

SUCU General Meeting Minutes Tues 13th Oct 2015, 1pm

Council Chamber, Octagon Centre

Chair: Craig Brandist, Branch President

Minutes: Jane Rodger, Branch Administrator

Craig Brandist introduced himself and welcomed members to the meeting

1. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes from the AGM on 10th June 2015 were accepted and passed. An update was given on progress following the motion carried raising serious concerns about the use of capability processes. There are also links to SRDS. It was re-emphasised that the campus unions did not sign up to the use of Performance Improvement Plans. Members of SUCU Committee are keen to hear about members' experiences.

2. Brief round- up of news

Sam Marsh, Branch Communication Officer gave a brief summary of recent branch activities. Thanks to a strong position taken by the campus unions in negotiations the new Reward and Recognition Framework continues to protect annual incremental progression, which was under threat. It was emphasised that the unions did not sign up to the rewards element of the new Framework. New anti-bullying procedures have now been agreed, and continue to be monitored. The unions have also undertaken health and safety inspections that highlighted workplace stress as an issue. SUCU Personal Caseworkers continue to assist individual members with employment issues. The Branch President Craig Brandist met recently with the Vice Chancellor to discuss concerns for lack of transparency in professorial pay. UCU has launched a new campaign to challenge of the USS fund valuation. Two Branch Officers attended a UCU pay consultation briefing on 2 October about the latest 1% offer for 2015/16. Members of UCU's Higher Education Committee met on 9 October to consider feedback and decided not to accept the offer but it took the decision not to enter into dispute, but to develop a campaign now and run it into and throughout the build up to the 2016 negotiating round (October 2015 - March 2016). This will seek to develop and submit a joint claim early (January 2016) and, if the resultant offer is unacceptable, to move to ballot and action in April or May 2016. The aim of the strategy would be to push for an offer that would make up for the pay

erosion of 15% since 2009. And finally, a living wage level in pay has now been introduced by University management for all its subsidiaries.

Comments and questions from the floor included:

- The Students Union want the University to “sign up” to the Living Wage as this also includes an obligation to ensure that external contractors also pay the living wage.
- The University should sign up to a new higher living wage once the tax-credit cuts come through.

3. Speaker from Sheffield Students Union

Unfortunately the speaker was unable to attend.

4. Speaker from Tamil Solidarity campaign

Sam Morecroft, Branch Anticasualisation Officer introduced Bharathi, a member of Tamil Solidarity and asked members to consider affiliating to the campaign.

Bharathi explained that Tamil Solidarity was formed in 2009 when tens of thousands of Tamil civilians were killed by Sri Lankan armed forces. The campaign has aimed to raise awareness of the situation facing the Tamils in Sri Lanka. Hundreds of thousands were held in open prison camps and thousands have “disappeared”. Bharathi explained that Tamil women have been subject to systematic rape and sexual abuse by Sri Lankan armed forces. Despite this the international governments have not held the Sri Lankan government to account for the war crimes and human rights abuses. Many Tamils fled and some came to the UK. The campaign’s strategy is to build its strength at a grassroots level involving trade unions and students. Tamil Solidarity has also launched a “join a union” campaign and has affiliations with UNISON, NUS, RMT and Unite.

Craig Brandist asked members to consider affiliating the Branch to the Tamil Solidarity campaign at a cost of £50 pa. A vote was taken and this was passed nem con.

5. Peoples march for climate, justice and jobs motion

Deborah Cobbett proposed and spoke to the motion below. Sam Morecroft seconded the motion. Colleagues also heard an update on the local activities of Sheffield Campaign Against Climate change. The campaign is relevant to the trade union movement as it sets out a policy for employment. The link to employment is highlighted by the expected loss of thousands of jobs as a consequence of the government’s removal of subsidy for domestic solar panels.

