AREA REVIEW
THE BIGGEST THREAT TO FURTHER AND ADULT EDUCATION SINCE INCORPORATION—UNIONS TO HOLD JOINT PUBLIC MEETING

In September, the government announced a review of post-16 education provision in England to be carried out by Dr David Collins the FE Commissioner on an area by area basis. The stated aim is to leave the sector with ‘fewer, larger, and more financially resilient institutions’.

This represents the start of a process which, if implemented, is likely to mean the biggest change within the sector since colleges were removed from local government control and incorporated in the early 1990s.

Birmingham and Solihull is the first area in the country to be subject to an FE Commissioner’s Area Review. The FE Colleges in the region in scope of the review are Birmingham Metropolitan College, Bournville College, Solihull College and South & City College Birmingham. There are also 3 sixth form colleges involved which are Cadbury College, Joseph Chamberlain College and Sixth Form Solihull College.

UCU is concerned that not only will the individual culture and ethos within each FE College, be lost but that the review will lead to job losses and attacks on terms and conditions of staff.

The whole process is being pushed through with indecent haste and the level of communication has been wanting. The review is being led by a Steering Group consisting of the FE Commissioner, the Schools Commissioner, the funding bodies (SFA and EFA), representatives of the local authorities and the local enterprise partnership and the principals and chairs of governors of the colleges themselves. The recognised unions were not invited to attend the steering group, however UCU has got the Commissioner to undertake to meet with stakeholder unions prior to each steering group meeting.

WATCH THIS SPACE!
The joint unions are proposing to hold an open meeting on 8 December at Carrs Lane Church Centre in Birmingham City Centre. Lecturers, support staff, students, parents and community stakeholders will be invited to take part and join in organizing and lobbying activities thereafter. Further details of the event, speakers and registration will be announced in the coming week.

FE staff governors’ conference – final call
UCU supported by the Association of Colleges, the Education and Training Foundation and other unions are holding a staff governors’ conference on 4 December – register now to avoid disappointment.

You can read the full details of the proposals for the Post 16 Skills and Education Agenda by following the link below:
Policy paper: Post-16 education and training institutions review
This is something that you can debate at forthcoming branch meetings—the next West Midlands wave is likely to affect Staffordshire and Shropshire.

AoC Conference Birmingham ICC
UCU believes the employers body is slow in responding to threat posed by the Area Review, so last week UCU and NUT jointly lobbied outside the conference, and spoke to many of the delegates to air our concerns. See picture right..
FE NATIONAL STRIKE

We have received lots of pictures of the 10 November 2015 FE National Strike picket lines and a well-attended rally was held afterwards at the Birmingham Midlands Institute, with a range of interesting and informative speakers.

Important national survey your strike feedback requested – UCU’s further education committee (FEC) meets on 11 December to discuss next steps in the English further education (FE) pay dispute. Officers in branches called to action on 10 November are requested to complete this survey to report back on action taken locally. Your feedback is important and will help inform FEC’s discussion.

Warwickshire College Leamington Site

Solihull College

South Gloucestershire & Stroud College—they start them young there!

Birmingham Metropolitan College sites
Early indications show that recruitment is up 87% on the same week last year following UCU’s first National Recruitment Week in November. There were many events across the region, including stalls, door knocking, anti-casualisation events in Universities, pensions briefings and surgeries, employment surgeries for members by regional staff and reps. It is important to keep the momentum going and build on the excellent start to this campaign.

Warwick University ran stalls and an anti-casualization event.
Coventry University ran a stall and door knocking at Coventry University College (a subsidiary of the University). David Ridley, branch secretary, reported huge interest amongst members and potential members, and collected lots of names and emails and addresses for follow up. Further work in the pipeline and hopefully UCU recognition to follow. Excellent result!
University College Birmingham and Wolverhampton University City and Walsall Branches held stalls and pensions surgeries which generated interest from members and potential members. UCB branch secretary Sian Williams also put on food and drink, which went down well!
Pensions presentation/surgeries take the format of an open meeting followed by timed advice slots for UCU members only. Chris Mason and Geraldine Egan from our pensions department are happy to do this at your branch at any time, not just for recruitment week. If you are interested, please contact Lesley Foley (lfoley@ucu.org.uk).

Recruitment tools you can use in future recruitment activities:
Galvanise any bakers on your committee into action! The team at Harper Adams Uni had the inspired idea of arranging for UCU cupcakes to be available in the staff common room before their AGM earlier this year. Apparently they went down a storm and they also recruited new members as a result.

