

# UNIFY

2020  
Edition



## TIME FOR EXPLORING GREATER UNITY

As I write, UCU is in the midst of the greatest struggle we have ever been involved in. So far, members in HE have sustained an unprecedented 22 days of all out strike action which has brought the employers back to the negotiating table. Hopefully, these negotiations will be productive but it is possible that further action will be necessary.

Members have been driven to fight back by year after year of real terms pay cuts and the continuous “drip-drip” effect of growing casualization and worsening working conditions – all of which has been going on since I first entered the profession in the 1970s. And all of it compounded by ever increasing workloads, an ever widening gender pay gap and clear evidence of discrimination against BME members. For those in pre 1992 universities, the ultimate provocation was the threat to destroy our defined benefit pension scheme.

Understandably, UCU’s immediate focus must be on winning current disputes. But, when the dust settles, the Union will have to explore new ways of

building even greater strength for the future. There is only one way to achieve this – unity, unity and more unity! Of course, there has been a fair degree of spontaneous support for the UCU action – solidarity visits to picket lines, welcome donations to the Union’s Fighting fund, to mention just a couple.

But, how much more effective could we have been had we had one strong union representing everyone in education – from porters to professors and spanning all sectors from nursery schools to research institutions.

A single education union would bring together the one million workers in our service, would be able to plan a coordinated strategy to reverse the cuts of the past half century and to share the costs of taking action sector by sector.

The time for unity is now. The first steps have already been taken – AUT merging with NATFHE into UCU – ATL merging with NUT into NEU. The next and decisive step is clear – unity between UCU and NEU would create a beacon for the rest of the education workforce to follow.



Alan Carr, Retired UCU member, Former President AUT, Former Treasurer UCU and Honorary President UNIFY on a UCU Belfast picket line—Day 14

## A MESSAGE FOR ALL WORKING IN EDUCATION

*"Across the months of lockdown and the COVID pandemic, the education unions have consistently worked together for the benefit of everyone in our schools and colleges. There has never been closer collaboration with joint letters, shared research and united public statements. The logic of professional unity has never been more evident: the possibility never closer - one union with a single purpose to represent the full breadth of interests of all those employed in education. It's a compelling vision and a tantalising prospect!"*

Robin Bevan,  
NEU National President



"Wigan NEU maintains very good working relationships with other unions in our borough particularly NASUWT, Unison and GMB. In ordinary circumstances we all meet in person with the Local Authority every couple of months but by mutual agreement this was increased to weekly (online) during the lockdown and has continued throughout the summer break.

Additionally, the TUs with members in education (NEU, NASUWT, Unison) requested further weekly dedicated meetings with the LA and these took place up until the end of term, with the next one planned for late August. As many of our members were bringing us similar concerns we found it useful to liaise with other union colleagues in advance of these meetings so that we could put together the issues we wanted to raise and identify the outcomes we all wanted for our members.

The council staff appreciated that too as it helped to focus the conversations. This is not something we have routinely done before, however the Covid crisis helped to facilitate this more collaborative approach. Inevitably, our collective

voice was louder than a single one and we made some real gains on health and safety matters which the council then incorporated into its weekly briefings to headteachers. As a fairly new District Secretary the crisis has been something of a 'baptism of fire' for me but also a great opportunity to get to know other union secretaries in Wigan. We aim to continue to work closely together in the coming months and hopefully beyond."

**Karen Parkin, NEU Executive and District Secretary for Wigan**



## ***Working together means gains for workers***

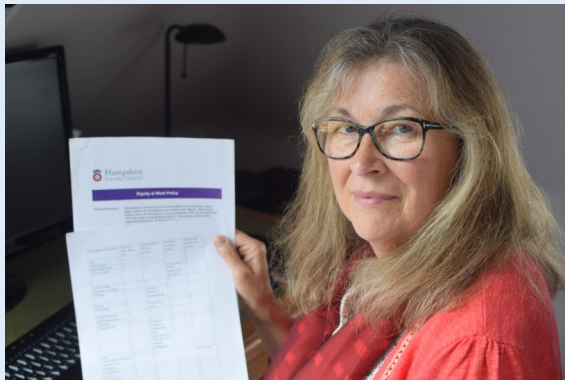
**I've been a caseworker for many years, so am very familiar with the employment policies in place.** Four years ago, I took on my first centrally employed (non-schools based) case, a teacher who was facing discrimination. In general discussions with those in our local authority Unions group around the discrimination which I thought was being shown by the employer, different branch secretaries from UNITE, UNISON, GMB and others all mentioned the "Dignity at Work" policy. I had never heard of this, and it didn't take long to discover that this was because there was no such school-based policy.

