

LUCU Members Newsletter 15 January 2026

Dear LUCU members

Happy new year once again and we hope the start of term is going well.

There is still a lot going on, so please take time to read through the new year update below which covers several major issues your UCU branch officers have been working on:

- 1. Lancaster UCU fundraiser**
- 2. LUCU Hardship fund**
- 3. LU Futures update – closure of collective consultation**
- 4. LU Financial position 2024-25 – our analysis**
- 5. PS service design meeting 6 January**
- 6. Meeting with the new VC Steve Decent and RSCOO Susan Mitchell**
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- 16. Solidarity for Lancaster and Morecambe College**

1. Lancaster UCU fundraiser

A group of volunteers and music bands from the North-West organised a fundraiser gig for Lancaster UCU. The event was absolutely rocking and a large following of approx. 95 LUCU supporters turned up, including students and from the local community. The music was buzzing, the energy was seamless, and the atmosphere electric. Many thanks to Bop Gun, Rice and Persimmon who played for free for the event for their flawless performances, and to Zoe Lambert for being the ‘Master of Ceremonies’. We sold a bit of merchandise as well and managed to raise £800 for our hardship fund to help the most vulnerable members in case we need to strike. Watch out for photos on our social media which will be posted soon.

2. LUCU Hardship fund

A huge thanks to all those who have donated via our fundraising page - <https://www.peoplesfundraising.com/donation/lancaster-ucu-hardship-fund>. We have raised £550 since redundancies were announced. Please do share the link with your contacts and on your social media pages – let's hope that we don't need to go on strike this year, but if we do, every little helps!

3. LU Futures update – closure of collective consultation

We have challenged the management’s unilateral decision to close the collective consultation process associated with redundancies made as part of the LU Futures project. While the legal basis for closing the collective consultation is doubtful, we have highlighted several

outstanding issues on which we are still awaiting a response from management. We have no doubt that the unilateral closure of collective consultation is an attempt by senior management to avoid scrutiny and to avoid responding to a number of unresolved matters raised by UCU.

4. LU Financial position 2024-25 – our analysis

Last year's financial statements have been published and can be found [here](#). We have still not been told how much the University is in surplus this year, but we know that the key metric ANOC (Adjusted Net Operating Cash Flow) has increased (10.6%) suggesting that the financial crisis has been manufactured to suit some senior manager's agendas. The increased ANOC means that there is ample scope for the University to meet its cash requirements in future, but more importantly, it *clearly demonstrates that these financial outcomes could have been achieved without the threat of CRs*. The statement also shows that the addiction of senior management to spend on their trophy projects continues unabated. It seems that the £5m savings of the overall £35m savings target from non-payroll has not been met. This means that instead of cutting needless capital expenditure senior managers focussed on cutting staff. The statement makes much of Transnational Education (TNE), but it elides the fact that only one of the four international partnerships generates any significant amount of revenues, and glosses over UA92 losses of over £6m. None of the partnerships come close to the 'surplus' expected of Bailrigg departments, so our members are right to question whether it would not be a better use of our time to devote resources to core work here in Lancaster, which determines our global reputation and income, not value-destroying partnerships with private providers such as Navitas, UA92, and 2U. Overall, the statements do not say much about LU Futures – which has destroyed morale and the culture of the University and has adversely impacted our brand value. We estimate 350+ staff have left or will leave the University by July this year either through voluntary means or resigning in disgust at the destruction caused over the last few months.

5. PS service design meeting 6 January

The meeting with the interim PoE Director and interim University Secretary managed to discuss just one item – the legality of closing collective consultation on the LU Futures redundancies while the LU Futures latest update published on 22 December still claims that *“For Professional Services colleagues, voluntary methods to make payroll savings are the priority. However, the need for compulsory redundancies as part of LU Future cannot yet be ruled out if the University does not successfully meet savings targets via ongoing design work and voluntary methods”*. Management did not have any updates on the PS service design, and it seems management does not appear to have a clue on when the work would be completed, or whether there would be any compulsory redundancies or not. Unfortunately, this uncertainty for PS colleagues looks set to continue for a few more months. *We have however made it crystal clear that we will reballot if the threat of compulsory redundancies is not withdrawn soon.*

6. Meeting with the new VC Steve Decent and RSCOO Susan Mitchell

We had positive first meetings with the new VC Steve Decent and RSCOO (Registrar, Secretary, and Chief Operating Officer) Susan Mitchell. Our discussions were wide ranging, and in particular we apprised them of our concerns with regards to the matters listed below. We also asked the VC for regular unmediated meetings with him over the next few months. We were reassured to hear that governance oversight, a new LU strategy, statutory compliance, and

transparency and engagement with staff were the VC's priorities for his first year. We have made it clear to both that from our perspective the new leadership needs to walk the talk, i.e. if staff are talented, dedicated and wonderful as the VC set out in his joining message then this needs to be matched by actions that demonstrate that staff are valued and not just disposable pound signs on the finance spreadsheet.

