

FOR A FUTURE THAT DOESN'T COST THE EARTH



UCU Annual Environment Report

June 2015 – May 2016

UCU Annual Environment Report 2015-16

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Foreword

This is Graham Petersen's last report as our Environment Co-ordinator. Much of what follows is a report of Graham's dogged and patient work in developing our policy in four key areas:

- the transition to a low carbon strategy
- investment and divestment
- education and skills
- research and development.

Over recent years we have seen the building of a network of UCU environment representatives and has ensured that we are a key actor within a coalition of other unions in the TUC and Trade Unions for Energy Democracy in challenging the government's damaging energy policies. We have also built positive relationships with a range of organisations (eg. NUS, People and Planet, Share Action) on issues of divestment by the university sector and our pension schemes from fossil fuels, instead promoting investment in greener technologies.

Our representatives and Graham have been instrumental in organising the union's approach to sustainable development for our collective benefit and I commend this report to you as a testament to their hard work.

Michael MacNeil, UCU National Head of Bargaining and Negotiations

Introduction

2015-16 has been another busy year for UCU. A big thank you to all the members, reps and UCU officials who have contributed to the progress made in a difficult period for the education sector. On a personal note I am sorry to say that this will be my last annual report. In July I will be stepping down as Environment Co-ordinator after 7 years of supporting the union on this issue. The good news is that the work will be taken forward

by a newly appointed officer with specific responsibilities in this area. It is a welcome commitment at a time when the union's sustainable development role is more important than ever.

Graham Petersen, UCU Environment Co-ordinator, May, 2016

UCU organisation

UCU environment reps - In 2016 we experienced a modest growth of 4% in the number of environment reps. For the first time the number in HE exceeded those in FE (ref table below). This is a reflection of the scale of cuts in FE that took place during 2015-16. A number of our experienced reps left the sector as a result of redundancy. The rate of growth has inevitably slowed but an increase of 29% over 2 years is a testimony to the interest from UCU branches in representing members on this issue.

Environment Reps	HE	FE	Total
2014	54	56	110
2015	68	68	136
2016	75	67	142

In 2015 we produced guidance for branches on the appointment of reps to support attempts at our annual general meetings to find members willing to take on this role.

https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/885/Branch-guidance-on-environment-reps-Aug-15/pdf/ucu_branchenvrepguidance_aug15.pdf. We provide an advice service to our reps and also highlight their achievements.

UCU rep wins award – Elaine Ball is the Branch Environment Rep at Salford University. Her work in the school of Nursing, Midwifery, Social Work & Social Sciences won the Innovation and Engagement Award. She was nominated for engaging staff and students in a range of initiatives to reduce energy consumption and generate an awareness of environmentally friendly issues within the college. Elaine also worked with three Green Impact project assistants throughout the cycle, allowing these students to gain valuable work experience.

UCU regional networks - UCU continues to press for legal rights for union environment reps. In the absence of this it is even more important that reps are given support to represent the union. One way of developing this has been to set a target of ensuring that all 13 UCU regions and countries include a dedicated session on sustainable development. This process commenced in November, 2014 and currently Scotland and 8 regions have discussed the development of networks designed to support union activity.

'Meeting in a Regional forum to discuss climate and sustainability issues provides an opportunity for Green reps and others to network and share experiences of (a) trying to build sustainability into the educational curriculum and (b) work with institutions to develop environmental and procurement policies focussed on low carbon solutions in the context of their wider civic and environmental obligations.' Martyn Moss, UCU NW regional official

UCU national activity – In May UCU organised a national conference on 'The role of education institutions in tackling climate change'. It took place at the University of Manchester and a report is available on the UCU web site. The union was represented at a large number of national conferences related to the environment throughout the year.

UCU international union activity – UCU participated in the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) delegation to the Paris Climate Talks in December, 2015. We also represented Education International (EI), our global union federation. During the talks we organised a workshop on '*The Power of Education*'. An EI resource network has been established to facilitate the exchange of information between affiliates.