Whilst working my way through the member's case, (eventually settled at ET) I was struck by how fundamental dignity is to all workers. I could see no reason

why teachers in schools could not have the same expectations in this regard as their centrally-employed colleagues.

Simple, I thought. Just ask the school-side of the authority to adopt the already existing and approved central policy. We have a Teachers' Liaison Panel, with around 17 members from all the teaching and leadership unions. The reaction was favourable from all, with everyone amazed that such an anomaly was there in the first place. The head teachers' unions in particular were very perplexed that there might be centrally-employed teachers on site (such as specialist teachers) who were entitled to more dignity than their own class teachers, support staff, or even themselves! I set about my mission to bring dignity to schools!

The initial discussions were rather one-sided, as at first I was met with just plain "No," then fobbed off with the idea that the



grievance and disciplinary policies and code of conduct covered everything. Clearly that would be an argument to remove the now-unnecessary-because-it-is-covered-elsewhere Dignity at Work policy from the central employee side – but I couldn't really see this happening. The backlash from Unite, Unison, GMB and others would have been too great. It was however clear that it was believed that we in the teaching workforce would just accept a lack of dignity. We were in for a long fight.

Thanks to the continuous support of local branch secretaries of NASUWT, ASCL and NAHT this was kept on the agenda over 3 long years of negotiation meetings with the LA. It would have been easy for the LA to try to divide and rule, and dismiss it as just a one-union campaign, as it was me (NUT then NEU) doing all the work and the presentation of evidence and arguments. But every union was united – we wanted this to be introduced, and we did not be-

lieve that the authority could justify its position.

I'm also grateful for branch secretaries and executives in NEU who responded to my pleas over social media for examples of this policy in place in their LAs – clearly if we could show this was an acceptable policy in other areas of the country, then our LA would be less able to argue that it was unnecessary. My final piece of work on it was a full-on dissection of the wording and intent of the various policies we had been expected to make do with, compared to the Dignity at Work policy in place centrally. That was the point at which the injustice was most visible. At the meeting where I presented this, backed up by union colleagues, it was clear that this situation had to change. And it did. Victory!

**Karen Williams. NEU Executive Joint Branch Secretary, Hampshire**



# Opening Speech to UNIFY AGM

**Our mission, our objective is crystal clear. We have pursued it with dogged determination for 24 years.** In the annals of persistence, we have been epic. We were the originators and prime movers of the uniting of the NUT and ATL to become the NEU.

**The Coronavirus pandemic and the Government's handling of it in the area of state education has been a trial by fire for the new union. We have handled it like a seasoned firewalker. We have sought and gained unparalleled unity within the NEU and with other education unions - NASUWT, NAHT, UCU, GMB, Unison and Unite and even on occasion ASCL.**

Johnson sought diktat and confrontation. *'All primary children in reception, year 1 and year six and their teachers and their support staff will be in all primary schools on the 1st June.'* They were not - only a tiny handful obeyed. We had won a significant, nay monumental victory. It bodes well for our future despite the stormy time ahead. Mary Bousted reported at the NEU District Secs briefing in Wembley on 6<sup>th</sup> March that the NEU has 51% of teachers in membership and the NASUWT 36%. If we had already been united, we would have had 87% of teachers. NEU are also representing an ever increasing number of support staff – Mary reported that their is now 39,000.

