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Welcome to the June newsletter. This is our annual congress special edition. It has been another busy year for UCU's environment work and you can read all about it in the link to our annual report below. It is also my last newsletter as Co-ordinator as I will be stepping down in July. I'm pleased to say that the work will be taken on by a new UCU appointment and future updates will appear on the Environment page of the website.

1. UCU / NUS Academic Conference Report

On May 13, 'The role of education institutions in tackling climate change' conference took place. The event was held at the University of Manchester and attended by 70 academics and students. It was chaired jointly by Michael MacNeil, UCU National Head of Bargaining and Negotiations, and Piers Telemacque, Vice President of NUS. A range of speakers presented around the 3 themes of:

- Climate change and the Curriculum
- Climate change and Research and
- Climate change and Finance

The final plenary was addressed by Lisa Nandy, MP, and Shadow Energy Minister. Lisa spoke about the role of education and the green economy. She stressed the importance of trades unions taking the lead and referred to the "fantastic contribution of the 1 million climate jobs campaign".

The event was audio recorded and further details including the speaker presentations are available here: <http://sustainability.unioncloud.org/articles/exploring-climate-change-and-education-with-ucu>

Additional information including the audio links to all the speaker presentations can be found at:

<http://sustainability.unioncloud.org/articles/exploring-climate-change-and-education-with-ucu>

2. UCU Annual Environment Report 2015-16

Launched this month, the report highlights the range of work carried out during the academic year. In a period of challenging times for the sector we have continued to strengthen our organisation and policy responses. Our regional and country network has continued to develop and we have increased our number of environment reps to 142.

A copy of the report can be found here: https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/8119/UCU-annual-environment-report-2016/pdf/ucu_environmentreport2016_may16_.pdf

3. USS Climate Assembly Report

70 members of the Universities Superannuation Scheme attended this event organised by UCU and ShareAction, held on May 9th at University College London. It was an opportunity for USS members to find out about how the pension scheme is addressing responsible investment in the light of the Paris Climate Agreement. After a presentation by the USS leadership team an expert panel posed a number of searching questions about the operation of the pension scheme. UCU members on the panel included Jimmy Donaghy, Chair of the UCU Superannuation Working Group, and Kevin Anderson, Deputy Director of the Tyndall Research Institute.

Bill Galvin, USS Chief Executive Officer, said that USS accepted that climate change was a financial risk. However, the legal advice provided in 2016 was that financial returns still took precedence over other considerations like climate change. <https://www.uss.co.uk/how-uss-invests/responsible-investment/approach>

It is difficult to see how in the light of this the USS Equities portfolio can currently be made consistent with the decarbonisation requirements of Paris. In other words, as USS has indicated to UCU previously, it would be perfectly possible for the carbon density of the portfolio to go **up in the future** as well as down due to this interpretation of fiduciary duty.

In conclusion, Bill Galvin, said that USS had found the event useful and made a commitment to participate in an annual meeting of members. He also agreed that the member survey would be undertaken in full consultation with UCU. The necessity to keep this issue in the spotlight was underlined by the recent study in Nature Climate Change which indicates that up to \$2.5 trillion could be wiped off the value of financial assets.

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/apr/04/climate-change-will-blow-a-25tn-hole-in-global-financial-assets-study-warns>

4. Fracking and divestment decisions

First – the bad news. The focus of the anti-fracking campaign has switched to North Yorkshire. The first fracking operation in England since a ban was lifted in 2012 has been approved. North Yorkshire County Council considered a bid by Third Energy to extract shale gas at a site near Kirby Misperton in Ryedale. UCU branches in the region are encouraged to make contact with local groups opposing this form of fossil fuel extraction. Further information can be obtained from: <http://frack-off.org.uk/social-media>

Next – the good news. Lancaster University announced they will be divesting £1million and reinvesting into "new technologies as part of our commitment to environmental sustainability". This makes Lancaster the first UK University to reinvest this much, marking a solid commitment against companies which profit from environmental destruction.

5. UCU Annual Congress 2016

This takes place in Liverpool on 1-3 June. There are a number of motions that will be discussed that will help shape our sustainability work for the next academic year. A fringe meeting on Apprenticeship policy will include a presentation on green skills.

