

‘Interesting times’... the year ahead

Committee President Andrew Mackillop on the challenges facing AUCU in the year ahead

It seems we live in interesting times. Whether viewed from the national or the local perspective, there is an awful lot going on, ranging from perennial favourites like collective pay bargaining and recognition rights to specific concerns at Aberdeen over car parking charges, Curriculum Reform and ongoing uncertainties over nursery provision. What, then, are the issues that will dominate the year ahead?

The last phase of the current national pay award will now be implemented. It is clear from members’ feedback that there is concern and uncertainty over what, precisely, the pay award will be. Rumours of 3.5% or 5.0% abound, with most members vaguely aware that the level is supposed to be tied to the Retail Price Index of September 2008. On 24 September, at the first JNCC meeting of this academic year, AUCU reiterated its position that it expected the University to immediately fulfil its obligations as defined under the last collectively agreed pay award. Both the local branch and AU management agreed that there exists in the University community a considerable degree of uncertainty and speculation on the issue. For this reason, the University helpfully agreed to release a statement on the pay award by the end of October. We all await this statement with understandable interest.

There is also the thorny issue of how the next pay settlement is to be negotiated. With members having voted to reject involvement in the reformed JNCHES, UCU is not at present directly participating in the current round of talks, although the union has taken up the offer to attend meetings in an observer capacity. Some severe brickbats have been thrown at UCU by UCEA representatives and the other recognised JNCHES unions for refusing to accept the new one table set-up and the revised timeline for future negotiations. Charges of obstructionism and even ‘elitism’ have been levelled against the union simply because its members refused to enter into arrangements that would have effectively denied them the capacity to initiate a dispute which could ensure maximum leverage. Charges of elitism are easy to make and produce cheap headlines. But they belittle the gravity of the issue and misrepresent UCU’s position. Everyone involved in university life – students, managers, academic and academic-related employees and support staff colleagues – fully understand how we are bound together and where our interests intersect and overlap. But this common endeavour is based on the different elements and inputs that each constituency brings to the University’s activities. The rhythm and rhyme of academic and academic-related work is necessarily different from that of our support staff colleagues, and indeed those of our managerial colleagues. The sort of work undertaken by UCU members is neither superior nor inferior to the work of others – it is just

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sufficiently different to warrant distinctive representation and negotiation arrangements. If UCU is to be a union with teeth, it must retain the capacity to represent the distinctive work conditions experienced by its academic and academic related members, as well as the freedom to undertake disputes at a time of its own choosing.

The issue of the JNCHES reforms and the question of the next pay round will be addressed at the extra ordinary Higher Education Sector Conference in London on 7 November. Aberdeen members are encouraged to pass on their views and concerns to their departmental representatives or directly to the local committee via the usual address: ucu-ctee@abdn.ac.uk

UCU's position on the reform of JNCHES leads naturally to another national issue that members should bear in mind. The decision by Trent Nottingham University to formally withdraw UCU's recognition rights is a salutary warning of the growing tendency among some university managers towards downgrading the established negotiating rights of campus unions. There exists here at Aberdeen a sound and tried recognition agreement that has on the whole delivered well for both union members and university managers: let us keep it that way.

Sadly, it appears to be part of the job remit of a local president to highlight current disagreements and possible problems in the future; but there is evidence that UCU and university managers can work together constructively at a national level. Representatives from AUCU and AU management have been involved in a series of talks relating to the reform of pre-1992 Scottish University Statutes. These negotiations have on the whole been productive and positive; there remain areas of disagreement, not least over the question of how far concepts of academic freedom should extend into employment areas not immediately connected with academic departments. However, a concrete set of draft proposals should be finalised at a meeting in Edinburgh on 24 October 2008.

