

SUCU Extraordinary General Meeting, 7 September 2016

Council Chamber, Octagon Centre

Chair: Jane Simm, SUCU Vice President

Minutes: Jane Rodger, Branch Administrator

1. Welcome and introductions

Jane Simm welcomed all members to the meeting. The campus unions were made aware, following the European Union referendum result that University management had already been looking at staffing costs. After the EU referendum University management announced the introduction of the “Strategy Delivery Group” (SDG) which will focus in the first instance on staff costs, particularly with regard to Professional Services staff. The SDG has a two year remit.

2. Motions

- 2.1. Sarah Staniland, SUCU Branch Secretary explained that a number of motions are to be proposed which were developed from discussions at a special SUCU Action Group which met in August, at SUCU Committee and member feedback. Other suggestions from the Action Group included a joint statement between the unions and the Vice Chancellor, setting up a mirror group to the SDG to monitor its activity, and for the unions to monitor the use of Fixed Term Contracts and conversions since the start of the recruitment freeze.
- 2.2. Sam Marsh, SUCU Branch Communications Officer proposed a motion regarding the national impact of the EU referendum result which was seconded by Sarah Staniland.
- 2.3. Comments from the floor included:
 - An amendment was proposed to make clear that the motion calls for current EU nationals working in the UK to be given indefinite leave to remain. This was accepted by the proposer.
 - An amendment to specify which immigration rules would be in the interests of staff and students was accepted by the proposer.
 - There was a discussion regarding the wording of “anti-expert sentiment”. There was a danger of the motion sounding elitist and it was felt that the union should promote an appropriate level of scepticism with regard to experts. The Branch had previously passed a motion against attacks on Academic Freedom. An amendment was accepted by the proposer.

2.4. The following amended motion was then put to the meeting:

Motion from University of Sheffield UCU on the national impact of the EU referendum result

a) Protection for EU nationals

This branch believes that the Higher Education sector benefits from its diverse workforce and student population, a significant proportion of which originate from abroad, particularly the EU. It notes that the uncertainty following the EU referendum places Higher Education staff who are EU nationals but who do not currently have Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK in a specifically vulnerable position. This branch calls on UCU and HEFCE to lobby vigorously and immediately for the government to clarify the situation and to confirm that EU nationals currently working in the UK will be given indefinite right to remain.

b) Protection of rights

This branch notes that leaving the EU means that rules on immigration and workers' rights can and will be rewritten. It calls upon UCU's National Executive Committee to forcefully campaign

- for immigration rules which work to encourage international recruitment of staff and students, including the return of the post-study work visa and the removal of students from immigration figures;
- for the protection of employment and trade union rights, particularly opposing the attacks present in the Trade Union bill.

c) Societal benefit

This branch believes that Higher Education is a key export industry for the UK economy, and calls on UCU's National Executive Committee to promote the positive role that universities play in society, highlighting the benefits that come with an educated population. It calls on the union to play a role in helping to encourage debate and counteract attempts to attack academic freedom, and to campaign for better information in the public domain.

d) Funding and cross-border collaboration

This branch believes that EU-funding has played a large part in the success of the UK's Higher Education sector, and calls for UCU's National Executive Committee to

- highlight the funding issues associated with leaving the EU;
- campaign for lost funding to be matched by the UK government;
- campaign to ensure that the ability to collaborate easily across borders is maintained or improved.

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

2.5. Sam Marsh proposed a motion concerning the Higher Education Bill which was seconded by Sarah Staniland. He explained that SUCU Branch Officers have met with Student Union Officers to discuss shared concerns, one of which was the proposed changes put forward in the Higher Education Bill.

2.6. There were no further comments made from the floor and the following motion was put to the meeting:

Motion from University of Sheffield UCU on the Higher Education Bill

This branch believes that, with the uncertainty caused by the result of the EU-referendum, this is not the time for rushing through a major change to the Higher Education sector, and calls on the government to delay its Higher Education bill to allow time to properly debate its contents.

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

2.7. Sam Marsh proposed the following motion regarding the impact of the EU referendum result on the University which was seconded by Sarah Staniland:

Motion from University of Sheffield UCU on the Impact of the EU referendum result on the university

a) Transparency

Directly following the EU referendum, the University of Sheffield announced a 4-month recruitment freeze and the launch of a Strategy Delivery Group (SDG), whose explicit remit has not been circulated to staff. In discussions between university management and the campus unions it has been made clear that this action is based on financial forecasts made prior to the EU vote, and that similar arrangements would have taken place whichever way the vote went.

