

Richmond UCU Branch Meeting
13th September 2023
12:00 Online
MINUTES

Attendees: Chair - Sue Pell, Secretary - Sam Bracey [minutes], Treasurer -Emmanuel Okyere, Membership Officer – Shuna Neilsen, Health and Safety Officer Martin Brown, Equalities Officer – Lucia Morawska, Adjunct Officer -Piola Massarotto,

Members: [Redacted]

Meeting began at 12:03

Welcome from Chair

The meeting commenced with the Chair welcoming all attendees and providing a brief overview of UCU activities over the summer.

1. Approval of Minutes - 05 May 2023 AGM Branch Meeting

The minutes from the 05 May 2023 AGM Branch meeting were presented and approved by the attendees.

Matters Arising

The Chair provided an update on the training day, which had successfully taken place with a total expenditure of £222. It was noted that this marked the first expenditure for the Branch, with plans for additional spending on a banner. All expenditures had been agreed upon.

A member inquired about the success of the training day. The Chair responded that the UCU Regional representatives had attended to highlight casework and was very useful. It was the first time the Committee members had met in person in three years. The day enabled productive discussions on Branch strategy and key operational issues, and there was a consensus that more training and social activities should be planned for the future.

2. 2023-24 Pay Claim

The Chair reported on the ongoing pay negotiations, noting that the pay offer remained at 2%. It was proposed at the AGM that a consultative ballot be conducted, this was approved and the consultative ballot was carried out in July.

a. Results of Consultative Ballot

The results of the consultative ballot were discussed, revealing overwhelming support for strike action and action short of a strike. It was noted that turn out was high despite the ballot being administered during the summer when most members were on annual leave.

b. Strategy

The next steps were discussed. It was noted that though the results of the consultative ballot indicated that a ballot for industrial action would be successful, the results of the consultative ballot do not automatically trigger such a ballot. Concerns were raised about

the ongoing poor financial situation of the university, with trust in the senior management coming under question, especially in light of higher appointments while the majority of staff and faculty remains underpaid with increasing workloads.

A member suggested using the "ASOS" (action short of a strike) approach and engaging student support. It was proposed that the workload points system could be boycotted. However, concerns were raised about potential hindrances to promotion and progression if self-assessment of workloads were boycotted.

A member shared their experience from another institution, where strike action had positive teamwork outcomes but was undermined by some who continued working. ASOS was considered unsuccessful, with a 50% pay withholding due to a marking boycott, and reliance on a hardship fund.

The overall concern was whether members could afford industrial action, especially given their low pay.

The Chair expressed frustration with the current pay negotiations, which didn't feel like negotiations, as the pay offer of 2% was not a meaningful increase, particularly after the 1.84% was implemented last year but with promises of a review of the rewards (it was noted this is ongoing and UCU are being consulted). Moreover, the lack of adequate response from UET regarding pay priorities is increasingly difficult for members.

Questions were raised by members about the allocation of funds for consultants and senior managers' high pay, despite claims of financial issues.

The possibility of a letter of no confidence in the UET be sent to Trustees was discussed, as a way to improve lack of Trustee engagement with the faculty and members and to force the UET to be more accountable.

The Chair shared a draft of the letter to UET concerning the consultative ballot, which emphasized the desire for better pay rather than industrial action. Member feedback was solicited, with one member suggesting adding the dire financial situation of members.

An action plan was proposed for Halloween week to highlight members working for free effectively in November and December due to ongoing pay devaluation. This action would publicise poor pay at Richmond and attempt to engage students in the discussion about pay.

MOTION 1: It was proposed to send a branch letter to the University Executive Team regarding the consultative ballot. The motion was seconded and passed.

MOTION 2: The motion to send the letter regarding the consultative ballot to Trustees and publicize it more widely was seconded and passed.

ACTION: An action plan was established to organize activities for pay-related issues during the Halloween week commencing 30th October. Volunteers were needed to manage stands, distribute information, and engage with students.