AUCU and its membership also face a number of local challenges and developments. It is axiomatic that the University's decision to impose car park charges was never going to be particularly popular. In response to protests over inadequate consultation, the university management held two meetings in September and October to give the campus unions an opportunity to voice their numerous concerns at the draft policy approved by Court in May. AUCU welcomes the University's willingness to

'work undertaken by UCU members is neither superior nor inferior to the work of others - it is just sufficiently different to warrant distinctive representation'

'The local branch will push the University over the coming weeks to bring forward its plans for the Rocking Horse'

'lobby and encourage the University to move towards an employment culture that eschews casualisation'

come back to the table for a further round of consultation and is working positively with the other campus unions to help produce an equitable, transparent and workable policy. There is general agreement among the unions that car parking arrangements must be standardised at the King's College and Foresterhill sites and that the University must make a real effort to ameliorate the impact of charging on colleagues with primary care responsibilities and lower incomes. The University must also demonstrate a clear financial commitment to invest in facilities and support infrastructure for those colleagues who do choose to car pool, take the bus or cycle to work. The community will stomach the prospect of car parking charging if they see the University making a real commitment to support alternative forms of travel before initiating its new policy.

Another matter of ongoing concern for members is the fate of the Rocking Horse Nursery. There has been little progress on this over the summer months. Despite the obvious anxiety of staff and parents, the University is yet to announce what sort of administrative arrangement will deliver a 'financially viable' nursery. Nobody likes uncertainty: the longer it persists the greater the likelihood becomes of detrimental staff turnover and of parents deciding, however reluctantly, that they need to make alternative and secure arrangements. The Rocking Horse Nursery is not luxury; indeed, a vibrant centre of child care provision, housed in a modern, appropriate building, is a major attraction to current staff and will be of inestimable value to the University as it seeks to recruit new staff both nationally and internationally. The local branch will push the University over the coming weeks to bring forward its plans for the Rocking Horse through a formal statement to the community.

Members will be aware of the May 2008 employment tribunal ruling involving a local fixed term member who challenged the University's assertion that limited research funding provided an objective justification for the use of fixed term contracts. In finding for the AUCU member, the tribunal posed a challenge to the University management to think imaginatively about how best to move away from a reliance on such contracts and build a progressive set of policies that emphasise the redeployment or retraining of experienced fixed term colleagues. In the last week or so, the University Management Group has approved a new draft policy that will now be the subject of consultation and negotiation with AUCU. The local committee urges

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colleagues and staff on such contracts to lobby and encourage the University to move towards an employment culture that eschews casualisation and treats researchers as fully integrated employees.

The last major local topic I want to highlight is the question of Curriculum Reform. The matter is to be considered by the Senate on 29 October and Court on 4 November, so the timetable is surprisingly short. No one doubts the significance of what is being mooted. It is only to be expected that any proposal to alter the delivery of the University's teaching and learning will produce some forthright opinions and arguments. Indeed, any University worth its salt will welcome and embrace discussion and dispute. Disagreement should be a natural state of affairs with which we are all comfortable.

Having organised an open meeting on the topic of Curriculum Reform on 22 October, AUCU encourages members and non-members to engage with the process and make their feelings known. Contact your department representatives or the local committee with any observations or comments you may have. In the days and weeks to come, as Senate and Court discuss the possible implementation of some or all of the Commission's recommendations, the local branch will continue to seek the views of its members and bring these forward to the University management. So far, many if not most members have welcomed the renewed emphasis on teaching. But there are also real concerns over the timing and speed of the proposed reforms, and there is certainly an awful lot of uncertainty and anxiety among colleagues that they may well find themselves teaching (or supporting such activity) at 8am,

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'a plea to the membership... engage with us on all these issues'

6pm on week days and even 10am on a Saturday! The local branch takes these quite legitimate worries very seriously and pledges to work in an open and positive way with the University to robustly defend established terms and conditions of work. It has sought, and been refused, observer status on the University's Resources Group, a decision which we think contrasts poorly against the Commission's genuine efforts at open and inclusive consultation. Should Senate and Court approve the Commission's Final Report, and the process move towards the implementation stage, AUCU has formally requested that it be included on the Implementation Group. We await the University's response once Senate and Court have deliberated.

