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Schuppert commended the UCU Anti-Casualisation Committee for its work over recent years in researching the impact of precarious contracts at Queen’s. “Our Anti-Casualisation activists have done a great deal to bring this about, both in terms of researching the issues involved and campaigning for positive change. They have also played an important role in negotiating with management, and deserve our thanks.” Schuppert also welcomed the work of senior managers, including Margaret Topping, Clare Briggs and David Jones.

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UCU is campaigning across UK universities to challenge casualisation as a creeping disease in our HE system. The union believes that high-quality education and fair working conditions depend on contracts that give staff stability and continuity of employment.

However, studies in HE have shown a system increasingly reliant on casual contracts. The statistics provide for sober reading: 46 per cent of universities and 60 per cent of colleges use zero-hours contracts to deliver teaching, and 68 per cent of research staff in higher education are on fixed-term contracts, with many more dependent on short-term funding for continued employment.

“Stamp Out Casualisation” is UCU’s campaign to win continuity of employment and fairer contracts for casualised staff. It is one of UCU’s priority campaigns across British and northern Irish universities. In this issue of UCU News, we publish the views of casualised staff on their predicament and how the recent strike has underlined the urgency for action on this issue (see pages 3, 4 and 5).

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Further comment on casualisation, pages 2-5
Statement from contract staff in AEL

As teaching staff in the School of Arts, English and Languages, and the next generation of academics in our fields, we fully supported our tenured colleagues and the UCU in their pursuit of a fair deal over pensions.

We joined our full-time tenured staff members and called on UUK to approach the pension negotiations with a commitment to a sustainable settlement that properly recognised academics’ contribution, including after retirement, to the life of the university.

The outcome of the UCU strike was won with a 64 per cent yes vote received by members to accept the UUK offer in April 2018.

While the outworkings of this vote and decision will take time, the USS Joint Expert Panel has since elected members to an expert panel and held its first meeting with an outcome that valuations need to take place in four areas. This is an ongoing issue for full-time staff, but those working insecure contracts must also join the conversation if they are to bring about the change required.

Teaching assistants form the core teaching team in universities generally and in Queen’s rely on those undertaking teaching responsibilities for courses to run year on year. The casualisation of work at Universities across the UK has placed extreme pressures on those starting out in their post-PhD careers and with further cuts to pensions, this will most certainly dissuade many from choosing this as a viable career path.

Those of us who are on casual contracts and who have supported the strike do not have a pension. However, we recognise the attack on pensions as a part of the same commodification that creates precarity of employment. We support job security for all and this is why many teaching staff have joined tenured members in the fight against further cuts to pensions and the diminishing prospect of gaining a lectureship position.

Queen’s UCU has recently supported those on casual contracts to improve fair pay for their work undertaken. As a result we will see an implementation of a payment system which recognises the amount of time taken by casualised workers to deliver high-quality teaching to students.

This new Policy Framework for Teaching Support has been approved by Academic Council in consultation with the various Schools across Queen’s University, the Students’ Union, and the UCU.

What the policy will account for is the amount of hours that a casual worker is providing and how to reimburse the work in an equal and transparent way.

While there may always be a difficulty in approaching the payment of casualised staff with a ‘one size fits all approach’, those working will be under no illusion about what they are entitled to receive for their labour. It is extremely important and the fact remains that the connection between casualised workers and those in tenured positions retain a united front—lobbying for fair working conditions and pay—even after the strike has ended. Continued support between both can achieve more than operating alone as was shown by the industrial action.

UCU to ballot HE staff over pay action

UCU has announced this week that it will ballot its higher education members for industrial action later this year as part of a row over pay. The ballot will open in August and close in October 2018.

The dispute has arisen after the Universities and Colleges’ Employers Association (UCEA) made a final offer of 2 per cent at the last joint negotiating meeting in May. UCU said the offer does nothing to address the falling value of higher education pay, which has declined in real terms by 21% since 2010.

Merav Amir, incoming President of the UCU@QUB said: ‘It is high time that universities faced up to their responsibilities in regard to pay. Offers below the Retail Price Index are effective cuts—and ought to be viewed as such. What is apparent when we look at university coffers is that they could afford to pay more but are choosing to prioritise capital expenditure over staff.’

Spending on UK university staff has fallen since 2009/10, to just 52.9 per cent of income in 2016/17, while capital expenditure increased by 35 per cent over the same period. This is despite students saying that they would like to see spending on teaching staff prioritised.

