

# UCU NEWS

Queen's

## VOTE NOW!

**YES TO STRIKE ACTION**  
**YES TO ACTION SHORT OF A STRIKE**

### **Looming Pensions, Pay Disputes Rooted in Employers' Misplaced Priorities**

The UCU is facing into disputes with our employers over two critical issues: continual undermining of the USS pension and long-term deterioration in pay for academic staff. Although there are particular complications in relation to the pension (we negotiate with our employers over the results, but the USS is governed by a semi-separate board and subject to pressures from the UK Pensions Regulator) the crisis on both fronts is rooted in the same basic problem. The turn to marketisation of HE in recent years has fuelled increased competition between UK universities, who in turn have calculated that the best way to attract student 'customers' is through large-scale investment in big capital projects. This has driven a shift in HE spending away from investment in staff and toward shiny new facilities. At unit level this translates into increased workloads, with all the added stress that this can bring. If UCU is unable to compel a change of direction it will mean further decline in pay and pensions, an increasing turn to casualisation, and will rule out any prospect of eliminating the gender pay gap.

No one wants a return to industrial action. But the best way to send our employers a clear message that they should return to serious negotiations is by delivering a mandate for action if needed. The UCU branch committee at QUB recommends that our members use their ballot and vote 'yes' to strike action and industrial action short of a strike on pensions and pay.

**UCU GENERAL SECRETARY JO GRADY  
TO VISIT QUB  
Monday 21 October 12pm Lanyon/01/052**

### Pay & Pensions



Centrespread on what's at stake in the current ballots p4,5

### New Academic Profiles: One Step Forward?



Branch President Merav Amir on making the new Academic Profiles work for members p2

### Taking a Stand for Climate Justice



John Barry on the University's responsibility in the face of climate and ecological emergencies p3

# Making New Academic Promotions: What You Need to Know

**Merav Amir, Branch President**

Academic Promotion and the Academic Standards were identified as core issues that needed addressing by our members among the academic staff. After much campaigning from UCU, we were very happy to see that University Management have decided to review and revise them. Following a long process of deliberation and consultation, we are now beginning to see a new approach towards these issues.

As you may already know, the decision was to get rid of the dual criteria we had in place and to combine the Academic Standards and Academic Profiles into one set of Profiles for each grade/pathway. These were sent out for consultation within each of the Schools over the summer and all academic staff should have had an opportunity to review them and have their input. In this process, the Profiles should have been adjusted to better suit each discipline. We know this was not performed uniformly across all Schools, but I hope you did have a chance to have your say.

While we have not seen the final version of the new Academic Profiles, which should be released soon, we already know that these do not include fixed metrics that should be met by all staff, and that a level of flexibility was built into them. This

means that there is no longer a single criterion against which all staff are measured (such as the securing of funding) when applying for promotion or when confirmed in post. Similarly, the expectation that staff should demonstrate that they are already performing at the grade that they are applying to as specified in the Academic Profiles was removed. We will be closely watching how these new Standards are actually implemented in the next round of promotions.

The procedures for promotion and confirmation in post have also been revised and simplified to a great degree. Confirmation in post and promotion to Senior Lecturer will now be decided by a School committee, instead of by a central University committee, as it has been until now. Progression to Reader will be decided by the Faculty and only progression to Professor and within professorial grades will be decided centrally.

This would allow Schools to have more discretion regarding the shortening of the three-year probation period for new Lecturers. We hope that with the lifting of the administrative and procedural burden which was until now associated with an early confirmation in post we will see more people confirmed in post

already after their first or second year.

Similarly, there was a broad consensus in these deliberations that too many people in Queen's spend too many years lingering at the Lecturer grade. The simplification of the promotion process from Lecturer to Senior Lecturer was aimed at accelerating this progression.

One of the decisions that came out of these deliberations was to make the Reader position distinct from that of Senior Lecturer not only by name. A new pay grade will be created for this purpose, which will only partially overlap with that of Senior Lecturer, allowing a pay increase for Readers. No other changes regarding the pay grades were proposed and the current pay grade of Senior Lecturers will remain as it is today.

The new Academic Promotion regulations and Academic Profiles will be rolled out in the next few months. This year will be a trial year for these changes and they will be reviewed again after the next promotion exercise. As with anything else, any improvement in regulations is only as good as its local interpretation and actual implementation. We are keen to get your views, so please share your experience with us, including any concerns or related issues you may have.

