

Annual Report - June 2009

President's Report - Steve Collier

This is my first Presidential Report and I must admit my first year as president has been rather full, to say the least.

The university finally started implementing the framework for conversion of hourly-paid staff signed by Steve Ludlam last year. This work is going far more slowly than the university anticipated and is proving to be a bigger job than they imagined. It has also proved to be more difficult than we imagined keeping track of progress, but we will continue to work hard in this area. If members have any concerns about how the framework is being applied in their department please contact the committee.

This year has also seen a more focussed effort on the plight of Contract Research staff – both locally and nationally. I would especially like to thank Andrew Maddon and Jane Simm for their continued hard work in this area, raising the issues and working closely with several groups of researchers across the university.

Over the last year we have done two more Health & Safety inspections across campus and have worked to make the university's Health & Safety Committee a far more effective forum. I must also point out that stress is now being seen as an integral aspect of H&S (especially by HSE) and we are planning to include stress surveys of relevant staff in all future H&S Inspections.

Not surprisingly the formation of the new faculty structure has created (and continues to create) lots of work for UCU and all the campus unions. There has been much negotiation of changes in policies, procedures and guidelines in order to reflect the new structure, and the work continues to be ongoing as the university discovers more and more anomalies. All this is on top of the seemingly annual reviewing of ad-hoc Terms & Conditions. The new faculties have also spawned many re-structures across the university, resulting in major changes to staff roles and positions, particularly for academic related and support staff. Each restructure places demands on all the campus unions as we work to minimise the damage to individuals. These reviews and restructures – and the resulting effects on jobs – show no signs of slowing down. On the contrary we can only anticipate an increase in the work generated by this type of activity.

Last October we received a 5% salary increase as the final stage of the 2006-2009 three year pay award, which was the result of the action taken by members in 2006 – remember the T-shirts? However, as predicted by Steve Ludlam in his president's report last year, the national situation has proved to "be back with a vengeance". UCU may have finally managed to take their part in the national JNCHES negotiations, but all is not easy and once again UCU needs to struggle for a

fair deal. As we all know, the landscape has changed dramatically and this time the struggle is not simply about salaries, but about minimising job losses across the sector.

On more day-to-day business, we have attracted national speakers on topics such as USS pensions, and H&S and Stress (thanks to Gill Brown) to speak at General Meetings, and of course personal casework support for individual members continues on a weekly basis. This work can often take up a considerable amount of committee members' time but for obvious reasons is one of the least visible aspects of the committee's workload. At the end of April the campus unions re-located to different offices (I won't say new officers as they are about 100 years older) in order to make room in the Octagon for library staff being decanted from the Arts Tower. We are now based at 2 Hounsfield Road, but the telephone, fax and e-mail remain unchanged.

Finally, I wish to thank everyone who has supported me through my first year – in fact the whole SUCU Committee, but especially Gillian Brown Christine Methley in the UCU office and Mick Ashman as Vice-President. I would also like to express my sincere thanks to Geoff Turner, who retired early this year after many years service to AUT/UCU. Geoff will be sorely missed by us all.

Secretary's Report – Gillian Brown

Meetings

We have continued to have six General Meetings throughout the year and have had a series of very successful meetings. We have organised these on different days of the week and at a couple of different venues in an attempt to make at least some of the meetings accessible to part time members whilst recognising that lunchtime meetings a problem for some members providing a sandwich lunch means that members don't have to think about finding food as well.

We have also held a number of update meetings with Departmental Contacts and activists. These meetings are an opportunity for us to update those members who are actively involved in UCU in more detail than can be given in emails and bulletins on current issues and events.

Communicating with members

The struggle to get the right balance of information to members goes on. We are aware that generally members do not want to be over-whelmed with lengthy and wordy explanations of every event and issue and so have worked to provide UCU noticeboards in each department and to channel some information through Departmental Contacts with requests that they pass on information rather than sending numerous emails to the whole membership list.

Not all Departments/buildings currently have UCU Contacts. If where you work has a vacancy for this role and you would be interested in taking it on then please do get in touch. There is lots of support available and involvement can be as much or as little as you want.

