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Please join the new Branch Facebook Group at:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1077256209678817>



### More information and news

can be obtained from these websites.

UCU National Website:

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

AgeUK: <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/>

68 is too late: [www.68istoolate.org.uk](http://www.68istoolate.org.uk)

National Pensioners Convention (NPC):

<http://npcuk.org>

### Follow your branch:

Website: <http://www.ucu-em-rmb.org.uk>

Twitter: @ucu-em-rmb

Please join the new Facebook Group at:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1077256209678817>

## Branch Meeting

Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> April 2022, 11.00am

The Gothic Warehouse  
Mill Road  
Cromford, DE4 3RQ

At 12.00:

“Campaigning against precarious employment”

Speaker:

James Eaden

President of Chesterfield Trades Council



## UCU East Midlands Retired Members Facebook Group

As we announced in our last newsletter, we have started a UCU East Midlands Retired Members Facebook group. This can be easily found by searching 'UCU East Midlands Retired Members'. If you are a Facebook user, please do this and ask to join. We hope that the group can be used to disseminate more information to our members, to facilitate more discussion, across a wider set of issues. It is open to all members, friends and supporters. Our colleague Harry Ziegler, who is one of the group's admins, has posted many interesting articles. Please join the group, read Harry's contributions, join the discussion and post yourselves.

Rob Kirkwood

*April Fools' Day is also the day when Universities UK's cuts to USS come into effect. What's happening to our pension scheme is as ludicrous as the great April Fools' pranks of the past (spaghetti trees, the island of San Serif), but, unfortunately, not as funny.*

***As a result of these cuts, the pension you will earn today is between 15% and 35% lower than the pension you earned yesterday.*** Coupled with the 21/22 pay award of just 1.5% and an inflation rate currently running at 6.2%, the assault on our pensions means that this year will see the biggest cut in our real-terms remuneration since at least the 1970s – potentially the biggest cut ever.

*The changes taking effect in USS from today have other implications, too. From now on, the University will be spending around £5.8m per year on servicing the 'deficit' that USS calculated existed on 31 March 2020, at the height of the pandemic. In the Trustees' interim monitoring report of 28 February 2022, USS accepted that this 'deficit' had shrunk from £14.1bn to £2.0bn. Remarkably, to create even this trivially small £2.0bn 'deficit', USS had to lower its growth assumptions below even the 'excessively prudent' assumptions used in the 2020 valuation: USS is now assuming 0% growth in real terms (since 2020 it has achieved 33% growth).*

*You may need to take a moment for this outrage to sink in. **This £5.8m per year is real money, taken from the University's bank account.** So, the next time you are told there is no money to fund your PhD student to attend a conference, no money to replace your faulty computer, or no money to buy a new heater for your cold office, please remember that there is enough money in the University to spend £5.8m servicing a deficit that doesn't exist.*

### **What now?**

*There are two immediate ways in which the dispute could be resolved.*

*First, USS is being taken to court by a group of UCU activists. The hearing is scheduled for 5 April, and you can find out details of the case at the [CrowdJustice page](#).*

*Second, Universities UK could insist that USS issues a new deficit recovery plan in light of post-valuation experience. Because the current 'deficit' is so low, this would be likely to reduce deficit recovery payments to zero, thereby providing scope for devising a new schedule of contributions and higher benefits. Critically, to improve benefits does not require the same lengthy consultation and legal process as is needed when benefits are cut.*



## 1. Higher Education Industrial Action – Update and Timeline

As I start this article, I have recently returned from a traditionally snowy picket line, at the West Entrance of Nottingham University. Our working colleagues in many Universities have been striking on and off for many weeks through the autumn, winter and early spring. Not every day has been as cold as today, but we can only admire and support the determination of our colleagues and fellow UCU members. The employers and USS have remained intractable.

Our colleagues at Loughborough University have described the situation as follows, adapted, with permission, from their members newsletter of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022.

*To date, Universities UK has refused to call for a new valuation, or for post-valuation experience to be taken into account in drawing up the deficit recovery plan; instead, it has preferred simply to cut staff benefits. Without concerted pressure from UCU members, in the form of a high turnout and a strong 'yes' vote in the current ballot for continuing industrial action, UUK will continue to erode our living standards.*

I think these words, published by current members, explain the current situation much better than any words of mine could. While I was seeking further inspiration on what to write in this update, I happened across a record of the dispute on the national website. I have slightly adapted it but I think it gives an excellent overview on what else has happened since our last newsletter. For more information see: [www.ucu.org.uk](http://www.ucu.org.uk)

*5th November 2021*

Members back strike action in a ballot over pay and working conditions. Overall, more than seven in 10 members who voted (70.1%) backed strike action with 84.9% voting for action short of strike, which could include a marking boycott.

*9th November 2021*

UCU writes to university employer representatives outlining what university vice chancellors have to do to avoid industrial action in the next few weeks, escalating into spring and beyond. The General Secretary writes to members to outline the next steps.

*12th November 2021*

UCU calls vice-chancellor salaries 'immoral' and 'unsustainable' after the revelations in a report from the Office for Students into senior staff pay in English universities, which exposes a 'cavernous' gap in pay between staff & management.

*16th November 2021*

It is announced that industrial action over the pay and working conditions claim will begin on 1<sup>st</sup> December. Strike action will run for three days from Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> December to Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> December, and the higher education committee has decided to call action short of a strike (ASOS) from 1<sup>st</sup> December, starting with working to contract only.

In a message to members, the General Secretary said 'Employers are doubling down on their completely unacceptable positions: another below-inflation pay offer, doing nothing on casualisation, workloads and inequality, and cutting USS members' guaranteed future pension benefits by 35% or more. We are at an impasse and nothing will change for the better unless UCU members put

on a massive show of strength in those three days of strike action and accompanying ASOS'.

*26th November 2021*

UCU warns that up to 100 universities could face disruption in the new year if the dispute over pay & conditions is not resolved after it is announced that members at 42 universities are to be asked to back strike action in fresh ballots that open on Monday 6<sup>th</sup> December and close on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> January. The reballots come after a number of branches narrowly missed the Conservatives' anti-trade union turnout threshold, in some cases by only one or two votes.



