

South West Retired Members Branch

No.40 January 2026

In this newsletter

1. Branch meeting
2. Welcome to new members
3. Branch delegates needed
4. Striking Phlebotomists at Gloucestershire Hospitals
5. UCU Equality Conference
6. Black History Month
7. Pre-2007 Survivors' pensions
8. Book Corner
9. Gender Pension Gap Day
10. Tony Mitchell "Lifelines"
11. S.W. Pensioners Committee
12. Song Corner
13. UCU RM Annual Conference
14. Ukraine
15. Editor's Note.

Are you getting all the info?

If UCU HO has your email you should also receive regular updates on campaigns from UCU head office as well as occasional branch emails. If this is not the case let us know and we can check with the H.O on your behalf.

address is ucu.swest@gmail.com and members are welcome to contact us anytime.

Tony Staunton chair SWRMB

2 Welcome to all members new to this branch since the previous newsletter.

New members are asked if they would like to introduce themselves.

David Joseph Price joins us from Plymouth University. "After 50 years at Plymouth, finally decided time to retire."

Newsletters: these newsletters are sent to all branch members for whom we have email addresses.

1. A branch meeting is planned for Tuesday 10th February 2026 Our speaker will be Liz Lawrence, chair of the Retired Members Committee.

It is intended that this will be a hybrid meeting at Exeter; the zoom link and papers will be distributed to members in time for the meeting.

Branch members can contact officers and reps by the emails listed in this newsletter; the general branch email

Email addresses: UCU encourages us to use our home email when we retire.

For more information please contact:

ucu.swest@gmail.com

or contact the officers below:

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and Mike Farmer
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3. Branch delegates needed.

Our branch has several vacancies following our AGM. We would welcome any volunteers to fill these roles. Have a look at the links and please get in touch if you could represent our branch at:

Exeter Trades Council
https://www.facebook.com/ExeterTradesCouncil/?location=en_GB

Bridgwater Trades Council
<http://www.bwdtuc.org.uk/node/1>

Torbay & S Devon Trades Council
<https://www.facebook.com/torbaytuc/>

North Devon and Torridge TUC
[Facebook](#)

Mike Farmer SWRMB

4. Striking Phlebotomists at Gloucestershire Hospitals

The strike by phlebotomists in Gloucestershire hospitals is now the longest strike in NHS history.



The phlebotomists are the health care workers who expertly take blood from patients, including children, in hospitals and they have been striking since March 2025. Their work is vital to the smooth running of a hospital bringing experience and expert skill to a vital part of care.



Gloucestershire phlebotomists are striking for an increase in pay. Currently paid NHS Band 2 (the lowest NHS pay band) they are demanding an immediate rebanding. They want fair pay after years of doing Band 3 work for Band 2 wages.

Every single phlebotomist in Gloucestershire Hospitals has joined Unison and over the past year they've elected reps, delivered a formal collective grievance direct to their elusive Chief Executive, voted for industrial action, smashed the barriers of the anti-union laws, and started strong and powerful strike action.

They have vowed to keep fighting until they get the banding they're entitled to, the backpay they're owed and the respect and recognition they deserve.

Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, and its Chief Executive have tried every trick in the book to evade responsibility and keep underpaying these vital NHS workers.



Laura, a spokesperson for the phlebotomists, says that she and her colleagues really miss their patients and "just want to get back to work" but they want the recognition they deserve for the work that they do. Living on Band 2 wages means that many NHS staff are forced to use foodbanks, to turn the heating off regularly and often do second jobs. They see their fight as a fight for the many thousands of low-paid staff in the NHS. As Christina McAnea, Unison General Secretary has said "the Gloucestershire Phlebotomists are unfairly being paid the lowest rate in the NHS. This in no way reflects the very skilled work they do".



November 17th marked the 236th day of the strike and there was a mass rally organised outside Shire Hall in Gloucester. Lots of local union branches supported

the rally including a delegation from my Unison branch Central Bristol Health.

