined?

SUCU has noted with concern some recent cases where management, with the support of an HR advisor, has leap-frogged the important informal stage in the agreed disciplinary procedures. The rather vague wording in the current procedures doesn't help!

### Case 1:

In one faculty a member was arraigned before a formal disciplinary panel on charges of "failing to comply with a reasonable request", namely to submit a request for annual leave by e-mail (even though the member's annual leave pattern was well known, and official UoS procedure is to use MyJob). The member called in SUCU to help with the appeal. It emerged in the course of the appeal hearing that management and HR had not gone through any informal stage in the disciplinary process though the procedures clearly state that most cases should be resolved informally. *HR claimed that discussions which had been held with the member prior to the disciplinary process should be retrospectively construed by the appeal panel as constituting the informal stage, even though the member had never been advised at the time of those discussions that they were in any way linked, formally or informally, to any disciplinary process.* Fortunately, the appeal panel disagreed with the management side's reasoning and upheld the member's appeal.

### Case 2:

In another department, a professional services member was put through a formal investigative interview involving HR and a line manager. HR rejected two approaches from the SUCU caseworker to go through an informal stage first. The member was then quizzed formally for over an hour by a HR adviser and a line manager about some work they had been doing. It was found that there was no case to

answer - unsurprising, as the member was able to demonstrate that they had been acting entirely within their job summary...



**SUCU regards the informal stage as fundamentally important in the maintenance of constructive industrial relations.** It saves an enormous amount of stress and time on all sides and avoids the prosecution of trivial and unnecessary disciplinary charges.

**As you are probably aware we are close to agreeing with HR a revised disciplinary procedure.** We are proposing within this a clarification and strengthening of the 'informal stage' section to ensure it is used properly and that where staff are being put through an informal disciplinary stage this must be explicitly pointed out to them.

Members are encouraged to report to SUCU any instances of such procedural non-compliance. Equally, members in line management roles are encouraged to think very carefully before putting staff through disciplinary procedures without covering every step carefully, especially the important informal stage. **It is always better to resolve matters informally where this is possible.**

## Switching Agendas

Imagine you are invited to a meeting with your line manager. You enquire what the agenda is, and you are told X. You get to the meeting, and to your surprise find your faculty HR adviser there and the agenda is not X, or not just X, but Y. In such situations, we advise members to request that the meeting be adjourned and to contact SUCU for advice. **In general, where management bring in HR, members have a balancing right to be accompanied to a meeting by their trade union representative or fellow member.**

Spring  
2012

In  
This  
Issue

Misuse of  
Disciplinary  
Procedures

Dangers of  
Social Media

Recognition  
of SUCU Anti-  
Casualisation  
Success

Welcome to  
our new  
Branch  
Administrator

Sheffield UCU  
2 Hounsfield  
Road

Tel: 0114 222 8976  
ucu@sheffield.ac.uk

# “29 million HR accidents waiting to happen”: The Dangers of Social Networking

In 2007, the TUC described the UK's then 3.5 million Facebook users as “3.5 million HR accidents waiting to happen”. That number has since shot up to around 29.8 million, or some 58% of the 51.4 million people online.’ (LRD Publications Ltd, 2012, *Social media, monitoring and surveillance at work*, page 54-55, ISBN 1 905322 78 X)

This raises some important issues for us as trade unionists and employees. It is a fact that people in all different working environments are being disciplined and sacked for behaviour and comments made on social networking sites. If you use Facebook, twitter, LinkedIn or any other social media site make sure you follow the suggestions in this quote from the LRD publication:

## “Do:

- think carefully before posting anything online. Remember that anything you post could end up in a public space and/or being read by your current or future employer;
- have a clear understanding of what comments about your work your employer will tolerate;
- understand your employer's policy. It may, for example, ban Facebook access at work or only allow access during break times. One rep told LRD how workers at his employer got into difficulty because instead of closing social networking sites, they simply minimised them, leaving a record suggesting a breach of the policy. Revised guidance has since been issued;
- understand the privacy controls of any social networking or blogging site you use;
- use access controls to limit who can see posted information and remember who you have granted the most detailed level of access. Check privacy settings often and **remember who your Friends are**;
- use a separate email address to register with networking and blogging sites — preferably one that does not include your name;
- remember that people are not always who they say they are;
- if you do run a blog, make sure you state clearly that all views are your own personal opinions and not those of your employer.

