

# **GENERAL SECRETARY HUNDRED DAY PLANS**



## **GIVING THE MEMBERS A VOICE**

*Dear members,*

**Following my re-election as general secretary I have been working with colleagues to produce a set of discussion documents based on the policy areas I campaigned on and the many conversations I had with you directly during the campaign. I hope that many of you will recognise that the ideas and concerns that you have raised have been incorporated into this body of work.**

**All of these documents are for discussion only at this point, and the aim of them is to create the widest possible debate on the future direction of various aspects of our union.**

In the coming weeks and months, I will be visiting workplaces across the UK to directly engage members and representatives in these discussions. We will also be holding online forums, producing surveys, and other engagement initiatives to ensure that every member feels part of this process as we proceed with actioning these plans.

This is a brilliant opportunity for us to collectively shape the future of our union, in an open, transparent, and strategic way.

There is nothing to worry anyone within these documents, the whole focus is simply on how we can collectively deliver the best possible union for our members.

I look forward to meeting with and engaging with as many of you as possible in the coming months.

**This is your union, help to shape it!**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Jo Grady'.

**Jo Grady**  
General Secretary, University and College Union

# ***BUILDING LOCAL BARGAINING IN HIGHER EDUCATION***

During the general secretary election, I made it clear that whilst there will always be battles we choose to fight on a UK-wide and coordinated basis, a key part of our strategy for higher education must be to develop our capacity for local bargaining around issues that members and potential members care deeply about.

I've outlined my thoughts for reinvigorating our approach to UK bargaining, so this is not about stepping back from it. However, it is in our workplaces that we directly experience the worst aspects of systemic failures and poor management, such as unrealistic workload demands, casualisation, unequal pay. To tackle these issues, we need a twin-track approach, submitting claims on the key local issue to each institution, as well as pushing our national claim with the UK-employer' body.

To help win local deals that suit your local circumstances, I want to increase the support provided to your branches. Winning means building our organisational capacity, for example: engaging members in an evaluation of local circumstances, developing an evidence base for our claims, giving local members the confidence and tools to revitalise their local negotiations and, where necessary, building effective leverage to make the employers negotiate meaningfully over our concerns.

I want to engage with all members on how we can build our capacity to bring about positive change in our working lives. To start the conversation, I thought it would be helpful for me to sketch an overview of the staged approach I think our union should take to local bargaining.

## ***INITIATIVE 1: Providing information, guidance, and template claims***

As a union, when we bargain with employers, we ordinarily do it through submitting something called a *claim*. In a claim, we outline the things that we want to see implemented or improved in our workplaces. It is an unnecessary duplication of effort for every branch to start from scratch and draft claims to present to your employer on key issues. Especially when as a union, we have made amazing progress in some of our branches. It is also important that we try to establish best practice to ensure no branch gets left behind.

**By the end of July 2024, branches will be shown guidance and model claims currently available; will be informed of the new guidance under development; and will be asked what their priority issues are.**

Our amazing head office staff has developed a new in-house system called the Organising & Bargaining Information System (OBIS). This brings together data sets on sector and institutional finance, workforce, and branch membership analysis. The OBIS will give you and your representatives the data to help inform the selection of local bargaining issues and the development of local claims. It will help cut through financial arguments made by local employers.

**By the end of October 2024, the OBIS will be released for both FE and HE, and a training session will have been held in locations across the UK. You will be equipped to make the case for what you want and be able to refute any false claims made by your university.**

## **INITIATIVE 2: Building for effective bargaining**

While arming you with better information and guidance will be a leap forward, building our organisation locally is essential to address the power imbalance in our workplaces. We need:

- **Higher membership density, i.e. more members in the union**
- **Greater involvement of members - in terms of how we develop our claims and how we bargain with our employers**
- **Higher participation of members - in any type of action called to win our claims**
- **More and better supported local representatives**

There is no easy fix to these issues. However, I asked staff to produce guidance for branches on how to build for effective bargaining.

**By the end of July, we will brief members and branches on building for effective bargaining.**

## **INITIATIVE 3: Engaging with you to select a local priority issue**

It would be easy for the national union to tell every branch what the priority area should be. But the truth is people are much more likely to engage in campaigns with which they identify, which they've helped select, and which promote their interests.

**To assist branches in engaging with members, by the end of September 2024 branches will be provided with materials to help them survey the local workforce and identify the key issues.**

**By the end of October 2024, your branch committee will be encouraged to select one issue on which to focus their organising and bargaining activities for the next 12 months.**

**By the end of October 2024, head office will produce templates for campaign materials and social media your branch can use for the emerging priorities (e.g. workload, casualisation, unequal pay).**

## **INITIATIVE 4: Selecting strategic target branches**

Although it is important that all branches are encouraged to engage members in building our capacity for effective local bargaining, it is also my intention to deliver on my manifesto call to use our time and resources better – in terms of staff time, members' time, and members' money.

