

# Annual Report June 2014

## President's Report – Mick Ashman

This is my final annual report. Next year I will be standing down as President but will still be actively involved on the SUCU Committee.

A significant amount of our effort over the past year was directed towards the national pay campaign. The paltry below inflation pay offer of 1% and subsequent intransigence on behalf of UCEA (the Universities and Colleges Employers Association) resulted in a resounding “Yes” vote in favour of industrial action in the national pay ballot. Our campaigning efforts were given a huge boost once the pay increases for Vice Chancellors were revealed. Russell Group universities awarded pay rises of 8.1% on average while overall benefits packages also soared by 5.2%. Then in January as we stood on the picket lines the Times Higher reported that our own VC had accepted a staggering £105,000 pay rise!

Such adverse publicity gave us the momentum which if used more effectively at the time might have led to a different outcome. As it was the two hour stoppages gave aggressive employers the opportunity to threaten a full day's pay deduction and this undermined national solidarity ultimately weakening our position. The imposed 2013-14 offer was finally accepted, which was a big disappointment, but the action meant that that UCEA took the 2014-15 pay negotiations seriously. The 2% award would not have been made if we were not in dispute.

Locally our work has focused on negotiations with HR on the revision of University statutes and the new suite of policies that have been introduced this year. We have worked hard to retain and in some cases improve provision. Academic freedom has been extended and pay protection for staff who are regraded is, as far as we are aware, the best in the sector.

The University and HR may pick up national awards for “working effectively with trade unions to create a new visionary employment package” but we know from experience that we will have to monitor their implementation absolutely rigorously. One challenge is academic freedom, the rhetoric from the University is one thing but we will have to work hard to ensure that the university understands that academic freedom also means the right to ask challenging questions about this institution itself.

It is my view that the new capability procedure presents the biggest challenge. The new policy is virtually untested. If it is used reasonably and fairly it can be used to help and support staff but should the climate in HE change (for example post REF) it could become a tool that “tough managers” can use to “legitimately bully and unsettle” their staff. This is an area where we have to be vigilant..

Once again our visibility and the pay dispute has translated into a significant growth in membership numbers this year, particularly fixed term contract staff and postgraduate students. Once again we have also recruited new committee members. As always it demonstrates that visible trade union activity leads to an increase in membership, our employers are aware of this and it allows us to speak with authority and to be more effective when we meet with them.

Over the next year our local campaigning efforts will continue. As always we will focus on those areas of the University where our members feel vulnerable; we will work hard to ensure that members are treated fairly with the new procedures we have negotiated properly implemented and we will challenge those departments where our members indicate there is poor managerial practice.

Finally, I wish to thank everyone who has supported me throughout my tenure as SUCU President. I have been an active trade unionist for nearly 30 years but the current SUCU Committee are without doubt the best union team I have been part of and every year we manage to strengthen our squad in the close season.

### **Branch Secretary Report – Pablo Stern**

This has been another good year overall for SUCU, with successes in local negotiations, a growing membership, a strong Committee with new members, and a good showing in the national pay dispute.

#### **Our organisation**

I am resigning as Branch Secretary this year, having served for two years, and am really pleased to be handing over to such a capable successor, AGM willing. We've had a strong and constructive team in the Committee last year and it looks like a terrific team again next year, with quite a few changes and new faces. I'm looking forward to another year working on t'Committee, again AGM willing, though I'll be taking more of a back seat. And trying to keep my trap shut, more of a pipe and slippers man.

We are of course all voluntary and have to balance the work for SUCU with our day jobs. The recognition and facilities agreement which we negotiated this year, alongside our sister unions Unison and Unite, provides funding for some cover which should relieve some of the pressure on ourselves and colleagues.

Again on a positive note Sheffield UCU membership is up, in particular among researchers and post-grads. This is great, and not only because these members are the future of the union but also because it strengthens one of our key campaigns, against casualisation and for professionalism.

Departmental Contacts are a very important part of the SUCU network and I would like to thank all of them for the great work they do. There are still quite a few departments without a Contact, so if you are in one of those departments do think about volunteering.