The strikers' morale remains high and is always boosted by support from the wider movement.



All photos with permission from Jackie Haskins.

Jackie Haskins, UNISON Retired Members Officer, Central Bristol Health Branch

Strike Map has produced "I Give a Phleb" badges for the UNISON Gloucestershire Phlebotomists. Over £400 raised and sent already, target £1,000. Every penny to the strike fund. Grab your £1 badge using the following

link: <https://organiseandstrike.sumupstore.com/product/i-give-a-phleb-gloucestershire-phlebotomists-strike-support-badge-pre-sale>.

You or your branch can make a donation to the strikers hardship fund-Union Gloucestershire DHC Branch 21311. Sort code 60-83-01, Acc no 20301750, Ref strikefund.

***AI Overview.** Gloucestershire NHS phlebotomists started their strike on Monday, March 17, 2025, with initial walkouts over three days. This industrial action escalated in subsequent weeks and months as the union continued to push for a formal review and re-grading of their roles, citing unfair pay for their skills and experience.

5. UCU Equality Conferences 20.11.25 Disabled Members Conference.

This year the format for the conference was changed. Previously there has been one conference held over two/three days that facilitated individual meetings for each equality strand and a plenary session for all participants, held on a residential basis. This year each equality strand has had separate meetings at UCU head office in London and there was no plenary session.

Participants in person and on-line were welcomed by the Chair of the Disabled Members Standing Committee and the programme for the day was outlined. The keynote address was entitled The State of Disability Inclusion for Disabled Staff in Higher Education and presented by Professor Carol Evans and Dr Melanie Best. The findings of an extensive survey of disability inclusion undertaken in 2024 were given and these provided a detailed picture of experiences and resources from 103 institutions.

This writer attended a workshop which gave an opportunity to contribute ideas to a planned update for the UCU CPD programme Neurodiversity at Work. This is the most popular of all the CPD programmes that are available. The workshop was interesting and worthwhile but suffered from a lack of time.

In the afternoon the minutes of the 2024 conference were formally confirmed and the results of the election of members to the disabled members standing committee were announced.

A Motion from Southern RMB was carried with a large majority and elicited some interesting discussion.

The motion essentially argued that this year's altered format for the equality conference had serious disadvantages, did not enable UCU members from all the equality strands to work together, and called for the restoration of essential elements from the usual conference format.

Many people spoke in favour but a minority of others defended the changed format. It appears that UCU's Equality Committee had introduced the changed format as a result of feedback from just one of the equality strands, the Black and Minority Ethnic Members Meeting. This group, it was reported, had felt that their meeting had not had sufficient time to discuss important issues.

One participant complained that there had been no consultation about the proposed altered format and that its introduction had therefore been undemocratic. This writer observed that it had been unsatisfactory that no rationale or explanation for the change had been given to members, branches and equality officers.

Overall, this was a useful and interesting meeting. A recurring report from participants, offered in a variety of different contexts, was the parlous state of the Access to Work scheme which was failing to support disabled workers in timely, consistent or appropriate ways. The agency's administrative functioning was described as 'chaotic'.

Accessibility at the meeting had been problematic in places. An on-line participant noted that the sound quality had often been poor resulting in some spoken contributions being lost. Whilst the efforts made by UCU staff to ensure accessibility were recognised, it was unsatisfactory that a fully accessible conference could not be organised. This writer experienced a problem in one of the workshop rooms where the induction loop could not be used. The conference chair said that these problems would be taken seriously and that steps would be taken to address them.

UCU staff were thanked for all their hard work in helping to organise the conference.

Martin Giddey
Equality Officer for Southern Region Committee and for Southern RMB

6. The origins of Black History Month

In 1926, Carter G Woodson established African Caribbean celebrations in America where Black History Month is still celebrated each February.

After visiting America in the 1970s, Ghanaian-born Akyaba Addai Sebo, a special projects officer at the Greater London Council, founded the UK's version of Black History Month in 1987.

