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Welcome to the March newsletter. This issue reflects the mounting concern about climate policy in the lead up to the May election. We urge all UCU members to get involved as we build towards the UN talks in Paris in December.

1. UCU Reps Network Update

During 2015 we plan to get round all the UCU regions and countries in the UK to discuss ways to increase the number and impact of our environment reps. Since the last newsletter we have followed up our launch on Yorks and Humberside with a London Region meeting on February 12. There was a valuable discussion about divestment from fossil fuels with colleagues from ShareAction. Two new reps were identified and updates provided on current issues and campaigns. All regional and national committees have now been contacted to arrange a session at future meetings. Our next set of meetings have been arranged for Northern Region on April 18, and Scotland on May 15.

2. Updated UCU course materials

We used the feedback from the course last term to update and improve the 3 day course materials for environment reps. These will be provided for the next 3 day course taking place at the UCU Birmingham Regional Office on April 29, 30 and 20 May 2015. Please send applications or requests for further information to Karen Brooks, UCU Training Officer at kbrooks@ucu.org.uk

3. Student Sustainability Summit

UCU members attended the NUS summit that took place at Leeds University on March 23. It was an impressive turnout of student activists. Workshop discussions included student and staff campaigns on fossil fuel divestment and education for sustainable development. A report on the progress of the 'Responsible Futures' pilot in 8 universities and 5 colleges was provided. UCU is backing this pilot as we feel it is an excellent way of getting FHE institutions to up their game on sustainability. This followed on from the research of student attitudes that showed that:

- 80 per cent are concerned about climate change
- Over two thirds believe they'll be affected by climate change
- 65 per cent believe we are already feeling its effects
- 82 per cent would vote for a government which increased action on climate change

<http://beta.nusconnect.org.uk/strong-students-unions/articles/82-per-cent-of-students-would-vote-for-more-action-on-climate-change>

4. Air Quality

Climate change is one of the biggest public health problems of the century, according to the UN. There are an estimated **29,000 deaths annually** in the UK from air pollution. Nitrogen dioxide is known to cause inflammation of the airways, reduce lung function and exacerbate asthma. Particulate matter - tiny invisible specks of mineral dust, carbon and other chemicals - are linked to heart and lung diseases as well as cancer. Many university and college campuses are built on busy main roads. The exposure levels to pollutants in many of these will exceed current EU safe limits. UCU branches are urged to raise this with their institutions. In London, UCU has been working with the London Sustainability Exchange to carry out 'citizen science' activities with students. Resources that have been used to support this are available at:

<http://www.lsx.org.uk/docs/page/2509/M&E%20toolkit%202014%20v1.pdf>

A useful web site has been set up to provide text alerts to the public when pollution levels in particular postcodes are at dangerous levels. In some cities in March it has been hitting 7 on the scale which is classed as 'high' and can induce harmful health impacts: <http://www.airtext.info/>

5. Industrial Strategy

The Ecobuild exhibition at the Excel centre took place in March. There was a debate on political priorities for an incoming government. A UCU member in the audience pointed out that the Green Economy Council had not met in over 2 years and that the Government's Industrial Strategy had been declared not fit for purpose by the Parliamentary Environmental Audit Committee. The response from Ed Davey, Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, was less than satisfactory, even claiming incorrectly that the GEC had met in 2014. In fact it last met in January, 2013.

<http://touchstoneblog.org.uk/2015/02/green-economy-council-out-in-the-cold/>

Given the lack of strategic direction it's no wonder that climate practice and policy is all over the place. The latest report linked to this has come out from Leeds University. Prof John Barnett has published a study which highlights the fact that when you factor in the net import of manufactured goods we are still at 1990 levels of carbon emissions. This research undermines the accepted wisdom that the UK is exemplary in meeting its climate targets under the Kyoto Protocol.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-31952888>

<http://www.emissions.leeds.ac.uk/>

<http://touchstoneblog.org.uk/2015/03/staggering-rise-in-our-carbon-trade-deficit/>

6. The rise of divestment campaigning

The divestment campaign argues that there is a financial reason, as well as a moral one, for getting rid of fossil fuel investments, because increasing policies to cut carbon will eventually impact on the stocks' value. The landmark climate change report in September, 2014, from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, stated that agreement by the world's governments to restrict global warming to less than 2C meant keeping total future carbon emissions under 500 gigatonnes. Analysis by the International Energy Agency and the Carbon Tracker think-tank has shown this would mean that about two-thirds of the coal, oil and gas on the books of fossil fuel companies would have to remain unburned.

