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Welcome to the June newsletter. This edition is our Annual Congress special.

1. UCU Annual Congress Report

There was an environment stall at the Congress in Glasgow on May 23-24. The annual report was launched. It outlined another busy year of UCU activity. One highlight is the increase in the number of UCU Environment Reps since Congress, 2014, by 26%. It shows that despite all the current pressure on union organisation this is an area of growing membership activity:

http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/d/s/UCU_Annual_Environment_Report_2015_Final.pdf

Congress passed a motion supporting local and national campaigns against fracking. It was moved by first time delegate Niroshan Sirose, who had lived near Balcombe, the centre of a successful community campaign against Cuadrilla. The text of the motion can be found here:

<http://www.ucu.org.uk/7519>

2. UCU Reps Network Update

Our latest news comes from UCU Scotland. The Executive Committee met on May 15 in Edinburgh. A discussion took place on the theme of 'Climate change the greatest economic challenge of the 21 century.'

Information was provided on the joint work between NUS Scotland and People & Planet on both education for sustainable development and divestment. It was agreed to include an Environment update on the Branch report template. An additional environment rep was identified to join the network.

Two motions were passed from the UCU Scotland Congress. One on 'Climate Change' from the Executive Committee and Queen Margaret University, and the other on 'Unconventional Gas Extraction' (fracking) from Queen Margaret.

A reminder will be sent to all branches with upcoming AGMs asking for nominations to fill environment rep posts.

3. After the election

There has been no shortage of speculation on the implications for sustainable development. Carbon Brief provides one of many:

http://www.carbonbrief.org/blog/2015/05/election-2015-what-will-a-conservative-majority-mean-for-climate-and-energy/?utm_source=Daily+Carbon+Briefing&utm_campaign=1049848b3f-Carbon_Brief_Daily_110515&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_876aab4fd7-1049848b3f-303426921

Two things are for sure. Firstly, any attempts to weaken unions through new legislation will have adverse effects on our ability to influence standards in the workplace. Secondly, cuts to funding for the sector will make campus and curriculum improvements harder to achieve.

There are already signs that FHE institutions are reducing sustainability resources. It puts a question mark over the ability of employers to rise to the challenges facing the education sector. UCU has discussed with the Environment Association of Universities and Colleges and NUS our concerns about this. A survey of sector employers will help to establish capacity and whether there is the prospect of a reduction in resources and commitments. This will inform any future campaign to press for sufficient resources to meet climate change and sustainable development obligations.

4. Education for Sustainable Development

The 13 pilot projects (8 universities and 5 colleges) were completed in May, 2015. This sustainable development accreditation scheme has been supported by UCU and offers an opportunity for students and staff to influence employer performance. The Sustainability Programmes Roundtable at Manchester Met University on June 18th will review the success of the project prior to a UK-wide roll-out in 2015-16.

'Towards an industrial strategy for Yorkshire and the Humber' is a European TUC funded project which will provide an opportunity for trades unions to set out the case for jobs in a low carbon economy. Skills will be a vital part of this and UCU officers in the Yorkshire region will be attending the launch at Leeds City Hall on June 17th.

The Greener Jobs Alliance which is being co-ordinated by UCU to promote ESD, will meet on June 4th to identify opportunities for engaging with the new Global Action Programme launched by UNESCO:

<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco-world-conference-on-esd-2014/esd-after-2014/global-action-programme/>

5. Divestment update

The divestment campaign argues that there is a financial reason for getting rid of fossil fuel investments, because increasing policies to cut carbon will eventually impact on the stocks' value. In our March newsletter we reported that 2 UK universities had voted to divest – Glasgow and Bedfordshire. Since then 4 more have taken decisions.

The School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London became the 3rd and the first in London. After a campaign spanning 18 months, involving over 1,000 students and staff, SOAS's governing body voted in favour of divesting the £1.5m it has invested in fossil fuels within its £32m endowment fund over the next 3 years. This decision also means that the university will have to take connections to the fossil fuel industry into account as a part of its gift and donations acceptance guidelines.

London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine has sold off investments in coal companies from its £16m endowment in a bid to rid itself of ties to firms that contribute most significantly to climate change. Campaigners say it is the first health research organisation in the world to do so.

