

### Getting organised at Newcastle

As local associations are getting more organised, I'd like to take a look at Newcastle UCU and how it has been tackling the challenges of implementing the pay framework agreement by taking the opportunity to reinvigorate its own structures.

Newcastle UCU has a good hard-working committee and yet, like many branches and local associations, needs more active members. The committee is often busy with negotiations and individual representation, yet realises the value of recruitment and communicating with both members and non-members.

Initially, a recruitment and campaign team was set up to look at the departmental representative structure, membership density and producing a plan for activity for the rest of the academic year. The well-balanced team consisted of an academic, an academic-related member, a postgraduate and a member on a fixed-term contract.

First of all, the sites for all our noticeboards were identified and where we didn't have one, a request was made for one or space allocated on an existing noticeboard. Monthly recruitment stalls were planned in various locations. Open meetings with academic-related staff were arranged and these have brought in several new members. Non-members have become more aware of the dangers in the job evaluation exercise and a potential loss of certain entitlements.

An open meeting was organised for fixed term staff to discuss negotiations to implement the new legislation which puts staff on more secure forms of contracts.

One of the most important features of any branch or local association (LA) is its departmental representative structure. Having members willing to campaign in their departments makes a real difference to the effectiveness of a branch/LA. One member of the recruitment and campaign team personally visited all our reps and asked them if they were happy to continue in the role, whether they needed support or more campaign material, and what future activities they could be involved in.

This extremely worthwhile exercise really paid off for Newcastle UCU as we gained several new reps and existing reps have become re-energised.

Newcastle UCU has used its negotiations on the new pay framework to encourage more members to become more active, recruit new members and raise its profile. A negotiations training day emphasised the importance of having a communications strategy and the LA is already putting together a plan to use all methods of communication to encourage

activity and increase their membership base. This is an ideal campaigning issue and it will bring real benefits to branches/LAs prepared to launch vigorous campaigns around the pay negotiations.

Already, Newcastle UCU is seeing the benefits of their increased activity with a more active and larger rep structure and also a steady stream of new members.

**Ronnie Kershaw, UCU Organiser**