

In this Newsletter

1. Congress Report
2. Adult Education
3. Regional Committee, 24.4.21
4. National Bus Strategy
5. More 'Global Britain'
6. The Lucas Plan
7. State of Ageing
8. 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 Meetings

Wednesday 20th October 2021, 11am
to include the Branch AGM

The Swan in the Rushes
Loughborough
or by Zoom if necessary

At 12.00:
“Luddism in the East Midlands”

Speaker:
Julian Atkinson



1. Congress Report

Congress was held online and one consequence of this was that voting did not happen during Congress but in two stages after sector conferences had also taken place. The results of voting were made available online on 15 June (<https://www.ucu.org.uk/Congress2021>). It had been proposed that motions which dropped off the agenda for lack of time would automatically be remitted, but, in the end, this proved unnecessary because all Congress motions had been put. Some, however, had no speaker and whereas in the past this would have meant that they fell, the President moved them formally from the Chair. In a sense, this was unsatisfactory as some motions would have benefited from an explanatory speech. Delegates had also been invited to prioritise motions, but the East Midlands Retired Members Branch could not discuss their preferences because our Branch meeting took place after the deadline. The Branch Committee therefore held a ballot on which motions they felt should be prioritised and I voted accordingly.

The first section of business, after an upbeat address by the General Secretary, were three motions on education, mainly concerned with the Government's attack on arts and humanities and the underlying agenda of narrowing participation and herding students from non-traditional backgrounds into what the Government considers, from an entirely uninformed perspective it often seems, vocational education. Speakers also felt that the Government was trying to move the hegemonic consensus even further to the right by means of funding cuts, so as to give institutions an incentive to close degree courses which encourage critical thought and analysis.

The next section of business were motions classed under Equalities. A number of motions raised issues as to how the union nationally and at local levels should deal with the consequences of Covid, including long Covid. Black Lives Matter and the decolonisation of the curriculum were debated, issues of gender identity and gender-based violence were raised, and there was a long discussion regarding the Government's attempt to impose the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of antisemitism on educational establishments. Some universities had adopted it without discussion and were now using it to shut down some areas of research and/or to discipline staff who spoke out on behalf of Palestine. Although the Government would like to cast itself as a champion of freedom of speech, it seems quite happy to curtail this freedom where speakers are in conflict with the Government's agenda and

priorities. Although for the time being this is an issue predominantly in some Universities, the matter was discussed at Congress as the feeling was that it would not take very long until the issue would start to affect FE too. (According to a news item in *The Guardian* on 8 June, Edexcel has withdrawn its two textbooks used for teaching the subject for GCSE.)



Business moved on to discuss Recruitment, Organisation and Campaigns which, in the time of Covid, included motions on working from home, but also casualisation. Some institutions had made large numbers of casualised staff redundant and there are also concerns that after the experience of moving teaching online, universities would be tempted to use technology to teach but source the teaching from lower wage countries or undermine terms and conditions in other ways. One speaker explained that at their institution, management had decided that it only needed space for 60 percent of its staff and that academics would no longer have a reserved office but would 'hot-desk'. This would be at least the second institution to do this as Northampton adopted a similar approach a while ago when it built a new campus. Other areas of debate were the climate emergency and the need for a standing committee to discuss climate issues and concerns over how the hostile environment affected staff and students not born in this country. The second day of Congress started in closed session to discuss the financial situation of the Union which, the Honorary Treasurer reported, is healthy. Some controversy was caused by a motion which asked for more NEC involvement in how Union money is spent and collected. The motion was the result, rather ironically, of the NEC imposing a levy on all members, and also of the Times Higher publishing a report that an Ex-General Secretary had received a £400,000 pay-out and signed a non-disclosure agreement. Some Branches also wanted easier access to the Fighting Fund as this might strengthen their position. The motion regarding NEC involvement in expenditure on consultants, redundancy payments and levies was carried against the opposition of the Honorary

Treasurer and Congress also voted to task the NEC to bring rule changes to make access to the Hardship Fund more transparent. Most of the motions after that, in open session, seemed uncontroversial but a composite on China, Hong Kong, and the Uyghurs prompted debate as to whether what is happening in China can legitimately be called genocide or whether China is the subject of a Western propaganda campaign. Some speakers wanted the motion to be remitted but, in the end, it was carried. A motion on voting electronically was opposed by speakers who felt that it would infringe Union democracy and the same position was taken on a motion which wanted to reduce speaking time at Congress for people moving and seconding motions. Electronic voting where possible was carried but the rule change regarding speaking time was lost. The motion submitted by the East Midlands Retired Members on pensions as possible Congress business was the last item in this section.

