



# BUCU News

## 11 Star or Out? — OUT! 3.5 or Out? — OUT!

### Another BUCU campaign victory!

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Following last year's successful BUCU campaign to eradicate the 11-star-or-out policy from the University of Birmingham, BUCU have again successfully opposed another disastrous University policy that was all too close to leading to UoB staff being unreasonably sacked.

#### **3.5 or you're out?**

During the summer of 2011, the College of Social Sciences Board circulated to staff a document titled, *College of Social Sciences: NSS Action Plan 2011-12*, which established 'new minimum standards', including the goal of "Minimum module questionnaire performance (**with the cessation of contracts of PTVL's and permanent staff with scores below 3.5 out of 5** unless there are clear extenuating circumstances". The threat was extraordinarily clear - staff must achieve an MEQ score of 3.5, or otherwise be either sacked (if they

were casualised staff) or put on disciplinary performance management schemes.

BUCU vigorously opposed this policy, claiming it might well result in unfair dismissals.

BUCU took the campaign to national UCU Congress - with the Times Higher reporting, "Steve Issitt, UCU branch president at the University of Birmingham, told the conference on 8 June that some academics at his institution had been told that their contracts would not be renewed unless they received scores of at least 3.5 out of 5 in the survey". This prompted the University to immediately, and somewhat embarrassingly for the College of Social Sciences Board, renounce its own policy and abandon any attempts to issue a '3.5-or-you're out' diktat.

Good campaigning BUCU!

# Work for free at UoB! (or how to build a bad reputation...)

*The catch?*

*The post  
was entirely  
unpaid!*

The University of Birmingham's senior management were out doing damage to the University's reputation yet again recently. Many of you may have seen the recent story in the Times Higher, *Advert for unpaid research position withdrawn*. This followed the decision by the University of Birmingham to advertise an 'Honorary' Research Assistant post in the School of Psychology. The duties for this post required candidates to be willing to "support a new clinical research study of mental illness in adolescents and young adults", to work for two days a week, and to have access to a motor vehicle.

The catch - the post was entirely unpaid!

In response, UCU rapidly issued a press release opposing these practices, on the grounds that it undermines the principle of equal pay and is discriminatory. Legal opinion reported in the Times Higher also pointed out that this might well fall foul of minimum wage legislation.

Never shy of performing remarkable U-turns in the light of media attention, the University of Birmingham quickly issued a statement claiming that it had decided to no longer proceed along this route of hyper-casualization. The statement read, "Although the Honorary Research Assistantships were conceived as training

positions *the University recognises that this was not clear and has, consequently, withdrawn the advertisement.*" BUCU will seek to continue to ensure that this extraordinarily concerning development of unpaid University work ceases to be considered acceptable.

Rather embarrassingly a note of the fiasco also appeared in the HE section of the THE's weekly roundup of news, where it stated that:

'... the advert disappeared after the University and College Union denounced it, joining critics including the science writer Ben Goldacre. The incident follows the furore over unpaid work for jobseekers, an issue that rose to prominence when Cait Reilly took legal action against the government after being forced to stack shelves unpaid at Poundland. You might think Birmingham was well placed to appreciate the pitfalls of unpaid work schemes: Ms Reilly is a recent Birmingham graduate.'

In the meantime, we have issued an open letter to the vice chancellor, in which we seek to clarify whether this unpaid post, and not just the advertisement for it, has been withdrawn. We also seek to ensure that anyone recruited to do this work is properly remunerated, and to ensure that no unpaid positions are created at the University of Birmingham.

**Birmingham UCU**

**[ucu-comm@bham.ac.uk](mailto:ucu-comm@bham.ac.uk)**

**[birminghamucu.org](http://birminghamucu.org)**

## **Negotiation breakthrough:**

### ***half-day off per week for all union representatives***

Following ongoing negotiations between BUCU and the University we have managed to reach an agreement to improve the amount of time allocated to union representatives. The University have now agreed to provide paid time off for half a day per week to all union representatives, in order that they can perform their union duties. This might include casework duties, department representative roles, or committee membership.

This will hopefully also mean that BUCU will be able to be yet more visible and active in campaigning on behalf of, and representing, members across the University.

We therefore encourage you to become more active for BUCU - and claim your half day per week! - Contact BUCU for more details.

## **Join the Union!**

In response to the REF, to the move to £9k fees, and to the government's attempts to underfund higher education, the University of Birmingham is adopting an ever-more draconian approach to the management of its staff.

Estimated REF scores are being used to discipline staff members, academic-related staff are suffering increased micro-management, the University appears to be moving towards the use of module evaluation questionnaires to monitor lecturer's performance, departments are constantly under review (with the ever-present risk of closure), and staff pay continues to decline in real terms.

**So now is the time to join the union!** BUCU have been consistent in opposing managerialism, commercialisation, and a decline in staff terms and conditions. We support members targeted by management and we challenge all compulsory redundancies.

