

SUCU General Meeting, Thurs 27 Nov 2014, 1-2pm

Chair: Catherine Fletcher followed by Mick Ashman

Minutes: Jane Rodger

1. Welcome and introductions

Catherine Fletcher (Branch Communication Officer) introduced herself and other members of Committee present, and finally welcomed all members to this very well attended meeting.

The minutes of the last Extraordinary General meeting were approved.

2. USS dispute and motions

Catherine introduced the first motion to be discussed. This is the only way within the internal democratic structures of UCU to recall a negotiation position. Under UCU rules 20 UCU branches are required to pass a motion calling for a special sector conference. The following motion was proposed by Sarah Staniland (Branch Equality Officer) and seconded by Sam Morecroft (Branch Education Officer).

Motion on Special Conference on HE Pensions, Sheffield UCU GM 27 Nov 2014

This UCU branch supports the call for the requisition of a Special HE Sector Conference to debate the campaigns to defend pensions in HE, and to defend the capacity of the UCU to call industrial action short of a strike as part of those campaigns.

The motion was debated. Comments and questions from the floor included:

- Many members are perplexed by the opening position of UCU negotiators.
- This is the only way that rank and file members can influence this negotiating position.
- How are the negotiators appointed?

Ans. The Higher Education Committee are elected by members. This Committee chooses the negotiators and holds them to account.

- The system for electing HEC members needs to be changed. Candidates' statements are too generic. There should be hustings where people talk about what they stand for.
- Has there been a special conference before?

Ans. Yes there has and union policy has been changed as a result.

- Are other branches debating this?

Ans. Yes many.

- The national negotiators are still challenging the actuarial valuation and the Employers have conceded to re look at this.
- If the Special Conference goes ahead how influential will it be?

Ans. The Conference will set mandates instructing negotiators to act. The Conference needs to be in early January before USS Trustees vote.

A vote was taken and the motion was passed Nem con

At this point Mick Ashman took the Chair. A second motion proposed by SUCU Committee was read out. An amendment was proposed by Jamie Gough and seconded by Catherine Fletcher to divide the original motion in to two; the first half dealing with the negotiations and the second with the punitive deductions.

Comments and questions from the floor included:

- USS is currently better than TPS pension.
- The negotiators haven't actually made a concession, but the proposal by UCU is being perceived as such.
- The proposal is an opening position within the current actuarial valuation.
- We should go back to a single tier system where everyone is part of a final salary scheme.
- The pros and cons of a final salary scheme were discussed. An amendment to include a demand for a final salary scheme for all was proposed.
- The key issue Employers' proposal tears up the contractual agreement made with staff for their pension.
- There was some discussion about the original wording of the ballot paper regarding action short of a strike. An amendment was proposed to the final point to replace "assessment boycott" with "action short of a strike".

A vote was taken on whether to accept the proposed amendments.

For: 72

Against: 2

Abstentions: 0

Each new motion following amendment (below) were then debated.

Comments and questions from the floor included:

- The marking boycott has had a disproportionate affect so we need flexibility.
- Two hour strikes are ineffective for academic related colleagues.
- The marking boycott was beginning to bite and had the potential to be highly affective.
- The Student Union nationally and locally support the action.
- There is no perfect method of industrial action, but this motion gives Branches the flexibility to decide what action is most effective locally.

A vote was taken and the motions (below) were passed nem con

Motion on USS negotiations, Sheffield UCU GM 27 Nov 2014

1. This branch recognises the absolute necessity to effectively fight the attack on our pensions, and in particular to prevent the introduction of a Trojan Horse 'Defined Contribution' element.

2. The branch is deeply disappointed with the extensive concessions made already to the employers by our negotiators, in particular the abandonment of the final salary pension. We would like to see final salary for all. We believe this concession was unnecessary and destructive, as there was tremendous support for action in the ballot on our side, and the employer side was publicly falling apart as the supposed scheme deficit was exposed as an artifice. The concessions should be taken off the table.

Passed nem con

Motion on Punitive Pay Deductions, Sheffield UCU GM 27 Nov 2014

1. In response to the recent assessment boycott our employer was going to make punitive deductions. They were going to deduct 25% of pay from staff engaged in the assessment boycott, a far greater proportion of salary than of work, and were to continue to deduct 25% until the assessment work was done, presumably until the end of the dispute, however short the assessment work itself. Compare that to the two hour strikes in our pay dispute earlier this year, which of course did not and could not result in indefinite 28% pay docking.

2. If an agreement is not reached with the employers in the coming negotiations and the industrial action resumes it is essential that our response is effective and deals appropriately with punitive deductions. We are pleased that the HEC on the 19th November reaffirmed the policy explicitly stated in the ballot that there would be national strike action if employers make punitive deductions.

3. If action resumes we would urge the HEC to allow local branches to flex the approach to action short of a strike and strike action, as each is most effective at different times in different universities.

Passed nem con

3. Reward and recognition negotiation update

There was insufficient time to give a full report about the negotiations. Suffice to say the University is trying to tie incremental pay increases to performance.

Questions and comments from the floor included:

- Aren't pay increments agreed nationally?

Ans. Yes, and this is the UCU position.

4. AOB

None