

EDUCATION WITHOUT EXPLOITATION

UCU promotes fairness and good working conditions for all. Much can be accomplished through negotiations and hard work behind the scenes all year round, and this newsletter highlights many examples of our recent local campaigns and successes.

But sometimes quiet negotiations are not enough, and we have to take strike action as a last resort. We only do this over issues that we feel are too important to back down on, as was the case in our 2018 strike over pensions, and again in our current strike over pensions and the 'four fights' dispute over pay, equality, workloads and casualisation.

Being on strike can feel isolating and difficult, but our pickets and Teach Outs are friendly, collegial and inclusive, and we have great support from Unite, Unison, NEU and the Students' Union. To keep our spirits up, we invented #HaikuStriku. Here's a haiku that sums up why we sometimes strike:

**“Things can always be
worse. The point of a strike is:
They can be better.”**

UCU STRIKE ACTION IN FEBRUARY/MARCH 2020

Unless our industrial dispute is resolved soon, UCU members will be on strike for 14 days between 20 February and 13 March 2020. Our reasons for striking are summarised on page 6.

Support on the picket lines and via social media is very welcome, and we have set up a crowdfunder for our local hardship fund: <https://tinyurl.com/vgt57f7>

NEW LU POLICY ON FIXED TERM AND CASUAL CONTRACTS

After many years of campaigning on anti-casualisation by UCU, we are delighted that our negotiations with LU management have resulted in a new policy being adopted, which should result in many more colleagues being offered permanent contracts.

Thank you to all the Lancaster UCU negotiators who helped to make this happen.

The challenge now is to keep up the pressure on management to actually implement the policy!



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EXAMPLES OF RECENT UCU CAMPAIGNS

Resistance to extending the Teaching Day

UCU is holding LU management to account for their failure to provide sufficient teaching space to keep pace with the growth in student numbers.

Despite having achieved its strategic target of 15,000 students, LU continues to try to recruit more and more students every year.

The 2019/20 undergraduate teaching timetable includes a total of 420 hours after 6pm; more than in 2018/19. The worst affected students, from LUMS, have 52 hours of evening classes this academic year. Alternatives such as repeating lectures or livestreaming are also on the increase. These are supposed to be temporary solutions while some new teaching spaces are built for October 2020, but we're concerned about a 'policy drift' towards reducing rather than eliminating evening teaching driven by space shortages.

The Students' Union shares our concern about unrestrained growth, and the SU Board recently voted to boycott visit days until LU commits to capping student numbers at a sustainable level.

Boycotting the Staff Survey

Are you tired of filling in the staff survey, hoping for an opportunity to say that you're working so much that you're too exhausted or don't have enough time to enjoy family, friends and hobbies - only to find that the questions never quite address these points?

Do you try to fit these important issues into the tiny survey box for open-ended comments, only to find that year after year these sorts of comments are ignored or are met with trivial responses? If so, you are not alone!

UCU believes that the main point of the staff survey is for LU management to congratulate themselves on how good things are here. The results will always be presented in a way that reinforces that message. In response to UCU's strike action, they trotted out numbers from the staff survey about how happy people are here. Our strike ballot suggests otherwise.

Before each survey, UCU has participated in consultation meetings about the design of the survey. But these consultations never deal with the fundamentals. How does a staff survey compare against other ways of evaluating how staff fare here? Is benchmarking against other universities really a good way to judge what is good and bad? Should we really partner with companies like Capita? Is a survey worth tens of thousands of pounds?

After failing to make any real headway, UCU organized a boycott of the last staff survey that resulted in a significant reduction in participation. Management's response was to note that less than half of academic staff participated, and then make sweeping statements that we were more satisfied than ever! This completely ignores the huge bias that results from the fact that many of the people who were the most dissatisfied did not participate in the survey.

UCU will continue to boycott staff surveys until our concerns are addressed.



WORKPLACE STRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH

Feeling stressed? You are not alone - and it's not your fault!

