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# ◆ AGORA ◆

*Newsletter of the Aberdeen University and College Union*

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Volume 14, No. 2

February 2008

## Car Parking Charges?



*Paradise? An unaccustomed view of the Taylor car park.*

### **Editorial**

The University of Aberdeen has indicated its intention to introduce car parking charges and has thereby provoked, amongst other things, record attendance at a Foresterhill GM as well as a welcome flood of letters to AGORA from Aberdeen UCU members. AGORA has always seen itself as a forum for the views and concerns of UCU members and AGORA's editors are delighted to see the opinions of members being expressed so fully on these pages (**letters to AGORA**, pp. 11 ff.).

Looking a little beyond more obvious matters such as money, Council planning permission and 'Sustainable Transport Plans', **Adam Price** and **Steven Lawrie** provide contrasting responses to the question of car parking charges and the environment (pp.2ff.).

Elsewhere on campus there may be unpleasant changes afoot at the Rocking Horse Nursery. **Jolene Galbreath** analyses developments on pp.7 ff.

Welcome to AGORA,  
in which:

environmental scenarios are  
found to be

**profoundly  
shocking**

the future of the Rocking  
Horse Nursery is found to be

**at risk**

a plea is made for

**merciless  
nationalization**

and for an

**on-site car  
crusher**

and the number of letters to  
AGORA

**breaks all  
previous  
records**

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## Parking Charges: Pro

The University of Aberdeen has indicated its intention to introduce car parking charges as a result of its review of the sustainable travel plan. I strongly support the idea because it will raise awareness among car users of their personal responsibility with respect to the quality of life of everyone else.

Just after New Year I attended a PhD student presentation on the impact of climate change on agriculture in the UK (within our School we have one of the members of the UN Inter-government Panel on Climate Change who were collectively awarded the Nobel prize; and a UCU member as well) and all projected scenarios for as near as 2050 are profoundly shocking. Even the most benign predictions modelling a rapid CO<sub>2</sub> stabilisation (taking emissions back to 1990 levels) indicate that most parts of Britain will suffer agriculturally significant droughts at least every 5 years. This presentation mirrors catastrophic predictions I have seen in research visits to North Africa, Mediterranean Europe and the Indian subcontinent.

Because I live within 2 miles from work, I cycle in every day. In fact, I love cycling as it is the best way to get around a town like Aberdeen. I am also a car user. In fact I love driving. My wife, who works 9 miles away, drives daily. It saddens me to think that the enjoyment and easy-living that cars offer is under threat, but that's the way it has to be. We have to do something about CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, and if it requires some policies that at first glance appear draconian, so what. This is serious, very, very serious!!

Opponents, too, raise valid arguments against charging which should not be ignored. I have considerable sympathy with the argument that charging preferentially hurts the less well paid. I would argue, however, that this is a justification for a differential charge based on pay or for increased salary at the bottom of the scale, not for neglect of the environment. But let's not kid ourselves, the people who will ultimately pay (quite probably with their lives) if no change is achieved globally will

be people in the developing world who are much poorer than any of those facing charges.

The second point is that there is no alternative to taking the car. While I profoundly agree that public transport in this country is a national disgrace, and the Government has failed us in its role at facilitating an easy change to a greener life-style, individuals must also, ultimately, take some responsibility for the choices they make that affect the environment. And I suspect (hope) that, if there is greater demand for public transport then the private sector will begin to provide it even if the Government cannot.

Awareness must be raised. Lifestyles must be

changed. The hurt is trivial compared to the consequences of not getting to grips with our own personal and combined impact on the planet.

Adam Price  
School of Biological Sciences

**'[...] all projected scenarios for as near as 2050 are profoundly shocking'**



*The best way to get around a town like Aberdeen.*

## Parking Charges: Contra

The University, as Steve Cannon informs us in his email of 16.1.8., intends via its 'Sustainable Travel Plan' to 'promote a wider range of more environmentally-friendly and healthy travel options.'

It is possible that the University's introduction of parking charges is intended as a contribution to saving the environment. It is equally possible to argue that Management is merely exploiting the current hysteria in Britain (about a problem that much of the rest of Europe has been aware of for at least 30 years) in the expectation that car owners will be on the back foot because political correctness these days dictates that we all pretend to a very much belated greenery and will consequently be prepared to cough up our cash into the University coffers.

It is worth remembering that University Management has already been trying to introduce car parking charges for many, many years. (As an aside, one wonders how many members of the University Management Group went home on a bus after making the decision to charge us.)

Beyond Steve Cannon's email alerting us to UMG's unilateral decision to impose charges on us, we have as yet no details as to the extent of these charges. One current rumour is of a charge of £2.00 per day, but that is nothing more than a rumour and it is unclear whether this, should it be the case, would mean a per annum flat rate of £2.00 x 365 = £730.00 or whether we would be charged on a day-to-day basis. The latter scenario would, of course, lead to all manner of complications. Academic colleagues would be eagerly vying to avoid Saturday exam invigilation (which would cost them an extra £2.00 to conduct) and to have all their teaching commitments and committee meetings take place on only one day a week (thereby saving £8.00/week, £32.00/month).