There are two reasons thought to be behind why Black History Month is celebrated in October in the UK:

Traditionally, October is when African chiefs and leaders gather to settle their differences, so Akyaba chose this month to reconnect with African roots.

Additionally, many thought that since it was the beginning of the new academic

year, October would give Black children a sense of pride and identity.

Black History Month has since grown in the UK, where over 6,000 events take place each year. As UCU members are interested in education here are some of the **Bristol's Black History resources**

Together Bristol Museums and Bristol History teachers have supplemented the existing curriculum about Bristol's links to slavery. This so that schoolchildren in Bristol have a better chance of fully understanding this part of Bristol's story.

[Bristol's Black History](#): learn more about Black history in this city, with stories compiled by the Bristol Museums Black History Steering Group.

[Black Bristol](#): a project by young people from Off The Record to show young black people the history of the city they live in and how this city has been shaped by black people across time and space.

[Bristol and the Transatlantic Traffic in Ensalved Africans - Bristol Museums](#)

[Collections](#): updated and improved collection of resources and information about the transatlantic traffic in enslaved Africans and Bristol's involvement.

[Bristol and Transatlantic Slavery. Origins, impact and legacy](#): A textbook for secondary schools.

Information from Bristol City Council.
Jo Corke SW RMB

public service pension schemes but only in respect of retirement prior to 2007. In TPS it affected a relatively small number – 53,000.

Data was not easy to pin down, about 2% of the affected group had their survivors' pension stopped last year, but the reasons for this were not clear – in some case it might simply be that the pensioner's survivor had died. It was an issue that all the unions continued to push on.

Pensions increase

This is determined by legislation. On the triple lock she thought that those who criticised the triple lock did not understand the financial circumstances of some pensioners.

TPS administration

E-J reported that all the unions say that the current situation is unacceptable, but also understand the reasons for those problems. The main issue is the huge amount of work in implementing the McCloud judgement. All calculations for transitional protection have to be done manually, and there are 590,000 TPS members for whom this applies. Priority has been given to calculations for those already retired, and this has impacted on other work. The delay in transferring the administration of TPS from Capita to Tata Consultancy Services was accepted by all the unions to enable all the McCloud calculations to be completed.

TPS data

E-J reported that she supported the call for more granularity (*the scale or level of detail in a set of data*) of data on members of TPS, such as the numbers in FE and HE. She reported that the position was improving but that most of the new data could not yet be released into the

7. Pre-2007 Survivors' pensions.

Emma Jane, UCU Pensions, spoke at our branch October meeting.

E-J explained that this was the official description of what had more colloquially known as widows' and widowers' pensions. It was an issue that affected all

public domain. However, she reported some (pleasant) surprises, for example on density of TPS members in FE and HE. In FE 95.6% of eligible members were in TPS. In HE it is 94.2%. This was higher than had been expected.

Conclusion Overall E-J considered that TPS was better administered than most other public sector pension schemes.

Questions

In response to questions E-J responded: Union representatives normally meet administrators and civil servants but ultimately it is ministers who decide on how the TPS operates within current legislation.

The transfer from Capita to Tata will probably take place at the end of 2026.

E-J reminded us to check our TPS situation; she said that half of us have not nominated the person we want to leave our pension to when we die.

TS thanked E-J for a helpful and informative talk.

