

Sheffield UCU General Meeting Minutes, Tues 9th Nov 2021, 13.00-14.00

Chair: Mark Pendleton, SUCU Branch Secretary

Minutes: Jane Rodger, SUCU Branch Administrator

1. Welcome and introductions

- 1.1. Mark welcomed everyone to the meeting.
- 1.2. We will hear speakers on the national disputes, and then consider a Branch motion which will be this Branch's feedback to national UCU on the outcome of the two national ballots and what should happen next.
- 1.3. Our local ballot is still live for another week, so if you have not voted yet please do so. Also please talk to colleagues about the issues in the local ballot and encourage colleagues (if they have not already done so) to return their ballot papers. We are hoping for a very strong mandate from members so we can go into negotiations.

2. National ballots outcome discussion - branch motion

- 2.1. Our two Branch ballot results have shown strong majorities in favour of strike action and action short of a strike (ASOS) in both national disputes. In our UCU region (Yorkshire and Humber) the majority of branches exceeded the required 50% turnout threshold.
- 2.2. Sam Marsh (branch Senior Vice President and national negotiator) spoke about the USS Pension dispute. The demands in the dispute are: the Employers revoke the cuts, and demand (with UCU) an updated valuation for 2021. Both these would resolve much of the problems with USS. If Universities UK accept this, the benefit structure would be retained, and there would be a contribution increase next April. This may be acceptable as a short term position. A further increase in contributions is planned by the Employer for October 2022, and we would have until then to get an alternative valuation. Legal action around how USS breached their own rules has also now been initiated by UCU, and as yet there has not been a response from USS. We also understand that two individuals are also taking legal action against the directors of the USS Scheme. Consultation of USS members is also being carried out at the moment. They had provided a USS modeller so that members could see how their pensions would be impacted by the changes. We understand that this has been taken down from the website due to errors in the modeller. Interestingly, the modeller backed up what UCU has been saying about the impact of the changes.
- 2.3. Robyn Orfitelli (branch Communications Officer and national negotiator) summarised the Four Fights dispute demands as; we want the Employers to increase the expenditure they devote to staff. Everything in the claim comes down to this regarding; equalities, workload, casualisation and pay. We want a reversal of the last two decades (with the exception of one notable year) of real terms pay decreases which have ramped up in the last year, and an offer that starts to

make up for what has been lost. We also want to see the introduction of mandatable standards for working conditions. These would probably be baseline sector standards with regard to for example zero hours contracts, elimination of fixed term contracts for teaching, researchers and for professional services staff, actual workload modelling measured in hours, and an action plan to address inequalities (for example promotions, caring).

- 2.4. Mark flagged that some members have asked about Branch finances and whether we can run a hardship fund again. Our Treasurer has confirmed that we spent £10,000 in support of members during the last action on top of the national strike pay that was provided. We are in a reasonable financial position to again support local members who are experiencing particular hardship assuming the national office provides strike pay support as well. Of course, should the outcome of our local ballot be to take action we would expect to receive financial support from other branches and community organisations.
- 2.5. Mark proposed the following motion on behalf of the Dispute Committee and SUCU Committee and this was seconded from the floor.

Industrial Action in the USS and Four Fights disputes

Branch notes:

1. The solid mandate achieved in the ballots which have voted for action.
2. The need to build towards sustained strike action in order to win the disputes.

Branch resolves

1. To call on UCU to:
 - a. Retain the alignment between the *USS* dispute and *Four Fights* dispute
 - b. Immediately commence significant ASOS that will bridge the Christmas break, regularly escalating until sustained strike action begins, and ensuring that members receive timely, clear ASOS guidance.
 - c. Conduct a disaggregated rebalot - commencing in December - of branches that achieved between 40-49% turnout in either dispute in order to bring these branches into ongoing ASOS and strike action.
 - d. Pursue one strike date common to both disputes in the first week of December which acts as a highly public launchpad for both the rebalot and ASOS. It must be clear that this is the beginning, not the sum, of action.
- 2.6. Discussion included:
- What does resolves (a) mean?
Ans. This refers to timescales for balloting and action.
 - Timescale really matters for the USS dispute and that we have sustained action before February.
 - The Four Fights dispute is very important particularly after the last year. Keeping the disputes aligned and the ballots disaggregated increases our chances of winning on both disputes.
 - We have a six month industrial action mandate and this should start with ASOS.
 - What does rebalotting accomplish?

Ans. We are in a similar position to where we were in 2019. A rebalot of branches who did not reach the 50% threshold would encourage them to join our action in the new year.

- We should look to the success of Liverpool. A marking boycott was a key measure.

Ans. Marking boycotts are part of ASOS in the disputes.

- What are the risks of an aggregated ballot? A number of views were exchanged about the political risks.

Ans. Our disaggregated mandate is still live no matter what.

- Is there guidance for Professional Services staff on taking part in ASOS?

Ans. The national Academic Related Professional Services Committee have produced this [guidance](#).

- There was a discussion about the pros and cons of starting concerted strike action this term.
- A marking boycott would be effective, and easier to organise.
- Do we have a sense of what the Higher Education Committee will decide on Friday afternoon?

Ans. We have to wait for the Branch Delegates Meeting on Friday morning where feedback from all Branches will be heard. A full range of options will be considered and voted on.

2.7. A vote was taken on each resolves in the motion and outcome was as follows:

- Resolves (a) - for 57%, against 26%, abstain 17%
- Resolves (b) - for 88%, against 6%, abstain 6%
- Resolves (c) - for 75%, against 9%, abstain 16%
- Resolves (d) for 61%, against 27%, abstain 12%

2.8. Each resolves was carried, and a final vote on the entire motion was taken. The outcome was - for 85%, against 4%, abstain 11%. The motion was carried.

3. Approval of delegates to the Branch Delegate Meeting 12th Nov

3.1. Branch delegates Ed Yates and Jess Meacham were approved by a majority vote.

4. Update on local campaign

4.1. Our local dispute and campaign is of course a continuing issue specifically around the Faculty of Arts and Humanities and more broadly how the University is being run. The dispute committee is running weekly. Please get in touch if you are interested in getting involved. It alternates between Tuesday afternoons and Wednesday lunchtimes.

5. AOB

5.1. Goldsmiths UCU are also facing threats to their Arts and Humanities. 28 jobs are at direct threat of being made redundant. Members at Goldsmiths have voted to take three weeks of sustained industrial action. Mark Pendleton proposed that we send our solidarity to Goldsmiths branch and match our previous donations to Liverpool and Leicester made last year i.e. £500. The proposal was seconded from the floor. A vote was taken and the proposal was approved by 93% in favour, 2% against and 5 abstentions.