UWE

University and College Union

Branch Annual Report May 2026

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University of the West of England Branch

Branch Chair's Report 2026 Matt Proom

I want to start this branch chairs report by thanking the branch executive team for all of their hard work and commitment to the important work of UWE UCU in the past year. I would also like to extend that message of thanks and solidarity to all of our members.

This has been a challenging year for our members and the likelihood is that the coming academic year will be just as challenging if not more so.

One of the highlights of branch activity this year was the Academic Workload survey that provided us with solid quantitative and qualitative data to support our work in representing members views and experiences and challenging excessive workloads and associated inequalities.

Whilst we welcome the University's decision to invest in a new system to record and plan workload, we will continue to ensure that transparency and fairness are at its heart.

Of course, that leads us on to the development of a new Workload Model for the 27/28 academic year which will be a very important feature of how the branch advocates for and supports our members. We know that workload planning/allocation has been a significant issue for many academics and that the impacts of excessive workloads create significant challenges for health and wellbeing and that there are often inequalities relating to sex, gender, global majority staff and disabled people – this must and will be a feature of UCU's involvement in the development of a new model. We have successfully challenged early attacks on workload and will continue to do so if necessary.

We cannot underestimate the national and global context of Higher Education, there are some institutions that are experiencing real financial hardship but there are others that are exploiting that narrative to drive down terms and conditions.

We do not believe that UWE's financial situation is one which is on the brink of bankruptcy however we know that the Vice Chancelor has indicated that he wants to "look at terms and conditions" and we know that the Vice Chancellor Executive have been in discussions with other institutions regarding their commitments (or not) to the Teachers Pensions Scheme. Let me be clear that we will defend any threats to our job's terms and conditions robustly. The branch is engaged in national and regional organising to protect the threat to the Teachers Pension Scheme.

Despite the challenges discussed above the branch has remained active, campaigning and organising against the far right in Bristol and London, holding regular members meetings, hosting stalls on campuses and engaging with our regional office and having the opportunity to meet with the General Secretary Jo Grady to provide feedback on and inform the national strategy for the union.

I want to end by highlighting what we all know – we are what makes this University, hardworking, skilled academics who go above and beyond. The value and strength of collective

power is essential – we need everyone to organise in their schools and colleges to increase our membership and be even stronger.

Always in Solidarity.

Matt

Vice Chair of Branch & acting Equality Committee lead Anne Foley

It was an honour to be elected as the VC of the branch. It has been a busy year, with some success and challenges. I am sure Matt has already mentioned many of the things I would make, so I will keep this short!

We had a great response to our workload survey, and it has been a powerful tool during our negotiations on the new workload system. This work is ongoing; we are waiting for the round of meetings. Our position is very clear; we will not accept any reductions in hours. That workload is a health and safety issue and we will fight for safe working conditions.

Recently, Matt, Carolyn and I met with our General Secretary, Dr Jo Grady. This was an insightful meeting and we were grateful to our regional office for inviting and hosting us.

We do face challenges, but we aim to be ahead of the game so that we can be prepared and ready to face these. I guess, for me, what I have reflected on is that as a branch we are strong and united and that together we have the power to make UWE a better place for everyone.

I would like to take time to thanks Amelia Baldwin, the elected EDI Committee Chair. Ameila left UWE, so I stepped in to support this work. So much has happened within this space, challenges to UWE's Trans policy, a campus walk to highlight colonialism at UWE, the creation of the Global majority members network. Fighting for disability rights and reasonable adjustments as well as ongoing work around care leave and gender equality.

I said I would keep it short and I am sure that I have missed so much out, the year went by in a flash! I would like to thank all our members, it has been wonderful to see new faces at our meetings, get-togethers and on marches.

Branch Secretary Sarah Harding

The Branch Secretary role continues to be both demanding and highly rewarding. Over the past year, I have maintained oversight of branch activity and ensured members receive timely guidance and support through our two dedicated mailboxes: **ucusecretary@uwe.ac.uk** and **ucu@uwe.ac.uk**.

Close collaboration with the Branch Administrator, Chair, and Vice-Chair has remained central to the smooth running of branch operations. I have also sustained strong links with regional and national officers to ensure alignment with wider UCU priorities.

A key focus this year has been strengthening branch organisation. I have updated role titles and descriptions, redistributed workload to ensure fairness and clarity, and successfully established two new roles—a Caseworker and a Policy Officer—to enhance our capacity and support for members.

Communication with members remains a priority. I continue to produce a regular newsletter highlighting current issues, branch activities, and opportunities for involvement. Member contributions are encouraged, and feedback indicates that reading about colleagues' experiences is both valuable and informative.