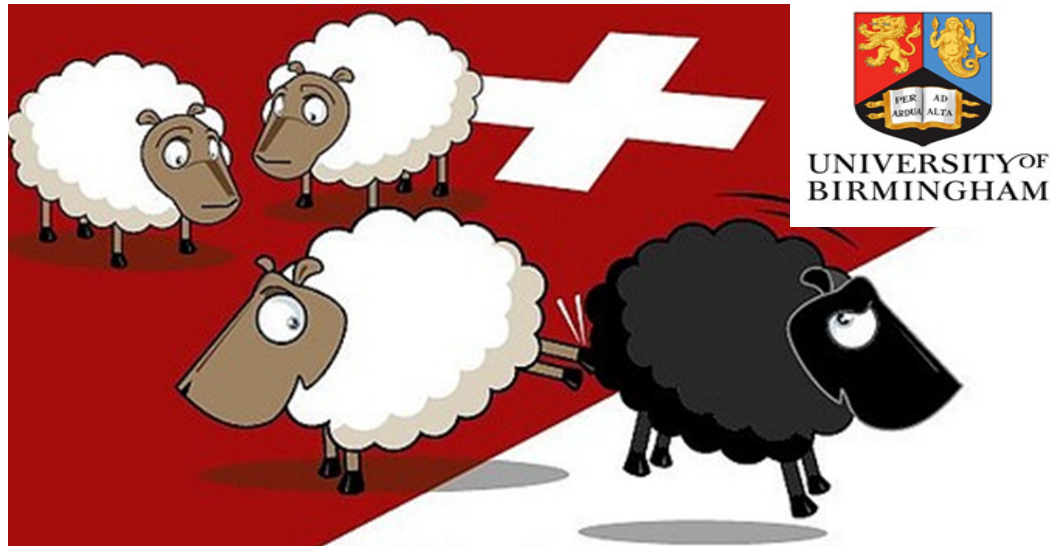
To join online, visit: <https://join.ucu.org.uk>

**Birmingham UCU**

**[ucu-comm@bham.ac.uk](mailto:ucu-comm@bham.ac.uk)**

**[birminghamucu.org](http://birminghamucu.org)**

# Ethnic Diversity at the University of Birmingham



The University of Birmingham is currently in the process of making its only ethnic minority member of permanent academic staff in Sociology redundant, at the same time as pledging to only provide temporary staff to teach core Ethnicities programmes at the University. This is a shameful failure to consider the importance of ethnic diversity – both in terms of staffing and teaching provision – which is particularly shocking for a university based in a city such as Birmingham.

There are also a number of issues related to the selection of the member of staff to be made redundant - who has found himself in a pool of 1 candidates for redundancy, with no clear rationale for that decision.

**Birmingham UCU**

**[ucu-comm](mailto:ucu-comm@bham.ac.uk)**  
**[@bham.ac.uk](mailto:ucu-comm@bham.ac.uk)**

**[birminghamucu](http://birminghamucu.org)**  
**[.org](http://birminghamucu.org)**

BUCU is calling for a halt to this redundancy, and for a more serious attitude to be taken towards ethnic diversity and equality of opportunities. We have already raised this as an issue with the Head of College of Social Sciences - but have thus far failed to have the decision reversed.

# Save the IAA!

As you have no doubt become aware, following a very rapidly conducted review of the Institute of Archaeology and Antiquity (IAA), the review group, chaired by Professor Malcolm Press, recommended that the IAA be closed. This will mean the redundancy of 19 members of staff and have a large and detrimental impact on the teaching and research of Archaeology and Antiquity at the University of Birmingham. It also raises considerable concerns about the commitment of the University to both the Arts and Humanities, and to areas that (for whatever reason) are not considered to currently be fashionable or commercially important.

The main proposals of the University are:

- Closure of the Institute of Archaeology and Antiquity
- 19 staff to be made redundant – that is over half of the non-professorial academic staff currently in the IAA
- None of the individuals involved in the review are included in the list of staff at risk of redundancy
- All Professorial staff are excluded from the threat of redundancy, despite the assertion that the IAA has been failing for a number of years and the questionable leadership of sections of the Professorial staff in leading to such failure.

BUCU is leading a strong campaign to oppose these compulsory redundancies. We believe that a University that makes an annual profit of around £27 million should not be making any member of academic staff redundant.

We have also raised a number of concerns about the way that the process through which this proposal has been made. These are all listed on our branch blog - [www.birminghamucu.org](http://www.birminghamucu.org)

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In the meantime, we ask members to continue to sign two petitions - one opposing the closure of the IAA, and the other calling for an extension of the current 90 day consultation period which the University is going through.

[www.ipetitions.com/petition/save-the-iaa/](http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/save-the-iaa/)

[www.change.org/petitions/the-university-of-birmingham-extend-the-consultation-period-of-the-iaa-merger-review](http://www.change.org/petitions/the-university-of-birmingham-extend-the-consultation-period-of-the-iaa-merger-review)

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# Performance management update

Against the backdrop of the REF the University of Birmingham continues to embark on its mission to develop a performance management regime apparently intended to either scare people away from the place or induce a prolonged period of stress-related absence. Perhaps two of the most recent examples we've encountered are the College of Social Science's so-called Advice and Guidance policy, and the setting of bizarrely specific performance targets in the College of Engineering and Physical Sciences.