Motion in support the People’s March for Climate, Justice and jobs 29th November, London and 28th November, Cardiff and Edinburgh

University of Sheffield Branch of UCU notes that unless action is taken to limit global warming to a maximum 2 degrees Celsius – and some argue it should be 1.5 degrees – we will be heading

towards catastrophic climate change. This will manifest itself in extreme weather events such as the wettest winter ever in 2013/14 in the UK, Hurricane Katrina that ripped through New Orleans in 2005 or Typhoon Yolanda/Haiyan which ravaged the Philippines in 2013.

This union also notes that the same global inequalities of our economic system are replicated through the impacts of climate change. Countries emitting the fewest greenhouse gases face the greatest risk from rising sea levels for example. In industrialised countries it is often the poor who are hardest hit as they cannot just leave town when the storms roll in.

In December world leaders meet in Paris to reach a global agreement on reducing greenhouse gas emissions. But these are not just another round of climate talks. Last year the authoritative UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released a number of reports that set out in stark detail the challenge facing the planet and human activity – the main cause of global warming.

Unfortunately there is little confidence that world leaders will put aside their power and profit driven politics to reach the scope and level of agreement needed to avert rampant climate change. Therefore we need to show that people are prepared to act where our leaders are not.

This Branch resolves to:

1. Support and encourage participation in the worldwide demonstrations for climate, justice and jobs, particularly on 28 November in Sheffield and 29 November in London, including taking our union banner and joining the trade union bloc on the marches;
2. Support and encourage participation in activities around the climate talks in Paris by keeping members informed about these, including the end of the talks demonstration on 12 December;
3. Help to fund coaches to the London demonstration by contributing £100 to their cost;
4. Affiliate to the Campaign against Climate Change: <http://www.campaignccc.org/> .
5. Participate in and help build the wider climate movement beyond Paris into 2016, by informing members about further action they can take on climate change, for example, through publicising activities of Sheffield Climate Alliance <http://www.sheffieldclimatealliance.net/> and the University of Sheffield Carbon Neutral University <http://carbonneutralshef.weebly.com/>.

Comments and questions from the floor included:

- The nuclear plant planned by the government would be far more expensive than the other non-carbon options.
- This is a pro-worker initiative. It's important that the trade union movement adopts a strong position as the campaign seeks to reduce carbon emissions and ensure economic security for workers.

- By debating this motion we do not preclude supporting other green initiatives.
- This issue links to the USS motion (also on the agenda for the meeting). USS should be pressured to dis-invest in fossil fuels.
- SUCU Committee is carrying a vacancy for an Environmental Officer and members were encouraged to consider putting themselves forward for the position.

A vote was taken and the motion was passed nem con.

6. Prevent Agenda and proposed Branch motion

Sarah Staniland proposed and spoke to the motion. The University's position was then explained from the floor. Its approach is one of safeguarding rather than security, and for the use of existing procedures to share concerns. There is a recognition that one significant risk is for people to over react, and respond to Prevent in an unhelpful way.

Comments and questions from the floor included:

- Use of the words "radical" and "extremist" is worrying. The issue should be one of safeguarding; that is, where there are concerns for the safety of an individual, or the safety of others.
- Government guidance itself doesn't limit freedom of speech and debate, but the misuse of the guidance could.
- If the use of the prevent agenda threatens freedom of expression and debate we must defend them.

Following discussion, an amendment to the original motion was proposed by Sarah Staniland and seconded by Sam Morecroft. The following motion was then put to colleagues.

Motion from University of Sheffield UCU on the Prevent Agenda

As a University and Union we are proud of our commitment to, and record of, challenging any expression of prejudice or discrimination directed against any group or individual (whether in form of racism, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism; attitudes to sexuality, gender or disability). Where any safeguarding or more general duty of care concern is raised that may put a student or other persons at risk of harm, there are established procedures of prompt referral which every member of staff should be aware of and should be able to act on accordingly.