The eventuality of daily charges might encourage Academic members of staff not to travel by bus, but rather to work at home whenever possible and thereby safeguard as much of their salaries as possible. Daily charges would of course financially



*Bus stop on St. Machar Drive: Just the ticket if you're after that windswept, wet, cold look. There's no bus shelter, oh, and no timetable either.*

disadvantage any colleague who *has* to be on campus every day. They would also disadvantage hourly paid staff, who, say, on a particular day work only one hour and lose £2.00 of whatever it is they are paid for that one hour.

Doubtless, these charges will be a nice little earner, providing the University does not squander the same proportion of charges revenue that Ken Livingstone has spent in London on the technology to

observe, control and fine drivers. If each parking space has the potential to generate an estimated income of £520.00 (52 x 5 x £2.00), on the basis of ca. 700 parking spaces, the University could reap from its employees in just one year an additional income of £364,000.00, a tidy sum. Over a ten-year period that would constitute £3.64 million of our money. This actually sounds like an enticement to build *more* parking spaces, since it is the next best thing to printing money.

**'Doubtless, these charges will be a nice little earner'**

The prospect of these charges is particularly annoying when one considers what Management may be spending our money on. UCU was told at JNCC that the parking charges would be accompanied by other facilities such as shuttle buses to Foresterhill, bicycle lockers and parking for special groups (e.g. the disabled), but one struggles to see how such innovations (in as far as they do not exist already anyway) could account for anything other than a small percentage of the overall income generated. A cynic—or a realist—might rightly conclude that this tax on car drivers is on one hand a juicy income generation project.

The last time this money-raising idea was brought up by Management at JNCC a few years ago it was flanked by some arguments about green transport policy and the requirements of the Council. The argument turned out to be misleading in as far as the Council did not prescribe parking charges *per se* as part of a green transport policy, as one quick telephone call to the Council revealed. It would be possible to see the matter the other way around and argue that drivers be not penalized, but rather that those who leave the car at home be presented at *University expense* with a free bus pass or a bicycle. This would, of course, torpedo the enticing prospect of revenue generation.

Parking charges, of course, cannot be interpreted solely as a lucrative source of income, since they are also on the other hand an instrument forming part of the University's 'Sustainable Travel Plan', the latter a prerequisite for (and here comes the important bit) Council planning permission for capital projects such as the new library, so that in effect: we pay, our employer gets planning permission. As an aside, in the less hysterically, more maturely green Germany planning permission for, amongst other things, public buildings has for years been widely dependent on the simultane-

ous construction of parking spaces whose number is commensurate with the function of the building. But clearly a pragmatic and reasoned long-term approach cannot be expected in Britain, in a country which has woken up to environmentalism 30 years after almost everyone else and is now running around in a pious panic like a headless green chicken.



*For bus times just buy an environmentally unfriendly mobile phone.*

Charges such as those envisaged would be acceptable if we were all on the salaries of GPs or oilies, but we are not (at least, most of us are not). They would also be acceptable if we lived in a country with a functioning public transport system. Unfortunately, in the author's opinion at least, the only way to experience a well functioning public transport system is to leave Britain and go to... well, more or less any other country in Europe.

On the occasions when I have travelled by bus in Aberdeen I have stood semi-patiently (in the rain and wind and cold) at shelterless bus stops. At many of these stops no timetable is provided (but interestingly the fares are advertised, I wonder if that says something about priorities?). Instead one is advised to 'text' such and such a number. OK, so one returns home, gets in the car, drives to Comet, buys a mobile phone, drives back home and then sends a text? Great.

I have repeatedly waited for late buses (as far as it is possible to work out if they are late, given the absence of a timetable) and thereby had the opportunity to discuss with other vexed travellers the phenomenon of delays and have concluded as a result that my limited experience of buses was not necessarily untypical.

When I complain (and I am usually the only one who does, everyone else is used to it) to the driver I get ludicrous excuses such as 'Oh, I picked the bus up late.' None of us, whether employed by the University or elsewhere, can afford to enter into a daily transport lottery and risk arriving late for work or for work appointments.

I have recently had two foreign visitors who entrusted their respective transport modalities to the bus service (if 'service' is the right word) and were much amazed by the unreliability of the same. The record for lateness was 40 minutes (for a particular bus service that is supposed to run 3 times an hour). Last year I had a colleague who lived in Cruden Bay and, being German and therefore green, that colleague resolved to travel by public transport, foolishly, however, assuming that the public transport system in Britain would function as in Germany, i.e. properly. My colleague eventually gave up after the bus drove past her on several different occasions. Reportedly, the bus was full only as far as Bridge of Don and the bus company would not put on additional buses. Said green colleague returned, not surprisingly, to travelling by car.

