

## 'Unashamed Exploitation' in Scottish Higher Education Sector

On Tuesday 1 April (when the 9.30am flight to Heathrow was due to take off at 2pm due to fog in London it did seem like an April Fool's Day joke) Aberdeen UCU Branch Secretary Rachel Shanks gave evidence to the Scottish Affairs Select Committee on zero hours contracts along with UCU Regional Official Mary Senior and Edinburgh UCU member Justine Seran. The one-hour session went on for over two hours and the Committee seemed impressed by the speakers but also appalled at what they had to say.

Following our evidence session, higher education has its own sections within the Committee's interim report (pp. 22-24 and 29-31) and Mary, Justine and Rachel are quoted quite a few times. There are also specific recommendations with regard to the higher education sector:

'38. We are alarmed by the extent to which zero hours contracts are used by Scotland's higher education sector. In some cases universities are being kept going by a staff who earn less than the minimum wage. The system of employment appears to us one of unashamed exploitation. This is unfair to dedicated teaching staff and may also compromise the quality of teaching that students receive. *Scottish higher education institutions must review the terms of employment of their teaching staff and make sure that levels of pay accurately reflect the number of hours that must be worked to fulfil contracted duties. In addition, we recommend that HMRC investigate the use of zero hours contracts in the higher education sector in Scotland in order to determine whether employers have broken minimum wage legislation.*'\*

At the moment we do not know if there will be a specific response from the government or if it will be part of their wider consultation on zero hours contracts.

Aberdeen UCU is currently working with other campus trade unions and management on a Zero Hours Working Group.

Rachel Shanks

\*Scottish Affairs Committee - Tenth Report. Zero Hours Contracts in Scotland: Interim Report', 9 April 2014, p.24. Emphasis by the author. The full report is available at this address: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmselect/654/65402.htm>



*Pictured, left to right, in the House of Commons: Justine Seran (Edinburgh UCU), Mary Senior (UCU Scotland), Ian Davidson (Chair of the Scottish Affairs Select Committee) and Rachel Shanks (Aberdeen UCU).*

## A Breath of Fresh Air

AUCU colleagues will be relieved to see the reality about exploitation and the whole crisis in HE being made public before the Scottish Affairs Select Committee. The footage is available at this address:

<http://www.parliamentlive.tv/Main/Player.aspx?meetingId=15248>

In this recording, our Branch Secretary, Rachel Shanks, and her colleagues give an eloquent, frank and revealing account of the frequently deplorable circumstances for university employees and they provide a breath of fresh air amongst the fog and babel of UCEA's press statements.

### Also in this edition of AGORA:

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## Flying the Flag for Palestine in Aberdeen, 29 November 2013



On 29 November, the UN's International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, Aberdeen UCU and Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign co-hosted an evening event with a variety of guest speakers. The event was chaired by Fiona Napier (SPSC Aberdeen).

Rafat Abuahaban, a Palestinian activist, was beamed in live via Skype and provided an account of the situation in Palestine. His contribution was supplemented by a short film which documented the hardship of daily life in the besieged Gaza.

Sheikh Ibrahim Alwawi (Imam from the Aberdeen Mosque) drew on his own experiences of living in Gaza and spoke movingly of the family losses he had suffered as a result of the conflict.

Elizabeth Stitt (St Andrews Education for Palestinian Students) provided a report about the scheme at the University of St Andrews whose fee-waiver enabled postgraduate study at St Andrews for two students from the West Bank.

Mike Arnott (Dundee TUC) provided an interesting account of the circumstances surrounding Dundee's twinning with Nablus and the solidarity actions that have made this link meaningful. The writer Hilda Meers (Scottish Jews for a Just Peace) was prevented from attending, but had sent a message of support. One of Meers's poems, 'After the Lebanon War', was read out on her behalf. Anne Begg (Aberdeen South Labour MP) sent a video message of support in which she highlighted the need for Palestinian self-determination and independence.