Thanks are due too to our regional officials, Marianne Quick and Mark Oley, but most of all to Jane Rodger, our administrator, who has continued to provide fantastic support for the branch. We could not have achieved nearly as much without her.

#### **Our sister unions**

We work closely with our sister trades unions Unite and Unison in all our negotiations other than on matters academic, and the joint industrial action last year was very effective and well received. We also worked well together with Hallam UCU throughout the dispute.

The Students Union is our other sister union on campus, and we had tremendous support from them during our dispute. We have worked together on many issues including the Living Wage - where the students have run an impressive and effective campaign. We hope to have good news on that front shortly. Big thanks to our student colleagues, and we look forward to working closely together again next year. They, like us, see the University as a learning community to which all contribute, not a customer-supplier marketplace.

#### **Challenges past and future**

The recent pay dispute was a mixed bag. We responded well here, as did most branches nationally, but the loss of momentum after Christmas was a mistake, giving a signal of lack of resolve which the more aggressive employers used to impose draconian deductions for the two hour stoppages. Indeed the national UCU HE Conference a couple of weeks ago censured the HE Committee for ignoring last year's Conference decision to escalate in January. Nevertheless the action was effective, and the support of students here was fantastic, and we should not underestimate the achievement of 2% for 2014/15. It's not great, but it's more than we would have got and just as importantly the employers were forced to genuinely negotiate for the first time in years.

Locally the strengthening of our organisation will be invaluable in the struggles ahead. There is a clear drive in the HE sector towards performance related pay (PRP), with our university among the vanguard, and we may have a real

fight on our hands here. The evidence is overwhelming that PRP is divisive, creates discontent and reduces performance, so it might seem odd that senior management seem so keen on it. But PRP also strengthens central control. Are we a command-and-control corporation or a collegial learning community? We are in the early stages of negotiations and we very much hope that management will still acknowledge the centrality of the latter, but we shall see.

There are many other local challenges of course. The restructuring in TILL looms large, threatening the University's key lifelong learning provision, but there are also other restructures and a great many individual cases of distress, bullying and overwork. The number of individual members needing support continues to increase, and I hope members will understand if we can't give as much support as quickly as we would like. Rising workloads are of course a factor in a large proportion of these cases.

And to return to another national challenge, the employers may be coming back for another bite at our pensions. USS is a wealthy and healthy scheme, but the artificial short-term accounting imposed by the government makes it appear to be in debt, and the employers are using that as an excuse to float more attacks. Meanwhile they sit on bulging coffers. Watch this space.

Goodbye and Hello

This is my last piece of work as Branch Secretary. Thank you for trusting me with that position, and I hope I have done it well.

I've been nominated as Treasurer for next year, so hopefully Hello in that guise following the AGM. Let the celebrations commence.

### **Health & Safety Report – Scott McMullin, Mick Ashman**

Working relations with University Health & Safety has seen some very positive improvements over the past year under the leadership of Tom Fleming. The SUCU welcomes the positive increase of support and dedication from the Health & Safety team in the field of safety regulation and practice across the University.

This year has again brought improvements to Health & Safety training offered to University staff including an increased standard of first aid training to a nationally recognised 3 day First Aid at Work qualification accredited by the Health and Safety Executive, improvements to online 'Fire' and 'Out of Hours' training and the introduction of a new online 'Accident, Incident & Near Miss' reporting system to better improve the monitoring of accidents and the causes of them within the University.

University Health & Safety has also recognised the need for improved responsibility and accountability at an executive level. A new mandatory training course has been introduced which is aimed at Heads of Departments and Senior Managers so that they may better understand their duty of care and responsibilities towards those either directly or indirectly under their charge, and towards those who may be affected by their acts or omissions as outlined in the Health & Safety at Work Act 1977. This is a new and refreshing approach the University has decided to implement, which we as trade union representatives are very pleased with.

In the year ahead we will continue to work positively and productively in areas of Health & Safety concern with the University Health & Safety on behalf of UCU members as well as all university staff, students and visitors.

