

Sheffield UCU Extraordinary General Meeting Minutes 28.6.21, 1-2pm

Chair: Ed Yates, Branch Vice President

Minutes: Jane Rodger, Branch Administrator

1. Welcome and introductions
 - 1.1. Ed welcomed all members to the meeting the purpose of which is to talk about the status of and ongoing national disputes, and foster discussion.
2. Strategy for the national disputes
 - 2.1. USS Pension has been subject to attack for over a decade. The key issue now is it's valuation. USS claims there is a large deficit in the scheme, which should be resolved by large increases to both the Employer and Employee contributions. UUK have now made proposals that lean towards USS's position on the valuation, and recommend cuts in benefits and terms of employment. These proposals will be presented to the Joint Negotiating Committee (USS and UCU) in mid August. UCU Congress (the union's main decision making body) in early June passed multiple motions condemning the actions of USS and stating willingness to respond with industrial action and legal challenges.
 - 2.2. Four Fights. During the previous industrial action (just prior to the pandemic) USS and Four Fights were linked. We were on strike with regard to pay, endemic use of casual contracts, pay equality and workload, and in April 2020 we had a pay offer of 1.8% and no substantial offer about the other elements. The union rejected this offer after a ballot of members. The revised offer from the Employers was 0%, with backtracking on the other expectations. Pay negotiations take place annually so whilst the 2020 offer is unresolved we are also involved in the 2021 round of bargaining. The current offer is 1.5% (below inflation) for pay bands represented by UCU, and between 1.5 and 3.6% for grades below 22 pay spine. This uplift for lower grades only brings scales to a legal minimum. The offer with regards to the other 4 Fights elements is also very weak. Again the Employers are not taking us seriously with regard to pay and related matters. At UCU Congress Branches put forward motions rejecting the offer and committing the union to seriously campaign against it and to potentially ballot members over it. UCU Higher Education Committee is scheduled to meet on the 2nd July and we will make decisions on industrial action strategy based on members' feedback. Suggested question topics for us to discuss include: the timing of the potential ballots and strike action; how we use potential Action Short of A Strike (ASOS), for example this could be used before strike action; the format of strikes (what days, ramping up); how we use student support; how to run the campaigns; what would a win look like; and how might this interact with local issues.
 - 2.3. Comments and questions from the floor included:
 - 2.3.1. I am in favour of indefinite and hard hitting strike action, for example during the marking period.
 - 2.3.2. We should combine the local and national disputes as it is all part of the same problem, it would galvanise support, and make for a bigger impact. Local issues

are the threats of s188 last year, restructures, Dept closures, worsening industrial relations and downgrading of job quality.

- 2.3.3. There should be an indefinite walk out at the beginning of the next semester, and we should not mark semester 1 exams.
 - 2.3.4. 300 students from SLC are putting in a complaint. Their core modules have been transferred to another unit.
 - 2.3.5. What kind of people would bluff about s188 and in the middle of a pandemic?
 - 2.3.6. Hallam UCU combined national and local disputes with a successful outcome.
 - 2.3.7. We should consider an assessment boycott.
 - 2.3.8. The ballot and action needs to be well organised in advance.
 - 2.3.9. We need a critical mass and we can achieve anything we want - strong ballot, strike and picketing.
 - 2.3.10. We need to define what a win looks like when we have multiple fights.
 - 2.3.11. The combining of USS and Four Fights has not yet been decided by the national union.
 - 2.3.12. The students are very angry and we have their support. Tuition fee claim back will be a significant threat to the University.
 - 2.3.13. Dept reps are currently holding local meetings to gather feedback from members. Some of the feedback was discussed.
 - 2.3.14. We should consider a series of escalating actions starting with ASOS (instead of ending with this), followed by strike action (eg, staggered over 14 days), and then indefinite strike.
 - 2.3.15. The biggest impact is on teaching, exams, and admissions.
 - 2.3.16. Professional Services staff can have a significant and effective impact too, and ideas around ASOS were generated. Support from academic colleagues is key, and the development of guidance for PS members.
 - 2.3.17. This is not the job we signed up for - we want to be student supporters/lecturers.
3. Donation to [Liverpool UCU](#)
- 3.1. A donation of £250 to Liverpool UCU's Hardship Fund was proposed. A vote was taken by and the donation was agreed by 97% in favour, 1% against and 2% abstentions.
4. Any other business
- None