

# UCU

# GREEN FUTURES NEWSLETTER

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## Stay Updated

Stay updated with the Climate  
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[UCU - Climate Emergency](#)

## UCU South West to launch Green Reps Network

Written by: Kevin Daws and Tim Hughes

UCU are holding an online meeting on 8th May to launch a Green Reps Network. All UCU members in the South West will receive an invitation to this meeting, which is to gauge the level of interest in setting up a Green Reps Network in the South West. The group will seek to identify priorities for the initial year, and how to get started.

It is intended that the online meeting will cover the following points:

- Green reps: What is a Green Rep? What do they do? Why is it important?
- Get mutual support and inspiration on how to influence your institution. What success have you had in engaging your institution to take action addressing the Climate & Ecological Emergency? What has proved challenging?
- Consider where we can bargain collectively.
- Consider how to organise the network: where do we go from here?

### South West Green network - call out!

Please join us for this meeting on 8th May - 12:30 - 13:30 and repeated from 17:00 - 18:00.

The meeting link will be included in the e-mail sent out to all UCU members in the South West.

# Prison Education and Climate Change

Written by: Adam Balmer



Photo Credit: Carbon Brief Facilities at Risk of Overheating  
The above image can be found [here](#).

Climate change will disproportionately affect people in prisons. Much of our prison infrastructure built pre-1900 is unfit for human habitation as it is, some of it requiring prisoners to break windows in order to get adequate ventilation when it is hot and then seal windows with newspapers and magazines when it is cold ([HM Inspectorate of Prisons 2017: 1.28](#)). Even if emissions suddenly drop to low levels, there is a high risk of overheating to offenders between now and 2039 in 96% of prisons (and a very high risk in 79%) ([Carbon Brief 2024](#)).

Prisoners are also at higher risk of food insecurity as a result of climate change and thus are at higher risk of poor physical health, which increases the already disproportionately high levels of communicable disease in prisons ([Rose & Chapman 2024](#)).

My personal experience of prisons includes teaching in classrooms with outdated heating systems that are either turned fully on and extremely hot (to the point that some areas of the classroom cannot be used) or are extremely cold. These issues are compensated for by bringing in portable electric heaters and air conditioning units (and I have seen these latter used in the dead of winter because the heating is at such an unbearably high level), which is an absurdity from an emissions (not to mention purely financial) perspective.

These issues are experienced more severely by the prisoners, who experience similar conditions in their cells, often shared with other prisoners, hour after hour, day after day. This also has further impact on staff because students who have been under intense physical pressure and discomfort for hours will be less ready to learn and more prone to misbehave.

# Prison Education and Climate Change (continued)

This is not to mention the increased risk of communicable disease posed by unhealthy prison populations in a context of increased global disease as a likely outcome of climate change ([WHO 2023](#)).

Additionally, as the effects of climate change become more pronounced and the impact of natural disasters, food insecurity and health problems must be addressed, the effects on government spending are unpredictable and, being funded (usually indirectly) by central government, the jobs of prison educators could be at risk.

All of this simply adds to the effects of climate change that will impact everybody, including rising food prices, global instability, massive economic damage and growing health problems. For prison educators, these risks and many more are compounded.

While we know that this is the situation, climate activists are being massively criminalised. In 2024, five Just Stop Oil protesters were given record jail sentences for non-violent protest ([Mooney & Pickard 2024](#)). The state crackdown on peaceful protest has showed no sign of slowing down, while the effects of climate change continue to accelerate.

We need to use the tools available to us to build up resistance both to climate change itself and to how the effects of climate change will be felt. The prison education workplace is just one place where this will be felt in particular and acute ways, and so it is up to us to make it a site of resistance. We cannot wait until this problem is unmanageable before we begin to organise and mobilise.

Prison educators are already up against it. When you are already fighting for basic safety provision to be in place, or to keep your job in the face of redundancies, or against an unwieldy workload, I can understand why educators will look at organising around climate change as being a luxury that they cannot afford. Unfortunately, because climate change is accelerating, this is the best possible time to organise. It will only get worse from here until we take action.