It is impossible to discuss car parking charges—in Aberdeen or anywhere else—without reflecting on the state of public transport in Britain, and it is equally impossible to reflect on the state of public transport without recognizing the need for an integrated transport system throughout Britain which does indeed provide a service, and such a thing is unlikely to transpire until a merciless nationalization of all public transport is completed.

The state of public transport might leave some of us only with the option of cycling to and from work, but the best response to the idea to get 'on yer bike' is an exact echo of that very phrase. There is nothing 'healthy' about cycling in Aberdeen and I could cite four examples of colleagues and friends knocked from their bicycles by cars. Some ended up in an unhealthy state in ARI. The historical development of the built environment and the narrow roads (see College Bounds, Bedford Road etc.) frequently preclude the construction of distinct cycle paths (separated *completely* from motor traffic). The lethargy of successive Councils in respect of cohesive road planning and construction (which could have included distinct cycle paths) now means that any remedial measures to alle-

viate the traffic problem are hopelessly late. Such measures should have been initiated 30 years ago when Aberdeen's rapid growth began. The much belated green flourishes appearing on Aberdeen City Council do not conceal the red flushes of embarrassment at the fact that it has taken successive Councils 30 years to wake up to the fact that just as Aberdeen has grown so too has the number of road users.

If the University has a problem with parking, one of the solutions, besides the incentive-based approach mentioned above, would be the acquisition of an on-site car crusher, into which should be placed: 1. all student cars 2. all vehicles belonging to nearby non-staff residents who park on campus because it is handy 3. All vehicles belonging to staff who cannot park properly and take up two spaces instead of one.

The University's 'corporate responsibility' in respect of the environment is cited in connection with parking charges, while the University Environment Office aims,

**'It is impossible to discuss car parking charges—in Aberdeen or anywhere else—without reflecting on the state of public transport in Britain'**

amongst other things, to 'ensure students and staff learn to develop an awareness of, and have a respect for, the environment we live in'. No, I am sorry, but neither I nor presumably others, require to be

educated by my/their employer about the environment, thank you very much. If my employer were serious about such things, double glazing to avoid heat loss, and central heating which is individually adjustable from room to room, would have been installed in the Taylor Building (and elsewhere) decades ago—about the same time the environmental movement was developing elsewhere in Europe—as it is, one regulates the room temperature in Taylor by either opening or closing the window! (a system I first encountered in the now defunct German Democratic Republic, but which reportedly still exists in some Eastern European states). If the University takes its environmental responsibility seriously, as it suggests, one wonders why a major programme for the double-glazing of existing buildings was not embarked upon before the construction of a new library was even considered.

We are all already aware that by standing patiently in the rain day after day waiting for

public transport and by thereby increasing the profits of transport businesses we will each individually lengthen the life expectancy of the human race by one nanosecond, leaving aside the consideration that in at the latest 7.5 billion years the sun, along with it the earth, will cease to exist anyway (but that is just a private point which has nothing to do with the green views of my employer, the same way as my private views have nothing to do with my employer).

'Are you able to do your bit?' (www.abdn.ac.uk/estates/environment/) the Environment Office asks in a curious linguistic flashback to the collective forced optimism and team spirit of the last war (no, not the Blair one, I mean the Hitler one). Presumably, the implication is that in environmental terms we are all in the same boat. Well, it is certainly true that *some* of us are all in the same small boat, frantically bailing out water; but whether we like it or not we are about to be swamped by two passing supertankers, one is American, the other Chinese.

The answer to the question above, in respect of transport—assuming of course that one feels in any way obliged to provide an answer—will depend on individual circumstances, such as our places of residence and the convenience or inconvenience of using public transport. It will also depend on our reaction to the parking charge bludgeon which is, it would appear principally for the sake of planning permission, currently being swung menacingly over our heads.

Steven Lawrie

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## Catering Forum

At a meeting in mid-January between Campus Services and Trade Unions it was agreed to establish a Catering Forum whose aims are to improve communications on matters relating to University catering and to seek opinions on future developments. The Forum, which is to report back to the Catering & Student Accommodation Project Board, holds its first meeting in mid-February, a meeting which will be attended amongst others by two UCU representatives, Mike Craig and David McCausland. If you have any views on University catering please send them to Mike (m.craig@abdn.ac.uk, tel (27)2594).

## Motions at Foresterhill General Meeting

The following motions for submission to UCUS Congress were passed at an AUCU General Meeting at Foresterhill on 6.2.2008:

'Congress instructs UCU Scotland Executive, as Kosova moves towards independence, to make all reasonable efforts to renew and advance the supportive links with the university teachers' union there, which were established (on the initiative of Aberdeen AUT) by AUT Scotland in the late 1990s.'

'Congress instructs UCU Scotland Executive to endeavour to ensure that—in any reorganisation of UCU's professional structure and service-provision that may be necessary—the integrity of UCU Scotland and its ability efficiently, effectively and in an appropriately devolved way, to represent the interests of members in Scotland, and UCU as a whole, to the Scottish government, the Scottish Funding Council, the Scottish TUC, the Scottish media and other relevant bodies is fully preserved.'

