

## **AN INFORMATION BULLETIN FOR MEMBERS IN LONDON REGION**

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Dear London region UCU member,

Welcome to the latest edition of our London regional office newsletter, which we plan to produce on a termly basis through the year. You will have noticed that we are settling on a format for these communications and we would welcome any feedback or ideas you may have.

We have just completed UCU National Recruitment Week. This is the fourth such event the Union has run, and it is clear that they are proving successful. Your branches will have run events planned to focus attention on the need to increase the membership of the union, and thus increase our influence in your workplace. Even though we have termly target weeks if you work with colleagues who are not currently UCU members, please encourage them at all times to join through the union's website - [www.ucu.org.uk/join](http://www.ucu.org.uk/join)

In the coming months, depending upon the sector in which you work, you will be hearing more about Area Reviews in FE, and the Union's work against casualisation in HE. An update on the former is included in this newsletter.

Thank you for your support.

Una, Barry and Greg (Regional Officials)

### **The heart of the union—meet the reps**

**Dr. Shakuntala Banaji, London School of Economics**

Friends and fellow UCU members usually call me Shaku. I teach media, communication and development at the London School of Economics and have recently become vice-Chair of this branch alongside my longtime comrade Dave Morris. We met on a picket-line in my first year teaching at LSE, and froze together as a steady stream of staff and students came up to have conversations about our strike – and to question us about what we were doing! Dave's a lot more experienced and patient than I am, and I'm still learning from him.

I've been involved with workers movements and trade unions for almost as long as I can remember, because my parents were labour researchers and organisers. As an active member of several branches in two trade unions – the NUT and now UCU – over the past twenty four years, I've held various positions from department rep to treasurer, and have engaged actively in dozens of campaigns, negotiations, and plenty of individual case work.

For me, negotiating and doing case work are two of the toughest but also the most rewarding aspects of the job, while administration and paperwork are my least favourite. Nevertheless – having done everything from leafletting and stuffing envelopes to chairing meetings and carrying the banner at protests, I'm convinced that we learn something from every aspect of branch work, however mundane. I've also always been critical of aspects of the trade union movement worldwide, especially in relation to issues of BAME inclusion, and cultures of self-exploitation, and have worked hard with my colleagues in our branch to make these issues central to our practice. There's a long way to go yet.

### **David Morris, London School of Economics**

Like many of my UCU comrades Shaku is modest about her input for the Union with compassion and passion especially on issues of equality an example to us all in the Branch and the LSE. One of those driving forces for good, she keeps us all going during difficult negotiations keeping us focused and organized. This is one of the secrets of all good branches, working together all bringing our skills to play.

Shaku is right that we first meet on a picket line and it's those shared experiences that build comradeship that can last a life time but getting up off our knees standing up for justice, improved working conditions, better pay, protecting pensions and many other issues isn't all that our work as chair and vice-chair is about.

We are both involved in personal casework which is, for the individual member, possibly the most valuable element of our work and for us the most rewarding. Often individual members perhaps suffering bullying and harassment or injustice can feel desperate and alone and just need to know they have someone on their side.

I started my Union activism as a Health and Safety Rep for what was then Post Office Engineering Union (now CWU) in 1978 and served as branch and regional secretary for 10 years and I have seen many changes and attacks on the TU movement. My study at CWU training centre Alvescot Lodge allowed me access to HE and one day I hope to return and help others follow that path and be the next generation to stand up for justice.

## **Area Reviews of Post-16 provision in London**

As you are aware all London colleges are going through the Area review process which should be concluded by January 2017. Detailed information is scant as it would seem all decisions are being made behind closed doors. Some responsible Principals are keeping members informed but many are not.

The body set up by the FE commissioner to consult with the unions is a shambles and a formal complaint is being made to the Pan London group chaired by the London Mayor.

What we do know is that many proposals for merger are expected in January with most London colleges effected, The London Regional office will be working closely with your local representatives to ensure UCU member's interests are protected both during and following any mergers.

More information to follow in January when we are told final proposals will be shared with the unions.

## **Adult and Community Learning London review**

Running alongside the college's area review is a review of Adult and Community Learning in anticipation of the funding being devolved to the Mayor office. UCU have are being consulted and have submitted a position paper to the review, if you would like a copy of UCU submission please contact [nlee@ucu.org.uk](mailto:nlee@ucu.org.uk)

## **London claim - Capital Contract for All**

The London Regional Committee (made up of local representatives from London branches) have developed a London claim to tackle the issues that members have raised as their main issues - workloads, cost of living in London, casual contracts.

UCU want a common contract across all London colleges that ensures stable employment and a manageable workload. Details of the claim can be seen here:

[www.ucu.org.uk/media/8348/London-Calling/pdf/London\\_Calling.pdf](http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/8348/London-Calling/pdf/London_Calling.pdf)

Its UCU intention to launch a campaign in the New Year and are calling on all UCU branches to support the claim, your local branches will have the full details and many have already met to vote on their support. For those of you whose branches haven't as of yet please attend your next meeting.

As members you will know that year after year we have seen pay and terms and conditions attacked, Its UCU view that if area review purpose is to create 'colleges which are viable, sustainable and efficient' then colleges must take on board and act on members concerns.

*Una O'Brien, Regional Official*

## **Recruitment Week 1 - 2016/17**

Thank you to all the branches across the region that really pushed hard to improve our recruitment of new members during last week's drive. It was heartening to see all the new ideas being used and the understanding that without solid membership density our fight to improve terms and conditions will always be more difficult.

