

In this Newsletter

1. Covid-19 statement
2. Meeting Report Feb 2020, AgeUK
3. Barry Johnson memorial
4. The Future of FE
5. UCU Cradle to Grave Conference
6. WASPI and back to 60 Campaigns latest
7. UCU Retired Members Branch



More information and news

can be obtained from these websites.
We suggest you have a browse.

UCU National Website:

<http://www.ucu.org.uk>

AgeUK: <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/>

68 is too late: www.68istoolate.org.uk

National Pensioners Convention (NPC):

<http://npcuk.org>

Your branch has its own website at

<http://www.ucu-em-rmb.org.uk>

Follow your Branch on Twitter:

@ucu-em-rmb

**Branch meeting
April 2020**

**Meeting
Cancelled**



1. Covid-19 statement

We're sure you'll expect and have heard that all Retired Members meetings are cancelled for the immediate future.

There's a huge amount of information and guidance about in news programmes, the papers, internet and social media, some of it (especially in the latter two) confusing and contradictory. In taking account of all this, the constantly updating information issued by the main government agencies should be a first call. Joint guidance from Public Health England and the NHS is available at... <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-guidance>.

The distinctions between general *social distancing* (for everybody), "*particularly stringent*" *social distancing* (for those over 70 and other vulnerable people), *social isolation* (for those with symptoms and those in contact with them) and *shielding* (for those who are especially vulnerable) are all accessible from the above. Specific guidance on the latter is at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people>.

For those of you on Facebook, information on local Covid Community Mutual Aid groups can be found at <https://covidmutualaid.org/>. If you find a group in your area, joining it will give access to a local network of people offering help and information.

No country or group of people are responsible for the covid 19 virus; as they were not for HIV, Sars or Ebola. But the ability of countries to deal with this threat flows from social choices. The ten years of austerity here have seen adult social care starved of funds. Some 17,000 nurses have been lost as have many thousands of hospital beds. Particularly relevant is the number of critical care beds. Germany has 29.2 per 100,000 of population; whereas poor suffering Italy can only muster 12.5. The cuts in the UK have left us with a mere 6.6.

This crisis is already showing the strengths of community and the weaknesses of our economic and social health and welfare system. When people saw what it was possible to achieve through the rationing, planning and social provision that was necessitated during World War II, they came out of it determined to build a fairer society. Let's hope that the challenges we now face will show people how we can build a better society after the months ahead. We should keep signing petitions, writing to MPs, protesting online over things that matter to us (such as the need for support for front line staff in

the NHS and beyond, adequate sick pay, financial support for people losing their income, reversing cuts to care homes etc).

We hope you're managing to take care of yourself, loved ones and friends in this rapidly developing situation and feel able to access as much of what you need as possible.

Best wishes.

Julian Atkinson and Angus McLardy on behalf of our RMB Committee



Picket at Nottingham University

2. Meeting Report Feb 2020, AgeUK

The meeting welcomed Maria Cooke from Age UK who had come to talk to us about Social Care. She began by saying she didn't want to dwell on the issue of social care as it's too depressing. Some of us felt it needed discussing because the current situation is so depressing! There is information about Age UK's campaign to improve the care system on their website www.ageuk.org.uk and a petition for you to sign.

Maria went on to identify some of the problems suffered by older people such as loneliness, living with long term health conditions and providing care for dependents.

She told us about the "age-friendly Nottingham" initiative which encourages businesses to provide seats for people and also the public provision of more bus stops and seats on the street to help people who are less mobile get out and about more easily.

More over 65-s than ever remain in employment, either through necessity or choice, but retail is a major sector for older workers and is suffering

many job losses. It can be important to continue working as a way of combatting loneliness and isolation.

Another initiative is the 'pub is the hub' movement which encourages pubs to put on events and activities in the daytime to encourage people getting together. Maria was keen to encourage older people to take responsibility for themselves to keep active, get out and about to meet people, eat a healthy diet and reduce alcohol intake.

There followed a discussion on the importance of structural issues in creating problems for the ageing population. Members pointed to the loss of solidarity with trade union membership declining, pubs closing and church membership going down.

Helen Chester



Picket of the Open University, Nottingham

3. Barry Johnson (1931 – 2020)

The last Newsletter announced Barry's death after a long illness.

A memorial to him on 17th February, at the Winding Wheel in Chesterfield, was attended by over a hundred people and our banner was present in honour of his outstanding contributions to the Labour Movement as a NATFHE and UCU activist.