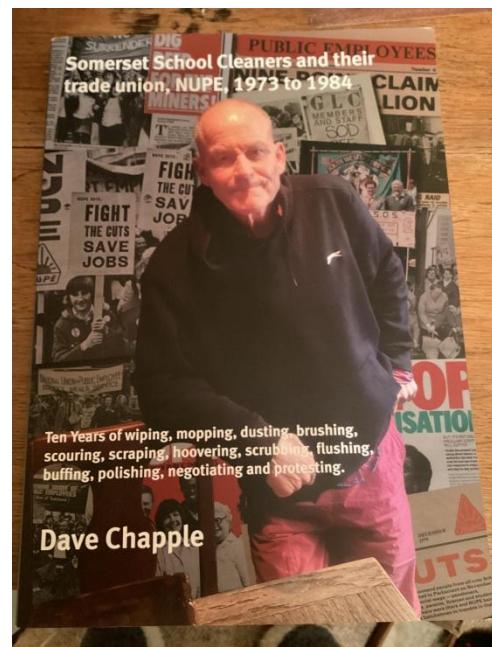
Mike Farmer sec SWRMB

Pensions Update from HO Campaigns email 12.12.25

UCU has won a major victory for prison education members in protecting their teachers' pensions when transferring from the public sector (Novus and Milton Keynes College) to a private provider, PeoplePlus. This followed over two years of campaigning including political lobbying, writing to MPs and links with the TUC and TPS board.

8. Book Corner.

Joanne Kaye wrote, in the foreword to this book by Dave Chapple: When we talk about the union movement, too often the voices of working-class women especially those in low-paid, undervalued jobs – are overlooked. This book is a tribute to the strength, resilience and solidarity of one such group: women school cleaners who were members of the national Union of Public Employees (NUPE) and their place in the wider working class across Somerset.



Copies from The Somerset Socialist Library, 1 Blake Place, Bridgwater, Somerset TA6 5AU. £10.00

This book captures their struggles and triumphs, their courage and determination. It tells of the battle they fought – sometimes against their employers, sometimes against a system that saw them as invisible, and sometimes even within the trade union movement itself. It reminds us that trade unionism is not just about grand speeches and conference motions; it is about the day-

to-day fight for dignity, fairness and respect.

In the book, to illustrate their struggles and triumphs, are photos of original union documents & memos, some typed others handwritten, together with lots of archive photos from those 10 years between 1973-1984.

To those who were part of these struggles, this book is a celebration of their legacy. For me, reading about them for the first time, has been an inspiration.

A timely reminder that there is no room for complacency; the fight for justice for low-paid women workers is far from over.

Joanne Kaye,
UNISON Regional Secretary.

9. Gender Pension Gap Day

On 21st August 2025 the Trades Union Congress (TUC) marked the 'Gender Pension Gap Day'. This is the date that an average retired woman would run out of pension income, if she were receiving it at the same rate as an average retired man. It is based on research showing that the gender pension gap in the UK is 36.5%. This level of inequality is unacceptable. The gender pension gap in schemes open to UCU members is also far too high, for example 27.2% in the Teachers' Pension Scheme (England and Wales) according to the latest valuation.

Thankfully, progress is being made. Some UCU members are covered by the Local Government Pension Scheme (England and Wales), which recently consulted on proposals that would close its gender gap significantly, including making all statutory parental leave pensionable.

UCU is pushing for similar measures in all pension schemes covering our members, including in all other public service pension schemes. You can take a simple step to support our campaign, regardless of the scheme you are in yourself, by signing the following petition and encouraging friends and family to do so.

This will make a real difference to millions of women and shows what can be done when pension schemes take this issue seriously.

UCU Campaigns 26/09/2025

10. Tony Mitchell.

Tony was an Honorary member of the UCU; when he joined our SWRM branch in 2015 I wrote to welcome him and he replied *"How good to hear from you and thanks for the congratulations. The 'honorary' award was for my efforts as Bedfordshire Natfhe's County Secretary and then as Eastern Regional Chair. I have just moved to the SW Area. I am 80 now and not particularly active but at least you know I exist and still have some fire in my belly."*

Some of you may remember Tony as a teacher who rose to be head of English at a Somerset comprehensive school, then became a teacher trainer in Bedfordshire. Tony had a fascination for literature and history and poetry.

He was also an inveterate letter writer to the Guardian. So it is fitting that The Guardian published this Obituary, written by his family.

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2023/aug/04/tony-mitchell-obituary>

When I read it I thought "It can be no other".

Tony liked writing poems and I like reading them. He wrote them to reflect his thoughts, moods and feelings.

Below is an extract from Lifelines, a book of poetry he published in 2020.

