



## CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY BRANCH NEWSLETTER April 2011

### Pay and Conditions

It was reported at the branch meeting on 4 April that pay negotiations for this year have started. However it is felt that the initial response from the employers is as negative as ever.

### Interim default retirement policy

As you may know, from 1 April 2011 the default retirement age of 65 no longer applies in the UK, with people now entitled to work as long as they like. The University, however, would like to keep a default retirement age and have introduced an interim default retirement policy.

Unite has raised concerns. The branch is about a policy which appears to make it easier for the university to dismiss older staff without having to present an adequate business case.

### TUC Rally 26 March

As well as Cambridge Unite branch members, hundreds of protesters from Cambridge travelled to London on Saturday 26 March to join the TUC march for the alternatives to governments cuts.



Among these were members of the Cambridge and District Trades Council to which the branch is affiliated, the Cambridgeshire National Union of Teachers (NUT), the country branch of Unison and other protesters and their families who marched alongside an estimated 500,000 demonstrators. The leader of the Cambridge NUT delegation described the mood as vibrant and positive.

### Local council elections

On 5 May more than 9,500 council seats will be contested in 279 local authorities across England and is the same day as the referendum on the future of the UK electoral system.

### Pensions

Proposed changes to pensions were discussed at an extraordinary University Assistants Joint Board meeting (UAJB) on 16 March. A straw poll of UAJB members resulted in the proposals to go forward to consultation. It is expected that members of the scheme will be consulted in June 2011.

### Robbie retires

Robbie Fountain, our Branch Chair, has announced her retirement from the University at the end of April.

Robbie has been a guiding influence to the Branch for over 10 years, becoming Branch Chair in 2004. She was a leading rep in the 2005/6 Pay and Grading negotiations and has been Chair of the University/Union Partnership Working Group since its instigation in 2005.

She will be missed by both staff and management and we wish her well.

### Unite Executive Council Elections 2011

Voting papers have gone out for elections to Unite's Executive Council. The Executive Council is made up of 65 members from various sectors and regions and is Unite's governing body. Those members elected will hold office from 1 May 2011 to 20 April 2014.

Will Smith from our own Cambridge branch is standing as a candidate for the London and Eastern Regional and Sue Sharp is standing for the Education sector. You may also vote for a representative for the National Women's seat.

Please make sure that you return your vote in good time: to count in the ballot, voting closes 1200 noon on Friday 15 April.

## England's colleges 'axing courses and jobs'

Scores of England's colleges have already started axing jobs and courses as a result of funding cuts, according to a survey. Public service union Unison and the University and College Union polled 247 colleges, and 146 replied. Of those 93% said they had axed jobs, with 80% saying they had cut courses and resources. The government said it was necessary to focus funding where its effect could be maximised. The survey found support staff and teaching staff were taking the biggest hit.

Source: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-13003726>

## Winter Fuel payments cut

The winter fuel allowance paid to most of those aged 60 or over has been reduced from £250 to £200 and from £400 for those aged 80 and over. Pensions campaigner and Saga director Ros Altman says this reduction "hits poorest pensioners hard. As food prices soar too, many over 80s can't afford heating or eating". Source: [MoneySavingExpert.com](http://www.moneysavingexpert.com)

## Tax changes

There have been 36 tax and benefit changes taking effect from 6 April. While income tax falls this coming year due to the increase in the personal allowance, there is an additional one percent to pay on national insurance contributions from April.

Furthermore many income tax thresholds will now rise every year in line with the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) which tends to be lower than the Retail Prices Index (RPI) measure generally used. This means that allowances will rise more slowly, which is an effective tax rise, as less of your income will be tax free or in a lower band. Meanwhile, the tax and national insurance system could be merged in a radical simplification move, though consultation which will take a number of years

Source: [MoneySavingExpert.com](http://www.moneysavingexpert.com)

## Take-home pay down 5% in real terms

The average employee takes home £1,088 a year less than two years ago when the sum is adjusted for inflation, BBC research suggests. The research was based on actual salaries paid into bank accounts and carried out by the Centre for Economics and Business Studies based on data on salaries from the payment processor, Vocalink, which looks after more than 90% of deposits into employees' bank accounts. It was commissioned by Panorama to work out how much worse off employees have become since wages hit their peak. Source: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/panorama/hi/front\\_page/newsid\\_9436000/9436026.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/panorama/hi/front_page/newsid_9436000/9436026.stm)

## NHS shake-up 'chaos' claim

Health Secretary Andrew Lansley is to launch a fresh attempt to explain the government's NHS shake-up in England amid claims the policy is in "chaos". The plans would give GPs control of about 60% of the NHS budget and allow more private firms to provide care. There has been speculation that ministers will water plans down amid criticism from across the political spectrum. The Health and Social Care Bill, currently going through Parliament, is the largest piece of health legislation since the NHS was created.

Source: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-12953646>

NB Unite's campaign "Unite for our NHS" is urging all members to contact their MP to ensure they know that the NHS is still under threat. For more information see: <http://action.unitetheunion.com/keep-pressure-up>

A Royal College of Nursing analysis of 21 NHS trusts where cuts were taking place found more than half of posts under threat were in areas such as nursing and midwifery. The union says this could have a "catastrophic" effect on care.

The RCN has been gathering evidence about the number of posts under threat in the NHS for nearly a year. It believes there are now 40,000 posts which could close in the next three years, a rise from 27,000 at the end of last year. Most of these will not be redundancies as the NHS tends to rely on natural turnover from people retiring or changing jobs and not being replaced.

Their research also showed that 54% of about 10,000 job cuts were clinical and, in total, more than a tenth of the nursing workforce could be lost in these areas. The union also said it had found examples of services being closed, including rehab centres, detox units and talking therapies.