*1st December 2021*

Three consecutive days of strike action begin after university leaders and their representatives refused to address falling pay and worsening working conditions.

After notifying vice chancellors that staff would take strike action unless they saw movement, the employers, represented by University and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) still won't meet without preconditions, and refuse to engage in agreeing action plans that would address widespread casualisation, excessive workloads and pay inequalities. UCEA has also refused to move on another below inflation pay offer for staff. Huge numbers of staff and students are seen on campus picket lines up and down the country.

*12th January 2022*

UCU's higher education committee (HEC) decide to escalate action short of a strike (ASOS) over the Four Fights and USS disputes. Notice is served on higher education employers where there is a live ASOS mandate and, with immediate effect, ASOS will consist of:

- working to contract
- not covering for absent colleagues
- removing uploaded materials related to, and/or not sharing materials related to, lectures or classes that will be or have been cancelled as a result of strike action
- not rescheduling classes and lectures cancelled due to strike action
- not undertaking any voluntary activities.



*18<sup>th</sup> January 2022*

Members at another 12 universities have voted in favour of joining industrial action over attacks on pay, pensions & working conditions. This brings the total number of institutions affected to 68. The General Secretary tells members the results are another powerful signal of members' commitment to address the issues of low pay, inequality, workload intensification and precarious employment. UCU's higher education committee (HEC) will meet on 19<sup>th</sup> January to decide the next steps, following a branch delegates' meeting to feed in members' views.

*21<sup>st</sup> January 2022*

Universities will see further strike action in February unless employers meet UCU's demands over pensions, pay & conditions. UCU's higher education committee (HEC), authorised sustained industrial action at a meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> January, which will include coordinated UK wide and regional rolling strikes. Specific strike dates are to be confirmed shortly. HEC also agreed to begin preparations for a UK wide marking and assessment boycott, which would see staff refusing to undertake marking and assessment duties.

*27<sup>th</sup> January 2022*

New strike dates are announced in the dispute over pensions, pay and conditions. Members in striking branches are being asked to strike on 21<sup>st</sup> & 22<sup>nd</sup> February, and from 28<sup>th</sup> February to 2<sup>nd</sup> March. Rolling strike action across UCU regions is then being planned from 7<sup>th</sup> March if no agreement has been reached with the employers. An escalation of ASOS is also planned. General Secretary Jo Grady also writes to members on the action.

*1<sup>st</sup> February 2022*

UCU responds to the latest HESA report on higher education staff by stating that it shows why university staff are taking strike action, especially as 'women, black staff and disabled staff continue to face shocking pay gaps with women more likely to be on zero hours contracts than men, and black women even more likely still'.

*2<sup>nd</sup> February 2022*

UCU's national disputes committee (NDC) gives its support to UCU's continuing strike action. In a statement published today they say that 'members have already suffered from years of stagnant pay, entrenched inequalities, rampant casualisation and increased workload pressures and are rightly angry at employers' unwillingness to stand with us, despite recognising the truth in our claims'. They add that 'we continue to endorse the mutual

reinforcement of the Four Fights and USS disputes as the two sets of objectives are intrinsically interlinked and coupling greatly increases our leverage on the employers'. The NDC also states their gratitude to 'students, our communities and members across our union and the trade union movement for their solidarity'.

*9<sup>th</sup> February 2022*

UCU warns hardline university leaders that they could be hit with additional strike action if they go ahead with 100% deductions in pay for staff taking action short of a strike (ASOS).

*11<sup>th</sup> February 2022*

In a message to members, the General Secretary reveals that there is now a 'nationally orchestrated move by employers to bully and intimidate UCU members' with threats to deduct up to 100% of the pay of members taking legal ASOS action.

*4<sup>th</sup> March 2022*

UCU announces a further five days of strike action beginning this month unless vice chancellors revoke pension cuts and meet staff demands over pay and working conditions.

The action will take place over two weeks, with members in 39 universities taking action from Monday 21<sup>st</sup> March to Friday 25<sup>th</sup> March, with members in a further 29 universities taking action from Monday 28<sup>th</sup> March to Friday 1<sup>st</sup> April. As part of the ongoing disputes, all branches will also be reballoted in preparation for potential industrial action next term.

*8<sup>th</sup> March 2022*

New industrial action ballots over deteriorating pay and conditions, and the USS pensions dispute, will open on 16<sup>th</sup> March. The new ballots over strike action and action short of strike (ASOS) are taking place because the current mandates to take industrial action will end on 3<sup>rd</sup> May at many universities. Successful reballots will allow staff to continue taking action through this calendar year.

*16<sup>th</sup> March 2022*

The new ballots over deteriorating pay and conditions open today across the UK. These ballots, which close on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> April, will pave the way for action to continue throughout the remainder of 2022.

*21<sup>st</sup> March 2022*

A third wave of strike action over the employers' failure to negotiate over deteriorating pay and conditions begins today. In a message to members on the eve of the action, the General Secretary says

the employers' treatment of their staff is causing material and reputational damage to the sector.

25<sup>th</sup> March 2022

UCU warns of a staff exodus from UK universities after two-thirds of university staff say they are considering leaving the sector within five years over cuts to pensions and deteriorating pay and working conditions. The finding comes from a new UCU report 'UK higher education - a workforce in crisis', based on a survey of almost 7,000 university staff at over 100 institutions.

Rob Kirkwood

### Please Donate to the fighting fund

Please support fellow members who are taking industrial action. Our union uses its fighting fund to support members involved in disputes, including the provision of strike pay where appropriate. Congress has recognised the current economic situation means that it is likely that there will be a number of disputes to save jobs and services and protect conditions. It therefore recommended that members who can afford to do so should make an annual donation to the fighting fund to support others. Congress suggested that an appropriate donation would be £25, depending upon individual circumstances, but any donation to support colleagues taking action will be greatly appreciated and used directly to help members on strike.

