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Are you getting all the info?

If UCU HO has your email you should also receive regular updates on campaigns from UCU head office as well as occasional branch emails. If this is not the case let us know and we can check with the H.O on your behalf.

1. Branch Meeting

A branch meeting is planned for Tuesday 11th June 2024.

It is hoped that this will be a hybrid/zoom meeting. Papers will be distributed to members in time for the meeting.

Branch members can contact officers, reps and delegates by the emails listed in this newsletter; the general branch email address is ucu.swest@gmail.com and members are welcome to contact us anytime.

Tony Staunton chair SWRMB

2. Welcome to all members new to this branch since the previous newsletter.

New branch members are asked if they would like to introduce themselves.

Tilly Mortimore has just retired from her position of Visiting Researcher at the School of Education, Bath Spa University. Previously she was a Senior Lecturer in SpLD/ Dyslexia and Inclusion at Bath Spa. Tilly has conducted a range of research into SpLD/dyslexia, multilingualism, inclusion and vulnerable learners. She uses mixed methods. She will continue her pro bono work for the British Dyslexia Association and PATOSS and is always happy to support work in this field.”

Barbara Berrington “I'm not sure how much I shall be able to be involved but have found the UCU very helpful more than once in the past. After working as an English lecturer at Newbury College, I thoroughly enjoyed a 'retirement PhD' at Reading University - and? inevitably was drawn into lecturing there (in Art History). But yes, I do miss all my lovely colleagues in both.

Obviously my nearest university communities are Bristol and UWE (and current UCU members I've met in both have been very friendly and welcoming too).”

Barbara Chambers. I was employed by Bristol City Council as a part-time tutor of Adults from 1979 until 2002. After that, I fought for redundancy pay with support from Nova Gresham (Regional Support Officer, South West Regional Office at that time) and won my case in March 2004. I was lucky to teach in Adult/Community Education at a time

when there were lots of local Adult/Community Education Centres in Bristol, many of them in local schools. 'Vocational' and 'non-vocational' courses were taught alongside one another in such centres with adults of all ages moving from one type of course to the other, following their interests rather than an 'instrumental' agenda. Some adults who had failed their 11Plus achieved O'Levels/GCSEs and A'Levels and grew in confidence. In particular women started to thrive in this atmosphere and found their feet. Some adult learners made it to University but that was not the be all and end all. It was truly education 'From the Cradle to the Grave'.

Newsletters: these newsletters are sent to all branch members for whom we have email addresses.

Email addresses: UCU encourages us to use our home email when we retire.

For more information please contact:

ucu.swest@gmail.com
or contact the officers below:

Chair: Tony Staunton

tony.staunton@blueyonder.co.uk

Vice Chair: Mike Shaeff

m.sheaff@plymouth.ac.uk

Secretary: Mike Farmer

mikefarmer84@hotmail.com

Treasurer: John Daniell

john.daniell@btinternet.com

Membership: Jo Corke

ucu.swest@gmail.com

Returning Officer Barbara Segal

barbara.segal@phonecoop.coop

Environmental Rep Tony Staunton

tony.staunton@blueyonder.co.uk

Regional delegates: Margaret George
mmargaretg@gmail.com

Charles Henderson
charles.henderson@btinternet.com

Stephanie Tailby:
stephanie.tailby@uwe.ac.uk

reserve Mike Shaeff
m.sheaff@plymouth.ac.uk

TC Cheltenham Mike Farmer
mikefarmer84@hotmail.com

TC Gloucester: Ruth Amias
ruthamias2000@yahoo.co.uk

TC Bristol: Barbara Segal
barbara.segal@phonecoop.coop
and Stephanie Tailby:
stephanie.tailby@uwe.ac.uk

TC Taunton & W. Somerset: Charles Henderson
charles.henderson@btinternet.com

TC Plymouth: Tony Staunton:
tony.staunton@blueyonder.co.uk
and Mike Sheaff:

m.sheaff@plymouth.ac.uk

TC Mendip: Eleanor Jackson. c/o
ucu.swest@gmail.com

TC Torbay & SD vacant

SW NPC GAS Ruth Amias,
ruthamias2000@yahoo.co.uk

Barbara Segal
barbara.segal@phonecoop.coop

and Mike Farmer
mikefarmer84@hotmail.com

2. Catriona Scott



From SW Regional Office. It is with great sadness that I need to inform you that our colleague Catriona Scott passed-away unexpectedly on Thursday, April 18th 2024.