Barry Donlan, our RMB delegate to Mansfield and Nottingham Trades Council, spoke of his early political activities in Nottingham such as: regular speaking from a soapbox in Slab Square; an abortive attempt during the Vietnamese war to raise the Vietnamese flag over the Castle; through the Trades Council, supporting the Evening Post strikers. He also talked of his work in establishing and developing the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Labour History Society.

Hilary Cave, his partner, talked of Barry's life: growing up in Hucknall, the son of a miner blacklisted in 1926 and mother who was active in the Unemployed Workers Movement; travelling as a guest of the Soviet Union and in France; his love of a broad range of music, theatre, opera and poetry; the loss he suffered from the death of his only son and brother; the effect on him of his disabling long illness.



Angus McLardy, Chair of our RMB, described Barry's commitment to empowerment through education, particularly his work in trade union studies and access courses. He outlined Barry's contributions to Chesterfield Trades Council and how, in representing a union of academic workers, he was able to build broad alliances. He spoke personally of the way Barry inspired others to take on the struggle for a better society.

Colin Hampton, Coordinator of the North Derbyshire Unemployed Workers Centres, talked of Barry's enthusiastic and uplifting performances as Trades Council President at Chesterfield's May Day celebrations for over two decades. His work as a trustee of the UWC was outstanding and he helped build the organisation nationally.

The Clarion Choir gave uplifting renditions of The Ballad of Joe Hill and the Internationale.

Angus McLardy

4. The Future of FE

It is usually the UCU Cassandras who predict a sticky future for FE, whilst the Government and Department for Education (DfE) carelessly bat away such predictions and ooze confidence. Now the dismal chorus has been joined by the DfE (*Costs and Cost Drivers in the Further Education Sector*, February 2020). The research goes as far as questioning the viability of the existing FE system on current funding: "Overall, our work suggests that, if the FE sector to survive "as is", consideration needs to be given to relaxing the financial pressure it is currently operating under."

There is a wealth of detail on the present state of FE and how resource starvation has distorted the system. It also might suggest that some FE Principals/CEOs may be compensating for their actual lack of control over Colleges by acting the strutting bully with their subordinates.

A key strength of FE Colleges has been the ability to offer up to date education and training; the “currency of their offer” - to use DfE jargon. Traditionally teaching was updated and the equipment was current – of a type generally in use in the place learners were or would be working; the curriculum was regularly changed to ensure that learners were acquiring the skills they needed for their sector; staff kept up to speed with developments in their sector etc. The report states that this “is no longer the case. “Money for staff development (CPD) has been cut and is now more likely to be held centrally. Retaining central control over CPD ensures that all development activities that do take place are geared towards meeting management priorities.

An indicator of the financial squeeze on FE is the average money spent per student: spending per full-time equivalent 16 to 18-year-old learner fell from £6,478 in 2011-12 to £5,698 in 2017-18 (a 12% fall in real terms). The consequences of this decline are felt by staff but also in the curriculum offer.

By far the largest single component in the costs of delivering an FE programme is the cost of teaching staff. Keeping this expenditure under control is the single major factor in ensuring that a College operates within its income. Staff numbers are down. Workload is increasing. Less staff development and CPD is taking place. Pay rises are made infrequently; when they have been given, they are invariably less than inflation. “These factors make recruitment and retention of all staff, academic and non-academic, more difficult. More attractive employment opportunities exist outside the sector. ...the pressure on budgets has led to levels of learner support that are inadequate to meet current and anticipated needs”.

The impact of under-resourcing is seen in increasing staff workloads: class contact hours are likely to have increased by at least 10% – typically tutors will have 24 or 25 contact hours per week (out of a total of thirty-seven contracted hours) with little or no remission for additional responsibilities for any staff below programme leader level. Some Colleges have moved to annual hours and the extent to which targeted contact hours are actually achieved is at least 95%, often higher. As a result, there is effectively no slack in

the system. The number of learners in a group has increased and this directly adds to the workload (more learners to support; more pieces of work to mark etc.). It is not surprising that the research shows that staff morale is very low.

Certain subject areas pay above the median: Science at 60.71%, Hospitality & Catering and Agriculture top the list – 66.13% and 66.01% respectively – salaries in these areas tend to have to be higher than the norm in order to attract and keep staff. Some managements are in favour of differing pay rates in these subject areas.