### How to donate

- Make a direct bank transfer, or set up a regular standing order, to:  
**Account name: UCU Fighting Fund**  
**Sort code: 60-83-01**  
**Account no: 20179432**  
**Reference: 'Fighting Fund Voluntary Levy'**
- or send a cheque (payable to 'University and College Union') to:  
**Fighting Fund donation**  
**Finance Dept**  
**University and College Union**  
**Carlow Street**  
**London**  
**NW1 7LH**

Please, give whatever support you can

Rob Kirkwood

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## 2. Roger Tanner "Refugees, Problems and Solutions"

Roger is a trustee of Nottingham Refugee Forum and does a lot of voluntary work for them. His role mainly involves meeting the refugees who come to the centre and determining what their needs are, assessing whether they need emergency assistance and directing them to appropriate support within the organisation. They deal with about 40 cases a day, both through face to face support at the Forum and through advice on the telephone.



He began by giving us the example of a family with two young children who had escaped from Syria and crossed the Channel on a boat. They'd been put in a camp in Dover and then moved to a hotel room in Nottingham. They desperately wanted their children to go to school but needed support to do this because of their lack of a permanent residence.

Many of the people they see are ordinary families like these and, some are young men. The media refer to them as 'migrants' and imply that they are coming here for economic gain. In fact, the number of refugees who come to Britain is much lower than for other countries in the EU – last year this country was seventeenth in terms of the numbers of asylum applications. There is no evidence that people come here to benefit from the welfare state etc., it is more usually because of family ties here.

Around 25,000 people cross the Channel in one year. The numbers remain similar to past years but the ways of coming have changed. The problem is that legal avenues have been blocked such that a market has been created for people smugglers.

Of the people being described as 'illegal migrants', around 64-70% win the right to remain on their first application and 50% of the remainder win on appeal. This indicates that the initial decisions are made in haste and are unsafe.

In Britain, asylum seekers aren't permitted to work as they are in other countries, they have to pay for full access to the NHS and they receive a grant of only £40 per week to live on. They are housed in hotel rooms or flats (run by organisations like Serco) and are often living in terrible conditions. They can be moved on at a moment's notice.

Roger quoted another example of a man from North Africa who had a letter rejecting his appeal. His solicitor had stopped helping him because there was no legal aid. He has now received a bundle of letters via a solicitor in Algeria confirming the persecution he suffered there so, with this new evidence, wants to bring a fresh appeal but there is no legal aid available for him.

The Nationality and Borders Bill is currently going through the House of Lords. It is aiming to separate those who come via a resettlement scheme and those who come illegally. Those on the resettlement scheme are flown in from refugee camps and refugees have already been coming from Syria under this scheme. Nottingham should have received 40 families from Afghanistan but only received 5. That scheme is now closing and will be replaced by a new one. The bill defines anyone not on the resettlement scheme as illegal and would place them in camps before deporting them. It is at odds with the Refugee Convention which defines a refugee as someone who has already left their country of origin.

The Refugee Forum knows of about 70 people in Nottingham who've had their claims rejected and therefore have no support, no housing, aren't allowed to work and are destitute. The Forum tries to help by giving small grants, food and clothing. If this Bill passes, there will be many more who will be destitute.

What can we do?

- The Refugee Forum is working with local MPs and members of the Lords such as Ruth Lister to try and ameliorate the worst aspects of the bill but face a government with a large majority in favour.
- Community support is vital – In Nottingham, Care for Calais puts on welcome sessions, several local mosques have provided meals. In Glasgow last year large numbers of people have turned out to prevent deportations from happening.
- Legal help - the Forum used to run a legal project but it closed down when the funding was lost. They are now trying to re-establish some legal assistance and are working with the Law Department at

Nottingham Trent University. If there are any retired law lecturers reading this who could spare some time to help the Refugee Forum they would be gratefully welcomed.

The Nottingham Refugee Forum is the largest in the East Midlands with 40 staff (many part-time) and 115 volunteers. They handle around 3,000 cases per year. They rely on grants and donations, but a major grant provider has been Nottingham City Council which is facing further drastic cuts, and this will hurt the Forum's ability to offer services to their clients.

Given their reliance on donations, the meeting had a collection and raised £120 which was very creditable given that we had a rather small turnout. For those who couldn't make the meeting, the bank details are given below so that you can donate directly. On behalf of the Refugee Forum, Roger thanked you in advance for your contributions.

To make a donation, just go on this website and follow the on-line instructions:

[Donate - Notts Refugee Forum](#)

[Helen Chester](#)

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### 3. Midlands TUC Pensioners Network

#### Notes from Midlands TUC Pensioners Network

A recent meeting of the executive of the network discussed the following issues to be taken forward to the next full network meeting.

Dates and possible speakers for upcoming full meetings of the network were raised including the annual AGM in March.

Suggestions for future speakers included issues around racism affecting older people's perspective. Enquiries are to be made to the Anti Racist Task Force.

The Bus Campaign is an ongoing topic for this group, so the report detailed current progress in the West Midlands and Leicester where interest has been raised through work with Trades Councils which could perhaps be considered in our area. Members were also interested in the Nottingham Tram strike which was apparently about Nottingham Tram staff asking for parity of pay and conditions with staff running trams in Wolverhampton. Although not a publicly owned service anymore, this was thought to link with issues around bus services.

The National Trade Union Pensioners committee recently discussed wages and allowances. Suggestions here included possible action through

campaigning during National Carers Week as concern was expressed about the unpaid or unrecognised roles of family and partner carers which perhaps leads to “Dignified exclusion” and “pensioner poverty”. The proposed date of the full network is March 30<sup>th</sup>.

Rowena Dawson

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#### 4. The FE employers: short of staff and short of ideas

The FE employer organisation the Association of Colleges (AoC) has just put out a report, “[College Staffing Challenges in 2022](#)”. This calls for a concerted national push to tackle the recruitment and retention problem before it worsens. There is now estimated to be more than [6,000 job vacancies in England’s colleges](#) – the most there has been in over two decades – with high levels of persistent vacancies in priority areas such as construction, engineering, health and social care and science and maths.

