UCU Branch news

AN INFORMATION BULLETIN FOR MEMBERS AT UCU UWE Bristol

SUMMER 2025

Hi colleagues,

Welcome to the latest edition of the branch newsletter. I am very proud to be writing as your elected Branch Chair following the recent AGM and extend a welcome of solidarity from all our branch activists. Thanks go to those who have been in branch positions for some time and who have stepped down or moved to other positions. I am excited to be working alongside Anne Foley as Vice Chair and all the branch executive members.

The early summer finds us in interesting and challenging times as a trade union, we face ongoing challenges around national University funding alongside a paltry pay offer from the employers.

Trans rights are under attack following the recent Supreme Court judgement and we have again seen the far-right attempt to bring their dirty views to Bristol and again seen them outnumbered by anti-racist citizens.

Locally we will continue to work hard to protect your workload and will be working with the University on the replacement Workload Allocation system, we will continue to support our Women members, our Disabled members, our LGBTQ+ members and our Global Majority members. Regardless of your identity your workplace should be an inclusive, fair and safe space and your employment rights are non-negotiable.

My final note in this welcome is to encourage you to get involved in YOUR union, we are stronger together and welcome members to get involved as Subject Area Reps for your department/programme or team, please email UCU@uwe.ac.uk to get involved or to let us know the views you want the branch to represent.

I hope that as summer approaches you get to spend some time to relax and have a well-deserved break.

In Solidarity

Matt Proom (Chair)

2025/26 UCU UWE Branch

Lead Officers

Chair -	Matt Proom
Vice Chair -	Anne Foley
Secretary -	Sarah Harding
Treasurer -	Phil Sayce
Branch Organiser & ROCC -	Carolyn Sissoko
Recruitment -	Kait Clark
Casework Lead -	Clive Warn
Health & Safety Lead -	Chris Mason
Equality Committee Chair -	Amelia Baldwin
CHSS Rep Frenchay -	Greta Squire
SHSW Rep Glenside (job share) -	Judith Worthington
SHSW Rep Glenside (job share) -	Kim Duffy
CBL Rep (job share) -	Rick Ball
CBL Rep (job share) -	Mary Young
CATE Rep Frenchay -	Chris Mason
CATE Rep Bower & City -	Chris Mason

Equality & Diversity Committee

Anti-causation -	Margaret Roberts
Academic Related Staff Rep -	Kim Duffy
Race and Ethnicity Rep -	Amelia Baldwin
Researcher Rep (job share) -	Rick Ball
Researcher Rep (job share) -	Mary Young
Disability Rep -	Charlotte Selleck
Women's Rep -	Charlotte Selleck
LGBTQIA+ Rep -	Clive Warn

Additional Elected Roles

Green/sustainability Rep -	Miles Thompson
Web Officer -	Vacant
Social Media Officer -	Charlotte Selleck
Communications Officer -	Charlotte Selleck
Membership Officer -	Sarah Harding
Pensions Policy Officer -	Chris Mason
Learning Rep -	Chris Mason

Negotiating Team (3)	Chris Mason
	Margaret Roberts
	Vacant
Caseworkers (7)	Clive Warn
	Phil Sayce
	Chris Mason
	Anne Foley
	Judith Worthington
	Matt Proom
	Vacant
Health and Safety Team (2)	Margaret Roberts
	Vacant

Not a UCU member yet? Here's how to join:
http://join.ucu.org.uk

General members meeting dates 2025 via TEAMs.
Thursday 4th September 2025
Wednesday 10th December 2025

EXCESSIVE Workload, a Health and Safety issue! Investigate! Agitate! Negotiate! By Sarah Harding

I attended a UCU H&S Workload training day because I am passionate about staff being treated fairly. I see so many colleagues stressed to the limit, burnt out, and exhausted because of enormous workloads. I wanted to know more about this issue to be able to help my colleagues say NO! Interestingly, you will read an article from a branch member about their experience of burnout. **Burnout is serious!**

Workload falls under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the UK Governments 'working time directive' lays out the rules and regulations for employers. However, analysis by UCU revealed some staff in the UK's FE and HE sectors are doing at least TWO DAYS unpaid work every week (Click HERE for ref). The UCU report lays bare the extent of the workload crisis gripping post 16 education (LINK HERE). In response to the findings, UCU developed a new approach to tackle workload issues using a campaigning and organising approach linked with health and safety at work, which was successfully piloted in 2016/17. Following significant changes made across workplaces since the covid-19 pandemic, UCU is now re-launching this workload campaign; **IT'S YOUR TIME** across the UK with new tools and refreshed approaches.