Some of the ideas being used in recruitment included a coffee and cake morning, open meetings for all staff to discuss how the UCU are ensuring there is protection for members terms and conditions during future mergers, staff room tours to meet non-members face to face, drop in advice surgeries, recruitment stalls, leafleting across campuses, and fresh materials and posters on the Union notice-boards.

Branches also confirmed that recruitment will not just be confined to target weeks but they will continue to endure the positive profile of the UCU continues to be kept at the top of the agenda.

Keep an eye out for the dates for recruitment week 2 in the term after the New Year and please make sure they you get in touch with region nice and early if you would like support in your college from your RO or RSO during the week.

*Ade Phillips, Regional Support Official*

**Education Support Partnership** is the new name for the joined forces of support charities Recourse, Worklife Support and The Teacher Support Network.



We're still here for anyone in further and higher education having combined our expertise and resources to become the only UK charity offering

dedicated support to the whole education workforce.

The aim of Recourse was to improve the wellbeing and effectiveness of anyone working in further and higher education and this continues. We offer a range of free, confidential services to anyone working in post-16 education and currently support over 60,000 individuals and 1000 organisations every year. We believe anyone working in the field deserves to feel at their best and we work to help individuals and organisations to boost health, wellbeing and happiness in and out of the workplace.

Stress and anxiety is growing in the sector. Concerns around workload, uncertainty around change, money pressures and managing difficult relationships are all common workplace issues we are called about. Our knowledge means we are uniquely placed to understand the pressures that education puts people under. That's why our experts offer a wide range of mental health and wellbeing support, including counselling, training, financial grants and advice.

Three in five people working in education tell us their work has suffered as a result of mental health problems including anxiety, stress and depression. Calls to our confidential helpline are increasing year on year. We provide independent support 24/7 through this free service, provided by trained counsellors as well as the possibility of sessions of face to face counselling. Whether wanting help with a workplace or personal crisis or looking for professional coaching and advice, we are here.

Call our free helpline anytime on 08000 562 561 and visit our website to find out more about how we can help you:

[www.educationsupportpartnership.org.uk](http://www.educationsupportpartnership.org.uk)



UCU policy is to develop self-organised networks for black and minority ethnic (BME) members in each region. This year a half-day CPD has been developed aimed at BME members/activists. The session is structured around the central concerns raised by BME members in the UCU survey of their experiences in 2015.

The session in the London region will be held on Tuesday 6 December 2016 in Room 4, at UCU headquarters, Carlow St, London NW1 7LH. The session will be open to BME members (and BME non-members who are considering joining UCU). The workshop will begin at 1pm and finish at 4.30 pm. Lunch will be provided at 12.30. All reasonable travel expenses will be recompensed. Contact Noreen Lee for full details [nlee@ucu.org.uk](mailto:nlee@ucu.org.uk)

## MEET THE TEAM

My name is **Karen Brooks** and I am UCU's Education and Training officer. I have responsibility for the UCU Reps training programme across England, Northern Ireland and the Devolved Nations.

UCU's programme trains over 1000 reps every year in areas such as representation, campaigning, organising, health and safety and bargaining. Along with other more specialised courses such as 'dealing with sexual harassment in the workplace' and 'tackling organisational stress'.

I have been involved with the trade union movement from the day I started work in back in the early 1980s. I became active in our local branch during my second week at work and from there held about every branch position possible, from branch secretary to the person who washed the cups after meetings.

I started working as a paid official back in 2006, since then I have worked for the TUC, and RMT both in learning and development roles, then, from 2009 for UCU. Initially as a branch development organiser, now as Education/training Officer.

I have been engaged in trade union education for over 25 years, first as a lay tutor for COHSE (confederation of health service employees) back in the 1980's, and later as a TUC tutor in FE.

It may sound cliché, but I am passionate about trade union education. Ensuring that our reps gain the knowledge, skills and confidence they need to effectively represent and organise members is the primary objective of the training team at UCU.

As many of you will be aware the government has cut funding to trade union education, consequently we are in challenging times. However, we will continue to ensure that our reps are trained in all aspects of their role and

that reps can access courses that are both relevant and, I hope, enjoyable.

For a full list of current courses please see the 'Activist education guide':

[www.ucu.org.uk/media/8255/Activist-Education-Guide-16--17/pdf/Activist\\_guide\\_Sep161.pdf](http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/8255/Activist-Education-Guide-16--17/pdf/Activist_guide_Sep161.pdf) or visit the training pages of the UCU website: [www.ucu.org.uk/training](http://www.ucu.org.uk/training)

### **UCU London Region Caseworker – Debbie Driscoll**

I am the Caseworker in the London Region providing advice and representation to UCU members and branch officials in the HE, FE and prison sectors. After getting my Masters in Political Science and a law degree, I qualified as a solicitor in 2000. I have specialised in employment law ever since and, prior to joining UCU, worked in private practice and for other trade unions. In addition to my casework duties, I provide UCU with preliminary assessments of the legal merits of employment law claims and make recommendations to the NEC Legal Panel. I have been at UCU for nearly two years now and I have been struck by the dedication and commitment of our members working in the Post-16 education sector. They are clearly under extreme pressure and, as you know, are often faced with unreasonable management decisions and procedures. My job is to defend members' individual interests in the workplace and I try to do it in a way that not only protects those interests but also puts HR departments on notice that members' employment rights will be protected. I have also worked with many of the London Region representatives and have similarly been impressed by their commitment to supporting their branch members. Hopefully I can continue to contribute to all the good work that is going on in the region.