As there was no speaker against, it seemed uncontroversial, and it was carried as amended by South West Region which we had accepted. Congress then moved on to consider rule changes, but here, too, some motions had no one speaking for them so that it was not always clear what the motivation behind them was. The most controversial rule change was a motion to reduce the number of Branch members required to have a Congress delegate. This motion was remitted. One of the more important changes for retired members is that Congress voted to establish a Retired Members Committee, similar to Sector Conferences.

I attended the HE Sector Conference as an observer but some technical issues at home meant that I was not able to follow all of it. Setting aside half a day for a sector conference was always going to be a challenge in terms of how much business would be transacted. The first six motions on the agenda concerned pay and the USS dispute and were taken in closed session. Delegates agreed that the USS valuation was based on a highly problematic model and several speakers claimed that staff in the USS were in effect being asked to make up for contribution holidays by the employers. The debate which ensued concerned strategy and timing. Some speakers from the NEC felt that some Branches were trying to micro-manage the dispute. Here, too, it remains to be seen how Sector Conference voted. I didn't quite catch the very end of the debate as we lost our internet connection at home and by the time I was able to log on again, the Chair was about to make her closing remarks.

Harry Ziegler

2. Adult Education

'Adult education is a permanent national necessity, an inseparable aspect of citizenship, and therefore should be both universal and lifelong'.

Just over a century has passed since a 1919 report into education commissioned by the Ministry of Reconstruction issued these fine words and concluded that the rebuilding and revitalising of a post-war nation would be well served by a better educated citizenship. The subsequent issuing of funds to local authorities enabled for the first time the provision of state grants to voluntary, philanthropic and church organisations to provide some generally informal adult learning opportunities away from the world of work. There was of course something of a patrician element to all this, similarly expressed in John Reith's formulation of the BBC as the nation's 'aunt' in 1922. It should inform and educate, as well as entertain, and 'give the public more than it thinks it likes', he insisted. If only the working class could learn to like classical music and fine literature the world would be a better place. Inter-war economic privations rendered adult education largely peripheral however, until something of a renaissance in the 1950s and 60s, encouraged by post-war redevelopment and the arguments put forward by liberal social reformers such as Richard Hoggart.

It is also 20 years since the Moser report, instigated under a Labour Government, became the catalyst for the development of multi-agency approaches to improving adult basic skills. As a result of the ensuing Skills for Life strategy 'between 2001 and 2011 some 14 million participated in adult literacy and numeracy activities with over 8 million qualifications being achieved and, as a result, a 13% improvement in measurable literacy skills in the adult population.' Unionlearn was established, with government funding, in an attempt to encourage hard-to-reach potential learners in workplaces. Retired FE members who were working in the sector then will remember that even amongst the trials and tribulations of Incorporation colleges were busy most evenings with eager adult learners. Access courses were popular, flourishing, and many barriers to access were removed. Basic skills provision was expanding, and efforts were being made to take learning out into the community.

Yet 100 years from that original report, a Centenary Commission¹, set up to re-visit the 1919 work, was forced to conclude; 'it is a serious

concern that the funding for – and infrastructure of – adult education has been cut to the bone in recent decades.’

Lest we get accused of being too rose-tinted the 2019 Commission suggests that ‘there has never been a ‘golden age’ of provision...However, there was steady progress until the beginning of this century. Around 11% of working age adults participated in ‘learning’ in the early 1990s; ten years later, it was over 20%. That put the UK clearly at the top of the European league – outstripping even the Scandinavian countries, with their long traditions of adult education. But by 2018 we were back down to under 15% participation. While the number of full-time entrants into Higher Education rose by 9% between 2009/10 and 2017/18, the number of part-time entrants fell from 470,000 to below 240,000 – a drop of 49%.