Employers often portray stress as an individual problem, questioning an individual's capacity to cope, rather than addressing the underlying issues affecting the whole workplace. Ever increasing workloads, hours of work, job insecurity, a culture of managerial bullying and unreasonable demands placed on staff all contribute to a 'stressed out' workforce.

Individuals who may have always regarded themselves as being of a robust nature can fall ill and suffer adverse effects. Stress can cause mental and physical illnesses such as anxiety, depression, altered appetite, headaches, backache or difficulty in sleeping.

If you think your health is suffering due to workplace stress don't suffer in silence – talk to your line manager, your GP, and your trade union. The law says that employers are responsible for the safety of their employees while they are at work, and this includes stress.

Impacts of casual contracts on mental health

Two-thirds of researchers and around half of teachers working in UK universities are on fixed-term contracts. Job security has been deliberately eroded to reduce overall staffing costs and create a workforce that is compliant and easy to dismiss or replace.

Precarity at work can lead to financial hardship, stress, exploitation, having to move regularly, and difficulties securing housing and maintaining relationships with family and friends.

A UCU survey of 3,800 casualised HE staff, published last month, found that 71% of respondents believed their mental health had been damaged by insecure contracts.

UCU is here to make sure that members don't feel alone in dealing with workplace stress or problems arising from a mental health issue. UCU campaigns for fair policies on sickness and disability, regular monitoring of mental ill-health levels, routine risk assessments and proper training programmes for managers and staff.

One in four people will experience mental ill-health in any one year.
One in six people in employment are experiencing a mental health issue *right now*.

Supporting staff at Lancaster's China campus

Lancaster UCU has been supporting our members who work part of the year at the Beijing-Jiaotong Technical University (BJTU) campus in China.

We've been hearing about many issues such as excessive workloads, problems with IT, visas and double taxation, a lack of adequate childcare or financial assistance for staff with dependent family members, and the challenges of living in remote Weihai.

The very high turnover of staff suggests that much more needs to be done to improve the staff experience at BJTU, which will surely result in a better student experience too.

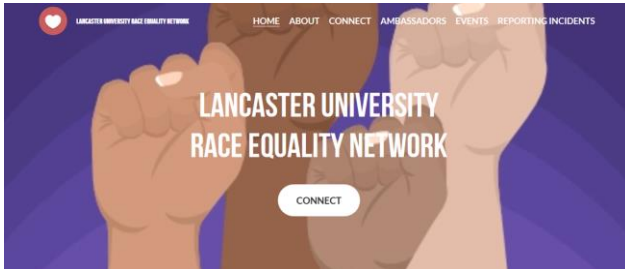


RESISTANCE TO RACISM ON CAMPUS



LU Race Equality Network (LUREN)

It's been a busy time for the new network. In November we had an amazing Strike Teach-Out led by MA students, to whom we're really grateful for facilitating such meaningful discussion.



New PGR Tracker

UCU is currently in dialogue with Student Services about the new PGR Tracker.

We oppose this both to protect staff wellbeing, and also to try to resist the surveillance of students, including those on Tier 4 visas.



UCU and LUREN – Black History Month

Two jointly-hosted discussion events took place in October 2019 entitled 'Trump, the Far Right and Racism on US campuses' and 'Racism on Campus – What Can We Do?' Really important points were raised by staff and students, prompting the creation of ...

... The LUREN Website

Due to be launched soon, this new site will enable staff and students to connect, advertise events, and report racist incidents.

If you're interested in being involved in developing the site, or if you have any comments, ideas or concerns, do get in touch! Please email LUCU Equalities Officer Miranda Barty-Taylor.

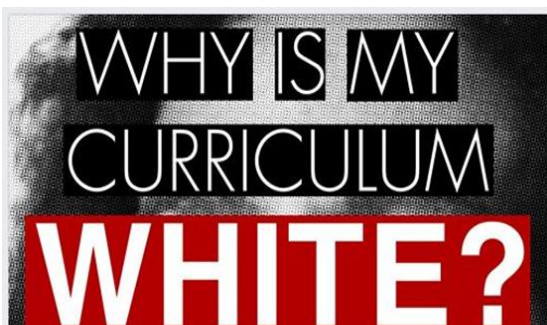
If you're interested in organising an event around decolonising the curriculum in FASS, please contact Richard Budd.