A Deputy Chief Executive, Association of Colleges said: “The issue for colleges around recruiting and retaining staff has been building for some time, it is a symptom of the decision to freeze or reduce colleges funding for over a decade and has left the sector struggling to keep pace on pay. In relation to schools, college pay doesn’t even come close and when potential staff can earn far more in their specific industry it makes it increasingly difficult for colleges to attract the people they desperately need.” So far so good in that the appalling pay levels in FE have been recognised.

The report, which based on responses from 48% of colleges found:

The average number of vacancies per college was 30, with one reporting 162 vacancies in teaching staff. But there were significant vacancies in support areas.

96% of respondents reported that the current level of vacancies is creating increased pressure on existing staff. Furthermore, 61% said that vacancies were having a significant impact on the amount they have to spend on agency fees.

ONS data (December 2021) on pay showed how badly educational workers were paid. Private sector pay had increased by 5.4%; public sector pay had increased by 2.5%; and education sector pay has increased by 0.3%. That final measly figure is less in FE, but the ONS has not disaggregated its figures. Teachers in schools are currently paid over £9,000 more than college lectures on average.

The DfE response has been staggeringly complacent. “FE teachers are needed across many subject areas. That is why we have launched a national campaign to encourage industry professionals, particularly those in priority sectors such as construction and engineering, [to teach in FE](#). This is a part of our wider FE workforce reforms set out in the Skills for Jobs White Paper.” So, they have done their bit!

In the face of this crisis of recruitment and retention, the AoC is bravely demanding that the government:

- Take important short-term actions, including adjustments to the 2021-2 adult education performance rules and providing sufficient flexibility in 16-18 funding for 2022-3.
- Commit to concerted action on whole college funding including funding increases and reform, action to reduce external bureaucracy and improvements to teacher training routes.

Now it might be that a substantial pay rise for all FE workers is somehow occluded within the above vague generalities. But, and least they are consistent here, there is no clear call for better FE pay for those who are not Principals.

Julian Atkinson

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#### 5. Regional Committee 5/2/22

##### FE SECTOR COMMITTEE

On the 21<sup>st</sup> January there had been a special FEC meeting to review the UCU pay strategy. There were no FEC reps in attendance to report back to this meeting, but branch officers had been sent the report in a Circular on 4<sup>th</sup> February. The report covers the 30% funding increase.

##### Branch Reports Derby College

Pay for 2021 depends on what funds are available but there will be no statement on pay until the College Board meets in March 2022. The branch has put in a 3% claim but has had no offer yet. Workload is a big issue, 24 hours per week is contractual maximum and 850 annualised hours. Any remission is spread across the year. The College Calendar has removed a business planning day to free up more time for teaching, and Induction time has also been reduced. The college is concerned about “staff utilisation”, which tends to mean staff are under pressure to be up to contractual hours.

COVID: There are no instructions from management about mask wearing in corridors. There are CO<sub>2</sub> monitors in some classrooms, but ventilation is a problem anyway and many classrooms are already regarded as unhealthy.

### Brooksby Melton (and Stephenson College Coalville: recent merger)

COVID: little guidance from college management, restrictions have disappeared. Students wear masks if they choose to, windows are open in classrooms, so cold students!

Workload: big issue, maximum annualised hours are 900! Was 780 – 800 in previous years. Most staff are teaching up to hours, so haven't got time to complain. Rep from this college works 4 days per week as a way of coping, has one free period per week of one and a half hours ("I can only cope because I am a part timer"). The new head of HR (previously worked at Tesco) remarked that everything is great in FE so there is no need for unions! Staff are overworked and have little time to do anything other than teach. There is no weekly limit on contact hours! Merger with Stephenson college; harmonisation of contracts taking place. Principal Dawn Whitmore (ex NCN) has not been seen since September! So, is she moving on?

### Loughborough College

COVID: A new risk assessment has meant that things are back to normal, so no clear guidance on mask wearing. There are some CO<sub>2</sub> monitors. Some staff are anxious about being back on site.

Workload is 24 hours weekly; no wriggle room for marking and prep for FE staff, HE people have time remitted for both. Positive first discussion with management about staff utilisation to include non-teaching duties too. There is a new HR structure, with posts paying £60,000 per year! There is no enthusiasm for industrial action over pay, members are very quiet. The atmosphere feels toxic and vulnerable workers re: Covid are being risk assessed and referred to Occupational Health.

The regional official added that a much more supportive approach to covid is shown at other colleges such as West Notts, where good practice is demonstrated. There is some ongoing discussion about the definition of "workload" especially re HE lecturers.

### Leicester College

1% pay rise offered, asked for 5%. The claim has been passed to governors but the branch officers don't expect the claim to be successful. There needs to be a regional approach to action on pay. Staff are very concerned about rising cost of living and that 1% does not even cover the increase in NI.

Lots of individual casework: the branch rep was concerned about lack of telephone support for this from Regional Office.

COVID: lecturers have been asked to challenge anyone not wearing a mask, but the college is more concerned with other issues. Management focus on a "love your lanyard" campaign!

Remission: Programme Leads have some remission of one or two hours per week, calculated differently for FE and HE. FE Leads remission is based on numbers of students, HE on cohorts. The college want all to be on numbers of students, UCU want all to be on cohorts. There is a lack of negotiation about Covid. There are some CO<sub>2</sub> monitors in some staffrooms (on top of the fridge!) but the risk assessment needs updating.

### Nottingham College

Lots of staff are leaving and so there is some "argy bargy" over notice periods, which has created a crisis in staffing and cover when staff leave. The college want to increase the notice period for staff leaving to three months, from the current two. There is a high turnover of members of management. The interim CEO is leaving (he was a temp replacement for JdVL), so there is currently a leadership vacuum. Staff been told the new head will have considerable FE experience in contrast to the previous CEO. The Pay talks are ongoing but reps are not allowed to discuss outside college meetings. The management generally are more friendly than the previous regime.

Workload is maximum 24 hours contact per week but officers are aware of some curriculum areas where staff are timetabled on 28 hours.