When it comes to the basic but essential skills of literacy and numeracy, the UK compares poorly internationally, with 9 million adults of working age with low basic skills, and shockingly, with those aged between 16 and 29 having on average worse literacy and numeracy skills than those aged 30 to 45. Things are going backwards.’²

Further confirmation comes from the Learning and Work Institute, whose most recent (2019) published survey ‘shows that just one in three adults have taken part in learning in the last three years, the lowest figure ever recorded. Since 2010, the participation rate has dropped by 10 percentage points. That is equivalent to 3.8 million fewer adults taking part in learning since the start of the decade. The fall follows a significant decline in investment over the last decade. Between 2009-10 and 2018-19, government spending on adult education excluding apprenticeships fell by 47%. Employer investment in training in the UK is also low compared to other advanced economies and has dropped by 10 percentage points. That is equivalent to 3.8 million fewer adults taking part in learning since the start of the decade.’

Furthermore, the survey reveals ‘deep inequalities in access to learning, with those who could most benefit from taking part being least likely to do so. Adults in lower socio-economic groups (DE) are half as likely to take part in learning than those in higher socio-economic groups (AB). Adults who left school at 16 or younger are half as likely to take part in learning as those who stayed on in full time education until at least 21.’³ The latest figures released by the Office for National Statistics reveal that in the 8 years to July 2019, the total number of

people in further education in England fell by 30.6%, from 4.2 million to 2.9 million. Adult government-funded further education and skills participation decreased by 15% to 1,168,100 compared to 1,373,800 in 2019/20. We can only currently speculate that the pandemic has hit participation rates particularly hard. Even through the narrow lens of the CBI there is a problem, as chief policy director Matthew Fell said; ‘Adult learning is heading in the wrong direction at precisely the wrong time for our economy and our society...Nine in ten workers will need some form of reskilling by 2030...Lifelong learning will be one of the defining issues of our age – countries who get it right will have an exceptional competitive advantage.’⁴

The reversal of this sorry trend is clearly going to need some serious funding and some inventive, holistic approaches to provision. A starting point for revitalising adult participation could be, for example, the establishment of well-funded local Adult Learning Partnerships comprised of local and regional government, colleges, universities and community and educational groups as well as employers. These partnerships could be informed by an Adult Basic Skills strategy that becomes organic to, and embedded in, the communities it serves. Revitalising agencies such as Sure Start Centres could be required as part of their remit to contribute to adult learning in their communities. Additional funding could be provided to bodies such as the WEA and the now cash-strapped Open University to provide added dimension. Local FE colleges should be democratised and college boards should be expanded in composition to include community groups, trade unions and local authority representation.

[What we have instead is the hapless Gavin Williamson's](#) White Paper on FE, published last January which, as argued in our last edition, illustrates a worryingly austere and myopic vision of lifelong learning, focussing as it does on job-related skills and little else. It resolves to put employers at the heart of course development and to relegate adult learning to a limited entitlement to loans on a narrow list of ‘legitimate’ courses. Naturally, Williamson does not consider huge swathes of the arts and humanities as worthy of public funding. Oh, and we will have to wait until 2025 before any entitlement kicks in - as long as the Treasury can be persuaded. And while we are waiting, the Unionlearn fund has been axed. Aside from a well-overdue £1.5bn for capital improvements there is very little promised investment in publicly funded lifelong learning and no indication that the current systems of incorporation and governance are going to be tackled, beyond giving direct powers to the

Secretary of State to intervene when a college goes belly up. We are a million miles away from UNESCO's definition of lifelong learning as *'the integration of learning and living, covering learning activities for people of all ages (at home, at school, in the workplace, in the community, etc.) through formal, non-formal and informal modalities, which together meet a wide range of learning needs and demands.'*

Those of us who plied our trade in FE in the last 15 years or so will have had our own direct experience of employer-led training done on the cheap as we witnessed the trammelling of dwindling staff development funds into the narrow focus of 'how to get through an Inspection' or 'how to recognise a potential terrorist', often via the medium of an online training package.

We can, and we must, do much better than this.
Refs:

1. <https://www.centenarycommission.org/>

2. <https://www.centenarycommission.org/wp-content/uploads/reports/The-Centenary-Commission-on-Adult-Education-Report-HI-RES.pdf>

3. <https://learningandwork.org.uk/news-and-policy/decade-of-decline-in-adult-learning-with-four-million-lost-learners-since-2010/>

4. Quoted in <https://learningandwork.org.uk/news-and-policy/decade-of-decline-in-adult-learning-with-four-million-lost-learners-since-2010/>

5 <https://www.centenarycommission.org/wp-content/uploads/reports/The-Centenary-Commission-on-Adult-Education-Report-HI-RES.pdf>