## YOUR UCU BRANCH OFFICERS, 2019/20

President	Merav Amir
Vice President	Fabian Schuppert
Honorary Secretary	Diarmuid Kennedy
Secretary for Local Issues	Fiona McGarry
Honorary Treasurer	Rob Gilles
Membership Secretary	Jim Donaghey
Public Relations Officer	Brian Kelly
Equality Officer	Leonie Hannan
Casualisation Officer	Morris Brodie



# Taking a Stand on Climate Justice

BEYOND SOLIDARITY WITH THE YOUTH CLIMATE STRIKE:

RETHINKING THE UNIVERSITY IN THE AGE OF CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES

John Barry (HAPP/UCU)

You know something's up when the Trades Union Congress, UCU and our own Vice Chancellor all agree to a work stoppage to demonstrate support for the same cause. All three publicly supported and called for a 30-minute workday solidarity stoppage to coincide with the global school student strike for climate on the 20<sup>th</sup> September.

From a trades union perspective there are 'no jobs on a dead planet' and it is vital to understand that while the transition to a low carbon future is inevitable (up there now with 'death and taxes' in my view), a *just* transition cannot be taken for granted. Hence the need for political activism to shape this transition so that no community or section of society is left behind.

Earlier this year I submitted the motion now embraced by QUB UCU. It states that our union 'agrees that drastic and far-reaching measures must be taken across society to try and mitigate the risks and declares a "Climate and Biodiversity Emergency"' and calls for an 'urgent report to assess the impact of QUB activities (such as procurement, estate management, staff travel including staff air travel) on greenhouse gas emissions, exploring what mitigation measures can be put in place.' The motion calls on the University to 'establish a working group to bring the issues of climate breakdown and biodiversity loss to the fore in its structures and actions' and 'to commit as an educational institution to demonstrating leadership on these issues and embedding teaching about climate and ecological breakdown [across] all degree pathways to ensure all QUB students are equipped with the most authoritative and current knowledge [and] how humanity can respond and

deal with these existential challenges."

There are some hard questions for us as academics posed by mobilisations such as the Youth Strike for Climate and Extinction Rebellion. Are we equipping the next generation adequately in terms of knowledge and understanding? Should QUB not follow the local UCU branch, the Irish and British parliaments, Belfast City Council and around 70 other local authorities and declare a 'Climate and Ecological Emergency'? And if we accept we are in a climate and

structural causes of our deepening socio-ecological crisis, I cannot see how we as academics, or the university as an institution, can continue as normal in the face of the existential challenges our societies and our species now face.

The climate and ecological crisis calls for the University to 'do its bit' to help identify the causes of the crisis (which of course rightly generates debate and discussion – my own views of the root causes for what it's worth are the three Cs – capitalism,

carbon and consumerism), develop solutions to decarbonise and create more climate resilience communities. We should also be developing strategies to cope with and adapt to an inevitably more climate unstable world, since even if we stopped burning carbon and eating beef right now, we have already pumped enough greenhouse gases to cause climate warming. But for us to 'do our bit' requires us to stop our normal routines, patterns of work and expectations of what is our 'normal job' and rethink what and how we might work differently.

As James Baldwin wisely noted, "Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced"... and we in the academy have a particular responsibility in the midst of our climate and ecological emergency, to face what we are facing and change what needs changing. Our young people in the climate strike movement have been incredibly courageous in taking a stand, and have asked us questions. We are right to support them, but beyond half an hour out of our daily work routines, what else should and can we be doing?



ecological emergency can we continue in our jobs in terms of 'business as usual'? What is our responsibility as a university, as individual and collective researchers, knowledge workers and teachers at this moment in human history? Surely at the very least we need to stop and take stock of how the University can contribute to responding to the climate and ecological crisis?

As someone who has spent all my academic career of almost 30 years (and my associated political activism), analysing and trying to understand the deep political economic, cultural-psychological and

# Pensions: Vote 'Yes' for a Permanent Solution



UCU General Secretary Jo Grady has argued that university employers are expecting their staff to accept deterioration in pay and pensions because the sector had been unable to control its own spending or curb a building bonanza.

