

Welcome

Last Updated Wednesday, 16 December 2009

EQUALITY THROUGH EDUCATION AND STRUGGLE

Welcome to the web site of the Northumbria University Branch of the University and College Union. This site is under development and we shall be progressively adding material to it in the course of time. For the present, access is open to all, but as the site develops some areas will be restricted to members only, with verification by membership number. Now is a good time to check up! If you have lost your number, you will find it on the address slip of your UC magazine, or you can always ask for it via the UCU national web site.

Northumbria University Branch of UCU incorporates the former Branch of the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (natfhe) together with former members of the Association of University Teachers (AUT) employed at (or retired from) this institution. Since 1 June 2006 both national associations have been merged into the new union. We are a democratic, campaigning branch (see How We Function) with a strong tradition of defending our members' interests, over jobs, pay, equal rights and conditions of service. On very rare occasions that perspective has brought us into such sharp conflict with the University Management that we have been obliged to ballot on, and take, industrial action. This has always been a last resort, and members recognise that the ability of Branch Officers to deliver on a whole range of other issues depends on the unity and strength of purpose of the Branch when the chips are down.

UCU is recognised at Northumbria to represent academic staff, and all agreements negotiated with natfhe have carried over to the new union. You will find the most important such Local Agreements on this site. Many are also on the Northumbria University web site but they are sometimes difficult to find there.

STAFF SURVEY OUTCOME UCU encouraged all members to participate in the Staff Survey last October. This was on the understanding that the full unadulterated results from provider Capita would be supplied to the union at the same time as the University received them. Summary results, as an average over the whole university, have been published. But the University Management has been sitting since December on an 1800-page detailed document from Capita, only promising us that "you will get this information when it is prepared in the format we will publish it in and when it is ready to be circulated - the reports are simply being reorganised. You will receive the Reports early in February." Quite apart from the fact that this is already "early February", and we have not yet had the reports, your Branch Committee considers that it is already quite long enough after the University received the information for them to put their own glossy spin on it. The overall Survey results already reveal a number of areas of concern. But for UCU the important matter was always the detail. The Survey was necessitated because the Health & Safety Executive had found areas of the University where there were excessively high levels of stress. We know that this is not a University-wide problem, but it is precisely the detail - by School and by staff grade - which will reveal where action needs to be taken. The Branch Committee therefore regards University Management as in breach of an agreement reached by UCU in good faith. As a result we have taken the unprecedented step of submitting a Freedom of Information request for the full 1800-page report, even if this will not arrive until after Management's "reorganised" reports. Furthermore, and in the context of the above, the Branch Committee is extremely disturbed at the University Management's approach to dealing with the Survey outcomes:

- At no time during our prior discussions about the Survey was there any suggestion that its outcomes would be considered by "focus groups";
- The terms of reference of these groups have not been defined, except that they will be dealing with certain University-wide issues rather than matters of detail.
- The way in which the University proposes to set up the focus groups clearly indicates that they can be "stacked" by Management nominees rather than be truly representative.
- No assurances been given that participants in the focus groups will be able to speak their minds openly, without fear of prejudice to their careers. It is patently obvious to UCU that this is an exercise by the University Management to avoid constructive negotiations on the matter with the recognised trade unions. The Branch Committee takes the view that the Survey outcomes, in detail, are matters for collective discussion through the Joint Negotiating Committee and its subgroups, including any which might be established specifically for this purpose. In the light of the above the Branch Committee has decided that we have no option but to refuse to participate in an exercise which would be nothing more than a charade. We urge all members to do likewise - i.e. BOYCOTT MANAGEMENT'S FOCUS GROUP CHARADE