## **So-called Advice and Guidance - some advice and guidance!**

The University appears to be moving towards a so-called policy of Advice and Guidance. Whilst this has become most apparent in the College of Social Sciences we believe that it may also exist in other parts of the University. BUCU are increasingly concerned that this is an attempt to circumvent (or misinterpret) the existing Ordinances of the University, and to put in place a rigid performance management regime that will be to the detriment of both staff and the

University as a whole. Our major concerns are that (a) this policy has not in any way been negotiated with BUCU, (b) that it appears to provide the opportunity for University senior managers to arbitrarily impose targets on members of staff that might be inappropriate, (c) that no due process has been established, (d) that in many cases no 'advice and guidance' appears to happen, and instead we simply witness the labelling of staff as 'on advice and guidance', and (e) that in doing so it represents a major challenge to academic freedom.

We have relayed many of these concerns to the University's HR department, which has responded with a detailed outline of their interpretation of Advice and Guidance. We have some concerns about this - not least that it does not reflect our experience of Advice and Guidance in practice, but also because we believe that (contrary to University claims) a more formalised policy of advice and guidance does exist. Nevertheless, we repeat below the University's description of advice and guidance, in part so that members might report to us any deviations from this declared process (see over).

## **Bizarre targets?**

If the so-called policy of so-called Advice and Guidance wasn't enough, we now also hear about extraordinarily bizarre targets being applied in the College of Engineering and Physical Sciences. This includes targets to publish in precisely named journals, to win specific amounts of grant income, and to attract an exact number of PhD students (including a stipulation regarding their geographic origin!). All of this comes with the possibility of a dismissal should they not be achieved! BUCU does not believe that this can be considered reasonable - not least because many of these outcomes are outside of the control of staff members concerned.

BUCU will continue to challenge ridiculous performance management processes, whether they are linked to REF performance or not- and believe this will be a key part of our campaigning during the forthcoming descent into Prof Eastwood's post-Browne academic-commercial dystopia.

## **ADVICE and GUIDANCE—the University position**

The following is the University’s response to a number of questions BUCU put to its HR department:

“It is important to understand that there is no University ‘policy’ on ‘advice and guidance’ so it is not possible to answer most of the questions you have set out.

Ensuring high standards of delivery of teaching, research and everything else we do in the University is an integral part of the role of Heads of School, Department, Unit, Group etc and there is a whole range of interventions they may use to encourage those that they work with to give of their best. Sometimes, if a Head, Leader etc believes a colleague is having a lean spell, it may be appropriate to support the individual through to the point at which they are once more able to achieve to the standards which are expected. This may involve setting objectives and timescales for their achievement, monitoring and reviewing progress etc. This requires the Head, Leader person to exercise judgement according to the circumstances and to make appropriate decisions to achieve the expected outcomes. Of course the individual member of staff is an important part of this process; the Head, Leader will be looking to engage the individual in the process, without whose co-operation higher standards will surely not be achieved.

‘Advice and guidance’ is simply a term which is used as a shorthand, as it were, for the process which is described above; it has no particular meaning or status beyond that. This is also the process which is described in para 5 of Ordinance 3.21, and referred to in para 4 as ‘informal methods’, and was agreed with BUCU some years ago. As para 4 of O3.21 implies, there are further processes, set out in the rest of O3.21, which may be taken if methods such as those described above do not resolve the matter.”

**Birmingham UCU**

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**If the picture given above doesn’t tally with your own  
experience, please contact BUCU !**

# 2011-12: A Year in Headlines

**“Education fatcat row as Birmingham University boss earns £419,000-A-YEAR” -**

*The Daily Mail*

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2101117/Education-fatcat-row-Birmingham-University-boss-earns-419-000-A-YEAR.html#ixzz207R4sSuQ>

**“Student protesters get evicted by universities” - *The Guardian***

[www.guardian.co.uk/education/2012/jan/09/student-protests-university-evictions?  
fb=native&CMP=FBCNETTXT9038](http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2012/jan/09/student-protests-university-evictions?fb=native&CMP=FBCNETTXT9038)

**“Birmingham students seek to overturn protest ban” - *The Guardian***

[http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2012/jan/23/birmingham-students-overturn-protest-ban?  
fb=native&CMP=FBCNETTXT9038](http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2012/jan/23/birmingham-students-overturn-protest-ban?fb=native&CMP=FBCNETTXT9038)

**“Birmingham University protest ban attacked as 'aggressive and censorious'“ -**

*The Guardian*

[http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/dec/11/birmingham-university-protest-ban-condemned?  
INTCMP=ILCNETTXT3487](http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/dec/11/birmingham-university-protest-ban-condemned?INTCMP=ILCNETTXT3487)

**“Advert for unpaid research position withdrawn” - *THES***

<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=420451>

**“University of Birmingham admits wrongly paying support staff double time at bank holidays”**

*- Birmingham Post*

<http://www.birminghampost.net/news/west-midlands-education-news/2012/06/07/university-of-birmingham-admits-wrongly-paying-support-staff-double-time-at-bank-holidays-65233-31129258/#ixzz207SFgyjt>