In addition to my secretarial duties, I have continued to serve as Membership Officer. This administrative role ensures membership records remain accurate and up to date. I am able to verify member details and provide relevant data to branch teams when required.

Overall, this year has been one of consolidation, improved structure, and strengthened support for members across the branch.

I look forward to working with you as branch secretary and membership officer in the 26/27 year.

In solidarity,

Sarah Harding

Branch Recruitment and Organising Committee Chair

Carolyn Sissoko

ROCC Annual Report 2025-26

For UCU this year once again turned out to be relatively calm. But given the problems in the university sector as a whole and UWE's constant refrain of needing cut-backs we need to be prepared for a more difficult 2026-27.

Action on workload was one of our most important wins this year. We started the year knowing that the university's shift from bundles to hours was likely to be contentious. Thus in September/October the college reps had local college-level meetings to discuss member priorities. We put together a UCU Workload Survey (many thanks to Matt and Anne for their hard work making this survey so effective!) and gathered over 150 responses. This provided UCU with data on the universal problem of too much work and too little time allocated to it. This has been an invaluable resource in discussions with management about workload. Kim put

together an AD Workload survey that we circulated in November – gathering more essential information for our discussions with management. UCU's rapid response pushback (thank you Matt, Greta and Kim!) on the unreasonable new workload model that the university put out in October led UWE management to roll back their workload reform plans for one year. This was a big win!

From October to November we were busy with Get Out the Vote efforts for the UCU national strike ballot. We purchased three folding tables and a cart, so that we are now well equipped to hold stalls at all three campuses. We held stalls and did walk-arounds on all three campuses making sure that our members knew about the ballot and chatting with people about why they too should join UCU. Several of the stalls were joint with Unison. Kait did an amazing job as Recruitment Officer organising this effort. Unfortunately the national ballot failed – but UWE UCU's turnout was excellent.

In October we also held two afterwork socials at the Student Union. And in November we had a Decolonising the university walk, which was an amazing opportunity to learn about UWE's history and how difficult it is to get acknowledgement of that history.

In the second semester we continued to hold many events. In January Amelia and Rheanna (of Unison) held a Black Members' Union Space event designed to create a space where black members of the UWE community could speak freely about their experiences. In February we held a UCU informal lunch and in early March had a coffee hour where the Exec could get together. This was followed up by an afterwork social at the Arnolfini in March – unfortunately members did not make it to this one. We also held two X-block stalls (one joint with Unison) during this semester – making sure UCU had a visible presence on campus.

Our big event in the second semester was the Together Alliance Rally in London in March. We arranged for a bus and were able to go as a group to the Rally. This was a great success and an excellent way to meet union colleagues whom you have not yet gotten to know.

Given concerns raised about changes to our pensions, UWE UCU sent a Freedom of Information request to UWE regarding the USS pension fund. Based on the response currently UWE is not planning to expand the use of this pension fund, but this is a space to watch.

We ended the year with our Annual UCU lunch. This was catered by Moveable Feast which raises money to support asylum seekers. The food was amazing!

Matt and Anne have spearheaded the practice of scheduling multiple members' meetings when there are issues that need to be discussed or explored. Thus there were weekly members' meetings during our GOTV efforts in October/November, a series of meetings after the UCU ballot failed, and a series of meetings in March to get a better sense of where our members feel that UCU should be headed. UWE UCU was invited to meet with Jo Grady in April to share our thoughts on where UCU should be headed. We also sent out an email to all members about the UCU Congress and asked them to give us any feedback they wished to share about the motions that will be discussed at Congress. This set a great standard for democratic practices at UWE UCU going forward.

Overall UCU has had a very active presence at UWE over 2025-26 and we look forward to another year of active solidarity in 2026-27.

Health and Safety Lead Report Chris Mason

UCU UWE's Health and Safety team has continued to play a constructive role as a member of the university's Health and Safety Executive Committee (UHSEC). It will come as no surprise that the university's continuing inability to meaningfully reduce incidents of work-related stress among staff remains a major concern.

Where appropriate, we continue to make managers aware of the issues affecting their areas. Particular thanks should go to Margaret Roberts for her work with staff in one of CHSS's schools. As a result of the school being unable to address unacceptable working practices, Margaret has formally raised the matter as a health and safety issue with UHSEC.

Casework Lead Clive Warn

Casework Lead Briefing 2025/26: Summary of Activity

The role of the Casework Lead is to coordinate activity, support our dedicated team of caseworkers, and facilitate collective action through regular caseworker meetings. Our branch manages a consistent stream of casework arising from member experiences across all Colleges.