## Do not:

- publish your email address, phone number or home address;
- choose an email address that reveals private information about you;
- publish any other identifying information, such as date of birth.”

The TUC guidance says:

“As you probably spend more time working than doing anything else, you may want to blog about work, but first stop and think about it. Blogging about existentialism or football may be harmless, but discussing your boss, your colleagues or any aspect of your work could lose you friends, cost you your job and even land you in court facing a defamation suit.”

## Oi! REF!

The REF exercise is gathering momentum within the University. SUCU has recently undertaken a branch-internal consultation exercise in response to management's draft REF Code of Practice. As a result, SUCU has expressed to management concerns about a number of features of the REF, and requested meaningful consultation in relation to the REF's future handling at the University of Sheffield.

The many areas of concern mentioned in the SUCU response to the draft Code include: the risks to non-included staff of an exclusive REF submission strategy; the transparency of the decision-making process; the handling of equality and protected characteristics issues around submission and inclusion/exclusion (the nine protected characteristics

are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation); UoS-internal assessment processes and criteria; the rigorousness of equalities training; any non-HEFCE-compliant use of proxy measures (e.g. reference to journal ranking lists); the considerable uncertainties surrounding academic judgements at the 2/3\* and 3/4\* boundaries; and the prevention of detriment to non-included research-active staff.

SUCU understands that all UoS staff involved in the REF 2014 decision-making process are to be given equalities training. Members are asked to report any concerns regarding the REF to SUCU at [ucu@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:ucu@sheffield.ac.uk)

# MORE PROOF THAT UNITY IS STRENGTH: SUCU ANTI-CASUALISATION SUCCESSES RECOGNISED AT UCU CONFERENCE

**Kaye Carl** a committee member here at Sheffield was invited to speak at the recent UCU Anti-casualisation meeting held in London. She told the conference about the work we have been involved in over the last four years and the successes we have had. Here are the key themes of her address:

**Sheffield UCU established seven priorities for action during the last 12 months.**

**COMMUNICATION:** Contacting atypical workers has always been a problem. We have obtained 380 additional email addresses of casualised staff during the last 12 months and have communicated with these individuals with much success. New UCU members have been recruited. We have had an assurance from HR that documentation will, in future, contain a clause allowing access to email addresses for new starters.

**JOB SECURITY:** The UofS has over 1,500 bank workers who are the most vulnerable amongst our workforce. For some time we have been pointing out that bank workers who teach cannot be included in one of the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in future available to all undergraduate applicants through their UCAS application and that is staff—student ratios (SSR). Our argument that people who teach should have a contract of employment is now being heard by our employers.

**FIXED TERM EMPLOYEES AND PERMANENCE:** We meet with HR each month to discuss potential redundancies caused through the ending of fixed term contracts, and open-ended contracts for those who have had more than 4 years' service. During the last 12 months over 100 fixed term employees have secured permanence as a result of these meetings.

**POST GRADUATE STUDENTS WHO TEACH:** Out of the 1,500 bank worker teachers, over 700 are postgraduate students and yet although the university has a policy for PG students, we pointed out that there is little assistance to help them undertake their teaching role. The university has, this year, introduced a training programme and we are also hopeful that the good practice policy which SUCU produced will be implemented without delay. We are working closely with the Students Union regarding this.

**TEACHING-ONLY POLICY:** At last our employers appear to recognise that teaching is not a teaching-only role but is a profession to be proud of and are following our suggestion that the offensive title be changed. Discussions are underway to develop and implement a University Teaching Policy.

**DOCUMENTATION:** Following success in securing backdated holiday pay for a number of members, when it was realised that documentation being issued was wholly inadequate and had not been revised for a number of years, the university is following SUCU's suggestion and has introduced a revised contract of employment and statement of employment particulars which will clarify employee entitlements and benefits.

