

Sheffield UCU Extraordinary General Meeting Minutes Wed 5th May 1pm

Chair: Mark Pendleton, SUCU Branch Secretary

Minutes: Jane Rodger, Branch Administrator

1. Welcome and introductions
 - 1.1. Mark welcomes everyone to the meeting.
2. University restructures
 - 2.1. University restructures have been an ongoing cause for concern in recent months. Last Summer the s188 notice given by University management threatened to change terms and conditions and ultimately “fire and rehire”. Following trade union pressure this was withdrawn. You may be aware of a recent well publicised use of the fire and rehire practice at British Gas. More recently the University has stepped up the pace and scale of restructures. For example there are proposed changes for language staff in the School of Languages and Cultures (SLC) that also impacts the Modern Language Teaching Centre and the School of East Asian Studies. A large number of staff at the AMRC have also been through restructure consultation. Further restructures include professional services staff in the Management School, staff at Sports Sheffield, and a merger is planned in the Biological Services. There are other smaller restructures too. Restructures do not necessarily result in redundancies. Any change of role requires a process of putting staff “at risk”, potentially applying for their own job, and downgrading. The resulting anxiety and uncertainty are very evident. We accept that management have the right to restructure but we have particular concerns about embarking on so many and large scale structures during this already extremely difficult period. The campus unions have asked Management to pause the SLC restructure, and the students have written to Faculty management. There has been a lack of transparency, no consultation with those affected, and communications have been appalling. The student petition has 4000 signatures. Staff have also produced a video which was shown to the meeting. This is a powerful response to the proposals. It illustrates the top-down approach with these restructures, where management teams are coming up with proposals that are disconnected from the areas of work they seek to change. They do not take into account the complexity of what they are trying to do and often they do not even have up to date job descriptions to show how work is currently being done. A staff open letter is also being circulated and will be sent to the Vice Chancellor tomorrow.
 - 2.2. The following motion was proposed on behalf of SUCU Committee and was seconded from the floor. The proposer gave background and explained that the purpose of the motion is to give Committee a mandate to escalate action should this be necessary. Although we are seeing a focus on Arts and Humanities and professional services staff across the University other staff groups are also affected by the restructures.

Branch notes:

- the continuing attacks on job security that the University of Sheffield has inflicted on staff during the pandemic, including the cuts to fixed term and precarious contracts in summer 2020, the s188 consultation that threatened 'fire and rehire', and the rapidly expanding programme of reviews and restructures that are ongoing
- that staff have experienced the hardest year many of us can remember due to the impact of the pandemic on our personal lives, caring responsibilities, mental health and workloads
- that universities across the sector are making sweeping job cuts and attacking programmes

Branch resolves:

- to take action up to and including consultation and balloting on industrial action to fight for jobs
- to defend all of our members from threats of redundancy, downgrading or closure, in particular our smaller departments, our colleagues and students in Arts and Humanities, and our professional services members
- to continue to do everything we can to safeguard conditions for our precarious members

2.3. Comments and questions from the floor included:

- 2.3.1. An amendment to the motion was proposed to add a fourth resolve to, "to continue to do everything we can to resist in the strongest possible way the actions of University senior management in this area". This amendment was accepted by the proposer. The following motion as amended was put to the vote.

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The amended motion was passed nem comm.

2.3.2. The video will not be released publicly as staff are scared. What can we do when management will not listen to our objections?

3. Workload campaign

- 3.1. This item is for information and update. On every front we will be helping the Branch address workload.
- 3.2. For many years Committee has been pressing the University to implement changes to the way workload is modelled, for example, ensuring there is a workload model, that all workload should be modelled, and hours should be capped. In 2019 the University agreed to set up an Academic Workload Working Group and we pushed further for professional services workload to also be addressed. The working group produced a 12 pages of recommendations that went to the University Executive Board. Two year later, the UEB has not accepted the recommendations. However, two weeks ago UEB agreed to follow the core principles but not all. The principles will be trailed and we will monitor this closely.
- 3.3. We are also now launching a workload campaign via our Department Rep Network to empower individual members, remove the pathologizing of stress, and start the conversation about work area Stress Risk Assessments.
- 3.4. Questions and comments included
 - 3.4.1. How does a Stress Risk Assessment work?
Ans. University policies are buried in their website. We will address all your questions in the campaign.
 - 3.4.2. We are also developing our Safety Rep Network. Please get in touch if you would like to get involved.

4. Branch Motion - Solidarity with HE Branches

- 4.1. Yesterday UCU invoked its global boycott against the University of Leicester due to the egregious behaviour of management. Management want to cut jobs, close Departments, and drill down into subject areas. This is also a threat to academic freedom and critical individuals have been targeted.
- 4.2. The following motion was proposed on behalf of SUCU Committee and was seconded from the floor.

Sheffield UCU condemns the wave of proposed job cuts and departmental closures across the HE sector, including at Liverpool, Chester, London South Bank University, Aston, Leicester and elsewhere and pledges to support industrial action taken by branches in defense of jobs, departments and disciplines.

We particularly condemn the targeting of certain disciplines, critical scholarship and individual scholars and UCU activists, which has been happening most egregiously at the University of Leicester.

We fully support our union's [call](#) for a global boycott (greylisting) of the University of Leicester and pledge our membership's full support to this boycott until such time as the threat of compulsory redundancies is removed.

In recognition of the start of industrial action this week, we also resolve to donate £500 towards Leicester's strike fund.

4.3. Comments and questions included

4.3.1. This is a powerful action and I am in support.

4.3.2. If the motion passes I will circulate this to members and non members in my Department.

Ans. We will also send an email to all Branch members.

A vote was taken and the motion was passed by a majority.

5. Any other business

5.1. Our AGM is scheduled for Tues 8th June 1-2. We still have a couple of spaces for so-opted positions. Please get in touch if you would be interested in these positions. We are also seeking volunteers to help with the workload campaign and join the Safety Rep network.

5.2. Does the union have boycott guidelines for professional services staff?

Ans. For specific advice please get in touch.

5.3. The new hybrid working principles recently circulated by University management were flagged. The principles are confusing and not universally applied or interpreted and this issue is already cropping up in personal casework.

5.3.1. Comments and questions:

5.3.1.1. As we are nearing the end of this academic year hybrid working will mostly impact PS staff.

5.3.1.2. There is no mention of how staff will be treated fairly.

5.3.1.3. Branch Officers will raise concerns at the next Covid JUCC meeting on the 19th May.

5.4. Return to F2F pressure on PS staff was raised. There is a concern that this group of staff will carry the burden of providing F2F activities for students over the Summer. Solidarity is needed from academic colleagues.