

Lancaster UCU newsletter January 14th 2022

Dear members,

And so we roll up our sleeves and take on 2022. Hope you had a break and are staying safe and well!

This first newsletter of the year leads with an update on how senior management continues to conceal and reward managerial bullying, and the work by the unions and their members to insist on transparent and accountable investigative and disciplinary processes. We also include an item about other areas in which UCU is working to improve the transparency and accountability of how our senior management govern the University. The newsletter further contains an update on COVID-related health and safety, and an update on the two disputes (USS and the Four Fights) in expectance of further information after the national UCU Higher Education Committee meets on 19 January 2022. We conclude with two notices about upcoming events.

1. Update on Institutional Failure on Managerial Bullying

Neither the malpractice of managerial bullying nor the absolute institutional failure to address it has gone away since UCU first raised it in 2018 and it later became [public](#). How do we know? UCU continues to pick up the pieces of shattered lives and tackle the opaqueness, delay and closing of ranks of senior management. The end result is widespread demoralisation, individual mental breakdown, the loss of highly qualified, highly motivated staff, including long-standing distinguished Professor Linda Woodhead OBE, and the increase in layers of secrecy. Here is an update on a collective case, which the unions reported on previously.

The saga began for over fifty staff, many union members, when they were subjected to managerial bullying in 2017. They pursued every single procedure to resolve the bullying: individual grievances, a collective grievance, appeals, an employment tribunal case for trade union victimisation, a collective letter of no confidence, an external investigation and now, finally, in desperation, another collective letter, to the highest legal organ of University governance, Council, invoking the whistle-blowing procedure. Alongside, repeated informal and formal union representations were made to the dean, the HR Director, the Chief Executive Officer, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and the Vice-Chancellor. The response was not duty of care or justice, it was silence, delay and hostility.

Where are we at now as we begin the fifth year? Has resolution been achieved? Has the employer taken responsibility for their actions? Despite going to judicial mediation in the employment tribunal case, no resolution was achieved (for clarity, no financial settlement was sought). The University was happy to pay its solicitors to fight against its own staff. After extensive pressure, an independent investigation was finally launched after the deeply flawed internal collective grievance investigation. Victims provided copious evidence on the condition that they would be informed of the findings. *When the findings were produced in May 2021, the victims were told that they could not be shared with them. They do not know what was found with their evidence or whether any managers underwent any disciplinary measures. Once again, the institution failed its staff.*

These responses are categorically unacceptable for any employer, let alone a top ten UK university. How have those discharged with legal duty of care and custodianship of reputation concocted layer upon layer of concealment over years rather than deal with the issue? This was asked of Council in August 2021. Council has now commissioned an external investigation...

What have we learnt? We have learnt that implicated senior managers have remained in power and even been rewarded. We have learnt that senior management would prefer to risk reputational

damage by closing ranks rather than investigate in good faith to resolve managerial bullying. The problem is that this will not go away until it has been resolved and as we have seen in public cases of institutional corruption, concealment has a habit of being exposed. We stand one minute to midnight, resolve the case, before the pack of cards falls. It would seem that loyalty among senior management supersedes their responsibility to both staff and the institution, but the modus operandum of bullying will not withstand our collective resolve.

2. Transparency and accountability of University senior management

UCU meets regularly with HR (aka POE, People and Organisational Effectiveness) and senior managers. In addition to industrial relation matters narrowly defined (working conditions, contracts etc.), we cover a range of aspects of the University's activities.

After expressing concerns about working conditions at our campus in China, we have this week had the first of regular meetings with senior managers dealing with our international partnerships, to express our concerns. These meetings on internationalisation have also touched on the foundation year teaching of mainly foreign students that happens on campus but is outsourced to the company Study Group. Working conditions, academic standards and opaque decision making are issues we pursue in these meetings.

Since the start of COVID we have also managed to get regular updates on University Finances, which has been helpful in understanding the financial impact of COVID, but also how senior management use budget targets to manufacture a sense of financial pressure, which they use to justify changes to staffing, workloads, organisation etc.

Also since after the start of COVID, there are now more frequent meetings about health and safety, with new biweekly meetings.

3. COVID-related health and safety update

Campus unions have expressed dissatisfaction with the process for colleagues who have serious concerns about returning to campus. The Individual Risk Assessment is no longer in place and instead POE have produced a "recommended 8 step guidance for managers" which is not transparent and there is a lack of clarity as to how the guidance interacts with other university policies. The campus unions are very unhappy with the final step in the process - *"if all avenues have been explored and there are no further reasonable steps to take to reassure the individual, or a justifiable reason for refusing to undertake on campus work activity including teaching, engage your HR Partner to explore options under University procedures and escalation to a University Panel consisting of the Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development, Deputy Vice Chancellor and an appropriate Dean"* and have asked for this to be formally consulted with the trade unions. There also needs to be a proper appeals process.

Campus unions requested additional measures on campus such as the reintroduction of one-way systems. This idea was rejected by management although additional cleaning and limiting the number of visitors to campus will be explored. National UCU guidance recommends ensuring a minimum of 2m social distancing as standard to prevent close contact transmission – this was also rejected.

Campus unions have suggested that the Reimagining Work Practices pilot should be put on hold because it is not appropriate in the current situation and there are issues around the cleaning of shared workspaces.

The campus unions carried out a joint safety inspection of the Learning Zone. Representatives met with colleagues working there, discussed some of the challenges they were facing and heard about Health & Safety related concerns. The unions then submitted a report to relevant senior management. All concerns which we raised were addressed.

In general, the campus unions are disappointed that senior management's aim is only to comply with the minimum standards set out in government guidelines. This was particularly evident in discussions around face coverings. At the start of last term, there was nothing to prevent senior managers introducing the firmer guidance that is now in place, but they preferred to wait until the Government's Plan B was introduced.

4. Two disputes update

The two national disputes UCU is in about USS and the Four Fights (casualisation, workload, pay and pay gaps) are ongoing. After the three strike days late last year, we are now undertaking action short of a strike – do make sure not to work beyond contracted hours and not take on voluntary tasks. Meanwhile, re-balloting at those institutions that were near but did not get over the reactionary 50% legal threshold is ongoing and ends this week. Next week, after the results are counted and more branches are able to join and support industrial action, there is a national meeting of branch delegates to discuss strategy, and a decision on next steps should be forthcoming soon after. We'll get back to you when we know more.

5. This Saturday - Lancaster & Morecambe Trade Unions Council protest, 'Johnson Must Go!'

In the light of the revelations of the Prime Minister's pattern of lies and corruption, the Council along with other Trades Councils across the country has called a socially distanced protest at 1pm on Saturday 15 January on Lancaster Town Hall steps. Bring banners and placards!

6. Holocaust Memorial Day

UCU commemorates Holocaust Memorial Day, observed annually on 27 January. It does so in memory of the six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust and the millions of people killed by Nazi persecution and in subsequent genocides in Bosnia, Cambodia, Darfur and Rwanda, and in order to challenge hatred and persecution in the UK [today](#). There are events at Lancaster [University](#) and in [Lancaster](#) city centre.

In solidarity,
Nils Markusson, branch secretary