Transition to a low carbon economy

The UK has endorsed the Paris Agreement and it will become legally binding. The transition will not take place without a major overhaul of industrial strategy. The role of unions will be crucial to ensure this is done in a way that leads to green and decent jobs. Throughout the year we have highlighted the failure of government to address this. The latest illustration of this is the lack of any sustainability references in the Government's apprenticeship policy

UCU has worked closely with other trades unions as a member of the Trade Union Sustainable Development Advisory Committee (TUSDAC). A seminar in October with Greenpeace launched a joint report, Green Collar Nation, about building a **just transition** to a low carbon economy. The paper sets out the need for new industrial opportunities and skilled jobs to support a fairer shift, exploring the common ground between the trade union and environment movements in tackling climate change. There's added urgency, too, as the Conservative government sets about dismantling ten years of progress towards a green economy. <https://www.tuc.org.uk/industrial-issues/energy/workplace-issues/green-workplaces/green-collar-nation-just-transition-low>

Energy policy and fracking – We supported campaigns against Fracking as part of our 2015 Congress motion. These centred on the passion and commitment of Frack Free Lancashire which finally gave Councillors the confidence in the summer to decide in favour of the campaigners. UCU provided speakers at rallies in Preston, including Michael McKrell, UCU Branch Officer at the University of Central Lancashire.

<http://frackfreelancashire.org.uk/cms/>

UCU is a member of **Trade Unions for Energy Democracy (TUED)** that organised a successful meeting in Paris with Naomi Klein and Jeremy Corbyn. We are now looking to follow this up with discussions on energy policy with the Labour Party Shadow Energy team. We are also members of the **Campaign against Climate Change** and UCU presented at the October National Conference in Sheffield on 1 million climate jobs. UCU co-ordinated the **Greener Jobs Alliance** and at the 2016 AGM an expanded programme of work was agreed. This combined policy advocacy with the development of resources that address climate change and trade union responses.

Investment and divestment

Enabling a low carbon transition will cost a lot of money. That's why we have supported initiatives throughout the year that seek to address this. It can only be done if there is a significant shift in investment policy.

Institutional investment – UCU has supported the People & Planet (P&P) Fossil Free Campaign to get universities to move their endowments and other funds into more responsible investments. As of May, 2016 at least 20 universities have agreed to a full or partial divestment.

UCU members participated in the National Union of Students (NUS) survey on Responsible Investment and Divestment There are 2 reports - one on the state of investments across our education system, and another on staff and student attitudes towards fossil fuels and renewables. You can read them here <http://sustainability.nus.org.uk/divest-invest/our-reports>

Pensions - In October UCU hosted a meeting of members to discuss Responsible Investment in the Universities Superannuation Scheme. USS is one of the biggest pension funds in the UK and has been criticised for failing to address a number of ethical investment issues. UCU has been working with ShareAction on this and the meeting was another opportunity to raise our concerns with USS staff that were in attendance. This was followed by a joint meeting with ShareAction in May to establish how USS will respond to concerns expressed by members.

Education and Skills

Laurent Fabius, the French Foreign Minister and President of COP21, said that 'the role of trades unions will be decisive' and that 'training and job creation were the most important role for unions'. This recognition opens up opportunities to highlight the importance of the sector in delivering the transition to a low carbon economy. UCU lobbied hard at Paris to ensure that education was properly reflected in the agreement. The text reads:

'Parties **shall** cooperate in taking measures, as appropriate, to enhance climate change **education, training**, public awareness, public participation and public access to information, recognizing the importance of these steps with respect to enhancing actions under this Agreement.' (emphasis added)

The adoption by the UN in September, 2015, of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and the UNESCO Global Action Programme provide a platform to embed Education for Sustainability (EfS) and places a clear duty on member states to implement this in national programmes. Some institutions have started to do this but it is the exception rather than the rule in the tertiary sector.

Paul Marris, UCU Chair, Anglia Ruskin University branch, summed up what the institution is doing on education for sustainability:

'Anglia Ruskin was the first UK university to sign The Rio+20 Declaration of Higher Education Institutions, and we are pleased that the leadership of our university is committing serious resources to embedding Education for Sustainability across our curricula.'

