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Although we wish to progress issues of equality within UCU and to bring the expertise and enthusiasm of all members to the work of our new union, we cannot allow the allegations of members of the former AUT women's committee to go unchallenged ("UCU split over equality brief", and Letters, July 14).

The decision to allocate responsibility for equality issues to Paul Mackney was taken democratically and in accordance with the processes of the union.

The 'capable and committed' male officials referred to are Paul Mackney, Joint General Secretary, and Roger Kline, Head of Equality, Health and Safety and Employment Rights. NATFHE, under Paul's leadership, made equality into one of the central three planks of union structure, policy and activism, together with higher and further education. Both within workplaces and the wider labour movement, NATFHE forged a tradition of proactive promotion of equality work and of enabling collaborative and complementary work between groups of women, LGBT, disabled and black activists, deliberately eschewing any hierarchy of oppression. Under Roger Kline, NATFHE's universities department ensured that the equality dimensions of such key industrial issues as the status of hourly-paid staff became a central consideration in campaigning and negotiation. The trade union movement as a whole has looked to NATFHE as an example of innovative and committed leadership in the area of equalities.

No one individual can represent equality interests on the basis of who they are; rather it is competence and achievement that count. A campaigning union must make space to encourage and nurture activists of all kinds and to enable effective organisation in relation to all equality issues that is led by members themselves. Of course, we do not suggest that NATFHE, Paul or Roger have all the answers in these regards. However, in terms of the prioritization given to equality work, the co-operative working developed between women, LGBT, disabled and black activists, the creation of a dedicated equality unit within the union and the integration of equalities issues into mainstream industrial organising, NATFHE has set a benchmark for the trade union movement. This is the work that we seek to maintain in UCU. We feel that it is a track record that speaks for itself.

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