This week’s announcement follows an initial consultation with members in which 82 per cent voted to reject the offer and 65 per cent said they were prepared to take industrial action in defence of their pay. Turnout was 47.7 per cent.
Now time for urgent action on casualisation

While action with other universities was crucial on pensions, tackling precarity starts at QUB

by Jim Donaghy and Tricia Malone
UCU@QUB Anti-Casualisation Committee

As has been noted in numerous reports on the recent strike action over pensions, casualised workers have been out in force on the picket lines. In the media, the industrial action was often dubbed ‘The Lecturers’ Strike’, but this sidelines the huge contribution to the strike by all of us who aren’t lecturers; here at QUB many are even referred to, in the lowliest terms, as ‘non staff’.

On the picket line we heard more than one casualised colleague comment that they were on strike for pensions, despite not being included in the USS pension fund. Some long-serving teaching assistants, who have been on (essentially zero-hour) ‘non-staff’ contracts for ten years and more, lamented that they never expected to be able to draw a pension in their lifetimes. (Yes, dear permanent colleagues, it really is that bad.) Yet there they were on the picket line, in the rain and the wind and the snow, in solidarity with the strike.

The two-tier staffing system affects the quality of life for those working under it, and the quality of education (and pastoral support) for those attending Queen’s.

As we write, it’s unclear how the current negotiations on pensions will work out, but it is clear that the next issue that UCU needs to tackle head-on is casualisation. Rising precarity in employment leads to an atmosphere of competition, mistrust, and feelings of insecurity throughout the university. The two-tier staffing system affects the quality of life for those working under it, and the quality of education (and pastoral support) for those attending Queen’s.

Because of how UK-wide pay bargaining is set up, casualisation will never be dealt with at that broad macro level — local organising, and local action are crucial.

The UCU branch at QUB has been proactive on this front, creating an Anti-Casualisation Officer role and supporting the Anti-Casualisation Committee. Permanent staff have voiced their opposition to casualisation on the picket lines of late; now it’s time to take that energy and solidarity and stamp out casual contracts at QUB.

We’re not just asking for reciprocal support—this directly impacts your teaching, your roles, and the shape of your departments, where casualised workers are used to disguise systemic cuts to core staff. Our fight is your fight, whether you see it yet or not.
Taking action on insecure contracts

The last few months have been an interesting time for us all; presenting us with opportunities for solidarity and a chance to tell UUK that we, staff and students, ARE the university. It has also been difficult at times, and for those of us on casual and so-called ‘non-staff’ contracts this has been a time of heightened insecurity. All of us sacrifice during industrial action, but for the increasing numbers of staff on casual contracts, we went into the strike under the fear that we would lose our entire pay for four weeks.

On precarious contracts, there is no guarantee that we will receive work from one contract to the next, so we currently live in the worry that taking part in this industrial action may mean that the University simply won’t find any teaching or research hours for us when our current contracts end. We have been asked to sacrifice more than many, and for pensions we know we may never receive. We knew this at the beginning of this strike, and answered that call nonetheless, because an injustice to any worker is an injustice to all.

We were particularly concerned with one proposal offered in potentially ending the strike; that we may have had to reschedule classes, with no guarantee of payment. As increasing numbers of lectures are taken by part-time staff on fixed-term contracts, this proposal would have impacted us disproportionately. The rejection of this proposal by the UCU was welcome from part-time and casual staff.

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The industrial action has, however, brought us exciting opportunities. One of the most repeated discussions among casual labourers was that taking part in picketing and other parts of industrial action, such as the Alternative University, presented many long-serving part-time and casual staff with the chance to talk to other academics in our fields, to discuss our ideas across fields, form relationships, and feel like a part of the university for the first time.

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It is hard. It is insecure. It is underpaid. We can’t plan for the future. We can’t plan beyond the end of the next contract. Simple pleasures like ‘taking a holiday’ are fantasy. Even getting accrued holiday pay is often a fantasy. We can’t get sick—we don’t get paid. More concrete ideas like mortgages and having a family feel entirely beyond us. And it is incredibly lonely. Precarious staff members do not often feel like part of the University. We often don’t feel like we are part of the school that we work in. We come into the lecture theatre or classroom once a week, and go home again. We go to research meetings, and go home again to continue working in the flats we rent. We don’t know the full-time staff, and although ‘we’ is the term I am using, ‘we’ don’t know each other. We often feel invisible. The fact that we are on what the university calls ‘non-staff contracts’ serves to emphasise and underline this.

