

SUCU General Meeting Minutes, Thurs 7th March 2019, 1pm

Council Room, Firth Court

Chair: Sam Marsh, SUCU Branch President

Minutes: Jane Rodger, SUCU Branch Administrator

1. Welcome and introductions

Sam Marsh welcomed all to the meeting.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

Minutes of the General Meeting on 24th January 2019 were agreed as an accurate record.

3. Brief round-up of news including USS

3.1. NEC elections: This Branch endorsed two of the national UCU Vice President candidates. Vicky Blake was elected. We understand that two thirds of the NEC votes went to candidates on the left which may indicate the direction of the union. We extend our congratulation to local Committee member Jo Grady who was elected to the NEC.

3.2. USS pension: The Employer is moving closer to UCU's position. This would not have happened without our strike action. The position of USS is problematic though. We are expecting the second JEP report soon which will look at governance of USS and the process of valuation. Members are encouraged to send opinions to USS and participate in USS's webinar.

3.3. Local grievance regarding USS strike deductions: Our collective grievance following a local motion on the University's use of strike pay deductions was filed in December. Negotiations started in February. Our demands are; transparency in how the money was used, an apology from the office of the Vice Chancellor for their part in the dispute, and a one off pay award for staff. So far University management are creating a webpage setting out how strike pay deductions have been used.

3.4. Equality and Pay Ballot: we are disappointed that the ballot threshold was not met nationally, but we estimate this branch probably had a turnout of around 60%. We believe a re-ballot was correct, and that if nationally we had had the extra support requested we would have been close to 50%.

4. UCU Congress

4.1. Delegates: A nomination form was circulated to all members asking for expressions of interest in attending this year's UCU Congress in Harrogate 25-27th May. The Branch is entitled to send five delegates. Three delegates put their names forward: Sam Marsh, Mark Pendleton and Robyn Orfitelli. It was proposed that we agree the three volunteers as delegates and remit the decision on how to fill the remaining two positions to SUCU Committee. A vote was taken and this was passed nem con.

4.2. Motions: SUCU Committee are proposing three motions to go UCU Congress.

4.2.1. Proposed motion to Congress:

UCU must remain open to a legal challenge against USS

The handling by USS of their recent actuarial valuations has been subject to intense scrutiny. Concerns over USS's decision-making, governance and associated processes have been raised by many members and branches, and also by UCU's actuarial advisers and the Joint Expert Panel.

The Academics for Pensions Justice group, set up in the wake of the USS dispute, crowd-funded over £50,000 from nearly 2,000 individual donations to obtain specialist legal advice about potential mismanagement by the Board of Trustees of USS.

Conference believes that UCU must remain open to supporting a legal challenge over the actions of USS, and instructs those with relevant decision-making powers (including but not limited to the Superannuation Working Group, National Dispute Committee, Higher Education Committee, National Executive Committee and the General Secretary) to give serious consideration to taking further legal steps in defence of members' pensions.

Proposed by Jess Meacham on behalf of SUCU Committee

Secinded from the floor.

The discussion was opened, but no comments were made, so a vote was taken. The motion was passed nem con.

4.2.2. Proposed motion to HE Conference:

Financial and training support for organising

Congress notes:

1. Participation thresholds mandated by anti Trade Union laws impede industrial action, despite strong member support. Thus, there is an urgent need to improve organising support for branches.
2. Existing organising training (Advanced Reps) requires Rep 1, limiting its accessibility to members.
3. Branches differ significantly in membership densities and available backfilled facility time.

Congress resolves:

1. To rename Advanced Reps to "UCU Organisers": A 1-2 day course assuming no prior knowledge of UCU structures, covering recruitment, GTVO, building strike committees, and coordinating effective industrial action.
2. To provide funds to regional offices to act as organising hubs, which will:
 - a. Coordinate and deliver organiser training
 - b. Provide specialist support to branches developing GTVO plans
 - c. Coordinate and deliver telephone banking, and be able to requisition additional staffing to support this

3. To permit branches to request access to these funds to coordinate their own campaigning.

Proposed by Robyn Orfitelli on behalf of SUCU Committee

Seconded from the floor.

Discussion included:

- Would this proposed course have less in it?
Ans. No it would still cover the existing content.

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

4.2.3. Proposed rule change to Congress:

Addition of 15.9-15.11 to Rule 15

15.9 Between 7-14 days after a ballot for Officers of the Union has opened, a national hustings event will be held. This event will be video-recorded and made available to all members.

Reasonable traveling and subsistence expenses will be made available to candidates, paid from union funds.

15.9.1 The location of this event may not occur at the home branch of any participating candidate, and the location will rotate to a different region from the previous year, with due consideration to accessibility depending on candidates' locations.

15.9.2 All members eligible to vote in the relevant election will have the opportunity to submit questions in advance of this event, which will be ordered into a list by the Congress Business Committee.

15.10 The date for the event will be chosen in consultation with all candidates, and will be finalised no later than one month before the beginning of the ballot period.

15.10.1 If a candidate prefers to attend electronically rather than in person, or to pre-record a statement and answers to questions, this will be facilitated.

15.10.2 If a candidate cannot make the session due to illness or emergency, they will be given an opportunity to record their responses on another date, to be included in the recording for members.

15.10.3 Candidates may choose not to attend.

15.11 During the relevant ballot period, any other branch organising a hustings event will provide candidates with 30 days notice, making every effort to make the event accessible all candidates, including facilitating electronic attendance. Reasonable traveling and subsistence expenses will be made available to candidates, paid from branch funds, on the basis that all candidates standing for a given position are invited to attend.

Purpose: to facilitate all members being able to stand for Officer positions by increasing the accessibility of hustings.

Proposed by Robyn Orfitelli on behalf of SUCU Committee.

