

Cardiff UCU: Getting to know your union branch

The more we work together, the stronger we are as a branch and as a union, which is why members should get involved in meetings and branch activity, even if they can't commit a lot of time. This document has information on how to get involved, how the branch operates, and how you can get help if you have an issue at work.

1. How can I get involved?

We have regular general meetings and working group meetings, as well as specific campaigns that members can get involved with (these will vary depending on what's going on).

1.1 Our current working groups:

- Anti-casualisation (including postgrad researcher concerns)
- Health and Safety, workload and wellbeing
- Equality and diversity
- Environment

Each of these groups meet monthly to discuss concerns and make plans for pursuing improvements in the university in each area. Working groups are a great way to get involved around issues important to you. A list of meeting dates can be found [here](#) and each group has a Teams channel for discussions outside of meetings. Email ucu@cardiff.ac.uk to be added to the Teams channels and receive meeting invites.

1.2 General meetings

There are usually four general meetings a year. Three are General Meetings (GM) and one is an Annual General Meeting (AGM). In response to arising situations or deadlines for formal UCU Cymru or UCU UK business that falls before a scheduled meeting, Emergency or Extraordinary General Meetings (EGM) may also be called.

General meetings are usually a mixture of discussing updates on university situations or issues affecting members, debating motions that have been submitted by members, and conducting formal union business like approving accounts or electing representatives. The agenda will usually be ordered based on urgency; relevance to the branch; and relevance to the sector.

How to contribute:

- To submit a motion, email ucu@cardiff.ac.uk. A short guide on writing motions can be found [here](#).
- To submit an item for the agenda, please email the Branch Secretary by the Monday two weeks before the meeting.

Standing items that appear on every ordinary general meeting are:

- Approval of the previous meeting's minutes;
- matters arising from the above;
- equality, diversity and inclusion.

When taking speakers, the Chair will prioritize new members, people who haven't spoken yet at that meeting, and members who are not on the executive committee. This is to ensure that as many people as possible have a chance to speak, and to promote more diverse and inclusive discussion.

Our Annual General Meeting (AGM) usually takes place in March or April. At the AGM, [executive committee members](#) are elected and accounts are presented.

You can read the Branch Rules and Standing Orders for meetings [here](#), including details such as how much notice needs to be given for a meeting, how members can request a meeting to be held, etc.

2. How does the branch operate?

2.1 Decision-making and setting branch policy

Cardiff UCU is democratic and member-led – this means that it relies on members to participate and get involved. General meetings are the basis of our democratic participation, because it is only by coming together and discussing or debating issues that we can reach informed decisions. Electronic votes are avoided except in situations where a very quick turnaround is needed, because it is important to hear everyone's perspectives before decisions are made.

Branch policy is decided in a few ways:

- Motions are submitted by members to General Meetings, which are debated and voted on by the membership
- Strategic priorities are agreed by the elected committee members and representatives in September each year
- The elected executive committee can make decisions on arising issues throughout the academic year and report back to General Meetings
- Working groups meet monthly and feedback to the executive committee. While these groups do not directly set policy, they are important places for hearing from members and making proposals for areas of work.

2.2 Electing committee members, representatives and delegates

As a democratic membership organisation, representatives are elected by the membership. Anyone can run for any position, and different types of elected positions are described below.

Executive committee

Each year, Cardiff UCU members elect an executive committee of 30 members (roles and descriptions can be found [here](#)). The executive committee meets every month to discuss issues affecting members, and make decisions. Executive committee members are also involved in regular negotiations and consultations with the university around redundancies, policies etc.

Department representatives

[Department representatives](#), or 'dep reps', act as a local source of information, support and advice. They are an important connector between the branch and rank-and-file members. We aim to have at least one dep rep in every School, as well as the bigger professional services and other non-school departments.

Dep reps are not usually elected in the same way as committee members but when someone wishes to put themselves forward as a rep, all members in that workplace will be emailed to let them know and give them the chance to step forward if they are also interested.

We are always looking out for more dep reps, even where we already have one or more. **If you are interested in becoming a dep rep or learning more about what it involves, get in touch with rcampbell@ucu.org.uk**

Safety reps

Safety representatives have legally protected powers to inspect, investigate and raise health and safety hazards. Wellbeing and psychosocial hazards, such as work-related stress, are included within the remit of our safety representatives, and we consider workload as a safety issue. If your department does not have a safety representative, you can email ucu@cardiff.ac.uk to raise any concerns.