Further information on the Kirkholt project can be found at

<http://democracy.rochdale.gov.uk/documents/s47534/Paper%202%20Case%20study%20Kirkholt%20Pilot.pdf>

Case Study – the Rochdale example.⁵

The Citizens' Curriculum in Rochdale is an innovative project, helping socially excluded people. Helen Chicot, who has worked in Rochdale for 26 years, explains the background: 'In the mid-2000s, the culture around adult education completely changed. Education became all about skills and employment, a kind of target driven,

qualification led service that wasn't serving peoples' needs. People were saying they were sick of being put on courses, as they didn't really address the context that they were in.' In 2014 Rochdale council launched a scheme on Kirkholt, a large social housing estate with high levels of crisis, its residents regularly calling on the emergency, health and social services. The scheme brought services together to make things work better from the bottom up. As Chicot explains: 'We brought a multi-agency team of people together and they were given the freedom to engage with people as if they were normal and not be treated as if they were a problem. The idea was to give them the opportunity both to learn how to do things for themselves, setting their own priorities and to be amongst those who are learning just like them.' Team workers include police officers, housing officers, health workers, and social workers, as well as teachers and ex-teachers. Chicot emphasises that 'most of the workforce see themselves as both educators and learners.' For every £1 spent on the project, £4.50 is now saved in terms of less police call outs, and fewer people going into care, and using ambulance and doctors' services.

Paul Wilkinson

3. Regional Committee, 24.4.21

Report from the HE Sector Committee meeting

There were no reports from the officers (Chair and Secretary had given their apologies) and no report from the HEC had been tabled. It was noted that a special HEC on pay had been held but no report had been received and no HEC member attended the meeting. The Regional Office urged Branches to register their delegates for Congress and the Sector Conferences. Membership numbers in the Region were going up in both sectors.

The main HE dispute in the Region is currently at the University of Leicester which is planning more than 140 redundancies. Management there is very aggressive and shows little inclination to mitigate or to negotiate. Some of the redundancies are aimed at Union activists. Staff and former staff publicising events on social media are being targeted and management is trying to intimidate them. An industrial action ballot has been successful and action short of strike was set to start on 4 May. Both staff and students had separately voted no confidence in the management and staff had asked for Leicester to be grey-listed. (A short discussion followed as to what this will entail.) Other areas of concern in the Region are workloads which are felt to be unsustainable and were possibly seen to have a higher priority than pay.

Covid, and more importantly Long Covid, was a concern especially as the latter is not covered by the Equalities Act although many of the symptoms are.

No amendments had been submitted for Sector Conference motions. Under AOB the RO informed those present that there had been some changes to the legal scheme and that the RO/RSO would in future act as gatekeepers.

Report from the Regional Committee

The Regional Committee received a report from the FE Sector Committee which had been held earlier. Return to on-site provision with lateral flow testing on a voluntary basis was causing concern. Staff had to negotiate changes to results deadlines and recruitment. FE would be holding a consultative ballot on terms and conditions. A written report from the NEC had been tabled. There were no amendments to Congress motions.

Harry Ziegler

4. National Bus Strategy

From the Midlands TUC Pensioners meeting, March 2021

This group have campaigned on bus passes and bus services for two or three years recently, so this is an ongoing concern and interest.



Bus Campaign 2021, talk and follow up briefing from Rob Johnson Midlands TUC Policy and Campaigns Officer

Rob reported: "...on the National Bus Strategy it's evident that this contains some good measures, but nothing that wouldn't be easier if (A), buses hadn't been de-regulated for the last 35 years and (B), if councils were able to run their own municipal services."

Among other points, the strategy includes £3bn for bus services in England and Wales, bus operators have to be engaging in good faith with LTAs (Local Transport Authorities) on enhanced partnerships, or to begin the process of franchising by 1st July 2021.

Bus improvement plans have to include moves to introduce simpler ticketing options and contactless payments in all areas and there is funding for a fleet of new green buses for each area, e.g. Coventry and Oxford will get approx. £50million each to move to an all-electric bus fleet.