I think I have abused your attention long enough. AUCU continues, of course, with a host of other activities, including ongoing review of the current temporary services policy, the promotions procedure and aspects of the framework agreement. But I want to finish with a plea to the membership. Setting out this address in terms of national and local issues is of course to create something of a false dichotomy. Awareness of purportedly 'big' national issues cannot come at the expense of what concerns us most immediately here in Aberdeen and vice versa. The key point is awareness of both the national and the local, and I would ask on behalf of the Committee that you, the members, engage with us on all these issues. We are only effective if we know what you want: tell us, support us and join us.

Best wishes for the rest of the first half session.

Andrew Mackillop
President, AUCU Committee

Bullying - cut it out!

The extent of workplace bullying and harassment for UCU members is reaching alarming proportions, according to a survey earlier this year. Half of UCU members responding to a stress survey in April and May said they were subject to some form of bullying at work, and an even higher proportion said they were subject to some form of personal harassment at work.

Aberdeen UCU will hold an informal lunchtime meeting for Anti-bullying Day on 7 November to raise awareness and distribute UCU materials. The meeting will be held at New King's 10 (NK10), 1pm - 2pm, on Friday 7 November.

Members are invited to attend the UCU conference on Tackling Bullying, Thursday 27 November 2008 at the Britannia Street Conference Centre, London. Contact the local branch office for further information.

UCU's Guidance on tackling bullying at work is available on the UCU web site at: <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=3314>

Curriculum Reform

Are you confused about curriculum reform? Are you aware of how it will affect you? Are you concerned about the impact the Reform will have on your workload? Are you worried that your concerns will be overlooked?

On 22 October, the AUCU General Meeting was followed by an information and discussion session on Curriculum Reform - open both to UCU members and non-members. National UCU officials were present to provide a national UCU policy perspective on the recommendations in the Commission's Third Report.

The General Meeting reconvened following the session. It then deliberated upon and passed the following motion.

AUCU General Meeting 22 October 2008 - **Motion on Curriculum Reform:** "AUCU notes and welcomes the initiative shown by the University of Aberdeen in focussing attention on teaching and learning through the Curriculum Reform Project.

In response to the Commission's efforts to consult widely and regularly on its published reports, AUCU committee posted questions on the Discussion Forum which reflect members' concerns. The Commission's reply to those questions, and the release of the Final Report, mean that the local branch now makes a formal request for official AUCU representation on the Implementation Board. AUCU is deeply concerned by the silence in the Final Report on the workload implications and financial risks of the Commission's recommendations. It calls on Senate to ensure the application of effective project planning, including resource scheduling methods, to the Curriculum Reform Project. The pedagogic consequences of the Project need to be weighed carefully when the Senate decides whether or not to implement the Commission's recommendations."

Your Letters - Membership perspective on Curriculum Reform:

AUCU encourages members and non-members to engage with the process and make their feelings known. Contact your department representatives or the local committee with any observations or comments you may have. The following letters are typical of members' current concerns. It should be noted that most of the letters below have been anonymised at the request of the member.

Dear Elizabeth, I'm writing to you because you were the contact person the UCU suggested for concerns about the curricular reform process. I've just read the third report and have major concerns about it. Apart from anything else, I never had the chance to give any feedback on the second report because the meeting I planned to attend in our department where this could have happened was cancelled. I tried to comment on the forum, but could not access the site. I cannot believe that the university would push ahead with a project that could have such huge implications for staff when there has been so little consultation. Along with many members of staff in the CLSM I am worried about the impact this project will have on hours and workload (not least the worrying claim in the third report that they wish to look at timetabling evening and weekend classes - I believe this would have a particularly negative impact on staff who have families). The move to four 15 credit points per semester seems like madness to me - I'm a BSc adviser and my students struggle to manage 3 courses, and the timetabling problems for science subjects don't bear thinking about. We already have flexibility of study built into the Scottish system - we do not need more.

