

Important information for UCU members at Lancaster University

Your Union on Campus

January 2012

30th November Public Sector Strike



Huge Support Received with Thanks

The strength of your union depends on everyone doing their bit. We know that working to contract isn't easy and strike action is inconvenient. Hence, the level of support shown for the ongoing industrial action over pensions has been tremendous and demonstrates that members are united in saying 'enough is enough—you've had my pound of flesh now hands off my pension'. Many thanks to everyone who is working to contract; who didn't cross the picket line; who turned out for the rally and march in the city centre, and who donated to the strike fund. Well done and keep going!

Myth1 Pensions for university staff need to be reformed

This is not true for public sector workers and it is not true for those of us who are members of the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS). USS is a private occupational scheme and it's the second biggest pension fund in the country. It's in good financial health. There is no pensions crisis or 'demographic timebomb' in the USS scheme. In fact, the university employers have had a clear agenda from the start to change the terms of the pension scheme, to shift the burden of paying in from themselves and to make us pay more. Partly this is about cutting costs. But we also believe that one of the reasons they want to do this is because they

want to attract private companies into partnerships and possible takeovers. Private companies complain that the USS pension scheme is too generous and they don't want to have to compete with it or pay high contributions.

Myth2 The university employers' proposals are reasonable

The proposals imposed by the employers place new entrants to the pension scheme on an inferior 'tier', where they stand to lose hundreds of thousands of pounds over the course of their retirement. It makes it easier to sack our staff more cheaply. They have also built in a cap on the extent to which the scheme can reflect the rising cost of living. This means that our pensions will lose value over time.

Myth 3 This strike was unnecessary

As trade unionists our aim is to negotiate to protect the value of our members' pensions. But for the last 12 months, our employers have done everything to avoid negotiating properly and have imposed their proposals on members without our agreement.

The USS pension scheme held a sham consultation and then assisted the employers by threatening legal action against our representatives if they did not attend a meeting where they would be outvoted by an 'independent' chair. Our members are sick of being treated like this and voted overwhelmingly in September to begin a new phase of industrial action. We began working to contract in October and we took this strike action alongside our colleagues in the public sector whose pensions are also under attack.

A Member's View by Jackie Hughes

After standing on the UCU picket line on a cold, dark November morning, we travelled into Lancaster for the TUC lunchtime march and rally to join at least 1500 other people who came together in a mass show of solidarity for the 30th November Day of Action.

I personally came away feeling **refreshed**, with **renewed** confidence in the righteousness of our cause; a **revitalized** sense of the common cause we

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share with millions of public sector colleagues across the UK; an **updated** understanding of our own and the wider public sector fight to protect pension rights, under renewed attack by the UK government.

It's become clear to me that attacks on public services have been launched and sustained by mis-selling the economic crisis as one arising from over-reliance on public sector growth and unreasonable demands from the public workforce. This mis-sold notion has been beefed up with unevidenced threats of grave economic consequences in the future. The triple whammy threat that we all *'work longer, pay more, get less'* is unprecedented and may condemn decent pensions to become a relic enjoyed by none but the most wealthy. So I was pleased that the rally struck a **chord of common cause**, both within and beyond the public sector, of pensions justice for all.

There were several speakers from across the area, who spoke to a 1,000+ crowd of marchers and supportive bystanders from the steps of Lancaster Town Hall. Speakers included:

- Our own Larry Reynolds, on behalf of the FE/HE sector
- Lancaster City Council and the CSI team within Lancashire Constabulary, each of whom earns rather less than £20k p.a. with rising contributions estimated at an extra £50 or so per month
- School teachers represented by the NASUWT branch secretary for Lancaster & Morecambe
- Lancaster Royal Infirmary and the Civil Service union PCS, who reminded the crowd of the longer game being played by the current coalition government—and likely to be acted upon as soon as they can get away with it.

What is that longer game? In short, we are witnessing the **'fattening of the goose'**, if you'll pardon my seasonal analogy. By denuding pension rights now, and denying these in the future for categories of low-paid workers—who may have no choice but to opt out as higher contributions hit home—the government serves up some tasty services for future privatisation... consider how attractive to privateers would be a cheaply-won right to deliver high-end NHS services such as physiotherapy, oncology services. The privatisation of education is already making its mark, via the Academies and Free Schools projects, all of which are a drain on a shrinking schools budget.