Rob suggested "This is a good start but there is much more to do. Also, even a franchised service means that public money goes to private companies where it is lost to the profit-seeking. Better would be to completely lift the ban and let local authorities set up and run their own services." Some action that has already been taken regionally has been to write to local authorities who had responsibility for buses outside the WMCA (West Midlands Combined Authority), The WMCA Mayor has the power to introduce franchising. These letters were followed up with a survey of councils which had a patchy response but also some positive and interesting leads from Leicester City Council, Shropshire Council, Warwickshire and Herefordshire.



As a follow-on to the talk, Rob sent a detailed document to the Pensioners group outlining the suggested proposals, including a copy of the letters to local authority which says: "We all want to see our region flourish and a world class transport system for our region is vital if we are to achieve our maximum potential. ... we must not overlook the centrality of the bus to our communities and future economic success."

Rowena Dawson

5. More 'Global Britain'

For the last newsletter, I reported that the Government had decided that the UK would no longer take part in the ERASMUS scheme because, it claimed, the scheme did not represent value for money. They did, however, sign up to Horizon Europe, so that international research collaboration would continue, and British researchers would be able to bid for European funds. That, at least, was broadly in keeping with its hyperbolic claim that Britain was aiming to become a "science superpower" – even though its spending on research and development is currently well below OECD average (1.7% of the GDP compared to 2.4%). Rumours were already going round at the time that research funding from the British Research Councils would be reduced, and the money used instead to pay the contributions to Horizon Europe.

It then transpired, however, that UKRI (a body sponsored by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, and which brings together the research councils and the UK's innovation agency), had its funding cut rather drastically, as a result, in part, of the Government reducing by roughly 70% the amount of money it allocates to Official Development Assistance (ODA) for the next year. The broader context of cuts to international aid is currently attracting some publicity in the press as some Tories are rebelling against the Government lowering its spending in this area from 0.7% of GDP to 0.5%. The debate in the press focuses mainly on the immediate humanitarian aspect of this reduction rather than the damage done in the short and medium term to Britain's standing as a reliable partner in international research. Our General Secretary was among those responding to the cuts and demanding that they be reversed. (You can find the letter [here](#).) Academics from a large number of institutions [have written to the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor](#) demanding the same, explaining the consequences that will ensue if they are not. Far from showing engagement in global research or seeing research as a process and product of global cooperation, the Johnson Government seems intent on undermining it. If these projects are prematurely terminated, this will also affect the researchers involved in them, for the younger ones potentially terminating their careers before they have taken off. Cutting the foreign aid budget, certainly in breach of a commitment made in the Tories' election manifesto and arguably a breach of the law (as the International Development Act (2015) fixes spending at 0.7% of GDP), may go down well with the Charity-Begins-At-Home Brigade as, for example, with Esther McVey who knows that aid is

wasted but cannot provide evidence, but it reduces Britain's soft power. It also shows that Johnson and his gang have no interest in pursuing the UN's Sustainable Development Goals as many of the ODA projects were directly contributing to them. None of this bodes well for the COP26 meeting in November.

While the Johnson Government uses the pandemic as an excuse to cut the ODA budget and claims that its contributions to Horizon Europe require it to claw back research funds, it has money to burn for a track and trace system which isn't working (Typhoid Dido seems to think that our expectations are too high) and for buying more nuclear warheads, arguably in breach of the non-proliferation treaty. Johnson referred to the Department for International Development as a "giant cashpoint in the sky" but I suspect that some of the research funds cut from aid and UKRI will actually help fund a pet project of his former advisor Cummings which is just making its way through Parliament: the Advanced Research and Invention Agency Bill. ARIA will be funded with at least £800m over four years, will not be subject to the Freedom of Information Act (2000) and also not to Government procurement rules. Given the scandals over the procurement of PPE and the opaqueness of ARIA, it will, in all likelihood, serve as a "cashpoint in the sky for Tory friends and donors.

[Harry Ziegler](#)

