

# UCU UWE

Jan/Feb 2017

*LISTENING TO, WORKING WITH, PROMOTING THE NEEDS OF MEMBERS.....  
AND STRIVING FOR A SECURE FUTURE.*

## *Branch News*

The posters are up again around UWE urging students to fill in the National Student Survey. The NSS has become a familiar part of the Higher Education landscape and staff are reminded each year of the importance of getting students to complete it: if only small numbers fill it in the views of malcontents may significantly skew the results, which will anyway be deemed not very representative unless reasonable proportions of students participate.

Although most academics favour the practice of allowing students to give feedback which can be very useful in helping us provide a better student experience and improving the curriculum, UCU has long been concerned about the potential misuse of the NSS. It can be used as a mechanism to target departments and individuals for closure and redundancy. It is also part of the array of procedures developed by the current government for evaluating universities and compiling league tables : an insidious practice, given that different universities do not have a level playing field in terms of their student intakes and the resources they have to offer. This has become all too evident as the NSS takes on a new role as a key metric in the TEF. Universities are to be awarded gold, silver and bronze status on the basis of this and other metrics (such as retention rates and DeLHE data on student destinations). This in turn may determine funding allocations and the fees HEIs are allowed to charge. This is yet another way in which a two or three tier system and a hierarchy of institutions is imposed on the sector by government audit.

These concerns have led the NUS leadership to call for a student boycott of the NSS. They share the view of UCU that the chosen metrics do not actually measure the quality of teaching and learning, since they wrongly assume equality of intake and of funding. We know, for

example, that graduates from Russell Group universities are more likely to be recruited to highly-paid jobs in elite companies, thus influencing the DeLHE data.

UCU congress voted to support the NUS position, calling on branches to develop joint policy statements with their local student unions, to distribute joint publicity materials and to support the right of UCU members to express their views as long as they were not in breach of their contracts. As the UWE SU has not in fact developed any policy either supporting or opposing the boycott, it has not been possible for our branch to implement the UCU recommendations, as stated in our recent message to members.

Clearly, given the imminence of the TEF, the possibility of the boycott has greatly worried university managements. For instance, at Bristol University, where the SU did vote to support the boycott, staff have been emailed by the senior management to the effect that supporting the students in their action would constitute breach of contract. Bristol University UCU is currently taking legal advice on this.

We have advised our members to work as normal. If anybody wishes to discuss this with their students we suggest it is done outside the formal framework of teaching and lecturing. The issues may well surface in the joint meeting we plan to hold with THE SU on 1st March on the current state of higher education. Please watch for further details.

**Harriet Bradley,**  
**UWE UCU**  
**CHAIR.**



## **We had a special visitor last month.....**

The recent meeting of the Regional Committee on the 21st January 2017 was hosted by UWE UCU Branch and the current UCU President Rob Goodfellow attended. Here is some of the good advice on using social media that he shared on the day as well as one of the photos taken, including Regional Official, Nick Varney, UCU President, Rob Goodfellow, Branch Chair, Harriet Bradley and Regional Committee Chair, Michael Carley

Rob suggested that Branches should have their own websites, in addition to the UCU Regional and National websites, as well as making use of both Twitter and Facebook: so the good news is that our branch is two thirds of the way there already.

There was also some extra advice about using Facebook and Twitter:

The use of social media is very effective but needs to be carefully moderated, perhaps by a group of two or three volunteers. We arranged for our Branch administrator, Christine Taylor, to have Twitter training. You can follow Christine's news on Twitter.

Employers can be very quick to round on employees who 'bring the institution into disrepute', so great care needs to be taken regarding what is said and shared.

The sites need to be regularly updated.

Branches need to be careful about student involvement .



*Recruitment week cometh.....Higher Education Sector*



**National Recruitment Week:**

**w/c 27th February 2017**

# Five Compelling Reasons to persuade your colleagues to join UCU

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**When UCU members have a problem at work, they don't face it alone. They seek the union's expert advice for free. Last year our branches provided face to face advice for more than 28,000 UCU members.**

**When UCU members are involved in a disciplinary or grievance hearing, they don't face it alone. Our case workers sit alongside and represent them. Last year we supported more than 8,000 UCU members in disciplinary or grievance hearings.**

**When UCU members require legal help they don't wrack up hundreds of pounds in solicitors' fees. Our legal advocacy team provide the best lawyers and get the best results with no charge for UCU members. Last year we won more than £10m for UCU members treated unfairly at work.**

**When UCU members want a pay rise they don't stand alone. Our negotiators use the collective power of 110,000 members to make the case for everyone. Last year we negotiated salary increases for more than 110,000 UCU members covering more than 500 employers.**

**When UCU members want to get more out of their job they use our career enhancing Continuing Professional Development programme. While non-members pay £200 a course, UCU members get them free.**

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**UCU specialises in providing high quality representation for education staff in colleges, universities, prisons and adult learning institutions. That is what makes us, in the words of The Guardian, 'Britain's biggest academic lobby.'**

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