

Welcome to the first newsletter from your new branch committee. On 22nd November, an all reps meeting was held at Milton Keynes College. As part of this meeting, the new committee was elected, they are as follows:

Chair – Rachel Barnes, HMP Birmingham
Vice-Chair – Matthew Fisher, HMP Onley
Secretary – Gina Hillsdon, HMP Winchester
Membership Secretary/Treasurer – Martin Keighery, HMP Bullingdon
Equality – Marion Pitt, HMP Stocken
Union Learning Rep (ULR) – Umran Greenaway, HMP Swinfen Hall
Health and Safety Convenor – Jennifer Tarafdar-Forker, HMP Birmingham

Rachel Barnes

I am based at HMP Birmingham and teach Adult Numeracy and Social and Life Skills. I have been in prison education since 2008. I became the UCU Rep in 2010 and soon after became a member of the Branch Committee under The Manchester College. Since transfer, I helped set up the MKC Prison Education Branch, alongside Matthew, Gina, Marion and Martin.

Matthew Fisher

I am based at HMP Onley and teach Adult Numeracy. I have been in prison education since 2008. I became a UCU Rep in 2011. I took on the role of Chair when we started the MKC Prison Education Branch. Due to work load, I have asked Rachel to take on the role because of her dedication, enthusiasm and hard work. I know she will do an excellent job.

Gina Hillsdon

I have been working at HMP Winchester for over seven years and before that in an FE College. I teach ESOL and English. I became a member of the committee of the newly formed TMC Prison Branch in 2009, and continue the role of Secretary with the MKC Prison Education Branch.

Martin Keighery

I teach at HMP Bullingdon in Oxfordshire and have done for the last 12 years. I specialise in Business Studies and Money Management but have taught and covered every course imaginable in my 12 years at Bullingdon. I have been the UCU Rep at Bullingdon for 3 years. I went to the UCU branch meeting in November 2012 and I became a branch committee member!

Marion Pitt

I am based at HMP Stocken in Rutland. I have worked in Offender Learning since September 2003, teaching Functional Skills English and Personal and Social Development courses. I also cover other subjects as and when required. I have been the UCU Representative at Stocken for just over a year and shortly after that I became the Equality Branch Officer.

Umran Greenaway

I am based at HMP/YOI Swinfen Hall. I have been teaching Functional Skills English in prison education for almost three years. I became the UCU Rep in August 2013 and became a member of the branch committee this November.

Jennifer Tarafdar-Forker

I have been working at HMP Birmingham since 2009 and prior to that in an FE College. I have been teaching for over ten years in total. I have taught many courses in the past, I currently teach Communications and Social and Life Skills. I became the Health and Safety Rep at HMP Birmingham in August 2013 and have recently been elected as Health and Safety Convenor for the branch.

As you have read, the MKC Prison Education Branch consists of UCU reps who volunteer their time. They would not be able to do this without the fantastic support from the paid officials at UCU. The Branch receives excellent support from regional and national officials. We would not have got this far without the tremendous support we get from Christiane Ohsan (UCU National Official for Prison Education) and Ronnie Kershaw (UCU National Organiser). Sadly, Christiane will be retiring in mid December and will be sorely missed. Both Christiane and Ronnie work tirelessly behind the scenes offering support to the branch. They are an asset to both the union and our branch. Ronnie will be continuing to help us with all the organisational things he does so well. He is always on the end of an e-mail and his help is invaluable.

Supporting Members

If you have any issues at a local level, in the first instance, contact your local representative. If you do not have a rep in your establishment, please contact a member of the branch committee who will be able to assist you.

Outgoing Chair's Report – from Matthew Fisher

The last year has seen turbulent times with many challenges. UCU has fought hard to protect and support its members. We started off assisting our members with prison closures with the threat of redundancies and redeployment at the beginning of the year. As the year is coming to the end, we are in the same position with OLASS restructures taking place in a number of prisons.

A lot of individual cases have come to our door. I like to feel that our involvement has helped get issues resolved with the best possible outcomes for our members. One ongoing situation, of which the branch is fully aware, is the effect the regime changes are having on our members. We hope to secure the best possible resolutions for our members in the forthcoming year.

In between this the committee have kept campaigning for a pay rise and increments. We have just had our first pay rise in years announced. We need to keep plugging away to secure the increments.

The Branch achieved a great deal last year. Here are some members' comments.

I was the victim of bullying. My UCU rep helped me with my grievance and the college took the appropriate action against the bullies. Thank you for everything you did for me.

I can't praise our local UCU rep enough. She is thoroughly professional, caring and supportive.

My UCU representative offered me sound advice and was highly supportive of my case [redundancy]. Her backing was instrumental in negotiating an increased redundancy payment from my employers. It would have been very hard to face up to this situation alone.

The UCU rep saved my job. My probationary period was extended unfairly and my UCU rep helped protect me.

I heard about the extra two days holiday from my UCU rep.

Thank you for the great support you gave me today.

Planning for the Future

The branch is looking to move forward and began planning for the future. At the reps meeting, we looked at the key areas that we need to focus on for the upcoming year. Being a new branch, one of our main aims is to ensure we have a rep in every establishment with Milton Keynes College education provision. That way we can strengthen the voice of our members.

If you do not have a rep at your establishment, have you thought about becoming the rep? The union offers full training for new representatives. If you would like to be more active in the union, you could also become a contact. A contact is less involved than a rep. They receive information from the union and pass this on to the members at a local level.

The main areas that the committee are working on for the upcoming year are:

Increments – The branch have been pushing for a pay offer and increments since it was set up. After a great deal of campaigning, we have secured a pay increase of 2% from the college. However, this is not a regular commitment to ongoing increments and moving people up the pay scale. We are seeking the college's commitment to recognition of the hard work done by all in offender learning.

Curriculum Changes – There are continual change to the curriculum and this has a great impact upon staff. We are dedicated to supporting and protecting staff where changes are unavoidable. We negotiate with the college management to get the best deal for staff when there are changes.

Restructure – There are many issues with the ongoing restructure. We are in weekly contact with college senior management and hope to resolve issues swiftly. If you feel that the process has not been conducted fairly in your establishment, please contact your local rep or a member of the branch committee for assistance.

If there is anything you wish the Branch to address, please inform you local rep or contact a member of the branch committee.

Many thanks,

Rachel Barnes

Chair, MKC Prison Education Branch