

UCU Office, Imperial College

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Welcome to the latest newsletter for Imperial College UCU members.

Introducing your Branch Committee

Gemma Williamson, Communications Officer, ICUCU



I joined UCU at the beginning of the USS Pensions dispute. The industrial action in February/March 2018 was the first I've ever taken part in and I was delighted to meet many like-minded colleagues from

across Imperial coming together in response to this nonsensical threat which would impact on so many of us. The feeling of community, care and concern within this group was empowering and I found myself stepping forward as a speaker for the group at rallies and presenting items for our picket-line meetings. Since the strike action I have remained active and taken up the Communications Officer role on the branch committee. As a member of admin support staff I feel it is vital for our professional services staff to get involved with the union, our voices also need to be heard! I'm impressed by the impact of the Imperial UCU branch's input on several aspects of college strategy and pay frameworks. I'm confident that with the current level of support from the membership this can only continue to improve.

UCU Campaign Updates

The Fight for Our Pensions is not over!

(Michael McGarvey, Branch President, ICUCU)

Our pensions are not yet safe from attack from the employers. This is clear from their delaying tactics and excuses since the joint expert panel (JEP) produced its report, which was agreed by both UCU and UUK, in September.

The JEP confirmed what UCU and their actuaries *First Actuarial* said of the pension fund valuations USS made before our strike last year. It identified institutional bias, obfuscation in the provision of information to stakeholders and poorly understood, non-standard actuarial practices in the valuation of the scheme. It added that "greater weight should be given to the unique features and strengths of the higher education sector" and that the way UUK consulted over their appetite for risk "produced misleading results". The report shows that the employers manufactured the USS crisis, and vindicates our decision to take the biggest strike action in the history of Higher Education.

The JEP argue for a return to the 'September Technical Provisions' (the assumptions used to value the scheme's liabilities), estimating as an interim measure that a scheme paying "broadly similar benefits" would likely cost 3.2% of salary on top of the 26% of salary currently paid by employers and employees – meaning an increase in employee contributions by a little over 1% (expected

from April 2019). UCU believe the JEP should be implemented in full, and that any outcome should involve no detriment to UCU members.

USS, under the direction of CEO Bill Galvin, has refused to be bound by the JEP report, to address the deficiencies it identified, or to amend their March 2017 methodology. Instead, they propose a fresh '2018' valuation, and are consulting employers on what should underpin it. Imperial's response claims to support "retaining the current defined benefit structure - if sustainable from a financial and regulatory perspective." However, our dispute happened because there was no justification for their previous 'perspective'.

The JEP has begun the second stage of its work on the underlying issues. If it can persuade USS to improve its valuation methodology, these costs might conceivably be reduced. However, that would only affect the next valuation round in 2020, with the new report not expected until June 2019. Last year we faced the end of guaranteed salary-related pensions, with a lifetime cost to the average member of £200,000. A large majority of UCU members voted to end last year's unprecedented strike action in the belief that an independent JEP would prove that the employers' calculations were a fiction. Despite that panel's work, many employers are determined to continue attacking our pensions.

The central aim of the union's negotiators is to protect and defend our current pension benefits. Once they reach a position, members will decide the next steps - including whether or not to resume industrial action. Thanks to our incredible strike action last year – which led to a 20% increase in UCU membership across the UK and about a 60% increase in our branch - we are still in a

position to turn back the tide which has swept away a guaranteed pension for so many other workers. The fight is clearly not yet over.

Sign the petition calling for USS CEO Bill Galvin's resignation:

<https://www.change.org/p/uss-ucu-members-call-for-the-resignation-of-uss-ceo-bill-galvin>

USS Early Retirement - A reminder for USS members employed before March 2009

(Margaret Chambers, Pensions Officer, ICUCU)

Up until 31 July 2019, USS members employed before March 2009 who are eligible to take early retirement (i.e. are aged 55 or over) may exercise their right to do so. The College will make a voluntary payment to meet any actuarial reduction that USS might apply to reflect early retirement between ages 60 and 65. Members retiring between age 60 and 65 will therefore receive an unreduced pension while members retiring between age 55 and 60 will receive a pension which is actuarially reduced for the years before age 60. Any member wishing to take up the offer must notify their department and HR at least 3 months before 31st July 2019.

With effect from 1 August 2019 the College will cease funding unreduced pensions for USS members employed prior to March 2009 who choose to retire before the USS Normal Pension Age (currently age 65).

Short-term Contract Campaign

(Vijay Tymms, Committee Member, ICUCU)

Short term contracts for university employees are a major problem. For academic staff it is all too apparent. People start in short-term university jobs with only a vague idea of potential career progression and soon find

themselves applying for new jobs shortly after starting their current job. To land a permanent academic job typically takes several years and requires patience, tenacity, and a great deal of luck. Due to the instability that this can cause to their personal or family life, many passionate researchers and teachers end up reluctantly bailing out of academia and accepting jobs in the private sector which have longer term prospects. The problem is a structural issue to do with the way universities are run, but it is possible to change this.