1. LU Strategy, LU Futures and CTP impact on academic quality, student experience, reputational damage and loss of credibility and trust in senior management
2. Governance of Finance
3. Trade union representation on Council, abolition of the redundancy committee, termination of partnership agreement, poor industrial relations
4. H&S culture and structures
5. PS regrades and vacancy freeze
6. FHASS envision move
7. Workloads and Simitive
8. Transnational Education (TNE) and other trophy projects of senior managers

7. H&S issues and County South advice

Among the issues we raised with the new VC is the way in which Health & Safety is managed at Lancaster University. The Health & Safety Office is part of PoE; this means that there is no oversight of Health & Safety that is independent of the University Executive. Just how problematic this is, became blatantly obvious during the FHASS move – where a lack of timely and meaningful consultation with unions led to serious safety failures, including improperly installed shelving in County South and post-hoc fire safety assessments conducted only after buildings were already occupied. Since we did not have any assurances that the risk was independently assessed and addressed, we advised our members not to work from County South. We have since received some limited assurances from the Faculty, Facilities and PoE that they have addressed the issues with shelving, as well as some of the issues we raised in our workplace inspection. While the University has recently offered limited assurances, the unions maintain that the "major" relocation was handled as a routine matter with insufficient regard for staff welfare. We are yet to see a response to our question about plans for vacant office spaces – *we have asked that the spaces are re-occupied if no satisfactory response is forthcoming on future use for the empty spaces.*

8. Workplace stress

Workplace stress keeps rising. The absence report that covers the first half of 2025 remains confidential (we have not yet had a response to our request to be able to share it); we can say that the FHASS relocation, LU Future and the threat of compulsory redundancies were imposed on a work force with high levels of absence caused by workplace stress. Stress-related illness – the epidemic of the 21st century, according to the WHO – is often stigmatized and signing off with stress often comes with feelings of inadequacy and of guilt towards colleagues, so we commend all colleagues who resisted stigmatization and signed off. If you are made ill by stress, do the responsible thing and sign off. *If you suffer from stress, do not keep working because you want to spare your colleagues overwork; if you see your colleagues suffering from stress, reassure them that they are not responsible for your workload and that you will resist overwork.* So far at Lancaster, stress is turned into the individual responsibility of staff by sending them to the EAP and suggesting that *they* need to change, rather than Management

taking responsibility for creating the conditions that cause stress and making structural changes to the workplace to remove the causes. How about Management providing a workplace that does *not* cause stress? We have been working with PoE on a 'Transformational Change Risk Assessment', which means that the institution identifies stressors and implements control measures during periods of institutional transformation. We have had some – not nearly enough – positive responses to an approach that takes experience seriously. But we want to make one thing clear: risk assessments are dynamic, and they are not the *only* measure that we want to see in tackling workplace stress – in other words: they are not excuses or fig leaves.

9. 'PG Hub' in Bowland Annexe

Our workplace inspection of the PG Hub in Bowland Annexe led us to conclude that the space is not fit for purpose as a 'hub' or workplace for postgraduate students. As well as that, we highlighted a host of other, specific issues; the address of none of which would make the space fit for purpose, but all of which needed to be resolved until PG students could be moved into a more suitable location. Some PS staff have been working on addressing some of the issues we raised in our inspection. But one thing is clear: these reparative actions won't resolve the wider issues, which is that the space is not appropriate as a workplace for PGRs. We are working with LUSU and Unison on the PG Hub issues and will continue to do so, until our PGR students at FHASS are treated with respect and are given a welcoming, appropriate workplace.