We need to organise alongside other prison staff. The Joint Unions in Prisons Alliance consists of a range of unions that all work in prisons, including officers, healthcare staff, educators and others. We need to collaborate with these unions to build a collective effort to change prison infrastructure to both stop contributing to the problem and to be able to protect those who live and work within its walls.

We need measures to reduce emissions. For instance, we need all prisons to be powered by renewable energy, and we need insulation available where this is possible. We need plant-forward catering, where plant-based protein sources form a more central part of catering (and which could have a significant positive impact on the prison population's health ([Almuntashiri, S.S., Alsubaie, F.F. & Alotaybi, M. 2025](#)). Plant-based foods are associated with significantly lower carbon emissions ([Poore & Nemecek 2018](#)) and land usage ([Our World in Data 2021](#)), and widespread adoption would thus have a positive impact on environmental outcomes.

# Prison Education and Climate Change (continued)

Prison educators should push for these changes to the institutions they work for, whether this be the prison service, private companies or colleges. These institutions should all be using renewable sources of energy and making a shift toward plant-based catering. We should also aim to tackle needless use of fuel, such as requiring staff to drive into work at points where they could be working from home, and any flights abroad that needlessly fall within company expenses.

The prison estate also needs measures to mitigate the impact of climate change, such as proper heating systems, good ventilation where possible and a clear food strategy to ensure adequate nutrition for prisoners as global food supply is disrupted. Functioning prisons should also never be classified as listed buildings; while we all accept the importance of historical artefacts, for a building to work as a functioning prison it needs to be readily modifiable and modernised. The absurdity that something can function effectively as an architectural museum while also ensuring proper living conditions for inmates has gone on for long enough.

## References:

Almuntashiri, S.S., Alsubaie, F.F. & Alotaybi, M. (2025) Plant-Based Diets and their Role in Preventative Medicine: A Systematic Review of Evidence-Based Insights for Reducing Disease Risk. *Cureus*. 17(2), Available [here](#).

Mooney, A. & Pickard, J. (2024) UK climate activists jailed for at least four years over road blocks. *Financial Times*, July 18th 2024. Article available [here](#).

HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2017) Life in prison: Living conditions. Article available [here](#).

Carbon Brief (2024) Revealed: Three-quarters of prisons in England and Wales face 'high risk' of overheating. Article available [here](#).

Rose, A & Chapman, N. (2024) How will the climate and nature crises impact people in prison? A briefing for charities and funders. Article available [here](#).

World Health Organization (2023) Climate Change. Article available [here](#).

Our World in Data (2021) If the world adopted a plant-based diet, we would reduce global agricultural land use from 4 to 1 billion hectares. Article available [here](#).

Poore, J., & Nemecek, T. (2018). Reducing food's environmental impacts through producers and consumers. *Science*, 360(6392), 987–992. Article available [here](#).

# UCU Scotland Green Network and Survey

Written by: Marion Hersh, UCU Scotland Green Officer

The Green Network was set up just over a year ago following a motion at UCU Scotland Congress 2023. Its activities have included exchanging experiences at different branches, discussing the Green New Deal and attending a CPD session on it, discussing working with students and TeachIn on teaching the UN Sustainable Development Goals.



Photo Credit: UCU

However, the main activity was organising the Green survey in response to a UCU Scotland Congress 2024 motion. A link to the report which is now available can be found [here](#).

We found that most branches in Scotland have a Green rep who is a committee member. Although few branches have an official representative on university sustainability committees, they have various ways of influencing policy. Institutions had a variety of green policies, particularly on sustainable and accessible buildings, but information about policies was not always easy to find. Policies on fossil fuel and military divestment were often inconsistent, with some universities having withdrawn from one, but not the other. Many institutions had travel policies for emissions reduction, but international travel emissions were found to be the main source of emissions in several institutions. This raises issues of how they can be reduced without damaging the very important international character of Scottish universities.