The training day was informative and interesting building on H&S law and developing a campaign in local areas. Suggestions included: appointing Workload Reps, gather evidence/data/mapping of excessive workloads, survey members on sickness and absence related to excessive workloads and start campaigning for fairer workloads.

Could you, would you be part of this campaign?
Sarah Harding **ucusecretary@uwe.ac.uk**

Recognising Burnout: A Call for Compassion and Support by Charlotte Selleck

Burnout isn't just a buzzword—it's a serious, often invisible crisis affecting more and more staff in the modern university workplace. High workloads, unclear expectations, and a lack of meaningful support from the University can leave us running on empty. Recognising the signs of burnout in ourselves and our colleagues is essential if we are to foster a humane and sustainable working environment.

In early October 2024, I was stepping into another academic year of programme leadership. The summer had brought a wave of uncertainty with a threatened course closure, and, as Programme Leader, I felt the pressure more than ever. I was pouring every ounce of energy into teaching, research, and leadership duties, all while managing the constant demands of life as a mum of two. I didn't realise I was burning out.

My family noticed it first. I was distracted, snappy, and losing sleep. I was forgetting things constantly—appointments, conversations, even what day it was. I stopped laughing. I withdrew from the things I normally enjoyed, like reading with my kids or going for walks. I was physically present, but at times emotionally vacant. My husband gently tried to raise concerns, but I brushed them aside—I kept going. Then, in a meeting with management, I broke down in tears. No one paused the meeting. No one followed up afterwards. I took a sick day the next day but was still expected to present at an Open Day that weekend. It was clear I wasn't coping, yet compassion was absent and support non-existent. Colleagues tried to help and support but they too were overworked and feeling the pressure.

Seminars on 'wellbeing' and 'resilience' can make you feel personally responsible for your burnout, when the real blame lies with the unreasonable expectations which employers place on staff: to excel in every area, to compete relentlessly with your colleagues, and to paper over the cracks of a broken system of student recruitment and support.

Things came to a head when my dad passed away very suddenly at the end of October. Grief collided with burnout, and I had nothing left to give. I took six months off. It wasn't just bereavement leave—it was the culmination of prolonged neglect, stress, and emotional depletion.

The time away ended up being much longer than I had anticipated. I had imagined a few weeks might be enough, but each attempt to return revealed just how depleted I still was. I knew I couldn't go back without being in a place of full mental strength—because I wasn't returning to a supportive environment. On multiple occasions, I sat through return-to-work meetings only to find that the expectations placed on me were unchanged—still too high, still unrealistic. Each time, I left those meetings and went straight back to my GP to request more time off. Recovery wasn't just about rest; it was about building the resilience needed to walk back into a workplace that had not changed.

But that time out also gave me something valuable: clarity. With space to breathe, I began to recognise that what I had been experiencing was not okay. It is not (or shouldn't be) normal to work in a place that feels so hostile and unsupportive. I had time to reflect, to process, and to put boundaries in place. I made a promise to myself that I would never again return to being that overworked, over-stretched working mum trying to hold up a collapsing structure. I've learned to say no, to ask for what I need, and to refuse the pressure to sacrifice my wellbeing for institutional demands.

Burnout is real. It can break you. And it is worsened by environments where pressure is constant, and care is in short supply.

This is where the role of your local UCU branch becomes vital. The UCU branch is there to support members facing unsustainable workloads, hostile management practices, or personal challenges that affect your wellbeing. Whether it's helping you understand your rights, advocating for adjustments, or just offering a listening ear—we're here. No one should have to carry these burdens alone.