An emergency motion from the floor was also passed. It reads as follows:

'Aberdeen UCU believes that the provision of in-house pre-school child care is an essential facility that benefits the whole university. AUCU expresses grave concern that this facility may be compromised through lack of investment and calls on the University to consider its willingness to fund a "fit for purpose" nursery facility that will benefit staff and students both now and in the future.'

## The Future of the Rocking Horse Nursery

### History

Since the Rocking Horse Nursery (RHN) opened its doors in July 1989, it has been a home-away-from home for hundreds of children of University staff and students. Managed by the Rocking Horse Nursery Board of Trustees and run by the capable and dedicated Sarah Walker, the nursery provides an invaluable service to the University. Indeed, the first manager, Wilma Cumming, received an MBE for her work in founding the nursery. Therefore, we were very concerned to hear from our members that the future of the RHN as an independently-run nursery was at risk.

### The problem

The current building needs capital repairs (it is old and deteriorating) and really is not fit for purpose. The historic nature of the building limits the use of the available space and places restrictions on expansion of the building. This severely affects the activities and comfort of the staff and children. The University had proposed the incorporation of a new nursery into plans to rework the Crombie-Johnson complex. However, due to the conservation status of this complex, these plans were considered untenable. The university has estimated that a stand-alone, purpose built nursery would cost up to 50% more than the nursery provision proposed in the C-J complex and it was at this point that the future of the RHN as an independent, trust-run childcare provider for the students and staff of the University became uncertain. To date, the University Management Group (UMG) (1), while supporting the retention of an on-site, independent nursery in principle, has declined to put it into the capital plan.

### The UMG and HR position

Instead, the UMG has charged Human Resources with investigating a private sector solution. Moira Faulkner (HR) is believed to be the key person in developing a business plan for developing the stand-alone site. The RHN Trust has provided HR with considerable evidence in support of an in-house nursery solution but there has

been no feedback to date. Furthermore, the RHN Trust papers relating to the nursery issue have not been presented to the UMG for discussion and the full HR documentation relating to the proposed options has not been shown to the Trust. It is believed that there are three options before UMG (but again, the Trust has not been permitted to see the documents):

1. In-House: the development of a purpose-built facility to maintain an on-campus, trustees-run nursery.
  - a. This is the option preferred by the RHN Trust
  - b. Currently, Estates is not forth-coming about committing a site for this purpose. Some suggestions have been made, but the overloaded site of King's has made finding a suitable site difficult.
2. RGU-style: the University would still have to build the nursery but it would be run by a private sector provider.
  - a. Research by the Trust and by ourselves has shown this to be an expensive (and, in the long term, unstable) option, which would reduce the flexibility so vital for students and junior staff who cannot afford a full-time place for their children. Also, there would be no prioritisation of University staff and students.
  - b. Although HR documentation has not been seen by the Trust, there is no evidence that the university has spoken to private sector providers about this.
  - c. Several attempts by other public service institutions (NHS nurseries and other universities in the UK) to adopt this version have ended in failure as the private provider pulled out (due to lack of profitability) and left the institution without any nursery provision.
3. Private-sector: a private company would provide the capital to build and subsequently run the nursery.
  - a. There has as yet been no interest by any private company to make this kind of an investment.

**'We were very concerned to hear from our members that the future of the RHN as an independently-run nursery was at risk.'**

The UMG was meant to consider the HR paper in December. This was postponed initially to 28 January but then again to the UMG meeting scheduled for 11 February, and there are plans for this to be followed by consultation with all stakeholders including the current trustees and users of the RHN. The item is currently on the agenda 'to be

confirmed', but the invitation of the chairman of the RHN Trust to the meeting has been countermanded, and the documentation which was to be submitted to the UMG still has not been shown to the Trust. It seems likely that the discussion will be postponed again.

The Trust has been working on the development plan of the RHN for five years. It does take a long time to effect significant infrastructure changes such as this: for example, it took the University at East Anglia twelve years to decide to build their new on-site and in-house nursery. The current building here on campus may not have seven further years left in it, and, if action is postponed for too long a RGU-style solution may become inevitable... or worse.

### Why should we be involved?

I initially asked you to participate in a survey on this issue to determine whether AUCU felt that it was appropriate that I voice our support for the RHN at this time.

Your response was phenomenal. Over half of the local membership responded to the survey and it is clear that you consider this to be a very, very

important issue. Over 120 of you took the time to outline your views and these statements in particular have been invaluable in demonstrating the importance of an on-site workplace nursery here at the University of Aberdeen.

Users of the RHN, past and present, point out how unusually excellent the nursery is with many stating that if they had not had the option of such excellent care, they would have delayed their return to work, reduced their hours, or even stopped working. Those who have been forced to switch to private provision have been disappointed. Lack of flexible provision disadvantages the career of the primary carer, generally the mother. This has a very big potential knock-on effect on the retention and promotion of women in academia and goes against the University's current emphasis on equality and 'investment in people'.