The Nature of Our Work

Casework is inherently rewarding. Knowing that our intervention improves the wellbeing and professional lives of our members is hugely satisfying. Our work generally falls into two categories:

- Informal Support: Centred on listening, advising, and making sense of options. We prioritise early resolution by working proactively with managers and HR to 'get it right' from the start.
- Formal Representation: Supporting colleagues through complex grievance and disciplinary procedures.

Significant Wins and Outcomes

This year has seen significant successes and positive outcomes. We have achieved 'wins' for our members in several critical areas:

- Workload & Regrading: Successful challenges to unmanageable workloads and ensuring staff are graded appropriately for their responsibilities.
- Framework Integrity: Ensuring G and H grade staff are supported to work within the agreed national framework.

- Equality & Inclusion: Securing the immediate implementation of reasonable adjustments and addressing cases of discrimination and racism.
- Employment Relations: Navigating contract disputes and improving return-to-work processes following sickness.
- Policy Adherence: Our interventions have forced a recognition of poor working processes. This has led to the correction of non-adherence to UWE policy, resulting in immediate impact.

Addressing the Grievance Process

Grievance cases at UWE remain high. Based on our experience, we have consistently raised concerns that these processes are often protracted and fail to support the complainant.

Progress Update: Following our advocacy, UWE commissioned a formal review of its processes. The review concluded that the current system is not fully fit for purpose. We are now working directly with UWE to overhaul and improve these procedures to ensure fairness and efficiency.

Strategic Oversight

Where casework identifies collective themes—such as specific departments or managers with disproportionate issues—we work closely with the Branch Executive and HR to seek systemic resolution. While we have supported members across the entire university, we remain vigilant against 'transformation' agendas that threaten professional support services and academic roles.

A Message to Members and Prospective Members

UCU is a union run by members, for members. To ensure we can continue to provide high-quality support, please note the following:

- Eligibility: We provide casework support for issues that arise while you are a member. We cannot offer support for pre-existing issues that began before your membership started.
- Strength in Numbers: If you are not yet a member, we encourage you to join now to ensure you are protected. Joint memberships are available with other professional unions (e.g., RCN).

Join UCU today: https://www.ucu.org.uk/join

Social Media Officer Charlotte Selleck

In my role as Social Media Officer for the branch, I have maintained and developed the branch Instagram account, contributing to a steady increase in engagement and membership visibility. I have strengthened connections with local, regional, and national accounts, including closer engagement with UNISON and related organisations, to improve communication and outreach. I have also supported the organisation and day-to-day running of the branch Signal group to facilitate more effective member communication.

Women's Representative Charlotte Selleck

Over the past year, I have continued to support members across the University on issues including menopause, childcare leave, flexible working, and caring responsibilities, helping colleagues navigate University procedures and access appropriate support. Alongside individual case support, I have worked closely with other UCU branch officers and representatives, as well as liaising with the University more broadly, to identify recurring issues affecting staff and have fed these back for wider discussion and systemic improvement. Through this work, I have sought to represent and advocate for women members' interests in discussions relating to equality, wellbeing, and family-friendly working practices.

A major focus this year has been on the clarity and consistency of policies around annual leave during term time and the implementation of new rights relating to unpaid leave for dependents. This is an area that I will continue to work on next academic year.

This has been another rewarding year in my role as Women's Rep. I have regularly attended UCU meetings and training events, which have helped me continue to develop my knowledge and support members effectively. I would welcome hearing from more members and am always happy to offer support and guidance where I can. I look forward to continuing in the role over the coming year.

Disability Member's Representative Charlotte Selleck

Over the past year, I have continued to support members across the University on a range of disability-related issues, helping colleagues navigate University systems, policies, and processes. A significant area of work has been seeking greater clarity and consistency around the implementation of reasonable adjustments for staff members. There remains considerable variation in how adjustments are applied across different Colleges and departments, and while progress has been made through ongoing discussions with HR, improvements are still needed to ensure a more equitable and supportive approach across the institution.

I have also engaged with a number of policy consultations and amendments, encouraging the University to consider more carefully the impact of policy changes on staff wellbeing, particularly for colleagues with additional needs and disabilities. Too often there is a strong emphasis on student support without equal consideration being given to the experiences and wellbeing of staff. Alongside this, I have raised concerns relating to the rollout of Blackboard Ultra, particularly around accessibility issues and the lack of adequate spell-checking and related support functions.

As part of this role, I have worked closely with other UCU branch officers and representatives, as well as liaising with the University more broadly, to identify recurring issues affecting disabled staff and feed these back for wider discussion and systemic improvement.

This has been another rewarding year in my role as Disability Members' Rep. I have regularly attended UCU meetings and training events, which have helped me continue to develop my knowledge and support members effectively. I would welcome hearing from more members

and am always happy to offer support and guidance where I can. I look forward to continuing in the role over the coming year.

