

Annual Report June 2013

President's Report – Mick Ashman

Twelve months ago it was clear that the financial crisis and changes in the funding arrangements for higher education were having a massive impact on the HE sector with student applications in England down by 10%.

A year later and the ideological thinking that is driving the Government's agenda is easier to see as the restriction of access and erosion of public funding continues. England is now the most expensive place in the world to study for a degree at a public university and students from the richest 20% are 10 times more likely than those from the poorest 20% to go to university. It signals a return to the days of elitism and means that we face an increasingly uncertain future within the sector.

Some may feel that the University of Sheffield, a large Russell Group institution, is in a stronger position to weather the storm. However from SUCU's perspective the last twelve months have reaffirmed our view that the University and Higher Education institutions in general are increasingly run along tough business lines as they respond to the attacks from Central Government.

As a Committee it's fair to say that we have "our work cut out" but I feel that we are well placed to deal with the challenges. I believe the strength and effectiveness of our team, supported by our Regional Officials, has improved year on year. The range and complexity of negotiations and personal casework we are now involved in would have been unimaginable when first I joined the committee.

We have worked hard as a team, to protect our members in this climate of uncertainty, and over the last 12 months, we have been successful on a number of fronts. In addition to personal casework where we deal with individual members, we have negotiated procedures that will benefit all our members – most notably those that deal with Change and Redundancy Avoidance. We have also made it clear to our employers that where there is evidence of workplace stress (as identified in staff surveys) that this is a staff wellbeing issue and must be addressed as a health, safety and welfare matter.

Our visibility and campaigning activity has translated into a significant growth in membership numbers this year, particularly fixed term contract staff and postgraduate students. We have also recruited new committee members. As always it demonstrates that 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. We intend to 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.

Branch Secretary Report – Pablo Stern

This has been a good year overall for SUCU, with significant success in negotiations, a growing membership and a strong Committee.

Our organisation

The union is only as strong as the members make it, and it was very reassuring that when there was a threat to our right to represent academic related staff we had an excellently attended emergency meeting which gave the Committee all the support we could have hoped for. Meetings generally are of course smaller, but they are interesting and constructive and the discussion and guidance for Committee are a vital part of our democracy. The growth in membership is encouraging, bucking the national trend, and particularly pleasing in post-grads, the future of the union.

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.

We have a very strong and constructive team in the Committee, and it has been a real pleasure for me to be involved. We are of course all voluntary and have to balance some of the work for SUCU with our day jobs, but we are negotiating a facilities agreement currently which may at least provide some cover.

Many of you will have had contact with Jane Rodger, our administrator, who started more or less when I started as Branch Secretary last year and has been a fantastic support for the branch – we could not have achieved as much without her. The regular Branch News emails which Jane puts together have provided a very popular digest of branch and wider union news.

We are fortunate in having very good support also from regional and national officials, and we have voted at the national Congress to try to ensure that the financial constraints don't reduce this vital service to members and branches.

Casework

The amount of individual casework has continued to grow, much of it due to excessive workload and concomitant stress and bad relations. REF hasn't helped of course. I hope members are understanding if Committee members can't always provide as rapid and full support as we would wish.

Negotiations

We have had a very successful year in negotiations, which have generally been very constructive. We have jointly with Unite and Unison reached agreement on new Disciplinary, Sickness and Grievance procedures, and most importantly on a new Change and Redundancy Avoidance Suite which provides a much clearer structure for organisational change and much better involvement and protection for our members.

As detailed elsewhere there is now a Post-Graduate Teachers' contract, and we also now have a joint review of other hourly paid teachers which we hope will result in proper fractional contracts for those with regular teaching.

We have also made very good progress on the review of statutes, which should be coming to a conclusion fairly soon.

Context

The local context is not however all rosy. In spite of its healthy finances the University has created a new non-union subsidiary (STS) for new catering and retail outlets which pays rock-bottom wages and without the procedures and protection that 'proper' University staff have. This follows the slashing of the pensions of staff in grades 1-5 in the previous year and shows a disturbing attitude towards staff and our community from University management. We have given very strong support to our sister unions in both these struggles and this has been greatly appreciated, but these are serious setbacks for our colleagues and community.

And nationally of course we have made no more progress on the imposed inferior pension scheme, and have had three years of real-terms pay cuts. The government's destructive 'austerity' agenda is causing havoc across the public sector and stagnation in the private sector, but vast increases in wealth for the very richest. The future of HE must inevitably be conditional on the effectiveness of the resistance to this devastating assault.