I had the opportunity to discuss the rally and its aims with John Girdley, NASUWT branch secretary for Lancaster & Morecambe and National Executive Member for Lancashire. John and I discussed the common cause we share with teachers in Lancaster & Morecambe – for instance...

"... For every £1 spent on public sector pensions, £2.50 is spent on tax relief for pensions in the private sector – a lot of this is tax relief for the top 1%. Meanwhile too many private sector workers have no pension provision at all..." John Girdley, NASUWT

- Wages, currently frozen and now with a tight cap applied for at least the next 4 or 5 years (1% for teachers and others).
- Emerging proposals for regional and local pay deals, which would hit us all hard in North Lancashire - and the break-up of national pay and conditions bargaining arrangements, most likely for good.
- Attacks on the facility time that union officers are entitled to and which allows colleagues – be they teachers in schools or lecturers and administrators in HE – to protect and represent their members.

We at Lancaster UCU are proud to have taken our part in the 30th November rally and delighted that the action attracted so much interest and participation from members at LU and unions across the Lancaster & Morecambe area.

As the implications of pension and pay attacks begin to press on UCU colleagues and future pensioners, we invite you to continue to support, or support afresh, **your branch, your union, your region, our futures.**

New Members Welcomed

Over the last couple of months, the UCU (nationally) has received a huge surge of new members applying to join the union. Here at Lancaster UCU, we've also witnessed a large increase in new members to whom we'd like to extend a warm welcome. Get involved—this is your union and your active contribution to what's going on here at Lancaster matters. How can you get involved? Attend the UCU Annual General Meeting (18th January 2012 in Elizabeth Livingston LT 1-2pm) and find out more.

UCU Training Dates at Lancaster

The following UCU training courses are being delivered specifically for us here on campus.

Book your place now!

UCU Reps: Friday 3rd Feb 2012
Researchers' Half-Day Workshop: Friday 24th Feb

To book your place, please contact the Branch Administrator. Email: lbanton@ucu.org.uk

Preparing for the REF 2014

January 2012	Publication of panel criteria and working methods
31 July 2012	Institutions intending to make submissions to the REF submit their codes of practice on the selection of staff
Autumn 2012	Pilot of the submissions system
October 2012	Invitation to HEIs to make submissions; invitation to request multiple submissions; and start of survey of submissions intentions
December 2012	Survey of submissions intentions complete and deadline for requests for multiple submissions
January 2013	Launch of submissions system and accompanying technical guidance
31 July 2013	End of assessment period (for research impacts, the research environment and data about research income and research doctoral degrees awarded)
Mid 2013	Appointment of additional assessors to panels
31 October 2013	Census date for staff eligible for selection
29 November 2013	Closing date for submissions
31 December 2013	End of publication period (cut-off point for publication of research outputs, and for outputs underpinning impact case studies)
Throughout 2014	Panels assess submissions
December 2014	Publication of outcomes
Spring 2015	Publication of submissions, panel overview reports and sub-profiles

Over the next twelve months a key issue facing members at Lancaster University will be the selection of academic staff for the REF.

As with previous research assessment exercises institutions will determine which staff will be included in their REF submissions and there will be a general requirement for academic staff to submit up to four high quality publications (subject to reductions according to 'individual staff circumstances'). The *Assessment Framework and Guidance on Submissions* (July 2011)

www.hefce.ac.uk/research/ref/pubs/2011/02_11/ advises HEIs on policy and practical matters in preparing submissions. One of these policy matters is the requirement to develop, document and apply a code of practice on the "fair and transparent selection of staff for their REF submissions".

As with RAE2008 one of the key issues is likely to be the definition of so-called 'Category A' staff. Under the new rules, so-called 'research assistants' will be largely excluded from the REF on the grounds that they are 'employed to carry out another individual's research programme rather than independent researchers in their own right'. In the 2014 REF, 'research-only staff' won't be eligible to be returned 'unless, exceptionally, they are named as principal investigator or equivalent'. Such definitions of 'research-only' staff are deeply problematic, particularly in the way they lump together different types of researchers. There is also concern that the eligibility rules will reinforce the 'two-tier' system between 'permanent' and 'fixed-term' academic staff and undermine aspects of the equality and diversity agenda in the REF. In addition, it is likely to make it harder for 'research-only' staff to get their work published and recognised.