Delegates to UCU Cymru and UCU UK meetings

The branch is entitled to send delegates to a range of UCU Cymru and UCU UK meetings to hear from other branches, join in conversations and vote on policy. For some meetings members can also attend as observers. Delegates are elected at a branch General Meeting, and report back to members with a summary of the meeting. They will also be accountable for their voting choices. You can put yourself forward by emailing the Branch Secretary in advance, or by volunteering during the meeting itself.

We send delegates to:

- UCU Cymru Congress – usually held in March
- UCU Congress – usually held in late May
- Annual meetings of particular staff groups (e.g. staff on casualised contracts; academic-related and professional services staff) – these usually take place in February-March

2.3 How the branch fits into national UCU structures

Branch policy and national policy are set in similar ways but separately. The supreme decision-making body of UCU at the UK level is the annual Congress. Branches and national committees can submit motions to Congress, which are then debated and voted on by branch delegates. In between annual Congress, the National Executive Committee (and its sectoral committees, Higher Education Committee and Further Education Committee) sit quarterly. Representatives for these committees are elected nationally in a postal ballot each year. Find out more [here](#).

There are also committees representing particular groups of members nationally (e.g. casualised members, academic-related professional services) and equality committees (e.g. Black members, women members, migrant members). Elections take place at the [annual meetings](#) for each of these groups.

UCU Cymru is the national committee for members in Wales and consists of delegates from HE and FE across branches in Wales.

3. What should I do if I have an issue at work?

If you have an issue at work, you should first speak to your [departmental representative](#) or a member of the executive committee who covers a relevant area (such as the Disability Officer or Anti-Casualisation Officer). The [ACAS website](#) is also a very useful additional resource for information.

It is best to get in touch with us as soon as you become aware of a potential issue, so we have enough time to assess the situation and, where relevant, allocate a caseworker to you before any meetings etc.

If you need urgent support, you can contact:

- Cardiff UCU office, normally staffed Monday to Thursday, 9.30am-5pm: The phone number is 029 2087 4443 and email is ucu@cardiff.ac.uk
- Paul Brennan, our casework coordinator: BrennanP@cardiff.ac.uk
- [ACAS helpline](#)
- [Education Support](#) helpline

3.1 Getting help

As well as negotiating and bargaining on your terms and conditions nationally and locally, UCU can help you individually if you have a problem at work. You can contact your [departmental representative](#), if there is one in your department, and/or contact [our office](#). We will advise you on ways to address your problem, offer support such as attending meetings with you, suggesting that you request a caseworker, if relevant, or direct you to other sources of support and guidance.

You will find a lot of information and advice about problems at work on the [national UCU website](#). As a UCU member, you can also get support from the [Education Support Partnership](#) which runs a telephone helpline – 0800 0562 5610 – to help people deal with stress and anxiety, bullying, career and money worries, and a range of other issues.

If you are facing bullying, sexual harassment and/or discrimination at work, please visit our [Bullying and Sexual Harassment in work](#) page and/or our [Disability and Discrimination](#) page, where you will find relevant information and the contact details for our various officers specialising in different areas.

3.2 Casework

The branch has a team of caseworkers who advise and represent UCU members with issues relating to your employment at Cardiff University. Cardiff UCU caseworkers are colleagues of yours who are employees of Cardiff University and members of UCU. They undertake casework on a voluntary basis and receive training and support within the branch and from Regional Office – UCU Cymru.

Caseworkers are drawn from across the University, from Academic and Professional Services staff. You will be allocated a caseworker from a different School/Department from your own, and your case will be dealt with confidentially. The team is led by the branch Casework Co-Ordinator, Paul Brennan, who is also a long-standing caseworker.

The caseworker will talk to you about your situation and your options. Sometimes this is as far as it goes. If you want to pursue the matter, the caseworker will help you do this and will accompany or represent you at meetings if you wish them to do so. If you already know that you need a caseworker, you can [download a casework request form](#). Please complete sections 1 and 2 and email it to caseworkrequests@cardiffucu.onmicrosoft.com, which is monitored by our office staff and Casework Lead.

If you need legal advice, you need to request this through UCU Regional Office and your caseworker will tell you how to do this. **Please be aware that there are strict time limits for pursuing legal claims, and you should contact us without delay.**

4. What next?

We are the union, and the strength of the union lies in active members working together to make our workplace, sector, and society, better. Even if you have only a few hours a month to spare, you can be part of that.

Please get in touch if there is anything in this document that you would like to get involved with: ucu@cardiff.ac.uk

The power to make a positive change lies in your hands!