Aberdeen North Labour MP Frank Doran then gave an informative account of his recent trip to Palestine. He described, amongst other things, the treatment of Palestinian children at the hands of Israeli courts, treatment which, he said, he as a former lawyer would describe as 'inhuman'. He also cited the example of the privations of Beduin Arabs who had been forcibly resettled by the Israeli state.

Tommy Campbell (UNITE), a veteran from the anti-apartheid movement, was present in the form of a video recording. In a broad historical panorama he linked the International Brigades' support for Spanish democracy against Franco with the campaign against apartheid in South Africa and with the support for Palestine. He emphasized that Aberdeen had a proud history of being associated with campaigns for democracy.

The series of talks was concluded by Karolin Hijazi (Aberdeen UCU) who argued that the Israeli occupation and human rights abuses were only possible due to the silence and implicit support of western countries.

The evening concluded with questions from the floor and with the showing of a brief extract from the documentary *Children in Chains* by Jon Pullman.



*Above: Karolin Hijazi addresses the audience.*

For more information on related projects and campaigns visit:

Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign  
<http://www.scottishpsc.org.uk/>

St Andrews Education for Palestinian Students (STEPS)  
<http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/admissions/pg/financialinformation/pgscholarships/steps/>

## Aberdeen UCU and Holocaust Memorial Day in Aberdeen, 27 January 2014

On Monday 27 January 2014 a group of staff, students and members of the public assembled in the James MacKay Hall to mark Holocaust Memorial Day and to commemorate the victims of National Socialist persecuton and of the Holocaust.



*Above: Paul Mealor, University Professor of Composition.*

The event, a musical memorial, was organised and delivered by a collaboration between Aberdeen UCU (in particular by Sue Bateman), the Chaplaincy Centre (Rev Dr Easter Smart), the Student Association, as well as by the University of Aberdeen. The renowned composer, University Professor of Composition and AUCU member Paul Mealor provided a fitting musical framework to the evening, while Chris Fynsk, Professor of Comparative Literature and Modern Thought, delivered a thought-provoking recital from an extract from a letter by the Buchenwald survivor Robert Antelme.

AUCU supported this commemoration, and Aberdeen UCU Branch Administrator, Sue Bateman, who was instrumental in the organisation of the first Holocaust Memorial at Aberdeen in 2013, again provided much of the organisational support to ensure that the Memorial event ran smoothly.

As the University of Aberdeen—for some reason—very disappointingly omitted any mention of AUCU in its publicity for the event, AGORA would like to take this opportunity to express its grateful thanks both to AUCU Committee for again supporting the Holocaust Memorial Day at Aberdeen and in particular to Sue Bateman for all her hard work in helping to make the Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration the dignified event which it should be.

### **UCU Scotland President Dave Anderson Addresses AUCU General Meeting**



At the AUCU General Meeting on 23 April Dave Anderson, UCU Scotland President and UCU Higher Education Committee member (pictured above), spoke about the pay dispute, the background to the current pay offer and about the ballot. Dave also spent a lengthy period answering questions from the floor.

## Gender Differences in Sickness Absence

Aberdeen UCU has recently had sight of a report produced by Human Resources which provides data and analysis of the last five years of sickness absence throughout the University workforce. One of the main concerns arising from the report is the disparity between men's and women's sickness absence rates.

Over the last five years, women were found to have taken sick leave significantly more often than men, with female staff being absent for an average of 7 days per year compared to 4.3 days for males. The report recommends further investigation through staff surveys and focus groups to uncover and address the reasons for the gender imbalance.

The University's Special Leave policy stipulates that staff are entitled to a reasonable amount of leave to resolve short-term difficulties with caring responsibilities, to be agreed at the discretion of line managers. One of the reasons suggested by the authors of the report to explain the gender differences in sickness absence rates is that women may be more likely to use sickness absence as a leave mechanism when taking time off for caring responsibilities for children or elderly parents. If this is the case, then perhaps the Special Leave policy is failing to meet the needs of staff with dependants.