“Step back and look at the wider context of this. Since the financial crisis, the proportion of overall spending on staff in the sector has dropped from 58% to about 54%, and we are seeing lots of cuts to staff and benefits,” she told *The Guardian*.

“But the sorts of expenditure we’ve seen at the same time have been capital expenditure, expensive new buildings and foreign campuses, which don’t directly benefit education, research or teaching. In that context, what we are asking for is not unreasonable. What we are saying is that enough is enough. We tried an interim [pensions] solution last year and that didn’t work. If we have a vote for strikes this year the aim will be to fix the long-term issues, and not just another temporary fix.”

**UCU members will be understandably frustrated** that after prolonged strikes in the spring of 2018 ended in a hard-fought agreement with university employers, we are once again facing into a new round of industrial action over pensions. Balloting is now underway and will conclude by 30 October. The elected leadership of UCU is seeking a mandate for industrial action, arguing that this is the only way to send a clear message to the employers’ organisation, UUK, and those managing the pension scheme at USS to pull back from a path of steep rises in the proportion of our pay being diverted into the pension. UCU argues that the pretext for substantial increases – the USS’s stated concerns about the health of the pension fund – is based on a flawed methodology, and has committed to a firm position for ‘no detriment’, insisting on no increases to contributions and no cuts to benefits.

But how did we arrive at a new crisis over pensions? Wasn’t the agreement reached at the end of the 2018 strike meant to address these issues? For a brief period following the settlement, it indeed appeared as if we might be on the verge of a breakthrough. The employers withdrew their proposals to change USS from a defined benefit scheme into a defined contribution scheme. UCU had demanded and won the convening of a new Joint Expert Panel (JEP) to go back through the faulty valuation on which USS had based its insistence on increased contributions. These were positive advances that – if seized upon by all sides – might have pointed a way out of the impasse.

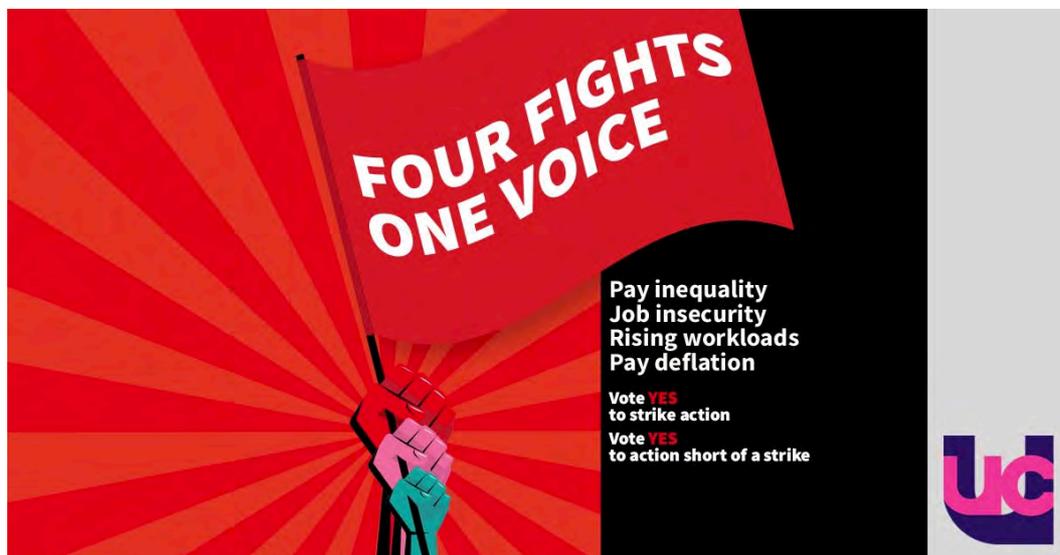
The key findings of the JEP (issued September 2018), with representation from both the UUK and UCU, confirmed that the so-called pension ‘deficit’ had been seriously overstated. Initially, if applied to the 2017 valuation, the

JEP’s proposals would have entailed a combined contribution level of 29.2% with no changes to pension benefits. Subsequent modelling by USS, based on changed market circumstances, showed that implementing the JEP in full would actually result in combined contributions no higher than 26%, or 8% for members. Adoption of this approach would have avoided any disruption through renewed industrial action.

