

End of year prison education report: 2025

As we close another significant year for UCU members in prison education, we want to highlight three key areas of success. This report focuses on the positive impact of UCU's strength, organisation, and campaigning—showing how collective action improves members' working lives.

1. Report on the Prison education emergency PES meeting on Friday 5 December

On Friday 5 December UCU reps and members from the three providers came together to discuss the impact of the Prison Education Services contract that came into effect on 1 October and plan how UCU will respond. The overarching theme of the day was building the union following the TUPE transfers between the education providers and the large-scale prison education redundancies.

Our estimation is that over 300 prison educators have left the profession. The impact of the redundancies has been widespread and deeply felt. Reps and members reported what has happened in their prison and Lot where courses including functional English and Maths, reading, catering, hospitality, construction, digital, and carpentry have been cut also. Quality is impacted, qualifications undermined and non-accredited courses increased.

Members reported that the redundancy processes were stressful and gave them little time to consider the big decisions that they had to make. The impact on members is increased workload and a lack of cover, members report poor redundancy consultation experiences, stress and isolation. There has been a widespread Loss of UCU reps.

It was reported that the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) has imposed cuts in some prisons of up to 50% to the prison education budgets. The MoJ denies this. Whatever the true level of the cuts the reality is that hundreds of staff have left and this has had a direct impact on UCU capacity to represent its members.

Rebuilding our branches

A large part of the meeting was spent with reps and members discussing how UCU would rebuild the prison education branches, support and train the reps and increase membership. What's clear is that reps and members are up for the challenge and the national union will be actively supporting a range of activities and campaign work so our prison education strategy is joined up and we all support each other.

The key matters discussed and that will be progressed were:

- mapping workplaces so we know where members are and who we can target for recruitment
- prison visits to raise the profile of the union, recruit and find new reps
- phone banking of members
- support existing reps and encourage new ones
- communicate the strategy and our successes
- organise member meetings
- maximize participation at the Prison education annual meeting on 20 February.

The next steps will be for individual prison education branches to develop an action plan based on the issues discussed at the meeting. National and regional UCU staff will be directly involved in these action plans. The first milestone will be to review where we are at the annual prison education meeting on Friday 20 February.

UCU is committed to rebuilding our prison education branches and to do that we need as many reps and members as possible to join in and spread the work. If you would like to get more involved or put yourself forward as a rep or contact, please contact

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2. New Fair Deal on Pensions

A core demand of the union's campaign in prison education **UCU - UCU prison educators: unlocking futures** was to secure the application of New Fair Deal on pensions to the PES contract.

Our campaign was developed in the knowledge that the new prison education contract would be rolled out in 2024 or 2025 and that pensions for transferring UCU members were not protected under the PEF contract where staff working for Milton Keynes College and Novus transferred to People Plus.

People Plus is a private provider and unlike Novus or Milton Keynes College it does not offer the Teachers' Pension or Local Government pension, TPS or LGPS. UCU built the campaign for New Fair Deal at the start of the procurement process for PES, which too was delayed and then impacted by the general election. This campaign involved political lobbying and UCU's links with the TUC and TPS board. For most of the pre-PES roll out the MoJ made no public statement on the application of New Fair deal to transferring staff, however HM Treasury eventually confirmed New Fair Deal applies. The protection of transferring staff pension was only confirmed by the MoJ and people plus a few weeks before the TUPE transfer of staff, which was effective on 1 October 2025.

This is major victory for UCU members who have had their teachers' pensions protected.

We will now turn our attention to our members in people plus who are not in TPS, and a campaign is already in development.

3. JUPG and JUPA

UCU works with the other justice unions as part of Justice Unions Parliamentary Group (JUPG) on developing a new campaign about the hazardous condition of the prison estate. We have also been raising the issue of New Fair Deal and seeking the support of parliamentarians to publicly back our campaign. The latest campaign work in the JUPG related to prison education redundancies which were raised by Rachel Hopkins MP a couple of weeks ago:

<https://x.com/ucu/status/1989342372657021435?s=20>

UCU continues to work with the other unions in the Joint Unions in Prisons Alliance (JUPA) on improving the health and safety of our members working lives. The Safe Inside Campaign Statement and Charter was updated and signed off by all 10 JUPA unions

A parliamentary launch event for the new Charter and Statement has been organised by JUPA unions in the summer and the Charter and Statement can be found here: **UCU - Joint Unions in Prisons Alliance**