6. The Lucas Plan

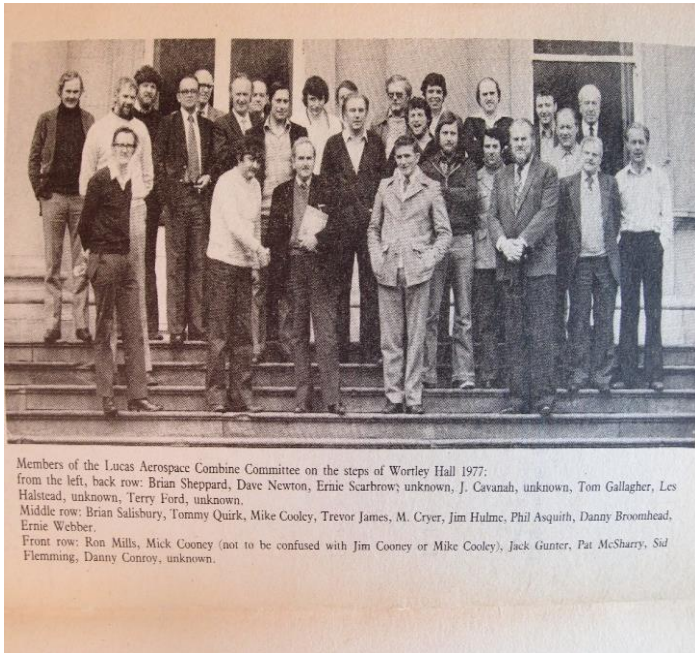
From the TUC Pensioners meeting 17.3.2021

The Guest Speaker to the meeting was John Routley, one of the original shop stewards involved in the initiative now known as "The Lucas Plan", at Lucas Aerospace in the 1970s.

The plan was produced by the shop stewards, following the company's announcement that thousands of jobs were to be cut to enable "industrial restructuring in the face of technological change and international competition".

A group from nine different unions on thirteen different sites got together to produce the plan by consulting their members and basing it on the knowledge, skills and experience of the workforce. The idea was to develop the production of different, socially useful products instead of having to face redundancies. This 'Combine' of union members became a representative body for the mixture of staff and manual worker unions to have

a coherent, unified voice especially when responding to management views on working conditions, wages and pensions, which previously were often used as divide and rule tactics.



Members of the Lucas Aerospace Combine Committee on the steps of Wortley Hall 1977:
from the left, back row: Brian Sheppard, Dave Newton, Ernie Scarbrow; unknown, J. Cavanah, unknown, Tom Gallagher, Les Halstead, unknown, Terry Ford, unknown.
Middle row: Brian Salisbury, Tommy Quirk, Mike Cooley, Trevor James, M. Cryer, Jim Hulme, Phil Asquith, Danny Broomhead, Ernie Webber.
Front row: Ron Mills, Mick Cooney (not to be confused with Jim Cooney or Mike Cooley), Jack Gunter, Pat McSharry, Sid Flemming, Danny Conroy, unknown.

[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA-NC](#)

About half of the company's original work involved military contracts depending on public funding which the "Combine" delegates argued would be better spent on socially useful products rather than having to make redundancy payments. For example, medical equipment, transport vehicles, and energy conservation involving the development of heat pumps, solar cell technology, and wind turbines etc.

This Alternative Corporate plan received worldwide support from a multitude of organisations which also included funding from charitable bodies and others. Aspects of the plan became the basis for useful Education and Training courses such as the Centre for Industrial Systems (CAITS) at North East London Polytechnic and the Unit for the Development of Alternative Products (UDAP) at Coventry Polytechnic.

As Brian Salisbury (former member of the shop stewards committee) says, "the products suggested are now mainstream and Lucas Aerospace no longer exists having been a victim of poor unaccountable management and a sad lack of successive governments' industrial strategy! Ref: "Lucas Aerospace , Our History" talk by John Routley,

"The Story of the Lucas Plan" by Brian Salisbury, Former member of the Lucas Aerospace Shop Stewards Combine Committee. lucasplan.org.uk
"The Lucas Plan" Wikipedia

Perhaps this is an idea that should be revived for the 21st century given there are likely to be many unemployed and redundant workers following the impact of the current pandemic.

[Rowena Dawson](#)

7. The state of Ageing

The Centre for Ageing Better has recently put out a report *The State of Ageing in 2020*. It examines the effect that inequalities had on the Covid 19 pandemic but also the impact that Covid had on those inequalities. It legitimately stresses that Covid merely deepened inequalities, but that it did not create them.

Even before the pandemic, the improvement in life expectancy was stalling – and disability-free life expectancy was going backwards. People are living longer in poor health than in the past. A man who turned 65 in 2010 could expect to live two years longer than someone who reached the same age in 2001. Over the same period, 65-year-old women gained 1.6 years. But since then, progress has slowed: since 2010, 65-year-old men have gained just an extra one year in life expectancy. For women, it is even less: 0.7 years. Disability-free life is also now actually declining; particularly among women. The average baby girl in 2018 could expect to live to just 62 without a disability or health condition, down from almost 65 in 2010.