What has happened since, and what has forced the UCU to go to ballot, is that in effect the USS has ignored the JEP report. It has insisted on imposing new increases, set to rise to 30.7%, with 11.7% (up from 6.35% in 2011) to be absorbed by members as of October 2020. If this goes ahead, many of us will see a steep cut in take home pay. According to modelling by First Actuarial, the changes to USS will mean a typical member will pay around £40,000 more in to their pension, but receive almost £200,000 less

# Pay: Time to Call a Halt to Decline

- By the employers' own accounts, staff pay has declined 17% over the last decade.
- UK universities' spending on staff 6% lower than EU average
- Spending on staff in HE down from 58% to 54%



in retirement, leaving them £240,000 worse off in total. This is simply unacceptable.

The USS's unwillingness to take on board the key JEP recommendations and its determination to continue with a flawed methodology has, in effect, been given a green light by the employers – despite the UUK having taken full part in the JEP!

Equally troubling have been the series of scandals and revelations about the internal workings of the USS. At all times its directors have seemed eager to lean upon the conservative recommendations of the Pensions Regulator – especially when these bolster the USS's own approach.

UCU pensions negotiator Sam Marsh has demonstrated that USS has not properly justified its 'de-risking' strategy, and this is confirmed in a detailed report from First Actuarial. USS is seen to have misrepresented the

Pension Regulator's methods for evaluating risk. More scandalously, the UCU's representative on the USS board, Professor Jane Hutton, published an extraordinary open letter in which she revealed that she was denied access to important information, concluding that the USS deficit projections have been 'substantially over-estimated'.

All of this points to serious problems at the heart of USS, which need to be resolved in any new settlement. UCU General Secretary Jo Grady has insisted that 'enough is enough. We tried an interim solution last year and that didn't work. If we have a vote for strikes this year the aim will be to fix the long-term issues, and not just another temporary fix'.



The UUK's unwillingness to challenge USS after taking part in compiling the JEP report suggests a degree of bad faith, and their more recent attempt to push through a poor compromise by compelling UCU to agree to a no-strike clause suggests they are as out of touch with the anger among staff as they were before the 2018 strikes. The scale of the damage now being contemplated for our pensions means that UCU might again have to resort to strike action. None of us – including your branch officers - takes the prospect of industrial action lightly. We are committed educators and researchers, and want to be at work. But if our members have to strike again to put an end to the continual assault on our pensions, we will strike hard. Send a clear message to USS and UUK that the crisis over pensions has to be resolved once and for all. Vote 'yes' on strike action and 'yes' to action short of a strike before balloting closes on

## Underfunding Forces Review of QUB Corporate Plan

Paul Hudson (Retired/UCU)

The Corporate Plan (approved in December 2016) was a roadmap for the development of the University over a five-year period. It was aligned with the NI Executive's draft Program for Government (2016-21), and contingent upon the NI Executive producing a sustainable funding model for higher education in Northern Ireland. With suspension of the NI Assembly, however, this has not happened, and the **funding for HE here continues to fall well below that provided in England and Scotland.** QUB is projecting an Operating Surplus of £9.7M for 2018-19, but with continued underfunding, the financial forecasts for future years show growing deficits.

The *Update on the Corporate Plan* says: 'Even with full delivery of our targets, Queen's will not achieve a sustainable financial position in 2021-22.' Therefore 'the development of a new financially sustainable Corporate Plan will commence, early in the 2019-20 academic year [to] allow for extensive consultation with staff and other key stakeholders, to create an ambitious plan that will position the University for the challenges and opportunities of the next decade'.

**UCU members should take an active part in the consultation in their unit and ensure that the consultation is not just a top-down exercise.** Clearly the proposed changes to the Plan will be aimed at financial savings and increased productivity, and given the shortage of resources, members should ensure that any

such proposed changes in their unit are practical.

The current Corporate Plan contains 19 numerical targets. QUB is on course in most areas towards the targets set for 2021 in the Plan, but **this has been achieved in the context of very heavy workloads, poor staff morale and declining student**



**satisfaction.** There is a target to invest £40M per annum in infrastructure, and currently QUB spends £50M. Despite UCU complaints, QUB management has persistently spent proportionally more on infrastructure than our Russell group competitors. We should insist that once the Students' Union has been rebuilt, capital expenditure can be drastically reduced, with the released cash being used for staffing. Our student/staff ratio is worse than our competitors.

