

Lancaster UCU e-Bulletin (October 2015)

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100,000 Strong 'Northern Powerhouse'

On Sunday 4 October, in glorious technicolour sunshine, Frances O'Grady, general secretary of the Trades Union Congress (TUC), told 100,000 trade unionists assembled in the streets of Manchester that *they* were the 'Northern powerhouse'. From junior doctors to the Redcar steel workers to the National Gallery strikers from London, tens of thousands of people came together to protest against austerity and the anti-Trade Union Bill with music, placards and lots of children. UCU general secretary, Sally Hunt, speaking at the event, described the bill as 'the biggest assault on the democracy of our country'. The bill is being rushed through parliament by the government with its third reading due on **2 November 2015** and the TUC, including UCU, is organising a mass lobby. In a public meeting at Lancaster Town Hall last month, Cat Smith, MP for Lancaster and Fleetwood, re-pledged her commitment to vote against it. If you live in a different constituency, please make sure that your MP represents the interests of working people and votes against this bill. At Manchester, we had a vibrant contingent of UCU members from Lancaster, some on their first march, not an egg in sight, here is what they thought.

'Fantastic atmosphere and a really positive vibe' Anne, Sociology

'It was great to be among so many people who had also come along to demonstrate! Lovely, happy crowd with people of every age. And good to know that so many want to defend our right to stand together in the workplace' Nils, LEC

'My first real protest. I had no idea what it would be like and how I would feel. It felt great! It was great to join in so many common causes with so many others' Amit, Computing

'It was great to bring the family to Manchester to take part in the action together with such a diverse crowd of people, all with the common aim to resist the destruction of our rights and public services' Tanya, Library

'It was great to be in Manchester to see that there is, indeed, 'Power in a Union'. And especially wonderful to sing along to Billy Bragg!!' Joanne, FASS

Photos on our revived twitter page: <https://twitter.com/lancasterucu> Please do follow!

CAMPUS NEWS: The Year Ahead

Branch Strategy: 2015/16

During an interesting political time, when austerity policies are affecting more and more UCU members, it can be difficult to discuss local branch aims for the academic year ahead without seeming parochial. However, while members' focus will, quite rightly, be on the pensions and pay situations, we felt it important to try and clarify the other key areas for our local branch. Following recent discussions we have identified:

1. Increased, active membership:

It is important that we recruit more members to ensure that we are represented in greater numbers in every section of the University. Equally as important, is to have a more active membership. Our executive and our reps lists have grown in the last two years but we need more people to be involved. Talk to your local rep or one of the exec to find out how you can play an active part in your union.

2. Improved Contracts:

We have identified the continued unnecessary use of Fixed Term and 'flexible' contracts, and the poor rewards offered our teaching post graduate members, as an urgent issue to be resolved – staff should be offered greater security of contract and properly rewarded for the work they do.

3. Wider UCU involvement:

The branch is committed to playing a more active role in regional and national UCU business. There are plenty of UCU committees and groups where Lancaster UCU can play a role.

4. Partnership Agreement:

Each branch has a partnership agreement with its university. The agreement outlines how business will be conducted and includes agreements on the process for negotiations, dispute resolution, facility time for union officers. Discussions for renewing ours have been proceeding well but there are still some key issues to resolve.

We have organised the following two meetings this month to discuss how we can make progress and we look forward to seeing you at either or both – come along and get involved!

General Meeting with UCU President Friday 30 October 2015 12.30 – 2pm Marcus Merriman LT

Liz Lawrence, UCU President, will be speaking about the issues that lie ahead of us this year (e.g. workloads, casualisation, pay, equality) and answering questions. The general meeting will discuss branch officers' reports and we will vote on a pensions motion to take forward with university management, see pensions report later on in the e-bulletin.

Anti-Casualisation Workshop Friday 30 October 2015 3pm – 4.30pm Faraday SR3

Liz will also be leading a workshop on how we can campaign against casualisation at Lancaster, sharing insights from around the country. Everyone welcome, particularly, if you are on an insecure contract.