I am frustrated that the curricular reform people

'curricular reform people do not appear to be listening to any of the feedback that we give'

do not appear to be listening to any of the feedback that we give - they dismiss negative feedback as cynical, but negative feedback is highly justified. I believe that this expensive exercise is a vanity project that could negatively impact on many staff here at the university and I think the union needs to do everything in its power to slow things down. If the implementations they suggest in the third report were to actually happen I suspect that many staff (including myself) would seek employment elsewhere.

I hope that the UCU can place as much pressure as possible on the curriculum reform commission to have the entire process halted until the curriculum reform commission can show a full analysis of the costs and workload implications of any recommendations for curriculum reform. I would also urge the UCU to strongly resist any move towards staff having to teach outside of usual working hours - this is an unfair change to working conditions and, while it would be difficult for any member of staff who dares to have a life outside of work, I believe such unsocial hours have the potential to discriminate disproportionately against female staff.

AUCU member

I support the proposal that the costs in staff time and the other workload/work balance implications, and the proposed timescale for implementation, be incorporated into the curriculum reform proposals. *AUCU member*

Have you seen ***any*** costing in time?

Imagine e.g., shift from 3 to 4 courses, in just one instance,

a) redesign (shrinkage) of 3 courses

b) likely creation from scratch of course 4

even for a), we require - new proposal forms, new docs, new rationale, webCT and other on-line materials etc, consideration by senior staff of redistribution of hours re: workload, likely fairly intense (perhaps divisive) consultations on course teams re: distribution of work and choice of topic etc. Unfortunately, our own workload model fails completely to take account of 'start-up' time. *AUCU member*

Hello, - The Department of Anthropology's response to the last consultation also noted workload issues, as follows - 'If we are to provide more courses with lower credit ratings at Levels 3 and 4, it is hard to see how this would not entail a significant increase in workload. Current assessment workload would be increased, for example.' *Best, Jo Vergunst*

Just a quick comment - if this reform is so important to the future of the Aberdeen University, why is it being rushed through so quickly? The union is right to highlight the completely inappropriate timing and timescale for this. *AUCU member*

It's galling that the University is concerned about the financial viability of a nursery but has so far shown no sign of concern over the financial viability of the curriculum reform process! I have just read the draft final report and am really angered by the suggestion for possibly extending teaching hours to weekends and evenings, when the University has such a poor record on responding to parents' concern about inadequate childcare provision. Will the University pay for childcare if I am required to teach on a Saturday afternoon? Where is the costing for that? *AUCU member*

This is a brief response to the AUCU members' letter regarding Curriculum reform costs and workload implications.

I have a number of concerns about the Curriculum Reform which appears to be poorly thought out and exceptionally crudely managed. The main difficulty I have as a degree scheme coordinator relates to the dangers of reducing

*'Have you seen ***any*** costing in time?'*

'if this reform is so important to the future of the Aberdeen University, why is it being rushed through?'

'no sign of concern over the financial viability of the curriculum reform process'

'The effects of implementing some of the proposals would be disastrous on staff morale. Keep up the fight UCU!'

the discipline specific material. This would fail to support students with appropriate levels of training in their chosen degree topics. The consequences of which would be to prevent our students competing effectively for jobs (most of our students use their scientific training in their first post). We may end up producing less attractive degree schemes which would attract fewer students and impact on jobs.

I would like to know why this reform which has unclear outcomes is being implemented so quickly and without a pilot scheme "new degree" being tested.

Finally, I have always been involved in curriculum reform it is a slow, safe process and remains an intrinsic part of our academic jobs, as courses and lectures are altered every year.

Good wishes, Rod Scott.

