

Sheffield UCU Extra Ordinary General Meeting Minutes Thurs 17th Sept 2020

Chair: Sarah Staniland, SUCU Branch President

Minutes: Jane Rodger, SUCU Branch Administrator

1. Introduction

Sarah welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. HE Special Sector Conference 30th September

- 2.1. Katy Fox-Hodess, Elena Simon, Craig Brandist, Ed Yates and Sarah Staniland were approved as delegates to the Conference.
- 2.2. Sheffield UCU is eligible to send two motions to the Special Sector Conference.
- 2.3. Robyn Orfitelli (SUCU Vice President) gave an update on the Four Fights Dispute. She proposed and gave background to the following motion on behalf of SUCU Committee. The crux of the motion is that all members need to feel a sense of ownership and involvement in dispute planning. The motion was seconded from the floor. The Secunder said that the motion speaks to a lot of the current discussion and helps get member buy-in.

Survey of members and escalating industrial action strategy

HESC Notes

1. HE employers are using Covid 19 to justify threatening job security, pay, and conditions;
2. UCEA's proposed 0% pay adjustment for the 2020 bargaining round;
3. the fundamental importance of member involvement in and ownership of dispute planning.

HESC resolves to

1. conduct a qualitative survey of members in October-November 2020 to determine levels of support across a range of industrial actions (IA), the potential impact of these actions on employers, and what concrete demands members prioritise in a dispute claim;
2. engage qualitative researcher(s) to analyse the data;
3. develop a plan for gradually escalating IA based on the results, beginning with ASOS and boycotting a range of activities reflecting members' different job roles, and eventually culminating in strike action;
4. run an IA ballot beginning December 2020, including actions which reflect survey findings;
5. develop online materials on the IA strategy and make them available during the ballot and any subsequent IA.

Comments included:

- You can join the online conversation about the Four Fights dispute by joining the email group. Get in touch for more information

A vote was taken and the motion was passed with 95% for, 2% against and 4% abstentions.

- 2.4. Caroline Metz proposed the following motion on behalf of SUCU Committee and gave background. The aim of the motion is for UCU to help members on a national level to know their rights and target particular Employers if necessary. The motion was seconded from the floor.

Supporting fixed-term contract staff in higher education

Conference notes:

1. Employers' exploitation of Covid-19 in the form of attacks on jobs, pay and conditions include non-renewal of fixed-term contracts and non-engagement of casual workers

Conference believes:

2. FTC staff are routinely made redundant on the basis of their contract and treated less favourably than permanent staff, in breach of the law;
3. Casualisation is an endemic, structural issue in HE;
4. All employers should fully comply with the law on parity among open-ended and FTC staff

Conference resolves:

5. UCU should explore a UK-wide legal action against employers who refuse to abide by the Fixed Term Employees (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2002;
6. UCU should consider a nation-wide campaign empowering and supporting FTC staff in securing a fair treatment, and wherever legally entitled, a permanent contract, in light of existing regulations.

A vote was taken and the motion was passed with 88% in favour, 4% against and there were 9% abstentions.

3. Branch motion

Elena Simon proposed the following motion on behalf of SUCU Committee and gave background. The Branch has been supporting this initiative for 3 years. The motion was seconded from the floor. The seconder said it was important for the Branch to operate more broadly in the community.

Branch Motion - Funding a South Yorkshire Organiser

Branch Notes:

- Sheffield Needs a Pay Rise (SNAP) has made significant progress in organising fast food workers in the city, who are disproportionately young and from BAME communities.
- Most recently, a community mobilisation organised by SNAP against wage theft at Papa John's resulted in an immediate agreement by the employer to pay back all the money owed, an example of the kind of creative and innovative work that SNAP is undertaking to develop rank-and-file workplace leaders in under-organised sectors and from under-organised communities.
- SNAP's work is at the leading edge of trade union movement revitalisation in this country.
- That Sheffield Trades Council are requesting donations from affiliate branches to help fund the employment of SNAP's organiser for the upcoming year.

Branch Resolves:

- To donate £1000 towards the cost of hiring this organiser to enable SNAP to continue the vital work they are doing.

Comments from the floor included:

- Is there sufficient funds to cover this donation?
Ans. Yes this amounts to about 2%.

A vote was taken and the motion was passed with 87% in favour, 5% against and 8% abstentions.