We will have an Environment stall at the Congress and delegates are urged to pay us a visit. It is a good opportunity to update our records on who is representing the branch. Those branches who are planning their AGMs and who don't currently have an environment rep may find our current guidance useful.

https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/885/Branch-guidance-on-environment-reps-Aug-15/pdf/ucu_branchenvrepguidance_aug15.pdf

6. Greener Jobs Alliance

The GJA will be launching a new web site on 1 June 1. This will go live at the UCU annual congress. The site contains a range of resources including an online course called Climate Change Awareness. It contains 4 modules and is free. It is aimed at trades unionists and anyone wishing to improve their knowledge of the issues around climate change. There will also be a launch at the Green Jobs workshop at the Tolpuddle Martyrs festival on 18 July 18.

From 1 June the site can be accessed here: www.greenerjobsalliance.co.uk

7. Energy Policy

Trade Unions for Energy Democracy arranged a meeting this month to discuss union perspectives on energy. A paper entitled '**The public ownership of the energy system**', published by the Public Services International Research Unit, was discussed. The paper sets out the advantages of public ownership; the extent of public ownership in other countries; how the process of returning to the public sector could work in the UK – taking full account of EU law; and calculates realistic estimates of the cost, the possible impact on debt, and the scale of the benefits. It is a welcome addition to the debate on an alternative industrial strategy.

<http://www.psiu.org/reports/public-ownership-uk-energy-system-%E2%80%93-benefits-costs-and-processes>

It follows on from a TUED paper that explores the problems with carbon pricing as a contribution to energy and industrial policy. A summary, plus a link to the paper can be found on this blog:

<http://www.hackneyenergy.org.uk/2016/04/11/carbon-pricing-a-bridge-to-nowhere/>

The National Audit Office has issued a damning report on the **Green Deal Scheme**. Meg Hillier, chairwoman of the public accounts committee, said the report shows ministers and officials had little idea how to implement the scheme.

"The Department of Energy and Climate Change has been flying blind when it comes to implementing the green deal and energy company obligation (ECO)," she said. "The schemes have cost over £3bn to date, but the department has achieved little energy savings compared to previous schemes," she said.

Improving energy efficiency in the UK's 27 million homes, which are responsible for more than a quarter of the country's energy demand and greenhouse gas emissions, is seen as key to tackling climate change, energy security and fuel poverty.

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/apr/14/green-deal-scheme-did-not-deliver-energy-savings-audit-finds>

8. Research

UCU has often stressed the role of research and curriculum on climate change. One of the feedback comments at our conference was that *'without evaluation of impacts on industry, curriculum change is a waste of time'*. A conference at Oxford University in September will bring together researchers, policy makers, businesses and members of civil society. The '1.5 degrees' conference will examine the impacts of warming of 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels and assess the feasibility of meeting the challenges in the Paris Climate Agreement.

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/apr/14/worlds-scientists-to-join-forces-on-major-15c-climate-change-report>

We are pleased to report that the campaign to exempt grants for academic research from new 'anti-lobbying' regulations has been successful. This potential attack on climate research was flagged up in our March newsletter.

https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/122957?reveal_response=yes

9. People & Planet University League 2016

UCU reps in HE are advised to check how their institutions intend to complete their returns on environmental and ethical performance. The methodology includes a 'Student and Staff Engagement' criteria. This contains a Trade Union section where points are awarded if the institution can show that:

'Invitations extended to recognised trade union environment reps (eg. Green Reps) or engagement with trade unions on sustainability issues'

Details, including checking on how your institution performed in 2015 can be found here:

<https://peopleandplanet.org/university-league>

10. Air Quality

Boris Johnson has been accused by his successor – Sadiq Khan – of holding back a report showing deprived schools were disproportionately affected by air pollution.

<http://www.energylivenews.com/2016/05/17/boris-johnson-accused-of-hiding-air-pollution-findings/>

The research done on schools should be replicated for colleges and universities. Many of those that are located in urban areas are likely to reveal equally damaging exposures.

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/may/19/why-air-pollution-in-schools-is-such-a-big-deal-and-what-to-do-about-it>

The standard of air quality in UK cities is scandalous. This revelation will do nothing to address the concerns that it is not being taken seriously. Hence the return to the Supreme Court by Client Earth over the failure of the government to strengthen national air quality plans.

Get in touch

If you are a UCU member looking for advice on sustainable development or have ideas for greening the FHE sector please let us know. Contact: Graham Petersen, UCU Environment Co-ordinator:

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