I am extremely glad to see UCU taking the initiative in responding to the curriculum reform group's proposals. When the project was launched my initial thoughts were: here we go again, more top-down management based on no genuine consultation. Whilst some attempt at least has been made to obtain staff views through meetings, blogs and the like, it is becoming clear that negative comment is unwelcome if not ignored by the reform group. As a result, people are reluctant to waste time making a contribution to the debate. When it comes to workload, which will almost certainly increase, we need to call a spade a spade. The effects of implementing some of the proposals would be disastrous on staff morale. Keep up the fight UCU!

best regards, AUCU member

Many members of the university are uneasy about this but reluctant to invest the time to make a meaningful intervention. That will be interpreted as passive support. I suggest the union has a poll of all members or all staff to test the level of enthusiasm for this ... *Grant Jordan*

It's been a fortnight or so since I read the third report and I am yet to come across a single colleague who is willing to put their hand up to teach a 6th century course, to produce a statement about achieving knowledge transfer, to help deliver Advanced Highers, to advocate PDPs to students... etc. But I do know some colleagues, senior researchers among them, who are likely to vote with their feet and leave the university if the majority of these recommendations are implemented. What will the legacy of this costly exercise look like then? And who will be held responsible? *AUCU member*

Local... national... international...

By Elizabeth C Macknight, AUCU Equality Officer

Everything seems to fall at once. During the second week of October it was the global stock-markets, rain in north-east Scotland, and the status of UK universities in the Times Higher Education-QS World University Rankings. The published rankings for 2008 show 'a slight drop overall' for UK institutions. This is unlikely to have grabbed your attention in the way that the sharp declines on the stock-markets, or even the rainfall, did.

In other countries there have been strong reactions to ranking results over the past few years. The findings of Shanghai Jiao Tong University, which produced the first world university ranking in 2003, horrified the French because of the poor performance of universities in France. *Le Figaro* ran a story on 'Le choc de Shanghai' - the ranking which hurts. More recently a 'spectacular' drop of eighty places by the University of Malaysia (from 89 to 169) in the second *THES* ranking (2005) was presented as 'a global blow' and triggered a debate about the future of higher education in Malaysia which led to calls for investigation by a royal commission.

On 9 October UCU General Secretary, Sally Hunt, observed in relation to UK higher education institutions that 'the slight drop in the rankings this year must serve as a warning' to government. Without the necessary investment in universities, members of academic and academic-related staff who are currently performing under pressure could not continue to deliver the high quality research and teaching on which the reputations of institutions rest. Hunt pointed out that 'UCU has not been alone in highlighting the huge gap in public spending on higher education between the UK and other key competitor countries.' In 2006, Sir Howard Newby, outgoing chief executive of the Higher Education Funding Council, described the current funding system as 'not sustainable', saying that without additional government investment the UK would continue to have only a handful of world-class research universities.

Critiques produced by analysts and some rankers show that the methodologies behind the best known world university rankings are deeply flawed. Particularly problematic is the substantial weighting given to the reputation and prestige of a university. Assessments of reputation and prestige, carried out by heads

'What are the implications of 'internationalisation' for a small, ancient university located in north-east Scotland?'

of universities, are driven more by subjective perception than by evidence, and this creates a situation of circularity whereby institutions such as Harvard, Yale, Oxford and Cambridge remain 'unquestionably' ranked within the top ten - and all English-speaking! Other problems in methodology include the bias toward research, with little or no focus on teaching quality; the bias toward natural and medical sciences compared with the humanities, arts and social sciences; and the bias toward English-language publications in bibliometric systems of citation analysis. Philip Altbach, of the Centre for International Higher Education in Boston, concludes: 'The problem with ranking concerns the practice, not the principle.'

What does all this mean for the University of Aberdeen and its ambition 'to be one of the top 100 world-leading universities'? What does it mean for our local UCU branch, part of the largest trade union and professional association for academic and academic-related staff in the UK?

