

Sheffield UCU General Meeting Minutes 2nd March 2021, 13.00-14.00

Chair: Sarah Staniland, SUCU Branch President

Minutes: Jane Rodger, SUCU Branch Administrator

1. Welcome and introductions

Sarah introduced and welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Minutes of the last meeting 21 January 2021

The minutes were agreed as a true record.

3. Brief news

3.1. We have held local meetings for our Professional Services members and our new network of SUCU Safety Reps.

3.2. UCU Interim National Conference which was postponed twice took place over two dates in February. Sheffield UCU's motion ([#Metoo truth and reconciliation](#)) was carried along with other related motions. UCU's response to H&S matters was also discussed particularly the use of section 44 to protect workers from entering unsafe workplaces. A record of all motion outcomes is [here](#).

3.3. SUCU Committee proposed a donation of £250 to the [Gaza Home Restoration Fundraiser](#). It was noted that branch funds are healthy. A vote was taken and the donation was agreed by a majority, with 11% abstentions.

3.4. Return to F2F working. We would like to hear feedback from members on this. Our advice is to use the [UCU template letters](#) if you do not feel your working conditions are safe. Contact [ucu@](mailto:ucu@) if you need support with this.

3.5. There has been concern about the adoption of the IHRA definition of antisemitism. We plan to circulate an open letter about this.

3.6. Last week was UCU antiracism week. We are grateful to our Branch Antiracism working group for the comms blitz of blogs and tweets.

4. USS Update

The Joint National Negotiating Committee meets today and an announcement is expected tomorrow. The meeting will discuss the report from USS on the 2020 valuation and implications for the contribution rate. We are worried that this will be bad news. There will now be a 90 day consultation period. It is possible that both UCU and the Employers will reject the potential 40% contribution rate. A new UCU Trustee Director has also been appointed.

Questions and comments included:

- If the contribution rate is increased to 40% then this assumes that the investments will not grow.

Ans. Yes, and a large part of the 40% is for deficit recovery payments. We do not agree that there is a large deficit.

5. UCU Congress 29 & 31 May and 2 June 2021

5.1. Branch Motions. The Branch is able to send a total of three motions - one to the National Congress and two to the Higher Education National Conference. We need Branch approval of any motions sent.

5.1.1. The following motion was proposed on behalf of SUCU Committee. If passed this will be submitted to the Higher Education Conference.

Title: Exploring open negotiation (3 words)

Conference notes that the General Secretary's election manifesto included a suggestion that "we should consider adopting alternative approaches that might deliver more for our members: in particular, open negotiations", and that the UCU ran a workshop on open negotiation in February 2021.

Conference believes that there is merit in further consideration of open negotiations in various aspects of the union's operations, and supports its adoption in principle in any forum where there is a good case as to its desirability and feasibility.

Conference requests that the HEC commissions a paper on the merits of open negotiation for debate within branches, and asks that the Superannuation Working Group and pay negotiating team explore and report back to HEC at the earliest opportunity, and within six months, on the desirability and feasibility of implementing open negotiation at the USS Joint Negotiating Committee and New JNCHES fora.

(144 words)

The proposer gave background and the motion was seconded from the floor. There were no comments from members present. A vote was taken and the motion was carried by a majority with 12% abstentions.

5.1.2. The following motion was proposed on behalf of SUCU Committee which if passed will be submitted to Congress.

**Addition of 15.9-15.11 to Rule 15 - National hustings event**

Add new rules:

15.9 Between 7-14 days after a ballot for General Secretary or Officers of the Union has opened, a UK-wide hustings event will be held to ensure that all members and candidates have access to a fully accessible hustings event. This event will be video-recorded and edited before distribution 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 If it is not possible to hold the event physically for any reason, it will be held online.

15.9.3 All members eligible to vote in the relevant election will have the opportunity to submit questions in advance of this event.

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. Candidates who are disabled, impaired or have a long term health condition will be able to make this known and have their adjustment needs accommodated to avoid any disadvantage by reason of disability.

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 to 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.

The proposer gave background and the motion was seconded from the floor. There were no comments from members present. A vote was taken and the motion was carried by a majority with 19% abstentions.

