



Wolverhampton City & Walsall
Branch
Newsletter
February 2016

www.wlv.web.ucu.org.uk/

In this edition...sickness levels, survey of members, staff counselling service, annual leave changes, new academic calendar, University financial report, Prevent strategy, national recruitment and campaigns.

Disturbing levels of sickness absence amongst staff

The figures of days lost through sickness absence amongst staff in 2014/15 were released last December, and they are, once again, damning. 20,306 days have been lost in 2014/15, which is slightly worse than the previous year (19,140 but with fewer employees). On average, 8.37 days were lost per employee last academic year, which is a lot higher than the average in the University sector (5.8 days per employee). The breakdown of the nature of the illness will be of interest to members, as 25 % of sickness absence is psychological (stress, depression, etc.), which is 8 percentage points more than the average in the sector. HR have acknowledged that at least half of this category is work-related stress. Figures per Faculty/Department are as follows (academics generally report sickness absence less systematically than support staff):

Department	Days lost per staff 14-15	% change since 13/14
FEHW Admin staff	19.57	+ 27 %
FoA Admin Staff	11.34	+1 %
FSE Admin staff	11.37	- 18 %
FoSS Admin staff	13.37	+ 201 %
FEHW Academics	6.26	- 8 %
FoA Academics	1.96	- 52 %
FSE Academics	4.22	+ 23 %
FoSS Academics	5.90	+ 4 %

Statistics of sickness absence have now been poor for a few years at the University, and UCU have been pushing OVC and HR to act promptly to find remedies for this. The VC has agreed to have it as a key performance indicator viewed by Governors. High sickness absence levels are a sign that colleagues are not happy working for the University, and so UCU will do its best to help turn this around. One point we have made, but will make again, is the unfortunate closure of counselling services for staff (read below).

UCU survey of members

Please take part in our **survey** to let us have your views about how sickness levels could be improved. We will relay your views at the extraordinary Safety Policy Committee dedicated to this issue in March. The survey also asks for your views on the Faculty Administrative Review, the new academic calendar and your priorities for UCU. The survey is available [on-line](http://survey.wlv.ac.uk/survey.asp?s=01025072242171029246) (<http://survey.wlv.ac.uk/survey.asp?s=01025072242171029246>).

Decision of OVC not to renew the staff access to University Counselling Service

Your UCU reps are puzzled that access for staff to the University Counselling Service has been withdrawn after nearly 5 years. This is despite significant numbers of staff using the service (74 in 2013-14 and 86 in 2014-15) and despite extremely high levels of satisfaction being reported by the 84% who completed a survey at the end of their period of counselling. For example, 97% said their problems were more manageable and 100% would recommend the service to a friend or colleague.

The service is beneficial to the employer as well as to the individuals using it. 68% said that the counselling has enabled them to stay at work and 70% said that it had enabled them to perform better at work.

Without the University provision, most of the staff concerned would have had to wait more than 3 months to access counselling via the NHS. University management have said that the institution needs to make cost savings and should not be taking on the role of the health service. However, a number of other universities in the West Midlands (Coventry, Keele, and Birmingham) provide free counselling for staff, whether in-house or via an outside organisation.

UCU and UNISON have argued that the University has a duty as an employer to reduce stress and anxiety at work and that the approximately £20,000 per annum spent on staff access to the University Counselling Service is a cost-effective contribution to the Health and Wellbeing agenda.

University management have ignored all arguments put forward by UCU so far. Members have speculated that maybe access for staff to the University Counselling Service has made the amount of human unhappiness in the institution much more visible and University management would prefer that it was hidden and not talked about. UCU reps would prefer to think that our OVC have just not yet recognised that the ability of staff in all categories to support and safeguard students will be diminished if they do not have quick and easy access to services that support their own mental and emotional health. Given the high level of sickness absence due to work-related stress discussed earlier, both UCU and Unison have pressurised the VC to organise an extraordinary Safety Policy Committee during which the topic will be discussed.

Please let us know, via the **short [UCU survey](#)**, what alternatives we could suggest to reduce the high levels of psychological distress experienced by staff at the University. We would also encourage you to report your concerns at your Faculty well-being committees and to your Deans.

Annual leave

In November the University formally announced changes to the annual leave system. The changes are to create a standard leave year for all staff that will be aligned with the University's financial year (August - July).

UCU had been consulted about the proposals and accept that they are being made in order to comply with the new International Financial Regulations. However, UCU pointed out that most academic staff need to take most of their annual leave in August and that the new arrangements would need to accommodate this. Unfortunately, the original proposals did not recognize this reality and only allowed for two days to be carried over to the year

starting August 2016. UCU continued to lobby for a change in arrangements. We were pleased that a change has been announced and colleagues can now carry 20 days over. This is a transitional arrangement for 15/16 only and carried over leave must be taken by the end of September 2016.