The key points that came up repeatedly in responses to the survey:

1. RHN is an urgent priority for capital investment.
2. RHN should remain an independent

nursery

- a. providing preferential places for students;
- b. providing 'academic' contracts:

- i. Term-time as well as year round
- ii. Short-term provisions (for visiting academics/ MSc students etc.).
- iii. Crèche-provision for students (term-time) and visitors (term-time and out of term);

- c. retaining high quality nursery staff with better pay and secure positions.

### 3. Without the RHN

- a. it would have been difficult/impossible to return to work;

- b. the University loses income from potential students who have to cancel or delay their studies without flexible childcare provision;

- c. you would have been forced to move/relocate to another university.

4. RHN is an important recruitment tool, particularly for young staff, 'dual appointments,' and international relocations.

5. Being close to your child permitted you to breastfeed during the early years.

6. Foresterhill also needs childcare provision of some sort, or RHN requires more flexible hours.

7. Car use would increase if on-campus

childcare was lost.

8. There is a lack of alternative, private provision in Old Aberdeen.

### Why is it so important to maintain an independently-run University nursery?

Parents of young children, in particular women, are more likely to return to the same employer if there is support towards childcare provision and the cost of this provision. Currently, the RHN does this brilliantly. RHN provides very high levels of care in a flexible environment at a reasonable cost with considerable support from the University. Several studies (2) have shown that childcare facilities are a necessity for the development of a career in an academic institution where a 'long hours, low-pay culture creates barriers for women with childcare responsibilities.' It is clear that the lack of childcare provision also impedes women entering, continuing or returning to education. The RHN also directly supports the careers of young fathers whose partners are not employees of the University because dual-career families are nearly universal among the current generation of young parents. Thus, the quality of the RHN direct-

**'Over half of the local membership responded to the survey and it is clear that you consider this to be a very, very important issue.'**

ly affects the recruitment and retention of men with children at university as much as it does women. Furthermore, both education and career development in universities generally require a move away from family and other social networks. This makes it unlikely that students/ staff are able to rely on informal childcare arrangements to provide the flexible care that is so clearly required. From the university's point of view, there are also significant financial losses associated with poor retention of both staff and students.

Research conducted by the RHN trust has found that private-sector providers are not generally flexible enough for University users. They do not have the capacity to operate with term-time contracts for students. By their very nature, their primary aim is to make a profit and as a result have no reason to preferentially take University-associated children or provide flexible contracts. There is evidence that nursery staff experience a reduction in the quality of their employment conditions after take-overs by private contractors. This has led to an exodus of highly motivated nursery staff at other universities. At three universities, contractors have got into financial difficulties and have had to cease trading. Locally, the hospital nurseries went through this a few years ago and found the 'RGU solution' not to be cost-effective.

It is clear from the survey that the provision of an on-site, independent nursery is a priority for parents and non-parents alike. Our members would like to see the retention of the RHN operated by a Trust in purpose-built facilities. As demand exceeds current capacity, it seems that a larger, purpose-built facility would be more efficient to run. Furthermore, provision of the capital investment by the university was deemed to be good for the image of the University as well as for recruitment, retention and morale of staff and students. Finally, our members believe that childcare provision should remain in-house as it is more cost-effective, more flexible, more suitable to user requirements, and more consistent and higher in quality in its provision of care.

The current staff of the RHN benefit from above average pay and conditions for nursery work in Aberdeen. This has enabled Sarah Walker to build a team of highly quali-

fied staff committed to a long-term career, taking care of our sons and daughters while we work and study at the University, contributing to its growing success in world-class research and teaching. Assembling such quality staff is not easy, and the University must avoid taking any decisions that would lead to nursery staff considering jobs elsewhere.

#### **What's next?**

We are in the early stages and we can expect this campaign to take a long time. We must be positive in our approaches to the University. UCU is actively involved with a working group coordinated by ParentsPlus. Other members of the working group include student representatives, RHN-users and RHN Trust members.

At this stage, we must request an open consultation process and foster good communication between UMG/ HR and the RHN Trust/ ParentsPlus/ the parents' working group and the wider University community.

**'[...] the provision of an on-site, independent nursery is a priority for parents and non-parents alike.'**

I am gathering information on the importance of workplace childcare in academia with particular emphasis on the impact on

women. I will use this to contribute to the RHN working group in building a case for why the cost of the capital investment is small in comparison to the cost of losing this institution.

#### **How can I help?**

You can help by writing directly to members of the UMG with your concerns and experiences. You may wish to highlight the benefits of an in-house nursery (flexibility, affordability, staff and student recruitment and retention) as well as raising the concerns associated with a private one (inflexible contracts, cost, competition with other users who can afford full-time places, chequered history at other universities). You may wish to highlight the improved efficiency of having a larger, purpose-built, greater capacity site and also that the current building would be freed up for alternative use (and perhaps that there will be a serious back-lash from the University community if the building is deemed unusable before an alternative has been established). You may also wish to mention the ways in which the University has benefited from having world-class childcare provision

on campus and the costs to the University should action to ensure the RHN's future be delayed. You may wish to encourage students to become involved in this issue as this may affect them and future students even more than it will affect staff.

