

FOR A FUTURE THAT DOESN'T COST THE EARTH



UCU Annual Environment Report

June 2014 – May 2015

UCU Annual Environment Report 2014-15

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Foreword

Welcome to the UCU Annual Environment Report for 2014-15. In what has been another tough year for the sector we continue to make progress in this area of the union's work. This report highlights how we have linked sustainable development to union organisation, campaigns and jobs.

The education sector has a key role in the transition to a low carbon economy. It is our members who deliver the skills, knowledge and research needed. It will not be easy. We have been faced with funding cuts and policy changes that have made this increasingly difficult. There is a massive gap between formal positions on climate change and the resources and the will to meet the challenge.

It is our job as a union to influence sector and national policy to provide a framework for UCU branches to take this issue up. The UN climate talks in Paris at the end of 2015 will also be a focus for our activity. This report signals the way in which we intend to play our part.

Michael MacNeil, National Head of Bargaining and Negotiations.

Introduction

Thanks to all the members of UCU who have given their time and energy in 2014-15. Also to David Bussell, in UCU Head Office, for providing administration support. We hope you find this report useful and look forward to working with you in 2015-16.

Graham Petersen, UCU Environment Co-ordinator

May, 2015

1. UCU Environment Reps

In May, 2014 we set an annual target of a 10% increase in the number of environment reps. By May 2015 we had achieved a **26%** increase. The table below shows that we have an even spread of reps in higher and further education. However, there are many more colleges and branches in FE and so the density is lower in this sector.

	HE	FE	Total
2014 Environment Reps	54	56	110
2015 Environment Reps	68	68	136

This is still a remarkable achievement and a testimony to the value that members place on this area of work. UCU has more environment reps than any other union and we have a real opportunity to influence the sector to ensure it is meeting its obligations to promote environmental and social justice. Maintaining this in 2015-16 will not be easy with the scale of spending cuts confronting us.

We continue to campaign for legal rights in the workplace to support this role. The lack of facility time available means that most reps have to make difficult choices about which issues to prioritise. These normally fall into one of the following categories:

- Campus - Environmental management issues like energy use
- Curriculum – Education for Sustainable Development issues that support changes to course programmes
- Campaigns – Linking campus and curriculum issues to engagement with other internal and external organisations

Examples are contained in this report and are covered in more detail in other UCU updates.

A source of new activists– Some of our reps combine the role with other branch duties. For others appointed this year it has been the first time they have taken on a role within the union.

"I took up the post of environmental rep to engage staff and students in environmental issues. I became the Branch Green Representative for UCU and have been busy leading initiatives in several directions to reduce energy consumption and generate an awareness of environmentally friendly issues within the college." Elaine, Salford University

.....and members

"The financialisation of the education sector affects students and staff. Not only are student fees rocketing, early career academics have very little job security. Such a hostile environment can detract attention from concerns not directly relating to labour issues or education fees. So it's all the more important that staff are represented by a trade union that has a progressive approach to, and active on climate change and social justice issues. This is why I joined UCU." Jo, UCL, London

We urge all branches to ensure that the appointment of an environment rep is on the next AGM agenda to help us move towards our objective of at least one rep per branch.

2. Regional, National and International union work

Regional and national networks - A decision was taken to develop regional and national networks in UCU following a motion to the 2014 Congress. This is an important way of supporting existing reps and recruiting new activists.

The first regional network was held at the Yorkshire Regional Office in Leeds on November, 2014, followed by London in February, 2015. Discussions with branch officers took place in Northern Region in April and Scotland in May, 2015. At each one we have identified new reps and raised awareness of current developments. All regions have been contacted to set up a meeting during 2015.

Trades Union Congress – The work of the UCU has featured at the Trade Union Sustainable Development Advisory Committee and TUC conferences. It was included as a case study in a TUC / LRD publication ‘The union effect: greening the workplace’ which was launched in July, 2014. Kay Carberry, TUC Assistant General Secretary, singled out the UCU project featured in the report, calling it “a great example of trade unions, the local community and an employer joining together to promote sustainability”.

http://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/The_Union_Effect_Greening_The_Workplace_Covers_2014_All.pdf

Greener Jobs Alliance – The GJA has been co-ordinated by UCU this year. It is a forum for joint work with the TUC, National Union of Students, and a range of environmental organisations. The focus is the need for climate jobs and the skills needed to perform them. An **Action plan for jobs, education and a sustainable future** was launched at the Campaign against Climate Change conference at London Met in September. The leaflet was distributed at sustainability events held in the autumn and as a contribution to the debate on education for sustainable development in the lead up to the May, 2015 election. http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/t/2/GJA_DL_leaf_sept14-1.pdf

Education International – We have worked with EI, our Global Union Federation, to set up a network of union environmental contacts. This was established in April, 2015 and can be accessed by registration via UCU. The end of the UN decade for education for sustainable development (2005-14) conference took place in Japan in November, 2014. The UN also called on governments to implement the Global Action Programme, which is the follow up to the ESD decade. The UK Government failed to send a delegation which reinforces our concerns about the low priority placed on this issue. UCU assisted in the drafting of the ESD commitment made by EI. Susan Hopgood, the President of EI, spoke at the opening plenary. She argued that education was the key to achieving sustainable development and the full development of children, young people, and adults.

