

Sheffield UCU General Meeting Minutes Thurs 29th April 2021, 13.00-14.00

Chair: Sarah Staniland, SUCU Branch President

Minutes: Jane Rodger, Branch Administrator

1. Welcome and introductions
 - 1.1. Sarah welcomes everyone to the meeting.
2. Minutes of the last meeting 2 March 2021
 - 2.1. The minutes of the previous General Meeting were agreed.
3. Brief news
 - 3.1. Yesterday was International Workers Memorial Day which commemorates workers who have died due to an accident at work, or from work-related injury and diseases. We particularly remember our UCU colleague Donna Coleman from Burley College who lost her life to covid. Please read this [article](#) that refers to the efforts made by UCU to try to pressure the college to put adequate covid safe measures in place.
 - 3.2. The London Region of UCU has organised an IHRA definition of antisemitism event for the 6th May. We will circulate the registration link soon.
 - 3.3. The TUC have circulated [a survey about long covid](#). Long covid will be an ongoing issue for workers and union reps. We encourage people affected to complete the survey to help improve the TUC response.
 - 3.4. In response to the extent of our local concerns we have organised an Extraordinary General Meeting to be held next Wednesday 5th May 1-2pm. Here we will discuss job security, restructures and the workload campaign.
 - 3.5. Our Annual General Meeting will be held on Tues 8th June 1-2pm. The deadline for submitting your nominations to Branch Officer and Ordinary Committee positions is Tues 4th May. Please get in touch if you would like to discuss this.
4. USS update
 - 4.1. UUK has accepted USS's valuation of the pension scheme, and started a consultation on proposed changes. This is a flawed valuation which we do not recognise. Please see [this article](#) that gives more information.
 - 4.2. UCU are planning a counterproposal based on five principles, and at the same time Jo Grady has asked members to mentally prepare to defend the scheme. The five principles are:
 - Progressive contribution structures to enable more low paid staff to join and stay in USS.
 - An end to the downward spiral of contribution increases and cuts to retirement income.
 - The fund weighted towards return-seeking, ethical investments.

- Commitments from employers on covenant support, governance reform, and lobbying for regulatory change.
- Exploration of conditional benefits on terms acceptable to UCU members.

4.3. The University of Sheffield is now consulting with staff to ask what pension benefits are important to them. It is very important that staff reply to the effect that we do not want a decrease in any benefits.

4.4. Comments and questions included:

4.4.1. There are no free text response options in the University staff survey. If I do not like any of the fixed options how do I send my views?

Ans. Please try sending an email to this University pension email address:

pensionmemberupdate@sheffield.ac.uk, and send specific feedback to Sam Marsh or Moty Katzman via ucu@sheffield.ac.uk.

4.4.2. This University survey is designed to divide and conquer. We need to be careful.

4.4.3. Finding a solution may be even more complicated due to the lack of trust.

Ans. USS want to make this look complicated when in fact it is simple.

4.4.4. We are hostages to USS?

Ans 1. We are hostages to Bill Galvin. UUK does have influence over USS, and we have been trying to influence them.

Ans 2. UCU continue to look into legal avenues. We need a multi pronged approach.

4.4.5. Should we recommend a mass opt-out?

Ans. We do not recommend this. UUK and USS would be happy about this as it would shut the scheme.

4.4.6. What do our counterparts in the Teachers Pension Scheme say?

Ans. An amalgamation could be something we demand. We would need to take strong strike action for the Employers to consider this demand, but we are exploring other options first.

4.4.7. The Joint Negotiation Committee will meet again in June to deliberate and it is possible that no decision will be made. Contribution rates related to the last USS dispute are scheduled to increase in October. The current proposed changes could be imposed by USS in April 2022. An industrial action ballot could come sooner rather than later.

5. JNCHES/4 fights update

5.1. Last year's pay offer was 0% and the Employers rode back on all the pay related elements too saying they had no mandate on these matters.

5.2. We are now in the middle of this year's round of negotiations on pay, and related matters. An approximately 1% pay adjustment has been offered, including models to spread this adjustment across grades, and represents a further degradation of pay. This lack of willingness to address pay shows that the Employer is not willing to invest in staff in the other elements too (such as the pay gaps, casualisation, workload etc). The last meeting of this round will be on the 6th May and we will update members then. Motions are scheduled to be discussed at UCU Congress at the end of May regarding what paths to explore in a potential nationwide dispute.