Jolene Slothouber Galbreath  
(Women's Officer)

#### Notes

(1) The UMG consists of the senior managers of the University, including the Principal, the University Secretary, Senior Vice-Principal, Vice-Principals, Deputy Secretary, Academic Registrar, Directors of Estates, External Affairs, Finance, Human Resources, Information Technology, Planning, and Research & Innovation, Acting Librarian and Principal's Special Assistant.

(2) *Recruitment and Retention of Academic Staff in Higher Education* (2005) National Institute of Economic and Social Research RR658; *Recruitment and Retention of Women in Academic Chemistry* (2002), Evaluation UK; *SET Fair: A Report on Women in Science, Engineering and Technology* (2003).



AUCU President Alex Arthur (right) presents Hugh Galbraith (left) with his prize.

## Prize Draw Winner

Hugh Galbraith has won the prize draw for switching his UCU contribution to direct debit.

Changing to direct debit will save your Aberdeen UCU time and money. The next prize draw, in which book tokens to the value of £25 can be won, takes place on 31 March. Switch to direct debit and it could be YOU rather than HUGH next time.

## Change to Direct Debit

Dear Colleague,

I am writing to ask you to join the majority of the local UCU membership, by paying your subscription by Direct Debit rather than by payroll deduction.

The payroll deduction method is being phased out nationally, and is not being offered to new members. This is because it is expensive and time-consuming to administer. UCU presently pays the University about £700 per annum for the deduction service, and the Branch Treasurer must undertake a monthly payroll deduction report for UCU HQ.

The Direct Debit method also allows you to pay your subscription without intimating your membership status to your employer. If you move between institutions, it is easier for UCU HQ to make sure your membership is moved to your new Local Branch.

In view of the savings we make when members transfer to Direct Debit, we are able to offer a small bribe:

When you return the mandate form, your name will be entered into a prize draw which will take place on the 31 March 2008. The winner will receive a £25.00 book token.

If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me (details below) or our Office Administrator, Susan Melvin.

Yours sincerely,

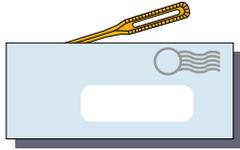
Alex Arthur

AUCU President

Tel. 2211, email: a.arthur@abdn.ac.uk

## Letters to AGORA

AGORA welcomes letters from AUCU colleagues. Please address all correspondence to: The Editors, AGORA, AUCU Office, C18 Taylor Building; or email: [aberdeen-ucu@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:aberdeen-ucu@abdn.ac.uk)



The introduction of car parking charges is usually a hot issue. It certainly was when car parking charges were introduced at the Aberdeen Royal Infirmary site a few years ago.

The problems with car parking charges are three-fold: (a) looking at the amount of cars parked on the Foresterhill site every day the charges are too low to stop people from changing to other modes of transport; (b) members of staff with the lowest salaries who have other commitments before and after work are hardest hit by the charge, especially part-time and hourly paid staff, who need their car to drop off children at nurseries and schools before starting work; and (c) the bus fares in and around Aberdeen are very high, especially if you have to take two buses to get to work. For environmental reasons we really have to reduce the amount of short daily car journeys we make. Getting more people to take the bus, walk or cycle to work must be a step in the right direction, but I'm not sure (as a cyclist) that parking charges are the solution. I think the rapidly increasing petrol prices will help to reduce our car use considerably over the next few decades.

Edwin van Teijlingen,  
Reader in Public Health

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Sir,

I would like to comment on two issues of concern to many UCU members:

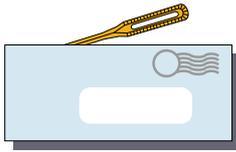
1. Car Parking Charges: I was very disappointed that senior management had decided, without any consultation with ordinary staff, to implement car parking charges on King's campus. While this was dressed up as being environmentally motivated, in reality this is a rather cynical way of both raising revenue for the central university

and effectively reducing the real wages of hundreds of UCU members. For this reason alone, UCU should strongly oppose these measures. Moreover, the need to use pricing to restrict demand for car parking spaces is further exacerbated by the new library construction—so desperate were they to get planning permission through quickly that they accepted substantial conditions imposed by the council to cut parking on campus. This is, of course, before any alternatives to the car have been put in place—for example, the same bus service still exists: no improvements to frequency or reductions in cost have been secured. I believe that UCU should campaign vigorously for there to be no cuts in car parking provision and no car parking charges.