The research deals with the curriculum: course content has been – and continues to be – reduced, Courses/Apprenticeships have been – and continue to be – lost, whole programme areas are under threat – some have already been lost, group size is increasing, use of non-tutor-led learning is increasing. The last category is more popularly known as FoFo, or F... off and Find out.

The principal area in which capital investment is currently required is IT: this is primarily an obsolescence issue – the kit is often simply too old to cope effectively with current operating and similar systems- ; the Wi-Fi is no longer fit for purpose; firewalls require upgrading; whiteboards are failing and replacements cannot be afforded etc.

Repairs and maintenance budgets are run on an expectation that costs will be reduced year-on-year. This is an area where all colleges are economising. Often only essential (Health & Safety critical) work is being undertaken.

The research ends on a chilling note: “The risk is that whole curriculum areas will be lost and that colleges – including some of the good/excellent ones we have seen – will disappear.” It is probably not useful to say “we told you so” but the ineluctable consequences of cut upon cut were obvious, so I will anyway. WE TOLD YOU SO!

[Julian Atkinson](#)

5. UCU Cradle to Grave Conference, February 8th 2020.

CLIMATE CHANGE, POWER AND SOCIETY

An item in a previous newsletter asked what we can do about climate change. This conference was a very timely and interesting, raising awareness of things we can do to address these very important issues.

Introductory speakers included:

Jo Grady, UCU General Secretary, who spoke about national policies and activities responding to climate change such as policies opposing fracking and airport expansion, causes of mass migrations around the world, the effects on women and the importance of climate change for all ages, all providing problems for this Tory Government. She suggested direct action is needed stating 'Capitalism is not working' so support for the youth climate change movement and school strikes, and the need for the Trade Union movement to take action are essential. She pointed out that UCU Green representatives and Green Skills training is useful, saying many students want "Green Collar Jobs". As examples of leverage we have to influence outcomes, she referred to USS pension scheme investments, and the need to divest from unethical investments.



Professor Jim Skea, chair of the Just Transition Commission, highlighted the use of more positive policies and action in Scotland (we are not as progressive in England), reminding us of the 'net zero' emissions statements in the Paris UN Agreement. He raised issues around the difficulties of trying to merge the interests of workforces (in the Labour Movement) with the Environment Movement such as Land Tenure, Fair Work, Energy Poverty, pointing out the way some unions see change as a threat while others see it as an opportunity. He also emphasised the need to keep on talking in forums such as COP 26. (This is the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference originally scheduled to be held in Glasgow next

November.) Altogether it seems much more interest and more action has been and is being taken in Scotland than in any of the other three countries in the United Kingdom!

In the workshop "Greening the Curriculum" some excellent ideas and activities were described and issues arising thoroughly explored. Examples of great practice were explained and discussed alongside major problems to be faced. Lydia Meryll from Manchester Environmental Education Network spoke from a background of wide experience in this field. She was very concerned about the importance of children learning about the environment from a very early age, (even 2yrs +) emphasising that we all have great responsibilities for them. However, there is much resistance, one example being climate change taken out of the National Curriculum in England although embedded in Scottish education. Lydia felt we should be looking at potential starting points to fill skills gaps and to provide useful education and training, especially where students are beginning to demand information and are learning with interest about topics such as waste disposal and are gaining skills and knowledge within the building/construction sector for example.

Professor Barbara Harriss-White from University of Oxford described curriculum aspects tried within a variety of courses including looking at climate change as an option or a compulsory element. It seems this was most successful as a compulsory part of first year studies as it was not so successful as an option in the second year. One problem is how to establish thinking outside normal curriculum boundaries, not only because of colleagues' apathy, but also opposition.

David Byrne, University of Durham, looked enthusiastically at the contents of curriculum such as 'world civilisation' but also again raised issues around dealing with complex systems, and the urbanised world. He emphasised that 'what we are doing is totally insufficient and that economics as a discipline will not work!'

Sean Vernell UCU FEC Vice Chair, and Climate Learning Week Activist criticised current ways of teaching, describing them as 'unjust' giving examples such as 'teaching to the test', exams without coursework etc. He felt that climate change should be integrated into all subject areas, particularly in Climate Change activity weeks. Comments issues and questions raised included; what interest does OFSTED show in the environment? The importance of Adult Learning

(such as WEA) to promote understanding and awareness within communities.

The final session of the conference focussed on wider issues:

Alexandra Philips, Green Party and Mayor of Brighton and Hove, first offered solidarity to our union for future strike action and thanked us for fighting for education.