Slow progress on Race Equality Charter

Lancaster University stated that it aimed to: *"be a member of the REC from 2017, producing an ethnicity analysis of staff and student data via a Self-Assessment Team, forming a 3-year Action Plan and achieving the REC Bronze Award by 2020."* To date, none of these objectives have been met. UCU is committed to pushing this forward.



A quarter of all BAME staff & students have experienced racial harassment at University. [EHRC, 2019]



Why Is My Curriculum White?

The WIMCW Campaign has created a survey for BAME students to share their experiences of life at Lancaster. The data will be analysed and published later in the year. If you would like to take part, please email wimcw.lancaster@gmail.com

CAMPAIGNING FOR A CLIMATE-FRIENDLY PENSION

Many UCU members have pension investments in the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS). USS holds assets worth £70 billion, including significant investments in fossil fuel industries, airports and airlines, as well as other harmful activities such as tobacco.

Ethics4USS is campaigning for USS's main (Defined Benefit) fund, and the default option for the Defined Contribution (Investment Builder) fund, to be divested from companies that harm people and our planet. We want our retirement savings to help, not hinder, the transition to a low carbon society.

USS members can choose to invest the DC part of their pension in an ethical fund which excludes these harmful industries, but disappointingly few USS members have actually done this. Good news is that the ethical funds are performing strongly and it only takes a few minutes to switch from the default (unethical) fund to an ethical one.

What you can do

- Join our newsletter/blog mailing list at www.divestuss.org and follow @DivestUSS on Twitter.
- If you have a DC (Investment Builder) pot in USS, switch it to an ethical fund – this is easy to do online, and instructions can be found at www.divestuss.org
- Check whether your bank and electricity and gas providers are funding the climate crisis – and switch if they are: www.campaigncc.org/timetoswitch

WHAT CLIMATE EMERGENCY?

A petition signed by more than 2,100 staff and students was handed to the VC Steve Bradley and Pro-VC Simon Guy in December, calling on Lancaster University to declare an emergency, set a target of net zero carbon emissions by 2030, and put new policies and structures in place to work towards this target.

LU management have not agreed to these demands (yet). They have organised a 'Big Conversation' on sustainability on 24 February (a UCU strike day!). Staff have been invited to participate in this event, but it is unclear what will be done to engage with students, and whether anything tangible will result from what could be just another talking shop.

UCU, the Students' Union and other groups on and off campus will continue to keep up the pressure.

Last summer, Lancaster UCU reps Emily Heath, Emily Winter and Miranda Barty-Taylor set up the LUCE Working Group for staff and students to campaign together for a robust LU response to the climate and ecological emergency. If you would like to join this group please contact luclimateemergency@gmail.com and visit our website: www.luclimateemergency.org.uk

Climate Strike Rally

in Lancaster City Centre
Friday 13th March
11am-2pm



REFLECTIONS ON UCU'S STRIKE ACTION

The current UCU strike action, over casualisation, pay, the gender pay gap, workloads and pensions, is partly a continuation of the pensions dispute that prompted UCU's 14-day strike in 2018. That dispute was paused for over a year to await the findings of a 'Joint Expert Panel' (JEP) made up of equal numbers of UCU's and our employers' nominated pensions experts.

The JEP has produced two reports, essentially supporting UCU's view that the valuation methodology underpinning the proposed changes to our pension scheme was flawed. The governance of the USS pension fund is not fit for purpose, and our pensions are still threatened. UCU rejects the so-called "de-risking" proposed by USS; it is an attempt to transfer more risk to us in our retirement.



Why did UCU decide to strike over a bigger range of issues in 2019/20?

Many university staff are on insecure contracts, resulting in stress, fear, hardship and illness.

A new LU policy promises to remedy this locally, but it has not been implemented yet.