**Further unity will only happen if we make it a top priority . Why we need to do this is shown, not just by what we have achieved by our numerical and density increase, but by the many thousands of new reps and our burgeoning level of participation and activity. We face an unprecedented short term, but even more importantly, strategically, long term future.**

We face another massive slump. A present financial crisis bigger than 2007/8, massive unemployment and huge pay cuts for those left in work. At the same time we face a climate and environmental emergency. Johnson levelling up? Don't hold your breath. We also need to look at the reality of where our country has been, and is presently, regarding trade unionism to appreciate the enormous impact and extent of what we have achieved so far, and its importance for the future of our country as we take our achievement further.

The overall history of trade unionism in our country has waxed and waned. In 1979 we reached the high point with a membership of 13.5 million. UK union membership had halved to 6.23 million in 2016 and education and our lives are much the worse, and many including children incalculably the poorer, for it. Our most recent figure is up to 6.44 million in 2019 and has risen since then. At last the tide has started to turn.

**Our defeat of the government over schools opening has given an astonishing and game changing lead to our whole trade union movement. We have been assisted in this by a vital structural difference from the other three big TUC unions. We only have members in education. We are a sectoral union. We need to develop this growing unity across the whole of education. A single union for education would be a million strong. In the light of what we have done and achieved as we presently are, think of what we could do. Renationalise education, take it back from the privateering Pirates.**

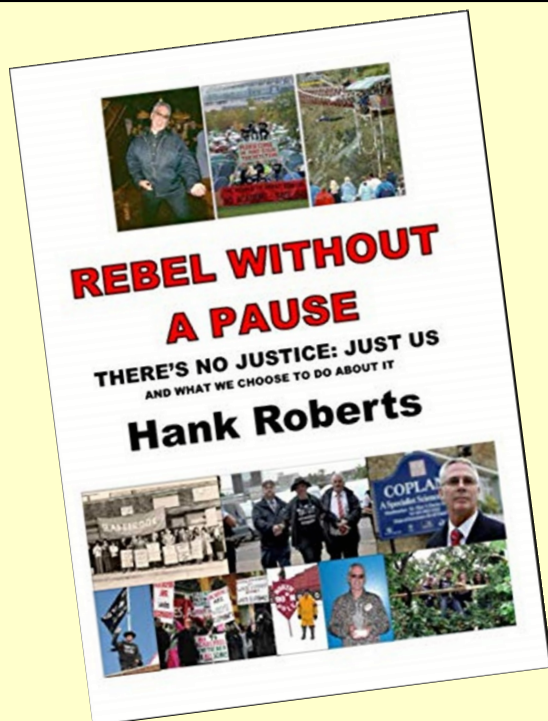
Representing further and higher education with an autonomous or semi-autonomous section (as the Scots have) we could end the reliance of the University sector on income from overseas students and the debilitating reliance on interest paying private finance instead of government funding as it used to be.

**We need to, by example and strategy, give a lead to the campaign to develop sector unions across the TUC. It would strengthen us mightily ending competitive recruitment. It will not be easy, but it should and must be done. If you do not reach for the sky you will never even touch the clouds.**

You can be in more than one union. Join another union, including NAHT and ASCL if you are in leadership. Stand for election. Go to their conferences and argue for unity.

**We have agency. We make change. Let's get down to more making history. No one else will do this for us. Our next amalgamation must come sooner rather than later.**

(Extracts from Hank's opening to the UNIFY AGM, 4/7/20)



## **Hank's book - just £10** **AN EDUCATION! FOR CHRISTMAS,** **BIRTHDAY OR ANYDAY!**

Hank Roberts is a well known campaigner against academies and corruption. He was a whistleblower on his headteacher and uncovered what amounted to the wrongful misappropriation of £2.7 million pounds from the school. He is also a long time campaigner against asbestos in schools. This is a no holds barred account of Hank's life in the fast lane from his birth in Bermuda, through street fights to legal fights, from classroom to class war.