She then talked about attacks on our education system with links to climate change such as the introduction of university fees that less than a third of former students will ever be able to pay off, that learning for its own sake is not offered, rather “the capitalist treadmill and mentality of economics” which is a perversion of what education should be. However, she did point out that education can be the greatest weapon for public good as a transformative force.

Olivia Blake, Labour MP for Sheffield Hallam talked about the Four Fights, the need for Just Transition and the scale of the crisis being so big with polluters and climate deniers as a huge problem. She suggested workers from all industries need to be involved and to take action and that the banking system also needs changing.

Questions and comments for these two speakers showed the very serious interest and concerns that are held by UCU members and conference delegates: transport, the fossil fuel industry, whether leaders understand the science behind the issues and can younger MPs hold others to account effectively to ensure the suitable forming of policies.

Many other valuable ideas put forward suggested strong and urgent action needs to be taken to try to find solutions that we should all be involved in, in whatever ways we can, from not flying or eating meat to supporting school climate strikes and rewilding university and college campuses. It was altogether a scary and thought provoking but also inspiring day.

[Rowena Dawson](#)

6. WASPI and back to 60 Campaigns latest

Women born in the 1950s that were affected by the changes in state pension age and their communication are represented by WASPI and Backto60 groups. The movements have been campaigning on behalf of the 3.8 million women that would have received the full amount of pension had their pension age remained at 60.

The High Court ruled on October 3rd 2019 that this increase in the state pension age was not discriminatory. This followed a judicial review in June brought by two claimants, Julie Delve, 61 and Karen Glynn 62, who argued that raising their state pension age “unlawfully discriminated against them on the grounds of age, sex, and age and sex combined.”



On age discrimination, the court rejected the argument that the legislation breached the European Convention of Human Rights, on the “basis of case law which establishes that a state can introduce a new legislative scheme which effects changes from a given date based on age.” The judges also ruled that there was no direct discrimination on grounds of sex because “this legislation does not treat women less favourably than men in law, rather it equalises historic asymmetry between men and women and thereby corrects historic direct discrimination against men.”

Shortly after this defeat, Backto60 launched a campaign to raise £72,000 to be able to bring an appeal. This appeal was lodged with the High court in October and their case is due to be heard on 21st July this year.

Ceredigion WASPI member, Pamela Judge, said “This is excellent news. The Court of Appeal was allowed twelve months to hear the case. 21st July is much earlier than we feared. Let’s hope the appeal goes in or favour as nearly 4 million women are struggling as their plans for retirement have been shattered.”

The Government had previously stated that reversing the hike in women’s pensions would cost more than £180 billion.

Of course, since this announcement the world is now in the grip of the Covid-19 pandemic. Like many in the population many older people are also facing severe issues because of social isolation. They have been forced to survive on very little income, reliant on their part time jobs for basic necessities. Lynn, a WASPI woman who will not get her pension for five years, is already in £15,000 worth of debt, paying for food and heating. She

works as a part-time home worker and comments, "I cannot afford to buy extra things like vitamins, and healthy foods such as fruit so my immune system isn't the best to fight the virus."

Joyce, 63, is also in a precarious position in her part time job. She is on Universal Credit and self-employed. She says: "Due to health vulnerability I have to self-isolate and had to cancel many of the classes I run due to Covid-19. I have COPD and have no family locally, except my disabled sister so I'm afraid every time I go to the shops. I am in pain and suffer anxiety and depression and not having a pension is making it worse."

We have yet to see if the latest Government statement on financial support to the self-employed will help so many vulnerable groups of workers.

Judy Wills

7. UCU Retired Members Branch

Our branch has been meeting since 2008 and now has over 300 members. Our aims are listed below. We meet three times a year, often in places of interest to make part of a day out. Meetings focus on important issues for UCU pensioners and provide a chance to talk with other retired members.

A termly newsletter with articles of interest to retired UCU members is e-mailed to all branch members for whom we have addresses and to UCU branch secretaries in the East Midlands and to other RMBs.

Please let us have your personal e-mail address and let us know if it changes.

RMB Roles and Functions

- To represent the interests of retired members within the union.
- To represent the interests of retired union members within the wider union and pensioner movements.

- To provide a forum within the union for retired members to come together to consider and debate matters of mutual interest.
- To provide a resource of collective memory, advice and expertise in support of the union, in particular to those still in active employment.
- To provide active support, where appropriate, by involving the broadest section of the branch in support of the wider interests of the union and its members, including support for those still in active employment.

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