

Guidance for Members Seeking Personal Assistance from University of Sheffield branch of UCU

1. UCU routinely helps members with individual problems arising from their employment at the University of Sheffield. The range of problems experienced is very wide including, for example, bullying, potential disciplinary action, renewal of fixed term contracts, promotion and career development, study leave, research facilities, performance, and harassment.
2. Members are strongly encouraged to contact UCU as early as possible in the development of a problem. Experience shows that rapid referral to UCU can often nip a problem in the bud whereas if matters are allowed to develop without UCU intervention it may become too late for effective intervention.
3. In particular, any member of UCU who is asked to attend a meeting for disciplinary reasons with their Head of Department/Unit, or other person to whom they are responsible, should immediately alert Sheffield UCU. It is our strong advice that they only attend such a meeting in the presence of a UCU representative: however, the final decision on whether to be accompanied is up to the member.
4. Members who seek the assistance of UCU should contact the Sheffield UCU Office (ucu@sheffield.ac.uk).
5. Members are advised that, should they find themselves present at meetings where serious issues relating to their performance or conditions of work arise unexpectedly, they should immediately ask for time to seek UCU or other advice.
6. Members are also advised to make their own record, at the time, of any work related incidents or developments which give grounds for concern.
7. Normally the Sheffield UCU will only offer its help to UCU members of more than 90 days standing, and is not normally able to provide assistance to members who have only joined the union once the problem has become apparent.
8. Exceptionally, help in the form of one meeting/phone call with a caseworker may be given to non-members (or late joiners) in either of the following cases:
 - the member of staff is new in post or has only recently become eligible to join UCU;
 - the problem is one which Sheffield UCU believes should be pursued in the general interests of all members.In all such cases the person concerned must join UCU at the earliest opportunity.
9. Cases will normally be referred to a Personal Caseworker. Personal Caseworkers are UCU members of the local Branch who have undertaken training in the handling of personal cases. They are volunteers who carry out this work in addition to their normal university duties. Personal Caseworker allocation is managed by the Sheffield UCU Personal Casework Coordinator with the assistance of the Branch Administrator.
10. Most cases are dealt with by liaison between the Personal Caseworker, the member, and the University. Exceptionally, the Personal Caseworker may recommend that a serious case should be forwarded to the UCU Regional Office under the terms of UCU's national legal protection scheme.

In the rare cases where legal advice is required, this will be obtained by the Personal Caseworker in discussion with UCU Regional Office. Please see [UCU's regulations for legal advice](#) (membership number required for access).
11. Personal cases are kept strictly confidential to the Branch Administrator and those Personal Caseworkers or UCU officials to whom the Branch Administrator refers the case. Material relating to individuals held by Sheffield UCU is deemed to be held by the National UCU as far as the Data Protection Act is concerned and not by the University of Sheffield. General issues involved in personal cases may be reported to the UCU Committee or UCU membership, but, except with the expressed permission of the member concerned, this will be done in such a way as to protect anonymity.
12. The University has several formal procedures to resolve disputes. Experience has shown that cases may often be resolved informally but in some circumstances a more satisfactory outcome can be obtained by using the formal procedures. Members will be advised accordingly;

however, the decision on which course of action to adopt rests unambiguously with the member concerned.

13. Advice is given to members on the understanding that:

- members will reveal all relevant facts to their Personal Caseworker;
- they will consult their Personal Caseworker before communicating with management;
- if they seek additional help outside Sheffield UCU this should be done with the knowledge and support of their Personal Caseworker. If this is not done then UCU reserves the right to withdraw support at this point;
- they will provide such documentation as the Personal Caseworker requests.

Relevant documentation may typically include a CV, a chronology of recent events, and supporting documents. Some documentation may be required at the outset to enable the caseworker to make an informed recommendation about which procedure should be adopted. Failure to comply with these conditions, which are essential if UCU is to give its best advice to members, may lead to the withdrawal of the support of UCU.

14. Members who are not happy with their Personal Caseworker should inform the Branch Administrator.

15. Disputes can arise between UCU members in which both parties seek the assistance of the UCU. This can occur between a line manager and an employee where the line manager is subject to a University procedure initiated by the employee, for example a grievance. Under such circumstances it is considered that the line manager will avail her/himself of support of the University's Human Resources Department, and therefore Sheffield UCU will support the other party. Should the line manager at a later point then be subject to action initiated by the University, Sheffield UCU would provide him/her with support. Strict confidentiality will be maintained by referring the case to a Personal Caseworker who has not had any previous involvement with the case.

16. Members should be aware that Personal Caseworkers drawn from the Branch are volunteers acting in conjunction with the duties of their day job. Therefore there are limits on the total amount of time that they are able to devote to any one case. In particular, once a problem has been resolved, the responsibility of the Personal Caseworker is at an end. Should a new problem arise, the member should contact Sheffield UCU Office afresh, and not the original Personal Caseworker.

17. Though care has been taken in drafting this document, it may be that it conflicts, or will in the future conflict, with National UCU advice on personal cases and legal aid. In all such cases, National UCU advice, current at the time, shall take precedence.

Other support available to UCU members:

Members should be aware that additional support is available from [Recourse Support](#) (for education professionals) complements the work of the union, offering members free information and advice, 24-hour telephone counselling, online coaching and financial assistance.