

SUCU Extraordinary General Meeting, 28th Feb 2013, 1pm

Chair: Mick Ashman

91 members in attendance

1. Welcome and introduction

Mick Ashman welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss and respond to the University's proposal to partially de-recognition UCU, and to amend Statutes. A member asked from the floor how the situation of de-recognition had arisen. Mick Ashman introduced Mark Oley the UCU Regional Official who gave a brief explanation. He explained that UCU (previously as AUT) had been recognised by the University for 40 years. The current Recognition Agreement (that includes the professoriate and academic related staff) dates from 1984. HR has proposed that a single new recognition document is used to cover all the campus trade unions. Part of this proposal is to de-recognise UCU for academic related staff.

2. Motion proposed by Committee

Mick Ashman introduced Craig Brandist (Vice Precedent) who proposed and spoke to the following motion that deals with both issues - Statute amendments and de-recognition. Julian Crockford (Committee member) seconded the motion. Craig explained that at a meeting this morning HR withdrew the initial proposal to de-recognise UCU.

This Branch notes that:

Documents received from the University of Sheffield (UofS) propose:

- questioning the scope of and the close link between academic and academic related staff groups by submitting a proposal to de-recognise UCU as the trade union with collective bargaining recognition for the professoriate and for Admin, Library and Computing staff. The proposal has since been withdrawn, but there is no resolution at this point.
- levelling down provisions in the UCU/UofS Procedure Agreement (the document that defines processes for collective negotiation and dispute resolution).
- removing Statute protection for academic staff, eg disciplinary & redundancy protection, apart from the academic freedom clause.
- undermining the UCU/UofS Procedure Agreement by seeking to have separate consultations with staff while negotiations over the current Statute 6 are in progress, in breach of good industrial relations practice.

This Branch believes:

- that senior staff should be seen as part of the academic team, not set apart from (or pitted against) 'the academics' as in the post-92 sector
- that central to UCU's trade union and professional work is the ability to recruit and negotiate for members within the established sphere of influence (that is Academic, Admin, Library and Computing staff)
- that the continued protection currently available to those covered by UofS Statute, within for example the disciplinary and redundancy processes, are a vital buttress for the academic freedom provisions.

This Branch resolves:

To instruct Branch Officers to enter negotiations with the employers and:

- to retain bargaining rights for all Academic, Admin, Library and Computing staff.
- to retain the clear link between academic and other staff in the academic team, as defined above
- to ensure provisions in the Procedure Agreement are not worsened
- to expand the protection currently afforded to 'academic staff who teach and research' under Statute to all staff who teach or research (whether that be University Teachers, Research staff or academic related staff who teach)
- to work with national and regional officials of UCU to best represent and support these negotiations
- to provide the scope for the negotiators to enter into formal dispute with the University if necessary
- to report back to the branch membership on a regular basis
- to undertake a campaign to bring to the attention of all UCU members and those eligible for membership of UCU the importance of the above
- to have a campaign of recruitment of non-members within UCU's remit, given the potential threat to UCUs bargaining position within the University
- to use whatever means of publicity the officers believe is reasonable in the campaign.

Comments from the floor included:

- This may be a conspiracy to: prize apart two areas of power in the Academic Team, undermine collective representation of the professoriate, reduce protection for academics, and therefore increase the scope for the University to use the REF as a management tool.
- This is part of a deliberate plan to increase the pressure to move towards a managerial culture within the University.
- It was noted that the University had continually refused to withdraw the de-recognition proposal, but it changed its stance the morning of the EGM.
- It was noted that the professoriate is well represented in SUCU.

A message of support sent from the National UCU Academic Related Committee was read out and circulated to members. Sheffield is the only pre-92 institution where de-recognition is being attempted.

Mark Oley explained that Statutes can only be changed by the Privy Council and the attempts by the University to level down marks a move towards minimum standards in employment practice.

A vote was taken. The tellers were Steve Ludlam, Julian Crockford and Vanessa Maughan.

For: 90

Against: 0

Abstention: 1

The motion was carried.

Mark Oley noted the very high turnout for the meeting, and emphasised the importance of organising SUCU membership and recruiting new members to build the strength of the Branch. There are some Departments that do not have a Departmental Contact and Mark urged members to elect a representative from amongst themselves, if they did not already have one. The recent surge in post graduate membership was noted and members were asked to not only talk to colleagues about UCU membership, but also post graduate students – who are the future of the union.

A vote of thanks was given from the floor to all the SUCU Branch Officers.

At the end of the meeting a collection was taken for the Halesowen UCU members who have recently been unjustly dismissed.