If we are looking for perceived quality and esteem - whatever the shortcomings of the ranking process - one of the things it could mean is developing Aberdeen as an 'international' university. Indeed, 'internationalisation' has recently been flagged as something the University of Aberdeen should pursue as a goal, which suggests we are not there yet. Discussion of such a concept, however, if it is to be fruitful, needs to set aside the competitive rhetoric associated with international league tables and get to the fundamental issue of how students and staff of differing cultural backgrounds interact and experience life on campus.

It might be taken for granted that the University of Aberdeen is already 'international' given that some 19 per cent of the student population and some 13 per cent of the staff population come from abroad. These mere numbers, however, do not get us far. What are the implications of 'internationalisation' for a small, ancient university located in north-east Scotland? Can the University of Aberdeen be both distinctively Scottish and international? What can we bring to, and take from, 'internationalisation'?

There are two main reasons why I think the

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local UCU branch could make an effective and valuable contribution to further discussion of Aberdeen as an 'international' university.

The first reason is that as part of a national trade union with some 120,000 members we are already in contact with processes, governing bodies, and campaigning organisations that operate internationally. The UCU website has a list of forty-eight international and global links running alphabetically from the Bologna Process through to the War on Want. These links serve a crucial function in reminding us of the diverse, serious, and sometimes intractable problems faced by colleagues in different parts of the world who are involved in research and the delivery of higher education. Typically it is beyond our power to resolve or even alleviate the problems. But the local UCU branch can and should remain as informed as possible about them and try to seize every opportunity for showing support to colleagues in troublesome or crisis situations.

There are critical debates about core issues and values happening on our doorstep. A presentation by Jens Vraa-Jensen of Education International to the UCU Scotland Executive Meeting last May discussed threats to academic freedom that have emerged in the context of the Bologna Process. An OECD report, 'Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society' (2008) seemed to advocate more autonomy for individual academics and universities, but it also recommended greater accountability for the outcomes of their academic activities. In June the European Humanities University and the Scholars at Risk Network co-hosted a meeting on 'Defending the University: Academic Freedom in Central and Eastern Europe'. Participants signed a resolution in support of EHU, a university established for and by Belarusians in Lithuania following its forced closure in Belarus in 2004.

Aberdeen has for some time been seeking fuller engagement with Europe's Bologna Process and there are members of our university community, many of them UCU members, with first-hand experience of the strengths and weaknesses of that Process. This brings me to the second reason the local UCU branch could contribute to discussion of what it means to be an 'international' university.

UCU members do not all share a common ethnic background. The equality questionnaire, put together by members of the local UCU branch committee last year, was completed and returned by 130 members. Of those 130, 93.1 per cent identified as 'white', which breaks down numerically into 45 Scottish, 44 Other British, 5

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Irish, and 26 Other White respondents. There were also 2 Indian, 1 Chinese, 3 Other Asian, and 1 Mixed-origin respondents.

Academic and academic-related staff members who do not identify as Scottish are likely to have different perspectives on Aberdeen as an 'international' university from those who have lived always or primarily in Scotland. Take the issue of language. We all use English in the work environment but that doesn't mean we all 'speak' (or think in) the same terms. It is precisely the challenges of intercultural communication that make the experience of working abroad so rich, and at times bemusing or frustrating. I am Australian and have learnt what it means to have a 'wee blether' over coffee but I will never possess the intimate knowledge of posh Edinburgh accents that a Scottish professor recently sought to demonstrate. Nor would I necessarily want such knowledge, even if some of my male ancestors were educated at the University of Edinburgh like the Scottish professor.

There are myriad subtle ways in which we are all affected, consciously or otherwise, by working in an 'international' community devoted to research as well as to learning and teaching. Some of the factors that enable such a community to function, or which create problems for the maintenance of such a community, are largely beyond our control. They include the UK Immigration Points-based System which is likely to increase entry delays and create additional difficulties in the higher education sector for students and staff moving from abroad. Within this context, robust support services become ever more essential for the University to maximise the kinds of linkages that help generate research of international quality, and which enable students to develop awareness of diversity and the intercultural communication skills they will need in employment. There have been numerous discussions about compiling an international staff handbook, which would serve as a positive gesture of support at a time when changes to the Home Office regulations make the decision to apply for and accept a job in a UK university more daunting for overseas applicants. Why does the University of Aberdeen not take the opportunity to create such a handbook now?

