

## AN INFORMATION BULLETIN FOR MEMBERS IN LONDON REGION

Dear colleague,

Welcome to our latest newsletter. Once again, UCU is engaged in disputes in both the further and higher education sectors, and you will be aware of the issues at stake.

In this issue, we have an article on the current dispute over the USS pension in HE. As always with pensions, these are important but complex matters. We also have an update on the pay dispute in FE. Ballots will be conducted on this matter in some colleges in the near future, and you should look out for information from your branch.

Otherwise, as always, we in the regional office are working hard to support members of UCU to achieve their collective and individual objectives. Thank you for your support, and allow us to take this opportunity again to ask you to speak to any colleagues in your institution who are not already members of UCU to encourage them to join.

Greg, Barry and Una

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### Getting involved in your branch

Although not everyone can be, or wants to be, branch secretary or branch chair, there are other ways of being active in the union and there are always opportunities for you to get more involved in your branch. Two ways that you could get more involved are as a local departmental rep or as a membership or recruitment rep. If you think you might be interested in either of these roles in your branch, or any other, please contact your local branch officers.

More information on the different ways of getting involved in UCU, with a brief introduction to being a rep, can be found on the UCU website at:

<https://www.ucu.org.uk/rep>

One way in which all members can help the union is by talking to your colleagues who may not be UCU members and encouraging them to join; forward them this newsletter and encourage them to join at: <https://www.ucu.org.uk/join>



## **An interview with David Coy, a lecturer in history and the branch secretary of Kingston College branch**

### **How long have you been active in UCU and what led you to get involved?**

I've been active in UCU since I joined Kingston College in 1986 – previously I had been in the NUT when I worked in a sixth form college. I became a UCU rep about five or six years ago – I always had an interest in improving pay and conditions and it was a moment when pay and terms were suddenly becoming more important as it became clear that, after the crash, the government were going to go after the public sector.

### **What is the most rewarding thing about being a UCU officer/rep?**

There have been quite a few successes – most satisfying was getting management to change their policy on sessional staff. Many staff who had been here on casual contracts, sometimes for many years, moved on to permanent contracts, which was good to see. Supporting members through grievances and workplace issues is rewarding; I've also done lots of UCU training on negotiation, casework, employment law. I also enjoy being part of the union and meeting people at local and regional level and also at conference.

### **What have some of the challenges been?**

The reluctance of management to ever admit that managers have acted wrongly – in grievances they almost always side with management unless you have an absolutely cast iron case. It's disappointing that, from an institutional point of view, they rarely want to admit that managers can get things wrong.

### **What do you think are the most important workplace issues for your members at Kingston?**

Workloads – lecturers are expected to work with larger and larger class sizes and asked to do more and more admin, marking, preparation – there is a constant pressure to improve for Ofsted. At the same time, we are not being rewarded for the extra work with any increases in pay, even at the level of inflation.

### **What would your advice be to others wanting to get involved?**

Do so! It's nice to work in a team – the committee here is very good, we work together and we're all supportive – and the work is interesting and rewarding. Get involved, even if you just come along to a few meetings, and volunteer for something, even for minor tasks.

# The gender pay gap and the new mandatory reporting obligations

The gender pay gap in Britain remains one of the highest in the EU at over 18%. For women aged over 40, it is 25%. In higher education, the gender pay gap is 12% and in further education it is just over 2%. There are many reasons why the gender pay gap exists, including discrimination against women in the workplace, more women in low paid work, the predominance of men in more senior roles and women's caring responsibilities.