Green Sustainability Representative Miles Thompson

This has been my first year as the green rep. for the UWE UCU branch. Our branch hasn't had a green rep for a while, so we needed to build or regain the collective memory of how best to operate in this role. Quite a lot of this year has been spent getting my feet under the table and working out how best to try and influence things positively. Luckily, our sister union, UNISON, has a green rep and they have been really helpful in showing us the ropes.

My time has been spent:

Building internal and external relationships

Getting involved with the UWE sustainability executive committee on which the green reps from UCU and UNISON sit.

Helping to get the vote out for the Avon Pension Fund Divestment Campaign. This was a wider campaign than UWE alone, and while it did not directly impact UCU staff (as our pensions tend to be held nationally not locally), the vote was still a relevant and important one. Sadly, it failed.

Working with staff and activists within UWE and UoB to nudge UWE towards even more ethical banking and investment options. UWE already does a good job. And, it could do even better.

Working with those behind the SWITCHED campaign (https://www.instagram.com/switched_campaign/) to work out the best ways to try and persuade more students and staff at UWE and UOB to move their personal banking to more ethical solutions. Expect more from this in the next academic year.

College of Health, Science and Society Representative Greta Squire

End of Year Report

This year has been a positive and productive one in my role as CHSS UCU College Representative. There has been strong engagement with members across the College, both through regular presence on campus and ongoing communication.

I have actively engaged with colleagues by attending and running stalls at Frenchay campus, which provided valuable opportunities to connect with members, raise awareness of UCU work, and discuss key concerns. In addition, I have held meetings with members on a wide range of work-related issues, offering support and ensuring that their voices are heard.

At branch level, I have raised several important concerns on behalf of colleagues. These include issues relating to the Duty of Care statement, the development of UWE's Domestic Violence Policy, and the introduction of the new work loading model. These matters remain significant areas of focus and ongoing discussion.

Overall, the year has demonstrated the importance of strong member engagement and representation, and I look forward to hopefully continuing this work in the coming year.

College of Business and Law and Researcher Representatives Mary Alice Young and Rick Ball

Representative Achievements

Over the past year, the College of Business and Law and Research Representative roles have delivered a series of successful outcomes that have strengthened colleague support and improved working conditions across UWE.

Key Outcomes

- Multiple successful contract renegotiations across the Business School and Law School, including downshifting, back pay, and progression to higher pay levels
- Resolution of bullying, workload and health-related concerns
- Secured a voluntary severance package at the colleague's preferred level
- Complex research-related case in the Law School that highlighted wider procedural issues beyond HR oversight

Notably, **four major successes were achieved within the last two months**.

Feedback shows increasing trust in the work of College representatives, with managers now proactively requesting UCU involvement — a clear sign of growing credibility and influence.

College of Arts, Technology and Environment Representative Chris Mason

For UCU UWE, 2025/26 has been a busy year. Before beginning the CATE report, however, we would like to acknowledge that most managers within the school do an excellent job. It would not be appropriate in this report to identify specific individuals, but those who have failed or, in many cases, have been failed by the system will know who they are.

Unfortunately, the 2024/25 Dignity and Respect reports investigating two teams within the School of Arts did not achieve their intended objectives. Some may argue that they caused more harm than good. On a more positive note, the school's senior management team has recognised this, and progress albeit slow is being made to address the underlying issues.

Over the past few years, we have worked hard to ensure that the university's Pay Equality Project (PEP) has not been diluted. Clause 7 states that staff acting as module leaders should be paid at H Grade (Senior Lecturer) level. We are pleased to report that, on several occasions, we have successfully argued that lecturers carrying out the duties of a module leader should either receive H Grade pay or be promoted to Senior Lecturer. We are aware that some managers believe that PEP no longer applies. To be clear, it remains fully applicable. If you are a lecturer undertaking module leader responsibilities while being paid at G Grade, please contact UCU UWE.

Regarding CATE's restructuring of its technical team, we would like to thank everyone who contributed to the consultation process. Although the school's senior management team has made some minor amendments, there remain areas of concern as the project moves into the implementation stage. Following implementation, a properly managed restructure should include a period of reflection and adjustment. Therefore, please do not hesitate to raise any concerns you may have. We will continue to work with our UNISON colleagues and management to ensure that the restructure supports both staff and students.

We would also like to thank those members who raised concerns about receiving only verbal feedback following applications for academic promotion. We have successfully negotiated an agreement whereby staff requesting feedback will now receive a written summary of the meeting.

I will be retiring at the end of August and am pleased to reflect that, over many years, it has been a privilege to work with such a dedicated team of colleagues, both past and present, within UCU UWE. While there have certainly been setbacks along the way, there have also been some significant achievements. I wish my successors every success for the future.