



# University of Bath UCU Officers Report

Annual General Meeting, 7 May 2024

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## Branch President - Ben Ralph

I took over the role of Branch President just under a year ago, in the midst of the most extensive UK-wide industrial action that the UCU has undertaken in two decades – baptism of fire barely begins to cover it. However, while I may have been fresh in my role as Branch President, years of work and struggle by the members, the branch committee and workplace contacts, and above all my predecessor as Branch President, Dai Moon, meant that the branch was organised, confident and comradely. I personally, and the branch more generally, owe Dai and Fran and the rest of the branch committee a huge debt of gratitude for their stewardship over four years of countless strikes and a global pandemic to boot.

Due to this organisation and preparation, and despite intransigent employers and at times a lack of clear strategy from UCU head office, our branch fared just about as well as any other during the Marking and Assessment Boycott (MAB). We significantly disrupted examinations across a number of faculties and departments, defended our members from the worst of the punitive deductions and providing support in full for those who needed it from our well-stocked local hardship fund. Despite the ultimate collapse of the UK-wide action, our local negotiating position was sufficiently strong that we stopped the University from using extensive scab marking, forced a pause in deductions after two months, extracted a public statement from management that diverged from the UCEA line, and ultimately recouped 75% of deducted wages in an exit deal. While this is not the place to litigate arguments about who or what ultimately caused the failure of the MAB, if there were a few dozen more branches like ours, the calculus of industrial power would have looked very different.

While there is no denying that this academic year has for our branch and our union been shadowed by the failure of the MAB, locally we have maintained our work on a number of local priorities. We have worked to implement in full the sector-leading anti-casualisation agreement signed just over the year ago, and, while we recognise that there is still a long way to go before practice on the ground matches what is in the agreement, initiatives such as the pooled research funding pilot schemes have largely been a success – many thanks in particular to our anti-casualisation officer, Mihika Chatterjee, for her work on this. We have also restarted discussions with management to better measure, act against and ultimately eliminate the Gender Pay Gap, as well as other disparities in pay.

Across the UK, recent months have seen a devastating wave of planned redundancies across dozens of Higher Education Institutions. While we have not seen signs that management here are planning anything on the scale seen at some other universities, we have seen a recruitment chill and pressure on Professional Services to cut costs. Most worrying was a restructure of DDAT, where initially around 60 staff were put at risk of redundancy. The casework team, collaborating with the other campus Trade Unions, Unison and Unite, worked with many affected staff individually and collectively to defend jobs and mitigate some of the worst aspects of the proposed restructure.

One corollary of the lack of industrial action this year has been a refocus on ordinary branch meetings, and with the help of the committee, I have tried to introduce a more regular schedule of Ordinary Branch Meetings, including the discussion of more motions this year than the branch has seen in at least the last decade. I would particularly like to thank our Vice-President, Kate Ehrig-Page and the two branch secretaries we have had this year, Brigitte Rodrigues and Sabina Gheduzzi, for their tireless support.

I would like to end this report in paying tribute to two people who we have lost tragically and unexpectedly in the last few weeks. Catriona Scott was been our UCU Regional Officer for many years, and has been an invaluable source of advice, wisdom and good humour for the negotiation team, especially during the intensive weekly negotiations leading up to and throughout the lockdowns. Alessio Guglielmi was a long-time UCU member in the Computer Science department and was deeply committed to the principles of academic freedom and the immeasurability of knowledge. More personally, he was my PhD supervisor at Bath, and gave me the space and support to become politically engaged and active, including with this UCU branch – I wouldn't be writing this report now if it wasn't for him. Both Catriona and Alessio will be sorely missed by many in the branch and beyond.

#### Vice-president - Kate Ehrig-Page

Following the 2023 AGM, I took up the position of Vice President. In the past 12 months, I have supported branch activities through helping to organise events and meetings, promoting awareness of elections (HEC and GS), as well as participating in the organisation of the Get The Vote Out campaign for the last ballot. Additionally, I have represented UCU Bath at Branch Delegate Meetings and supported a branch motion amendment in relation to free speech. After having participated in several UCU CPD workshops in the last year, a CPD session for Bath was organised that focused on managing excessive workloads.