This outcome of the industrial action could change this, if we continue to use the energy and commitment to solidarity created over the last few months in the post-strike landscape. ‘We’ feel like a ‘we’ now. We have created a solidarity between permeant and casual staff, that, unbroken, has shown itself to be a formidable force in difficult times. But where do we go now?

It is my hope that these conversations continue going forward, but now that we have found some space in the university community, we don’t want to go back. We have important roles in this. We need to push ourselves forward, get involved in union activity as we move forward. We need to find ways to integrate ourselves into university life – present at seminars, continue to develop the links we have made with academics on the picket line, push for a Staff Common Room.

Permanent staff have a crucial role to play too! Remember that much of your school’s teaching and research is done by staff on insecure contracts. Add us to your mailing lists. Invite us to seminars. Invite us to reading groups – or consider coming to events we organise, if we ask. Find out if your school has office space for the people working in your department, and demand it if they don’t. We have all made sacrifices for 2018’s industrial action, and as more staff contracts become insecure, we may need more in the future to demand better for our staff on precarious contracts. We will invite you to stand with us. And we will see you there.

Caoimhe holds a PhD in sociology, and has worked across numerous insti-

SOLIDARITY: Student Union President Stephen McCrystall addresses striking university staff. The action forged links across and between the universities involved, with lasting implications for the UCU and its capacity to demand change.
At our UCU@QUB Annual General Meeting on 25 June, the following newly elected officers and committee members were confirmed.

President – Merav Amir
Merav is a lecturer in Human Geography at the School of Natural and Built Environment. She joined Queen’s in 2013 after a research fellowship at the Leonard Davis Institute for International Relations at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She has fifteen years of experience as an activist in human rights and feminist organisations in Israel. Merav became active in UCU in 2016 and has served as the Membership Secretary for the QUB branch for the last two years. She has been elected to the role of Branch President and will take on this role as of August 2018. Contact m.amir@qub.ac.uk

Vice-President – Fabian Schuppert
Fabian is a lecturer in Political Theory and Philosophy in the School of HAPP. Fabian did his PhD at QUB (2007-2010) and returned to QUB in 2013 after a 3-year post-doc in Switzerland. Fabian was President of the UCU for the past two years, leading the union during the recent strike action over the proposed changes to the pension scheme. Contact f.schuppert@qub.ac.uk

Membership Secretary - Will Megarry
Will is an archaeologist and heritage management specialist in the School of Natural and Built Environment. His research focuses on landscape archaeology, geoscience and World Heritage management. Originally from Dublin, he came to QUB via the USA and has been involved in UCU activities since arriving in 2016. He lives in Bangor with his family, which includes two young (and very active) boys and a neurotic cat. Contact willmegarry@gmail.com

Honorary Secretary - Diarmuid Kennedy
Diarmuid was educated in Dublin and Glasgow and has worked at QUB for about 20 years. He is currently the Subject Librarian for AEL. Previous posts at QUB include Faculty Library for AHSS, Faculty Librarian of MHLS and Subject Librarian for HAP. In addition, he was the assistant librarian in Special Collections for about 6 years. Contact d.g.kennedy@qub.ac.uk

Assistant Honorary Secretary – Arty Ward
Arty is a final year PhD student, Teaching Assistant, and Research Assistant at the Institute of Cognition and Culture. He joined the UCU as a postgraduate student in 2014, and was active in the pensions strike. He also acts as the Public Relations officer for the UCU branch at Queen’s. and edits the UCU newsletter. Contact sward21@qub.ac.uk

NEW PREZ: Merav Amir takes over in August as our new UCU@QUB Branch President.

Equality Secretary - Véronique Altgas
Véronique is a lecturer in Sociology at Queen’s University Belfast. She has conducted research on new religious movements, the management of minority religions in France and Britain, and anti-Semitism. Her last book, From Yoga to Kabbalah: Religious Exoticism and the Logics of BRicolage was nominated as best book in 2017 by the International Society for the Sociology of Religion. Véronique has been Honorary Secretary in 2016-17 and was Secretary for Local Issues last year. She is also staff representative on QUB Senate. Over the last two years, she concentrated her efforts in the organisation of the local branch, for instance by developing training of members and a collective approach to casework. The organisation and leading of last winter’s industrial action with Fabian was also a central aspect of her commitment to the union. Having worked around issues of bullying last year, she is keen to pursue the subject matter next year as officer for Equality. She is also particularly interested in the gender pay gap, the representation of BME and International staff and all other matters related to Equality and Diversity. Contact v.altglas@qub.ac.uk