It would be useful to know how the 2014 REF preparations are rolling out across Lancaster. Please keep us informed.

New Employment Procedures

Discussion of the new redundancy and redeployment procedures has continued, following the decisions of two UCU branch general meetings last summer to accept the procedures subject to some caveats: the rewording of provisions concerning a) the scope of the redeployment procedure and the rules for "pay protection" and b) the designation of the senior managers empowered to make decisions about redundancies. Recent experience has demonstrated that it is not appropriate for mid-level managers to take the intermediate steps (such as preparing the business case) leading to redundancy situations, nor the ultimate decisions.

The reason is straightforward: sometimes line managers make decisions that they see as advantageous for the “bottom line” of their particular unit although these decisions are contrary to the interests of the employees who face redundancy and are also inimical to the interests of the institution as a whole. One recent example is the experience of the Graphics Unit, where some local costs were saved with significant knock-on effects for the campus community who enjoyed the services that the on-campus Folio unit used to provide but which will now need to be outsourced. In discussing the proposed redundancy procedure UCU has fought to ensure that any restructuring and redundancy decisions will be rigorously scrutinised both by the unions themselves, at an early stage, and by senior managers at a stage when it is still possible to reverse the plans—something the relevant committee, the Redundancy Collective Consultation Forum, has not been able to do effectively because we do not always receive a full and transparent business case. Now that the University’s top managers openly say that the current Business Process Reviews are likely to lead to a reduction in staff numbers, and as one department and division after another is caught in the maniacal cycle of restructurings we have endured in recent years, it is important we get the redundancy policy right, placing the appropriate emphasis on the legal requirement to *avoid redundancies* wherever possible.

Review of Disciplinary, Grievance, and Capability Procedures

Last May, this UCU branch declared that management had breached its own new procedures, introduced in October 2010 after union agreement. Soon afterwards, the vice chancellor stated his expectation that management and UCU could quickly resolve their differences, and a UCU branch meeting declared that resolving them was a precondition for agreeing the proposed new redundancy procedure. After all, how could UCU accept new procedures when we saw management breaching the procedures so recently agreed? Seven months later, it pains us to report no substantive progress.

Management undermined the process by a) failing to take up all the issues raised by UCU reps in management-UCU meetings; b) declining

accurately to record any of the agreements that the joint campus unions and management actually achieved on the issues that UCU raised; and c) prematurely declaring the review meetings to have ended before any of the issues UCU raised had been satisfactorily resolved through the conclusion of written understandings.

The UCU concerns are serious. (See the UCU position paper at www.lancs.ac.uk/users/ucu/payback.htm). For example: despite the painstaking work that went into agreeing the written disciplinary, grievance, and capability procedures, managers have reserved for themselves the prerogative to implement what they regard as the “spirit” of the procedures in individual cases, irrespective of the wording the unions agreed to. Managers have used their own secret guidelines in determining the outcome of individual cases without disclosing to the employee or his/her representative what those guidelines say, and without ever having subjected those guidelines to the scrutiny of the campus unions—or, indeed, anyone but themselves. For those who are accustomed to life in the real world, entering the bizarre parallel universe governed by such Kafkaesque practices is a disorienting experience.

This branch is determined to correct such travesties but we need the help and support of an active membership. Don’t wait until you fall foul of the HR practices described here before you become involved. The time to act is *now* by becoming an active branch member.

Beware of “Event Contracts”

Any employee facing a redundancy situation needs to be aware of the risks of taking a post under the terms of a so-called “event contract” such as a maternity cover post or a temporary post covering for an employee seconded elsewhere. Taking such a post can lead to the loss of rights to redeployment or a redundancy payment as some members and non-members have been shocked to discover when their contracts have come to an end. UCU has asked HR to agree to a policy of informing anyone who is considering such a post of the possible consequences *before* they sign their employment contract. In November 2010 the former director of HR agreed the following: any employee in such a position “should be fully aware of the implications [of taking such a contract] at the time”. He committed himself “to ask[ing] colleagues to consider how best we can ensure that this happens”. We have asked the current director of HR to make good on that commitment.