For the local UCU branch to reflect on what is 'international' about Aberdeen we need first to reflect on what is historically distinctive about the 'Scottish' university system. To that end I urge members to attend the public conference organised by UCU Scotland in St Cecilia's Hall, Edinburgh on 31 October. The conference will

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The conference will bring together contributions on the history of Scotland's universities and the state of the European higher education system. By involving university staff and students in round-table discussions on the future of Scottish universities the conference will move the debate beyond what has so far emerged from the narrowly-composed Scottish Government's Joint Future Thinking Taskforce.

From my perspective, as an Australian who teaches French history to Scots, genuine discussion about being part of both an 'international' and a 'Scottish' university has the potential to be far more engaging, satisfying, and aspiration-generating than stock statements about where a university stands, or wishes to stand, on the international league tables. My hope is that the local UCU branch can play an active role in such a discussion, as indeed it is well placed and configured to do so. Among the outcomes might be some tangible and imaginative measures by the University of Aberdeen not just 'to attract', but also 'to develop and retain' members of academic and academic-related staff, wherever they come from, in line with its Strategic Plan.

In 2007 the President of a Japanese university put it this way: 'a farmer wanting to breed a big cow should focus more on nutrition than the weighing scales.' True investment in university staff, which encompasses fair pay, the creation of robust support mechanisms, and the provision of responsible development and training, is what's needed for positive growth. I'll leave you to ponder that prospect, at least until it starts raining again and even the highlanders bring out their umbrellas.

'genuine discussion about being part of both an 'international' and a 'Scottish' university has the potential to be far more engaging, satisfying, and aspiration-generating'

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ADVICE, SUPPORT, REPRESENTATION...

We recognise that members may, from time to time, encounter problems in the workplace. These can be anything from stress and health issues to bullying or harassment, equality issues, promotion appeals, disciplinary hearings, contract problems, issues relating to academic freedom..... to name but a few.

Aberdeen UCU has a 10-strong team of Personal Case Workers who are trained to deal sensitively and discreetly with all aspects of workplace problems. They are available to offer advice, support and assistance to members. Further support is available from the regional office in Edinburgh and, if required, legal advice and support is also available to members.

We are looking to expand the PCW team and would like to hear from any member who would be interested in finding out a bit more. New case workers will be given training and will "shadow" a more experienced team member before "going solo" with case work. UCU Scotland will be running a training event for new case workers here in Aberdeen in February or March 2009 - final details will be announced nearer the time.

For more information please contact the local office (Susan Melvin, susan.melvin@abdn.ac.uk, tel 272377) or our Personal Case Co-ordinator (Isobel Ford, i.ford@abdn.ac.uk, tel 553013)

PERSONAL INJURY HELPLINE

For those of you who have not read your UC magazine cover to cover yet (!), we would like to draw your attention to the new personal injury call line which UCU have introduced. To register a claim for personal injury, any UCU member (or a family member in some limited circumstances) can telephone a new national low cost call number 0333 2400 474 or send an email to injuredatwork@ucu.org.uk.

The call line covers all personal injury claims, including industrial disease and stress. There is no longer a need to complete an application form or stress questionnaire.

Just phone or email to 0333 2400 474 injuredatwork@ucu.org.uk

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'engage with us on all these issues'

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The AUCU office is open from 9am - 1pm Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday during school term time. If you would like to come in to the office outwith those hours for any reason please contact Susan to make an appointment, or contact us by email.

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AGORA

Contributions, including letters, are welcomed from all members... please send to:

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