The differences in pay between men and women is generally accepted to be a pernicious stain in too many of our workplaces, but clearly much more needs to be done especially since it has been estimated that, at the present pace of change, it may take over 50 years to close the gap. UCU has been campaigning for our members in this area by, among other things, identifying those institutions with particularly large pay gaps and providing an online 'rate for the job' tool to allow members to find out more about pay levels at their place of work. We also make use of the equal pay legislation. Equal pay is about ensuring that men and women receive the same pay for doing the same job, similar jobs or work of equal value. The gender pay gap is different in that it shows the **difference in the average pay between all men and women in a workforce.**

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Under the new Gender Pay Gap Regulations, institutions who have more than 250 employees will have to report the overall percentage differences in mean and median hourly pay between male and female employees. The reporting deadline is 31 March 2018 for public sector employers and 4 April 2018 for private sector employers. The information must be published on the employer's own public facing website and on a government website. This obligation will be in addition to the Public Sector Equality Duty which requires public authorities to eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity by publishing information demonstrating compliance with their duties under the Equality Act.

UCU is determined to ensure that employers analyse, address and eliminate the gender pay gap as soon as possible. It is hoped that this new mandatory reporting requirement will help achieve that aim.

# YOUR PENSION UNDER ATTACK

Members will be aware of the looming confrontation over the future of USS, and the critical importance of the dispute. This has been indicated in a letter from the General Secretary **update on the current threat to pensions**. The article below further starkly illustrates the difference between the current model of pension provision, with the one promoted by the employers, and reinforces the need for the union to be fully geared up for the struggle ahead.

## **How would we fare if defined benefit is replaced by defined contribution?**

Many USS employers favour the closure of our defined benefit (DB) pension scheme and its complete replacement with individual defined contribution (IDC) pension pots. When IDC was introduced in 2014, our employers made the case for it by assuming returns on these pension pots that were more optimistic than USS's assumptions regarding returns on the DB pension fund. In order to pre-empt a renewed attempt by our employer to make the case for IDC on the basis of an inconsistently optimistic set of assumptions, I have applied USS's own current best estimates of returns in order to calculate how one would fare, on these assumptions, if DB is replaced by IDC. Here are my estimates: If you will retire in 30 years, your expected IDC pension is only

c.80% as good as the DB pension it would replace. If you will retire in 20 years, it is only c.65% as good. If you will retire in 10 years, it is only c.45% as good. Note that your 'expected IDC pension' is what you have at least a 50% chance of obtaining. What you end up with may be higher or lower, with equal probability, depending on actual returns on the investments in your IDC pension pot during your working life and the actual annuity rates on offer at retirement. So the lower expected returns of an IDC pension pot are also accompanied by much greater uncertainty regarding the pension you will end up receiving, as compared with the guaranteed pension of our current DB arrangement.

**Mike Otsuka, Pensions  
Representative, LSE Branch**

## FE pay

UCU's consultative e-ballot of members in FE closed on the 29<sup>th</sup> September 2017; 75% of members responding indicated that they would be prepared to take industrial action if the Association of Colleges did not make a recommendation on pay that was satisfactory.

Disappointingly, the AoC made a recommendation of 1%, or £250 for the lowest grades – substantially below inflation and completely failing to address the 23.6% real terms fall in wages that FE staff have endured since 2008. Staff in London have been particularly hard pressed as housing and travel costs have soared in the capital over the last decade.



At the same time, the funding situation in FE colleges means that staff are continually asked to do more with less, leading to overwork, rising stress levels and increasing use of agency and casual staff. Many branches in London have lodged '2-part' claims over terms and conditions where the national pay claim from the joint unions is supplemented by a local claim seeking to address common issues like unmanageable workloads and increasing casualisation.

Branches should now have received guidance from Andrew Harden, UCU Head of Further Education, about proceeding to industrial action; members are encouraged to offer strong support for any action on pay as well as for local claims.

You can read more about UCU's campaign on FE pay at <https://www.ucu.org.uk/fepayengland>



These courses are for all new and existing UCU reps and officers. We encourage all UCU activists to attend regardless of whatever role is held within the branch to gain essential knowledge and skills.

- **Rep 2: Representing UCU members, 21-23 March 2018, London**
- **Effective negotiating & bargaining skills: 18-19 April & 2 May 2018, London**
- **Rep 1: UCU reps induction, 20-22 June 2018, London**
- **Introduction to pensions, 10-11 January 2018**

You can find a wider list of courses available in London region by following the link below

<https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/4797/Courses-in-the-London-South-East--Eastern-region>