Seconded from the floor.

The current rules offer no guidance for how UCU hustings should be conducted, no consideration for members with disabilities or caring responsibilities or other protected characteristics. Also, not all costs are recoverable. The proposal is for a national hustings event where members can submit questions.

Discussion included:

- Why would a hustings event take place 7 to 14 days after the ballot opens?
Ans. This would give members time to submit questions, as candidate statements are only released on day 1.
- Accessibility issues for hustings have been massively overlooked.
- An amendment was proposed from the floor for the proposed rule 15.9.2 to remove, “, which will be ordered into a list by the Congress Business Committee”. Robyn accepted the amendment so the matter did not have to go to a vote.

A vote was taken on the following amended proposed rules:

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Purpose: to facilitate all members being able to stand for Officer positions by increasing the accessibility of hustings.

The motion was passed nem con.

5. UCU National Dispute Committee motion

Proposed motion:

National Dispute Committee suggested branch motion

This branch notes that:

- USS has calculated that the full implementation of the JEP proposals to the 2018 valuation would lead to a £0.6 billion technical provisions surplus and require a contribution rate of only 25.5%. This vindicates the UCU position of 'no detriment'
- nevertheless USS are continuing to insist that the JEP proposals be implemented only in part and that contributions be raised to a minimum of 29.7% for the coming valuation period
- the USS pension dispute has not been resolved.

This branch resolves:

- to call on USS to implement in full, in the 2018 valuation, the 6 JEP proposals for the 2017 valuation
- not to accept any increase in member contributions, including 'trigger contributions', for this valuation
- to call on our employer to endorse this position, and also to publish their response to the USS technical provisions document.

Proposed by Jo Grady.

Seconded from the floor.

This motion has been circulated by the UCU National Dispute Committee. The purpose of the motion is to give leverage to the negotiation team.

Discussion included:

- What is the purpose of the motion?
Ans. It is to gauge strength of feeling amongst members and will help negotiators.
- There was discussion about the meaning of the second resolves, and whether it should be removed.

A vote was taken on two possible amendments. The first vote was whether to keep the second resolves. This passed by a majority of hands with 1 against and 1 absention. The second vote was on whether to reserse the order of the first and second resolves, as this makes it clearer that this is the Branch members' resolve. This passed by a majority of hands with 3 abstentions.

A final vote was taken on the following amended motion:

National Dispute Committee suggested branch motion

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This branch resolves:

- not to accept any increase in member contributions, including 'trigger contributions', for this valuation
- to call on USS to implement in full, in the 2018 valuation, the 6 JEP proposals for the 2017 valuation
- to call on our employer to endorse this position, and also to publish their response to the USS technical provisions document.

The motion was passed by a majority of hands with 1 abstention.

6. Partnership with Palestine motion

Peter Jones our colleague from Sheffield Hallam University UCU was welcomed to the meeting. He is part of the staff Palestine Education Network. Their activities are an act of solidarity - to raise awareness of the issues for staff and students in Palestine, and try to change things. The issues include mobility and access as travel is very difficult, problems with work visas, arbitrary arrests of staff and students, and the closing of the University for months at a time. The group at Hallam organise events, guest speakers and film showings, and campaign for institutional links between Hallam and institutions in the west bank . We understand Sheffield City Council is also wanting to pair with Nablus. This is a good opportunity to work jointly with Hallam UCU on these issues.

Proposed motion:

Partnership with Palestine motion

UCU welcomes the links of friendship established between the cities of Sheffield and Nablus in Palestine and calls on Sheffield University to contribute to developing these ties by:

- Calling on the Global engagement office to make formal contact with An-Najah University (Nablus) expressing interest in pursuing mutually beneficial partnership through scholarly exchanges and other collaborative mechanisms
- Facilitating faculty to faculty relations between our two universities
- Supporting links between student councils
- Supporting student exchanges, e.g. supporting Sheffield University students who wish to volunteer to teach English in exchange for tuition in Arabic or An- Najah University students who wish to study in the UK or take part in internships.
- Supporting a forthcoming visit of young students from the city of Nablus to Sheffield this coming July.

Proposed by Sarah Staniland on behalf of SUCU Committee.

Seconded from the floor.

Discussion included:

- How do we publicise this if the motion is passed?
Ans. This corresponds with global engagement, so we can write to the University about this and publicise in Branch communications. We can also write the press.

- We need to establish a University of Sheffield grass roots group to ensure there is productive engagement with University management.

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

7. SUCU delegates to the Sheffield Trades Council

This Branch is able to send a number of delegates to the Sheffield Trades Council, which is a body that brings together trade unions from across the city to organise and campaign. Some Committee members already attend but Committee wants to open this opportunity up to our members. Members are encouraged to get in touch if they are interested.

8. AOB

Steffan Blayney proposed the following motion on behalf of SUCU Committee:

This branch notes:

- the significant detrimental impact of the Hostile Environment on staff and students across UK Higher and Further Education
- the rise in activism by and about migrant issues at UK universities and colleges, by groups like Unis Resist Border Controls and the International and Broke Campaign
- that UCU responds nationally and at individual branches to both the Hostile Environment and the rise in migrant member-led activism have been varied, and have revealed some deficits in how the union understands issues affecting migrant members and how it responds to member-led demands
- that the University of Leeds UCU branch is developing Congress motions to change UCU's structures to create systems of representation for migrant members

This branch resolves:

- to support these efforts by Leeds branch to make our union more responsive to migrant members' needs
- to support other Congress motions that oppose the Hostile Environment and promote better working conditions for migrant colleagues

The motion was seconded from the floor.

The motion commits SUCU delegates to UCU Congress to support a motion from Leeds.

Discussion included:

- Will the Leeds motion make as distinction between EU and non EU workers?
Ans. We understand it will.