Our pay has by declined by 19% in real terms over the last decade.

Meanwhile, the pay of Vice Chancellors and other senior managers has soared. E.g. **Lancaster's VC pay and benefits increased by 26% in 6 years** from 2012/13 to 18/19, outstripping inflation by 11%.

Lancaster's 27% gender pay gap is one of the largest. The mean for UK universities is 15%.

The average academic works 50 hours per week. Workloads continue to increase, with the added pressure of REF, TEF and now KEF. Evening teaching worsens our work-life balance.

None of us enjoy disrupting students' learning, or having to lose weeks of our pay, but it is the only way we can fight back when all else fails. So we 'down tools', organise picket lines and teach-outs, and create space in our busy lives to dream together of a better university.

Check out our blog for more discussion: www.lancasterucu.home.blog



Next steps in the disputes

Negotiations between UCU and UCEA (representing our employers) are ongoing, and although there has been some progress, we are not yet satisfied that universities are willing to take meaningful action on all five of the issues that prompted us to strike.

Meanwhile, Action Short of a Strike (ASOS) matters for keeping the pressure up on employers. And it is a good chance for us all to see what life is like when we only work our contracted hours and do only what we're paid to do ...

A total of 74 UCU branches will participate in the next wave of strike action, scheduled for 20-21 & 24-26 February and 2-5 and 9-13 March.

As our mandate for industrial action is time-limited, there may also be a new ballot for industrial action in summer term, should there not be sufficient and timely progress in negotiations this term.

Solidarity from staff and students is always welcome. Please join UCU if you're eligible to and not already a member (see back page). Let's talk about what is going on and how we can all support each other.

Collective action is the most effective way to make our workplaces fairer, happier and healthier for everyone.

What does ASOS mean?

UCU members are taking Action Short of a Strike (ASOS) in between periods of strike action.

This means that we withdraw all of the free work and goodwill that we normally give to our universities. We won't offer all our usual "extras" until VCs meaningfully address our concerns.



For example:

1. NO working more than our contracted hours where those hours are expressly stated, and no more than the maximum of 48 hours per week as stipulated in the Working Time Regulations.
2. NO performing additional voluntary duties, such as out of hours cover, or covering for colleagues (unless contractually required).
3. NO setting and marking work beyond that which we are contractually obliged to.
4. NO attending meetings on a voluntary basis.
5. NO filling in forms about REF, TEF and KEF!



Don't wait until you have a problem!

Last year thousands of your colleagues sought help from UCU with issues such as promotion appeals, contracts, redundancy, disciplinary hearings, workload issues, grievances, etc.

As a member of UCU you have the support of trained local officers and access to legal representation and advice.

The more staff and PG students who join us, the more we can achieve!

There's **strength** in numbers



So join your union today

www.ucu.org.uk/join

WHO CAN JOIN UCU AND HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

You are eligible to join UCU if:

- Your work involves the provision of, or professional support of education, training, or research, in the higher education, further education or learning and skills sectors; or
- You are a postgraduate student intending to follow a career in any of the above sectors.

Membership is free for postgraduate students, with a sliding scale of monthly membership subscriptions for staff, based on your annual earnings.

It is vital to ensure that you are paying subs at the correct level, so that you will be able to access the full range of UCU services including legal advice, if needed.

UCU works closely with Unison and Unite on many issues, and we encourage you to join one of these recognised campus trade unions if you are not eligible to join UCU.



Julie Hearn

President



Sunil Banga

Vice-Pres. & Pensions Officer



Emily Heath

Secretary & H&S Rep



Nils Markusson
Treasurer



Miranda Barty-Taylor
Equality Officer



Emily Winter
Green Rep



Alex Finch
Research Staff Rep



Ellie Fielding-Redpath
PG Students' Rep



João Nunes de Almeida
Anti-Casual'n Rep

WHO'S WHO IN LANCASTER UCU?

Plus six other exec. committee members and a team of caseworkers and departmental reps! More info at www.lancaster.ac.uk/users/ucu/