10. Vote of No Confidence in the Chair of Council follow-up

We believe that at the Council meeting in November last year the UCU's vote of no confidence in the Chair of Council Pro-Chancellor Alistair Burt was cursorily dismissed as not being a substantive item for discussion. We made it clear to the new VC that the current nexus between the University Executive and Governance is not fit for purpose and needs a complete overhaul so that there is effective oversight of Executive decisions instead of the current rubber-stamping culture where the Executive claims that decisions are 'approved' by Council while Council claims they have complete trust in the Executive. The fact that the LUCU, the largest union on campus, for the first time in its history, has taken the extreme step of a VNC in the Council Chair and has asked the FHASS Executive Dean to reconsider his position should focus the new VC's mind on issues on hand - the erosion of democratic structures and overly hierarchical, authoritarian and managerial cultures where any questions about transparency are silenced with obfuscation, circumvention, or dissembling tactics.

11. Suspension of MARP

The suspension of MARP by senior managers to suit their agendas makes a mockery of the MARP process. It is clear the suspension was not to facilitate CTP but to cut programmes and modules in the name of efficiencies. We are not against efficiencies, but the MARP was put in place exactly to prevent senior managers and others who operate outside the structures of accountability from making arbitrary decisions on what the 'size and shape' of the University should look like. The suspension of MARP has meant that some individuals have usurped the power to dictate the University's provision. We now understand that programme approvals have restarted under CTP, with January deadlines. We strongly urge members to be cautious when submitting the approval papers for modules and programmes, in order to make sure that modules / programmes are not being axed which pose a threat to our jobs in future. We

appreciate many decisions on CTP might have already been made, but where decisions have been imposed by faculty / department leadership then this is the time to challenge and to make sure those decisions are reversed.

12. 2U

We believe the University's partnership with 2U has ended, although there has been no official confirmation so far. This project was doomed from the start, given that it was seeking to 'diversify' income via a dubious private provider who wanted to appropriate our work and take our focus away from the core of our work here at Bailrigg. Members will recall from our previous newsletters that 2U was formerly called EdEx, and the University entered into a partnership with 2U to deliver online programmes. The company was bankrupted a couple of years ago, faced inquiries in the USA and the UK for defrauding students, and management has never been able to give a satisfactory response to our questions about the partnership. How do senior managers come up with such ideas which are so irresponsible and nonsensical? It is almost as if LU is a side-hustle for them to improve their career prospects.

13. Inquiry into financial irregularities at the University of Wollongong

Members might be interested in the news that an [inquiry is examining the Wollongong university's financial management](#), including a failed public-private partnership for student accommodation that left the university with an estimated \$160 million shortfall. This is exactly the kind of risk about which we asked the LU interim senior management team – and we were silenced by their audacious response which flatly refused to answer any questions about the LU-UPP-KMPG relationships. The following quotes could equally apply to LU's governance and management: "*Decision-making at the university had become increasingly centralised [...] created a culture of fear that discouraged staff from raising concerns and undermined transparency and accountability [...] concerns related to the management of conflicts of interest at senior levels, including allegations involving council members and the governance division*", and crucially, "*many university councils were dominated by members from finance, property and big-four consulting firms. [They] help executives create paper financial crises, recommend slash-and-burn solutions, then profit from auditing the outcomes ... while staff are sacked, disciplines cut, and students get a thinner, more precarious education.*" The LU crisis is not very different in this regard – *We must resolve not to accept an artificial crisis created by a duplicitous interpretation of finances to suit senior manager's agendas.*

14. Even more spending on the cards

Simply unbelievable - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cvgr8w03nrjo>. Is it buildings which will teach students, and do research and engagement, or staff who the senior managers are bent on sacking?

15. USS

The triennial valuation of the USS pension scheme will take place on 31 March 2026. USS is in a very positive position with a £15.4bn surplus at September 2025 – and both staff and employers continue to make lower contributions. It was our grit and solidarity during the 2018-20 strikes which achieved this historic victory – *because we refused to accept the artificial crisis created by the USS and UUK executives.* The outcome of discussions between UCU and UCEA (and USS Board) on changes to Valuation Methodology are due to be reported soon. UCU continues to raise concerns about USS investments with companies complicit with genocide in Gaza, and

we will continue to push for USS to review its investment strategy. Please contact Sunil if you have any questions on USS.

16. Solidarity for Lancaster and Morecambe College

We had made arrangements to support Lancaster and Morecambe College UCU pickets this week on 14 – 16 January, but their strike action was withdrawn following last-minute negotiations and an offer from management which members accepted. We've sent a message of support.