5.3. Comments and questions included:

5.3.1. As we are fighting on so many fronts this is a problem for communications. We need a clear message that this is all completely unreasonable and is easy for students and the public to understand.

Ans. The underlying message is the unwillingness of the Employer to invest in staff. This can provide a powerful message.

6. UCU Congress 29 & 31 May and 2 June 2021

6.1. Branch delegates were approved by a majority vote and 6% abstentions. Sam Marsh, Jess Meacham, Ed Yates, Themasa Neckles and Ben Purvis will be the Branch delegates to Congress this year.

6.2. Amendments to motions. An amendment to the following Congress motion was proposed on behalf of SUCU Committee and seconded from the floor. The amendment was - delete 'including in pornography', and the proposer gave background. The purpose of the amendment is to remove the focus on sex workers.

EQ 9 End gender based violence Women members standing committee

The appalling murder of Sarah Everard has demonstrated anew the extent of gender-based harassment and violence. The pandemic has highlighted issues of domestic violence, with estimates that one in three women will suffer domestic violence in their lifetime. While reports of rape have nearly doubled since 2015, gender-based violence is under-reported, including in post-16 education.

Violence against women is rooted in the oppressive system we live in, where women's bodies are used to sell products, dehumanised and presented as objects of gratification including in pornography. Black, migrant, disabled women and the LGBTQ++ community are disproportionately affected.

Congress calls upon NEC to:

1. Campaign and educate to end gender-based violence
2. Work with sister trade unions on this matter
3. Protest at every opportunity to raise this issue
4. Support Reclaim the Night demonstrations.

A vote was taken and the amendment was approved by a majority with 10% abstentions. This Branch amendment will now be submitted to Congress and will be debated there.

6.3. Please see details of [all motions to be discussed at Congress](#).

7. Sheffield Against the Policing Bill

7.1. The following motion was proposed on behalf of SUCU Committee and was seconded from the floor. The proposer gave background.

Defeat the Police Crackdown Bill

This branch notes:

On the 16 March 2021, the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill 2021 passed its second reading in parliament. The bill contains new limits on the right to protest, sweeping new powers for the police, the criminalisation of Gypsy Roma Traveller communities, and increased stop and search powers.

Since March, demonstrations have taken place in towns and cities across the country in opposition to the Bill, including in Sheffield. In some cases, notably in London and in Bristol, these protests have been met with a disproportionate and violent response from police forces. In response to protests, the third reading of the Bill has been delayed until the next Parliamentary session.

Sheffield UCU is a signatory of the Sheffield Against the Policing bill open letter, along with other organisations, trade union branches, and elected representatives in the city.

This branch believes:

The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill represents an unacceptable extension of police and state powers, which attacks fundamental freedoms of speech, assembly and the right to protest.

Trade unions will be adversely affected by the criminalisation of basic forms of protest. These limitations only add to the existing punitive restrictions placed on trade unions by decades of anti-union legislation. These measures may diminish our ability to legally assemble, to protest against our employers and to picket our place of work. This would destroy the most basic forms of resistance available to trade unions.

Moreover, we have a responsibility as a labour movement to stand with oppressed groups who will face renewed gendered and racialised attacks on the basis of the new legislation.

This branch resolves:

To support groups and organisations across the country who are mobilising and demonstrating against the Bill, by publishing a statement of support.

To continue to support the work of Sheffield Against the Policing Bill by committing practical support for demonstrations and donating to any legal funds for protestors should they be needed.

To encourage members to attend demonstrations against the Bill where possible, including the Sheffield Against the Policing Bill protest on 1st May at Devonshire Green.

To call on UCU nationally to campaign against the Bill in the long term.

No comments were made and a vote was taken. The motion was passed by a majority vote with 9% abstentions.

8. Any Other Business

- 8.1. This Branch has already passed a motion in support of the student rent strike. Students have now started a number of occupations. We encourage members to sign the petition that is being circulated on Twitter.
- 8.2. A vote of thanks was given to Amy Ryall for her work in support of professional services members. She has been a powerhouse, and we are very grateful for all her work. We are looking to continue the network developed by Amy, and the campaign on professional services pay and promotions. We need PS members to help organise the meetings and continue the campaign. Please get in touch if you would like to discuss this.

