

## UCU Prison Education Annual Conference 2013

Prison educators from across the country descended on Carlow Street on 22nd March for the annual Prison Education Conference. It was good to see colleagues from all four providers, A4e, Manchester, Milton Keynes & Weston Colleges able to attend and the depth of experience this brought to the day was most welcome.

Terry Hoad, UCU past president, opened proceedings and welcomed all to UCU HQ before our national official Christiane Ohsan gave us an outline of the day ahead.

### Update from NOMS

A keynote speech next, from Sharon Barrett (NOMS), who spoke about clustering arrangements, partnerships & working prisons around the OLASS 4 agenda. Sharon took questions following her presentation and the room delivered posing & searching questions that hit the key strategic issues.

Question/Concern	Response
HMPS staff reductions & education staff being asked to undertake searching & rubdowns. Concern around the potential loss of education officers due to benchmarking and subsequent safety.	PSI 04/2012 'ENABLERS OF HEALTH, LIBRARY, EDUCATION AND JOBCENTRE PLUS SERVICES IN PRISONS prohibits provider searches. I will talk to the benchmarking team around education officers.
Concern over education staff turnover, recruitment & inferior contracts/T&C's.	A matter for the providers but I will raise the issues with key stakeholders.
Re-tendering & Privatisation (A4e)	The procurement process was fair and A4e had the strongest bid. I will take concerns over the instability caused by re-tendering to the key stakeholders.
Funding (GLH)	The funding model is presently being looked at in response to concerns raised.
Creative industries not considered important under OLASS 4.	NOMS met with the Arts Forum and are taking onboard concerns to share with partners.
Virtual Campus too complicated to be effective in terms of administration. Not enough practice papers from exam providers.	Will take this back to Mark Taylor, the NOMS VC lead.

Functional Skills issues with administering exams (named entry etc).	Will take this back to partners.
Quantum not fit for purpose.	Quantum is due for refresh and an IE8 trial is presently underway.
Concerns over PSD provision in OLASS 4.	New funding guidance has been announced (personal and social development fund). An innovation code can be raised to get quals on the LARA.
Security clearances – still the case that this is done a number of times for different prisons in some instances.	Will speak with NOMS.
Targets for learner recruitment on tutor shoulders when they have no influence over this. Numbers are often low as prisons fill 'working prisons' spaces.	Presently looking at how L&S attendance is recorded and we are making it clear to Govs that L&S is important. The prison allocates learners so will take this back.
Working Prisons – work identification process is flawed locally and seems to have little thought behind it.	Will take this back to 131 and partners. Work identification opportunities should respond to local labour market research.
Closure days, L&S staff automatically excluded (providers save money by not paying them).	A matter for individual employers but will take this back to key stakeholders.
Duplication of administration & paperwork.	This is down to individual providers but the point is taken and SFA are aware of the administrative burden.

UCU meet regularly with NOMS, SFA & BIS and it was refreshing to hear that concerns we had raised on your behalf previously were on course to be addressed and whilst every question could not be answered on the day it is very useful to put these types of questions to persons in positions of influence and a means by which we can effect change. Well done to all!

## Branch Organisation

Branch organisation next and Terry introduced the subject to the room. UCU faces some very difficult decisions presently as membership drops off in line with trends being felt by other unions. There are many factors affecting membership but key issues here relate to the amount of redundancies being made in education and people entering the profession on casualised contracts. The summative effect is that UCU needs to save 2M year on year to remain an effective and viable union. By working to increase our membership in these difficult times we can reduce this figure and thus protect the services we receive from the cuts required to keep our union solvent.

National organiser Ronnie Kershaw led the work and split us into employer groups to look at the issues around recruitment and retention... Each group then worked out their own programme of work.

## UCU Survey

Graham Mawdsley, our NEC member, took the chair after lunch as we moved into looking at policy issues. Many of you took part in the UCU survey of prison educators and Angela Nartney gave us an update. We have had a fantastic response and the survey results will inform UCU's lobbying and campaigning work on behalf of prison educators.

Jane Hurry and Lynne Rogers, project partners from the Institute of Education, took us through the survey results and drew comparison to the last full survey of prison members undertaken in 2008. From the results it is clear we suffer from high stress levels, long working hours and a poor work/life balance. The full report, 'A Punishing Regime', can be found here:

[www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/8/b/ucu\\_punishingregime\\_prisonstress\\_mar13.pdf](http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/8/b/ucu_punishingregime_prisonstress_mar13.pdf)

## YOI Contract Consultation

The young offender estate is up for re-tender and Christiane brought to our attention the consultation paper, 'Transforming Youth Custody':

[consult.justice.gov.uk/digital-communications/transforming-youth-custody](http://consult.justice.gov.uk/digital-communications/transforming-youth-custody)

The MOJ's vision for YOI's revolves around the provision of secure colleges that provide 'education with detention' and the consultation paper makes much of the *success* of academies. Whilst time did not allow for a full discussion around the proposals we would very much like to receive your feedback on the consultation document.

## UCU Training

A brief diversion from the agenda followed as Karen Brook took us through the training opportunities currently afforded us by UCU. As we heard earlier finances are tight and it is not economically viable to run courses without sufficient numbers attending. Karen urged us to of course, take advantage of the excellent training on offer, but also to make every effort to attend once committed to doing so. It is unfortunately the case that courses are needing to be cancelled where drop out rates mean the minimum numbers required cannot be met. Full details of all courses available can be found here:

<http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=3311>

## H&S Follow Up Survey

Copies of UCU's latest research on this was circulated.

## UCU & FE Issues

Barry Lovejoy, UCU's Head of FE, up next and we were updated on current issues of national significance to include, the national pay offer, pensions (<http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=1320>) and UCU's workload/stress campaign.

On workload and the national pay offer individual branches should presently be consulting with members and branch officers liaising with Carlow St to inform UCU of their indicative position on both issues.

UCU, along with other unions, submitted a 5% pay claim this year and at an earlier point in the year than normal. The rationale behind this is that where the claim is rejected this enables a unified approach to any industrial action we may take. We do expect the offer to be rejected and are currently canvassing branches on the appetite amongst the membership for taking action as a result. <http://www.ucu.org.uk/fepayengland>

On workload Barry has written to all college principals asking them to sign up to the FE national agreement on workload. As this is a national agreement, negotiated with the AoC, we expect employers to sign up to it and will seek to take the matter to trade dispute. Where resolution is not forthcoming, it is proposed branches would initially resolve to take action short of a strike against their individual employers and escalate action as appropriate. Again branches are presently being canvassed for the views of the membership on this matter. <http://www.ucu.org.uk/workloadcampaign>

A brief action-planning slot to close off the branch organisation session followed before the meeting was brought to a end. We had a retirement in the room and longstanding rep David Tyler was thanked for his many years service to UCU by Lance Phillips, the TMC Vice Chair.

Graham Mawdsley thanked all participants for what had been a very useful and productive day and reserved special thanks for national organiser Ronnie Kershaw in regard to his tireless work for prison education.

Thank you to all for your engagement, for your continued commitment and for taking the time to make a difference to us all as prison educators.