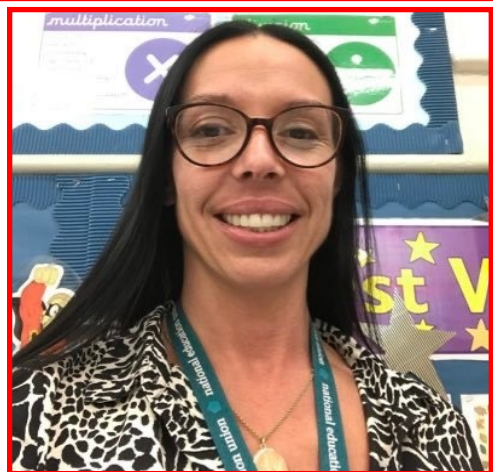
**All profits go to the**  
**National Education Museum**

[www.amazon.co.uk/REBEL-WITHOUT-PAUSE-Theres-justice/](http://www.amazon.co.uk/REBEL-WITHOUT-PAUSE-Theres-justice/)

Or, if you prefer, order from 27 Ridley Rd, London, NW10 5UB  
Enclose a cheque for £12 (inc p&p) made out to PH Roberts

***"I firmly believe that we are stronger when we stand together and that we can achieve more when we work together. Our strength through the Covid crisis came from our unity and our breadth and depth of membership. Our strength also came from working closely with the other major education unions to formulate clear and reasonable demands from the profession. We must go forward build on that, build a coalition of all education unions, to stand up and to fight for an education system fit for all."***

**Louise Atkinson, NEU National Junior Vice President**



# Taking unity forward



Text of statement signed by AEP, GMB, NAHT, NASUWT, NEU, NSEAD, Prospect, UNISON, Unite and TUC sent to The Secretary of State in May.

"We all want schools to re-open, but that should only happen when it is safe to do so. The government is showing a lack of understanding about the dangers of the spread of coronavirus within schools, and outwards from schools to parents, sibling and relatives, and to the wider community.

"Uniquely, it appears, school staff will not be protected by social distancing rules. 15 children in a class, combined with their very young age, means that classrooms of 4 and 5-year olds could become sources of Covid-19 transmission and spread. While we know that children generally have mild symptoms, we do not know enough about whether they can transmit the disease to adults. We do not think that the government should be posing this level of risk to our society.

"We call on the government to step back from the 1st June and work with us to create the conditions for a safe return to schools based on the principles and tests we have set out."

The principles and tests include (see full statement from Friday 8 May, linked to below):

- Safety and welfare of pupils and staff as the paramount principle
- No increase in pupil numbers until full rollout of a national test and trace scheme
- A national Covid-19 education taskforce with government, unions and education stakeholders to agree statutory guidance for safe reopening of schools
- Consideration of the specific needs of vulnerable students and families facing economic disadvantage
- Additional resources for enhanced school cleaning, PPE and risk assessments
- Local autonomy to close schools where testing indicates clusters of new covid-19 cases

The above is an example of education unions working together during the Pandemic. This unity has been vital to ensure schools open safely. It must continue and develop into further professional unity.

**Our aim: one union a million strong!**

***"These key priorities, including developing greater professional unity, should be incorporated into an overall strategic plan, reviewed annually."***

Hank Roberts and Gawain Little (NEU Executive) successfully added the wording above to Motion 3 for the NEU Special Conference on 3rd October 2020.

## VOTE FOR THIS AMENDMENT

**For Motion 3**

**Amendment passed at NEU Brent District (and others)**

Conference instructs the Executive to

1. Reinstate the NEU Executive Professional Unity subcommittee meetings
2. Take action/s to prioritise the production of a new pamphlet on Professional Unity and an accompanying leaflet. The text to include an analysis of all the education unions' Annual Returns financial information to facilitate the production of the pamphlet as soon as possible
3. Seek joint union positions and statements regarding exams, Ofsted, pay, etc and how we will ensure we build back better.
4. Seek to organise a national joint unions zoom conference entitled *Post Pandemic and the Climate Emergency: What future for education?*

Conference asks the Executive to ensure the actions under 2,3 and 4 are widely publicised in the education sector.

### PLEASE JOIN US IN TAKING OUR UNITY TO THE NEXT STAGE

UNIFY Membership: £5 pa individual, £10 pa school or college, £30 pa branch, association, division or federation, £50 one-off payment as Patron. Hank Roberts, Organising Secretary UNIFY, 27 Ridley Road, London, NW10 5UB email: hankr@hotmail.com Cheques: UNIFY—one education union BACS: Sort code 60-14-37, Account number 58709819 (but please send us your name and address and let us know via email!)