

SUCU Special General Meeting 18th Sept 2013, 1 – 2pm

Chair: Craig Brandist

Minutes: Jane Rodger

1. Welcome and introductions

Craig Brandist welcomed all to this special general meeting about the pay dispute and introduced Simon Renton UCU National President.

2. Simon Renton National UCU President speaking on the Pay Dispute followed by discussion.

Simon spoke to colleagues about the UCU decision to move forward to a strike ballot of HE membership regarding the derisory pay offer of 1%. The ballot will open on 25th Sept and will close on Oct 10th.

2.1 Simon explained that UCU has a good case to pursue industrial action:

- The last significant pay increase was in 2008, the final instalment of a settlement reached in 2006. This rise equated to just keeping in line with inflation. Since 2009 salaries have lost 13% of value in real terms. At the same time Employee contributions to USS Pension Scheme have also increased effectively cutting pay further.
- The Employer can also afford to offer more. Overall staff costs in Higher Education as a proportion of income have fallen from 58% in 2001/02, to 55.5% in 2011/12. This University is worse, at 54%. We have also seen an increasingly unfair distribution of pay – a minority at the top have enjoyed generous increases, and the gap between men and women has worsened. There is money in the system but most staff are not receiving a fair share as the Employer has chosen to divert institutional income elsewhere.

2.2 UCU believes that national bargaining over the last few years has not been meaningful.

This year the trade unions asked for a pay increase of the Retail Price Index plus an extra 2%, as catch up. The claim contained other demands 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. The Employer offered 1% (less than the rate of inflation) and would not talk about the additional elements of the claim. The Annual Sector Conference in May agreed to consult with members and Branches about the pay offer, with a recommendation to reject it, and prepare for a program of escalating industrial action starting in the Autumn. Negotiators were to continue to talk with the Employer during this period. Widespread consultation took place and the UCU

national negotiators have taken the decision to inform the Employer that we are moving to an industrial action ballot.

2.3 Simon urged for a strong vote for industrial action as well as ASOS (action short of a strike) in order to establish a safe position for members. The law unfortunately requires that the two questions are separate. It is also very important to have a good turn out and members are asked to speak to colleagues. When the ballot closes on 10th October HE negotiators will meet to make recommendations to the HE Committee. Unite and UNISON will also be balloting their members for industrial action in conjunction with UCU for greatest impact.

2.4 Should the vote go in favour there is a proposed program for sustained, serious and escalating industrial action over a number of months, starting in the Autumn term. Simon gave an outline of the proposed time table which will involve ASOS and strike action.

Questions and comments were taken from the floor and included:

- University of Sheffield cash reserves have increased considerably.
- We have the support and close links with the National Union of Students which is essential, and SUCU Committee members are meeting with Officers from the local Students Union this week.
- There are already signs of a move by Employers to seek local bargaining by the back door. Local bargaining gives scope for nepotism and victimisation. A strong result in this ballot will help preserve national bargaining on pay and conditions.
- There was a discussion about the categories of member not entitled to vote in an industrial action ballot which includes student members. The recruitment of PhD students was encouraged by Simon who explained that UCU is piloting lower cost subscriptions for post grads who have paid teaching or research work, and an enhanced program of early careers courses will be announced soon. There are tight legal constraints on who may take part in the ballot.
- There was a question about the outcome of the consultative ballot held over the Summer. 69.2% voted for ASOS and 50.2% voted for strike action.
- There was a discussion about options for working to contract.
- This is a good opportunity to recruit new members.
- Colleagues were also encouraged to vote in the UCU NEC by-election (6th Sept – 3rd Oct).

3. AOB

None.