5.2. Branch delegates. The deadline for this is 30th April, and a final decision will be made at our General Meeting on the 29th April. Members are encouraged to get in touch if they are interested in attending Congress this year.

## 6. University restructures

6.1. The campus unions are very concerned about the scale and pace of the University reviews and restructures. When the University wants to make changes and jobs could be significantly affected they should follow a set of change processes governed by a suite of change management policies. This starts by conducting a review which is usually followed by a proposal to restructure. A consultation process follows - the aim of which is to avoid compulsory redundancies. This leaves staff potentially at risk and the process creates a large amount of stress and uncertainty. Due to the number and scale of the current proposed restructures, a large number of staff are affected. It is difficult for the unions to cover all these restructures effectively as there is insufficient time.

6.2. We wrote to University management on the 12th February, and raised concerns at the employment security monthly meeting. We have not had a satisfactory response to either. A very well attended meeting of all members in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities was held this Monday. All unions will be writing to the Faculty VC in Arts and Humanities with a formal request that the process in the School of Languages and Cultures is stopped. We have previously used a branch motion to persuade the University to agree to pause restructures. Doing this during a pandemic with the impact on people's mental health is wrong.

Comments and questions included:

- The current behaviour towards restructures is not in the University's best interest. People are undermined, the University's reputation is damaged, and they are a waste of time.  
Ans. If there are so many reviews it is very hard for the unions to meaningfully engage with them. Many members are experts and have not been consulted in the original proposals.
- Proposals in SLC have been written by people without the relevant expertise and experience.  
Can we resist this?  
Ans. Yes, we will say that staff are 100% against these proposals. This is happening across the University sector and push back is occurring in many forms. Ultimately we can go into dispute.
- Previous damaging restructures resulted in many staff just leaving to get another job. This saves the University a lot of money as redundancy payments were not paid and a much greater workload was pushed onto far fewer staff.
- The huge fallout from these restructures is still felt. The University is "trying it on". We need to take a strong stance and then push back against the poor governance in Arts and Humanities, and other faculties.

7. Other national conferences - approval of delegates

- 7.1. Staff on Casual Contracts Annual Meeting Sat 13 March. Ben Purvis and [Steffan Blayney](#) were approved as delegates.
- 7.2. Academic Related and Professional Services Annual Meeting Thurs 18 March. Eleanor Madley and Amy Ryall were approved as both delegates to the meeting, and SUCU nominations to the national ARPS Committee.

8. Member motion

The following motion was proposed by a member of the Branch.

**Motion: Solidarity with Greek academics - No Uni Police**

The Greek government passed a new bill on higher education (11th Feb. 2021), despite the unanimous opposition of the Greek academic community and some Police Unions. It introduces a new police force for public universities, which reports to the Ministry of Citizen Protection rather than the University Authorities. Equipped with truncheons, pepper sprays and handcuffs, they will patrol on campuses, without the consent of university authorities. Their duties include systematic surveillance and on-campus preliminary interrogations. The Greek Police will recruit 1,000 **men** and Universities will have to cover the cost of this operation. The relevant recruitment call does not promote graduates from the relevant Special Forces Institutions of Vocational Training. In contrast, it favours candidates that have completed their military obligation (excluding thus female candidates). The call gives priority to former conscripts in the special forces (commando and parachute soldiers).

Government officials have continued spreading false information that The University of Oxford has a similar police force, despite a statement by [Oxford UCU](#) discrediting such a claim.

- Sheffield UCU stands in solidarity with Greek colleagues, students, parents, and citizens opposing the creation of such a special university police force.
- Sheffield UCU is concerned by the continuous spread of misinformation regarding the existence of such task forces in UK Universities and seconds UCU Oxford's statement that no such force exists.
- Sheffield UCU feels that such a task force, manned by men trained in military special forces and answering to the Ministry of Citizen Protection is not compatible with the spirit of academic freedom. In contrast, given the recent violent intrusion of police forces at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki resulting in the detention of 31 students (22 Feb. 2021), it threatens its very existence.

The proposer gave background to the motion which was seconded from the floor. A vote was taken and the motion was passed by a majority with 4% abstentions.

9. AOB  
None.