

Regional Office Roundup

State of the Union

The Regional Office staff based in Leeds work with, and on behalf of, UCU Branches and Local Associations in Yorkshire and Humberside.

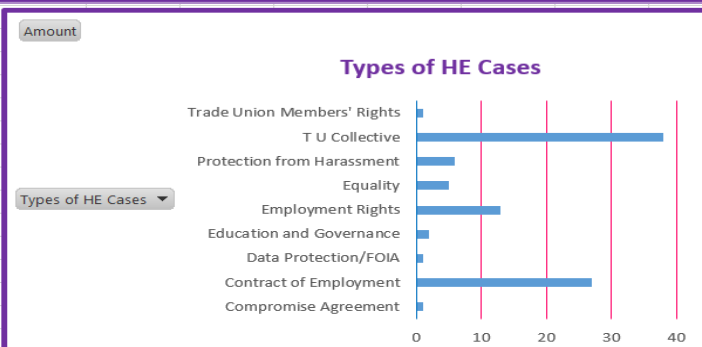
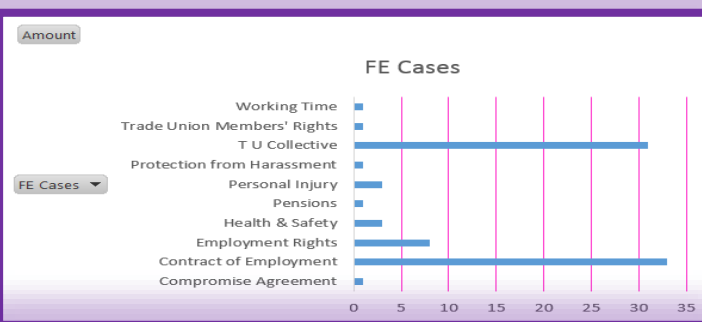
In the Yorkshire and Humberside Region there are 25 FE College branches, 10 Adult Education Branches and 12 University Branches/Associations. Staff also support Prison Educators located in our Region.

There are a total of 9102 UCU members in our Colleges, Universities and Adult Education Branches.

The Branch and the Branch officers are the cornerstone of UCU. There are 281 branch representatives in the Region, giving a ratio of 1 lay representative per 32 members.

Most of the UCU representatives have participated in many of the UCU training opportunities provided by UCU. Maintaining and increasing the numbers of trained and active representatives is one of the Regional Office's priorities as this is essential if we are to have effective bargaining, representation and recruitment in workplaces. Good branch organisation, committed lay activists, together with UCU's experienced Officers and Officials, have helped members through countless difficult collective and individual situations.

Regional Office Cases from start of Academic Year 2016



Case Work

The two charts show a breakdown of the type of work Regional Office staff deal with in supporting branches with collective issues, which include anything from disputes to negotiating policies and procedures. They also show the amount and type of work supporting individual members with, for example, personal injury claims and employment rights.

Case Studies

Recent notable successes include:

A case involving a Curriculum Team Leader who was dismissed from employment following an incident involving a number of students misbehaving. With the support of UCU, the member appealed against the decision to dismiss and was successful in having the dismissal overturned. The member was reinstated and has now returned to work.

Another case involved a Research Academic whose fixed term contract came to an end. As part of the institution's redeployment policy, the member would be entitled to receive an enhanced redundancy package if the member had actively engaged with the redeployment policy. The institution refused to pay the enhanced payment, citing that the institution believed our member had not actively engaged with applying for vacancies through the redeployment process. The member, unfortunately, had left the institution and had no written evidence to disprove the institution's stance. The member sought advice and support from the Union. Following a formal personal file request – called a subject access request, the required evidence was obtained which supported the member's position. The institution paid the enhanced payment.

Personal Performance Ratings come to an end at Sheffield College

Serious studies argue that in the FE/HE sectors there are two categories under which performance management mechanisms can be classified. These are "Agency based" PM systems and "Stewardship" PM systems. Agency PM is based on an economic theory suggesting two parties in a college – management and the rest (Agents). It sees the Agent (us) as having opportunistic behaviours in pursuit of individual interests. In order to prevent this and force adherence to the institution's "values", monitoring and incentives and threats are used. In contrast, "Stewardship" theory argues that behaviour in institutions is not primarily opportunistic but guided by the values of public service and the protection of long term interests of others and of the organisation (if its values coincide with theirs.) Under "Stewardship" theory the role of PM is to create a high trust working environment, the development of the intrinsic motivation of individuals and possibilities of self-management. A form of Agency PM has been operated by management there for a couple of years and has created havoc. Demoralised staff, an exponential rise in the number of grievances, and a management where performance indicators determine their pay,

