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Welcome to the first UCU newsletter of 2015. Once again we bring you our take on the top 10 stories on sustainability in the education sector and beyond.

1. UCU Reps Network Launch

A decision has been taken to develop regional and national networks in UCU following a motion to the 2014 Congress. This will be an important way of supporting existing reps and recruiting new activists. UCU has more environment reps than any other union but we also have a massive opportunity to influence the sector to ensure it is meeting its obligations to promote environmental and social justice.

The first regional network was held at the Yorkshire Regional Office in Leeds on November 24. There were presentations from reps on Travel Policies at York College and Student Engagement at Sheffield College. A speaker from Sheffield Climate Alliance outlined some of the current campaigns in the region. During 2015 we will be setting up other network events across the UK so watch this space for further information.

2. UCU Environment Reps Training

A 3 day course was completed at UCU Head Office in November. This was the first course for our environment reps linked to a TUC accredited award. The updated course worked well with plenty of positive feedback. "More confident, better informed and feel far less isolated. I now have some concrete ideas and the beginnings of action plans. It all seems a lot more achievable" (Rhiannon Thompson, University of Portsmouth).

The next 3 day course takes place at the UCU Birmingham Regional Office on April 29, 30 and May 20, 2015. Please send applications or requests for further information to Karen Brooks, UCU Training Officer at kbrooks@ucu.org.uk

3. 'Responsible Futures' Pilot

The NUS has begun a pilot in 8 universities and 5 colleges. The purpose of the pilot is to develop an externally assessed accreditation mark for a whole-institution approach to environmental sustainability and social responsibility, spanning the formal and informal curriculum, and applicable to both further and higher education.

It is not an exercise in 'marking the performance of lecturers'. The objective is to train a group of appointed students to act as auditors of the institution's performance against a range of agreed criteria. Their assessment will then be examined by an external NUS auditor and a judgement made as to whether the accreditation mark is awarded. No league tables are involved.

We hope this work will support the efforts of UCU to ensure that students are prepared for the demands of work in a low carbon economy. A member of the UCU is on the steering group for this project. The plan is to make the scheme available to the whole sector in 2015-16. Manchester Met has set up a web page which contains further information:

<http://www.celt.mmu.ac.uk/esd/index.php?section=rf>

4. Divestment

In the last newsletter we reported that Glasgow University had become the first HE institution in Europe to vote for divestment from fossil fuels. Since then a Global Day of Disinvestment has been announced for February 13 and 14. To find out about events on the day and obtain resources for a local campaign go to: <http://gofossilfree.org/uk/>

UCU has been meeting with colleagues from ShareAction to address the concerns about the future direction of the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) which invests significant sums in companies like Shell and BP. A joint event is planned later this year.

Financial experts, including the Bank of England and Goldman Sachs, have begun taking seriously the risk that expensive fossil fuel projects will be rendered worthless by future climate action. James Leaton, research director at the Carbon Tracker Initiative (CTI) said "Investors are already using the detailed CTI cost curves to start identifying how low demand and price scenarios could play out."

New research in the journal 'Nature' highlights the concern about unburnable carbon. Academics, Paul Elkins and Christophe McGlade from UCL have published the report:

http://www.nature.com/articles/nature14016.epdf?referrer_access_token=KzXdUL9h5bfbs9hohILPJ9RgN0jAjWel9jnR3ZoTv0MEzzy4wDRQt

**e5fViQxiPJjJIIfgcjxiQpfQtqwAkMQY0JLvKN-
t7UU3Q5Hpwixj6wJAcw7ZVrXGHNSUweoIqxYL**

...and this from north of the border, 'Scotland and the Carbon Bubble':
<http://www.scotlink.org/wp/files/documents/Scotland-and-the-carbon-bubble-final-for-publication.pdf>

5. Energy Efficiency

The scandal of some of the worst insulated homes and public buildings in Europe continues. Sally Hunt, UCU General Secretary, signed a joint letter to political parties asking for commitments to address fuel poverty in their election manifestos. Students living in poorly insulated properties are one of the groups most affected. For further information see the Energy Bill Revolution **<http://www.energybillrevolution.org/>** The TUC are holding a conference on January 29 on energy efficiency. Details are here:

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/events/money-burn-driving-energy-efficiency-commercial-sector>

6. International Developments

The trade union delegation that attended the UN climate talks in Lima, Peru was less than enthusiastic about the outcome.

"Governments have decided to ignore our calls to promote ambition before 2020 – a critical aspect for growing jobs in climate-sound sectors, and fundamental for protecting workers in the transformation of our economies", said Sharan Burrow, General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation. "Rather, they have played again the lowest possible ambition scenario and postponed for Paris critical discussions about how they will manage to stay below 2°C".

<http://www.ituc-csi.org/lima-climate-conference-deceives>

In Europe there are also concerns about the direction of environmental policy. EU plans to tackle air pollution, which causes tens of thousands of premature deaths, and make countries recycle more of their rubbish are to be scrapped, according to leaked documents. At risk are a clean air directive designed to reduce the health impacts from air pollution caused by vehicles, industry and power plants, and a waste directive that would set states the target of recycling 70% of waste by 2030.

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/dec/11/eu-plans-to-scrap-clean-air-and-waste-recycling-laws>

Meanwhile the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership hovers in the background. The TUC Green Workplaces Newsletter highlights some of the environmental threats posed by TTIP:

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/workplace-issues/green-workplaces/green-workplaces-news/greenworkplaces-news-december-2014>

7. UNESCO Global Action Programme

The end of the UN decade for education for sustainable development (2005-14) conference took place in Japan in November. The UN also called on governments to implement the Global Action Programme, which is the follow up to the ESD decade. The UK Government failed to send a delegation which reinforces our concerns about

the low priority placed on this issue. UCU assisted in the drafting of the commitment made by Education International, our global union federation. Susan Hopgood, the President of EI, spoke at the opening plenary. She argued that education was the key to achieving sustainable development and the full development of children, young people, and adults.

http://www.ei-ie.org/en/news/news_details/3323

8. Greener Jobs Alliance

The AGM was held on 14/1/15. The annual report outlined developments that had taken place in 2014. These ranged from local actions on issues like Air Quality and Energy Co-operatives to influencing the national policy framework. The GJA has been working with the TUC to highlight the weaknesses of the Government's Industrial Strategy. The 11 industrial sectors, which include 'International Education,' have been criticised by the Environment Audit Committee for failing to reflect sustainability in their strategy. A summary of the kind of actions that are required can be found in the GJA '10 steps for sustainability':

http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/t/2/GJA_DL_leaf_sept14-1.pdf

9. Go Green Week

This runs from February 9–14, 2015 in universities, colleges and schools. The theme is Go Fossil Free. UCU branches should check the People & Planet site for resources and further information. Please send us a report on initiatives for coverage in the next newsletter:

<http://peopleandplanet.org/gogreenweek>

10. Time to Act Campaign

UCU branches are urged to mobilise for the next demonstration called by Campaign against Climate Change on March 7. The demonstration aims to put pressure on political parties before the general election, and raise the profile of climate change. It will be followed by local action immediately before the general election, the Climate Coalition lobby of Parliament in June and planning throughout 2015 towards the crucial Paris talks in December. The start point for the London event is Lincoln Inns Field at midday. Visit the website for further information:

<http://www.campaigncc.org/TimetoAct>

Get in touch

If you are a UCU member looking for advice on sustainable development or have ideas for greening the FHE sector please let us know. Contact: Graham Petersen, UCU Environment Co-ordinator:

gpetersen@ucu.org.uk