

Dear colleague,

Welcome to our latest regional office newsletter at the end of a busy and successful year for UCU, with major campaigns over USS, and over pay and conditions in both further and higher education. The fight goes on as UCU is currently balloting for strike action in six FE colleges in the London region with a ballot of all higher education institutions expected in the new year over the 2018 pay claim.

In this issue, we have an article on the current ballots and the recent successful strike action as part of the #FEFightsBack campaign, as well as updates on the pay campaign in HE, USS and the Teachers' Pension Scheme.

We in the regional office continue to support our members and branches with their individual and collective issues but as always we remember that our members and activists are the lifeblood of the union. Thank you to those who have campaigned, picketed, and joined our lobbies and demonstrations over the last year: we ask you to speak to your colleagues who may not yet have joined and ask them to become members of UCU to support the work we all do across higher and further education. The union is only as strong as our members!

We wish all of our members and activists a happy and peaceful Christmas and New Year and look forward to an active and successful 2019.

Amanda, Barry and Una
Regional officials



FE FIGHTS BACK

Croydon College UCU and Lambeth College UCU were among the magnificent six branches in England taking strike action for fair pay on 28 and 29 November. Picket lines were lively and strongly supported, with messages of solidarity from across the country.

This was the first wave of UCU's FE Fights Back campaign, following the joint unions' pay claim for 5% or £1500 for all workers in FE colleges. Our campaign saw UCU members take to the streets with other trade unions in FE and the Association of Colleges, as part of the Love Our Colleges week of action. We lobbied Parliament to call on the government urgently to address the funding crisis in further education.

Meanwhile, 26 colleges are now being balloted for strike action over the 2018/19 pay claim, with six of those in London. Strike ballots at City Lit, Havering College, Morley College, West Thames College, Richmond-upon-Thames College and South Thames Colleges Group will close on 19 December – if you're a member at one of the above make sure that you **use your vote** and keep a strong voice in your workplace.

Recent wins at Capital City Colleges Group, where strike action by UCU members led to a landmark 5% pay award for over 1,700 staff, and New City College, where a new deal on pay and contracts has been agreed, show that determined action by further education members can make a real difference.

Support the #FEfightback campaign!

- If you're a member at South Thames Colleges Group, Havering, Morley, City Lit, Richmond-upon-Thames or West Thames College, **don't forget to use your vote** – we need a high turnout in order to take strike action.
- Check out www.youtube.com/watch?v=IUpKB_Z8BX8&t for a great piece on BBC 5Live about the strike action
- Sign the petition calling for the government to increase FE funding to sustainable levels: <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/229744>
- Add your solidarity messages to our online 'wall of support' at www.ucu.org.uk/fefightingback
- Tweet messages of support using the hashtags **#FEfightback** and **#Fairpay**

Do we have your correct information?

It is very important that UCU has accurate membership records. It is now possible for individual members to update their own data through the MyUCU portal:

https://ucu.custhelp.com/app/utils/login_form/redirect/membership%252Fmy_details/

Depending on when you joined the union, you may need to register for this facility, but it is far the best way of ensuring that the contact details we have for you are up to date. This is especially important when it comes to the union's ballots and consultation exercises, when maximum participation is essential and statutory obligations to ensure accuracy apply.

You can also update your record by emailing membership@ucu.org.uk



UCU – taking action on workloads

UCU is launching an ambitious and innovative UK-wide workload campaign - www.ucu.org.uk/workloadcampaign

The campaign encourages branches to use a joined-up approach to tackling workload issues; gathering evidence and using legal leverage under statutory health and safety

provisions, in a way which supports organising and recruitment and the development of local workload claims. Inspections of the workplace carried out by bespoke H&S reps (Workload Reps) are at the heart of the campaign.

Outcomes from the pilot stage - where the campaign model was developed - has resulted in the appointment of additional UCU reps, visible campaign activity in workplace departments, the identification of core issues for local bargaining and campaigning, and the submission of local workload claims.

A longer term objective is to establish effective joint working groups with the employers to agree action plans to systematically address core workload issues and ensure minimum compliance with employer legal duties to control and manage work-related stress risks.

The resources include campaign poster/flyer, overview, checklists, legal rights, flow chart, workload claim outlines and specific factsheets covering workload inspections, reporting, and reviewing work-related stress risk management by employers.

Online versions of the HSE stress questionnaire and the UCU generic local workload survey are available upon request from your regional office.



Universities Superannuation Scheme

In the summer, UCU members voted to suspend strikes over proposals to end defined benefit pensions in USS in return for the establishment of a Joint Expert Panel to look at the issue. The JEP has delivered its first report which vindicates UCU's position in concluding that the proposal was unnecessary, though it also concludes that a modest increase in contributions may be required. (See www.ucu.org.uk/media/9523/JEP-report-September-2018/pdf/report-of-the-joint-expert-panel_002.pdf)

It will now move on to look at the adoption of a more collaborative approach to the 2020 valuation and beyond, in order to avoid future disputes. At the HE sector conference held last month, support was expressed for the JEP and discussion took place on the union's approach to any proposal for an increase in contribution. UCU negotiators will have taken the views expressed into ongoing meetings with the employers and USS.

