



UCU prison education annual meeting and AGM 2023

The annual meeting took place on Friday 17 February (in person) at UCU headquarters in Carlow Street, London.

The event was well attended by all prison branches who were treated to some exceptional speakers who had a keen interest in education and specifically prison education.

The day kicked off with a very warm welcome from **Maxine Looby, our national UCU vice-president**, who chaired the event for the day. Maxine has been a long-time supporter of prison education and her continued support through her presidential term will be much appreciated by all in prison education.

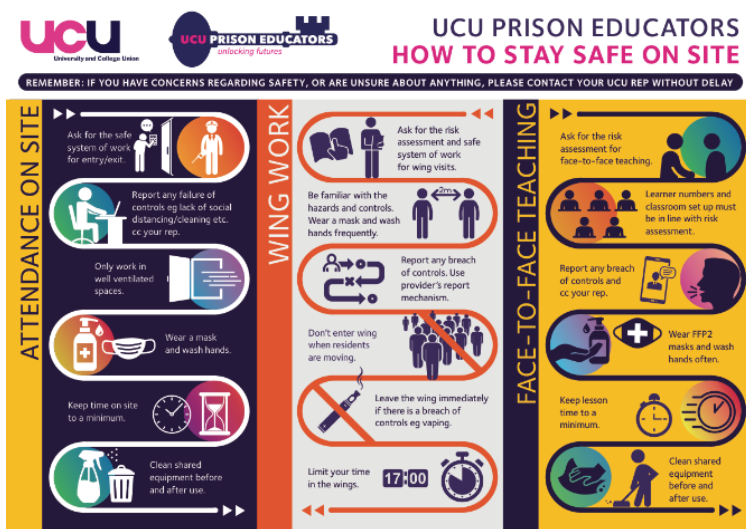
Our first speaker was our current **president Janet Farrar** who, fresh from her visit to Wormwood Scrubs, talked about organising within our workplaces with specific mention to those employed on insecure and precarious contracts. Janet also referred to the work of Maxine and others in the setting up of a **Black prison educators' Network** and the need for this space for debate and organisation on the particular issues facing them. Maxine also referenced the challenges Black prison educators face in the workplace and expressed the need for the voice of Black prison educators to be heard and acknowledged in a meaningful way across the whole of the union.



There then followed a discussion of issues raised from the floor that mirrored our first two speakers' concerns and how the PEF contractual arrangements had exacerbated them.

Baroness Christine Blower, long-time supporter of prison educators, had taken time from her busy Parliamentary schedule to show her solidarity and support for prison educators. She spoke about the importance of prison educators as 'The heroic few who could offer hope' and discussed the link between school exclusions and involvement in the Criminal Justice System.

Most importantly, Baroness Blower confirmed her clear understanding and support for the UCU campaign for a **national prison educators' contract**, ensuring that the constant race to the bottom of providers for diminishing terms and conditions ends.



Health and Safety was the next issue addressed by **Alex Lancaster**, UCU's Health and Safety official, who reflected on how during Covid more establishment H&S reps were recruited, systems were improved and escalation routes established.

Reference was made to the successful outcome in the Novus dispute of 2020. prison educators

were the first trade unionists to take strike action over Health and Safety, an action we all should be proud of.

Alex discussed the normalisation and acceptance within prison education of inadequate conditions, from lack of water to poor ventilation to the presence of nesting pigeons in departments. In tackling these issues she looked at the importance of using reporting systems and the impact of not feeling safe on recruitment and retention.

Stress was another issue raised and Alex referenced **UCU's Workload Survey** where respondents reported the average amount of unpaid days they are working and how the pace and intensity of work has increased. The

difficulty in addressing concerns and the tensions between the Education providers and the establishments was another issue being constantly raised from the floor which members felt led to insurmountable and ever-changing paperwork.

NOVUS branch AGM

The meeting started with the election of the officers to serve for the next term.

The results were as follows:

- **Brian Hamilton** (Chair) Cumbria and Lancashire
- **Jane Inskip** (Vice-chair) West Midlands
- **Maria Walker** (Secretary) Tees and Weir
- **Paula Keenan** Greater Manchester
- **Pauline Rattray** London

Vacancy: Yorkshire and Humberside.

The Chair then thanked **Sharon Norey** and **Art Murray** for the service that they had both given serving London and Yorkshire and Humberside respectively.

The meeting then discussed next years' pay claim and the ongoing discussions with the employer to resolve the Part 2 elements of last year's claim.