2. Campus catering: It is evident to anyone who has dined at 'eatJohnston' that catering services for staff have taken another turn for the worse—a substantial reduction in quality and choice accompanied by a hike in price. Moreover, as 'the Hub' is now the only well marketed venue for students, it becomes excessively busy at peak times. I have written several letters to the director of catering and received the usual formulaic replies about 'running a business' (this guy is kidding himself: if he can't make a profit as a monopoly provider, his business acumen must be seriously questioned). My proposal would be that both the front part of 'Zeste' and 'eatJohnston' should be closed, and a new facility opened in 'Zeste' (minus the unbelievably uncomfortable chairs!) that provides a decent hot-food, self-service provision for staff and postgraduate students (or anyone else who prefers a quieter venue). This would complement the rear portion of 'Zeste', which serves a lighter fare. Of course, this would deprive certain senior managers of their waitress-served facility, but surely a smaller venue (maybe at the very back of Crombie) could be found for this purpose, and for visitors, externals and the like). Again, I hope that UCU would try and push this kind of proposal to ensure that there are decent catering and social facilities for its members.

Yours  
(Name and address supplied)

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[...] The University must surely be aware that parking charges are a contentious matter and has, after attempts to introduce it, not surprisingly, shied away from this policy over the years, presumably in order to maintain goodwill between employees and Management upon which a part of the functioning of the University is based.

Many colleagues use their cars not only for transport to and from the workplace, but also for such things as student reading parties, schools liaison visits, the transportation of External Examiners and so forth. If our employer wishes to charge us for parking, the simple response is to invoice our employer for the use of our vehicles for the previously stated purposes, not only on a pro-mile basis, but also at the current daily rates of car hire companies. This would seem only fair.

I wonder, too, whether this penny-pinching policy will go far to maintain the goodwill which is the prerequisite for the continued enthusiasm of, for example, Advisers of Studies.

Yours  
(Name and address supplied)

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[Charging staff for using the car park] is exactly the opposite that all other businesses in Aberdeen are doing—providing parking facilities free of charge and supporting staff to and from work. I wonder whether the Aberdeen UCU would like to bring this forward.

For staff, it's a stealth tax they can't circumvent (particularly unfair for those living outside Aberdeen).

I believe that such a move could actually backfire: it could become an incitation for staff to work from home and/or to arrive later/go away earlier being subject to public transport timetables. I wonder whether those ones who came out with such a brilliant idea know the meaning of the sentence 'shooting oneself in the foot'.

Best regards  
(Name and address supplied)

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The pending introduction of 'controlled car parking' on campus is raising concern among staff and Union members and is likely to do so much more as this part of the University's transport strategy is being further hatched up. The very legitimate concerns extend from the possibility that those higher up in the University hierarchy find ways of avoiding parking fees that bite everyone else, to questioning whether the quite substantial sums that are likely to be generated from the charges will really be spent on what they should be spent on—substantial improvements to what at present is an extremely poor provision of sustainable transport in Aberdeen. In fact, I have little doubt that the opportunity to introduce 'controlled car parking' is going to be welcomed by the University as a cash cow first and foremost.

But why shouldn't it? None of the above means that a parking levy for all (except carefully defined groups such as people with impaired mobility) should not be welcomed by UCU members. Let's face it: we all know that car commuter traffic is one of the main culprits in the rapid degradation not only of our natural environment, but also of the quality of life in Aberdeen and, indeed, of our very health. Fixing the environmental and health problems caused by motorists is many times more costly than what road and petrol taxes can cover. And these problems hit the less-well-to-do disproportionately hard. Many people poorer than us cannot afford moving out to the suburbs and surrounding villages to come into town in an air-conditioned vehicle that protects them from the pollution coming out of its own rear end. Instead, they frequently live in houses right along those major arteries that we drive down twice a day, pumping our exhaust fumes into their children's faces and bronchial tubes.

But why should we care? The Union's job is not primarily to look after social justice in general—or is it? After all, we have our own, middle-class problems to worry about. Any policy designed to make environmentally harmful behaviour less attractive will inevitably be painful. And it will be more painful to us than to people in the cosier income brackets. But that is true about anything that costs something and for which pricing is not either means-tested or progressive. This is simply what the difference between rich and poor is all about. If we have a problem with that (and we probably wouldn't be in the Union if we didn't), let's



tackle it and fight for higher salaries and wages. But please, let's not fight a proxy war on the backs of people who need air to breathe and kindly ask to have as few toxic and carcinogenic particles in it as possible. OK, it will be costly and it will be inconvenient. But while none of us are going to be plunged into poverty by parking fees, every mile that is driven less in individual motor vehicles will contribute a little bit to improving the health and well-being of all. No matter what the University ends up using the parking revenues for, charging people for parking it is a good thing, so let's pay up and get on with it.