4. Return to Campus

4.1. Sarah introduced this subject and acknowledged the fast pace of change in the covid-19 situation. She explained what work Branch Officers had been doing over the Summer, and what has been achieved by the campus unions. We have held member meetings in each Department, are conducting a H&S survey that closes next Wednesday, and H&S groups have met throughout the Summer. The main concern expressed at our return to campus Action Group (two weeks ago) was uncertainty in terms of what University management were planning. We had hoped that by today we would know more. We have shared the other action points with management and these are being taken forward. Our main achievements include "do what you can" messaging, pay for casuals during the lockdown, furlough top up and various policy changes. At this point we feel there is a lack of preparedness on the University's part.

Comments from the floor included:

- Some staff are already teaching.
- Student Support services are also being asked to start face to face (F2F) activities.

4.2. SUCU Committee would now like to discuss our proposed three pronged approach to what happens next.

- 4.2.1. Ground work. We have been pushing for adequate and sufficient risk assessments. We recognise that the problems will be around their implementation. Many staff have not seen them, signed them, and we know that PPE provisions are not there. We are in the process of designing a policy whereby staff can remove themselves from dangerous situations. There will also be template letters for members to use.
- 4.2.2. Collective concerns. If there are concerns relating to a specific area, such as unsafe practices, SUCU Committee needs to know. We will organise H&S walk throughs, and we need more Safety rep volunteers to help us with this. Training is available.
- 4.2.3. Global. We are designing a set of principles that will be sent in an open letter to management. We need member feedback. We hope to send a joint campus union statement too. The draft principles are:
- 1.No F2F work until risk assessments are followed.
 - 2.If adequate testing is not done - then risk is not managed.
 - 3.Students should be able to return or not return.
 4. There should be no detriment for opting out of F2F working.
 - 5.The University must have a daily dashboard providing covid case data.
 - 6.The University must ensure that covid cases and mental ill health incidence is monitored.

Comments from the floor included:

- A sign up sheet for H&S training was circulated.
- The University seems to be saying that F2F is the only option for teaching, but this will not be the same experience for students compared to pre-covid. Students are being deceived.
Ans. The University is pushing for face to face teaching as it justifies the tuition fees.
- Many Graduate Teaching Assistants and staff on fixed term contracts have not been included in University communications to staff. They are missing out on the relevant training and Departmental meetings.
Ans. GTAs and casual staff should be on the staff lists for H&S reasons at the very least.
- Management are not interested in evidence about the safe return to campus. They are driven by economic concerns, and retrofitting the pedagogical argument. We are expecting 6000 asymptomatic students to arrive on campuses across the country. Management know there will be a big outbreak that will affect the city.
Ans. It is important that individuals are involved in the risk assessments and raise concerns. Ensure that mitigating measures are actually in place. We are working with the Student Union, local Public Health Officials, MPs and local Councillors.
- The Country is in a mess and the Government is terrible. If we normalise the situation, then we support it. There is a risk that commercial advantage could be made if remote teaching is normalised. We need to

ensure that the language we use makes it clear that remote working is required due to the pandemic.

- The only aspect of Government guidance that is clear is - what can be done online should be done online.

Ans. We have been arguing that Government guidance is not being followed with regard to there not being a good reason for face to face teaching.

- The SUCU H&S survey needs to include issues relevant to PS members.
- The fact that some members do not understand what a risk assessment is, is a further indicator that the University is not ready.
- What happens if mitigation measures are not followed?

Ans. We will provide guidance on how to remove yourself from a dangerous situation, and template letters. We encourage members to make a noise in their Departments, and prioritise their personal H&S.

- Members feel conflicted in their day job.
- We hear that Hallam are meeting staff to have one to one discussions about return to campus.

Ans. Hallam are ahead of the curve.

- Students who suspect they have covid, and have to isolate may be put at a disadvantage if replacement teaching is not provided, and may dissuade them from doing so. There are equality issues.
- Not being able to undertake F2F has an effect on research lab work. We need to ensure that this can be done safely.

Ans. we have pushed for the wording of risk assessments to be changed so that some people can be on campus if it is safe.

- Examples of different approaches across Departments were highlighted, such as the advice for staff who cannot wear face masks, and where one Department has stopped F2F teaching for the first semester.

Ans. There are huge variations across departments with regard to staff being asked to undertake face to face work.

- Does the University have a policy on travel during a lockdown?

Ans. Yes, this is in the University risk assessment that is stored in the google drive.

5. AOB
None