

**SUCU General Meeting Wed 9<sup>th</sup> March 2016, 1pm**

**Council Chamber, Octagon Centre**

**Chair: Craig Brandist, Branch President**

**Minutes: Jane Rodger, Branch Administrator**

Craig Brandist introduced himself and welcomed members to the meeting.

1. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes were passed as a correct record of the last meeting and there were no matters arising not already on the agenda.

2. Brief round-up of news

2.1. Pensions are an ongoing issue. The downgrading of our pension is to be introduced in April, and our contributions will increase, in addition to the increase in national insurance contributions. USS valuation is due again in April 2017. If the same flawed method is used as last time this is likely to prompt another attempt to devalue the scheme. The University's contribution to the national USS valuation consultation has been submitted by a UCU member.

2.2. Convention for Higher Education. Three members from the Branch attended this convention and fed back on the key points. This included:

- The Green Paper is an attack on HE.
- The extra costs associated with the proposed Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) is supposed to be absorbed by the Universities.
- Employability and student satisfaction are poor metrics and will divert activities away from core aims.
- All those affected must be united in resisting the Green Paper.
- An alternative paper written by the Sector should be proposed.

Comments from the floor included:

- The production of an alternative paper is going forward and should be published in May or June to coincide with the release of the White Paper.

2.3. There continues to be concerns about the use of Performance Improvement Plans (PIPs) which are an informal part of the capability process and not agreed by the campus unions. Campus unions are seeing an increase in casework relating to the use of PIPs, particularly for staff with disabilities. Discussions are ongoing with

management about PIPs and the conduct of investigations. SUCU would like to hear more about peoples' experiences of PIPs and investigations.

2.4. To mark International Women's Day UCU has produced a video and data on the gender pay gap.

2.5. Student occupation. SUCU Committee has been added as a signatory to a letter in the Independent supporting the aims of the campaign – opposing marketization, privatisation and casualization in education. The University is taking court action against the students. The students stress they are not disrupting lessons.

Comments from the floor included:

- It's great that our students are demanding democratic free education, and their campaign is building links across the University.

Members were asked to consider adding the entire SUCU Branch as a signatory to the letter. A vote was taken and this was agreed nem con.

### 3. Pay campaign – update from Regional Briefing

3.1. The pay claim for this year has been submitted, which includes a 'catch-up' award of 5% to redress recent pay erosion, and includes a demand for action to reduce the gender pay gap and use of casual contracts. Formal negotiations start soon, and if the Employers' response is unsatisfactory UCU plan to ballot our members for industrial action. Sam Marsh and Nikolay Ogrysko attended a Regional UCU briefing about the pay campaign recently, at which a negotiation time table and plans for industrial action were discussed. The local Branch has also asked that University Management do not circulate misleading UCEA pay materials until UCU and UCEA have clarified the data.

3.2. Members discussed options for effective local action.

Comments from the floor included:

- This needs to be a well organised fight.
- Strike action will always be effective as it damages the University. It's therefore important to have pickets on every building.

3.3. There was a discussion about the importance of the individual strands of the pay claim, each of which is part of the negotiations i.e. actions to address the gender pay gap, and casualisation. Members were asked whether each element of the pay claim should have an equal weighting rather than an emphasis on the percentage increase in pay for all. A vote was taken and this was agreed nem con and will be feedback into national UCU and the UCU activists list.

#### 4. Threats to Academic Freedom and motion

Since the start of commercialisation in education there have been longstanding threats to academic freedom. However, a more recent development amounts to a very significant attack. The following motion for submission to UCU HE Conference was proposed by Craig Brandist and seconded by Daragh O'Reilly.

#### **Motion from Sheffield UCU concerning threats to academic freedom**

This branch notes:

- 1) Academic freedom is under pressure from universities defending their 'brand' from outspoken and critical academics and from the 'impact' agenda;
- 2) Government has announced that all new government grants will include an 'anti-lobbying clause' to prevent public money being used to "lobby for new regulation or more government funding" and "support activity intended to influence or attempt to influence Parliament, government or political parties... or attempting to influence legislative or regulatory action."

UCU believes:

- 1) Further narrowing of the category of 'impact' significantly increases the threat to academic freedom, democratic participation and the freedom of speech more generally;
- 2) The results of publicly funded research should be made available to all members of society to inform debates about policy and the public good;
- 3) Recipients of grants from state bodies should not be prevented from such participation.

UCU resolves:

to campaign actively against any such restrictions.

*A vote was taken and the motion was carried nem con.*

#### 5. Research Excellence Framework

An initial meeting with University management has taken place concerning the next round of REF. We are already receiving concerns from members. We want to ensure the REF process does not feed back into performance management, and that a no detriment clause is included in the code of conduct. Delegates to the HE Convention also learnt of the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) which originated in 2012, and is now

a worldwide initiative. Its aim is to break the link between impact factors and assessment of individuals or institutions. We would like the University to sign up to DORA. HEFCE has already done so. We will circulate details of DORA to members.

Comments from the floor included:

- We need to co-ordinate with other Branches in the Region.
- We need more feedback from members about how the preparations for REF are playing out in Departments.

## 6. Review of Recruitment Weeks and where do we go from here

6.3. The recruitment week in February was marked by two stalls on campus – in the Mappin and in Jessop West Foyers and it was good to chat to members and non-members. A straw poll indicated that workload stress is the most important issue for staff - followed by pay.

6.3. SUCU Committee is considering a different model of branch organisation which would give members the opportunity to get more involved in the Branch but without a formal role. For example an action group may be established which would co-ordinate the increased visibility of the union.

## 7. AOB

7.1. The annual audit of SUCU membership records has started. Its aim is enable the Union to ballot its SUCU members successfully, and legally, whenever the need arises. This year we will be sending an individual email to each member containing their information held by UCU. Members are asked to look out for the email, check the details for accuracy, and if necessary follow a link to update their details on line.

7.2. A small number of SUCU members pay their union subscriptions via payroll deductions. The Government is unfortunately now taking steps to stop such arrangements within the public sector itself and within all publicly funded institutions or agencies. There is little doubt that this is an attempt to weaken trade unions and leave staff without effective representation. UCU is therefore asking members who pay subscriptions via their salary to change to the direct debit method. Members who pay via their salary will be contacted individually with straight forward directions on how to change payments method.