Source: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-13029534>

## Prescription charges rise in England

The cost of prescriptions in England will rise by 20p to £7.40 per item from 1 April. England is the only part of the UK still charging for prescriptions. The British Medical Association (BMA) has called for charges to be scrapped altogether. MSPs have voted to scrap NHS prescription charges in Scotland, while Wales and Northern Ireland have already removed the charges.

## Oil prices surge to fresh highs

Oil prices have surged to a two-and-a-half-year high amid concerns about Middle East supply and a weaker US dollar. Source: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business>

## Cambridge University Press

At the branch meeting on 4 April 2011 Daniel Perrett reported that an agreement had been reached of a 2.25% rise backdated to January 2011, an extra 0.25% higher than the previous offer, plus an extra day's holiday to be taken on Christmas Eve.

## Free city bus shuttle goes

More than a thousand people have signed a petition to save the popular free shuttle bus in the city centre. Campaigners are hoping to secure an extension of the service while alternative funding was found which ends on 17 April.

*Source: Cambridge News and Crier*

## Stagecoach raises fares

Stagecoach is to raise fares by an average of 4.7%. Some single and return fares will increase with the price of a journey into the city centre from places such as Cherry Hinton and Arbury rising from £1.85 to £1.90. All Dayrider and Magarider tickets have increased and in addition the boundaries for these ticket zones are also changing. There have been cuts in subsidies to 57 bus services by the county council.

## Lecturers strike over pensions

Lecturers in Cambridge went on strike and joined a rally in the city centre last month to defend their pensions. Staff from Cambridge Regional College (CRC), Anglia Ruskin University and Cambridge University where they were joined by students outside the Senate House where they were addressed by Alan Whitaker, national president of the University and College Union (UCU). Mr Whitaker said changes to the Universities NUT members from Long Road 6<sup>th</sup> Form College also held a protest in solidarity. .



Will at TUC Rally in London, 26 March 2011

## Branch News

At the branch meeting on 4 April 2011, Robbie Fountain announced that this would be her last meeting as Branch Chair as she will be leaving at the end of the month.

Adam Booth proposed a vote of thanks to Robbie for all her hard work for the branch over the years which was expressed by a round of applause.

Will noted that a new Branch Chair would be needed if anyone would care to stand.

Steve Laurie also announced his retirement. Steve has been involved with production of the Newsletter and of the Branch website, for which we are very grateful. We are sorry to see him go but wish him a great time in retirement.

## Treasurer's report

Paul Stokes reported that there are some outstanding bills to be met. The situation with branch finances has changed following the merger with the T&GWU whereby 'excess' branch finances can now be appropriated by Head Office.

## Motions

A motion was put to branch at the meeting on 4 April 2011, the full text of which can be seen on the website. It asks Unite's Executive Committee to call on the TUC to co-ordinate a 24-hour general strike. Sara and Adam spoke in favour of the motion. Will warned that such a strike could be illegal and members could put their jobs in danger by striking. The motion was not passed by a small majority.

## Regional News

The Regional Industrial Sector Committee met at the end of March. Other universities are facing difficult times particularly over pensions and job cuts.

## Training Course

### Change at Work, 11 – 15 July, Eastbourne

If you would like to attend this 5 day full-time course, please contact Will Smith asap. Applications by 9 May 2011



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Mike Robinson

**London & Eastern Regional**

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**For national news and issues** please visit  
the *Unite the Union* website at:  
<http://www.unitetheunion.com/>

**More information and links**

Information on the branch including details of  
working groups, branch structure and Minutes  
of monthly branch meetings can be found at:  
[www.amicus.cam.ac.uk](http://www.amicus.cam.ac.uk)

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<http://www.unitetheunion.com/>

**Branch Meetings**

Branch meetings take place on the first Monday of the month (except when a Bank Holiday occurs) at 12.45 pm in the Bramwell Lounge, University Sports and Social Centre (USC)

**UNITE Cambridge Website**

The Unite / Amicus web pages are  
available at: <http://www.amicus.cam.ac.uk>  
Website co-ordinator : Cathy Salkield. I  
tems for inclusion please contact:  
[webmaster@amicus.cam.ac.uk](mailto:webmaster@amicus.cam.ac.uk)

**Use your website:** copies of draft Minutes  
from monthly Branch meetings can be  
downloaded from the website and taken along  
to Branch meetings: this will help cut down on  
photocopying costs for the Branch.

**Branch Newsletter**

Please display a copies of Newsletter in your  
workplace. If you need additional copies  
please contact Will. Please pass copies of  
your Newsletter to colleagues who may not  
be union members to show them what Unite  
can do for them. Any items for inclusion in the  
Newsletter to Juliet Barrows at:  
[newsletter@amicus.cam.ac.uk](mailto:newsletter@amicus.cam.ac.uk)

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**Branch Officials and Organisation: contact details**

Name	Email
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Sara Bennett <i>Vice Chair</i>	
Will Smith <i>Branch Secretary Recruitment &amp; Organisation</i>	<a href="mailto:secretary@amicus.cam.ac.uk">secretary@amicus.cam.ac.uk</a>
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John Baldwin <i>Retired Members</i>	
Adam Booth <i>Student Liaison</i>	
Vacant <i>Personal Case Coordinator</i>	
Vacant <i>Health &amp; Safety</i>	<a href="mailto:health-safety@amicus.cam.ac.uk">health-safety@amicus.cam.ac.uk</a>
Vacant <i>Lifelong Learning</i>	<a href="mailto:staff-dev@amicus.cam.ac.uk">staff-dev@amicus.cam.ac.uk</a>
Vacant <i>Equal Opportunities</i>	<a href="mailto:dignity-equality@amicus.cam.ac.uk">dignity-equality@amicus.cam.ac.uk</a>