We will be holding a workshop, in May, to discuss the survey results and plan future action. Particular action points from the survey include developing the Green network and using it to support branches to have more impact on institutional policies, as well as divestment campaigns with students, where divestment has not yet taken place. There are also two motions on campaigning and organising on Green issues on the agenda of the postponed UCU Scotland Congress, which should also inform future action.

The workshop details have now been released and it will take place on Thursday 15th May at 2pm. Please contact Marion Hersh by email for the Zoom link and further details at: [mhersh@posteo.net](mailto:mhersh@posteo.net)

# TUC Webinar - Green Reps and Sustainable Workplaces

Written by: Kevin Daws, Vice-Chair CEEC and City of Bristol College Branch

Recently, the TUC held a webinar to launch its Greener Workplaces and Sustainability Toolkit. The webinar was useful because it asked some basic questions, such as,

## What do we mean by a green rep?

The TUC, and indeed the UCU, tend to call them green reps, but they're also known as sustainability reps, environment reps, environmental reps or health and safety environment reps, in addition to other titles. The core function of the role is to implement worker-friendly sustainability strategies in workplaces. *But what does that mean?*

Firstly, that means ensuring that there are plans in your workplace to take sustainability seriously, which include but are not limited to reducing carbon emissions, pollution, resource usage and minimizing waste. Essentially, reducing negative impacts on the environment in as many ways as possible. There are lots of businesses doing something, but very few of them are going the whole hog and taking it seriously. What would it look like if businesses were doing it seriously?

It would mean looking at things like:

- Procurement travel policies. Who travels and how?
- Investments. Where you invest, where you spend your money, pension investments and funders.
- Thinking about which products are viable over the long term. Which products are genuinely sustainable? Do they break too often? Can they be repaired?
- Carbon emissions associated with home working, in addition to helping those workers reduce their energy costs.
- Changing production models. Replacing fossil fuel furnaces with electric furnaces or generating electricity on-site.
- Shipping. Is it best to ship things around the world, or is it better to put the factory next to where people are buying the product?

Being a green rep is about ensuring the kinds of measures described above are being aimed at, but as trade unionists, not bosses. Crucially, it's about the process. It's about achieving sustainable organisations, but in a socially responsible way, a way that makes workers' lives better.

A green rep's responsibility is to make sure that sustainability planning includes workers and takes account of the important things that matter to you and your members at every stage. Ideally, a green rep will also help workers drive that change and help shape what this transition means for workers.

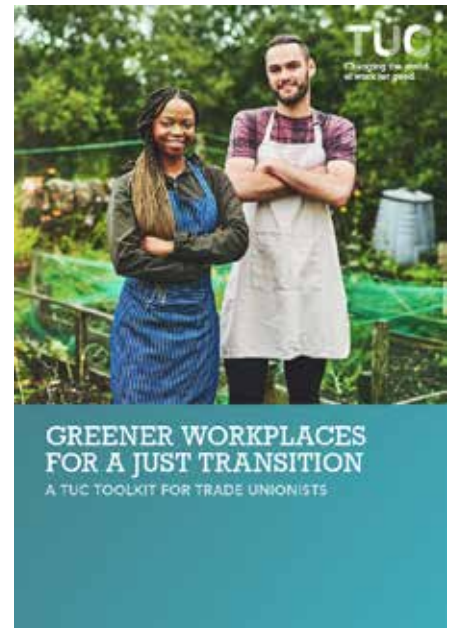


Photo Credit: TUC Toolkit

The link to this resource can be found [here](#).

# **TUC Webinar - Green Reps and Sustainable Workplaces (Continued)**

## **Why is this a trade union issue? Why should trade unions be concerned about the environment and climate?**

This was partly answered in the previous question, but the speaker gave examples of what had happened in different workplaces – these case studies are included in the TUC Toolkit.