Generally, morale is at rock bottom – staff feel overworked and under-appreciated. There is much surveillance of teaching. In addition, more "learning walks" are taking place. The management is top heavy as usual. COVID measures have gone, masks no longer used, some maintenance staff are coming around to check ventilation; some buildings and rooms have poor ventilation issues anyway. There are some students choosing to continue to wear masks.

### Regional Office Report (Sheila Smith)

Pay claims across most colleges are usually based on national guidelines.

Most issues are related to COVID, and support for prison education and smaller colleges who have no reps. Work also being done on the Menopause policy and greater entitlement to support members who have experienced stillbirth or miscarriage (see Stillbirth and Miscarriage policy).

Burton College have given 2% pay rise consolidated in January – this is very unusual – this was out of kilter for them as they don't usually implement AoC pay recommendations. They have made this pay award because of difficulties in recruitment in the Business Studies area.

Northampton College have had a 4% pay rise. West Notts College (there was no rep present) show very good practice in terms of COVID – risk assessment plus providing information re CO<sub>2</sub> readings, and offering support to vulnerable staff.



One area of concern, the college refer to MAF – Multi Authentication Factor, whereby staff are asked to use personal mobile phones to access college e-mails and registers. West Notts management did back down on this intrusion because of major security breaches and insurance concerns. The Rep from Brooksby Melton said this had been suggested at her college as staff were unable to access registers in some classrooms. The Rep from Nottingham College said this had also been used reluctantly at Nottingham from September last year because of erratic signals. Workload and COVID concerns are the two main issues across the region. There is new guidance re covid issued by UCU in January. Other concerns from members: 2022 exams and use of TAGs. Assessment schedules are imposed by management without discussion with teaching staff. Many reps felt they were being pressured to over assess students: “keep weighing the pig”.

### National Pay Claim

Needs a regional approach. 50% threshold will be difficult to achieve in many colleges. Notes on current earnings compared to 10 years ago from Leicester College  
Lecturers on an average of £4,000 less per year than 10 years ago  
Support staff also on much less, whereas management jobs are advertised at £50,000 or more. The usual management justification for these differentials is “affordability”.  
Reps requested an extra meeting to discuss the pay claim, disaggregated ballots, the strategy paper, legal strike action, support for other branches. A date was set for this after February half term, on Monday 28<sup>th</sup> February.

### AOB

The Rep from Leicester college raised the issue of the lack of telephone support from Regional Office and that e-mail communication was too slow. There was some tension here between the rep and the regional official who said this was not an appropriate forum to discuss this issue. The rep was advised to use East Midlands Inbox.

### HE SECTOR COMMITTEE

With the benefit of hindsight and the collation of this joint report, the simple summary of the situation in HE is that it is bad but not as bad as it is in FE. As conditions have declined over the last 40 years or so, one can probably consider that it was ever thus.

Much of the discussion at the HE committee meeting covered the ongoing industrial action in the HE sector over the Four Fights and in the pre-

92 institutions the USS dispute. A further round of strikes was due at the time of the meeting and there had been little or no progress in negotiations. Particular thanks were given to Neil Williamson for the immense amount of work that he has carried out in support of branches. A number of problems have arisen in the wake of the strike and ASOS (Action Short of a Strike). Some institutions are threatening pay deductions for not rescheduling work that was missed because of strikes. UCEA policy is that full deductions should be made in response to ASOS. The industrial action is covered in another article (see Item 1 of this newsletter) and some further points are picked up below.

At DMU there are curriculum change threats and there is insufficient Covid security.

At Leicester the local dispute has ended but has left a bitter legacy. Leicester made the 50% threshold for the Four Fights at the first attempt and for USS at the second attempt. There will be full picketing etc. in the next round of strike action. Concerns over Covid remain. Teaching fellow progression is an issue.

At Lincoln, they failed to get to the 50% threshold by just 9 votes. This was an encouraging but frustrating improvement. As elsewhere, the mask mandate has been lifted but some Covid concerns remain. The College of Arts is being reorganised. This is ‘not a restructuring’. The unions are proposing that the grievance policy be changed, although the Regional Official noted that, in the general case, grievances are a poor procedure, action should be collectivised, wherever possible. Timetabling, accounting for caring constraints, is under discussion.

At Nottingham, the government Covid line is being followed, with a ‘return to normal’. Professorial banding is being proposed by management, involving the imposition of a system based on performance related pay, which could result in salaries moving up or down. The University refused to negotiate on this but is now ‘consulting’. There is lots of preparation for the next round of industrial action.

At Derby, there is a new academic workload model, with safeguarded hours and conditions. The Covid situation is similar to elsewhere. There are concerns over the number of admissions. The branch is working to improve its internal communications and engagement.

At NTU, there is concern about the results of the Get The Vote Out campaign. The support for action from those who voted was good but the turnout

was insufficient. The government line is being followed re Covid. Management is actively working against Working from Home. There are particular concerns re gender equality for pay. There is a new workload model but staff can't see it!

## JOINT COMMITTEE

Key points from the sector meetings were summarised.

Some other points were raised, not recorded above. NEC and Regional office pushing for strike pay for sessional members.

Congress takes place from 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> June. Deadline for motions is 18<sup>th</sup> March. One delegate for each of FE and HE sectors. Extra meeting needed to sort motion and delegates.

The Regional AGM is on Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> May. We need a health and safety rep.

Training and CPD: there has been a good uptake of online training.

Chesterfield May Day takes place on Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> May. £150 donation to Chesterfield.

Should the next regional meeting be face to face? To be decided.

Margaret Davies, Judy Wills and Rob Kirkwood

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## 6. Goodbye Mr Laarschot

*This article has been reprinted from Post-16 Educator, a quarterly magazine produced by and for activists in all sectors of public education.*

*Contributions are welcome.*

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<http://post16educator.org.uk>

The November resignation of Nottingham College CEO John van de Laarschot ends a particularly unhappy period for FE in the city. Writing to staff, Corporation chair Carole Thoroughgood noted the 'positive vision and values' Laarschot had helped establish at the college. These sentiments are not shared by most current and former staff or by many local observers. Laarschot's appointment as CEO in 2016 before the merger of the city's two remaining FE colleges - despite no experience of work in education - and his subsequent leadership of the merged college were controversial. His prior appearance on the junk-reality show Wife Swap and his £230,000 pay off as Chief Executive at Stoke City council in 2015 did little to help his reputation.