Teachers' Pension Scheme

In TPS, meanwhile, there are also changes on the horizon. Since pay has fallen relative to inflation and increases in life expectancy have stalled recently, benefits need to improve in order to compensate members of the scheme. Government demands have, however, increased, requiring a substantial increase in employer contributions. The government has agreed to cover these for schools and for FE, leaving only HE to find the funds necessary.

Whichever scheme you belong to, watch out for updates from the union at www.ucu.org.uk/strikeforuss and www.ucu.org.uk/pensions

PAY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

In higher education, you will probably be aware that UCU's Higher Education Sector Conference on 7 November voted to conduct a ballot of all relevant branches on the 2018/19 pay, equality, casualisation and workload claim. The exact timing of this ballot is to be announced, but it will take place during January and February 2019, to be concluded by the end of March 2019. This gives us some time to plan and implement full scale campaigns to ensure the maximum possible participation in the ballot and to get us well over the 50% threshold for a statutorily actionable ballot.

Please look out for details of your branch's campaign, and support it actively if you possibly can. We in the regional office are committed to offering every assistance to branches, and we want to hear from you and your colleagues about how we might best resource and support your work, as well as any ideas for focussing the campaign on your institution's issues with equalities, casualisation and workloads.

Meet the activists!

In this newsletter we meet Suzanna Butler, a lecturer in sociology and UCU rep in the Uxbridge College branch, and Huw Morgan Jones, a higher education sector rep from University of London Senate House:

Suzanna, how long have you been active in UCU and what led you to get involved?

I've been active for about 3 years now. I realised that we needed a voice and that we aren't always protected by the institution that we work for. I wanted to become a part of the union as it made me feel protected at work, knowing that there was a group who would support me if I needed it.

What is the most rewarding thing about being a UCU officer/rep?

The most rewarding thing is after you help someone with an issue that they are having. Sometimes it is something small than can be solved through mediation, but sometimes there can be huge cases that take months!

What have some of the challenges been?

Building the union is an ongoing challenge. There's a lot of interest in what the union can offer, but getting people to be active and take part can be more difficult. We'd be really happy to have a few more officers and reps and to recruit some more members so that our branch can be as strong as possible!

What do you think are the most important workplace issues in the FE sector/for your members at Uxbridge?

In FE at the moment it is definitely budget cuts - they have increased our teaching hours but not increased our pay. This has led to a noticeable difference in stress, motivation and sickness this term. Ultimately though, it is the students that suffer as we cannot spend as much time with them as before.

What would your advice be to others wanting to get involved?

Join the union, be as involved as possible. It's great to make a difference and help others!

Huw, how long have you been active in UCU and what led you to get involved?

I joined UCU in 2014 and became a particularly active member when I was one of 24 people that went through an unnecessary and harmful corporate review/restructure process in autumn 2017. After getting UCU involved in this process, I went along to the branch AGM in December and accepted a nomination to become the branch secretary. At that time UUK had just announced their intentions to get rid of the DB element of USS. I knew that this was the right time to become more active within the union.

What have some of the challenges been?

I definitely jumped in at the deep end by becoming branch secretary. Organising a branch takes time and I've done a lot of things this year that have expanded my comfort zones. 18 months ago I would have never imagined explaining the mechanics of a pension scheme to peers, organising a picket line, advocating for the rights of peers with HR and senior managers, or attending a higher education sector conference to vote on motions on behalf of my whole branch! Pushing myself to do these things has been really good for me personally and has hopefully done more good than harm to others, and I don't regret it for a moment.

While there was a steep learning curve at the start, I have definitely found my voice within the branch now and am finding out what works and what doesn't. Time is a challenge - there's not enough to achieve all you want to at the branch.

What would your advice be to others thinking of getting involved?

The strength of a branch lies in the members who put themselves forward to do stuff.

If you think your branch doesn't do enough, is complacent or ineffective help be the change by doing something yourself - it's not as scary as it sounds. You don't need to join a branch committee to be an active member.

Training for reps and officers...

UCU provides a variety of free workshops and courses for reps and officers. We encourage all our reps to take part in trade union training to build skills and share experience with other activists.

Rep 1: UCU reps induction, 19-21 June 2019, London

Representing individual members: an introduction to casework, 12 February 2019, London

Health & Safety 1: Induction (Health & safety reps role and functions), 22-24 May 2019, London

Health & Safety 2: Organising and bargaining for health and safety, 13-15 March 2019, London

Introduction to pensions, 17-18 January 2019, London

Equality reps: 8 May & 29 May 2019, London

Effective negotiating & bargaining skills: 29-30 April & 14 May 2019, London

You can find a wider list of courses available in London region by following the link below:

<https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/4797/Courses-in-the-London-South-East--Eastern-region>