#### Secretary - Sabina Gheduzzi

I stepped in as Interim Secretary towards the end of 2023 due to the position of Secretary having become vacant. My role has been mainly associated with providing some administrative support for the branch, such as organising branch, committee and other meetings, keeping an eye on the communications received from UCU national and monitoring the ucu-sec inbox.

#### Health and safety officer – Michael Carley

Much of the work of the Health and Safety is linked to the oversight of the employer's policies in the workplace, through membership of the university's Health and Safety Committee. In the last year, this has revised and updated various policies, as well as dealing with incidents which relate to the welfare of staff.

In particular, the university has awarded a contract for its Employee Assistance Programme to Health Assured, about whom a number of concerns were raised following a BBC Radio 4 investigation. The university Director of Safety and Wellbeing has noted these concerns, and has said that he will include feedback from staff and trade unions if necessary. If you do have concerns about the EAP service, or other health and wellbeing facilities, please get in touch and we can raise the issues at management level.

Elsewhere, a member raised the issue of the heating of offices in their department, where the temperature routinely dropped below the recognised standard. A call to University Health Safety and Environment and Estates, using Health and Safety rep powers, got a quick response and the university is taking some steps to improve heating in the building.

There is a particular environmental interest in doing so, because if the temperature is maintained at a reasonable level, the university's energy use will decrease, because staff will not need to have electric oil-filled heaters in their offices.

Finally, a request for data on sickness absence showed that members of the Education and Research job family take an average of 0.19 sickness absences per year, compared to the university average of 0.89. This means that either Education and Research staff are extremely healthy, or they are not reporting their sickness. You are encouraged to report all sickness and take appropriate leave, for your own health, to allow the employer to monitor problems, and in case you ever need a record of sickness for pension or other reasons.

### Membership Secretary – Kate Ehrig-Page

Overall membership of the branch (as of 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2024) stands at 672. Consisting of:

- 575 Full members (of which 22 are PGs) [85.6% of branch total]
- 78 Student members [11.6% of branch total]
- 6 Attached [0.9% of branch total]
- 13 Retired [1.9% of branch total]

The overall membership figure represents a decrease of 9.2% of total members over the past 12 months [compared to May 2023]. The reasons for people leaving were given as follows:

Reason for ending membership	Percentage
No reason given	1.4%
Membership expired	34.3%
Left the job	26.4%
Joined another union	8.6%
Resigned - dissatisfied	10.7%
Cannot afford subscriptions	18.6%

### Historical figures

	Dec 2023	Dec 2022	Dec 2021	Dec 2020	Dec 2019	Dec 2018	Dec 2017	Dec 2016
Total	696	711	721	810	803	768	578	542
Full	599	625	648	696	713	664	524	507
Student	78	69	59	92	83	86	46	32
Attached	5	3	3	10	3	13	6	2
Retired	13	14	11	12	4	5	2	1

### Branch Composition

Academic depts (83.2%; the following departments have % over 3%):  
 POLIS 8.4%, SPS 7.8%, SoM 6.75%, Psychology 8.1%,  
 Math Sci 6.6%, Life Sciences 6.3% Education 4.35%,

Comp Sci 4.65%, Architecture & Civil Engineering 4.2%,  
Mech Eng 4.05%, Physics 4.05%

Prof Serv depts (11.1%)

Academic Related: 5.7%

#### Anti-casualisation Officer – Mihika Chatterjee

I took up this position in September 2023. Since then, I have attended four meetings with HR on the progress noted on pilots linked to 'redeployment and stability on contracts' for research staff and research culture surveys. I presented a progress report in December 2023 reporting back on HR updates on progress with agreement, noting limited progress in teaching-related contracts, and seeking feedback on departmental issues.