AUCU is interested to know about members' experiences of a) the Special Leave policy and b) using sick leave to meet the demands of caring responsibilities. The AUCU Women's Group is especially interested in exploring the reasons behind the gender disparity; members (male and female) are encouraged to contact AUCU's women's rep ([fiona.stewart@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:fiona.stewart@abdn.ac.uk)) with their views and comments.

Fiona Stewart

### Curiously Little-known Fact

As a consequence of an email sent on 16 March 2013 by the CASS College Registrar, it transpired that a number of members of staff were surprisingly unaware that 'personal belonging are not covered by the University's insurance [...], this includes items such as books which members of staff may be using at the University.' Instead, AU has the 'expectation' that employees themselves should shoulder the insurance costs.

Anything else they'd like us to pay for?



*Left: The University has helpfully posted this sign—or ones fairly similar to it—all over campus.*

## Snakes and Ladders?

UCU is currently balloting its members on whether to accept or reject the employers' pay offer of 2% as of August 2014 and 1% for last year. As AGORA goes to press the outcome of this ballot is not yet known, although it is clear what is being offered:

(87% of 2009 pay) plus (1% imposed increase 2013-14) minus (2.5% RPI inflation 2013-14) plus (2% pay offer August 2014) minus (unknown inflation rate in 2014-15) equals more or less where we started. Or worse.

We at Aberdeen, however, are not *quite* where we started. As a result of the industrial action and of some of the less than savoury aspects of AU Management's cack-handed reactions to the dispute, we have seen a healthy increase in our membership. On behalf of AUCU Committee, AGORA extends a warm welcome to all our new AUCU colleagues!

We at Aberdeen are also not quite where we started in as far as the conflict has revealed that, far from tagging reluctantly along with the rest of the UCEA pack on national pay bargaining (if 'bargaining' is the right word), in some respects University of Aberdeen Management has actually been leading the pack, as illustrated by Management's unilateral imposition of a non-negotiated 1% pay 'rise' in December 2013 and by Management's vigorous attempts to prevent AUCU colleagues taking industrial action.

We have, therefore, learnt something about the nature of our employer and about that employer's attitude to what had hitherto been, arguably, its best asset: its staff.

Whatever the outcome of the ballot, industrial action has also revealed an admirable collegiality and solidarity among AUCU members and a determination to stand up both to these year-on-year real-terms pay cuts and to those who would seek to force these cuts upon us.

Steven Lawrie

## Not Real Salaries: Innovative New Pay Cuts at British Universities?

After UUK's recent barking mad thumbs up to sexist gender apartheid at UK universities, UUK has, according to the *Times Higher*, now launched its next initiative, this time—and there will be no surprises here—it's that old management favourite: cutting the payroll.

In case anyone missed Jack Grove's article in the *Times Higher*, the depressing news this time is that, according to Grove, UUK has got it into its collective head to 'review [...] efficiencies' (translation from the *Management Speak to English Dictionary*: think up cunning new ways to further slash pay) in higher education and to explore the benefits of hiring academics on nine-month contracts.

The committee exploring this innovative approach to pay cuts is being chaired by our very own Principal, Professor Ian Diamond, who is cited in the *Times Higher* as suggesting that the "record surpluses" seen by universities were "not real surpluses", and that 'he wanted to see if shaking up long-standing academic practices could lead to more savings for the sector'—one assumes he means that risible old-fashioned academic practice of paying staff a proper salary.

But before university employees burst into 'Gaudeamus igitur' and joyfully throw their mortarboards into the air at the prospect of three months free of Principals, Vice-Principals and sundry Senior Management teams, it should be pointed out that it is unlikely that that particular class of university employee will be participating in the annual three-month redundancy wheeze.

The implications of nine-month contracts are not only downright horrific for any member of staff forced to scratch out an existence for three long unpaid months of summer starvation—while presumably remaining (much like the victims of zero-hours-contracts serfdom) 'on standby' for each coming academic year—but the more general implications concerning the nature of higher education are highly unsettling, too, for one wonders what right-minded student would embark on the three years negative equity slog of a PhD with only the abysmal prospect of a 75% salary, which itself has the unwelcome tendency to be cut by university managements (the last five years of real-terms salary cuts refer).

