

**SUCU General Meeting Wed 23rd Nov 2016, 1pm**

**Alfred Denny Conference Room**

**Chair: Craig Brandist, SUCU Branch President**

**Minutes: Jane Rodger, SUCU Branch Administrator**

1. Welcome and introductions

Craig Brandist introduced himself and welcomed everyone to the meeting

2. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the SUCU General Meeting held 20<sup>th</sup> October 2016 were agreed as an accurate record.

3. Brief round- up of news

3.1. The UCU national pay campaign has now ended and the anti-casualisation, and gender pay gap elements are now being taken forward as local campaigns. A recent Guardian article has highlighted precarious employment practices in Higher Education. There were a number members at Sheffield who could have told their stories, but were too frightened to do so. SUCU Committee have sent out a questionnaire to reach casualised staff at the University, and so far we have received over 100 testimonials describing the impact of precarious working arrangements. The testimonials will be used to improve conditions for staff by presenting them to University management and using them in press releases. A campaign stall in the Student Union Building foyer tomorrow (24<sup>th</sup> November) will raise awareness amongst the student body of University management's use of precarious employment contracts. The first step of the local gender pay gap campaign is to press for University management to assemble better data on pay.

3.2. Sheffield Needs a Pay Rise group are organising a demonstration for Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> December. The campaign is seeking a £10 minimum wage, unionisation and the scrapping of casual and zero hours contracts.

3.3. Decisions made by the University's Strategy Delivery Group regarding staff requests to the Staff Release Scheme will be known by Christmas. The unions are asking management about the extent of University capital expenditure.

3.4. Changes made following the last valuation of the USS Pension Scheme have now been introduced. The next valuation is due in March 2017. This is likely to show a deficit but is based on very dubious maths. SUCU Committee want to engage with University management. It is not in the Employer's interests to have the scheme devalued further either.

- 3.5. Disability History Month runs from 22<sup>nd</sup> November and aims to raise awareness of the important steps taken to achieve equality rights.
- 3.6. This week is UCU National Recruitment week. Members are encouraged to talk to colleagues about joining the union. The more members we have the stronger our hand in local negotiations.
- 3.7. There are many issues keeping SUCU Committee and activists especially busy at the moment. Help from our general membership would be very helpful at this time. Ways to help include producing infographics, attending our drop in Action Groups, acting as a Contact in Departments, getting involved with personal casework, and considering Committee membership.
- 3.8. Comments and questions from the floor included:
- Representing members affected by restructures is interesting and another opportunity to get involved.

#### 4. University Strategy Delivery Group

- 4.1. The closing date for applications to the Staff Release Scheme is 30<sup>th</sup> November. In some Departments staff are being actively encouraged to consider the scheme. We are aware of some communications that sound threatening. In contrast we are hearing from many members who have been told they would not be released. Committee are keen to know more of what is happening so that issues can be raised at the next meeting with management. Workload issues linked to staff being released is also a concern, and we are raising this.
- 4.2. The Strategy Delivery Group is also looking at “workstreams” the first of which is research support. This will potentially affect over 100 staff.
- 4.3. Comments and questions from the floor included:
- We are hearing conflicting messages which is unsettling for people.
  - What happens if the required savings are not made?  
Ans. The trade unions would be informed.
  - Management are saying there are no specific targets for savings.
  - People should not be pressurized to take up the staff release scheme and members should notify the Branch should this be the case.
  - There is a concern that the SRS could be used by management for intelligence gathering.
  - Rather than a “recruitment pause” there should be a building pause. Staff costs have already been reduced as a proportion of spending.

## 5. University finances – branch motion

Seth Mehl proposed the following motion on behalf of SUCU Committee, and it was seconded by Sam Marsh. The projected deficit of £30m after years of running large surpluses raises many questions.

Questions and comments from the floor:

- This is a sensible motion.

### **Motion on Capital Expenditure at the University of Sheffield 23.11.16**

The branch observes that the University of Sheffield has announced a projected worst-case deficit of approximately £30m in the coming year, despite running large operating surpluses in the range £10-40m in each of the previous 6 years.

This projected deficit is the stated justification for the ‘hiring pause’ and for the Staff Release Scheme. The explicit goal of both is to reduce staffing costs.

At the same time, the university plans to spend £80-90 million per year for the next three years on capital expenditure, including the campus master plan.

Over the last seven years, staff have experienced cuts in real terms pay and pension benefits, and staff costs as a proportion of overall expenditure have fallen, indicating a significant shift in spending priorities away from staff towards other objectives.

Sheffield UCU therefore moves that:

1. **The nature of the university’s projected deficit must be made fully transparent to staff so that they can be sure the figure is robust and not a scare-tactic.** University management must release clear details of the economic indicators and figures employed in the projections to show why there has been such a deterioration in finances. Our staff and union membership includes world-class economists, and Sheffield UCU believes that their expertise will offer valuable insight into the stated projections.
2. **The full extent of the projected £80-90 million pound annual capital expenditure must be publicized to staff, including its relationship to projected deficits.** Details of committed and non-committed costs of all new buildings, and the campus master plan, must be made public at every stage, and justified in relation to cutting staff costs. The procedures and penalties for renegotiating these capital expenditure contracts must also be made clear.
3. **The university must give strong justification why it has chosen first to cut staff costs rather than renegotiating capital expenditure contracts.** Evidence must be shared affirming that the Strategy Delivery Group has performed its duties

thoroughly by weighing all of the options for reducing university spending. This is likely to include:

- records of discussions for instituting a hiring freeze and SRS, and the reasons for deciding to cut staff costs first instead of renegotiating capital expenditure contracts;
- minutes from meetings in which the SDG discussed the possibility of renegotiating capital expenditure projects and the reasons for any decision not to renegotiate those contracts.

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

## 6. NSS – branch motion/ joint statement with Student Union

6.1. The Higher Education White Paper if unchanged will intensify the metric driven agenda. The National Union of Students has voted to disrupt the National Student Survey (NSS) as the results are deleterious to both students and lecturers. Craig Brandist will be meeting with the Student Union to formulate a joint position and statement to ensure the action is effective.

6.2. Craig Brandist introduced Josh Berlyn from the Student Union. The National Union of Students endorsed the NSS boycott in April. This is part of a broader strategy to defeat the Higher Education reforms. NSS is the central mechanism in the HE market and the main metric in the Teaching Excellence Framework. For maximum disruption there needs to be a 50% or more boycott of NSS, but any level of disruption that calls in to question the validity of the NSS strengthens the campaign.

6.3. Comments and questions from the floor included:

- A joint statement between SUCU and the Student Union will give us a stronger position.
- A local conference on the future of HE is taking place in the Student Union Auditorium on 28<sup>th</sup> November 6-8pm.

## 7. AOB

7.1. Sheffield Hallam Student Union have announced a demonstration opposing the Teaching Excellence Framework on Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> December at lunch time on the main campus.

7.2. There will be a demonstration at 5pm today outside the Town Hall opposing the Autumn Statement and further austerity.