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**Higher education pay and equality ballot opens 15 January**

Members at 143 universities will be asked to vote in a ballot for action to address the falling value of HE pay, insecure contracts and the gender pay gap. [UCU is in dispute over the employers’ offer of 2%](https://list.mercury.ucu.org.uk/t/64762/151504/7400/1/)which means a real terms pay cut of 21% since 2009. HE members should look out for ballot papers arriving in the post next week – please vote ‘yes’ to both questions and encourage colleagues to do the same.

**FE fightback continues: new strike dates proposed**

More and more further education (FE) staff are saying enough is enough and UCU members at 16 colleges have now voted to take strike action to secure a better deal. UCU’s further education committee (FEC) officers have recommended 29 and 30 January, and 20, 21 and 22 March as the next strike days so please look out for confirmation over the next week.

**Black academics speak out over unfair pay**

Over a dozen ethnic minority academics have come forward with allegations of unlawfully being paid less than white colleagues doing similar jobs. [Read their stories in this BBC article](https://list.mercury.ucu.org.uk/t/64762/151504/7381/2/) including UCU’s call for universities to work with us to tackle insecure contracts which disproportionately impact women and ethnic minority staff. A UCU report looking at the experience of black female professors is due for release next month.

**Join the conversation at UCU’s Cradle to Grave conference, 16 February**

The Cradle to Grave series of conferences provide a unique opportunity to discuss current issues with top speakers from the world of politics and education. This year’s conference taking place next month in Manchester and shadow secretary of state for education Angela Rayner has been invited to be our keynote speaker. [More details and registration here.](https://list.mercury.ucu.org.uk/t/64762/151504/7371/3/)

**LGBT+ research conference – call for papers**

This is a [one-day conference](https://list.mercury.ucu.org.uk/t/64762/151504/7383/4/?c73c8e04=Y2FtcGFpZ251cGRhdGU%3d&60bc612e=X2FsbC1tZW1iZXJz&560a3889=VGhlIEZyaWRheSBlbWFpbDogMTEgSmFudWFyeSAyMDE5&x=38b7800e) for academics, researchers and activists conducting research on sexual orientation and gender identity issues and/or bisexual, gay, intersex, lesbian, queer, trans lives. The call for papers has a deadline of 25 February. The conference will be in Manchester on Friday 17 May.

**General Election now! People’s Assembly demonstration tomorrow**

Anti-austerity campaigners are assembling in London tomorrow for [a demonstration calling for a general election.](https://list.mercury.ucu.org.uk/t/64762/151504/7384/5/) Meet 12 noon, Saturday 12 January, BBC Portland Place, London, W1A 1AA.

**USS update**

[Please see here for an update on USS](https://list.mercury.ucu.org.uk/t/64762/151504/7399/6/?c73c8e04=Y2FtcGFpZ251cGRhdGU%3d&60bc612e=X2FsbC1tZW1iZXJz&560a3889=VGhlIEZyaWRheSBlbWFpbDogMTEgSmFudWFyeSAyMDE5&x=6216c379) including the live technical provisions consultation with employers.

As a result of the unavoidable resignation of one of UCU’s JEP members we are seeking to appoint a new panellist as phase 2 of the work commences. [More information and details of how to apply here.](https://list.mercury.ucu.org.uk/t/64762/151504/7382/7/?c73c8e04=Y2FtcGFpZ251cGRhdGU%3d&60bc612e=X2FsbC1tZW1iZXJz&560a3889=VGhlIEZyaWRheSBlbWFpbDogMTEgSmFudWFyeSAyMDE5&x=c6ea4eb5)

**UCU democracy commission**

UCU’s democracy commission, established by Congress 2018, has begun its work to review UCU’s democratic structures and make recommendations, and is keen to hear from members. Please email comments to the commission here. More information including minutes of the first commission meeting [is available here.](https://list.mercury.ucu.org.uk/t/64762/151504/6497/8/?c73c8e04=Y2FtcGFpZ251cGRhdGU%3d&60bc612e=X2FsbC1tZW1iZXJz&560a3889=VGhlIEZyaWRheSBlbWFpbDogMTEgSmFudWFyeSAyMDE5&x=4ec9c1e6)

**UCU subscriptions consultation**

Congress 2018 passed [motion 6 requiring the honorary treasurer and NEC to review our subscription rates and bands.](https://list.mercury.ucu.org.uk/t/64762/151504/7390/9/?c73c8e04=Y2FtcGFpZ251cGRhdGU%3d&60bc612e=X2FsbC1tZW1iZXJz&560a3889=VGhlIEZyaWRheSBlbWFpbDogMTEgSmFudWFyeSAyMDE5&x=45992f4a) As part of this review, members are invited to submit views on the principles set out in the motion, by Friday 15 February 2019.

Best wishes

Justine Stephens
UCU head of campaigns