What, one further wonders, will become of the much lauded link between teaching and research when academic staff are preoccupied with summertime job seeker activities? And what, too, one wonders, will become of the already sagging morale and of the tattered remnants of goodwill at British universities staffed by a nine-month-contract pool of casualised labourers?

The UUK study Chair, according to the *Times Higher*, wished further to investigate the questions 'when do we teach, how much do we teach and how long is the academic year', questions which, at least as far as the

author of this article can see, scarcely require the collective cogitation of a committee, but lest the committee finds itself labouring over, for example, the final question, the answer might well be that the academic year is exactly the same length as the mortgage repayments year, exactly the same length as the gas bill year and exactly the same length as the electricity bill year. That would be 12 months.

In case you can stomach reading more about nine-month contracts:

<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/news/uuk-review-to-look-at-nine-month-contracts/2012408.article>

Steven Lawrie

### 'Efficiency' and Nine-month Contracts

You can only measure efficiency if you can measure inputs and outputs, and if you have some idea of what an 'ideal' relationship is between these—or at least an idea of how you can improve the relationship you have discovered. We can't easily measure outputs—these are to do with teaching quality, student satisfaction, and other longer term and much more amorphous contributions.

The only input measure that is mentioned in the THE article, 'UUK review to look at nine-month contracts', is cost, and this can be very misleading. It's easy to reduce costs in ways that *reduce* efficiency—e.g. by buying in poorer quality materials or labour (in a manufacturing context). Nine-month contracts are likely to cause this kind of problem.

We can only address problems like those mentioned in the previous paragraph if we understand the relationship between our activities and our outcomes. We don't—and we don't even very seriously try to. For instance, no very useful information is collected about what academics do, or about how what they do contributes to outcomes. In most professional organisations staff will do some time-recording against projects, so that it is clear what real project costs are. Without this, we're guessing. Staff may have reservations about engaging with this kind of measurement, but my opinion is that our employers are much more worried about what such measurements would reveal than we would be...

The nine-month contract idea is bizarre for other reasons, as well. It would only save money if other work was available in the slack months. Otherwise it's just a way of driving down wages (and so of input quality). Since the other work would probably be in the same institution (preparing the material to be taught in the 'working' months comes to mind...) it's hard to see what the gain would be.

I'm not sure what is meant by 'teaching only' contracts. At Aberdeen University we have agreed that 'teaching and scholarship' is a career path, so we already have that kind of teaching only contract anyway.

AGORA's Time and Motion Correspondent

## Aberdeen Tops Scottish League Table

Overall Remuneration of Scottish Principals\*

Aberdeen	£303,000.00
Glasgow	£300,000.00
Strathclyde	£290,000.00
Edinburgh	£285,000.00
Abertay	£273,000.00
St Andrews	£271,000.00 (ca.)

Etc., right the way down to a laughable £140,000.00

\*Source: 'NUS Scotland Briefing', April 2013 (these figures will, of course, have increased substantially since 2013)

<http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/pageassets/campaigns/nations/scotland/priorityscotland/briefings/Principals-Pay-at-Scottish-Universities.pdf>

**But Aberdeen still has room for improvement in UK-wide terms:\*\***

LSE	£466,000.00
Open University	£407,000.00
Birmingham University	£400,000.00 (basic)
UCL	£365,432.00***
Southampton	£333,515.00
Cambridge	£334,000.00
Russel Group average	£318,500.00
UWE	£314,632.00

Etc., in the same spirit...

\*\*Sources: *The Guardian*, 3.3.2014, *The Independent*, 2.1.2014 and *The Telegraph*, 22.12.2013.

\*\*\*Not bad going for a 3-day week.

### The Critical Student Voice is Alive and Well

For coverage of recent developments from the student perspective, see *The Tab*:

<http://aberdeen.tab.co.uk/2014/02/10/aberdeen-lecturers-forced-to-strike-for-third-time-this-year-over-pay-but-principal-pockets-an-extra-25/>

## Four Legs Good, Two Legs Better

From our animal farmyard correspondent

University Managements in the UK are currently (April 2014) still attempting to dictate yet another real-terms pay cut for their long-suffering employees in the form of a 1% pay 'rise' for 2013-14.

