

Pensions campaign latest

THE LAST STRIKE

Birkbeck staff voted overwhelmingly in the March UCU ballot for strike action (73%) and action short of strike (89%) on the issue of pensions. UCU oppose the employers' current proposals which will mean a massive and unfair detriment to new members. Beyond our obligation to future generations paying into USS, it is clear that that once new entrants are on such a greatly inferior scheme the

employers can then demand that existing members also move to this scheme. In addition UCU continues to argue for the maintenance of existing members' rights to an unreduced pension on redundancy. In effect, the employers want a charter to sack members more cheaply in 2013, when it is expected that they will be looking to restructure the sector.

The two days of strike on 22 and 24 March were enor-

mously successful with wonderful support from Birkbeck students and other unions. On 22 March a 'teach-out' attracted an audience of 200 and on 24 March the picket line was joined by numbers of graduating students - as well as by the College Dean and College Orator - who came to show their support and to have their photographs taken, making the day even more memorable for all who took part. UCU made it clear that the March action was not directed against College management, but rather was part of a national dispute aimed at the employers' association who have refused to negotiate on their proposals to abolish the current pension arrangements for university staff.

RESULTS

Unfortunately the employers have still refused to enter into meaningful negotiations with UCU. Instead they have threatened the UCU representatives on the USS Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) with high court action and bankruptcy if they did not attend JNC meetings, and they have then used the Chair's casting vote to force through their proposals. UCU has already won some improvements in the course of this campaign, moving the employers away from the threat to introduce a career average pension scheme for everyone. But the employer's new proposals would introduce a 'two-tier' system that would be



disastrous for new entrants, making their pensions worth far less than those already in the scheme. At the same time, their scheme would mean that USS will receive at least 6.5% more in pension contributions than it currently needs. The 'surplus' ostensibly needed to further insulate the scheme from risk would then be used to cut the amount they will have to pay in. Moreover the scale of the gap between the present final salary scheme and the very poor scheme on offer to new entrants is not only unfair, it is very dangerous. The next stage will be for the employers to try to move existing USS members onto the new scheme.

WHAT NEXT?

In his email to all staff on 18 April the Master expressed the hope 'that there will be no further industrial action and disruption in what is a critical year for the future of the College in terms of recruiting and retaining our students'. Birkbeck UCU shares this aspiration. However Birkbeck could have avoided the threat of industrial action..

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March 24th: The College Dean, a proud student and a supporter show their backing for the strike



March 24th: Students joining in the colourful protest outside the College

Health & Safety Update

INVITING BIRKBECK

The World Day for Safety and Health at Work is an annual, international event to promote safe, healthy and decent workplaces.

It is held every year on April 28th (yes, we have just missed it). It is endorsed by the United Nations and the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

New research from mental health charity, Mind, has found that work is the most stressful thing in people's lives with two-thirds of those interviewed saying they feel stressed by a reduction in budgets since the downturn.

The report recommends that it is more important than ever that organisations invest in staff well-being. Meanwhile an ILO report refers to "occupational health (as) the promotion and maintenance of the highest degree of physical and mental health and social well-being of workers."

UCU has therefore invited Birkbeck to make arrangements to recognise the World Day for Health & Safety at Work. This request was made at the Safety Committee meeting on May 18th. The Committee has agreed to consider this.

HEALTHIER ENVIRONMENT

Birkbeck UCU wishes to promote the development of a greener & healthier working environment. In this way, we could provide an environment that would give people enjoyment throughout the year and not just on April 28th. Have you any suggestions how the college could recognise this annual event? Please let us know.

Richard Carabine, Birkbeck UCU Health & Safety Officer

Pensions Campaign Latest

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if the Master had made a public statement or had written to the employer's representatives calling for a negotiated settlement to the dispute. Regrettably he decided not to do this. Instead he has chosen to impose a deduction of strike pay of 1/260th of annual salary on those who participated in the - largely symbolic - action on 22 and 24 March. This is contrary to the spirit of goodwill and trust that has characterised industrial relations at Birkbeck hitherto, and is contrary to the position taken by several other Colleges and Schools in the Uni-

versity, including LSE, and LSHTM who are all deducting at the rate of 1/365th - the rate that has always been applied at Birkbeck in the past.