The Southwest regional team are shattered by this news, as we are sure many of you will be as well. All we can say right now is that we have lost a wonderful colleague and a dear friend.

Nick, Morin, Alison, Rob and Becca.
SW Regional Office

From David O'Toole.

I worked very closely with Catriona on the UCU South West regional team in Exeter for very nearly ten years. She was a colleague, a comrade and a close friend. Catriona was the consummate, hard-working professional in the office and a great laugh outside of it. I am still processing the fact that she has passed so young and my heart goes out to her friends, colleagues and family.

Dave O'Toole UCU Organiser. retired,
SWRMB

4. Cheltenham hosted the “Protect the Right to Strike” march and rally through Cheltenham on the 40th anniversary of the union ban at GCHQ. You can watch a video here; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lp61eRFZsk8>

The PCS with their banner rightly led the march; I saw trade unionists, with their banners, from Bristol Uni., Unison, Cheltenham TC, Scotland Unison, Tolpuddle branch, Wirral, London, GMB. Other reports can be read here:

<https://socialistworker.co.uk/news/unions-march-against-anti-strike-law-in-cheltenham/>

<https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/protect-the-right-to-strike-march-marks-anniversary-gchq-union-ban>



CC license
Jo Corke SWRMB

5. International Workers Memorial Day is commemorated throughout the world on 28th April.

This year the Cheltenham and District Trades Union Council remembered workers both at home and abroad who paid the ultimate price - those who left for work and never came home.



With Permission from C&DTUC

This year's theme for International Workers' Memorial Day is 'The Climate and Workers' Health'. 2023 was the hottest year on record and rising temperatures and pollution bring with them their own dangers. Heat stress caused by climate change, UV radiation, air pollution, industrial accidents and vector-borne diseases are just some of the dangers workers face.

Simon Smith
President, C&DTUC

6. Branch Officer and delegates needed.

The Branch has a number of vacancies following our recent AGM. We would welcome any volunteers to fill these roles.

Branch Equality Officer. To support the Branch in equality issues particularly in relation to retirement, pensions and older people. You would also represent the Branch at the UCU SW Regional Equalities Committee.

Trades Council delegates:

Exeter Trades Council
https://www.facebook.com/ExeterTradesCouncil/?locale=en_GB

Bridgwater Trades Council
<http://www.bwdtuc.org.uk/node/1>

Torbay & S Devon Trades Council
<https://www.facebook.com/torbaytuc/>

N Devon & Torridge Trades Council
(this is a new Trades Council)
<https://www.facebook.com/IfacombeandDistrictTUC/>

National Pensioners' Convention (NPC) delegate(s) for Devon NPC
<https://www.npcuk.org/regions>

Mike Farmer SWRMB

7. SW Region Equalities Committee.

At the 2023 Equality Conference the Disabled Members' Standing Committee (DMSC) promoted their Accessibility as Standard' Checklist, <https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/13507/Accessibility-as-Standard-checklist> which recognises that access and accessibility remain an issue that impacts members both individually and collectively.

Here are a couple of suggestions from our branch members.
From **Eleanor Jackson**. The unfussy (sans serif) font **Arial 14** (the one used for this newsletter) is a good one for those of us with vision-loss.

From **Liza Sentence**. Hearing Aids
-Persevere with your hearing aids: don't leave them unused in a drawer.

-Talk to your audiologist, they can tweak your devices until you feel comfortable with them. Remember too that they will need cleaning and ask to be shown how to do this.

-Ask if there is an app you can have on your phone which allows you to adjust volume and direction as well as streaming phone calls and notifications to your hearing aids.

-Sounds will seem different to how you remember them; but the brain does adjust, it just requires perseverance.