### **Equality and Diversity Officer – Jane Simm**

This important topic relates to all aspects of our work and is not a single issue. As part of representing all campus unions on the University Equality/Diversity Board I continue to emphasise that much more needs to be done in areas such as disability and the issue of reasonable adjustments to support our members. The Board and related projects also serves to reinforce our networks with academic staff, professional services – including Human Resources, the Students Union, and senior managers within the University. It also provides ample opportunity to remind senior management that all grades of staff should be taken into account and treated with dignity and respect.

During the last year I have continued to have a watching brief over matters relating to equality/diversity issues and to try and update/share information with committee members. This is an issue which involves all our committee and union members and requests for contributions are welcomed and encouraged please. One of SUCU's Bulletins recently featured a spotlight on Equality issues with an article on Mental Health and how it affects our members.

Equality/diversity aspects of our work are regular features at our branch meetings where we try and review casework implications that should be taken forward to meetings with other campus unions and Human Resources. Key themes remain especially around disability discrimination, and bullying and harassment, and we intend to continue to campaign on behalf of our members. Casework is monitored to take into account equality issues and see where we can implement changes. The advice, guidance, and training from our Regional Office has been invaluable in terms of campaigns, and the implications for personal casework for our members.

Finally, in addition to supporting colleagues on the various committees, task groups and working groups we are involved with on your behalf, I have also contributed to other university working groups such as the Teaching Career pathways group, and the Health and Wellbeing task group. I also attend monthly meetings of the Employment Security group along with other campus union representatives. I will be stepping down from this role but hope to continue to support our membership through my contribution to the SUCU Committee and wider activities that I participate in.

### **Atypical Workers – Charles Fox, Kaye Carl**

A change in the law relating to employment tribunals, i.e. an increase in fees brought forward a rush of personal cases last year. Seven of these members had accumulated 112 years of service between them and it was disappointing to hear that they were not being treated fairly. Atypical workers have, in the past, not thought it necessary to obtain union membership but we can demonstrate through this work how important UCU membership is to a group of workers who have traditionally not joined because of the "flexibility" of their relationship with the university. Needless to say trade union recruitment from this group has increased dramatically.

We would like to thank the caseworkers who have supported members through what can be a difficult and stressful process just to get what the law says they should have – a contract of employment reflecting the skills and contribution of this undoubtedly committed group of workers.

Researchers and other academics have begun to get more active in Sheffield this year, with a group of around 10 now meeting and acting to campaign for secure employment in Sheffield. They are not anti-business but instead view the present one-fixed-term-contract-per-project system as inefficient and bad for the university's research business. By moving to open-ended researcher pools, we can increase staff utilization rates from the present cycle of "1 year learning a new job, 1 year research, 1 year looking for new jobs", and increase goodwill hours worked for free by better motivated staff, who do otherwise love what they do.

Through collective consultation, and a mass letter-writing campaign to convert to open ended contracts we now have a new University policy which has banned the use of fixed term contracts on the grounds of fixed term project funds. New research hires should be on open ended contracts from the start unless justified by "specialist skills". We consider that the latter does not cover generic research and subject skills, but only genuine specialist needs such as flying in someone to operate a specific piece of machinery or process i.e. it should not cover roles which could be performed with reasonable retraining by generic researchers in the same Department.

Engineering Faculty is now interested in the researcher pool idea, along with parts of HR which have produced a draft "researcher retention strategy".

A point of contention continues to be the state of the redeployment system, which several researchers have challenged individually and through SUCU - as violating the Research Concordat's commitment to reasonable redeployment systems.

## Treasurer's Report

The Sheffield UCU branch treasury function is currently managed collectively by the committee. Financial statements are prepared by a local accounting service based on the branch's accounting documents and bank statements.

Attached are financial statements to the end of the last financial year 2012/13, which have been approved by UCU head office. Also attached are financial statements to the end of April 2014, i.e. for the first eight months of 2013/14.

Because of concerns about 2013 cash flow, the committee (1) sought and obtained approval from the 2013 AGM for an increase in local subscriptions, and (2) implemented some cost-cutting measures on discretionary spending, e.g. Catering. This has resulted in a positive change in the financial position of the branch. Based on recent scrutiny of the financial statements to the end of February 2014, the outcome for the end of 2013/14 is expected to show a much improved position.