It was decided to wait until we had a clearer picture of the February CPI figure (due 22nd March) before we hold an all members' meeting to formulate our final claim that has the branch's mandate.

On the Part 2 claim we celebrate the awarding of gate time (after a 20 year fight) and will take forward some minor issues reported on its implementation.

On the Project Connect part of the talks, two major workstreams have been identified on Terms and Conditions and Work Profiles. Talks have only just started and once your negotiators have anything concrete to put to members an all-members' meeting will be called for the appropriate decisions and mandate.

Milton Keynes College, People Plus and Weston College.

Branch meetings also took place for UCU reps from Milton Keynes College, People Plus and Weston College. It was decided not to elect the branch officers at this time, and focus discussions on the key issues facing members, about which there were lots of similarities.

Workload and workload pressures was the key issues. The Milton Keynes committee reps reported that as part of last year's pay agreement, a prison workload working group had been set up and was now regularly meeting. Members had direct access to the working group that was currently looking at ways to consider how best to balance gate time issues with preparation and administration demands. The committee had recently agreed to survey members on workload, and this would take place in advance of developing this year's pay claim around April.

People Plus reps reported that members had recently been surveyed about the negative impact the demands of the quality team was having on members' workloads. The survey closed last week, there was a good response and these were still being analysed, however it was clear that a number of issues were identifiable and would be raised with management along with proposals to tackle them.

The pay claim for this year was likely to be developed around April/May and the committee were keeping a keen eye on the CPI figure that will be realised in March, which will be used as the basis for the MoJ contract uprating passed onto the provider.

For Weston College the most pressing issue was the pending TUPE transfer of Lot 8 to Milton Keynes. This will mean about half of the UCU members and reps will move to MKC. That's good news for the growing branch at MKC and a plan is being developed to build Weston College prison education branch - it is the only one of the four prison education providers that doesn't recognise UCU's prison branch. However, we can draw on the really positive experience of the college membership who last year went into dispute with the college over pay, won a statutory ballot and took part in strike action before winning a pay increase for members. The reps in the college and prison are now joined up and will be sharing experiences and working together to grow UCU in Weston College.

Joint session

The main meeting then continued with **UCU Organiser Ronnie Kershaw** talking about the importance of an organised branch and how communication is the key. Ronnie emphasised how strength in numbers when it comes to bargaining and negotiation make employers take notice and makes them more likely to respond to our demands, Ronnie highlighted how individual conversations make all the difference for recruitment and we all have a responsibility to engage with members and non-members to get our message across.

An insight into the Parliamentary work done by UCU through the **JUPG** and JUPA was given by Charley Allen who is the organiser for both groups in Parliament. Charley stated that 'Prison education should be at the heart of the rehabilitation process'. He explained the work of JUPG in supporting trade unions in taking their campaigns to Parliament.

Charley explained Parliamentary campaigns and how members can engage in the process. Parliamentary questions are discussed and how they have been used by prison educators to amplify and contribute to recent successful disputes.

The importance of this work cannot be over emphasised if we hope to shape prison education to both benefit learners and members going forward into the new prison education Service.

The final session of the day was given by **Paul Bridge, UCU head of further education**. Paul spoke about the work UCU was doing to raise the profile and recognition of prison education and highlight the exceptional work members did in the most trying of environments. Teaching and learning had been downgraded at the expense of extracting value from the prison ed contract. UCU members had been de-professionalised as a result and UCU has developed a strategic response to this and will be campaigning hard to reset matters. UCU's vision for prison education is one that isn't driven by profit, but is focused on the power of learning, the supporting environment and rehabilitation and reduced offending. All of which were undermined by the PEF and the commissioning model, which is about delivering the contract and the managing behaviours that spin off from this. UCU ultimately want an end to for profit provision and prison education to be removed from the MoJ and housed within

the DfE. Treating educators with respect and giving you recognition was a core part of Paul's session. The current wide range of terms and conditions within and between the four providers, often as a result of TUPE, was a mess. Plenty of cracks existed and members pay, and conditions were held down as a result. UCU wants a national standard set of terms and conditions (a national contract) linked to increased funding that recognises the vital role of prison education and its wider positive impact on society. UCU will campaign hard for this and use our lobbying links to win for members.

The meeting was closed by the chair, Maxine Looby, with thanks to all the speakers and to the reps for all their excellent contributions from the floor.