## **What are some of the main barriers that green reps might face?**

Due to the hostile political and business environment that we currently see ourselves in, green reps can face barriers when trying to instigate change in their work environment or community. Rights to facility time is a barrier that unions will have to negotiate, which also links to the lack of employer engagement, which is being seen when trying to discuss sustainability concerns. In addition, there is a lack of recognition within the trade union movement of what core environmental issues are, and should be.

The webinar is available for public access and you can watch it in full by following this [link](#).

## **Greening the Workplace Resources**

Here are a list of the resources that were shared during the webinar:

[Greener Workplaces for a Just Transition](#)

[Greening the World of Work: Resources for Green Trade Unionists, hosted by the TUC](#)

[Too hot, too cold: How to protect workers from extreme temperatures, and fight climate change](#)

In addition, below are some links to other organisations and the valuable resources that they provide:

[Greener Jobs Alliance newsletter](#)

[Campaign Against Climate Change trade unions](#)

The Campaign Against Climate Change trade unions also produce the excellent Climate jobs book which can be downloaded [here](#).

## **UCU Resources**

Do not forget the resources that UCU produce, but first of all, please visit the CEEC (Climate & Ecological Emergency Committee) section of the UCU Website by following this [link](#).

# Green and Environmental Motions listed for debate at Congress

Written by: Kevin Daws, Vice-Chair CEEC and City of Bristol College Branch  
with contributions from: Marion Hersh, UCU Scotland Green Officer

It is good to see that there are 6 motions on Green and Environmental issues and a Rule Change on the Agenda for UCU Congress. As the numbers indicate, there should be a group of motions taken sequentially on green issues. There is also a motion on adding an environment officer/green rep to regional committee rules.

Thank you to the following branches and regions for submitting the motions and the rule change: University of Exeter, University of Glasgow, City of Bristol College, Bradford College, New City College (Poplar), Manchester University, North West Regional Committee, University of Nottingham, and the London Retired Members Branch.

## **ED4 Reorienting HE and FE financing for a just transition, University of Exeter**

This motion calls for a just transition to become an integral part of bargaining and campaigning, and a focus on institution finances being oriented towards just transition. I have already spoken to Tim Hughes from the University of Exeter and discussed that whoever moves this motion needs to explain what it means. It will be interesting to know how a Just Transition can improve the finances in FE & HE, as stated in the motion.

## **ROC4 Campaigning on Green Issues, University of Glasgow**

This motion has a programme of campaigning actions, including pressure on the government to fund a just transition from fossil fuels with no job losses and home insulation, as well as against the third Heathrow runway and for UCU to move to a renewables-only supplier for electricity and have an action plan for reducing environmental impacts. I think this is a good motion.

## **ROC5 Fuel Poverty, Retrofitting, and Energy Justice London Retired Members**

This motion calls for a campaign against fuel poverty and better training in retrofitting and endorsing the Energy for All manifesto. I think this motion makes some of the points made in Motion ROC4, but may provide an opportunity to talk about reinstating the Winter Fuel Allowance.

## **ROC6 Union action on climate change, Bradford College**

This motion calls for UCU to sign up to the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty, support a year of trade union climate action starting with COP30 in Brazil and for branches to organise outreach events.

## **ROC7 Trade union year of climate action, New City College (Poplar)**

This motion calls for UCU to work with other trade unions and climate campaigns to organise a climate/ecological emergency conference and workplace events in the year of trade union climate action. These motions both refer to the motion passed at the 2024 TUC Congress and the need for us to take action during 2025 in the run-up to COP30 in Brazil during November.

# **Green and Environmental Motions listed for debate at Congress (Continued)**

## **ROC8 Higher Environmental Risks demand stronger roles for Environmental Reps, Manchester University, North West Regional Committee**

This motion calls for all branches to have a green rep who is a core officer and to campaign for them to have facility time, for a stronger role for UCU in negotiating climate action plans in all institutions and for the TUC to support more regional green bargaining officers. As this brief summary indicates, these motions give the basis for an exciting plan of action to support sustainability and combat climate and ecological emergency. I think this is a good motion which complements the Rule Change Motion, which a number of us were involved in drafting, that is, the amendment to Regional Committee standing orders.