His resignation follows a period of sick leave following a heart attack in April. This was an example, some thought, of a decidedly poetic irony. Staff recall his response when asked at an all-staff meeting about stress levels in the college.

Laarschot replied that he didn't suffer stress and so couldn't give a view. He passed the question over to the Human Resources director who he presumably thought was made of less muscular stuff. Self-denial or performative macho? It's impossible to say. It was certainly considered crass, as were his reference to critics in the college as 'FE terrorists' and his question to teachers at a get-to-know-you meeting: if you only teach for 24 hours a week, what do you do the rest of the time?

It was commonly agreed: Laarschot was the wrong person for the job. One former senior manager who sat through Laarschot's presentation to the interview panel before his appointment commented on his presentational chutzpah; what he lacked was knowledge of the sector. The board was evidently more interested in the chutzpah than his lack of know-how.

The merger of the two colleges was followed by an over-hasty reorganisation, not helped by failing IT systems, the loss of local knowledge through redundancy and voluntary departure, and a radical cut in learning support by a newly appointed senior manager, similarly with no FE experience.

Writing in the Nottingham Post (28 July 2017), Laarschot set out his mission. He would lead 'an educational revolution' producing workers with the skills and aptitudes local employers needed; 'tough love' would 'replace students' false hopes with real preparation and genuine opportunities'.

His FE revolution eventually led to an ultimatum to staff: sign new contracts or be sacked. The UCU branch balloted for a sixteen-day strike. It was creative, tenacious and successful. At one point, a deal recommended by branch officers and officials was voted down by the branch. They wanted nothing less than Laarschot's capitulation. This is exactly what they got. Hubris costs.

### Lest we forget: the 3 FE stooges

Laarschot was an FE outsider but not the first Nottingham CEO wanting to revolutionise the sector. Nick Lewis, Broxtowe College principal before and after incorporation, and Amarjit Basi, boss of New College Nottingham between 2011 and 2013, had equally radical intentions.

An architect of post-incorporation FE managerialism, Lewis refused collective bargaining, and ran one of the lowest-paying colleges in the East Midlands. His 1994 Staff College paper, 'Reengineering the culture of a college', listed the 'forces' he thought held back the cultural changes colleges needed, among them: long-staying staff and, most tellingly, 'the strong priority commitment

given by lecturers to students, teaching and curriculum matters'.

Basi was a founding member of the Gazelle Group of Colleges, a coterie of FE CEOs who championed a new kind of 'entrepreneurial learning' that would prepare young people for the hyper-marketised, super-networked world of turbo-capitalism. Its mantra: 'Excellence, Employability and Enterprise' made no mention of education. Financial crisis led to an investigation by the FE Commissioner, who criticised the college's 'largely unnecessary' deficit, poor financial control, 'expansionist' ambitions, including investments in India, and weak oversight by the governing body. In 2016, Basi left his subsequent post as CEO at Cornwall College following a financial crisis the year before. His pay-off and salary, reported to be over £400,000, made him the highest paid FE CEO of 2015-16.

### **Bad apples or bad systems?**

Are these cases outliers in an otherwise ethical system of FE management? The problem is systemic, not personal.

Nottingham's history of FE asks for systems that are not vulnerable to the pedagogic, ethical and performative vagaries of CEOs and corporations. Other places have similar histories.

The case for democratic educational systems that can support the highest forms of educational practice needs to be made.

Reference:

1. From FE Revolution to FE Revolt - 16 Days that Shook the Sector. The 2019 Nottingham College Strike - available online <https://ucuemrrmb.wordpress.com/nottingham-college-dispute-2019/>

**Submitted by Paul Wilkinson**

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## **7. Conservative attack on widening participation**

A discussion among the Conservative government which, if implemented as discussed would disenfranchise a large number of students and threaten some of the post-1992 staff teaching them, has found little attention in the press outside *The Times Higher*. These proposals would also aggravate shortages of social workers, nurses and allied health services,

When the Coalition government tripled tuition fees, critics argued that the Government's estimates as

to how much of the student loans would be repaid, were optimistic. Pursuing their free market ideology, the Tories removed caps on student numbers in 2015. The combined effect, as could have been predicted, was rising student debt and lower debt repayments. The Conservatives are using the situation to attack the post-1992 universities and students from non-traditional backgrounds. The proposals also introduce a cap on student numbers through the backdoor.

As part of the Augar review of education and funding, the Conservatives are discussing the introduction of minimum requirements at GCSE level for students to be eligible for a student loan for higher education. *The Guardian* reported that prospective students will have to have at least the equivalent of a C in English and a C in maths to qualify for a student loan. According to *The Guardian*, Million+ (the lobby group of post-1992 universities) claims that such a bar would in effect exclude 48% of all students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The bar would, however, affect regions differently: students in the North would be worse affected than students in the South. If "levelling up" ever was more than hot air to buoy Johnson in the "Red Wall" constituencies, then a policy which bars a significant number of 18-year-olds from these areas from going to university, would be counter-productive. There are, nevertheless, voices in the Tory party which attribute the lack of lorry drivers to Labour's widening participation agenda (e.g., Andrew Bridgen) and Gavin Williamson, when he was still Secretary for Education, wanted to "rebalance" the student loan system from HE to FE, in accordance with a long-standing but erroneous view which wants to distinguish between education (academic) and training (vocational) and sort students accordingly, mainly based on their social background.

