University and College Union
University of Northampton Branch

November 2026 Newsletter

Branch News and Updates

National Day of Action

This Friday (20th November 2026) is UCU's National Day of Action**,** Higher Education. It's ours campaign. An event which recognises UK higher education is being undermined by long-term underfunding and marketisation, and calls for urgent investment, stronger governance, and collective action to secure a sustainable future for students, staff, and communities.

How we address this locally is in our hands, collectively as members of Northants UCU. As your representatives we ask that you raise awareness of these issues locally, including contacting your local MP; in the workplace, with your peers and colleagues; and through participating in this day of action with us, as a show of strength of feeling and concern. We ask that you join with us to build campaigns that challenge this practice and raise awareness that contributes to the wider debate about the value of, purpose and future of higher education for the difference it makes to us, our students, and our local economy.

To discuss how you can be a part of this day of action, or if you would like further details, come find your local representatives on Friday 20th November 2026, from 10:00-14:00hrs in the Learning Hub Drop-In zone, or contact northantsucu@gmail.com and we'll be in touch.

Three-week marking turnaround

The branch continues to be opposed to a three-week marking turnaround. We therefore ask you to continue to send in your thoughts about how so-called 'light-touch' marking may, or may not work. Would you need to provide less feedback to meet a three-week turnaround? Will you perhaps be moving from written assessments to group presentations in order to spend less time marking? Do you have a condition or disability that

Upcoming Events

Next branch meeting
December 16th 4pm
http://bit.ly/ucu-collab

Day of Action
November 20th 10.00-14.00
Drop-in zone, 2nd floor, Learning Hub

Branch Drop-ins
November 25th 10.00-11.00
LH109; https://tinyurl.com/2xfkdffv
December 2nd 14.00-15.00
LH108; https://tinyurl.com/sy5yxz7b
December 9th 10.00-11.00
LH108; https://tinyurl.com/zrypwuc8
December 16th 14.00-15.00
LH209; https://tinyurl.com/dhrasxhz

Branch Activity in Brief

What we've been up to this month
Casework: 16
JCNC meetings attended: 4
TUL meetings attended: 2
Other Committee meetings: 3
Staff induction: 1

means you already struggle to meet the four-week deadline? If so, have you applied for an occupational health referral, and/or agreed a workplace passport with your manager?

Please see our October 2026 update for more details on this. Please contact us by email if you wish to discuss further; your feedback so far has been very valuable!

Policy of the month

Having decided to restart publishing an occasional newsletter, we thought that (literally) nothing could be more exciting for our loyal reader than the reintroduction of everyone's favourite column, Policy of the Month. This month's topic, randomly selected by our trade union super-computer, is that of whistleblowing at work, and how this is addressed in the University of Northampton Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure.

In 1998 the UK Parliament passed the Public Interest Disclosure Act (PIDA). The Act protects all workers from victimisation or detrimental treatment from their employer if, in the public interest, they blow the whistle on wrongdoing. But what you might ask is 'wrongdoing' and how do we know whether reporting it qualifies for protection of the law? A qualifying disclosure is one which the worker *reasonably believes* tends to show that one (or more) of the following matters is either happening now, has happened in the past, or is likely to happen in the future:

a) a criminal offence has been committed, is being committed or is likely to be committed
b) the breach of a legal obligation;
c) a miscarriage of justice;
d) a danger to the health and safety of any individual;
e) damage to the environment; or
f) deliberate concealment of information tending to show any of the above five matters.

To give an example of point (b); Employers have a legal obligation to provide an adequate supply of wholesome drinking water for everyone in a workplace. If a worker at that workplace reasonably believed, that the water was unsuitable to drink, then he or she has the right to report that wrongdoing without suffering any detriment at the hands of the employer.

