

## SUCU General Meeting 16<sup>th</sup> October 2013, 1 – 2pm

Council Chamber, Octagon Centre

Chair: Mick Ashman

### 1. Welcome and introductions

Mick Ashman welcomed all members to the meeting and introduced himself, Jane Rodger (Branch Administrator) and Liz Lawrence (National UCU Vice President) to the meeting.

### 2. Pay Ballot outcome – Liz Lawrence UCU Vice President

2.1 Liz Lawrence announced that UCU, Unite and UNISON have all voted for strike action. There was a significantly improved majority vote for strike action and ASOS (action short of a strike). This shows there was a good national campaign ahead of the ballot, and members appreciated the required link between both elements of the vote. On 11<sup>th</sup> October UCU HE Committee voted unanimously to move to dispute with the Employer, and today notice was served on the Employer of a strike day on Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> October, and for ASOS to commence 1<sup>st</sup> November.

2.2 The Pay Claim demands were: a pay increase of the Retail Price Index plus an extra 2 % (as catch up), and to address the gender pay gap (which has increased in the HE Sector), the need for a national agreement on disability leave, workloads, and widespread casualisation. However, there has been no meaningful negotiation by the Employer.

2.3 This dispute is about more than pay. The Employers clearly have a long term agenda for pay cuts year on year and we are fighting this trend. Members feel increasingly pressured by increasing workloads, REF, attacks on pensions and pay. There is a broader fight against the austerity measures and a growing feeling that enough is enough.

2.4 We now must organise and build for this action, eg sites to picket, placards, local leaflets, joint rally with Hallam and the Trades Council, and consider using key University events in November as a focus for campaigning. There will also be a Branch circular giving advice regarding ASOS eg the use of out of office messages regarding working to contract. Other ideas included producing a leaflet for all staff with an invitation to join before the strike. Depending on the response of the Employer there may be further days of action in November and an escalation in the New Year with a marking sanction and further strike days.

Comments and questions included:

- Is SUCU talking to the Students Union? Members of SUCU have already met with SU Officers who are supportive of campus trade union action. They are to produce a guide for students about the dispute. There has already been positive coverage in Forge Press regarding SUCU activities and a

further article on the pay dispute is planned. The Students Union may wish to ask the University to treat sympathetically students who cannot get to any lectures etc which do take place. There will be a need for regular meetings with the SU.

- Sheffield Hallam Vice Chancellor has had a 9.33% pay increase this year – this should be highlighted along with known pay increases at the University of Sheffield and the increase in University reserves.
- We must talk to colleagues about the dispute and planned action.
- As the first strike day falls on Halloween we could dress up as the “Ghouls of Neo-liberalism”. A small group of members will organise this.
- We need to ensure that our call to action emphasises that this struggle for a fairer society, the distribution of money within HE, and the attack on the HE Sector.
- The Branch will manage measures to work to contract carefully to ensure that potentially vulnerable members are protected.
- Liz Lawrence suggested that SUCU Branch Officers could attend the Hallam Branch meeting next Wednesday afternoon to plan joint action.
- Liz Lawrence urged members to look at their contracts of employment and consider what working to contract would mean for them. Members should not routinely have to work more than 35 hours a week. Members should ask their managers what work they can drop in order to bring down their workload to a reasonable level. Also, if they are asked to reschedule lectures missed on strike days then some other work should be taken off them.
- We need to focus on the Living Wage element of the claim.

### 3. Academic Notice Periods

Members heard an update from Daragh O’Reilly. SUCU has been invited to propose an alternative model for managing notice periods for academic staff. Under the current model it is legally possible for the University to impose an eleven month notice period and this has been the case for some individuals during the last year. Many other institutions have a clear 3 month notice period. Members of SUCU Committee will be meeting with the University to discuss this formally this afternoon and it will be an ongoing issue. Members are asked to send feedback regarding bad practice to [ucu@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:ucu@sheffield.ac.uk).

Comments and questions included:

- The use of this measure by the University during the last REF round sends a poor message to students.
- The University justifies the imposition of this measure due to concerns for teaching cover. However the same principle does not apply to University teachers’ required notice periods.

#### 4. Workload

Members heard an update from Daragh O'Reilly who explained that workloads and pressures to perform are increasing at the same time as wages being cut. SUCU were invited to propose an extended set of WAF principles. Members of SUCU Committee will be meeting with the University to discuss this formally this afternoon and it will be an ongoing issue. It is hoped that a University wide document will be agreed against which members can assess their Department's practice. Members are asked to send their feedback on this issue to [uc@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:uc@sheffield.ac.uk).

Comments and questions included:

- There is a strong element of subjectivity in workload models and can be used as a management tool. SUCU must address instances of the cynical use of a workload allocation model.
- WAF principles do not apply to Professional Services where there are serious concerns about workloads eg long hours culture, working on Saturdays.
- Individuals should not normally be obliged to work more than 35 hours per week and if they do SUCU must address this.
- Health & Safety Law makes the University responsible for our health and wellbeing and allows SUCU to highlight concerns in a workplace risk assessment. Also any significant change in working arrangements must be risk assessed before introduction.

#### 5. AOB

None.