UCU recognizes that this does not resolve all queries and difficulties. The University promised group briefing sessions in the New Year, and we hope that these will be arranged soon. We also remind members that the advice from HR is that we can raise queries by emailing transition@wlv.ac.uk or calling Faye Crosbee on telephone on extension 2727.

The revised academic calendar

After a 2-year experiment with starting the academic year later, the OVC has proposed and Academic Board has agreed that Welcome Week should be in late September and Semester 1 teaching should end by Christmas. UCU members have welcomed this reconsideration of the academic calendar and in fact UCU reps asked for such a rethink before the experiment went ahead in 2014. But two significant drawbacks remain. First, Welcome Week has been merged with Week 1 of Semester 1 teaching. It is hard to see how this can work pedagogically and logistically. It was tried once before but not repeated. Second, re-assessment boards are still scheduled for August, eating into the only time that academics can take the majority of their holiday entitlement.

You wait three years for a staff survey...

In 2012 all members of staff were told of the importance of the new staff survey, and we were repeatedly encouraged to complete it. The results identified several problem areas, including widespread dissatisfaction due to too much change and poor communication, and particular issues, including bullying of disabled members of staff. These problems were a matter of great concern for UCU but at least the difficulties were out in the open and could be tackled. However, the change from schools to faculties was then imposed and the working groups and action plans seemed to fizzle out.

The survey was due to be repeated every two years, but was shelved in 2014 to 'allow more time for the change to faculties to bed down'. Your UCU representatives have asked for updates about the staff survey at every formal meeting with OVC, given its importance as a means for members of staff to inform management of their opinions and experiences. We welcome information recently published by the VC about the new approach and will be pressing for it to get underway very soon.

“Redundancy” and the Professors

We have been working hard to support professors through the so-called redundancy process. So far, no-one has been made compulsorily redundant, and the immense majority of Professors at risk have been told that their position is safe. The fight continues both for the very small minority still at risk and because professors are facing a change in their terms and conditions, including performance-related pay.

Hard times in FSE

The turmoil in FSE goes on and on. UCU will continue to support colleagues in this faculty as they keep working with students, external partners and in research despite the very difficult circumstances.

University financial reports

As we go to press the latest financial reports for the university have been put on the university website a month or so later than usual. A fuller analysis will follow in a later bulletin. *But good news for the VC - its £268,000 and rising.* Yes the accounts (which relate to the year ending July 2015) record a massive £44,000 pay rise (including £18,000 of benefits in kind). While student numbers are still some 10% *below* their previous peak of the mid 2000s, the VC's salary is 50% *up*. It is not so good for the rest of us. 'We will continue to maintain pressure on pay and non-pay expenditure to ensure financial sustainability'. And it's not just pay. Full time equivalent non-academic staff numbers are now beyond the Carline Gipps pre crisis peak but academic numbers are still 13% down.

An overseas venture: *In Memoriam*

A campus on an island paradise:

"How splendid!" thought the Chancellor (Vice)

But the links to Mauritius

Proved less than auspicious-

Next time, perhaps he'll think twice.

Dysfunctional Performance Related Pay

Imagine that the OVC announced that the university will proceed as if gravity is a myth. It would be embarrassing. Don't they realise that we teach the evidence of science? Well, it seems that when it comes to the social sciences the answer is no. The VC is proposing to make 130+ senior members of staff subject to secretive performance related pay deals. Yet in the business school we teach the negative effects such competitive and secretive policies have on organisations. In the social sciences we teach the negative effects they have on societies. In health and education we explore their negative effects on wellbeing and learning. In the arts and humanities we look at their dystopian cultural effects. Our students write essays on these themes. We give people professorships for research on them. We invite eminent speakers to lecture us on how societies are better if based on cooperation. Why then, do we use competition as a principle in our own Human Resources?

Prevent strategy

On the 6th January 2016 Jon Elsmore sent to all staff a guidance leaflet summarising Safeguarding and the 'Prevent' strategy stating:

The University has a new legal duty (established in The Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015) to have proper policies and procedures in place, alongside guidance for staff and support for students to monitor and mitigate the threat of terrorism through the exploitation of vulnerable individuals and challenging extremist views and ideologies.

UCU's national position is to contest Prevent - more details can be found here: [UCU and Prevent](#). Many of us may agree with this opposition but as the national advice points out, refusing to implement the policy may be deemed unlawful or partial performance.