There is significant concern about meeting 2020-21 targets in four areas, and these must be addressed in the revised Corporate Plan:

In 2015-16 we achieved 90% overall satisfaction in the National Student Survey and the target was to maintain this, but it has now fallen to 83%, probably

due to over-stretched teaching resources.

In 2015-16 external research income was £55M and the target for 2020-21 was to double this. But in 2017-18 it had only reached £85M, casting doubt that the target is realistic.

There is a target to have a staff vacancy level below 5%, but in the current year the proportion of vacant posts had grown to 8.4%. Existing staff bear the strain of covering the gap, and this is unsustainable.

There is a revised target of the proportion of women at professorial level of 27% by 2025, but it is currently only 24.3%. UCU will be pressing for progress.

Unfortunately with the current political turmoil, the funding of Higher Education is not at the top of the agenda of local political parties. But a General Election is in the air, and, if politicians come knocking at your door to canvas your vote, here are some points that you can make:

- Without better funding QUB will not be able to supply the graduates needed for the Program for Government.
- Northern Ireland can meet only 60% of the demand in NI for undergraduate places. 35% of NI school leavers go to Great Britain to access higher education and few of these return to NI to work.
- For every £1M invested in research activity at Queen's an additional £3.9M is generated across the UK economy.

# #TheNorthisNow #TheNorthisNext

## UCU Joins Rally for Choice



Following the passing of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation) Act in July, placing a duty on the government to regulate to provide for access to abortion in Northern Ireland, UCU attended the Rally for Choice in Belfast city centre on the 7th of September. While the legislation will not come into effect until October 21st and is conditional on the continued dissolution of the Stormont Executive, activists have been wasting no time in taking to the streets to show their support for the initiative.

UCU members from QUB, UU and the NI Regional Office joined the thousands of activists and pro-choice campaigners, many clad in pro-choice purple, from across Ireland fully equipped with banners, placards, and flares, unapologetically chanting “our bodies, our lives,

our right to decide”. The rally was a massive success, culminating in music and rousing speeches from Bernadette Devlin McAliskey and others.

The current Northern Irish laws surrounding abortion are some of the most restrictive in the world, even in cases of rape or incest. People face up to life imprisonment for accessing abortion, and several cases have passed through the courts in recent years. Research has shown that more than 900 people from Northern Ireland travelled to England for an abortion in 2017, a 25 per cent increase from the year before.

We as trade union activists and equality campaigners need to stand together in this fight. The right to free, safe, legal, and local access to abortion is a human right and we want it this year.

**HAVE YOU VOTED?**

**TWO BALLOTS:  
H.E. PAY & USS**

Vote **YES**  
to both!





# TEACHING AT QUB?

## KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

As of June 2018, new policy on teaching and teaching-related duties applies across the University. The below will apply to most TAs and PGTAs (if you have an issue, refer to the full guidance document or ask us: [ucu-officers@qub.ac.uk](mailto:ucu-officers@qub.ac.uk)).

### CONTRACTS

- You should have your contract before you start working.
- All expectations and duties should be made explicit at point of contracting.
- Your hours and time commitment should be set out as far in advance as is practicable.
- You should not be asked to undertake duties outside of your contract.

### RESOURCES

- You should have access to printing facilities and locker space, hot-desking facilities where possible, and access to a regular space for office hours.

### PAY RATES

- You should be told in advance about the regular scheduling of payments (including marking).
- All work you do, whether preparation, marking, delivery etc., is all accounted for explicitly and on an hourly basis. The pay rates are **£17.57** per hour AC2/ Band B, **£14.73** per hour AC1/Band A.
- The figures below are a guideline based on the disaggregated pay rates:
  - Lectures** (1 hour) = **£70.28**
  - Seminars, Tutorial or Oral classes** (1 hour) = **£52.71**
  - Lab supervision and demonstrating** = **£22.10** or **£29.46** for each hour (dependent on level of preparation).
  - Field Trip Assistance** = **£14.73** per hour inclusive of travel time
  - Office hours** = **£7.37** per seminar group per week

The full policy guidance document is available at the QUB Human Resources web page or via our website - [www.ucuqub.org](http://www.ucuqub.org)