3. Workload and Occupational Stress

- a. **Workload as a H&S issue:**
- b. **Stress survey:**

The two items were combined in the discussions

The meeting revisited the campaign initiated in 2021, which involved conducting a survey on stress among members. Responses from adjunct faculty had been particularly extreme and had prompted efforts to combat casualization in a campaign which is ongoing and remains a priority for the Branch. Since the 2021 survey, COVID restrictions have ended, leading to changes in working conditions. In addition, there have been relocations both in London and Leeds. Further, a new workload model has been implemented and members have raised issues with increases in workload. All have prompted the Branch to repeat the survey as workload is a health and safety issue resulting in occupational stress and impacting the health and wellbeing of members.

c. **Feedback from members on workload, appraisals, progression, and promotion:**

Discussion revolved around member feedback on workload, appraisals, progression, and promotion. There was a consensus that the model is flawed and is not protecting faculty from overwork, rather, members complained it was setting excessive workloads as the default.

d. **Work space:**

The Chair informed the meeting that a university workspace committee had been established and UCU are represented by the Health and Safety Officer. This is important to ensure members are informed and their interests (e.g., operational use of space and pedagogy) are factored into decisions about use of space moving forward

e. **Teaching Prize and student evaluation:**

Discussion of the proposed teaching prize, raised concerns over issues with student teaching evaluations and their use in promotion and progression. Concerns were expressed that evaluations are discriminatory against protected groups (women, BAME). Issues with Head of Department (HoD) recommendations were also raised, suggesting that they are not valid unless teaching is observed. Members did note the prize could be useful in gaining recognition for members' career development both within and outside of the university. It was suggested that the teaching prize is less important than the issue around student evaluations and the issues should be treated separately.

A motion was raised to establish a Branch position on teaching evaluations:

MOTION: UCU refute the use of student evaluations in probation, progression and promotion and seek clarification from UET on how student evaluations are being used in probation, progression, promotion, and other areas pertaining to members' career development. The motion was seconded and passed.

ACTION: Members were encouraged to email regarding the teaching prize, and the use of student evaluations, unobserved teaching recommendations, and the need for clearly defined criteria.

6. Green Agenda:

a. Chiswick Park sustainable energy:

A letter to UET regarding sustainable energy and Chiswick Park was discussed. Green Officer had discovered that Chiswick Park had moved from a sustainable energy source which counters the green agenda of the university, Chiswick Park and UCU. The letter asks for action from UET and accountability from Chiswick Park plus a commitment to restore sustainable energy.

b. Recycling:

Discussion on recycling was deferred to a later meeting.

7. Discussion on Contracts:

a. Feedback on updated faculty contracts:

b. Guaranteed Course Contract for Adjunct Faculty:

In September 2021, a letter was written to UET, and in March, action on campus was taken to publicize the casualization of adjunct contracts. Guaranteed courses were offered to 25% of adjuncts (15 people), which was seen as a success for the union.

Adjunct Officer focused on role profiles to ensure adjunct faculty work remains within the contract terms. It was noted that class caps have increased for 3000/4000 courses, impacting the 113 hours per course. Members suggested exploring payment based on the number of students or hours for grading.

The Chair acknowledged the importance of addressing these issues for members and their workload.

ACTION: An inquiry was to be made about class sizes in departments and levels throughout the university to determine if adjunct faculty were disproportionately affected.

Concerns were raised about the new tutor roles advertised, and the Chair explained that UCU was being consulted on this issue and had expressed concerns about these roles including the precarity of the contracts plus poor pay, that they undermined the professionalism of faculty, and would increase workloads for course leaders. Objections to the introduction of more precarious contracts and the irony of them being introduced as guaranteed course contracts were rolled out was also noted.

8. Building the Union:

This item was removed from the agenda, and at this point the Chair acknowledged the resignation of Anita as Staff Officer, thanking her for her contributions and reflecting on the difficulty of non-faculty as they are not part of the collective bargaining agreement currently. However, it was noted, should professional services staff wish to we fully support growing the union and extending the agreement.

7. AOB (Any Other Business):

It was noted there are CPD opportunities via UCU membership which would be shared with members via email.

The Chair closed the meeting at 13:35.