This means a limited number of strategic targets for particularly intensive support in pursuit of local bargaining aims will be identified. We are developing the package of support target branches can expect, but:

**By the end of July, branches will be informed of the criteria and regional offices will make contact with potential target branches.**

**By the middle of September, a small number of target branches will be selected.**

**By the beginning of October 2024, we will have developed an extensive support programme for those branches, with a view to commencement in October 2024.**

**Crucially, whether you are selected as a target branch or not, we want you involved and will support you. Every member, in every workplace, needs change on the issues that matter.**

## **Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland**

We will be working with UCU staff in the locations above to ensure that the approach outlined takes account of devolved circumstances.

# ***BUILDING LOCAL BARGAINING IN FURTHER EDUCATION***

**During the general secretary election, I made it clear that whilst there will always be battles we choose to fight on a national and coordinated basis, a key part of our union's strategy for further education must be to develop our capacity for local bargaining around issues that members and potential members care deeply about.**

**It is in our workplaces that we directly experience the worst aspects of systemic failures and poor management, such as unrealistic workload demands, unequal pay, and local pay discrepancies. To tackle these issues, we need to continue a twin-track approach, continuing to push our case for national pay negotiations where the outcomes are binding on employers, along with pushing our claims on key local issues at each institution and employer.**

To help win local deals that suit your local circumstances, I want to increase the support provided to your branches. Winning means building our organisational capacity, for example: engaging members in an evaluation of local circumstances, developing an evidence base for our claims, giving local members the confidence and tools to revitalise their local negotiations and, where necessary, building effective leverage to make the employers negotiate meaningfully over our concerns.

I want to engage with all members on how we can build our capacity to bring about positive change in your working lives. To start the conversation, I thought it would be helpful for me to sketch an overview of the staged approach I think our union should take to local bargaining.

## ***INITIATIVE 1: Providing information, guidance, and template claims***

As a union, when we bargain with employers, we ordinarily do it through submitting something called a *claim*. In a claim, we outline the things that we want to see implemented or improved in our workplaces. It is an unnecessary duplication of effort for every branch to start from scratch and draft claims to present to your employer on key issues. Especially when as a union, we have made amazing progress in some of our branches. It is also important that we try to establish best practice to ensure no branch gets left behind.

**By the end of July 2024, branches will be shown guidance and model claims currently available; will be informed of the new guidance under development; and will be asked what their priority issues are.**

Our amazing head office staff have developed a new in-house system called the Organising & Bargaining Information System (OBIS). This brings together data sets on sector and institutional finance, workforce, and branch membership analysis. The OBIS will give you and your branch representatives the data to help inform the selection of local bargaining issues and the development of local claims. It will help cut through financial arguments made by local employers.

**By the end of October 2024, the OBIS will be released for both FE and HE, and a training session will have been held in locations across the UK. You will be equipped to make the case for what you want be able to refute any false claims made by your college.**

## **INITIATIVE 2: Building for effective bargaining**

While arming you with better information and guidance will be a leap forward, building our organisation locally is essential to address the power imbalance in our workplaces. We need:

- **Higher membership density, i.e. more members in the union**
- **Greater involvement of members - in terms of how we develop our claims and how we bargain with your employers**
- **Higher participation of members - in any type of action called to win our claims**
- **More and better supported local representatives**

There is no easy fix to these issues. We have to work harder to include more people. However, I asked staff to produce guidance for branches on how to build for effective bargaining.

**By the end of July, we will brief members and branches on building for effective bargaining.**

## **INITIATIVE 3: Engaging with you to select the local priority issue**

It would be easy for the national union to tell every branch what the priority area should be. But the truth is people are much more likely to engage in campaigns with which they identify, which they've helped select, and which promote their interests.

**To assist branches in engaging with members, by the end of September 2024 branches will be provided with materials to help them survey the local workforce and identify the key issues of local concern.**

**By the end of October 2024, if it hasn't already done so, based on engagement with you, your branch committee will be encouraged to select one issue on which to focus their organising and bargaining activities for the next 12 months.**

**By the end of October 2024, head office will produce templates for campaign materials, and social media your branch can use for the emerging priorities (e.g. workload, unequal pay, job insecurity).**

## **INITIATIVE 4: Selecting strategic target branches**

Although it is important that all branches are encouraged to engage members in building our capacity for effective local bargaining, it is also my intention to deliver on my manifesto call to use our time and resources better – in terms of staff time, members' time, and members' money.

This means a limited number of strategic targets for particularly intensive support in pursuit of local bargaining aims will be identified. We are developing the package of support target branches can expect, but:

**By the end of July, branches will be informed of the criteria and regional offices will make contact with potential target branches.**

**By the middle of September, a small number of target branches will be selected.**

**By the beginning of October 2024, we will have developed an extensive support programme for those branches, with a view to commencement in October 2024.**

Crucially, whether you are selected as a target branch or not, we want you involved and will support you. Every member, in every workplace, needs change on the issues that matter.