Anti-Casualisation Secretary - Jim Donaghey
Jim has been the Anti-Casualisation Officer with UCU at Queen’s since 2017. He is a postdoctoral researcher at the School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics, but has previously worked as a lecturer and module convenor at the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work (on casual and zero-hours contracts). Jim has long been involved in various forms of activism, including with local independent trade unions and people’s education initiatives. Contact j.donaghey@qub.ac.uk

Rob Gilles - Honorary Treasurer

Rob Gilles is a Professor of Economics at the Queen’s Management School, with a special interest in microeconomics, game theory, and social networks. Contact r.gilles@qub.ac.uk

General Member - Marie Coleman
Marie is a Senior Lecturer in modern Irish History and has been at QUB, and a member of the UCU at Queen’s, since 2004. Marie advises UCU colleagues applying for promotion and is especially concerned about the arbitrary and unbalanced application of research income targets for promotion; the difficulty faced by women and staff with disabilities in gaining promotion. Contact marie.mcoleman@gmail.com

General Member - Ioannis Tsoulakis
Ioannis is a lecturer in Anthropology and Ethnomusicology at the School of HAP. His research focuses on issues of creativity, politics, and crisis, among musicians in Greece, and he has taught on a range of subjects that include music and identity, political/art movements, ethnographic research methods, and social/cultural theory. He has been a UCU member since he joined Queen’s in September 2013.

Continued on page 8
While the strike had a negative impact on teaching, and took its toll on our finances, it wasn’t all doom and gloom: many colleagues spoke of feeling part of a vibrant collective, of the warmth and friendliness of the picket lines, and of the opportunity to talk about ideas and ways forward for our beleaguered universities — something that should be part of our workplace culture all of the time. Here and on the following page, we’ve collected some of the many snaps that were Tweeted and shared on social media throughout this year’s UCU #pensionsstrike campaign.

Pictures from picket lines

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Your new union officers and committee

continued from page 6

and has been part of the UCU at Queen’s committee since August 2016, as Assistant Secretary (2016-17) and General Committee Member (2017-present). He was actively involved in the successful ‘Save Our Schools’ campaign in 2015-16, which resisted the closure of Anthropology and Sociology programmes. Contact i.tsioulakis@qub.ac.uk

General Member – Ricki O’Rawe
Ricki is based in AEL, as a lecturer in Latin American Studies. His research and teaching focus on on the intersections of art with politics and religion in Latin American visual and literary cultures. He is involved in the Transformative Cultures reading group, which has organised seminars and events thinking through the political potential of art. He has been a member of UCU since 2015 and has participated in strikes for fair pay and pensions. He is also a member of the Gender and Diversity committee in AEL. Contact r.orawe@qub.ac.uk

General Member - Geraldine Lawless
Geraldine is a lecturer in Spanish, in the School of Arts, English and Languages. Her research looks at Spanish literature from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Before coming to Queen’s, she worked at the University of Strathclyde and the University of Sheffield. She has been a member of UCU since she started work in academia, though has become more engaged since coming to Queen’s. Impressed by the work Queen’s UCU have done on behalf of their members, she decided to put her name forward for the general committee, hoping to make a greater contribution to these activities. Contact: g.lawless@qub.ac.uk

There’s strength in the Union! Join today

UCU is the largest post-school union in the world: a force to be reckoned with.
To join: email ucu@qub.ac.uk to inform Queen’s UCU that you are joining, then either:
Telephone UCU HQ at 0333 207 0719 or use the online form at https://join.ucu.org.uk/

UCU slams Tories on LGBT+ rights

The UK cannot take progress on equality for granted when the country is led by the Tories under Theresa May, UCU general secretary Sally Hunt has this week claimed. Speaking at the TUC LGBT+ conference, Hunt highlighted the prime minister’s poor voting record on LGBT+ rights and said that the legacy of Section 28 remains ‘a sore to this day’.

On Tuesday, Theresa May claimed she had ‘developed her view’ on LGBT+ issues and apologised for how she had voted in the past. She also said that she had never prayed for someone to change their sexuality. But in July 2000 May voted to maintain Section 28 and she told a student newspaper a year later that ‘most parents want the comfort of knowing Section 28 is there’. Hunt also attacked the government’s handling of Brexit and warned that May cannot be trusted to protect workers’ rights while seeking a Brexit deal to satisfy the likes of Boris Johnson and Jacob Rees-Mogg.

‘Thirty years ago, we struggled against a government that showed disdain for working people. A government that tore apart entire communities. And a government that legislated to install oppression in our schools, in our town halls, in our hospitals and all our public services. The legacy of Section 28 remains a sore to this day.’