

Lancaster UCU newsletter May 24th 2022

Report from our AGM and disputes update

Thanks to everyone who made time to attend the branch's annual general meeting on the 12th of May! We elected a new committee, see [here](#).

We are of course disappointed not to have gotten over the turnout threshold in the recent ballot over industrial action in the USS and the Four Fights disputes. Branches that did get over the turnout threshold went on marking and assessment boycott from yesterday. We need to focus on supporting them. Beyond those two disputes, there are also a number of HE institutions where the employer is sacking staff, for example at Goldsmiths. And there were Further Education colleges in the Northwest currently on strike over pay. We voted at the quorate AGM to allocate £3k from branch funds for solidarity donations to UCU branches taking industrial action.

Solidarity twinning with University of the Arts London (UAL) branch undertaking the boycott

We have 'twinning' with UAL UCU branch, who are in need of funds as the employers are deducting a 100% pay deduction for members' marking and assessment boycott, which could last until mid-July. We will stay in touch with UAL and send them our heartfelt solidarity with £1,000 for their hardship fund. Please follow and retweet them on [Twitter](#) and let us know if you would like to help support them further.

Accountability of UCU leadership and future strategy

The branch has also noted questionable, undemocratic practices at the national level in the process of implementing democratic mandates for industrial action, and we are planning to compile a list of these. Congress will be taking place on 1-3 June and will amongst other things be debating a motion to censure the general secretary for undermining UCU's democracy and national disputes. It notes, among other points, the short three-week re-ballot of members that ended 8th April, the failure in notifying employers of any industrial action until May, and the general secretary's intervention on 13th April with a report arguing to end the dispute despite a mandate for industrial action. Censure is an accountability mechanism to signal behaviour that is unacceptable and needs to change. The motion and the debate will bring together members' anger at the extraordinary deliberate and documented weakening of national action by the general secretary. Thank you to Congress delegates, who will be giving up two bank holidays to attend.

Lancaster University's phantom rules

Meanwhile, the work at local level goes on, especially in exposing 'phantom rules':

Overseas workers

The employer has recently written to staff abroad and told them they are required to come back to Lancaster. This ignores the fact that some of them were hired to work abroad, for example at research facilities where Lancaster takes part in collaborative work or have agreements to live abroad and only needing to be present in Lancaster at specific times of the year. The unions were not consulted over these changed requirements, and we have challenged the employer's actions. It seems they are making up 'phantom rules' as they go along.

Starting salaries

Another 'phantom rule' the employer has introduced is guidance saying that new recruits should normally be hired at the bottom rung of their pay grade. This is problematic in several ways. It does not reward the expertise and experience the recruits may bring to the organisation. As job ads don't spell this out, we are misleading applicants. It will likely disadvantage women, who are less likely to push for a negotiated salary. The branch has challenged this guidance.

BJTU Belongings

A UCU rep was able to negotiate a compensation payment with POE (formerly HR) and Senior Managers, on behalf of Weihai teachers at our China campus, who have been separated from their belongings for just under three years since the pandemic. Previously Lancaster had offered to pay for some of the belongings to be brought back, but the sum offered to do this was not adequate and logistically it was very difficult. Therefore, the compensation is a welcome option for teachers, thanks to the rep's persistence in taking up this issue, with the support and advice from Lancaster's UCU Officers.

Cost-of-living crisis campaigning

The local Lancaster & Morecambe Trade Union Council are organising a coach to a national TUC cost-of-living crisis protest in London on **Saturday June 18th**. Contact Eugene on 07944142876 to book early! There will also be a local community event on the evening of **Monday June 6th** at the Gregson Centre on the same theme.

In solidarity,
Nils Markusson, branch secretary