Meanwhile, the celebrations continue over at Mr Jones's farmhouse...

In 2012-13 Steve Chapman (Heriot-Watt) hit the jackpot with a juicy 24% pay rise.\*

Runner-up was Joan Stringer (Edinburgh Napier) who received a less juicy 11% pay rise.\*

Seamus McDaid (West of Scotland University) came in third with his 8% rise.\*

And, amongst the 'also rans' in 2012-13 the average increase for Scottish Principals was more than 4%.\*

It remains unclear whether these shameless salary hikes were real shameless salary hikes or not real shameless salary hikes.

\*Source: *The Herald*, 20.1.14

<http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/education/university-principals-accused-of-greed-over-pay-rises.23214992>

### Redeployment

Is your post or your funding coming close to an end? If so, you can apply for other posts, and be interviewed, in advance of the general job advert going out. This is a significant advantage negotiated by UCU and has helped many people retain employment here.

The time window for those applications is extremely short, so you should try to keep checking the list of redeployment vacancies on the website <https://static.wcn.co.uk/company/aberdeenuni/redeployment.html> or register for automated email alerts (just click 'Register for Job Alerts' in that same website).

Sometimes there are suitable posts organised through different Schools. Several people have recently lost out on these redeployment opportunities because the deadline passed before they noticed the suitable post.

### 'Murky and Unaccountable'

Universities tight-lipped on vice-chancellor pay increases, see:

<http://www.independent.co.uk/student/news/murky-and-unaccountable-universities-tightlipped-on-vicechancellor-pay-increases-9246866.html>

## Aberdeen University Tops the List of Punitive Pay-dockers

(but for purely alphabetical reasons)

In response to punitive local pay docking policies (which UCU considers to be illegal), ten UCU branches escalated the two-hour strike of 10 February to a whole day. Aberdeen University was amongst those institutions who, in a blatant attempt to break the strike, sought to intimidate AUCU members with the threat of docking a whole day's pay for a two-hour strike. Aberdeen University, along with a handful of other punitive pay-dockers, realised its threat and is consequently facing a number of official grievances from affected members of Aberdeen University staff.

### Rogues' Gallery of Punitive Pay-dockers:

**Aberdeen**  
Bradford  
East London  
West of Scotland  
Greenwich  
Staffordshire  
Leeds College of Art  
Manchester Met  
Nottingham Trent  
Robert Gordon  
Queen Mary UL

### Compare and Contrast:

Aberdeen University graduate attribute: 'An understanding of social and civic responsibilities, and of the rights of individuals and groups.'

'[...] If you engage in two hours strike action but choose to undertake work during the rest of that day, [...] those services you do provide on the strike day [...] will be voluntary on your part and will not be paid.' (Email from AU Senior Management, 21.1.14)

### Compare and Contrast:

Aberdeen University graduate attribute: 'An awareness and appreciation of ethical and moral issues.'

Principals' soaring salaries and university employees' perennial real-terms pay cuts.

## Shuttle Bus Restart?

In April we learnt that the University was tendering for the restitution of the 30-minute intra-campus shuttle bus.

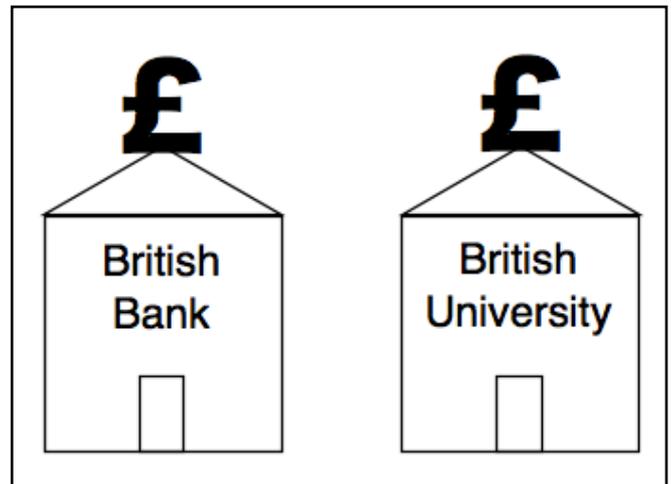
Aberdeen UCU representation has had a hand in the reinstatement of the shuttle bus where members' views have been regularly and rigorously expressed at the Advisory Group on Sustainability and Social Responsibility, at informal meetings on the issue at IMS and in emails by our Environment Rep Professor Adam Price