BBC News: Deaf students in Devon lead awareness training across UK
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-devon-68553545>

.....
Following the 2023 Conference Kevin Daws, City of Bristol College and SW Region, organised an online meeting (17.4.24) for Branch officers to attend the inaugural meeting of the new SW Regional Equalities Committee.

I attended for our branch. Those present agreed to organise working groups for each of the Equality strands which will act as member networks. We also agreed to produce a Regional Equalities Newsletter.

The plan is to hold a South West Equalities Conference in late September/early October which shall either be held as a hybrid event or an exclusively online event.

I am not our branch Equality Officer; we do not have one. Maybe it seems that Equality issues are not a big issue for our branch? The issues of Accessibility for our members with reduced mobility, vision-loss, and hearing-loss are important and we need to address them.

So here is your opportunity to support our branch Equality issues. Do get in touch if you want to find out more about this role.

Jo Corke SWRMB



8. Congress 2024.

Our congress delegate this year is Mike Farmer.

As retired educationalists I

guess we're all familiar with the way changes in technology have widened access to education and training. Perhaps the most famous example of this was the Open University, which opened up access to higher education to thousands for whom the conventional mode of learning (face to face in lectures and tutorials) was not possible. Technological advances, together with changing attitudes to what should be regarded as 'proper' education, led to a range of new methods of teaching and learning in colleges and universities.

But the same could not be said for modes of meeting in trade unions. The dominant mode continued to be the in-person, face to face meeting, albeit with some technological improvements, such as those for members with hearing impairment (induction loops and/or signers). If some members were unable (or unwilling) to get to the meeting, for whatever reason, this was regarded as an unfortunate but unavoidable fact of trade union life.

All that changed in 2020 with the COVID pandemic, which accelerated advances in the technology for on-line meetings (Zoom, Teams etc), a by-product of which was that some members who had previously been excluded, could now participate. Not all members are comfortable with meetings that are solely on-line (just as not all students like distance learning). Several trade unions,

however, rather than reverting to 100% in-person meetings are now using 'hybrid' meetings, where some members attend in-person, and others on-line. Our branch held its first hybrid branch meeting in April, where some members met physically (in Plymouth) while others participated on-line. Although more challenging to organise and manage than a conventional meeting, this appeared to work well, and certainly enabled a number of members to participate which could not have travelled to Plymouth, whilst at the same time providing the benefits of personal contact for those who could.

UCU nationally is now holding hybrid meetings for many of its committees and groups, but has not yet moved to holding a hybrid annual Congress. I'm pleased to report that the NEC bringing a rule change to Congress in May to facilitate a hybrid Congress in future. Our branch is bringing a motion to Congress to take this further, so that holding a hybrid Congress would become UCU policy.

Our motion reads as follows, and I'll report back on how it went in a future newsletter.

Meetings Policy

Congress believes that the COVID pandemic raises significant challenges for UCU in protecting the health of its members (and employees) while facilitating participation in union-organised meetings.

Congress notes the wider availability of technology that enables hybrid meetings, and of advice and training in managing such meetings;

Congress therefore calls for all UCU meetings at national and regional level to be hybrid meetings, in order to:

- 1. Ensure maximum involvement in democratic debate and decision-making;*
- 2. Meet the desire of some members to meet in-person;*
- 3. Meet the desire of other members to meet on-line, particularly for health reasons;*
- 4. Reduce the environmental impacts arising from travel to meetings.*

Mike Farmer SWRMB

9. Retired Members Committee

I was elected last year to the national Retired members' Committee for a two-year term. This is a new national committee, and we are still working out how best to influence UCU policy on matters that are of interest to retired members. We've been looking at a number of matters in our first year. In response to requests from branches we developed a Branch Handbook for retired members' branches, which has now been published at <https://www.ucu.org.uk/RMBHandbook> and which we hope will provide useful to branches. As part of this work, I drafted a new set of model rules for retired members' branches, which has now been endorsed by the Committee and will be sent to the NEC for consideration. Fortuitously, the NEC is going to review model branch rules anyway.

