

## CONTENTS

1. No progress regarding casual contracts at Lancaster University
2. Disputes over USS and the Four Fights
3. Health and safety
4. RAID/CAM merger
5. Pulse survey – do we or don't we?
6. Promotions for academic staff - Two sets of criteria, for one year
7. Subs tax rebate
8. Climate protest – outside COP26 event
9. Regional meeting on Oct 2nd

\*\*\*\*\*

### **1. No progress regarding casual contracts at Lancaster University**

We're coming up towards the 2<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the negotiated agreement on the Fixed Term Contracts and Casual Work [policy](#). But for staff on casual contracts, nothing has so far changed in practice. The policy promises to improve the situation for many on casual contracts, with for example university-wide norms for pay for most kinds of casual work, clarity about what work is included in contracts and conversion to fixed term contracts (usually fractional) for jobs with regular work patterns lasting longer than 12 weeks. In practice, the university continues to [advise](#) departments and units to use casual contracts for up to 25 weeks for Graduate Teaching Assistants. UCU has asked for a timeline for implementation for the part of the policy relating to casual work.

### **2. Disputes over USS and the Four Fights**

The results of voting from the 9 September Special Higher Education Conference (SHESC), which met to decide next steps in the USS and 4-Fights campaign have been declared. The conference voted to declare a dispute with UUK over USS, and to ballot members for industrial action to defend our defined benefits in order to take industrial action in the autumn term. The conference also decided to continue the Four Fights campaign over pay, workload, casualisation, and equality, and importantly, to coordinate the USS and Four Fights ballots. Members have voted to stand up for our pension, our hard-earned right as deferred pay, and have voted to fight against pension cuts based on an artificially constructed deficit in the pension scheme. There is nothing fundamentally wrong with our pension, but lots which is wrong with scheme governance and those who are in-charge of running it.

Members may have noticed in the internal communications sent to all staff by the Director of POE which states that UCU did not formally table a counter-proposal to UUK's one. This is disingenuous, as UCU did informally present proposals, which UUK negotiators pre-empted by saying that they would not support them (provide the 'covenant support' necessary to underwrite them). And this is despite the fact that employers were perfectly willing to provide exactly the same level of support for their own plans to cut members' pensions to the bone.

A timetable for ballot and action will follow shortly from national UCU. In the meantime, we must start planning to maximise participation in the ballots and subsequent industrial action. It is only if we stand and fight together that we will win on pension, pay and decent working conditions for all our colleagues.

### **3. Health and safety**

Lancaster UCU remains very concerned that elements of the approach to returning to a full campus remain unclear, particularly around Health & Safety. Despite seeking clarification from senior university management, the following key issues remain unsatisfactorily unresolved:

- Despite clear evidence that the wearing of face coverings reduces the chances of transmission, LUCU is concerned that the University guidance (*“as a general rule of thumb, we encourage all staff and students to keep a distance from each other where possible. If this is difficult or impractical then face-coverings are recommended and, in line with Government guidance, are expected in crowded and enclosed areas. Local risk assessments may also identify activities where face-coverings will be required”*) is not sufficiently strong. It also gives no support or guidance to staff if they feel that, in a specific situation, this guidance is not being followed by students or other staff.
- The reference to local risk assessments is also worrying because the campus unions, as part of the University Health and Safety Consultative Committee sub-group, have not, since August, received any updated risk assessments to review as part of the large-scale return to campus. We encourage members to ask their line manager about the risk assessments for their particular area.
- The Individual Risk Assessment, which was used last academic year as a framework for members who had concerns about returning to campus, has been withdrawn. Instead, members with concerns - about their own wellbeing or the wellbeing of their family members or those for whom they have caring responsibilities - are encouraged to have a conversation with their line manager,<sup>9</sup> which may be followed by a referral to Occupational Health. We believe there is not enough guidance for members (or line managers) on how to manage this process, particularly if the concerns are related to the wellbeing of others.

If members have concerns about any aspect of H&S we encourage you to contact your departmental or area rep in the first instance, or to contact Rory Daly, LUCU Health & Safety Officer, [r.daly@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:r.daly@lancaster.ac.uk)

### **4. RAID/CAM merger**

It seems that the RAID/CAM merger has now officially gone ahead. Interestingly, though, it has not been announced to the 90 plus staff who work in these two divisions. After the so called “consultation” staff heard nothing more about it. The questions that were asked went unanswered and further documentation requested was nowhere to be seen. The senior managers, who were to gain from the merger, have all been put in place, by stealth, and there have been no announcements. UCU were able to ensure that due process was followed for roles with proposed higher salary, despite a freeze on regrades across the university. This meant that these roles had to be initially disestablished and then re-evaluated with postholders required to reapply, so it was made less easy for them to do what they wanted. But UCU is disappointed that it did not receive any response from University leadership on why some senior managers got away with rewarding themselves with more responsibility, which we are sure will attract higher pay in future years.

## **5. Pulse survey – do we or don't we?**

Lancaster UCU has in the past boycotted staff surveys. The University has now abandoned the previous model of broad-spectrum staff surveys for so-called pulse surveys focussing on specific topics. The branch is still concerned with the way management spin results from surveys which seriously undermines their usefulness, but have decided for now to respond positively to an offer to give input to the next pulse survey. Please get in touch with opinions about the branch's stance on this.

## **6. Promotions for academic staff - Two sets of criteria, for one year**

The promotions criteria for academic staff have recently changed. UCU were concerned about that the lack of forewarning about the change meant some staff members who had worked towards promotion under the old set would be disadvantaged. The concession from the employer was to let both the new and old criteria be in use, in parallel, although for only one academic year 2021/22.

## **7. Subs tax rebate**

UCU members are entitled to tax relief on their union subscription. You can claim tax relief on phone/post by contacting [HMRC](#), or [on the HMRC site](#) - you will need your NI number and a recent payslip or P60. Claim the tax relief under section 'professional fees and subscriptions'. The allowable figure to be entered should be 67% of the total subscriptions paid for each year. You have up to four years to claim for each tax year. Tables of national subscription rates for the current and previous tax years, together with tables for local subscriptions, can be found [here](#). **To make things easier for you to claim, we have prepared the attached file with tax relief worked out for each pay band for 2020-21 which you can just fill in the relevant columns in HMRC website.**

## **8. Climate protest – outside COP26 event**

UCU is planning to be present outside the COP26 climate event in Glasgow in November, to support protests for rapid climate action and climate justice. The branch is collaborating locally with other unions and other organisations, and the plan is to organise a bus taking those interested to Glasgow on Saturday November 6<sup>th</sup>. If you are interested in joining in, get in touch with [n.markusson@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:n.markusson@lancaster.ac.uk).

## **9. Regional meeting on Oct 2nd**

Lancaster UCU regularly meets up with other branches across the North West. The next meeting is on Saturday October 2<sup>nd</sup>. We have places free, so if you want to come along and hear about what the issues are at other universities, and how other branches are tackling them, get in touch.