The next stage in the dispute is likely to be a ballot for widespread industrial action in the autumn. Sally Hunt, UCU General Secretary stated on 11 May that the new ballot will spell out proposals for sustained industrial action during 2011-2012 starting with admissions and asking everyone to take part in a rolling programme. Unlike the strikes in March, future industrial action would be directed particularly at those institutions and at their vice-chancellors and other heads of institutions who have supported the bullying tactics of the employers and who, whilst happy to protect their own end-of-career pension pots*, seek at the same time to deny a proper pension to lower paid staff.

Birkbeck UCU believes that the best way to minimise the disruption that will be caused by further industrial action is to remove the

need for industrial action altogether. To this end Birkbeck UCU has again asked the Master to call publicly for the EPF to engage now in meaningful negotiations - either through ACAS or directly with UCU. We do hope that the Master will, on behalf of the College, call publicly on the EPF to change its stance - in the interests of Birkbeck, its staff and students, present and future.

Birkbeck UCU Committee. May 2011

For more information and updates visit:
www.bbk.ac.uk/ucu/campaigns and
www.ucu.org.uk/defenduss

* *Of the employer's trustees on USS, two are Vice-Chancellors, on salaries of £341,000 (David Eastwood at Birmingham) and £278,000 (Glynis Breakwell at Bath). The average VC salary is £213,813 (all 2009-2010 figures).*

At Birkbeck, the average (2009-10) salary of full-time academic staff was £42,134 (non professorial) and £67,781 (professors). The Master's salary was £299,000 (an increase on the previous year of 15.5%) plus £43,770 employers pension contribution (an increase of 16.1%).

Source: THE 24/3/2011 and www.timeshighereducation.co.uk

DATE FOR YOUR DIARY
JUNE 30TH

June 30th is likely to be a major day of action for the campaign against public sector cuts, with teaching unions, UNISON and other public service unions currently balloting for industrial action.

Birkbeck UCU, along with all the other Bloomsbury colleges, will be planning activities to show our support. For more info, come to the AGM on June 7th, or see www.bbk.ac.uk/ucu.

'Not a happy one': The lot of the sessional lecturer



It's the time of year when academic staff are planning teaching commitments for the following year, while sessional colleagues anxiously wait to see whether they will have work.

Some academics are being asked to take on teaching which has been part of the regular work of their sessional colleagues. Academics end up stressed and overworked; sessionals end up stressed and redundant.

Hourly paid lecturers at Birkbeck can feel isolated and vulnerable, even though Birkbeck's mostly a friendly and professional place.

There are some departments that are a model of inclusiveness. But good practice isn't universal. Human Resources rolls out fine policies regarding the employment of sessional lecturers. But in a context of cuts and restructuring, what happens next sometimes isn't so fine.

Sessionals often fear to speak out. We fear to make a fuss, fear to assert our

rights. If we do, we're apt to find colleagues with whom we've worked for years avoiding us (UCU has several reports of this happening). And do we dare challenge such treatment? What about that reference that I need? Or next year's teaching? So we grit our teeth and carry on.

UCU and the College's management would be glad if the entire College observed best practice in working with sessional lecturers. So how do things go wrong?

It's not usually deliberate meanness. However, sessionals are in some ways a threat to the College we've served for so long. We don't mean to be. We want to go on doing our best for Birkbeck students. But we'd like to start doing so for a fair rate of pay, instead of being stuck on rates that were set in 2007.

And there's the snag. There are so many of us, and the rates of many of us are so low, that, even having let go most of the sessionals with-

out a legal claim to permanent employment, the College is horrified at what paying all of us properly would do to the deficit.

In some cases the integration of FLL's sessionals into the new schools and departments has gone well. But in others, sessionals have been treated as a threat to be managed and (in extreme cases) got rid of.

UCU is struggling to advance two main concerns in the Framework negotiations for sessionals. In the longer term we need to agree the working hours necessary to deliver our teaching. It will then be clear what our pay ought to be, given that virtually all of us have been graded, even though the announcement of our grading keeps being postponed. In the short term, we're pressing for a pay increase for those of us on the lowest rates to reinstate the value our pay had in 2007.

We're grateful to everyone who has already responded to our pleas for information. But we could still do with

knowing more about the real hours hourly paid lecturers have to work to deliver each hour of our teaching. The more detail the better.

We also need to know about all the ways in which pay has been eroded: not just by inflation, but by the withdrawal of allowances and anything else that we need to try to claw back. Some of us have been asking whether harmonised contracts are still a reality. Our response is 'yes': UCU is working for it and the College's management has always given a commitment to resolving this since current sessional contracts are not sustainable. But we're going to have to work together to make a fair new deal a reality.