http://www.ei-ie.org/en/news/news_details/3323

Trade Unions for Energy Democracy – UCU is an affiliate to this international alliance of trades unions. Meetings are conducted via Skype conference calls. TUED was set up to promote public control of energy that addresses the needs of workers, communities and the environment. It was instrumental in mobilising the large trade union contingent on the Peoples Climate march in September, 2014. This was the largest climate demonstration in history with over 400,000 people on the streets of New York. A five minute video describing the work is available at

<http://unionsforenergydemocracy.org/watch-our-new-animated-video/>

3. Education for Sustainable Development

ESD has been a priority issue for UCU both in terms of influencing curriculum change in the sector as well as the wider policy context.

Skills for a Green Economy - The UCU participated in the Sustainability Skills sub-group of the Green Economy Council co-ordinated by BIS. The Government produced an 'Industrial Strategy in 2012 and this was followed by 11 sector strategies in 2013. The Environment Audit Committee questioned whether sustainability had been effectively integrated into the strategies and BIS undertook a review. In July, 2014 UCU contributed to a paper which contained 10 proposals to improve the Industrial Strategy and respond to the EAC concerns. In the event the Green Economy Council never met after September, 2013, which was symptomatic of the failure of the last coalition government to address the skills gap in the UK.

Responsible Futures – The NUS began a pilot in 8 universities and 5 colleges to develop an externally assessed accreditation mark for a whole-institution approach to environmental sustainability and social responsibility, spanning the formal and informal curriculum, and applicable to both further and higher education. We hope this work will support the efforts of UCU to ensure that students are prepared for the demands of work in a low carbon economy. A member of the UCU is on the steering group for this project. The scheme will be available to the whole sector in 2015-16. It has the potential to be an important driver for change and UCU reps have been actively involved in the 2 FE college pilots in England.

Green Gown Awards – UCU is a member of the EAUC steering group that promotes best practice in the FHE sector. At the ceremony held at Manchester University in November, a project led by the UCU Environment Rep at Sheffield College won an award. This was an innovative student and staff induction to sustainability called 'Green Trails.'

Higher Education developments – In June, 2014, the Quality Assurance Agency published '*Education for sustainable development: Guidance for UK higher education providers*'. UCU made a submission during the consultation process. Some improvements were made but our main concern is on the crucial issue of lack of staff support for training, cpd, and time off. UCU has been lobbying with other organisations in the English Learning and Sustainability Alliance (ELSA) to include a reference to sustainable development in the Grant Letter from BIS to HEFCE. This had been left out in 2014 and there was concern it would send out the wrong message to universities. The 2015-16 letter that was issued in January 2015 by Vince Cable now has the following reference:

*'We welcome the publication of the HEFCE sustainable development framework and HEFCE's continuing role in facilitating the sharing of good practice on sustainable development. We note the HE sector's performance and look to the sector to **continue improvements** in this area.'*

Further Education and Adult Education developments – Not such good news, where a UCU submission on the need to include sustainability in the Ofsted Common Inspection Framework consultation went unheeded. Progress, as in the example below, has still been made by our reps

Linda Ruas, UCU Environment Rep at Greenwich Community College, London, created a new on-line bank of resources for ESOL learners and teachers, all related to global justice issues, including, of course, sustainability. Linda is working with the co-operative New Internationalist to simplify their articles and create "ready lessons" and quizzes for teachers to use in ESOL classes

4. Campaigns

Campaign against Climate Change - The new edition of the 1 Million Climate Jobs pamphlet was launched in September, 2014. UCU contributed to a chapter on education and copies are available to UCU branches for their campaign work. It sets out the latest thinking on the transformation to a low-carbon economy. It can be downloaded here:

<http://www.campaigncc.org/sites/data/files/sites/data/files/Docs/one%20million%20climate%20jobs%202014.pdf>

Hard copies are available free to UCU members on request. **Time to Act Campaign** – UCU members and banners were present on the climate demonstrations in London in September, 2014 and March, 2015.

Divestment - Glasgow University became the first HE institution in Europe to vote for divestment from fossil fuels. After 12 months of campaigning, led by the Glasgow University Climate Action Society and involving over 1,300 students, the university court voted to begin divesting £18m from the fossil fuel industry and freeze new investments across its entire endowment of £128m. They have been followed by the University of Bedfordshire and the School of Oriental and African Studies. Many other institutions have decisions pending following the Fossil Free campaign organised by People & Planet. UCU has 2013 conference policy which calls for the building of divestment campaigns. A UCU fringe meeting at the annual congress in Glasgow in May, 2015 to help develop our strategy has been arranged.

