

Saturday Open Days: defending the right to a fair and reasonable work life balance and challenging exploitative practices

University of Sheffield UCU Branch motion

This branch notes that:

- Up to nine Saturday open days per year will be mandatory activities for all departments undertaking undergraduate student recruitment.
- The University is seeking to compel attendance without incentivising staff consistently, and members being compelled to attend is not likely to help student recruitment.
- Workloads for many staff continue to increase.
- Pay has decreased in real terms by over 15% in the last 8 years, and deferred pay, in the form of pensions, is under threat of severe downgrades.

This branch believes that:

- The lack of incentives offered to those working Saturday open days is exploitative practice, loses goodwill and demoralises staff.
- The threat of using the disciplinary processes for staff who decline to attend Saturday open days is unacceptable.
- The burden to attend Saturday open days is likely to fall disproportionately on lower grades, and disproportionately on women.
- Imposing change on staff without appropriate consultation demonstrates poor understanding of the principles of good management that one would expect from a 'Top 100 Employer';
- Management decisions that have workload implications for staff should be evidence-based and subject to consultation. The University's duty of care toward staff must be met.
- Some departments are concerned that the shift to Saturdays could be harmful for their student recruitment.
- Time off in lieu (TOIL) will be meaningless compensation for a large section of staff (who, due to workload, are often not able to take all their holidays), especially if TOIL is to be taken within a specified short timeframe, possibly during term-time.
- Staff on Grades 1-6 should have a choice as to whether they wish to work unsociable hours, and should be offered enhanced payment as an alternative to enhanced TOIL.
- Staff on Grade 7 and above should be offered additional appropriate incentive as an alternative to TOIL.
- Where TOIL is the preferred compensation option, work or commitments must be covered or replaced, ensuring that the time taken results in a genuine reduction in workload.

This branch demands that:

- Attendance at the Saturday open days should be declared entirely voluntary.
- The University properly engages with staff and offers meaningful incentives fairly and consistently, and with agreement with campus unions.
- The University reimburses childcare, car parking and travel expense costs to staff willing to sacrifice a Saturday from their personal time (recouped centrally not from departments).
- An equality impact assessment be undertaken and shared to demonstrate that an inclusive approach to Saturday open days will be managed. The EIA will need to make clear that there is no unreasonable discrimination against staff, student workers, or visitors with protected characteristics in moving to Saturday open days.
- Our research-led University undertakes a proper evidence based cost-benefit analysis of the action to move to exclusively Saturday open days, and is accountable, taking full responsibility if the change results in a negative effect on recruitment.