If any part of this story resonates with you, please don't wait until things reach a crisis point. Talk to someone. Reach out to your union rep. Take the signs seriously—**because your wellbeing matters more than any deadline or data point ever will.**

Stressed?

Report stress to your line manager as soon as possible so action can be taken to help eliminate or reduce stress to a safe level. Your manager will work with you to identify the specific causes of your stress and help you address them.

If your stress is related to a personal issue, your manager could allow you some flexibility and time. They will advise you of any appropriate leave (such as carer's leave or compassionate leave), or consider allowing unpaid leave. Your manager may review your work to see if some could be prioritised or deadlines extended to reduce additional work pressures.

If your stress is work related, your manager will work with you to identify the specific causes of stress. The HSE's set of management standards for stress (external link) cover the six primary causes of stress at work. Your manager should carry out a wellbeing at work action plan to identify the issues and the actions to effectively manage stress. Follow-up meetings will be scheduled to review progress against the actions and check whether further support is required.

If reporting stress to your line manager would not be appropriate you should contact People Services Advice Team for advice and guidance or Click HERE for more staff support and HERE for EAP.

What Culture? What Change?

Watching the sun rising, I reflect on yesterday's Elevate workshop. What a privilege it has been to participate in this positive action - thank you, Ify!

In my presentation I talked about how it is obvious to me, particularly from observations as a line manager (a title which would, conceptually, benefit from a rethink!), that discriminatory incidents do not occur in a vacuum. Ceaseless prejudice pervades because it is allowed to, because the environment permits it. I reflected on how structural decisions permit systemic discriminatory attitudes and behaviours to persist. For example, EDI being attached to a role, not a stand-alone post, subsequently this does not reflect the value of EDI or recognise that EDI requires very specific critical academic knowledge and expertise. Ironic, given the nature of our institution.

And so, I come to this provocation that: our responsibility to each other is to build, through our uniquely transformational academic institutions, an environment where inequity and discrimination is impermissible to the culture, as a raised voice is to the library.

I wonder what policies, processes and opportunities would need to look like to make that happen?

Kim Duffy
CHSS College Rep (Glenside)

UPDATE FROM ROCC – Carolyn Sissoko

Update on pay negotiations

On May 20 UCEA rejected the unions' demand for a pay increase of RPI + 3.5% (for a total of about 6.5%) and instead submitted a 'full and final offer' of an uplift on each point on the new pay spines of 1.4% from 1 August 2025. Unsurprisingly, the trade unions found that this pay offer (which represents a decline in real wages of about 1.8%) is inadequate and will recommend rejecting this offer. Full details on pay negotiations are available here: **LINK**
In short, at present we are heading towards a strike ballot on pay.

UCU prepares for an Industrial dispute with the Education Secretary

UCU held its national Congress in May and voted overwhelmingly to prepare for an industrial dispute with the Secretary of State for Education over university funding. Thus, UCU is heading towards a strike ballot with respect to the government's policies towards the University sector. The information that UCU has released on this is **here.**

It is not clear to anyone at UWE UCU where this is heading, but we wanted to make sure that our members were aware that this is happening, as we may well be balloting on this issue soon.

Goodbye Union Bungalow.

The union bungalow is planned for removal and so the union offices are on the move. At the time of writing the full facts are not available but we think UCU are heading to Level 5 (top floor – 5E13) sometime in June. Watch this space!

STOP THE CUTS

UCU SUMMER PICNIC

Members enjoyed a sunny get together in May to celebrate the ongoing work of the branch!

UCU comment on Education Committee Inquiry

A win for Midwives!

After many issues were raised by Midwives regarding workload, UWE UCU caseworkers supported the Midwifery team with grievances regarding increased and poorly allocated workload. As a result of negotiation and hard work, the Midwives have secured:

- More transparency regarding workload allocation and over bundling.
- Midwifery staff saying 'NO' to extra work.
- A successful business case for an additional full time midwifery lecturer
- One midwife requested, and was granted, more hours.

Well done UWE Midwives and **thank you** to the **casework team** for their hard work.

Did you read this newsletter? CLICK HERE to respond using code 5 1111 009 Thank you.