**SPECIAL BULLETIN FOR ATYPICAL WORKERS AND FIXED TERM EMPLOYEES:** A bulletin, especially for these individuals, has been produced and has been well received. An offer to meet our Regional Official was contained within the bulletin and some took advantage of this."

As well as the incredible effort and expertise put into this work by SUCU Committee members these successes have been achieved as a result of support from Regional Officials and prove that continued collective activity is the best way for us as UCU members to make a difference to our working conditions.

A very timely reminder that now as ever: **Unity is Strength**





## Welcome to: Jane Rodger – Our New UCU Branch Administrator



I have been involved with the trade union movement since 2005 when I was recruited as a Unison Steward. At that time I was working in Social Housing. I became increasingly active within my local Branch dealing with representation, departmental restructures, collective bargaining, and organising around campaigns.

Due to funding cuts I was made redundant from my post in Housing in August 2010. I then worked as a Branch Administrator for Unison. I also took the opportunity of training as a workplace and community mediator. Since October last year, I have been working as Branch Administrator for UCU at the University of Bradford.

The many threats to both the HE Sector and USS Pension make for a deeply challenging time for UCU members and activists. Through personal experience I recognise the dedication, time, and commitment given by Reps and Officers. I see my role as very much supporting and contributing to their hard work. I am looking forward to getting to know everyone at the Branch at the University of Sheffield.

I have lived in Sheffield since 1987 when I came here as a student. My current interests are walking, DIY, relaxing with friends, and volunteering as a Community Mediator for Mediation Sheffield.

## Thank you to: Jack Windle

With Jane joining us as a permanent Branch Administrator, Jack is stepping down from his temporary role.

We're sure you will join us in thanking Jack for his excellent work in supporting the branch during the long process of recruiting a permanent Branch Administrator.

Jack will continue as a branch committee member. We also wish him luck as he returns to the library to put the finishing touches to his PhD.

## FYI

- The University had a £30.2M surplus in 2010/11, 6.8% of total income.
- Staffing costs in 2010/11 were 51.5% of budget... compared to 60.2% nine years earlier in 2001/02.
- The VC's pay increase for 2010/11 was 6% (unconsolidated). The increase for staff was on average about 0.5%.
- In 2011 the University was the national leader in cutting pensions for low paid staff.
- For 2012 the University is planning a non-union minimum wage minimum rights retail/catering subsidiary.

## Pay Negotiation Update

In the latest negotiations, Employers increased their pay offer from 0.5% to 0.8%. Unsurprisingly all unions rejected the offer.

The joint trade unions argue:

- We have lost 10% of pay since 2009, and RPI inflation during the negotiating cycle is forecast to remain above 3.5%.
- Given the HEFCE report *Financial Health of the Higher Education Sector*, affordability arguments used by the employers don't hold water. Total staff costs continue to fall relative to total expenditure, down to 56.2% in 2010-11.
- Vice-Chancellor's pay rose 62.1% on average between 2002-3 and 2009-10 compared to 38.5% for other academic staff.

For more information, please see:  
[www.ucu.org.uk/circ/pdf/UCUHE147.pdf](http://www.ucu.org.uk/circ/pdf/UCUHE147.pdf)

## UNITING AGAINST SEXISM IN SHEFFIELD: WE WON'T CALM DOWN "DEAR"

**Sheffield Against Sexism** had a demonstration on Saturday 28th April 2012 to oppose sexism in our city.

The march culminated in a rally in Barkers Pool with speakers from local women's organisations, community groups and trade unions.

**Sheffield Against Sexism** is a broad group of local activists, students and workers formed as a response to Government attacks on local services for women: Rape Crisis; Women's Aid; and Sheffield Domestic Abuse Forum, to name just a few.

The march signals the beginning of a campaign in the city to bring a wide layer of people together to resist the cuts to women's services, stop the opening of strip clubs, and unite against sexism. They invite everybody who wants to challenge sexism and inequality to get involved regardless of gender, race or age.