## **R4 Regional committee standing orders – Environment Officer/ Green Rep University of Exeter, City of Bristol College, University of Nottingham**

I would also like to further mention the Bradford College motion to Congress - ROC6 Union action on climate change, Bradford College, which calls on the UCU to support the year of trade union climate action, which starts in Autumn 2025. To make UCU's participation in this as effective as possible, we need people to come forward to be Green Reps or Environmental Reps in every branch and to be active in their workplaces. In this context, I welcome the motion from Manchester University and the UCU North West Region calling for every Branch to have a Green Rep/Environmental Officer. I also welcome the motion from the University of Nottingham, University of Exeter and City of Bristol College calling for every UCU Region and Nation to have a Green Rep/Environmental Officer on their regional or national committee. I must declare an interest in this motion because I helped to write it, and I persuaded my branch – City of Bristol College – to submit this rule change motion.

**Please ask your Branch Delegate(s) to support the Rule Change and all the motions listed.**

In addition to these motions, has anyone else identified any motions to UCU that we could amend? We would be interested to hear your thoughts on the existing motions and potentially include them in future newsletters. Please do contact the UCU Climate and Ecological Emergency Committee with your thoughts.

As a final thought, can anyone think of any Late Motions that we could submit? Remember, for a Late Motion we need to be able to show that it is urgent or timely and requires a decision of Congress or sector conference, and it could not have been submitted before the motions deadline for 14th March. The submitting Branch(es) would have to explain how the Late Motion fitted the relevant criteria.

# FE Sector Conference

Written by: Kevin Daws, Vice-Chair CEEC and City of Bristol College Branch

Earlier this year, I attended the AGMs of the Campaign Against Climate Change and immediately after that the AGM of the Trade Union Group of the Campaign Against Climate Change. I think there were some other members of UCU in attendance, including Marion Hersch. It is worth noting

that in addition to the green and environmental motions listed for UCU Congress, there is also a motion on the Agenda for the Further Education Sector Conference.



Photo Credit: Campaign Against Climate Change - Trade Union Group

During these back-to-back AGMs, mention was made of the Motions passed at last year's TUC Congress. We were invited to ask our trade unions to express their support for these motions, and a model motion was sent to Marion and myself. I think that I shared this amongst Committee members of the CEEC as well as in the UCU Green Networks e-mail group. The model motion was over 400 words in length and would need to be trimmed down to approximately 150 words to be submitted for debate at Congress or either of the Sector Conferences. It did not seem possible to achieve this through e-mail discussions, but I am very pleased to see that Bradford College have submitted similar, but different, motions to the FE Sector Conference and the Congress. Motions FE13 Climate action in FE Bradford College and ROC6 Union action on climate change Bradford College.

## **FE13 Climate action in FE Bradford College**

This motion from Bradford College, like their motion to Congress, refers to the motion passed at the 2024 TUC Congress, but it then specifies what we should be doing in FE. I think this is a good motion.

The motion to the FE Sector Conference focuses on skill shortages and the need to mass retrofit homes with energy efficiency measures. It highlights the role that FE can play in providing that training. It also points out that 2025-2026 is the Trade Union year of Climate Action.

I am sure that Further Education providers would welcome the opportunity to train up the workers needed to deliver the mass programme to retrofit homes and to deliver the much-promised Green New Deal.

We should remember that there is 'No Planet B', so we must do everything to protect this planet for this generation and future generations. If you are in an FE Branch, please ask your Branch Delegate(s) to support Motion FE13 Climate Action in FE Bradford College.

If you are interested in knowing more about the Trade Union Year of Climate Action you can follow this [link](#) to register for the online meeting which will be held on Wednesday 7th May.