Committee membership

The UCU Committee continues to develop and take on new issues. We have had a full Committee over the past year or so and have taken on new committee members. Because people do inevitably move on there are some co-opted vacancies on the Committee and we will be looking to recruit to those vacancies. We're especially looking for people who are working in departments/areas that are currently under-represented on the Committee at the moment.

Health and Safety – Mick Ashman

Health and Safety has become an area of union work that Sheffield UCU has devoted increasing time to. All Committee members are now Health and Safety Representatives and as such they have the right to be consulted by the University on the introduction of any measure which may

significantly impact upon the health and safety of employees. They can also inspect designated work places and investigate potential hazards, complaints from members and the causes of accidents, dangerous occurrences and diseases

Inspection Work

Over the past year Sheffield UCU has continued with its inspection work, visiting two workplaces the CICS Building on West Street and the New Jessops (West) Building. In both cases the inspections were in response to members concerns.

In the Jessops Building 43 defects were identified. These included problems with the building and other issues such as stress and noise identified by the staff. As with previous inspections the University did not contest our findings and has provided us with a detailed response addressing each point with a timetable outlining when action will be taken. SUCU will continue to monitor progress with these.

Action on Stress at Work

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) met with the University and SUCU in 2007 and in its report identified a number of areas where their University needed to improve its management of stress at work.

Sheffield UCU is represented on the University Staff Wellbeing Group which was established by UoS following the HSE inspection to improve the management of work stress at the University.

If members identify stress is a factor at work during our inspections it is identified on our report forms and returned to the University. The Union will continue to focus on work areas and departments where stress is a problem.

Revising the University Safety Committee Terms of Reference

The University has worked closely with UCU full time officers and other campus unions to revise the terms and reference of the University Safety Committee to ensure that the Committee functions in accordance with its statutory obligations with regard to staff side organisations.

Equalities/Diversity – Jane Simm

In addition to representing UCU and the other campus unions on various committees including the University Equality and Diversity Board, scrutinising monitoring information being produced by the university and keeping SUCU Committee and members up to date, there have been a number of important developments over the past year.

The UCU campaign highlighting bullying and harassment that culminated here in Sheffield with a very successful stall on the University concourse where we were able to talk to both members and non-members about the importance of being able to identify and challenge bullying in the workplace.

Contract Research Staff update – Andrew Madden

Sheffield University currently employs over 900 staff on fixed term contracts (FTC), representing over 40% of the academic workforce. Despite changes in legislation designed to reduce the use of casual labour, the university's efforts to redeploy staff approaching the end of a contract remain

inadequate. These staff are amongst the most vulnerable at the university, and amongst the most under-represented in the Union. [any figures to show proportion of CRS in SUCU compared to staff on open-ended?]

Sheffield UCU was one of the first branches in the country to recognise the need to focus on problems experienced by FTC staff. Our efforts have now been recognized at a national level: UCU is following our lead and making concerted efforts to recruit FTC staff and to work for improved conditions.

The use of fixed term contracts not only results in many staff being employed under stressful conditions, it is also detrimental to other academic staff at the university and to students. The practice makes it harder for academics on open-ended contracts to engage directly in research, and it weakens the links between research and teaching.

Membership Report – Daragh O’Reilly

The following table shows the changes in membership levels over the past three years. In the period 2008-9, membership increased slightly by approximately 3%. The main reasons for departures were resignations, retirements and moves to other institutions or employers.

Year (end May)	Membership			% Change	Comment
	Full	Ret’d	Total		
2009	1,198	69	1,267	+3	32 net new members.
2008	1,149	86	1,235	-2	70 new members; 56 departures.
2007	1,167	92	1,259	-7	TUPE transfer from School of Nursing and Midwifery to Sheffield Hallam University.
2006	n/a	n/a	1,359	n/a	

Earlier this year, details of eligible-grade staff working at the University were obtained from Human Resources and provided to UCU head office as part of the National Recruitment Campaign.

Over the course of summer 2009, a study of membership patterns and density will be carried out with a view to enabling better targeting of recruitment efforts. While seeking to grow local membership across all relevant grades and departments, a particular effort will be made to focus on contract research and hourly paid staff, as these have proved more difficult to reach.

Treasurer – Jonathan Perraton (to follow)

Personal cases – Mick Ashman (to follow)