A policy excluding students from disadvantaged backgrounds would also have a detrimental effect on some areas in the North and the Midlands where post-1992 universities are often large employers. Universities contribute in many ways to the culture and economy of the area they serve and the post-1992s are particularly vulnerable to such an attack by the Government as their intake comprises a higher percentage of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Often, they are also more dependent on income derived from students (not just the student fees, but also rents and other student expenditure). Excluding these students from access to student loans could easily lead to a situation where institutions are no longer viable and would have to close – with consequences for the whole area a university serves, particularly

where that university is the only one. (I experienced first-hand the hit Hull took when the University of Humberside decamped to Lincoln, and Hull had two universities at the time.) The Government, following its prejudices, wants to deter students from study at “some lower-tariff” universities. We have heard Ms Donelan, minister for universities, complain about low-value courses by which she seems to mean those which don’t lead to high-paid jobs (conveniently forgetting that access to those often requires social capital in addition to an academic qualification).

Not only would limiting access to student loans along class lines affect the areas where the post-1992s are located but it would also impede the training and recruitment of social workers, nurses and allied health services – areas where there are already significant shortages of staff. Many of those choosing these areas of study are mature students without much in the way of formal qualifications. It is also an attack on arts and humanities subjects as they don’t always require GCSE maths in particular. Earnings in these areas are often low, especially at the beginning of students’ careers (and the Government’s anti-union position contributes to that) so that nursing, health services, social work, creative industries, teaching all seem to fall under the Government’s notion of low-value degrees which don’t help students clear their debts. There again, the Tories have form on confusing low-paid with low-skilled.

The Government likes to talk about levelling-up and Global Britain but, in its short-termist defence of its own class interests, i.e., passing on their privileges to their offspring, they are exacerbating regional and class disparities and undermining the training of their workforce.

Harry Ziegler

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## 8. Tales of the NHS

### NHS and Emergency Services under Stress.

As retired members of varying ages, no doubt most of us have reasons to be grateful for help and advice from NHS services in different circumstances and on all levels.

An example, from my personal experience very recently, includes a hasty trip by ambulance, following an early morning 999 phone call, to the ambulance service. They arrived very quickly and soon whizzed me off to A&E (at Derby Royal Hospital) where I was very well looked after in spite of the pressure they are obviously under at

the moment. I was there all day – advised of a 6hr waiting time when I got there, but the care I received was very reassuring as I was tested for everything from my temperature and blood pressure to a brain scan, and told I had not had a stroke.



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My sister arrived and sat with me and a bit later my niece, who nurses at that hospital appeared and told me that I would not be staying in as they had no beds available. But she did bring us some emergency rations to keep us going! On being sent home again much later, armed with a packet of pills, I felt relieved and so lucky to have been able to receive such care without having to worry about scrambling for attention, potential costs or was I covered by insurance! A perfect example of the NHS continuing to do their very best for everyone in their hour of need and showing understanding and kindness in spite of the pressure they are under.

So how do the NHS staff feel? From the same hospital I received these thoughts from a booklet some of the nurses produced:

“Rally the troops the COVID war  
Battle time,  
Told we had to uproot,  
Time to move the troops.  
An area not visited often,  
Anxious and worried we had gotten  
.... Patients just kept on dying  
Everyone carried on trying.” *Nicole Wallis RGN*

“The face time calls were amazing, I was holding the tablet while one lady saw her daughter for the first time after 28 days .... I felt so proud of all of recovery and theatre staff.” *Jane Johnstone RGN*  
“In the blink of an eye my once familiar workplace has changed, empty bays were now filled with ventilators waiting for patients to be attached to them, cupboards filled with unfamiliar equipment... I felt as if I was stepping into a Stephen Spielberg movie but didn’t know what my lines were or which part I would play.” *Maggie Kirby RGN*



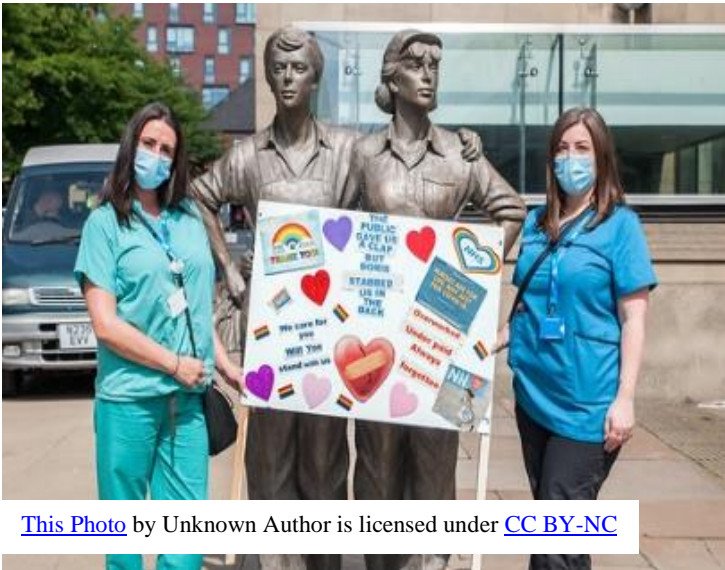
"I watched you work hard to keep me and others alive unable to thank you for the time you gave to me ... You are all my angels sent by God ... I have never ever seen such selfless people in my life. Thank you for everything and for being so compassionate ... God bless you all! *Ansel - grateful patient.*

"Making tough choices for better healthcare"  
Letters, The Guardian Feb 2022

[Rowena Dawson](#)

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## 9. Report from Chesterfield & District Trades Union Council



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The Covid-19 pandemic and the first lockdown in March 2020 significantly altered the way the Trades Council was able to carry out its functions. Like many organisations and individuals, the necessary transition to online working was rapid. Moving to Zoom allowed monthly meetings to continue without a break and has actually led to an increase in the number of participants who are able to join in online but who previously may have found attending in-person evening meetings at the Chesterfield Labour Club more problematic. As such, it would appear that some form of hybrid working will continue even when meetings can regularly be held physically.

