UCU-UWE Branch Newsletter November 2021 – special edition on Disability Day of Action

Disability Day of Action – 24th November

This special edition comes during Disability History Month (18th Nov – 18th Dec), a month to celebrate disabled people and champion their abilities and rights. However, 'Not All Disabilities Are Visible', is the theme of International Day of Persons with Disabilities on 3rd December. This refers both to impairments like mental illness, learning differences, chronic pain and sight or hearing impairments which can affect daily life for people, but also how the experience of stigma and the existence of discrimination faced by people, means that many have no incentive to identify. And the theme for UCU Disability Day of Action - 24th November is to tackle discriminatory language. This newsletter is an opportunity to raise awareness, and commit to a more truly inclusive experience for all members.

Firstly, how is UWE getting on with its EDI commitments to Disabled members?

There is a lot of activity across UWE on EDI that members will be able to access on how Disabled colleagues are being supported. However, **Elaine Hall**, the branch Equalities Officer suggests that UWE's policies and procedures would indeed be quite reasonable *if only* they were well implemented.

An analyses of case-work undertaken by the branch shows that issues of disability and/or age related discrimination remain the most common referral issue for individual members. This suggests that policies, procedures and good intentions are not working for a large portion of Disabled members. This shows that existing adjustments are not being considered *reasonably,* as well as suggesting that improvements are needed in how UWE meet *future reasonable adjustments.*

Nicky Goodall, Branch secretary draws attention to some key themes from the casework undertaken with disabled members:

"The Equality Act 2010 states that an individual must not be discriminated against because they have a disability. As a protected characteristic, it is essential that colleagues feel reassured that UWE both recognises a declared disability and where necessary, initiates reasonable adjustments. These reasonable adjustments need to be sustained over time, to ensure that there is a level playing field for everyone to flourish in their work and career. However, what many longstanding case-work examples have demonstrated is that this is not consistently or sufficiently a current reality for many of our members, which is legally and morally unacceptable…

Types of disability discrimination caseworkers work with

"The most prevalent types of disability discrimination include direct discrimination; indirect discrimination; failure to make reasonable adjustments; and harassment...

What are the main themes arising from casework?

1. **Failure to initiate and/or sustain reasonable adjustments**, even when the organisation is 'deemed to know' that the member of staff is disabled and has requested reasonable adjustments. Case work shows that some line managers fail to comply with the legal duty to consider reasonable adjustments, a position that discriminates against workers and puts the organisation at risk of legal challenge.

2. **Failure to act in accord with the Disability Confident scheme that UWE has signed up to**, meaning that some of our colleagues are not shortlisted when they should be. If you look at the Gov.UK website, it says that: "Disability Confident is creating a movement of change, encouraging employers to think differently about disability and take action to improve how they recruit, retain and develop disabled people". Under this scheme, disabled applicants should be guaranteed an interview if they fit the essential criteria, however caseworkers in the branch deal with numerous cases where applicants fit both essential and desirable criteria yet are not offered an interview. This is a clear transgression of the process.

3. **Failure to offer project, promotion and developmental opportunities to some members of staff**. Even when disabled staff are interviewed, they can find that non-disabled members of staff are offered such opportunities, despite having less qualifications, skills and/ or experience than the disabled applicant. If UWE was serious in seeking to address the deficit; if UWE implemented its own policies, then disabled staff would be more effectively represented in higher positions than is the case currently.

4. **Access and Accessibility can also still be an issue**. Staff members with impairments who do not currently have a Blue Badge have been told they can can apply for accessible parking permits. However, these promised additional accessible parking bays (as distinct from current disabled parking bays) have only appeared in Frenchay so far. As it is getting harder to find a parking place at UWE generally, the barriers to feeling welcome on campus are increasing, when these barriers should be reducing.

So what can we do about it?

We can champion the rights of Disabled people

*1 - **Meet your Disability Officer***

Sarah Chicken, UWE UCU's Disability Officer

I grew up in the multicultural Pill area of Newport, South Wales where I developed a keen sense of social justice which has steered my career. I have a long-standing interest in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and sit on several University Committees for EDI. As an adult with dyspraxia, I aim to support the move towards viewing disability and neurodiversity in a more positive light in all that I do, and this aim is reflected in all aspects of my work.