## AUCU Annual General Meeting

Wednesday, 7 May, 1-2pm, New King's 14

### Spot-the-Difference Competition

Back by popular demand!—Or at least: back. AGORA's spot-the-difference competition this time poses the particularly ticklish challenge of spotting the difference between the two images in the illustration below. The winner will receive a major prize (which, of course, is a not real major prize). Answers on a postcard to... etc.



See also: Aditya Chakraborty, 'Meet the new breed of fat cat: the university vice-chancellor. Never mind the bankers—university bosses are lining their pockets like never before', *The Guardian*, 3.3.2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/mar/03/new-breed-fat-cats-university-boss-vice-chancellors>

## Farewell Celebration for Sue Bateman



On Thursday 3 April members of AUCU gathered at Rishi's Restaurant for a farewell celebration to thank Sue Bateman for all her good work as Branch Administrator over the last three and a half years.

Sue was delighted with the gifts with which she was presented and she later indicated her intention to buy a flute from John Lewis with the vouchers. 'I'm going to have a bit more spare time and I want to spend some of that learning to play a new instrument and to enjoy music again', she said.

Over the past years Sue has been an efficient, innovative, committed and seemingly tireless AUCU colleague and one who, despite the pressures of the job, managed to retain a healthy sense of humour.

AGORA would like to repeat the sentiments already expressed elsewhere and thank Sue for all her sterling work and wish her all the best both for her new job and for her musical ambitions.

### Susan Melvin: New Branch Administrator



Following an interview process, the branch has appointed Susan Melvin as Sue Bateman's successor. Some members may recall that Susan worked for us previously and so AUCU Committee is confident that Susan will be an equally able administrator.



AGORA continues to welcome offers of articles from members for forthcoming editions.

The views expressed in AGORA by individual contributors may not necessarily reflect the views of AUCU Committee.

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## New Cost-cutting Policy Forces Aberdeen University Employees to Look Like Skinflints

Below: AGORA's handy cut-out-and-keep leaflet which could be given to waiting staff etc., instead of the customary tip. This leaflet may prove particularly useful as the season for dining out with External Examiners approaches and AUCU colleagues may be musing on how best to explain to the External Examiner that, in order to avoid leaving a tip, everyone is going to have to do a runner. There is, of course, no need to point out that the University of Aberdeen still has lots of money available to pay for unnecessary sandwich buffets prior to Senate meetings—while it cuts the income of waiting staff etc. (some of whom are AU students). In case AUCU colleagues wrongly think they have spotted a belated April Fool's Day joke here: they have not. Gratuities will not be reimbursed by AU. See [http://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/documents/policy-zone-finance/2013\\_Expenses\\_\\_Benefits\\_Policy\\_Summarised.pdf](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/documents/policy-zone-finance/2013_Expenses__Benefits_Policy_Summarised.pdf), Section 31c.

**Dear waiter/ waitress/ kitchen staff/ reception staff/ taxi driver/ anyone else whom it might concern,**

**Sadly, my / our employer, the University of Aberdeen, will not fund gratuities given by those on official University of Aberdeen business.**

**I / we are aware that tips traditionally constitute a part of your wage, that you are probably on the minimum wage anyway and that you doubtless feel deeply cheated by the University of Aberdeen's tight-fisted policy.**

**I / we are unable to subsidise the University of Aberdeen by paying you a tip out of my / our own pocket due to the fact that my/ our employer has cut my /our pay to 87% of its 2009 level.**

**Thank you for your understanding/ disdain.**