

Sheffield UCU Extraordinary General Meeting Minutes Tues 1st June 1-2pm

Via Zoom

Chair - Ed Yates, Branch Vice President

Minutes - Jane Rodger, Branch Administrator

1. Welcome and introductions
 - 1.1. Ed welcomed all members and explained that the purpose of the meeting is to discuss how we respond to the escalating pace of and egregious University restructures. This is the second Extraordinary General Meeting in less than a month regarding restructures. There is no sign of the restructures stopping and recently we have heard the announced plan to close the Department of Archaeology.
 - 1.2. Ed introduced colleagues from two of the areas impacted by proposed restructures.
2. University restructures
 - 2.1. Our guest speaker from the Department of Archaeology gave background and timeline information about what has happened so far. Over a number of years the Department has been eroded with no investment. When concerns were raised with University management about obstructions faced by the Department, what appeared to be a neutral review was announced. There was very little consultation with staff. Two external reviewers were appointed but there was no meaningful way to talk with them. After a long wait the review outcome options were announced which sparked massive national and international opposition. Despite this the University Executive Board (UEB) decided to close the Department. Staff have been told they cannot see the review report. The process used has been flawed and unfair. Senate meet on the 23rd June and a final decision is taken by Council.
 - 2.2. Our guest speaker from the School of Languages and Cultures (SLC) also gave background and detail about the proposed changes to language teaching. Changes were recommended by people who lack the appropriate expertise and experience. The proposals are not fair to students or staff and will result in reputational damage. Language will be presented as cheaper and easier. We fear that management are just looking to make redundancies, and therefore finding ways to do this. The first two phases involve staff in SLC and the Modern Language Teaching Centre (MLTC), and the third will include staff in the School of East Asian Studies.
 - 2.3. An update was provided about the joint union grievance against changes in SLC. There has been no agreement reached in the dispute resolution process with the University, which involved two meetings with management. The unions are now at the point of registering a "failure to agree". This will impact our relationship with University management - who are well aware of the strength of feeling amongst staff and students.
 - 2.4. Whilst SLC and Archaeology are currently prominent in our SUCU communications, there is a long list of restructures in other teams across the University. This includes

AMRC, Bio Sciences, Arts and Humanities and Social Science teams. This needs a strong response.

3. The role of Senate

- 3.1. Senate has a role in democratic governance, and it's role is relevant to our considering next steps. We have severe concerns about transparency and democratic governance at all levels in the University. The recent decision at UEB to close Archaeology further amplifies our concerns. The UEB decision will now go to the next Senate meeting scheduled for the 23rd June. The more we hear about how Senate operates in practice further adds to our concerns about transparency and democratic governance. We need to take an active and critical look at these procedures.
- 3.2. A link to the [Senate Standing Orders](#) was put in the chat for all to read. Sections 4.2 and 4.3 describe how Senators can call for a vote in advance, but it also sets out how the Chair of Senate can move a discussion on and not allow a vote. We do not want this to happen, so we call on all Senators to contact the Chair in advance to request a vote and proper discussion. We need to hold UEB to account if a vote does not happen.
- 3.3. It is possible that any one of us could be at risk of redundancy next. We need to talk about this, and we all need to shout about this, so that there are no solo voices. This protects everyone and is the best solidarity you can show yourself.
- 3.4. Comments and questions included
 - 3.4.1. What has happened is despicable. Changes have been made to the role of Senate over the years. It used to have much more than an advisory function. For example, at a meeting in 2009 Senate pressured the Vice Chancellor to climb down over the closure of Biblical Studies.
 - 3.4.2. We now have a one off opportunity to get University management to change course.
 - 3.4.3. What is the timeframe for the Archaeology restructure?
Ans. Council meets in mid July and a 90 day consultation period will follow. This ends in mid October, assuming we cannot make changes.
 - 3.4.4. It is clear that the University has been acting in bad faith.
 - 3.4.5. Branch Officers are in touch with the Student Union.
 - 3.4.6. The campus unions have learnt from previous experiences in the restructure of the Institute of Lifelong Learning (now the Department for Lifelong Learning).
 - 3.4.7. Under the current plans most of the staff in Archaeology will be made redundant including professional services and technical colleagues.

4. What should the Branch do next?

- 4.1. Options were discussed. Comments included:
 - 4.1.1. Staff are seen just as impediments to what management wants to do. I think UEB should resign, and we take a vote for industrial action. We should do all we can, as I am sick of this treatment of my colleagues.
 - 4.1.2. We should keep all options open. There has been a scale of contempt for University management since the s188 debacle last year. There is a wider problem in lack of clarity in comms to students and staff. The threat of reputational damage is key, as it hits them where it hurts - in admissions and funding etc.
 - 4.1.3. Management have a changed response when students get involved.
 - 4.1.4. There are four current Freedom of Information (FOI) requests submitted with regard to Archaeology but the time requirements for a response from the University are too long to be in time for Senate.
 - 4.1.5. We need to consider industrial action timelines. A local dispute has not been called for a very long time but this is the time to act. Should we do so this would happen early in the next Semester.

- 4.1.6. SUCU Committee are taking this very seriously. We are calling on you to get more actively involved.
- 4.1.7. We do not have access to the Archaeology review report. Staff's request was refused. The only way we can succeed is to publicly dissect the report. Archaeology staff have seen some presentation slides and they contained incorrect information. We assume this information also went to UEB. We need to challenge the process.
Ans. The trade unions have the right to see relevant information, so we will submit a request for the report.
- 4.1.8. The branch position on financial transparency and the Office for Students is that University finances are very healthy, and closing of Departments is not justified.
- 4.1.9. A rally is for Archaeology and SLC is being planned for 21st June

5. Any other business
None.