Recruiting non-lecturers’ in further education
UCU have produced new bargaining guidance and resources for campaigning and organising non-lecturers in FE which can be found here. These can be used for associate lecturers and educational support staff.

Join UCU by telephone
As well as using the link on the UCU website, https://join.ucu.org.uk/ workers can now join by telephone on 0333 207 0719, 09:15-16:45 Monday to Friday – calls charged at standard rates.

If you need any help with recruitment/branch development/materials please do not hesitate to contact Lesley Foley (lfoley@ucu.org.uk).

Build the union
Every branch has scope for growth. There are two more national recruitment weeks planned next year, the first being the week commencing 22 February. Recruitment is an ongoing process, especially in light of the jobs cull resulting from post March funding cuts. The time is now to raise the union’s profile—you can use email shots, posters, and stalls at lunchtime. When the union is seen to campaign over issues that are relevant to them - people join.
If you need help contact: Lesley Foley (lfoley@ucu.org.uk)
**OTHER NEWS**

**Disability History Month**
UCU has celebrated Disability History Month since its launch in 2010. The month provides an opportunity to focus on disabled members’ issues. This year UCU is focusing on disability leave.

UCU find it is disappointing that Higher Education employers refused to make disability leave a national agreement and many Further Education colleges have not yet adopted the Joint agreement on guidance on equality in employment in Further Education colleges.

Disability Leave and new updated guide for Disability History Month
Branches are asked to raise awareness of disability leave and disseminate the updated guide ‘enabling not disabling’ during Disability History Month.

[www.uuc.org.uk/circ/rtf/ucu688.rtf](http://www.uuc.org.uk/circ/rtf/ucu688.rtf)

Paul Lunn regional disabled members’ officer would like to pilot a new initiative in the West Midlands region, encouraging each local committee to have a "Disability Officer", and to recruit a disabled member to take up this position, in addition to your Equality Officer. The Disability Officers’ role would involve meeting with fellow disabled members and representing their views on your local committee and disseminating information disabled colleagues. If you have any queries please contact Paul via email at paul.lunn@coventry.ac.uk

**West Midlands Black Members’ Network**
The second meeting of the West Midlands Black Members’ Network took place on 19 November. It was well attended, in spite of trouble on the rail network between Coventry and Birmingham. The group is looking at issues facing black members in the region. If you are interested in attending future meetings in the coming year please email Dave Muritu dmuritu@hotmail.com or Lesley Foley lfoley@ucu.org.uk

**Strike action at Open University**
The OU is taking strike action in response to the closure threat to regional centres and 500 jobs. W Midlands regional strike action is on Monday 30 November in Birmingham. Contact Martina Gibbons at the West Midlands OU regional centre. Offer your support at m.gibbons@open.ac.uk Please attend the picket on 30 November at West Midlands OU Regional Centre, 66 High Street, Harborne, Birmingham B17 9NB. Please alert members to these issues and encourage them to support OU colleagues.

Register to vote by 1 December
Time is running out – make sure you [register to vote here](http://register-to-vote.hubpages.com/) and please circulate the link to colleagues and students. Everyone eligible or soon-to-be eligible elector from the age of 16 up should be on the electoral register and with the UK government due to redraw the Westminster constituency boundaries based on the registered population on 1 December, making sure that everyone is signed up is more important than ever before. You can help raise awareness by [downloading and displaying these materials](http://www.uuc.org.uk/circ/ucu688.pdf), produced jointly with the National Union of Students

HE news – issue 42 out now!
Featuring five key facts to help build the campaign in your branch for fair pay, [issue 42 of HE news is out now](http://www.uuc.org.uk/circ/rtf/ucu688.rtf)

**DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

**Saturday 6 February 2016**
Regional Committee Meeting
Birmingham Alpha Tower Office

**UCU Training Programme 2015-2016**
We have spaces on the following courses:

- **Rep 2 Representing UCU Members**
  9-11 December
  Contact Lesley Foley or register on line lfoley@ucu.org.uk

- **Effective Negotiation and Bargaining**
  9-11 March 2016
  Contact Lesley Foley or register on line lfoley@ucu.org.uk

- **Challenging and Handling Redundancies**
  15-17 June 2016
  Contact Jenn Estridge (jestridge@ucu.org.uk)

- **Understanding Pensions**
  7-8 July 2016
  Contact Jenn Estridge (jestridge@ucu.org.uk)

**LET US KNOW WHAT YOU THINK**

We intend this Newsletter to be a regular feature and welcome contributions from across the West Midlands region.

Email the editor, Lesley Foley (lfoley@ucu.org.uk)