

## Short branch officers' report Newcastle UCU 2021/22

We begin by thanking all our Branch Representatives (including all those who have undertaken casework, health and safety and worked with members in other capacities), the Branch Committee, and our Branch Administrator for all their hard work in a challenging year that included ballot campaigns and industrial action.

Our major focus over the last year has been equality. Concerns were raised two years ago during our successful defence of members, when there were attempts to force staff back to work at the height of the pandemic. Since then, we have remained concerned that the employer's responses to the pandemic exacerbated underlying inequalities that continue to play out.

Currently we are in negotiations that put equality front and centre in all our union work, but we should also acknowledge that in doing so we are recovering ground. Specifically:

- We have actively pursued Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) for all new policies coming from HR. As a branch, we previously had not received any EIAs from the university management. Now we are requesting them and ensuring that they are completed correctly and are more than tick box exercises. This has been a long process, but we are making good progress on this.
- Following from this, the EIA data we pursued and eventually received on a new disciplinary policy, provided us with evidence that there are problems with race equality at the university. We have alerted university management to this, and will continue to pursue it
- We published a Workload Report ([Workload Report Newcastle University 2021 \(ucu.org.uk\)](https://www.ucu.org.uk/workload-report-newcastle-university-2021)) that focuses on equality issues and is being used to negotiate a just and equitable Covid Recovery Plan with the university management.
- Equality and Diversity is a standing item at all our branch committee meetings
- Within the branch we have started an equality working group made up of interested members.
- We are members of Regional Equality Group (with the equality officers at other universities in the region) which has organised events linked to Anti-Racism Day, International Women's Day, decolonisation, and disability. The Covid recovery plan was suggested by the Regional Equality Group.
- We have held International Women's Day events, Anti-Racism Day events, contributed to Black History Month event, and organised a Holocaust Memorial Day event.

The branch officers would also note that there were significant levels of School-wide issues over the year that have taken significant effort and time.

This is addition to attending meetings with the employer's representatives on a regular basis. These have not been easy with agendas filled by a series of policy concerns that were often not the priority of members, but all the same required addressing for potentially detrimental impacts on colleagues. Nevertheless, we have stated on several occasions the issues that now form the basis for the current dispute. As a result of our lobbying, management have now changed the structures and scrapped the People Policy Forum which used to relegate the unions' involvement to the same position as any interested party from across the university. In its place a joint union forum now takes place with the three unions (UCU, UNISON and UNITE) consulted collectively. The employer has agreed to adopt a more manageable pace to policy change which allows time for proper consideration and consultation with our reps on changes.

We have taken an evidence-based approach to negotiations. This includes most notably, the workload report circulated earlier this year (see above). We also commissioned a report on the

university's finances which has swept away the employer's propaganda that the university's finances are unsound while exposing some of the risks that have resulted from their own financial policies.

It was our overarching organisational aim to rebuild branch structures that would be more inclusive, collegiate, and accountable. This resulted in:

1. The strengthening of the network of branch representatives and improved communications. There is still more work here to do and is one of the reasons for creating faculty convenors on the Committee.
2. The reorganisation of casework that is now reintegrated into Branch Committee, ending structural tensions, and beginning to address the increase in demand from members.
3. Re-establishing regular branch meetings as published in the branch constitution.
4. Rotating chairing of branch meetings and making better use of video conferencing tools.
5. Establishing new Committee roles including strengthening PGR representation.
6. Establishing stronger and more inclusive working relations on the Branch Committee. Shared responsibilities across the committee moving away from a presidential style of leadership.
7. Growing the size and density of the branch. Noting that the figures in ballot results are a substantial under-estimate of our membership figure. We note that our membership has increased during periods of industrial action.

We acknowledge that there is great deal more work to do. This includes rebuilding our Health and Safety network that came under enormous pressure over the last two years. We also recognise that resources, including facility time, are currently insufficient

However, overall, we believe that the branch is in a much better place this year than last.

More detailed information can be found in our newsletters. These are available on our website under the News Events tab at <https://ncl.web.ucu.org.uk/>

**UCU Newcastle  
Branch Officers 2021/22**