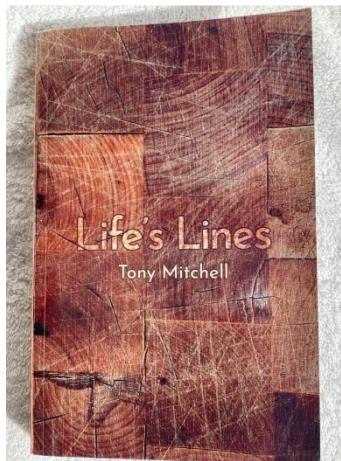


Photo – my copy of the book.

On visiting Milton's cottage 29.3.2013.



Photo: Wikimedia commons .

*John, where is your fierce spirit now,
Which called the tyrant to account,
Believed it right to kill King Charles
And build a commonwealth that's free,
To end the right of kings and queens
To rule our world?*

Jo Corke SWRMB

11. South West Pensioners Committee

TUC continues to fight against the cost-of-living crisis, and push back on even more anti-trade union, anti-worker laws; we need the full strength and solidarity from all our members to win, including the experience and knowledge of our retired members.

Mike Farmer, SWRMB, is on the committee. (Nov 2025)

Meetings: provisional venue Tony Benn House, Victoria Street, Bristol, BS1 6AY
Thursday, 29 January 2026

Thursday, 7 May 2026

Thursday, 10 September 2026

12. Song Corner.

We've had two Books in this issue, so why not a song.

Why do we build the wall?

I first heard this song a couple of months ago: it seemed a good question.

HADES

Why do we build the wall?

My children, my children

Why do we build the wall?

CERBERUS

Why do we build the wall?

We build the wall to keep us free

That's why we build the wall

We build the wall to keep us free

HADES

How does the wall keep us free?

My children, my children

How does the wall keep us free?



photo Wikimedia commons

The answer is in the subsequent verses. You can check it out to see if the answer Hades gets seems relevant today.

When Anaïs Mitchell wrote these lyrics in 2006 the wall around the city of Hades stood for the fear that caused struggling souls like Eurydice to choose the safety of the Underworld instead of the chaos of life. In interviews, Mitchell has referred to her desire to keep *Hadestown* firmly on the “metaphorical plane.”

That was nearly 20 years ago and now it seems less metaphorical. Some have hailed Mitchell’s “Why We Build the Wall” as a prophetic song of protest.

Jo Corke SWRMB

The UCU RMB Annual Meeting notes UCU policies on defending the right to protest and support for action on the climate emergency. It sends its best wishes and solidarity to UCU retired members, Ludi Simpson and Mollie Somerville, (Bradford) who are facing trial in 2026 after taking part in an act of non-violent protest at the National Gallery in connection with Just Stop Oil.

It supports the right of protestors arrested for non-violent civil disobedience to advance in court arguments about the merits of the causes they support in their defence and the right of juries to hear these arguments. It opposes jail sentences for peaceful protestors who engage in acts of non-violent civil disobedience. It condemns moves which have led to more authoritarian policing of political protest.

We applaud the senior citizens who are stepping up to oppose genocide whether arising from military aggression or from climate inaction.

UCU RM Committee

14. Ukraine



A Ukrainian stamp and a poster depicting the RTS Moskva. Source: Creator: Elena Perez-Alvaro; author's photograph. [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International](#) Copyright: © Copyright by BACHLaw Foundation and the Authors.

13. UCU RM Annual Conference.

Mike Farmer, Barbara Segal, Charles Henderson attended for our branch. The full Conference report, including our branch motion, will be received at our UCUSW RMB February 2026 meeting.

Seven motions were passed unanimously. The motion proposed by Yorkshire and Humberside RMB is reproduced here as colleagues may not be aware of this matter, which involves UCU retired members.

15. Editor's Note.

You might want to try your hand at producing the next newsletter. You can use our current format, or another if you prefer. Distribution by email to our members can be delegated to the branch membership secretary. You can get in touch using this email ucu.swest@gmail.com

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Jo Corke SW RMB