Health & Safety Report – Gillian Brown

The arrival of Tom Fleming as Head of Health & Safety in 2012 has brought welcome changes to health and safety issues across the institution and with it a noticeably more pro-active approach in developing robust policies and procedures. This step-change has brought changes to training offered and introduced compulsory training for all staff involved in the management of others and resources. Although it is too early to be able to measure the quality and success of this we are looking forward to working with Tom Fleming to promote and encourage staff uptake.

My report last year talked about the Staff Survey undertaken by our employers. Added to this you will recall UCU undertook a Stress Survey at more or less the same time. This has meant we have been able to compare some of the responses from the Staff Survey with sections of the UCU Stress Survey. We commissioned a report that brought together outcomes of both surveys and came to a number of interesting conclusions.

We have talked about this report at recent UCU General Meetings, with Departmental Reps and Contacts and taken it for discussion with HR and Health and Safety Committee. I would encourage all members to take a look at this. You can find a copy of the report at:

<http://ucu.group.shef.ac.uk/documents/SUCU%20work%20related%20stress%20demands%20SCorbett.pdf>

I was fortunate to get funding from UCU to attend the Hazards Conference last September. Hazards is an organisation that promotes health and safety at work through a network of resource centres and campaigners and is

supported by UCU. An excellent conference and opportunity to hear from health and safety activists from other trades unions.

Under the Health & Safety at Work Act 1977 our employers have a duty of care for our health, safety and wellbeing while we are at work. The Government has announced intention for law changes that will inevitably water down long held protections; our jobs are changing, and we are faced with an increase in workload that will bring with it higher levels of stress; the importance of health and safety is being high-jacked by the 'elf & safety' campaign being waged by those who want to discredit health & safety activism. As trade unionists we must ensure we are vigilant and not allow ourselves to be side-tracked by engaging in this debate, but concentrate our efforts to retain this important and in some cases life-saving legislation.

Treasurer – Daragh O’Reilly
Background

The accounts for 2011/12 were duly audited and approved by UCU HQ. They indicate a loss on the Income and Expenditure Account of around £12,000.

The budget for 2012/13 predicts a loss of around £5,000.

These losses arise basically from the removal of admin support provision by HR.

For 2013/14, the Committee is budgeting for breakeven on the Income and Expenditure account.

A two-pronged approach is proposed below.

Proposal

The proposal is:

- to cut costs without damaging branch effectiveness
- to increase revenues sufficiently to cover costs.

As far as cost-cutting is concerned, the proposal is:

1. to remove catering provision at general meetings and departmental contact meetings, except for the AGM.
2. To raise local subscriptions from the current level of £2.12 to £3:00/month for band F1 only (those earning more than £40,000). This represents an annual increase of £0.88 x 12 = £10.26.

Proposer: Daragh O’Reilly, Hon Treasurer

Secunder: SUCU Committee

Financial Accounts

Sheffield UCU Budgeted Profit and Loss Account to 31.8.13

	Budget	Average Monthly cost
Income		
Subscription Income	50,700	4,225
		0
Expenditure		0
Subscriptions Payable to Head Office	26,200	2,183
		0
	0	0
Gross Profit/(Loss):	24,500	2,042
Administrative expenses		0
Travelling Expenses	1,060	88
Printing and Stationery	1,442	120

Catering	3,000	250
Donations	1,000	83
Subscription Collection Charge	797	66
Clerical Assistance	20,387	1,699
Audit and Accountancy	900	75
Depreciation	335	28
Other Outgoings	840	70
	29,760	2,480
		0
Net Profit/(Loss):	-5,260	-438

Income and expenditure

Date: 18/09/2012	University & College Union Sheffield		Page: 1
Time: 21:02:54	<u>Income & Expenditure Account</u>		
From: Month 1, September 2011			
To: Month 12, August 2012			
	<u>Period</u>	<u>Year to Date</u>	
Income			
Subscription Income	48,077.73	48,077.73	48,077.73
Expenditure			
Subscriptions Payable to Head Office	30,635.07	30,635.07	30,635.07
		0.00	0.00
Gross Income/(Expenditure) :		17,442.66	17,442.66
Administrative expenses			
Travelling Expenses	207.80		207.80
Printing and Stationery	2,329.09		2,329.09
Catering	2,812.24		2,812.24
Donations	570.00		570.00
Subscription Collection Charge	1,248.31		1,248.31
Clerical Assistance	20,596.61		20,596.61
Audit and Accountancy	700.00		700.00
Depreciation	334.68		334.68
Other Outgoings	669.91		669.91
		29,468.64	29,468.64
Net Income/(Expenditure):		(12,025.98)	(12,025.98)

