

Minutes of a General Meeting of Sheffield UCU 9th May 2019 at 1pm
Council Room, Firth Court

Chair: Robyn Orfitelli, SUCU Communications Officer

1. Welcome and Introductions

Robyn Orfitelli welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

Minutes of the last General Meeting (7 March) will be approved at the AGM in June.

3. Brief roundup of the news

3.1. Academic workload working group: The Academic workload working group has been formed, to investigate the workload crisis that has been facing our university. It features a member of professional services to ensure that changes to academic workloads won't simply shift the problems onto their workload. That group will be contacting HoDs soon about stress risks and workload models. It plans to make recommendations to UEB in September. We are pushing for there to be a separate professional services working group after that. If members have things they want to say, they should email the branch list, or email Sarah Staniland, Mick Ashman, Robyn Orfitelli or Simon Stevens (all of whom are members of the group), or contact their departmental rep and ask them to pass it on. We would particularly like to hear from colleagues in professional services.

Questions and comments from the floor included:

- This is a positive new approach and seems productive.

3.2. Action group on union democracy: Next week there will be an Action Group meeting on union democracy. This is to follow up on the Democracy Commission, and in preparation for Congress 2019. Our branch has passed influential national motions on this topic in the past. The branch delegates for Congress are Sam Marsh, Emma Nagouse, Robyn Orfitelli, Mark Pendleton, Jess Meacham (representing the Professional Services working committee), and Sam Morecroft (as regional observer). Many motions will be heard there, and this Action Group meeting is a good chance to influence our branch response to them.

4. USS and local grievance update

4.1. USS: There has been no national news on USS yet: an announcement is expected today. To give some background, after the Joint Expert Panel report came out, USS made plans not following their recommendations, and our negotiators (including Sam Marsh) complained it wasn't following the best evidence they had available. Today USS will present their next offer (which they will present as a final offer, but recent events have shown that even their final decisions can be changed).

4.2. Local grievance: We have had what is possibly our final local negotiation with HR. They have agreed to one of our three demands in its entirety: they are making an account of what the

university has done with the strike deduction money, down to the last pound. This is a big change from previous practice, and we believe it sets a precedent for the future. So far as the other demands go, the Office of the VC and UEB have refused to give a one-time pay award to members on strike. We have asked them to provide a written statement to our members outlining their reasons for refusing. They have, however, agreed in part to our final demand, which was for an apology. They have agreed to write a statement on the strike, which will be presented at the AGM for discussion. At that point we will have the choice between accepting these and closing the dispute, or escalating the dispute. We will outline the options to members at that time.

A discussion continued from the floor.

5. Pay and equalities negotiation update

In the Friday email, we saw that a final pay offer has been made. This is higher than the initial offer, but is still below inflation: a real terms cut. Though it is a blow that we didn't reach the threshold in the pay ballot, we suspect the offer is not worse than it would have been had we not rebaloted. A live mandate would have been very useful though! We would like feedback on how to proceed.

Questions and comments from the floor included:

- It is important to understand that it's a national ballot. We did well in the first round and well in the rebalot too. In fact, we were one of the few branches with a resounding mandate for strike. So most of our actions should be national, rather than local.
- Obviously we've had years of real-terms pay cuts, and there are other problematic aspects, too, like the gender pay gap, and the approach to casualisation. Ironically, while we can't strike based on the recent ballots, those ballots had higher turnouts than most of the successful ballots we used to hold before the current legislation was passed.
- Workload and pay are coupled. Can we couple this to workload management?
Ans. We will have an Action Group on workload soon, and that will be a good place to talk about building a local campaign around this.

6. Metrics

We had a very well attended Action Group on metrics last week, and the findings could be summarised as "metrics are bad". We are planning to make this a significant campaign locally, and would like to push the university. Several individual proposals made there look promising. If you were there, and want to get more involved, please get in touch.