Personal Performance Ratings come to an end at Sheffield College (cont)

have proven to be disastrous for staff and students alike. The Performance Management System threw up issues such as quota ratings whereby only a specific number of staff can achieve the highest rating, a scatter gun inconsistent approach to the use of improvement plans with a blatant disregard for staff health and wellbeing. This has led to stress, staff absence, resignations and divisiveness. UCU has criticised and campaigned against the system over the past year. At long last, a recent email to staff from the Chief Executive signalled the start of what we shall call a reflective review by the college. The following key statement was enclosed in the email –

“Significantly, we are planning to replace the performance development review ratings system with non-graded summative reflections on performance and development across the year. Greater emphasis will instead be placed on regular informal one-to-one meetings and the tracking of rolling objectives.

This approach is regarded as the best way to improve collective performance, represents a significant departure from previous practice and has been identified based on feedback from the Learning Together Review. If performance issues exist, these will be addressed as and when they arise, as will opportunities for accelerated progression. Further details will be provided following feedback from, and engagement with, a range of stakeholders.”

This represents a welcome change in direction and we hope it is a step on the way to a Stewardship approach to performance management and a lesson for other College Managements not to go down this route driven by crackpot HR theorists.

Rest of the Region

Good work by local branches at Hull University and Sheffield International College. Both employers have moved away from a compulsory redundancy scenario.

Barnsley College branch are in the process of negotiating a policy document that will enable some Part Time Variable Hours staff to move on to a permanent form of contract.

Bradford College Branch have recently sent reps on a three day Health and Safety course run by Leeds City College TU Centre. The branch now has 10 trained up Health and Safety reps, each having 2 hours a week remission to carry out their duties. Bradford College will be a safe place to work as a consequence.

Recruitment Weeks

What has now become a regular part of the UCU's annual calendar of activity are termly week long recruitment activities. Branches across the country have organised workshops, mailshots, newsletters, stalls and walk rounds, all with a view to raising the profile of UCU and recruiting new members. The strategy seems to be paying dividends. In Yorkshire and Humberside in the last 12 months membership numbers have risen modestly by 102 members. Statistics relating to new joiners are particularly pleasing, with an increase in FE of 11.1% and HE of 50.7% in comparison to the previous year.

No time for Complacency

While it is always good to hear some good news for a change, we cannot afford to become complacent and unfortunately employers in the region continue to throw up challenges.

Leeds University are proposing changes to their employment statute which, amongst other things, will codify a procedure to dismiss academic staff on Some Other Substantial Reason grounds. This is a catch all reason for dismissal. The employer has been unable to articulate when they might use this process and understandably this has caused grave concerns with UCU. The branch have lodged a dispute and are currently balloting members for industrial action.

The threat of redundancies never seems to go away. In FE, The Rotherham North Notts Group have placed 170 staff at risk of redundancy, Doncaster College are proposing to close their High Melton site with the loss of up to 58 jobs and more job cuts seem likely at Leeds City College. Sadly, this phenomena now seems to be becoming more common place in HE, the University of Bradford is in a constant round of restructuring which has resulted in a number of UCU members being identified for compulsory redundancy, the University of Huddersfield and Leeds College of Art have also placed academic staff members at risk of redundancy. The University of Sheffield is currently embarking upon a large scale restructuring exercise and while they have not served a Section 188 notice they will not rule out compulsory redundancies. Hull College's serious financial problems still continue to be a grave a concern for our members' job security and potentially, terms and conditions. The new college leadership team is currently producing a comprehensive recovery plan for the EFA and are in talks with branch officers over proposals to reduce the value of existing salary protection arrangements. Are the two things unconnected? Sadly probably not!

North Lindsey College & Doncaster College are proposing to merge. Formal collective consultation has yet to commence and given that TUPE legislation will apply, both institutions have recently been written to remind them of their statutory obligations. Kirklees College has a new Principal and after many years of no cost of living pay rise, offered a 1% consolidated award. Very good you might think, but unfortunately management have shifted the pay award date with no negotiation, from 1st August to 1st April! Meanwhile the college continues to recruit new managers to the SLT team. UCU believe it is a question of priorities and continue to push for the pay rise to be backdated.

Due to not having a cost of living pay rise for 7 years, Branch Officers from Bradford College have submitted a local pay claim to their management for a pay rise. The management have responded and offered a paltry 0.35% consolidated and 0.65% unconsolidated. With the value of pay being systematically eroded, officers are surveying members to determine next steps.

This is just a snapshot of what is happening in the region and apologies if your branch has not been mentioned as there is never a shortage of activity or stories. One common denominator connecting all these situations is that strong and organised UCU branches working to well-planned strategies can and do make a huge difference to the outcome of workplace disputes and problems.