

SUCU General Meeting Minutes Thurs 15 October 2020, 1pm

Chair: Sarah Staniland, Branch President

Minutes: Jane Rodger, Branch Administrator

1. Welcome and introductions

Sarah Staniland welcomed all to the meeting. This is the largest online meeting we have had so far.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

Minutes of the Emergency General Meeting 5.10.20 were agreed as a true record.

3. Congress business and election of delegates

An interim UCU Congress is being held 28th to 30th October. Mark Pendleton and Robyn Orfitelli will attend in their roles on the National Executive Committee, and Themesa Neckles will attend in her role on the national Disabled Members Standing Committee. The following delegates from this Branch were agreed by a majority vote: Eda Yazica, Elena Simons, Katy Fox-Hodess, Sam Marsh, Jess Meacham (split registration) and Caroline Metz (split registration).

4. Brief round-up of news

4.1. This period since March has been the most intense and sustained period of negotiations between the trade unions and University management. We are meeting several times a week.

4.2. We continue to meet with the University about staff job security. We are particularly concerned about Graduate Teaching Assistants and how they have been treated throughout the crisis. Guidance has now been issued that they should be included in University messages to staff. Updates for GTA and fixed term colleagues will be sent to members soon.

4.3. The changes seen as a result of covid have had intense equality consequences and we are working with University staff groups and other campus unions.

4.4. We are holding a workshop about sweatfree organising next Monday 19th Oct.

4.5. We have seen a new set of social media guidelines circulated in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. We are objecting strongly to this. It has not been agreed by the unions.

4.6. Apologies for not sending our Branch News recently. We have instead sent shorter interim email updates to members. Please expect a quarterly edition of Branch News soon.

5. Formal grievance

5.1. A formal collective grievance was discussed and voted on at the last Emergency General Meeting on the 5th October. This has been submitted (copy below) along with campus unions Unite and GMB. The focus of the grievance is on health and safety concerns. There will now be extensive discussions with the University about the detail and substance of the collective grievance. An initial meeting will be held tomorrow. We are aware of five or six other Branches who are currently in dispute about similar issues, such as Sheffield Hallam. There will likely be more in due course.



writing to raise a formal collective grievance in accordance with University policy.

It is our view that the University has failed in its duty to ensure a safe working environment for employees, and that the decision to push ahead with non-essential face-to-face teaching and on-campus work has endangered the lives of staff, students, and the wider Sheffield community.

Our members have been asked to return to face-to-face work:

- when in many cases this was non-essential
- without valid risk assessments being in place
- on the basis of out of date risk assessments
- without effective risk mitigation measures being in place

Furthermore:

- Risk assessments are being carried out in an inconsistent manner across different work spaces, with workers receiving changing and confusing guidance. - The self-reporting process is failing to adequately track cases across the university, and is therefore not sufficient as a method of risk mitigation.

We are calling on the University to immediately pause all non-essential face-to-face work and teaching until trade union safety officers are satisfied that it is safe to return to campus for face-to-face work. We expect that this process will involve the consistent application of health and safety guidance and risk assessments, and the provision of safety controls for over-exposed frontline staff, such as our porters, cleaners, residences, and food outlet staff.

5.2. Questions and comments included:

- An email has been sent by a Head of Department stating that the University will be fined if face to face teaching is reduced.
Ans. This is a failure in University communications. The trade unions have asked to see the legal advice about this matter and there does not seem to be any. The Department of Education tier 2 guidance is to prioritise clinical and practical face to face teaching.
- Now that covid-19 cases are increasing on campus should we now ask for the Vice Chancellor's resignation due negligence?
Ans. This could form part of the next discussion.
- What are we asking for in the collective grievance?
Ans. We want a pause in face to face working until it is safe
- Whilst we have been in this meeting, the VC has sent an all staff email which states that covid-19 transmission is not likely to take place in teaching spaces.
Ans. We need to look at this. We do know that increasing numbers of staff are reporting that they believe to have become infected whilst teaching. Template letters created by UCU have already been circulated. Members are advised to use these initially if they are concerned.

6. Motion: no confidence in UEB response to Covid-19

- 6.1. Sam Marsh proposed and gave detailed background to the following motion of no confidence on behalf of the Branch Committee. The motion was seconded from the floor. Sam explained that there does not need to be agreement on every aspect of the analysis to agree with the motion. A vote of no confidence does not have a formal status but would give a clear indication to University management and would help in our negotiations.

SUCU Branch motion of no confidence

The handling of the Coronavirus crisis has left this branch with no confidence in the decision-making of the University's Executive Board

6.2. Questions and comments from the floor included:

- Could the union have stopped the University from making these decisions?
Ans. Our requests to meet with UEB have been refused. The Vice Chancellor has also refused to meet us apart from at the meeting where the s188 job threats were announced.
- Are these personal failures or due to systemic problems?
Ans. The problems are structural, but the choices that were made were bad ones. For example we asked University management at the time to pause face to face work
- I do not agree. Many people have been working hard to save the Sector. I have no confidence in SUCU management.
Ans. The trade unions have worked constructively with University management from the beginning. We are aware that so many staff and management have been working very hard. Our criticism is of UEB's decisions, and these are making more work for everyone. We welcome increased involvement in the SUCU Committee.
- Myself and my partner were exposed to covid whilst teaching. The reporting system is broken, there has been no discussion of care of staff and of shortages due to sickness, and no acknowledgement of chronic covid symptoms.
- The University has declared war on staff. Economics should serve society.
- There should be temperature checks when entering University buildings.
- When University communications are sent to staff at the same time as students there is no time to plan.
- There was a very long delay before we received advice about what to do about a positive case from a teaching session.

6.3. A vote was taken on the motion which was passed by a majority: 82% in favour, 6% against and 12% abstentions.

6.4. The motion will be put into an open letter format for all members of our university to sign, but particularly to give members who were unable to attend the meeting the opportunity to sign it. Note all those that voted at the meeting should still sign it. Committee will release the letter after 500 signatures.

7. AOB
None

