

SUCU General Meeting Minutes Thurs 30th April 2020, 1pm

Chair: Sam Marsh, SUCU Branch President

Minutes: Jane Rodger, SUCU Branch Administrator

1. Welcome and introductions
Sam Marsh welcomed everyone to the meeting.
2. Minutes of the last meeting
Minutes of the last General Meeting held on 27th February 2020 and the last Extraordinary General Meeting held on 30th March were both agreed by members present.
3. Sheffield UCU support for SU and Unicus staff - branch motion
Proposed motion on behalf of SUCU Committee

Branch notes

1. The decision by the Unicus board of directors to not pay 100% to furloughed staff, and the decision of the SU trustee to stop paying 100% to furloughed staff as of May.
2. That these decisions will impact nearly 1000 workers on campus, and will mean that many members of staff on casual contracts will be earning below the living wage.
3. Unicus' stated commitment to paying 'the equivalent of a living wage'

Branch believes

1. That staff at the SU and in Unicus are members of this university community. Although they are employed by legally distinct employers, there are significant overlaps in the management and financial planning which underscore this connection.
2. The University of Sheffield has a duty of care towards all members of this university community, including those employed by the SU and Unicus.

Branch resolves

1. To sign the open letter in support of SU and Unicus staff, as a branch, and to encourage individual members to also sign.
2. To support and take part in the ongoing campaign to secure 100% pay during the current crisis for all staff working on this campus.

The motion was proposed and seconded from the floor. The proposer gave background.

Discussion included:

- UNICUS was set up 10 years ago in order to facilitate employing staff on poorer terms and conditions. All staff side unions waged a vigorous campaign opposing this at the time.
- The University claims that USDAW (Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers) are happy with what is happening to UNICUS staff. However we do not believe that any staff at UNICUS have spoken to USDAW.
- We need member support to start a campaign to bring UNICUS back in house and support the organising efforts of Unite.

A vote was taken and the motion passed by a majority. There was one abstention.

4. USS and Shell AGM - open letter
Members were encouraged to sign and circulate an open letter about USS investments in Shell if they agree with the contents.

5. Preparation for SUCU AGM including a proposal to create a Environmental Branch Officer role
- 5.1. Members were encouraged to run for the Branch Officer and Ordinary Committee member positions ahead of the Annual General Meeting on 4th June. The nomination deadline is Thurs 7th May.
- 5.2. SUCU Committee proposes the creation of a new Environmental Branch Officer role. This is a role that has been discussed at General Meetings previously but we need to formally amend the Branch Rules to introduce it. If the rule change goes through, members can elect someone to the new position at the AGM. The rule change requires a two thirds majority vote in favour.

Proposed motion on behalf of SUCU Committee

Adding an Environmental Officer to SUCU Committee

In accordance with SUCU Branch Rules:

" 23. These rules of the Branch may be amended by resolution of any quorate general meeting of the Branch. [...] Amendments to these rules require the support of at least two-thirds of the members present and voting at the general meeting at which they are considered, an abstention not being regarded as a vote for this purpose."

Sheffield UCU proposed rule changes

STARTS

ADDITION OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL OFFICER The Environmental Officer raises awareness of environmental issues in the workplace, making sure they are included in the negotiating/bargaining agenda. The Environmental Officer supports approaches to making the workplace more environmentally friendly, lobbies the employer to address environmental issues and works towards a collective agreement on these issues.

Rule amendment to 8.1 (addition of this role), changing the current rule 8.16 to 8.17, new rule 8.16 to describe the new role.

ENDS

The motion was proposed and seconded from the floor.

Discussion included:

- This is a very important role. It will bring environmental issues to the union's core agenda, help develop national strategies on greening the workplace, and link with other campaigns and organisations.
- The University has a "green impact" initiative which looks like a token gesture. We should have more interaction with this initiative.

A vote was taken and the rule change motion was passed by greater than a two thirds majority.

6. Covid crisis - union response update

This is one opportunity for members to ask detailed questions, but it is likely that committee will hold another EGM on this issue soon. We have already met with our Dept Reps and Contacts and gathered their concerns.

6.1. Working from home:

- 6.1.1. University risk assessments have now been written and are considered working documents. Some Departments are less familiar with conducting risk assessments than others.

- 6.1.2. Specific office equipment requirements. Management are prioritising the needs of staff with disabilities and arrangements are being made for the provision of equipment at home. Members are advised to contact their line managers.
- 6.1.3. Financial support for working from home is subject to ongoing discussions.
- 6.2. Academic Career Pathways (ACP). This new process was due to be reviewed in any case, and is now impacted by the covid crisis. A way forward has not been formulated yet but the idea of delaying the process to allow people to prepare is being discussed.
- 6.3. The Furlough Scheme is for staff who cannot work from home or who are not currently needed. The University has agreed to top up the furlough pay of 80% to 100% of wages. Management are currently looking at the revised more specific Government guidance and a range of communications from HR are expected soon. The messages need to make clear that furlough should not be seen as a detriment. The issues are complex particularly with regard to some fixed term contracts. Members are advised to contact the University covid team, and SUCU with their questions and concerns.
- 6.4. Researchers and PGR issues. SUCU hosted an open meeting for PGRs last week where 150 people attended. We have circulated minutes that include FAQs. There have been some successes; in amending the GTA contract to allow PGRs on leave of absence to teach; and pay has been guaranteed until the end of term. This group feels left behind by university management.
- 6.5. Recruitment pause. Members need to be vigilant for the implementation of this. The Recruitment Approval Panel are assessing whether vacant posts are “critical roles” and this has implications for the redeployment process. Management have presented new proposals for the redeployment procedure which include allowing a longer period in which to apply for a role. Discussions are ongoing.
- 6.6. Discussion included:
 - Have probation issues been considered?
Ans. Probation raises some unique issues and we are addressing this.
 - What are the University finances like?
Ans. The information is all public and continues to show a relatively healthy financial situation, despite uncertainties about the next 2 years. We understand the university may still end this financial year with a surplus, and the University is applying different models to look at the following year, which will be shared with staff next week.
 - We are likely to call another Extraordinary General Meeting for members soon to discuss covid issues.

7. Report back from UCU Higher Education Committee

Skype for Business did not work well for this meeting.

- 7.1. Motions regarding the covid response were discussed. These build on the seven key priorities already developed in Jo Grady's letter to Gavin Williamson. The general consensus was to not return to how things were.
- 7.2. Disputes. The crisis has highlighted the key issues in the disputes.
- 7.3. UCU National Congress will not be held this year, so the national negotiators will continue in their roles and the Vice President election has been postponed. The union is trying to continue with democratic structures.

8. National disputes update

- 8.1. Pay. We are still waiting for a response from UCEA.
- 8.2. USS. Agreement on shared principles has been reached with the Employers and we are expecting a document soon. The 2020 valuation is ongoing and there has been some progress. There is a new chair on the board and new Trustee recruitment is expected soon.
- 8.3. Discussion included:

- Is there a different position on strike pay deductions locally due to the crisis? Will this still be ring fenced or disappear into a general pot?
Ans. No, this has not changed. Members are asked to get in touch should they hear anything about this.

9. AOB

9.1. We want to hold a special meeting about some Universities' attempts to break from the national pay bargaining framework during the crisis.