University Endowment funds - £5bn is invested in coal, oil and gas by the endowment funds of UK universities. Glasgow and Bedfordshire have voted to divest. SOAS has agreed a freeze on new investments. Campaigns are underway in LSE, LSHTM, Edinburgh, Oxford, Manchester and Warwick. The NUS announced in 2015 that this will be a priority campaign. People & Planet has produced a 'University Guide to Fossil Fuel Divestment': <https://peopleandplanet.org/dl/fossil-free/resources/action-guide.pdf>

UCU has 2013 conference policy which calls for the building of divestment campaigns. We will be holding a fringe meeting at the annual congress in Glasgow in May. This will debate the pros and cons of divestment in the city where the first UK university initiative was taken. It has also become a priority subject for The Guardian who launched their campaign in March:

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/keep-it-in-the-ground-blog/2015/mar/17/guardian-petition-for-fossil-fuel-divestment-receives-60000-signatures>

Related campaign – ShareAction's Green Light calls for 'responsible investment'. It encourages pension providers to embed climate-awareness into their investment decisions, into dialogue with companies and into policy advocacy. UCU will host a joint meeting with ShareAction for members on Ethical Investment. It will be held on June 11 from 1.30-4.30 at UCU Head Office. Details to follow.

7. UK Elections and the Environment

In the lead up to the election in May, political parties, with the exception of UKIP, have been trying to puff up their green credentials. Cameron, Clegg and Miliband signed a 'climate agreement' to accelerate the transition to a low carbon economy.

http://www.green-alliance.org.uk/resources/Leaders_Joint_Climate_Change_Agreement.pdf

However, these are the same parties that passed the Infrastructure Act, 2015 which gives them a mandate to "maximise the economically recoverable onshore oil and gas". You could be forgiven for thinking that if every country implemented legislation like that then the chances of staying below 2 degrees temperature increase would be zero.

The backdrop for the education sector is a future of funding cuts. The ability of the FHE sector to lead on sustainability issues will be seriously jeopardised. This is compounded by the lack of any strategic direction on education for sustainable

development. The Greener Jobs Alliance Action Plan highlights the key policy changes required http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/t/2/GJA_DL_leaf_sept14-1.pdf

Other publications trying to influence the debate that are worth a read include the **Aldersgate Group** - 6 priority areas for the next parliament <http://www.aldersgategroup.org.uk/reports/aldersgate-group-manifesto-priorities-for-the-next-parliament-2>

Money to Burn pamphlet – A TUC Touchstone publication on driving energy efficiency in the commercial sector https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Money_To_BurnTS.pdf

Society for the Environment – ‘Priorities for the next Government’ a set of policy recommendations from across the professions. In a welcome change from many approaches, the issue of climate change and sustainability skills is listed as the first policy priority. Although UCU did point out at the parliamentary launch in March, that the FE sector should be given the same prominence as schools and universities in the report <http://www.socenv.org.uk/news/launch-of-environment-priorities-for-the-next-government/>

8. The road to Paris

UCU members were among the 20,000 people on the ‘Time to Act’ demonstration in London on March 7. This is part of the build up to the UN conference in Paris in December. Unions will need to make their voice heard not just in the UK but at European and global level.

An **EU Protocol** was signed in March committing member states to 40% reductions by 2030.

<http://treealerts.org/home-global/2015/03/ministers-sign-off-eu-offer-for-paris-deal/>

The **International Trade Union Confederation** has published a Frontlines Briefing, Climate Justice: There are no jobs on a dead planet. <http://www.ituc-csi.org/ituc-frontlines-briefing-climate>

Show your support for climate action by signing the petition for climate justice at <http://act.equaltimes.org/unions4climate>

Trade Unions for Energy Democracy, which UCU is affiliated to, has put out this 5-minute video animation on why unions are coming together to fight for democratic control and social ownership of energy resources and infrastructure

<http://unionsforenergydemocracy.org/watch-our-new-animated-video/>

Education International, UCU’s global federation has set up a network of educators on education for sustainable development. If you are interested in accessing the portal that has been created contact getersen@ucu.org.uk

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:

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