

SUCU General Meeting Wed 28th Jan 2015, 1pm

Chair: Jane Simm

Minutes: Jane Rodger

1. Welcome and introductions

Jane Simm welcomed all members to the meeting.

2. Pensions

2.2 Jane Simm introduced Pablo Stern, Branch Treasurer, who gave an update on the USS Pension dispute. Two Committee members are attending a special USS meeting called by the union leadership in Manchester today. A report from this meeting will be circulated soon.

2.3 Pablo outlined the current position. The outcome of the consultative ballot was to accept the Employers offer, and the offer will be formally accepted by union negotiators tomorrow. The Employers have destroyed the final salary scheme and had the audacity to start at the same time the destruction of the career average scheme. We knew this would be attempted as soon as the CARE scheme was introduced. The Employers' tactics risked fracturing their own side, and it did split, but their tactics paid off due to national UCU strategy. The union was in a good position: the biggest vote for action since UCU was founded, the deficit was demonstrably phoney, the Employers were divided, and the Employers could afford a much better deal. There was not quite enough rank and file strength to seize control of the union strategy. The Special USS Conference that could have achieved this is now being called but the motions calling for it from 20 branches came too late. This Conference will go ahead but the agreement will be signed.

2.4 Its important that we move forward. The next battle on pensions will be to stop the expansion of the 'defined contribution' scheme, and to defend the career average scheme. It's our union - we must reclaim it through democratic mechanisms. We also have local battles – a major one might be coming up to protect normal increments, so it's vital that our local negotiators are supported. We must learn from the defeat, and build our strength: Firstly, vote for a fighting leadership. SUCU Committee will circulate information when elections come up, so people are aware of candidates' stance on the pensions dispute. Secondly, become active locally: the strength of our union is here, and in the departments. Become a rep or deputy rep, talk to people, ask them to join.

2.5 Questions and comments from the floor included:

- Strength at a local level is vital in ongoing negotiations, and a fighting agenda is needed.
- We need the flexibility to have a localised industrial action strategy. Ans. This Branch submitted a motion to the union leadership demanding this. It is important to ensure that the UCU National Executive Committee is willing to devolve decisions to local Branches.
- We must move forward - continue to challenge the valuation, fight to get rid of the defined contribution element of the scheme, the denominator, and further attacks.
- We must also focus on union strategy and strength at a local level. We should call an EGM of members to discuss this. For example, decentralised events in Departments/Faculties have been successful and should be used more. Members are encouraged to arrange such meetings and SUCU Committee members would always try to attend. Ans. The suggestion of an EGM is a good idea and SUCU Committee will come back to members about this.

3. Local pay and performance management

3.1 Jane Simm introduced Jon Benson who gave members an update on the local joint union reward and recognition negotiations, which started during the Spring last year. There are four areas under negotiation and broad agreement over three, but disagreement about the proposals to change incremental progression. The less contentious areas are: to de-couple the rating system from SRDS so that the scheme focuses on the individual and their role; to remove and replace Exceptional Contribution Awards with a wider spread more varied scheme (which campus unions are stepping back from); and proposals that affect promotions. Our Employer wants to break with the National Framework Agreement, so that staff “earn” the right to pay increments. This would open the door to performance related pay i.e. increments are removed if staff do not “perform”. This method of staff control also does not work. The joint unions are now reaching a point of deadlock with the Employer and entering into dispute is a possibility. National Officials will attend the next negotiation meeting.

3.2 Comments and questions from the floor included:

- The proposals will fundamentally change the relationship between the manager and the managed, and can be used as a bully’s charter. There are already provisions within the framework agreement to deal with performance issues which carry the possibility of a lost increment. However, the current mechanisms to do this are transparent and have the right of appeal, unlike the proposals under discussion.
- There will not be sufficient transparency, objective criteria, or monitoring.
- People should be paid a decent wage for what they do. If there is any surplus money this should go into basic pay.

4. Guest speaker from Sheffield College – Brandon Wilshaw, Branch Secretary

4.1 Jane Simm introduced Brandon Wilshaw from Sheffield College UCU. Industrial action at Sheffield College starts tomorrow with a one day strike triggered by the announcement of another round of redundancies. Previously UCU has successfully stopped any compulsory redundancies, but now the government has reduced the redundancy consultation period from 90 to 30 days there is a real risk of this now happening. Managements’ consultation was very poor. Sheffield College are downgrading teaching staff to business support (with a loss of pay, poorer conditions and pensions) and are removing UCU recognition for this group of staff. Sheffield College management also want to introduce performance related pay - the guides for which are an insult to staff. Brandon also spoke more broadly about the impact of this management approach and proposals will have on students’ education. He also emphasised the importance of maintaining national bargaining, as FE management now operate outside of this framework. Members were encouraged to join colleagues on the picket line in the morning.

4.2 Comments and questions from the floor included:

- Expressions of solidarity.
- It was noted that industrial action at Lambeth College had brought significant improvements to the Employers proposals.

5. AOB

Sam Morecroft, Branch Education Officer asked that the Branch nominate him for membership of the national UCU Anti-casualisation Committee. A vote was taken and his nomination was agreed nem con.