



Safe inside campaign: prison safety summit

As part of the work that UCU is undertaking with Joint Unions Prisons Alliance (JUPA) <https://www.ucu.org.uk/jupa> we are looking to ensure that staff safety and decency is taken seriously. As part of the Safe Inside Campaign JUPA has called a Prison Safety Summit which will be taking place on the 25 February.

In attendance at the summit will be politicians, HMPPS, HSE and providers from education and health, with members representing different workers within prisons giving testimony. The aim of the summit is to develop a more robust and effective approach to health and safety systems for all workers within prisons and is part of our Safe Inside Campaign.

Billy Bragg – jail guitar doors initiative

We are excited to announce that UCU is currently developing a project with the singer-songwriter and activist Billy Bragg.

The joint UCU/Jail Guitar Doors music project will look to bring together our members and Billy's long-standing initiative in some of the prisons you work in: <http://www.jailguitardoors.org.uk>

The aim of the project is to raise the profile of prison education both within and beyond the union, help to improve the culture and

atmosphere of prison workplaces and have a positive impact on the wellbeing of both staff and students. We believe that this exciting project will positively enhance staff/student relationships and help to improve the environment for all.

We are asking for your help and ideas in supporting us to successfully pilot and roll out this project by responding to the short survey:

<https://yoursay.ucu.org.uk/s3/Questions-for-prison-educators>

MPs call for more stable contracts

UCU has welcomed calls from the Justice Select Committee for more stable prison education contracts and increased training for prison governors, but said bolder reform is needed to ensure prison educators are able to do their jobs effectively.

The union was commenting on the committee's report on prison governance, <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/justice-committee/inquiries/parliament-2017/inquiry/> which highlighted concerns about new one-year 'Dynamic Purchasing System' contracts for prison education.

UCU said the uncertainty created by constant retendering was 'bad for staff and bad for prisoners' and welcomed the committee's recommendations for longer, more stable contracts and improved accountability.

Giving evidence on behalf of UCU, Acting General Secretary at the time, Paul Cottrell said: *'If prisoners are engaged in purposeful and satisfying activity, their social and communication skills improve. Their self-respect improves, and that will affect the whole culture of the institution and behaviour in the institution more broadly. It is actually in the interests of prison officers to understand and support education. That needs to be built into their training, just as it does into the governor's training.'* He expressed concern that the success of the new arrangements would depend on governors' interest in and commitment to education.

UCU said the recommendation for more training for prison governors and their teams was also welcome, but said bolder reform was needed to ensure that prison educators could do their jobs effectively. It said the process of competitive tendering for prison education diverted resource away from the front line and made it harder for providers to retain staff and invest in their development. The union called for a wider review of how prison education is delivered to ensure the government's approach is meeting the needs of prisoners and education staff.

Witnesses emphasised to us the importance of education being properly integrated into the rest of the prison regime. Paul Cottrell, Acting General Secretary, University and College Union, gave evidence to the select committee that *'The prison regime always comes first and controls the education. The need to integrate education provision with the regime is the really big challenge that we have never got right, and I think it is probably getting worse, rather than better.'*

(Continued overleaf)

Following release of the report, UCU general secretary, Jo Grady, said: *'The committee is right to recognise that short-term contracts for prison education are bad for staff and bad for prisoners. The uncertainty of constant re-tendering makes it harder for experienced and committed education staff to be retained. We welcome the committee's recommendations for longer contracts and improved accountability so there is more stability in how prison education is delivered.'*

'While the call for more training for prison governors is also welcome, we need bolder reform if we're going to ensure prison educators can do their jobs effectively. Prison educators are constantly being asked to do more with less, and competitive tendering diverts vital resource away from the front line.'

'It also makes it harder for providers to invest in staff development. We need a wider review of how prison education is delivered so we can ensure the government's approach is meeting the needs of staff and prisoners alike.'

The report goes on to conclude that education in prisons is an important part of the regime and the ministry needs to ensure that it retains a focus on this, and other purposeful activity, as well as safety and decency in prisons.

UCU – representing members in parliament

UCU is part of the Justice Unions Parliamentary Group who seek to lobby and raise issues relating to prison education as part of parliamentary business. Our next phase of work is looking to raise justice questions following the Safety Summit, working with MPs and Lords in raising the profile of prison educators including the development of proposals around a National Contract for prison educators and problems our members are experiencing with the implementation of the PEF.

UCU – representing members with employers

UCU full-time officials and representatives have been working hard in representing UCU members collectively at local consultation and negotiation forums over issues such as pay and grading, workload, health and safety. Look out for your branch's own newsletter on how progress is being made with your employer.

UCU – representing members with HMPPS

UCU met with the head of health and safety for HMPPS at the end of January. We have identified a potential escalation route for health and safety concerns directly to HMPPS via Health & Safety advisors who sit outside of the prison hierarchy (ie they report to HMPPS not governors or education managers).

This will hopefully address the employers' lack of proactivity on

addressing health and safety concerns because of what they perceive to be constraints of the contract and not wanting to antagonise the governor (or that they simply don't see it as a priority). Once we have received the list of HMPPS H&S contacts and where they are located, we will draft a safe escalation route and coordinate our local H&S reps so they know who their relevant HMPPS contact is.

Prison education annual meeting: 20 March 2020

This is an opportunity for reps (prisons without reps can send someone) to discuss the challenges that prison education staff face and hear reports from prisons and UCU nationally. Billy Bragg will be attending to talk about the joint UCU/Jail Guitar Doors music project.

To register: <https://www.ucu.org.uk/prisonedmeeting>

The deadline for registering is Friday 6 March. The meeting will be held at UCU HQ. UCU will pay reasonable travel expenses and lunch is provided.

UCU needs you

If you would like to help your branch there are various ways to get involved.

- Encourage colleagues to join UCU is a key way you can help – ask your local rep or contact Ronnie Kershaw rkershaw@ucu.org.uk for leaflets.
- If your prison doesn't have union reps, consider becoming a UCU rep or health and safety rep. Training and support is provided: www.ucu.org.uk/training
- Forward this newsletter to your colleagues

Membership benefits

1. Every day our trained local representatives, backed by full-time UCU officials, help to resolve hundreds of problems
2. UCU's legal scheme covers **employment rights**, **personal injury** (free and covers workplace stress), and **immigration employment advice**.
3. 24/7 confidential support including counselling and financial assistance through Education Support

For membership benefits: www.ucu.org.uk/ucuplus Join: www.ucu.org.uk/join

Your UCU region can ONLY represent you on issues that occur after joining.