

SUCU General Meeting 28th Jan 2014

Council Chamber, Octagon Centre

1. Welcome and introductions
2. Feedback from UCU Pay Dispute briefing 24th Jan 2014

Catherine Fletcher attended a UCU Regional Pay dispute briefing on behalf of the Branch and updated members. The HEC's revised pay dispute strategy is for a series of three, two hour strikes, a full day joint strike on the 6th Feb, and significant escalation after April with a marking boycott. Branch delegates at the briefing debated the merits of this approach - compared to a strategy of immediate escalation, which was thought by many to be more likely to bring the dispute to a faster conclusion. The UCU HE Committee meets again on 7th Feb to review the current strategy.

Question and comments from the floor were taken. This included a debate about the use of two hour strikes, exam invigilation exemptions, and the rationale for the current strategy.

3. Emergency motion proposed by Committee

Members were given a copy of the proposed emergency motion, which Mick Ashman read out.

This branch:

1. *Reasserts its support for the pay campaign and the strategy of escalation agreed by delegates at the HE sector conference last year.*
2. *Will support the two-hour strike on 28 January and the one-day action on 6 February, but regrets the failure of HEC to take into account that for the University of Sheffield and a significant minority of other branches these dates fall outside teaching term, limiting the impact of the action.*
3. *Expresses its strong disappointment with the retrograde decisions of the HEC meeting in December which reneged on the democratically determined strategy and opted for two-hour strikes and a delay until April in the implementation of the marking boycott.*
4. *Believes that this weakness risks punitive deductions of pay, potential victimisations, and fails to recognise the difficulties posed for branches in seeking to mobilise members for 2-hour strikes.*
5. *Calls on the union leadership to organise a special delegate HE sector conference to consider escalating the action (to at least 2 days' duration), with other unions if possible, and to bring forward the marking boycott to the earliest possible date, and to prepare for a robust response to any aggressive behaviour by the employers.*

Catherine Fletcher formally proposed the motion, Daragh O'Reilly seconded it.

The proposals and following discussion included the following points:

- We have had a 13% real pay cut since 2009.
- This pay decrease will adversely affect our pensions.

- At the University it's our work and their reward – the number of high earners are increasing, pay differentials are increasing.
- This University is more a multi million pound business than a civic university.
- Our HR Director talks to CIPD about making it easier to sack staff.
- We have the support of the NUS, Unite, UNISON, EIS.
- Concerns that low key action will not be as effective.
- Members should use their collective democratic influence on the UCU Higher Education Committee.
- Opposing the motion, that the current action is viewed as being just about pay and should be broader, including casualization, to get the support of more members.
- Industrial action law limits the reasons for national bargaining disputes. We would like the strike to be about broader issues such as casualisation and workload, and we do fight about all of these issues. But this is the dispute we have and, if we win this we will be in a stronger position regarding other campaigns and negotiations.
- Most members are supporting the industrial action because of all the issues – workload, inequality, casualised contracts. Strike leaflets also detail these issues.
- A move to immediate escalation with a marking boycott will be more affective.
- There needs to be more discussion about targeted action by admin staff eg to hit registration.
- Local Branches should be given scope to take action flexibly to achieve the greatest impact.

Vote was taken: All present were in favour, apart from one abstention. The motion was carried.

4. Pay dispute strategy

This University and its VC are vulnerable to poor publicity because of the pay differentials, the University's refusal to sign up to the Living Wage, and the conditions for staff at Unicus. A strategy of increased publicity would put pressure on the University to exert its influence on UCEA to end the dispute.

Questions and comments from the floor included:

- We should develop a pay model that can be replicated, for instance that the maximum pay should not be greater than a multiplier of the minimum pay, eg times 10. The situation here is symptomatic of the inequalities in society.
- The VC's pay rise (40%) should be publicised rather than the overall package increase (26%). If we decided we didn't want the employer's pension contribution it would not be added to our salary.
- This VC has presided over: low pensions for the lowest paid, the setting up of UNICUS, and large increases in pay for the highest paid.
- We need to consider a strategy for a marking boycott.
- The primary concern is pay differentials
- The University's introduction of a "balanced score-card" will increase our workload.