UCU at this University, asked to be part of the operational group discussing Prevent (the SU is part of the group) but this request was refused. However, we commented on the

guidance leaflet referred to above. We were then invited to a meeting on the 30th October 2015 to discuss our suggestions for change. The key points from the meeting are below:

1. Jon Elsmore commented that the university did not want to make a 'big deal' of Prevent, particularly because the university is not 'high risk'. That is why Prevent is wrapped or 'hidden' in 'safeguarding'.
2. Training had already taken place for some staff and more was planned but none of this was in the leaflet or discussed openly. Prevent will be closely monitored from December 2015 onwards. UCU organised its own training session on 9th December, and members present had a lively discussion.
3. We were offered a place on a course about Prevent called 'Train the Trainers' which a UCU Negotiating Committee member attended but UCU and Unison will still not be part of the operational group for Prevent.

The University will be required to carry out a risk assessment which assesses where and how our students might be at risk of being 'drawn into terrorism', including non-violent extremism. We are not sure who will carry this out, or when. There could be a wide range of changes proposed or pushed through as part of this agenda. **Please raise with your branches where they cause concern.**

TUC #heartunions week 8-14 February 2016

UCU will be joining the entire trade union movement for a week of activities <http://heartunions.org/> in February celebrating the great work done by union reps and members in workplaces and in society and highlighting our rejection of the Tory government's trade union bill. There will be a huge programme of events taking place across the UK supported by all major unions and reaching out to the communities in which we organize.

National recruitment week 22-26 February 2016

Following on from the success of our recruitment week held in November 2015, national UCU have announced another week of activities in February to encourage more staff to join the union. Please do whatever you can to help the build the union.

As part of the UCU recruitment week in November, both Walsall and City branches organised pension talks from the UCU regional specialist, Chris Mason. Chris gave a talk which was also open to non-members, and provided one-to-one sessions for members afterwards. Colleagues found Chris's expertise extremely helpful as they investigate what all the recent changes in pensions mean for their individual circumstances.

TUC Unionlearn

The University has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with TUC Unionlearn, which means that union members from across the country can have access to some courses from UoW, on a part-time basis, with 10 % discount on fees. The scheme does not include stand-alone modules, it would have to be driven towards a qualification.

Stop press: Next **city branch meetings**: 4 Feb and (provisionally) 8 March, 1pm-2pm

<p>Who are your Faculty reps for 2015/ 16? Please contact your Faculty rep if you have any issue that you want to discuss confidentially.</p>		
<p>Faculty of Arts Anne-Marie Beaumont (Walsall) Frances Clarke (Walsall) John Clementson (City) Frank Wilson (City) Cécile Hatier (Health and Safety, City)</p>	<p>Faculty of Education, Health and Well-being. Catherine Lamond (Walsall) Michael Welsh (Walsall) Veronica Grant (City) Kate Lees (City)</p> <p>We need more reps for City and Walsall campus... Please consider standing for election.</p>	
<p>Faculty of Social Sciences Mike Cunningham Lee Crofts Jennifer Hulme</p>	<p>Faculty of Science and Engineering Sue Gill James Vickers Adrian Priest Anthony Hatfield</p>	
<p>UCU Negotiating Committee in 2015/16</p>		
<p><u>Chair:</u> Catherine Lamond (FEHW) <u>Vice Chair:</u> Ben Andrews (FEHW & Academic Related) <u>Secretary:</u> Cécile Hatier (FoArts) <u>Green rep</u> Aidan Byrne (FoArts)</p>	<p>Pauline Anderson (FoSS) Paul Barrow (FSE) John Chorley (FEHW) Andy Cramp (FEHW) Lee Crofts (FoSS) Mike Cunningham (FoSS)</p>	<p>Stuart Farquhar (FoSS) Sue Gill (FSE) Jane Harvey (FEHW) Mike Haynes (FoSS) Julie Hughes (FEHW) Kate Lees (FEHW) Penny Welch (FoSS)</p>
<p>UCU City Branch Officers and other representatives</p>		
<p>Chair: Mike Cunningham Vice Chair: Mike Haynes Secretary: Aidan Byrne Treasurer: Alan Apperley</p>	<p>Membership: Karin Dannehl Equality: Penny Welch Health and Safety: Gill Outterside Auditors: Chris Fullwood and John Dale</p>	
<p>UCU Walsall Branch Officers and other representatives</p>		
<p>Chair: John Chorley Secretary and Membership: Ben Andrews</p>	<p>Equality: Catherine Lamond Women: Julie Hughes Branch contact: Neil Duncan</p>	
<p>Other staff reps</p> <p>Anti-casualization: Alan Burns Black members: Veronica Grant Disability: Veronica Grant</p>		