I became UCU's Disability Officer earlier in the year and as many of the articles within this newsletter outline, there is currently a significant amount of work to be done to raise awareness of the current lived experiences of disabled workers and to improve these.

A key theme from the disability movement is,' *Nothing about us, without us' a*nd I would be interested to hear issues that are currently significant for our disabled members so that these can be raised with HR and developed through UWE policies. Please contact me at sarah.chicken@uwe.ac.uk or via TEAMS for a face-to-face or virtual coffee.

We can adopt a social model of disability and call for universities to develop strategies to reduce the current pay gap for disabled workers.

Removing the barriers is the best way to include disabled people in our society.

#IncludeUs

UCU's stance towards disability is underpinned by the Social Model of Disability. Whereas the pervasive *medical model of disability* views the 'problem' to be within the individual, the social model argues that the barriers they face are what disables people. A person may have an impairment, but their experience is shaped by the way society responds to this, whether it responds inclusively, or whether it creates barriers for them. This model argues that structural inequalities create collective disadvantage for disabled people and is due to deep-seated societal discrimination, as fundamental as sexism, racism, or heterosexism.

Barriers, including stereotypical attitudes and perceptions around disabilities, can make it difficult for disabled people to access jobs and entrenched institutional structures make career progression extremely challenging. Such inequalities are reflected in statistics related to both employment and pay rates when comparisons between disabled and non-disabled workers, for example:

- Disabled people have an employment rate that is **28.8 %** points lower than that of people who are not disabled and has increased from 28.1 % over the last year.
- Disabled workers are less likely to be in higher-paid roles, illustrating that disabled workers are being denied access to promotion and progression.
- Disability Pay Gap Day (held on Sunday 1 November) showed the pay gap has increase d by **4.5%** on last year's finding and is now 20%!
- This means disabled workers are now paid **£2.10** less an hour than their non-disabled peers. This is based on a 35-hour work week, is equivalent to being paid **£3,800** less a year.
- Disabled women continue to face the most significant pay gaps of all, higher than those faced by both disabled men and non-disabled women.

We can challenge attitudes and mind our language!

The branch Disability Officer challenges us to become more consciously aware of the use of casualised ableist language in circulation.

Just as with other oppressed groups the use of language is significant to disabled people and trying to avoid and challenge derogatory terminology can be viewed as an act of solidarity. It is problematic when terms associated with disability are used in a deliberately derogatory manner. There are numerous cases of this but examples could include, calling a manager 'schizophrenic', using phrases such as 'falling on deaf ears,' describing someone as 'really OCD / autistic/dyspraxic,' or using phrases such as 'that is so lame.'

Many of the everyday phrases in circulation might seem harmless or even humorous and are generally not motivated by a desire to maltreat disabled people. However, phrases such as these are disparaging and damaging since they perpetuate negative constructions of disabled people as

'less than' where compared to non- disabled (or more specifically en-abled) people. This means that whilst the intention may not be to cause offence, these impact on how disabled people are viewed within society and further, within the workplace.

Consider the word 'dumb' for example - originally used to signify a deaf person who did not speak, but now used flippantly to denote a person deemed as having limited intellectual capacity. It is easier to see how this is damaging but equally noteworthy that this is viewed as completely acceptable, demonstrating the wholesale discrimination that disabled people face.

If we continue to accept ableist language, we will continue to accept marginalisation, segregation and ultimately oppression – so a call to action - focus on checking your own language for the day, you may be surprised what you find out!

We can be stronger in our actions when we work with our sister unions

---

This semester UCU, Unite and Unison at UWE have been working closely together in order to explore the experiences and challenges for disabled colleagues at UWE who are represented by the different trade unions. This year has had a disproportion impact upon disabled people across the county and the following issues are being reported by some of our disabled members at UWE:

- The return of disabled staff to campus
- Manager's awareness of processes related to reasonable adjustments including the need for regular review meetings
- Disabled staff and (lack of) career progression
- The need to develop inclusive recruitment and interview strategies for disabled staff

Issues related to reasonable adjustments has been a key theme and in order to explore this further there will be a tri-union online panel event with outside speakers with a focus on Reasonable Adjustments and ableism.