The UCU National Office has started an Anti-Casualisation campaign. Our university makes extensive use of fixed term contracts with postdoctoral researchers particular badly off. A staggering 78% of research staff are on fixed term contracts. Teaching fellows are also affected and this is getting worse as the injection of cash into the Learning and Teaching Strategy sees a new batch of junior teaching fellows come in on temporary contracts as backfill for staff seconded to work on Curriculum Review.

We will be using last year's employment in HE survey results to form local and global plans to improve things next year. The campaign's principal feature is likely to be the request that open-ended contracts without a fixed end date become the normal form of employment, and that a bridging fund be established support those between grants. We welcome your views and ideas.

Panopto - Are you being watched? (Faye Dowker, Committee Member, ICUCU)

Many teaching staff at Imperial allow their lectures and some other teaching sessions to be recorded by the lecture capture system Panopto. Most of our lecture theatres and many other teaching spaces are now covered

by the system. Despite the extensive coverage and centralised control over this system, and despite repeated demands by ICUCU over many years, there is no negotiated agreement between Imperial College and UCU covering the uses to which this recorded material can be put. A negotiated agreement is needed to cover other issues in addition to usage, including control eg the ability of staff to stop a recording when needed — and serious [legal questions](#) including liability. (<https://www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/recording-lectures-legal-considerations>)

Teaching staff allow the use of Panopto *solely for the benefit of students' education*. We acknowledge the benefits to some students, especially those with disabilities, of being able to re- view lectures or watch missed lectures. There is a debate (<https://medium.com/ussbriefs/lecture-capture-dubious-scholarship-and-market-forces-6f6c8dcb960d>) to be had about whether the benefits of the universal availability of recordings outweigh the disadvantages of reduced lecture attendance. But there is no debate about the basis for staff's consent to be recorded: it is for educational purposes alone.

This does not seem to be the view of IC management, which is why a negotiated agreement with IC UCU is long overdue. For example, during the UCU strike over pension cuts in February and March 2018, a hasty threat of using Panopto recordings to replace lectures missed by striking staff was made by management, essentially threatening to break the strike by using the past labour of striking staff. This threat was withdrawn in this instance but, since there is no agreement, there is no guarantee that this will not happen in the future.

Furthermore, at a recent Joint Committee meeting with UCU, IC management stated that Panopto recordings have already been used both in a student appeal and in staff disciplinary matters. This isn't a future threat: it is already the case that Panopto recordings have been used for non-educational purposes, ones to which staff have not consented.

The name Panopto shares its etymological roots with the Panopticon designed by philosopher Jeremy Bentham. The Panopticon is an architectural design for visual surveillance ("opto") of all ("pan") prisoners in a penitentiary by a single watcher, for the purpose of control. The longstanding refusal of Imperial College management to engage with UCU and agree a joint policy on the use of audio-visual recording leads one to wonder whether Panopto shares more than just its name with that infamous control mechanism.

Help Us Stand Up To Racism

(Roddy Slorach, Branch Organiser, ICUCU)

The government used the Christmas break to manufacture a racist scare over a tiny number of refugees. Home secretary Sajid Javid deployed UK Border Force patrol boats to keep out people he called "[illegal migrants](#)" and we were told the armed forces "stand ready". All this for a total of 1,832 clandestine arrivals at UK southern coastal ports in 2017-18. That's 23% less than a year ago.

Meanwhile, a new far-right street movement led by the fascist Tommy Robinson is attempting to take advantage of the crisis over Brexit by scapegoating migrants, refugees and the Muslim community.

The Trump Presidency has inspired a wave of racism and a growth in the far right around the world. From Bolsanoro in Brazil and Le Pen in

France to the AfD in Germany, racists and fascists are moving from the political margins to centre stage. Governments and right-wing media are using migrants, refugees and Muslims as scapegoats for economic crises and wars they did not create.

From Germany to Greece, people are organising against Islamophobia and anti-Semitism and saying migrants and refugees are welcome. Recent opinion polls show that [hostility to immigration in Britain has fallen](#) in recent months.

The March Against Racism is on Saturday 16th March, United Nations International Anti-Racism Day, and London will join demonstrations in cities across Europe. UCU is one of many trade unions affiliated to Britain's biggest anti-racist organisation, [Stand Up To Racism](#). Our branch is proud of our multicultural society, and has been represented on recent protests.



We hope to do our part in helping to build another huge demonstration against all forms of racism on 16th March. Unity is our strength - so we must not let racism divide us. Please join us.