REGIONAL SOLIDARITY: Job Losses; Regional Networking; Researchers Conference

Unions Rally against Redundancies at University of Manchester

UCU, Unison and Unite members [protested over redundancies at the University of Manchester](#) with over 300 marching on campus to rally against the redundancies involving staff who have been on the redeployment register for more than 3 months and also as a result of the restructuring of IT Services.

Regional Committee Meeting Saturday 17 October 2015 Manchester

We have one delegate for this but would welcome others! Please contact us for more information.

NW Activists Network Day Saturday 24 October 2015 Liverpool

This is a workshop for us to meet other members at universities in the region and share ideas. Please contact us for more information.

Rethinking UK Research Funding Event Wednesday 4 November 2015 Manchester

Do you have strong opinions about the way academic research is funded in the UK? Maybe you're a researcher employed on one short term project after another and have ideas about how things could be better organised? Maybe you are concerned about the effect the competitive culture in research has on the quality of results and their reproducibility and believe changes in the way funds are allocated could improve the situation? Or perhaps you believe that the current system for research funding is basically excellent, but have a strong view about one particular issue that needs to be addressed?

If any of the above apply to you, you should consider attending a **FREE** one day event being held as part of Manchester [Policy Week 2015](#), [Rethinking UK Research Funding](#) on 4th November. A summary programme for the day can be downloaded [here. mailto:rethinkingresearch@gmail.com](mailto:rethinkingresearch@gmail.com) Supported by UCU.

NATIONAL NEWS: Pensions; Pay

National Pensions Meeting Report: Change the Valuation Method!

Previous reports to branches have stressed the need for the UCU to continue challenging the USS trustee board's approach to funding methodology. Despite these efforts, the USS Board refuses to agree to a fundamentally different methodology for the 2014 valuation.

If the problem is the method used in calculating the value of the USS scheme then the focus is to determine how to persuade the UUK trustee members to vote to change the valuation method.

The best way to do this is to get individual institutions to put pressure on their representatives. Locally, we need to get our VC to appreciate that the international competitiveness of Lancaster will decrease if the pension is not attractive. Finance directors should also understand, a poor valuation in 2017 (poor=larger deficit), will mean sizeable pension contribution increases (for all concerned).

We will be holding a vote (at the General Meeting on Friday 30 October) on a proposed motion to get the University to join the UCU in its aim to ensure a different valuation approach is used.

USS Pensions Risk Survey

USS recently sent out a questionnaire with questions about our individual attitudes to financial risk and our ability to live with such risks, in order to help them design the direct benefit (DB) section of the new planned pension scheme. The questionnaire itself is poorly designed with some leading questions and no space for expressing opinions beyond the tick boxes, and is therefore of doubtful use. Also, given USS's exaggerated ambition for de-risking the overall pension scheme, if our individual responses indicate risk aversion, they might try to argue that we are collectively risk averse (although that does not follow), and thus weaken us in current and future negotiations. We do not endorse the questionnaire and instead suggest contacting USS directly and giving them your views on the questionnaire.

National Pay Dispute – Breaking News!

UCU Higher Education Committee met on 9 October 2015 and decided that UCU will not accept the 1% final pay offer but neither will it be taking any action in connection with it this year. Instead, it will focus on building a sustained campaign on pay for next year, alongside our sister unions.

Please put the date for our branch meeting - **Friday 30 Oct 12.30-2pm Marcus Merriman LT** – in your diary, so that we discuss how we can take pensions, pay and secure contracts forward together at Lancaster.

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY: Release Dr Miguel Beltran!

UCU General Secretary, Sally Hunt, has drawn attention to the plight of Colombian academic, Dr Beltran, in an email to all members. Please sign and share the petition.

http://speakout.web.ucu.org.uk/release-dr-miguel-beltran/?utm_source=ucuhemembers_all&utm_medium=email&utm_term=NW059&utm_content=html&utm_campaign=lyr-Please%20help%20your%20colleague%20imprisoned%20in%20Colombia