FN2 Negotiating Team

For information about the negotiations, see www.bbk.ac.uk/ucu/campaigns/
Contact: ucu@bbk.ac.uk

Performance management and capability

Birkbeck HR is presently working on proposals for new 'performance management systems' (PMS) to apply to all staff at Birkbeck. The trigger for this is the abolition of the Default Retirement Age (DRA) which means that, instead of retiring at 65, staff may carry on working until they retire by mutual agreement, are made redundant, or are dismissed for incapacity.

There are existing procedures for redundancy and incapacity, both of which have been agreed with the Unions, although changes to both of these may be proposed following the removal of the DRA.

The new performance management systems (including appraisal, performance reviews, training policies and dismissal procedures) will of course apply to everyone, not just those over 65!

For more information, come to the UCU AGM on 7 June.

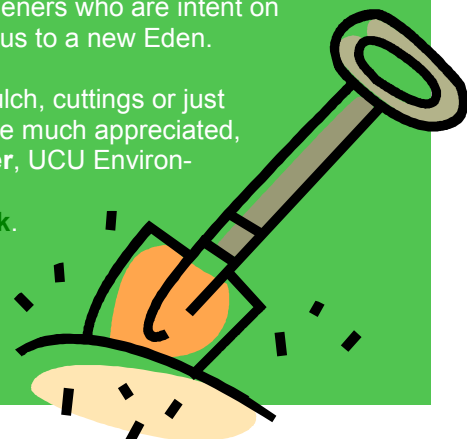
Greening Birkbeck



No alert Birkbeckian can have failed to marvel at the verdant vegetable patch springing up beside the Clore Centre. But several other sites have been earmarked for greening by a small band of guerilla gardeners who are intent on converting our campus to a new Eden.

Offers of muscle, mulch, cuttings or just good company will be much appreciated, contact **Kezia Barker**, UCU Environment Officer email k.barker@bbk.ac.uk.

Get digging!



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING TUESDAY 7TH JUNE 2011

B01 Basement, Clore Centre, 12.30-2pm

The Annual General Meeting of Birkbeck UCU will take place on Tuesday 7th June. Be there. The AGM is the most important branch meeting of the year where we elect our committee.

Light refreshments from 12.30pm. Come and meet other UCU colleagues, hear our Regional Officer speak on the campaign over pensions and pay and have your say in UCU's strategy for the coming year.

If you are interested in becoming a committee member or departmental contact, please get in touch with the current holder via www.bbk.ac.uk/ucu.

YOUR UNION NEEDS YOU

Your local Birkbeck UCU contacts

For contact details of all UCU Committee Members and a full list of UCU Departmental Representatives, please see the UCU web-pages at: www.bbk.ac.uk/ucu

Your elected UCU officers & Committee members are:

Joint Presidents - Kate Purcell (academic related), Mike Berlin (academic/sessional staff), Richard Clarke (academic); **Secretary** Patricia Costall; **Membership** - Keith Mannock; **Treasurer** - Trevor Fenner; **Welfare** - Linda Milbourne; **Equality** - Rebecca Gumbrell-McCormick (VP Academic); **Pensions** - Nick Pronger (VP Academic Related); **Health & Safety** - Richard Carabine; **Environment** - Kezia Barker (VP Academic); **Committee** - James Brown, Laura Salisbury, Dominic Janes, Stephen Parrott, Annette McCone, Alex Colas, John Kelly

UCU Departmental Contacts:

Business Relations - Warren Oliver; **External Relations** - Annette McCone; **ITS** - Alan Forth; **Registry** - Simon Eades; **Biological & Chemical Sciences** - Jane Nicklin; **Computer Science** - Keith Mannock; **Economics, Maths & Stats** - Nigel Foster; **English & Humanities** - Jo Winning; **Geography, Environment & Development Studies** - Paul Watt; **History of Art & Screen Media** - Patrizia di Bello; **History, Classics & Archaeology** - Eleni Liarou; **Iberian & Latin American Studies** - Carmen Fracchia; **Law** - Daniel Monk; **Management** - Sean Hamil; **Media & Cultural Studies** - Tim Markham; **Philosophy** - Sam Fremantle; **Politics** - Alejandro Colas; **Stratford** - Garmon Ap Garth.



UCU is the largest trade union and professional association for academics, lecturers, trainers, researchers and academic-related staff working in further and higher education throughout the UK.

Join UCU today: www.ucu.org.uk/join

Birkbeck UCU | www.bbk.ac.uk/ucu/ | ucu@bbk.ac.uk