In addition:

It is essential that in order to explore views and opinions and where necessary, challenge them, we actively promote a climate of free discussion and debate. There should be no fear that this will incur suspicion, or limit on free expression within the boundaries of our equality and diversity policy and disciplinary codes on harassment or abuse.

It is essential that legitimate political opinions expressed by staff or students are not in any way regarded as 'extreme' or legitimising 'extremism'. In the context of 'Prevent', it is perfectly legitimate for example, to criticise government foreign policy; to criticise the wars in the Middle East and Afghanistan; to express support for Palestinian rights or to express either support for or opposition to Israel.

Neither is it extreme or illegitimate to hold that the rise of terrorism or hostility to western governments is a direct result of these policies. One may agree or disagree with such views, however they form part of legitimate discussion and debate; they are widespread in the political and academic sphere and in society at large. They are neither 'extreme', nor should they be presented as 'excusing' or providing cover for 'extremism' or acts of violence or terror. Finally, the insistence on freedom of expression and free debate, within the boundaries of established policies and codes of behaviour, is paramount.

Therefore sufficient time for discussion, debate and respectful exchange of views is essential in any forum in which 'Prevent' is discussed or presented. Everyone is entitled to their own political view or opinion but no-one should privilege one view over that of others, or present one political explanation as 'expert' or not subject to challenge.

All presenters in 'Prevent' forums, whether internal or external, should be made aware of these principles and be expected to abide by them.

University of Sheffield UCU resolves:

1. to present the above to the University Executive Board, and at our negotiating forum the Joint Union Consultative Committee, as an agreed set of principles by which any discussion or training on Prevent be conducted.
2. To actively campaign for freedom of expression and debate, and against the limitations that the use of the Prevent program may put on this, which risks reinforcing divisions and prejudice and exacerbating the problem.
3. to campaign locally alongside Stand Up to Racism, anti-racist and civil rights campaigns and Muslim community and faith organisations.

A vote was taken and the motion and was passed nem con

7. USS valuation campaign and proposed Branch motion

Sam Marsh, Branch Pensions Officer talked about the new UCU campaign to challenge the next USS valuation due in 2017 by putting pressure on the Universities. There have already been some meetings with management at this University. Sam proposed and spoke to the following motion which was seconded by Sam Morecroft.

Motion from University of Sheffield UCU on USS Scheme funding

University of Sheffield UCU Branch believes that the USS Board adopted a recklessly prudent approach to scheme funding in the lead-up to the 2014 triennial valuation and that this was been the driving force for increases to employer and employee contributions and cuts to members' pension benefits.

This Branch notes that UCU commissioned expert advice and used this to suggest an alternative approach to that adopted by the USS Board. Adopting UCU's alternative approach could have reduced the deficit in the 2014 valuation by around £8.6bn. It is also noted that a number of other universities were critical of the valuation methodology.

This Branch resolves to:

1. Raise the USS scheme funding approach through the relevant joint negotiating/consultative machinery and highlight the problems with the current approach, asking for the employer to agree that USS should adopt a reasonable interpretation of the available evidence when setting the approach to scheme funding;
2. Write to the VC asking for the University to join with UCU in reviewing the USS funding methodology;
3. Encourage members to raise the USS scheme funding approach at other institutional bodies (i.e. Senate, and Faculty meetings);
4. Keep the UCU's head office informed of developments.

A vote was taken and the motion was passed nem con.

8. SUCU branch affiliations

There was insufficient time to discuss this and the item will be rolled forward to the next General Meeting on Nov 24th 2015, 1pm.

9. AOB

Craig Brandist advised that this Branch will be sending a message of solidarity to colleagues in the Open University who are threatened with the closure of seven out of their nine regional centres putting 500 jobs at risk of redundancy.

It is European Health and Safety week next week so the campus unions will have a stall next Tues 20th Oct 12.30 on the Concourse. The focus will be on workplace stress and colleagues are very welcome to come along to discuss this and related issues.