So how would someone report such a breach? The two key routes to do this are helpfully set out in section 7 of the UON policy. That is to say there is an *internal* disclosure, and an *external* disclosure. An internal disclosure should be made to an HR representative in the first instance, so that the matter can be

Your executive

Branch chair: Liam Miles
Vice chair: Richard Whitehead
Secretary: Annie Lama
Equality Officer: Kirstie Best
Health and safety officer: Hilary Scott
Health and safety officer: Friedemann Schaber
Academic Officer: Tracey Ali
Professional services officer: Declan Mee
Membership Secretary: Jacquie Ridge
Lead casework coordinator: Dominic Watts
Treasurer: Khanh Nguyen
Anit-casualisation officer: Louise Clarke
Committee member: Hazel McAllister
Committee member: Korrin Smith-Whitehouse
Committee member: Onur Acaroglu

How to contact us
Website:
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Instagram: ucunorthampton
X: @NorthantsUCU
Bluesky:
bsky.app/profile/northantsucu.bsky.social
Email: northantsucu@gmail.com

investigated. This is not to say that the investigation will necessarily resolve the breach, but it does mean that the worker has the right not to endure any detriment or punishment for reporting it.

However, if the worker:

- Remains dissatisfied following the outcome of an internal investigation into a disclosure, or
- Has a reasonable belief that the employer will disregard or conceal a disclosure, or
- Has a reasonable belief they would be treated unfairly or victimised if they made a disclosure, then he or she may make an *external* disclosure

As the wording suggests, this means that wrongdoing can be reported to a person or body outside of the business that they work for. These are known as *prescribed* people or bodies, a list of which can be found here. It may not be immediately obvious which body should be approached, and so, as per the UON policy, any UCU member at Northampton considering an external disclosure is encouraged to contact their trade union (either locally or regionally) before doing so.
Whistleblowing on issues such as drinkable water, workplace toilets, and temperatures in the workplace should be made to the Health and Safety Executive. It would be remiss of us not to point out that whistleblowing rights also apply to those who wish to report wrongdoing in a trade union (or an employer's association).

A few final things to point out:

- If you suspect that a there is, for example, a threat of violence to someone then you should notify the police in an emergency on 999.
- The protection given by PIDA is more limited in a situation where a worker blows the whistle to the media, or on social media. Governmental guidance is quite helpful in this regard.
- Similarly, workers may lose their protection if they whistle-blow for private gain.
- The whistleblowing procedure is not appropriate for raising grievances.

If you, or a colleague, believe you have suffered a detriment due to whistleblowing at work (regardless of who the employer is), then please contact your trade union without delay.

Update from the Casework Team

Since the beginning of October to the 13th November, the casework team have supported 16 of our members on matters related to grievances, disciplinaries, redundancy, whistleblowing, and performance management. Numerous other contacts have been received (both face to face and by email), the overwhelming majority of which related to concerns about the University's proposal to move to a three-week marking turnaround.

If you need our assistance with any work problem similar to those categories listed above, do get in touch by email at northantsucu@gmail.com.

Spotlight on the executive

Meet the Chair - Liam Miles



I joined the University of Northampton in 2024 as a Lecturer in Criminology. Since then, I have taken on several leadership roles, becoming Course Leader for the BA Criminal and Corporate Investigation programme. Alongside my teaching and leadership responsibilities, I remain research active, publishing and collaborating on studies focused on poverty, young people, and social theory. I also recently successfully defended my PhD thesis at Birmingham City University.

My interest in trade unionism has been longstanding. I first became involved with UCU through my former colleague David, a previous Branch Chair. We shared a commitment to collectivism, advocacy, freedom of speech, and the protection of workers' rights. These values inspired me to stand for election as Chair of UCU and continue to shape my approach to the role.

Since being elected Chair, I have immersed myself in branch activity at both operational and strategic levels. This includes supporting members, leading the Executive Committee, promoting awareness of the union, and representing colleagues across the University. I regularly engage with senior leaders through committees and forums including the Joint Consultation and Negotiation Committee (JCNC), Trade Union Liaison meetings, and a range of university working groups. I also chair

Executive and Members' Meetings, where I provide updates, answer questions, and facilitate discussion on emerging issues affecting our members.

I recognise the challenging environment facing both our university and the wider higher education sector. I am committed to working closely with colleagues, listening to members' concerns, and supporting those affected by organisational change and restructuring. My priority is to ensure that members' voices are heard and that staff are treated fairly, respectfully, and with dignity.

Outside of work, I am an avid reader with a particular interest in politics, philosophy, and sociology. I am also an aviation enthusiast and am currently undertaking flying lessons on light aircraft. When I'm not working or studying, I enjoy running, keeping fit, and spending time with family and friends, who are a hugely important part of my life.

Liam Miles
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