UCU supported the NUS Responsible Futures EfS accreditation scheme that was piloted in 2015 in 8 universities and 5 colleges. This is designed to recognise achievements and UCU members were encouraged to support the initiative. We realise however, that without an effective framework of policy drivers there will be limited take-up. That is why we have been working within the English Learning and Sustainability Alliance (ELSA) to call for reforms in sector policy.

Research and Development

Sector research - UCU participated in research on the 'State of sustainability in the tertiary sector'. At the start of the academic year we published a joint report with the NUS and the Environment Association of Universities and Colleges (EAUC). The survey was circulated to UCU environment reps where a high response rate was recorded. On release of the report UCU noted that 'Some institutions are performing well but the overall picture is not encouraging. Education funding cuts must be reversed and a strategic framework put in place to ensure institutions deliver for students, staff and their communities.' There are 2 reports - one on the state of investments across our education system, and another on staff and student attitudes towards fossil fuels and renewables. You can read them here <http://sustainability.nus.org.uk/divest-invest/our-reports>

The role of R & D – The Paris Agreement highlighted the importance of research activities as a vital part of making the energy transition. For example, the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has made it clear that future investments in research, development and demonstration will be the determining factor for the cost of emissions reductions policies, in particular the further development of renewable energy, as well as in key areas like smart grids and energy storage.

Training, resources and fundraising

Environment rep training – In previous years we have run a number of training programmes for environment reps. This year we were unable to recruit sufficient numbers for the day release courses offered. This is unfortunate but reflects the fact that most existing reps have now completed some training, plus the increasing difficulty of obtaining paid release. Until environment rep training is put on a statutory footing UCU is investigating opportunities to provide on-line training resources and courses.

Environment rep handbook - At Annual Congress in May, 2014 we launched our Handbook - 'Staff Organising for Sustainability.' The guidance has been produced as a resource for existing reps and to help in the recruitment of more. The main message is that there can be no effective staff engagement without representation. A hard copy has been sent to all reps and branches and is available on the website at:

<https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/7996/The-UCU-environment-rep-handbook>

Bi-monthly newsletter – We publish a newsletter six times a year which is sent to over 600 contacts. It also goes out on UCU circulars to all our branches.

Website – The environment page on the UCU site contains a range of videos and other resources that reps can use in their workplace and communities.

<https://www.ucu.org.uk/environment>

Membership advice – During the year we dealt with a range of sustainability enquiries.

Greener Jobs Alliance – UCU is a founding member of the GJA. A new web site and resource materials for environment reps will be launched at UCU congress in June, 2016

<http://www.greenerjobsalliance.co.uk/>

EAUC Sustainability Exchange - The EAUC is a membership organisation that is an important advocate for the sector. One of its services is the Sustainability Exchange. UCU is a founding partner of the Exchange and we recommend that reps access the wide range of resources to be found on the site. <http://www.sustainabilityexchange.ac.uk>

Fundraising - A big thank you to the UCU Greener Jobs Alliance Teams that helped staff the Workers Beer Company bars at Glastonbury and Latitude festivals in 2015. Their fundraising helped resource the work programme for 2015-16. This included developing the Greener Jobs Alliance web site and resource materials . It also supported UCU attendance at the Global Labour Institute Summer School in Northern College, Barnsley in July, 2015. The teams raised £1,232 and were co-ordinated by Becca Richards in the SW region office.

Looking forward to 2016-17

Following the annual congress in June 2016, UCU will draft up a work plan for the next academic year. It is likely that the work plan will focus on work:

- for a just transition to a low carbon economy;
- on divestments and responsible investment;
- with a particular emphasis on developing relevant work on education and skills; and
- building our representative structure.

Contact us – UCU is the largest trade union and professional association for lecturers, learning support staff, academic related staff, trainers, researchers and managers working in the UK. Our 120,000 members are employed mainly in universities, colleges of further education, colleges of higher education, and in adult, prison and land-based education. We also have members in the private sector, for example in private training agencies and language schools, as well as members working on a freelance basis. Students training to teach in post-school education also belong to UCU.

For further information related to this annual report please contact:

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