The Committee gets reports from UCU representatives on a range of pensioners' bodies, including the TUC, the Public Services Pensioners'

Committee, and the National Pensioners' Convention. Other topics that the committee has discussed include, bus transport, health & social care, and staff development for UCU retired members' branch representatives.

However, as you might expect, the most significant areas of discussion have been around pensions. On the state pension we've looked at the impact of the use of different inflation indices on the annual uprating of pensions, noting that CPI (which is currently used) is less generous than RPI (which used to be used) and much less generous than average earnings. On USS we get regular updates, and it is particularly pleasing that UCU has achieved success in its long-running dispute with the employers. On TPS we also get regular updates, and two recent developments will be of interest to TPS pensioners. The first, which affects those who retired between April 2015 and March 2022 is the so-called 'McCloud Remedy' on a choice of Legacy or Reform scheme benefits. Those affected should be contacted by the TPS directly. The second, which affects all TPS pensioners, is that Capita, which has been administering the Scheme, has lost its contract, and will be replaced by Tata. Whether we will see any changes or improvements in how the Schemes is managed remains to be seen.

Finally, on TPS, the Committee is aware of some significant unfairness in the Scheme rules, the most egregious of which affects the surviving widows (or widowers) of TPS pensioners who retired before 2007 and who have subsequently died. These surviving partners are contacted each year by

the TPS to find out if they have subsequently remarried, or formed an enduring relationship. The Committee is therefore taking the following motion to the UCU Congress at the end of May, as part of the campaign to end such injustice.

Congress notes:

1. That recipients of TPS survivor pensions, where the TPS pensioner retired before 2007, are contacted annually by TPS and required to declare whether or not they have remarried or formed a new relationship and lose the pension if they have done so;

2. That this requirement can cause considerable distress to the survivor in receipt of a TPS pension;

3. That the withdrawal of the TPS survivor pension can cause financial hardship.

Congress believes:

a. That survivor pensions should not be withdrawn on remarriage or the formation of a new partnership;

b. That such a provision is an invasion of privacy and undermines the right to marriage and to a personal life.

Congress calls on NEC to work with other teacher unions in TPS to remove this provision so that survivors of TPS members who retired before 2007 are treated as favourably as survivors of TPS members who retired after 2007.

Mike Farmer SWRMB

10. Fiscal drag revisited.

Comments from readers are always welcome, this especially so as this was from a former colleague at UWE.

Hi Jo, I think the definition of Fiscal Drag provided in the January 2024 newsletter is misleading; the **tax rate** is not part of the current story.

The simplest case: Fiscal drag has occurred when income recipients are identified as being liable to pay tax when **previously they had not earned enough to be liable to pay income tax.**

The marginal case at higher levels - the next step up - Fiscal drag occurs when a tax-payer's remuneration **increases such that her income now exceeds the level stipulated for the imposition of a higher rate of tax** (40% tax band).

What is critical here is that when someone's income rises at the boundaries of tax bands, taxation of incomes rises for them at more than the marginal rate - because tax brackets have not been adjusted in line with inflation.

In other words - Fiscal Drag is a stealth tax. This allows the Conservative government to say - "**We kept our promise not to raise income tax rates**" - while at the same time they have raised taxation on incomes.

Peter Wardley SWRMB

11. USS: benefits restored in full on 1 April 2024.

Although this does not affect retired members, it is good news for working members.

On 1 April 2024, members of the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) had their benefits restored in full. The restoration has come two years after employers forced through cuts to USS that meant guaranteed benefits were slashed by on average 35%.

UCU Updates

12. Teachers' Pensions | For Members

My Pension Online is the Teachers' Pension online portal designed to help you manage your pension more efficiently.

<https://www.teacherspensions.co.uk/members/faqs/my-pension-online/my-pension-online.aspx>



13. Ukraine Independence Day 24th August.

“A referendum on the Act of Declaration of Independence was held in Ukraine on 1 December 1991. An overwhelming majority of 92.3% of voters approved the declaration of independence made by the Verkhovna Rada on 24 August 1991.”

Wikipedia.



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14. Editor's Note.

Contributions to the newsletter are welcome. Jo Corke SW RMB

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