Pensions - ShareAction's Green Light campaign calls for 'responsible investment'. It encourages pension providers to embed climate-awareness into their investment decisions, into dialogue with companies, and into policy advocacy. UCU has worked closely with ShareAction and the 'Listen to USS' campaign as part of a 2014 congress motion to engage with the Universities Superannuation Scheme. USS has £40 billion under asset management. The No. 1 equity investment is in Royal Shell and is valued at £340 million. UCU has held meetings with the USS Responsible Investment team about the scheme's environmental, social and governance policy.

Air Quality - Climate change is one of the biggest public health problems of the century, according to the UN. There are an estimated **29,000 deaths annually** in the UK from air pollution. Many university and college campuses are built on busy main roads. The exposure levels to pollutants in many of these will exceed current EU safe limits. UCU branches have begun to raise this with their institutions and local authorities. In London, UCU worked with the London Sustainability Exchange to carry out 'citizen science' activities with students. Resources that have been used to support this are available at <http://www.lsx.org.uk/docs/page/2509/M&E%20toolkit%202014%20v1.pdf>

Energy – UCU is a supporter of the Energy Bill Revolution. Thousands of training places and jobs could be created with an ambitious energy programme. That is why UCU joined the lobbying of political parties. Sally Hunt, UCU General Secretary, wrote to Ed Miliband spelling out the need for action. *"We are writing as trade unions deeply concerned about the failings of the government's Green Deal, with a strong interest in Labour developing an ambitious domestic energy efficiency programme that cuts bills, creates jobs and is good for the environment."*

<http://endfuelpoverty.org.uk/>

5. Training, Resources and Fundraising

Environment Rep Training - A 3 day course was completed at UCU Head Office in November. This was the first course for our environment reps linked to a TUC accredited award. The updated course worked well with plenty of positive feedback.

“More confident, better informed and feel far less isolated. I now have some concrete ideas and the beginnings of action plans. It all seems a lot more achievable” Rhiannon , University of Portsmouth.

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:

http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/7/7/UCU_Environment_Reps_Handbook.pdf

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. www.ucu.org.uk/environment

Membership advice – During the year we dealt with a range of sustainability enquiries. A number of these involved the imposition of unfair travel to work policies.

Environment Association of Universities and Colleges - 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. 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, Latitude and Leeds festivals in 2014. Their fundraising helped resource the work programme for 2014-15. This included a contribution to the 1 million climate jobs pamphlet and the Global Labour Institute Summer School in Northern College, Barnsley in July, 2014. The teams raised nearly £2,000 and were co-ordinated by Becca Richards in the SW Region Office.

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:

Graham Petersen, UCU Environment Co-ordinator Email: gpetersen@ucu.org.uk

6. Looking forward to 2015-16

UCU has no shortage of goals for the next academic year. These include:

Appointing more reps – Increasing the number of environment reps may seem ambitious at a time when the sector is facing job loss and savage cuts. However, our experience suggests that for many members this is a pro-active agenda which they closely identify with. We will work closely with branches to increase their capacity in this area.

Building networks – Meetings in Wales and 8 regions need to be arranged to ensure that we continue to mainstream our work across our union organisation. This issue will only grow in importance and it is now a matter of the speed at which it happens. UCU structures need to be ready to respond to the challenges and opportunities ahead.

Working with sector organisations – Our ability to influence future developments will be affected by forging strong links with organisations inside and outside the sector. In the year covered by this report we have had very constructive relationships with sector organisations like NUS, People & Planet, and the EAUC. They share many of our concerns about the lack of progress within the FHE sector. Establishing the current and future sustainability capacity of universities and colleges through joint surveys will provide important evidence for the development of a long-term sector strategy.

Education for Sustainable Development – UCU will work closely with the NUS on the development of the Responsible Futures kite mark. We will prepare a briefing for branches to ensure that if their institution participates in the 2015-16 roll-out that they are aware of the opportunities and potential pitfalls.

Preparing for the Paris climate talks – The period leading up to the talks in December, 2015 is likely to witness huge press coverage and activity within institutions. There is a real opportunity for UCU branches to strengthen their links with students and community activists. We will provide regular updates and ideas for local initiatives.

Divestment and Responsible Investment - Even the Governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney, put on record that “the vast majority of the world’s oil reserves are unburnable if the world is to avoid catastrophic climate change.” This is a topic that is likely to take on increasing importance. We need to ensure that the concerns of our members are factored in to future guidance and that we raise awareness of the importance of this issue.

Appendix 1 – 2014 UCU Motion on Climate Change

19 (EP) Climate change - Greenwich Community College

Congress notes:

- that recent reports suggest that the last winter's devastating floods in the wettest UK winter for 200 years were clear evidence of accelerating climate change due to human activity
- that the government have been keen to divert attention away from their responsibility for the severity of flooding in many areas due to cuts in the Environment Agency budget and their failure to address flood prevention measures or sufficient development of alternatives to energy production through oil, gas and nuclear means.

Congress resolves:

- to encourage branches to elect green reps and bring to members' attention materials on climate change for use in curriculums and as campaigning materials, such as those produced by the Campaign for Climate Change.



The UCU Server team at Glastonbury, 2014