I attended the Academic Related, Professional Services Staff (ARPS) National Annual Meeting in March, 2024 and exchanged ideas about building better links between ARPS colleagues UCU may represent and colleagues in UNISON. Five motions were passed at the meeting, and they covered (1) visibility of ARPS members in UCU; (2) better guidelines from HEC to guide ARPS staff on which union is appropriate based on local circumstances; (3) better guidance to pursue pay, training and progression of ARPS staff; (4) expertise of ARPS staff is utilised in rolling out technologies that put certain ARPS jobs at risk.

The anti-casualisation efforts requires a committee, and we will double our efforts to recruit members from our branch, including a PGR representative. Based on members' feedback, areas of focus for the sub-committee are: (1) better communication with GTAs/PGRs on fractional contracts and their advantages, as well as development provisions; (2) Redundancy/Redeployment for teaching contracts in the Education-only family. Section 5.4 of the anti-casualisation agreement says 'more can be done to aid the internal redeployment of research and research-related staff through a combination of technical and policy changes to improve stability of employment'. Certain research groups, such as Tobacco Control, and IAAPS have seen implementation of open-ended contracts delinked from funding source. Next year, we need more negotiations with HR on this and clearer policies on FT teaching contracts across UoB.

#### Equality Officer – Fran Amery

This year, I have continued to work with the University towards a collective agreement to tackle the gender pay gap and other equality pay gaps at the University, though as of February negotiations are now in the capable hands of our Women and Non-Binary Members Rep Sofia Doyle and Branch President Ben Ralph. As a caseworker, I am attentive to how matters of inequality may manifest in problems in the workplace, perhaps particularly so for disabled colleagues. Earlier in the year, I organised a workshop for committee members on reasonable adjustments with the chair of the aFLAME Disability Network. I have joined the new UCU Regional Equalities Committee, which had its first meeting on the 17<sup>th</sup> of April, and will continue to attend regularly.

## Pension Officer – James Davenport

This has been a momentous year for UCU, and indeed the whole Trades Union movement, over pensions. We have won a more sensible valuation and correspondingly lower contribution rates, *retrospective* restoration of the old 1/75 accrual rate instead of the 1/85 that employers had forced through (a national first), restoration of the previous DB/DC threshold (as indexed) with an across-the-board uplift to compensate for the change (another national first), and another look at governance and valuation metrics.

But it has not been perfect. As well as the contribution rates, accrual rates and thresholds (which are decided by the Joint Negotiating Committee), the pensions many people receive are also governed by early/late retirement factors and commutation factors, which are decided by USS Limited with no employer/employee input. Earlier this calendar year, USS slipped through a significant change (for the worse as far as most people were concerned) in these factors, to take effect from 1 April 2024. I promptly informed members, and some planning early retirement justifiably complained. I (and my opposite numbers at other universities) took these complaints to UCU and to management here, with the result that USS has delayed the change in early retirement factors (*only*) until 1 October 2024: not perfect, but a significant help to those members concerned. This also points to a further loophole in USS governance, which UCU has taken on board.

## Green officer – Sandhya Moise

In 2020, UCU alongside NUS launched [UCU's Green New Deal \(GND\)](#) agenda for creating sustainable workplaces and taking radical action on climate change. Around the same time, [our university declared a climate emergency](#) and set carbon net zero targets: Net zero for Scope 1 and 2 emissions as well as 50% reduction for Scope 3 by 2030. Overall net zero by 2040. Our annual climate report for 2024 is due to be published shortly showing our progress against our targets (previous reports can be found [here](#)).

In the past year, I've completed a 3-day TUC Green officer's training and linked with green reps across the country, learnt and shared good practices. I've been in conversations with various key allies across our university to assess our employer's progress against the goals they've set and where to best support/be a critical friend. I work very closely with the Green/Environmental officers from Unite and Unison and the CAF team and sit on various committees including the Climate Action Advisory group, Travel Advisory Group and the CAF Education Advisory group. Our LGBTQ+ Members Rep, Lewis McDonald and I organised a UCU CPD session on 'Decolonise and Decarbonise' delivered by UCU's Glen Pickard and Tracy Walsh and SOS UK's Beatrice Anomah and Abbie Jenkinson that was well attended by both members and non-members.