For those in the poorest areas of the country the story on health is much worse. Women in the wealthiest parts of the country are likely to live 16 years longer in good health than those in the poorest. In the poorest parts of the country, a baby girl has a disability-free life expectancy of just 51. The average man and woman aged 65 can expect just six years longer free of disability compared to the 12 years their wealthiest peers will enjoy. In addition, there is a North/South divide. Someone aged 65-69 living in the North East can expect 8.3 more years disability-free – nearly three years less than someone living in the South East. This health-wealth gap risks becoming wider still in the wake of COVID-19. Poverty and financial insecurity, employment, and the places people live all affect physical and mental health directly. They also affect behaviours like being physically active, smoking, having a poor diet and drinking too much. Without action COVID-19 will accelerate health inequalities. Future years may bring not only a further reduction in disability-free life expectancy, but a larger gap between the richest and poorest. (Disability-free life expectancy: ONS (various years), Health state life expectancy at birth and at

age 65 years by local areas
<https://www.ons.gov.uk>)

The type of housing that people have has an impact on their health. More than two million people aged 55 or older are living in a home that endangers their health or wellbeing. During this pandemic, many have spent more time in their homes than before. For some, this has had positive implications: nine in ten workers who were able to work at home during lockdown said they would like to continue to do so to some degree. For too many people, their home is actively damaging their health. There are 4.3 million homes in England that do not meet basic standards set by government. They are excessively cold, or damp, or contain hazards that put the occupant at risk of tripping and falling. At least half of them are headed by someone aged 55 or older (and a million have at least one child). In England, one in five excess deaths in winter is attributed to cold housing. Fixing all of these hazards would cost a total of £4.3 billion – an amount that could be paid back in savings to the NHS in just eight years. The report might have mentioned, but did not, that Government imposed cuts in local government funding played an important role in worsening housing conditions.

The proportion of people over the age of 50 in employment has risen over the last 20 years. The employment rate among people aged 50-64 has risen from 60% to around 73% since the year 2000. One in three workers are now aged 50 or older. This masks the large number of people who are out of work prematurely. Prior to COVID-19, there were nearly 800,000 people aged 50-64 who were out of work, but wanted a job. They were kept out of the job market by a range of barriers – ageism in recruitment, lack of flexibility, insufficient support for their health conditions and managing caring responsibilities – but there were at least jobs to be filled. COVID-19 risks bringing about a long-term unemployment crisis among the over 50s. This could stall – or even reverse – the progress in employment among workers at older ages. Surprisingly, the report does not explore the deleterious impact of casualization and precarious work. Millions of people risk struggling with long-term unemployment in the years before they are able to draw a pension, leading to a rise in pensioner poverty. This effect is exaggerated as State Pension Age rises relentlessly regardless of the ability of people to either find or have the health to do jobs.

The report, perhaps inevitably, does not deal with some of the political solutions to this crisis. There would need to be a generous reshaping of the

benefit system, more social housing of a decent quality and a dramatic improvement in employment law that protects the interests of all workers but has elements that particularly are relevant to the elder worker. Perhaps most importantly, the removal of restrictions on Trade Unions would help raise the wages of the poorest paid and combat the uncertainties of casualization.

[Julian Atkinson](#)

8. 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.

For more information
please contact Julian Atkinson
e-mail: secretary@ucu-em-rmb.org.uk
telephone: 01773 532105

website: www.ucu-em-rmb.org.uk
twitter: @ucu-em-rmb

East Midlands Branch officers and committee

Chair: Angus McLardy: chair@ucu-em-rmb.org.uk
Vice-Chair: Rowena Dawson vice-chair@ucu-em-rmb.org.uk
Secretary: Julian Atkinson: secretary@ucu-em-rmb.org.uk
Assistant Secretary: Rob Kirkwood
asst-secretary@ucu-em-rmb.org.uk
Treasurer: Brian Hambidge treasurer@ucu-em-rmb.org.uk

Equalities officer: Judy Wills
equalities-officer@ucu-em-rmb.org.uk
Membership: Greg Cejer membership@ucu-em-rmb.org.uk
Newsletter: Bob Haskins
newsletter@ucu-em-rmb.org.uk
East Midlands regional UCU committee
representatives: Brian Hambidge, Rob Kirkwood