Or, even better, let's not pay up and take the bus instead. Alex Arthur said at the General Meeting on 6 February that using the bus was not an option if you have children to move around. Since when is that? What happened here? I remember being moved around in buses all the time as a child, having a blast. Today, for me and most people I know, driving to work can be replaced by taking the bus or cycling or whatever. Surprisingly many admit that, at the end of a stressful day in the office, lab or lecture hall, they simply don't want to face the prospect of squeezing between sweaty working class people with prams and hordes of screaming kids on the bus (moving children about town on buses does seem to be an option, often the only one, for some people!) when they can sit much more comfortably in their nice ride, Classic FM on the radio. For most of us, it's a lifestyle choice. Nobody is trying to take that choice away from us. But I for one would not dream of insisting on my right to stink up the air at current, publicly subsidized rates, when someone proposes to charge me a wee bit for it.

Patrick Bernhagen

**AUCU Website**  
Address: <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/ucu/>

Dear Sir,

I am writing to you about the unsatisfactory state of University catering.

Since the abolition of the Senior Common Room there has been little alternative to lunchtime starvation on campus, unless one wishes to spend lunchtime surrounded by students. In the commercial world employees are not, generally, required to spend their lunch breaks surrounded by their customers. I cannot think of any reason why we should be expected to spend our breaks in the midst of students, delightful as they otherwise are.

The 'Hub', reminiscent as it is of a noisy school dinners hall, is a prime example of where not to go for a bit of peace and quiet. The 'Hub' is frequently full, it is noisy and it is full of students. It is also overpriced and has (despite the egalitarian principle and the non-elitist ethos that were used as arguments for the abolition of the Senior Common Room) a two-tier price structure: a lower price for students and a higher price for 'staff and outsiders'. I object to paying a 'staff and outsiders' premium for food in an overcrowded environment which offers no respite from the student population.

The only alternative, if one wishes peace and quiet, is the waitress-service section of 'Zeste', but that is a little too expensive for five visits a week, even if 'Zeste' does permit the fun activity of Senior-Management-spotting (none of whose number will be commonly found lunching amidst the student hubbub in the 'Hub').

As a result of the geographical factor the University in effect has a catering monopoly, since it would be impossible to travel into town and back for lunch in an hour, and therefore has, it could be argued, at least a moral duty to provide satisfactory staff catering. The current situation is 'like it or lump it' and leaves some of us with no choice but to do what any unhappy restaurant customer would do and vote with our feet, in this case for the Unhealthy Choice starvation option.

Yours sincerely  
(Name and address supplied)

*The content of letters and articles in AGORA may not represent the views of AUCU Committee.*

## A Helping Hand When It Is Needed Most

Any UCU member who has needed union support for a work-related problem will appreciate the value of our local personal case workers. They are trained to deal sensitively and discreetly with all sorts of problems faced by our members, from support at disciplinary hearings to help with promotion appeals—and plenty more in between!

## Aberdeen UCU Personal Case Workers Training/ Refresher Day

A personal case workers training event for new or experienced personal case workers will take place on Wednesday 21 May and will be held in the Powis Gate Boardroom. The course will be run by David Bleiman and Deborah Shepherd of UCU Scotland. We still have a few places left on this course so if you are interested in coming along to find out a bit more about becoming a personal case worker, please contact the Aberdeen UCU office (tel: to find 01224 272377, email: [aberdeen-ucu@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:aberdeen-ucu@abdn.ac.uk)). It promises to be a very useful and informative course.

The draft agenda for the day is as follows:

- 10.30 - 11.00 Coffee/tea/biscuits
- 11.00 - 1.00 First session
- 1.00 - 1.30 Lunch
- 1.30 - 3.30 Second session
- 3.30 - 4.00 Coffee/tea/biscuits
- 4.00 - 4.30 Q&A

## Pay Claim for 2008-9

UCU, with other unions in further education, has submitted a joint pay claim for 2008-9 calling for a 6% increase or £1,500, whichever is the greater. UCU members in FE are being asked to support industrial action on 24 April in support of our pay claim, if there has been no acceptable response from the employers. For further details see: [www.ucu.org.uk](http://www.ucu.org.uk).

**AUCU Office**  
 Susan Melvin  
 C18 Taylor Building,  
 University of Aberdeen  
 email: [aberdeen-ucu@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:aberdeen-ucu@abdn.ac.uk)

## Hourly-Paid Staff and Teaching Assistants

The University and UCU have arrived at an agreement with regard to hourly-paid staff, including teaching assistants and tutors. The agreement sets out new hourly pay levels based on a role evaluation and the equivalent full-time salary, and includes regular increases and compensation for paid holidays. The agreement also states:

'Individuals engaged on a temporary services basis will be paid for those hours reasonably required to undertake the duties of the role. Schools and Sections should define the work that is required and payment should be made for all activities that may reasonably be expected of the individual. The assessment of the number of hours to be offered to individuals will be determined by Schools and agreed with the individual. In the case of teaching and related activities Schools should offer individuals work that takes account of activities such as preparation time, exam marking and administration in addition to the required delivery of material.'

If you have concerns about how this agreement is being implemented in your school, please contact [p.m.howard@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:p.m.howard@abdn.ac.uk).

### AUCU Office-Bearers 2007-2008

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