This will take place in the week of the 8th December. Look out for further details!

We can get our MP's to sign the Early Day Motion to recognise Disability History Month in Parliament

Disability History Month is supported by a wide range of disability groups, unions and voluntary organisations, and aims to promote disabled people's rights and their struggle for equality now and in the past. The theme for this year's disability history month is 'Relationship and Sex. Disability and Hidden Impairment'. This year's UKDHM focuses on two enduring stereotypes that make disabled people's lives more difficult and act as a barrier to our inclusion. Events to mark UK Disability History Month will be held around the UK and further information can be obtained from http://ukdhm.org

In order to support the rights of disabled colleagues through raising awareness of disability discrimination (ableism), we are encouraging you to get your MP to sign the Early Day Motion to recognise Disability History Month in Parliament

https://ukdhm.org/early-day-motion-in-uk-parliament/

We can add a tagline to our email signatures (& also ask our colleagues to do the same)

Be an ally to Disabled colleagues! Follow the instructions on the email on which this newsletter was sent to set up your signature that demonstrates your support. This will also show respect and solidarity with Disabled students.

Update on the National Ballot and the Four fights

Nationally, you will have heard about strike action taking place this term. And for those branches who did not vote for strike action or Action short of a strike (ASOS) at this stage, we await news about re-balloting for future action, and about '3 days of action' on December to support our striking colleagues in other universities. Its been good to hear from supportive members in touch already. We look forward to planning action with you at our next members meeting on 24th November.

Frequently, we encourage staff to ensure their details are updated. This prevents them missing out on email communications, invitations to meetings and of course ballots and other decision making.

In particular, its really important that you members consider their membership status. This will be important for upcoming (re-)ballots and campaigns. For example, if a member is a postgraduate student, but have since gained a contract to teach, they then can change membership from 'student membership' to 'standard free membership'. Individuals who hold the 'standard' and 'standard free' membership will be entitled to vote in industrial ballots.

Use MyUCU to view & update your membership record:

- amend personal details
- update contact information
- review subscription band
- transfer to direct debit or update your bank details
- change workplace and employment information

Do you want more power in the workplace?

It is evident that frustration is building amongst members at UWE, particularly over workload but also in relation to lack of consultation about changes to role and conditions. It is evident that many wish to act; many want to show UWE that enough is enough; many want to show solidarity with colleagues at other HEI's over the four fights.

Academic staff have great ideas about how to create decent, humane working conditions at UWE and across Higher Education, and know these are key to delivering excellent learning conditions for students.

Members have been contributing excellent ideas about workplace development AND effective action through members meetings and emails. Some of you have begun to organise in subject areas. In doing so, our branch develops capacity to step up when we need and wish to. So please, lets put these ideas into action!

A strong member-led union has the capacity to take industrial action over what matters to its members, but a strong member-led union is even more than this. A strong member-led union is one where members know each other, where members share common concerns, where member are ready to act in solidarity. The first step to having a strong member-led union is for you and your colleague to come together and act now. To build this, members can:

- Share a newsletter with colleagues or put up some posters.
- Pick up a UCU mug or flask and use it at team meetings.
- Tell member colleagues about members meetings and invite them along, or agree for someone to collate and represent a group of members at members meetings.
- If you are worried about a development or practice in your area, plan a subject area meeting with your member-colleagues to consider a collective response.
- Taking collective issues to departmental and faculty meetings.
- Consider a campaign, or look up existing national campaigns.
- Become a SAR - Subject Area Rep and support communication and activity in your area.
- Think about allies who would support improvement of teaching conditions - students, parents, partners, politicians, media etc.
- Volunteer to be in involved in Getting the Vote out (GTVO) or encouraging effective and visible action.
- Using straplines on your emails and other social media to build awareness and solidarity.
- Encourage non-members to join at: https://www.ucu.org.uk/join
- Consider taking up a vacancy in the UCU branch.

For any or all of these, contact your Faculty Rep to see how else to get in involved.