Oxford University has ruled out future investments in coal and tar sands from its multi-billion pound endowment, but said it would not divest from all fossil fuels as demanded by thousands of students, academics and alumni.

Edinburgh University with a £290m endowment committed to 'engage before divestment' and had been heavily criticised for not even ruling out coal and tar sands investments. On May 26th they eventually agreed that they will fully divest from 3 of the world's biggest fossil fuel producers within 6 months. UCU members were participating in an NUS Scotland Ethical Investment meeting at the University of Strathclyde when the decision was announced:

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/may/26/university-edinburgh-divest-fossil-fuel-student-protestors>

The NUS has increased their profile on divestment recently. Piers Telemacque, Vice President, commented in The Guardian that "Whether it's apartheid or fossil fuels, divestment is on the right side of history":

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/apr/27/divestment-fossil-fuels-apartheid-barclays>

On May 27, UCU organised a joint meeting with NUS and People & Planet at the LSE to review progress on the divestment campaigns in London. We will be producing a detailed update on this in the next newsletter.

6. USS

UCU has been in discussions with the Universities Superannuation Scheme on their ethical investment policy. USS is the second largest pension fund in the UK. We have been working with ShareAction to call for greater transparency and consultation.

We have arranged a meeting on June 24 at UCU Head Office on 'Responsible and Ethical Investment'. This is open to UCU members of the scheme and can be booked on this link:

<https://www.ucu.org.uk/uss-ethical-investment>

7. Paris

The trade union movement is gearing up for the UN climate talks in December. A useful publication setting out how 'climate change is trade union business' is the latest briefing:

http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/ituc_frontlines_climate_change_report_may_en.pdf

On 14-15 September, the ITUC is holding a union climate summit in Paris – “a summit to mobilise but also to showcase union successes in the industrial challenge to de-carbonise our workplaces and our industries.” ITUC affiliates are encouraged to ensure they register delegates by 14 August.

8. Air quality

The ITV Tonight programme screened on May 19th reported on the dangerous levels of air pollution in the UK:

<http://www.itv.com/news/2015-05-19/tonight-the-air-we-breathe/>

It also reported on the hearing at the Supreme Court on April 29 when the UK government was found to be in breach of the EU Air Quality Directive. UCU members celebrated outside the court along with other campaigners:

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/apr/29/supreme-court-orders-uk-to-draw-up-air-pollution-cleanup-plan>

UCU will be presenting on its innovative 'citizen science' project at the London Sustainability Exchange event on July 7 at St Bride Foundation, Fleet St, London:

https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/taking-a-deep-breath-cleaning-up-londons-air-tickets-17067154318?dm_i=CXK%2C3E4GG%2C271KKF%2CC76XN%2C1

9. Fossil Fuel subsidies

The pollution that has been classified by the World Health Organisation as the 'greatest public health threat of the 21st century' is being massively funded by the taxpayer. Fossil fuel companies are benefitting from global subsidies of \$5.3tn (£3.4tn) a year, equivalent to \$10m a minute every day, according to a startling new estimate by the International Monetary Fund:

<http://touchstoneblog.org.uk/2015/05/ending-global-fossil-fuel-subsidies-would-cut-carbon-emissions-by-a-fifth/>

10. Environment Rep Corner

We like to use the newsletter to showcase the great work being done by our local reps. Elaine Ball, UCU Salford Uni Green Rep, talks about her role working with students on the Green Impact programme:

With Green Impact we were able to find practical ways to work with such challenges to implement eighteen initiatives (B001 - B005) Energy; (B006 - B007) Travel; (B008 - B011) Waste & Recycling; (B012 - B012) Water; (B013 - B014) Procurement; (B015 - B015) Greening teams, action plans and communications; (B016 - B018) Embedding & Communication. Now we are at the end of this years' simple but effective cycle, and have worked as a student/academic union team and focused on providing simple actions, supporting people to make the changes and disseminating our efforts. Waiting to see if we are to be awarded Bronze....

Get in touch

If you are a UCU member looking for advice on sustainable development or have ideas for greening the FHE sector please let us know. Contact: Graham Petersen, UCU Environment Co-ordinator:

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