

Prison Education AGM February 2026

A well-attended (in person and online) meeting of all Prison Educators was held on Friday 20 February 2026.

The meeting was chaired by Suzi Toole the chair of the FEC who has a long-declared interest in Prison Education. Both Suzi and the UCU president Maria Chondrogianni spoke and showed their appreciation of the work you all do and the conditions and contract you do it under.

Jo Grady was the first speaker of the day, and she gave an insight into how UCU is working for you and the hard work by members and staff that went into her being able to give evidence to the Justice Select Committee. Jo gave a brief description of the Parliamentary work being done on behalf of all UCU members and the formulation of a new Parliamentary group.

Paul Bridge gave the following overview of UCU's strategic Prison Education campaign and UCU's work in prison education over the last year. He outlined the significant challenges facing UCU prison educators, including the impact of the new Prison Education Service (PES) contract, major funding cuts, and over 300 redundancies. These changes have harmed educational provision and staff wellbeing.

UCU exposed the true scale of cuts—up to 65% in some prisons—and challenged the Ministry of Justice's initial denial. The consequences include fewer courses, heavier workloads, lower standards, increased safety risks, and reduced rehabilitation outcomes.

The union's 'Unlocking Futures' campaign focuses on exposing PES failures, pushing for an independent review, seeking a national contract, and advocating for prison education to return to the Department for Education.

Rebuilding branches is a priority, with efforts to recruit new reps, re-establish committees, strengthen communication, and prepare for pay claims. Strong branches are essential for success in pay, workloads, pensions, and safety.

A major win highlighted in the speech is securing Teachers' Pensions protection for Novus staff transferring to People Plus.

The speech concludes with a commitment to challenge PES, improve safety, rebuild capacity, and continue campaigning for a better prison education model. Together, members can rebuild and win.

On the rebuilding theme Brian Hamilton, Jane Inskip and Adam Lincoln gave a session on rebuilding branches and the need for development plans. They all recognized that each branch had suffered as a result of PES and that they were all at a different stage of development.

They all touched on the requirements of the plans in which branches should be asking the following questions.

- Do we currently have a rep in each prison?
- Do we at least have a workplace contact?
- Where are we completely uncovered?
- Rough membership density?
- Which sites are strongest?
- Which are fragile?
- Who could we approach as a rep?
- Who is respected and steady?
- Who might start as a contact?

These questions were posed so that each new committee, when elected at their AGM, would have a starting point for their rebuild.

The branches then reported to the meeting their current situations. Both reported a significant loss of members and reps through the last restructuring exercises because of the implementation of PES. An increased workload for all staff because of the extra monitoring paperwork required by HMPPS to monitor the contract and the suitability of the initial assessment materials which they felt placed students in a vulnerable unsupported situation. The branches were aware of the rebuilding challenge but were keen to take it on.

After Lunch the branches held their individual AGM's and will be reporting to their own branches in in due course.

The afternoon continued with a report from Rhianwen Roberts UCU policy officer on the work of the policy team. Rhianwen Roberts from the UCU Policy Team, reported on some of the work she has been doing in prison education policy over the last year or so. She also explained the operation of government policy work, how it fits in with the prison education industrial bargaining work, together with the wider UCU machinery, including the Campaigns team and the Public Affairs team.

Last year, the Parliamentary Justice Committee had two prison education-related Inquiries, 'Rehabilitation and Resettlement: ending the cycle of reoffending' and 'Tackling drugs in prisons'. We drafted written responses to these Inquiries, with input from members, which led to Jo Grady being invited to give oral evidence to the Justice Committee.

The Justice Committee Inquiries reported their recommendations, and the government has responded to those recommendations. One key issue that

appears to be a cause for concern is the disconnect between the Justice Committee's recommendations and current reality. An example of this is the recommendation that access to 'purposeful activities', including education, must be expanded, yet the current trajectory appears to be a move away from accredited education courses in prisons, to non-accredited courses.

The Justice Committee has recently established an Inquiry into 'Children and Young Adults in the Secure Estate' and we will be responding to that imminently.

Maxine Looby and Pauline Rattrey gave an account of the work to establish the Black Prison Educators network and the safe space it gave members to raise their concerns. There is a research project which will be presented at Parliament on the 3 March and will be made available to members soon after. The group has come a long way in a short period of time and it would be good if as many of you could come along to Westminster on 3 March to support them.

Louise Church JUPA (Joint Unions in Prisons Alliance) co-chair gave an account of the on-going work of JUPA and the resistance from the HMPPS to sign up to the Safe Inside Prison Charter. She explained the approach of taking each piece of the charter and having individual discussions on each piece. They are currently working on secondary exposure to toxic substances and are seeking clearer definitions to allow the development of Safe Systems of Work.

Charley Allan who is one of the political lobbyists engaged by UCU explained how we can get access to Parliament through the mediums of lobbying and both written and oral questions to the relevant ministers. UCU are involved in the regular meeting of JUPG which is attended by a number of MP's and Peers. Charley has been instrumental to securing the MP briefing event on prison which will take place at Parliament on Tuesday 3 March 17.30. You can find out more details and how you can attend by contacting the team here: politics@ucu.org.uk

The successful day was wound up by the chair who thanked everyone for attending both in person and online and said how impressed she was to the commitment to Prison Education shown by all the reps. A special vote of thanks was given to Sue Bajwa for her efforts in organising the event.

For those of you who wish further reading please follow the links below:

- [UCU prison educators: unlocking futures](#)
- [UCU - Prison education staff](#)
- <https://tvcs.co.uk/googlemaps/mysql/prisons/prisonsvacancyindex.php>