7. AOB

7.1 Member proposed motion:

Motion for Sheffield University UCU Branch to exclusively endorse Dr Jo Grady for UCU General Secretary

This motion notes:

- Dr Jo Grady, Sheffield University UCU branch pensions officer, is currently running for the position of UCU General Secretary.
- Jo Grady is a committed UCU member who has worked tirelessly to improve working conditions for all university staff, both at The University of Sheffield and at every previous institution where she has been employed.
- Jo is an expert on the subject of workplace pensions, and in employment and industrial relations more generally.
- Jo Grady – through her campaigning and pensions expertise – has been instrumental in:
 - Advancing the 2018 USS Pensions Dispute for the benefit of members.
 - Raising the profile of: the UCU nationally, the ongoing industrial dispute, and Sheffield UCU branch.

- Raising and maintaining morale of UCU members nationally through her online activism (e.g. through usage of social media).
- Communicating to UCU members the complex and ongoing nature of the pensions dispute through social and other forms of media (e.g. USS Briefs).

This motion proposes that:

- Sheffield University UCU branch exclusively endorses Dr Jo Grady for the position of UCU General Secretary.
- Jo Grady should be the preferred – and sole – nomination from Sheffield University UCU branch for several reasons:
 1. Her expertise in the field of employment and industrial relations mean Jo Grady will be excellent General Secretary. One example of this expertise was expressed in a recent question and answer session with all potential General Secretary candidates. On the subject of how each candidate would respond to climate change, Dr Grady noted that the responses to climate change proposed by other candidates were potentially illegal, as they would violate the 2015 Trade Union Act. Irrespective of what members think of this Trade Union Act, it is imperative we have a General Secretary who is aware of employment law and can act accordingly in response to it. Jo's own proposed response to climate change was financial divestment. This proposal highlights her ability to combine nuanced academic insights with pragmatic policy suggestions.
 2. Jo is an independent candidate, unaligned to any of the factions within UCU. As such, her campaign is not tainted by association to the failing of existing UCU bureaucracy or existing political groupings, as other candidates may be.
 3. If Sheffield UCU branch endorse two candidates for the position of General Secretary it may project the impression that our branch is not unified, and is affected by internal disputes. This would be a sign of weakness which could be used by unscrupulous university managers. Further, failing to exclusively support one of our own members for a senior UCU position may demoralise other Sheffield branch members from attempting to seek election for senior UCU positions.

Proposed by a member from the floor. Seconded by a member from the floor.

An amendment was proposed and seconded from the floor. The proposer of the amendment accepted an alteration to make it clear that Jo McNeill should be the second preference. The following amended motion was put to the vote.

This Branch notes:

- Dr Jo Grady, Sheffield University UCU branch pensions officer, is currently running for the position of UCU General Secretary;
- Jo Grady is a committed UCU member who has worked tirelessly to improve working conditions for all university staff, both at The University of Sheffield and at every previous institution where she has been employed;
- Jo is an expert on the subject of workplace pensions, and in employment and industrial relations more generally;
- Jo Grady – through her campaigning and pensions expertise – has been instrumental in:
 - Advancing the 2018 USS Pensions Dispute for the benefit of members,
 - Raising the profile of: the UCU nationally, the still-ongoing industrial dispute, and Sheffield UCU branch,
 - Raising and maintaining morale of UCU members nationally through her online activism (e.g. through usage of social media),
 - Communicating to UCU members the complex and ongoing nature of the pensions dispute through social and other forms of media (e.g. USS Briefs);

- Jo is an excellent “grassroot” candidate in touch with the membership views on the ground;
- Jo is an independent candidate, unaligned to any of the factions within UCU, and likely to appeal to a broad swathe of the membership;
- Both Jo Grady and Jo McNeill are excellent candidates and stand for what our Branch believe in.

This branch resolves to:

- Endorse Jo Grady as first preference for the position of UCU General Secretary and Jo McNeill as second preference;
- Call on all members to vote for Jo Grady in position 1 and Jo McNeill in position 2 to offer UCU the opportunity of positive change.

The motion was passed by a majority, with 5 abstentions.

7.2. Palestinian solidarity: SUCU might start a Palestinian solidarity group. Please get in touch if you would be interested in getting involved.