Among the many problems faced is the lack of enough staff. In the press recently there have been reports on "possibly 1.2 million people missing from the UK labour market". The "I" has reported that over 27,000 NHS staff voluntarily resigned from July to September last year ... with such staff "increasingly warning of burnout pushing them to the brink"

Prior to lockdown the Trades Council held Executive Committee meetings on the first Monday of each month, with open campaigning meetings usually held on the third Monday of every other month. However, following on from the national launch of the People Before Profit 'Emergency Programme for Jobs, Services and Safety' on 29 September 2020, our meeting schedule was altered to become an open campaigning meeting held on the first Monday of each month, thereby permitting more people to attend, but only registered delegates to the Trades Council are entitled to vote on official Trades Council business.

Ongoing funding problems and competition from private health care don't help. A recent letter in a well-known newspaper stated "Neither private patients prioritising their health, nor private clinicians prioritising better working conditions, are the villains here. Those in power, who have systematically broken our national healthcare system, are to blame."

We have had a fantastic range of guest speakers at these campaigning meetings, the insights from which then feed into discussions about a range of ongoing strikes and disputes. Once it was possible to congregate in a Covid safe manner, several socially distanced 'flash mob' campaign activities were held towards the end of 2020 which permitted short physical interventions in support of strikers and disputes. As some restrictions were lifted, it became possible to hold more events, but safety issues have always been paramount in decisions taken to campaign actively on the streets. The Trades Council has supported many campaigns across Chesterfield and District over the recent period, including the successful strike by GMB bin collection staff against Serco, and most recently the very successful strike by Unite workers at B&Q Wincanton where the workers accepted a pay deal worth 10.75%. Currently the Trades Council is actively supporting members of the IWGB trade union Just Eat courier drivers in Chesterfield, and

I feel we should be doing all we can to support the NHS as the life- saving and life enhancing institution it is and trying to defend it from the gross commercialisation that seems to be creeping in to undermine the original purpose as a basic national support system.

We, East Midlands UCU Retired members, are affiliated to "Health Campaigns Together" but could perhaps also support others such as "Keep our NHS Public", "999 Call for the NHS" and "We Own IT".

References:

"The Last Hug" By Maggie Kirby (Derby Royal Hospital)

"The Truth About The Great Resignation" The Big Issue 24 Jan 2022

lobbying Derbyshire County Council against its plans to close seven care homes.

As well as the vital pay issues in many of these campaigns, the workers have been angered by the way in which their managements have treated them. In the case of the Derbyshire bin collection staff, comments by management that they were 'ten a penny' and 'only hands and feet' galvanised the workers in their resolve to fight, as did the way management at B&Q Wincanton sought to attack the union, or the boss of Stuart, the delivery platform, suggesting that most of the Just Eat staff were 'happy' with the new pay arrangements which result in a 24% pay cut! So while employers have continued their attacks workers have fought back, in many cases successfully, and using a range of innovative methods in doing so, from which the whole trade union movement can learn and use in both current and future campaigns.

The Trades Council has also continued its important work with DAST (Derbyshire Asbestos Support Team) and TRUST (Trade Union Safety Team), notwithstanding the delays and difficulties in being able to support claimants due to bureaucratic delays. Furthermore, the Asbestos Victim Support Groups' Forum has recently won a landmark case for the retention of important documents which were saved from destruction by a vital court battle. These documents highlight how much was known about the high risk of fatal cancer caused by the use and handling of Asbestos Insulation Board (AIB), trade name Asbestolux, demonstrating the extent of knowledge about the risks and the lengths manufacturers went to in order to interfere with the Government's regulation of asbestos in the 1960s and 70s. These documents will be an invaluable source for solicitors acting in current and future cases.

The annual May Day People's Gala & Demonstration has also had to adapt to the prevailing circumstances. The first May Day following the lockdown took place online with a great range of speakers thereby ensuring the continuity of the cherished event even in the midst of the pandemic. In 2021, May Day was held physically, although in a reduced form due to the prevailing situation, gathering in Shentall Gardens, Chesterfield, opposite the Town Hall entrance, with a march to the bandstand in Queen's Park for a rally with a range of speakers including: Sarah Woolley, General Secretary of BFAWU; Rehana Azam, National Secretary GMB; Steve Turner, Assistant General Secretary of Unite; Councillor Tricia Gilby, leader of Chesterfield Borough Council; Maria Vasquez-Aguillar, Chile Solidarity Network; Chris Peace, Orgreave Truth and Justice

Campaign, Patrick Wakefield from Schools Strike for Climate.

2022 will see May Day back to its usual strength and route, assembling at 10.30 am on Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> May to march at 11 am through town to a rally in New Square. Speakers confirmed to date include Frances O'Grady, General Secretary of the TUC; Daniel Kebede, President of the NEU; Toby Perkins MP; and Dorothy Guerrero Head of Policy at Global Justice Now as our international speaker, as well as lots of great bands and stalls. It's a good reason to dust down your union banner and join us for what promises to be a fantastic day. Further details are available on the Trades Council's Facebook page and other social media.

As the cost-of-living crisis deepens and bosses seek to use more extreme measures against workers, as seen in the recent sacking of 800 staff by P&O, it is vital that the trade union movement resists such deplorable attempts by bosses against working-class people and fights back. We hope to see you at May Day and other demonstrations and protests as we campaign for peace and socialism.

[Allister Mactaggart](#)

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## 10. UCU Retired Members Branch

See how to join our new Branch Facebook group, as detailed in the information section on Page 1.

Our branch has been meeting since 2008 and now has over 300 members. Our aims are listed below. We meet three times a year, often in places of interest to make part of a day out. Meetings focus on important issues for UCU pensioners and provide a chance to talk with other retired members.

A termly newsletter with articles of interest to retired UCU members is e-mailed to all branch members for whom we have addresses and to UCU branch secretaries in the East Midlands and to other RMBs.

Please let us have your personal e-mail address and let us know if it changes.

### RMB Roles and Functions

- To represent the interests of retired members within the union.
- To represent the interests of retired union members within the wider union and pensioner movements.
- To provide a forum within the union for retired members to come together to consider and debate matters of mutual interest.

- To provide a resource of collective memory, advice and expertise in support of the union, in particular to those still in active employment.
- To provide active support, where appropriate, by involving the broadest section of the branch in support of the wider interests of the union and its members, including support for those still in active employment.

**For more information**

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