The committee would like to express its sincere thanks and appreciation for a donation of £1,000 received from one member. The industrial action resulted in payments from the hardship fund amounting to around £850. It is expected that the role of Treasurer will be filled by a single committee member after the 2014 AGM.

### UCU subscription rates 2014/15

The tables below set out the national subscription rates which have increased by 3.5% and will apply to UCU members from 1 September 2014.

#### **Subscription rates from 1 September 2014**

	<b>Monthly national subscription including political fund</b>	<b>Monthly national subscription excluding political fund</b>	<b>SUCU local subscriptions</b>
£60,000 & above	£23.38	23.15	£3.11
£40,000-£59,000	£21.31	£21.10	£3.11
£30,000-39,999	£19.37	£19.18	£2.37
£20,000-29,999	£18.28	£18.10	£2.37
£10,000-19,999	£11.14	£11.03	£2.37
£5,000-10,000	£5.05	£5.00	NIL
Below £5,000	£2.67	£2.64	NIL
<b>Retired/attached members</b>	<b>£2.67</b>	<b>£2.64</b>	<b>NIL</b>

### Local Subscriptions

In accordance with the motion on local subscriptions from the Treasurer approved by Branch General Meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2010, local subs are to increase in line with the percentage increase on national subs ie 3.5%. See table above.

### Donations and subscriptions 2013/14

North Staffs Miners' Wives	Donation for event	£50.00
Student Union Living Wage Campaign	Donation for event	£50.00
Labour Research Department	Subscription and affiliation	£213.25
South Yorkshire NUJ	Donation to miners' strike event	£50.00
Doncaster & Bassetlaw Branch	Donation to striking care workers	£50.00
Sheffield Trades Council	Affiliation and subscription	£100.00

## Financial reports

The accounts **for the year ended 31 August 2013** are below. These were prepared by the branch accounting service and have been signed off by head office.

### Income and expenditure account.

	<b>Period</b> <u>Actual</u>	<b>Year to date</b> <b>31/8/13</b> <u>Actual</u>
<b>Income</b>		
Subscription Income	4,075.93	<u>51,219.55</u>
	<u>4,075.93</u>	51,219.55
<b>Expenditure</b>		
Subscriptions Payable to Head Office	2,119.15	25,667.70
	2,119.15	25,667.70
	-	-
Gross Profit/(Loss):	1,956.78	25,551.85
<b>Administrative expenses</b>		
Travelling Expenses	0	1,080.00
Printing and Stationery	36.56	781.87
Catering	0	2,128.56
Donations	57.7	387.7
Subscription Collection Charge	57.99	712.23
Subscriptions	17.25	263
Clerical Assistance	1,639.77	19,162.51
Audit and Accountancy	75	1,020.00
Depreciation	27.89	334.63
Other Outgoings	777.34	2,684.25
	<u>2,689.50</u>	<u>28,554.75</u>
Net Profit/(Loss):	-732.72	-3,002.90

Balance sheet for year ended 31 August 2013 attached.

Please also see some interim accounts for **1 Sep 2013 - 30 April 2014** prepared by our Branch accounting service.

### Income and expenditure account

	<b>Period</b> <u>Actual</u>	<b>Year to date</b> <b>30/4/14</b> <u>Actual</u>
<b>Income</b>		
Subscription Income	5,055.84	41,287.82
	<u>5,055.84</u>	<u>41,287.82</u>

Expenditure		
Subscriptions Payable to Head Office	2,138.07	18,343.31
	<u>2,138.07</u>	<u>18,343.31</u>
Gross Profit/(Loss):	2,917.77	22,944.51
Administrative expenses		
Travelling Expenses	0	65.44
Printing and Stationery	20.08	737.24
Catering	0	769.44
Donations	50	230
Subscription Collection Charge	61.65	501.14
Subscriptions	17.78	240.12
General Expenses	27.9	27.9
Clerical Assistance	1,636.73	13,115.12
Audit and Accountancy	75	600
Depreciation	27.89	223.12
Strike Hardship	0	1,280.97
	<u>1,917.03</u>	<u>17,790.49</u>
Net Profit/(Loss):	1,000.74	5,154.02

Balance sheet for 1 Sep 2013 - 30 April 2014 attached.