This branch believes that the university should have been explicit that the recruitment freeze and launch of the SDG is not a response to the EU vote, and calls for the the remit of the SDG to be made clearer to staff.

b) Focus on staff costs

This branch expresses dismay that university has chosen to focus on staffing costs as a way to cap its expenditure, while at the same time spending large sums in other areas, notably development of the estate. It notes that the university has spent around £0.5bn on capital expenditure in the past five years, and is forecast to spend £80-90m per annum on capital expenditure over the next four years. Meanwhile, staff costs as a proportion of income, and salaries in real terms, have fallen since 2008.

This branch calls on the university to immediately cease and rethink the recruitment freeze and, if not, justify why a financial solution should target staff budgets rather than any other, clarifying whether spending plans for capital expenditure (in particular, the campus masterplan) have been adjusted.

c) Workloads and stress

With high workloads and stress identified priority issues for our members, this branch expresses significant concern over the effects the recruitment freeze is having on staff. In particular, it is leading to the failure (or delay) to replace jobs in a potentially random and unstrategic manner, which is having a detrimental effect on already over-stretched staff who are being asked to compensate for this under-resourcing.

This branch calls upon the university and its Strategy Delivery Group to

- consider high workloads of existing staff members as a valid reason to recruit, and offer a mechanism to alleviate excess stress and workload if posts are refused;
- include in the Business Case for Recruitment form a section entitled 'Effect on staff workloads if the post is unfilled';
- undertake proper staff stress risk and equality impact assessments, and consider other due process in advance of any decision affecting staffing levels, including the refusal of permission to recruit;
- consider whether the increased bureaucracy involved in the recruitment freeze is counter-productive to an efficiency drive.

d) Job security

This branch expresses significant concern over the effects the recruitment freeze will have on the job security of staff. In particular, it

- severely restricts redeployment opportunities for those coming to the end of fixed-term contracts or at risk of redundancy in a review or restructure;
- may affect the ability of casual and fixed-term staff to secure a proper contract.

This branch is clear that the recruitment freeze must not be used as an excuse to keep staff on casual contracts or to stop fixed-term posts from becoming open-ended, and calls upon the university and its Strategy Delivery Group offer assurances that agreements on regularisation are unaffected.

2.8. Comments and questions from the floor included:

- The effect of the recruitment freeze is arbitrary. An example of one team in a Professional Services Department was given where it will be left half staffed and colleagues are expected to cover empty posts.
- People need to monitor what is happening in their Departments and be mindful of Professional Services staff colleagues.
- The recruitment freeze process adds to the workload and stress.

- Why can't the amount of capital spending planned for the future be cut rather than staff costs?
- The proportion of income spent on staffing costs has already been reducing.
- It is important that we continue to work to contract.

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

2.9. A motion regarding union representation on the Strategy Delivery Group was proposed by Sarah Staniland and seconded by Sam Marsh. The following motion was put to the meeting:

Motion from University of Sheffield UCU on Union representation on the Strategy Delivery Group

With the Strategy Delivery Group primarily focusing on staffing matters, this branch demands that the university includes union representation on the committee to ensure that decisions are being made with staff interests in mind.

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

2.10. Sarah Staniland introduced a discussion about the direction of the pay campaign which was also discussed at the SUCU Action Group in August.

2.11. Comments and questions from the floor included:

- There was a proposal to remit the motion proposed and to use the discussion to inform the Pay Briefing on 26 Sept. This was agreed.
- UCEA want to impose the pay award and have released distorted figures that inflate the offer. The revised offer also makes vague comments about looking at the gender pay gap and casualization.
- We should fight for a deal that spans a number of years.
- There should be a campaign against attempts to use the Brexit vote to justify below inflation pay increases.
- Members are committed to fighting the gender pay gap and casualization.
- The money is there but it's unequally distributed.
- We should demand a coherent argument regarding the affordability of the pay claim and a strong plan to resolve casualization and the gender pay gap.
- Further consultations with members regarding the pay campaign are planned.

3. AOB
None.