Date: 18/09/2012
Time: 21:03:53

University & College Union Sheffield
Balance Sheet

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From: Brought forward
To: Month 12, August 2012

Chart of Account: Default Layout of Accounts

	<u>Period</u>	<u>Year to Date</u>	
Fixed Assets			
Furniture and Fixtures	877.02	877.02	877.02
		877.02	877.02
Current Assets			
Subscriptions Receivable	3,113.95	3,113.95	
Bank Account	19,476.24	19,476.24	
		22,590.19	22,590.19
Current Liabilities			
Creditors and accrued income	3,250.08	3,250.08	
		3,250.08	3,250.08
Current Assets less Current Liabilities:		19,340.11	19,340.11
Total Assets less Current Liabilities:		20,217.13	20,217.13
Long Term Liabilities			
		0.00	0.00
Total Assets less Total Liabilities:		20,217.13	20,217.13
Accumulated Funds			
B/fwd	32,243.11	32,243.11	
Surplus/(deficit) for the year	(12,025.98)	(12,025.98)	
		20,217.13	20,217.13

Equality and Diversity Officer – Jane Simm

Last year has been a busy one on this important topic which 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 have continued to take part in the Policy Focus Group as part of equality objectives. 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 project 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. The recent UCU Congress which I attended on behalf of the branch, gave us an update on new initiatives and campaigns. One worthy of note is the new Black Members Survival Guide which we plan to raise awareness with our members. UCU is producing some excellent new material which we will promote via Branch news and general meetings.

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 Policy group and Career pathways group, and the Health and Wellbeing task group along with Gillian Brown. For the next year I will continue to do my best to support our membership in this crucial aspect of our work.

Atypical Workers report – Kaye Carl and Gillian Brown

Well into the fifth year of working on discussion and negotiating with our employers on the regularisation of atypical workers, and flagging only slightly (that is those individuals paid an hourly rate) we can report this year on a couple of successes that will have positive benefit to UCU members.

By far the largest group of individuals traditionally paid an hourly rate are postgraduate research students who are involved in demonstrating, seminar leading and marking across all faculties and academic departments. Our campaigning and negotiating has led to the University rolling out a Graduate Training Contract to postgraduate research students who teach and will provide teaching opportunities and training as an integral part of postgraduate research studies. This scheme will give them a contract of employment with the same terms and conditions as colleagues.

Disappointingly we are still becoming aware of cases where members are not being treated fairly. A change in the law relating to Employment Tribunals brought forward a rush of personal cases earlier in the academic year where UCU members asked for support in taking cases forward to Tribunal before an introduction of charges for this. We can still report a 100% success rate in resolving these cases before they actually get to Tribunal, and can through this can demonstrate the value of UCU membership to a group of workers who have traditionally not joined a UCU because of the 'flexibility' of their relationship with the University. Needless to say trades union recruitment from this group has increased dramatically!

We would both like to say thank you to all UCU caseworkers who have supported members through what can be a difficulty 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.

Membership Report

The national membership database is subject to ongoing development by UCU HQ in consultation with Branches. Members are now able to update their own records online. It is important that all the information is accurate as we need to be "ballot ready" to avoid challenge by the Employer.

We have more members as of the end of May 2013 compared to the same time last year, with membership density remaining roughly the same.

The greatest increase has been in postgraduate student membership - the future of the union - with an increase of 63%. The postgraduate group is organised using Facebook, and they are currently looking at issues that affect both teaching and non-teaching postgraduates. Facebook has been a particularly effective way of keeping postgraduate members up to date with issues such as the postgraduate teaching contract and has been instrumental in the recruitment of new members.

There have also been increases in fixed term contract (FTC) membership. This follows a Branch campaign to raise awareness of the rights of this group of staff, assistance to individuals through casework, and a locally produced leaflet. FTC members are using LinkedIn to organise. Similarly, more hourly paid (HP) workers have been recruited due to campaigning work, individual casework success, and success in negotiations.

Following a list of staff provided by the University we have also sent out a local hard copy mail-shot to all eligible staff. This was a substantial piece of work with contributions from Departmental Contacts as well as Committee members. A small group of activists are also meeting to assess the outcome of the mail-shot with a view to conducting targeted recruitment in Departments.

The essential work done by Departmental Contacts in providing information to potential members should also be highlighted, as contact from a colleague within the department has proved to have a significant impact on recruitment.