## **Wales and Northern Ireland**

We will be working with UCU staff in Wales and Northern Ireland to ensure that the approach outlined takes account of devolved circumstances.



# ***BUILDING AND IMPROVING ON OUR LEGAL SCHEME***

During and before the general secretary election it was made clear to me by members, representatives and branches that they did not feel the union's legal support was at the level they expect it to be at. There have been questions about the threshold we apply for taking cases on, controversy about cases we have been unable to support that have then gone on to win at tribunal, and concerns around the whole accessibility of the system. This is why we will be undertaking a full review of our legal work to ensure that it is as effective and supportive as possible.

The union's legal scheme has an important role both in terms of assisting individual members in relation to issues arising for them personally, and also, when it is feasible, to add weight via strategic litigation to union campaigns. Over the years that the union has provided legal services, many members have successfully won cases and settlements with the help of the scheme. Due to the confidential nature of legal work, we are often unable to tell members more generally about the successes that have occurred, but we do, and will, try to do so when it is possible.

I want to ensure that members understand how the scheme works, how it can be accessed by them and how decisions are made in relation to those applications. Whilst not all potential cases can be pursued under the terms of the legal scheme, I want to ensure that members have the information to understand why decisions are taken that impact their applications.

## ***INITIATIVE 1: Streamlining the procedure for obtaining information and providing decisions on applications***

Over many years, the legal scheme has developed and it has been added to in terms of different areas being covered. Whilst this is clearly positive, it has resulted in is an internal system for dealing with applications that does not always operate in the same way across the regions and devolved nations.

While the decisions about who gets access to legal support which are made by the legal panel are consistent (as they are always made with reference to the same criteria that is detailed in the legal scheme rules), it would help the smooth running of the application process if internal systems were also more consistent. This would speed up applications for members and reduce the number of times a member may have to be asked to expand on the information they have provided.

To address this, a series of checklists have been developed by the union's legal team working in conjunction with our agent solicitor firms and barristers we frequently instruct. This has enabled a wide input from expert parties and resulted in the production of detailed and purposeful checklists. These take the individual completing them through the questions and document requirements for any potential claim in a logical way that is easy to follow, and which is tailored specifically to the type of potential case being considered.

The use of these checklists will reduce dramatically the risk of missing evidence when the potential claim is going forward to the legal assessment stage. This is important because it is not possible for a solicitor or barrister to advise properly without full information and all available evidence.

Union staff are being trained now on the use of the checklists and all training should be completed by the middle of 2024 with a full rollout of the checklists in operation for the start of the academic year in September 2024.

Alongside the need for all our processes to be professional and legally compliant, we will also review how these are received by the individual member, to improve the personal experience of those seeking support. We want members to feel supported, and that their case is being handled in as personable way as possible all the way through the process.

### **INITIATIVE 2: Building the mechanisms for strategic case consideration**

Taking group or mass litigation is often very difficult in terms of what the law offers (although we always do look into any possibilities where they arise and will continue to do so). Frequently we are only able to look at claims taken by individuals. This does not mean however that we cannot seek out cases of strategic value to back up the campaigns that the union runs.

In order to push the possibility of strategic litigation, we are in the preliminary stages of development of a plan within the union and with a barristers' chambers. This would work across teams within the union and with early intervention from Counsel in identifying campaigns that might have the possibility of individual claims to back up the campaign. Legal claims alone are unlikely to move industrial matters on and campaigns are important for that, but a union campaign which is run at the same time as individual legal cases could well have additional power.

### **INITIATIVE 3: Providing clearer information to members**

Some of the issues that have been brought to me by members are around confusion about: how the scheme works; who they should contact when they are worried that they may need to consider taking a legal claim; what information they need to gather and where that needs to be sent to; and how decisions are reached when applications are made by members to the legal scheme. These are all really important points.

To address the issues raised, we will review and refresh the information available on the website to provide a much clearer explanation of what the scheme is, the way in which an application under the legal scheme progresses and the various stages it goes through. We know that currently there are different areas within the union's website where different information is provided and this understandably causes frustration and confusion. We will address that.

We will streamline the way in which information and documentation is obtained from members which will speed up this part of the process and reduce the need to revert frequently to members for missing information (this is expanded on further below).

We will improve the way in which progress reports during the legal services application process are provided. It is a reality that sometimes we must give members unwelcome news, but we will ensure that this is given in a clear and accessible way so that they can understand the position.

# **BUILDING AND IMPROVING ON OUR EQUALITY AND POLICY WORK**

Equality is at the heart of the union and runs like a thread through all aspects of our work. We must continue to be ambitious in our drive to break down barriers and promote fairness and equality in our workplaces and communities. I want to engage with all members on how we can build our capacity to bring about positive change in our working lives. I thought it would be helpful for me to sketch an overview of the initiatives our union will take to improve our equality and policy work. What is presented is not the end point, but what we will be doing over the coming months.

## **INITIATIVE 1: A comprehensive review of experiences of racism across UCU**

Developing anti-racist practice is a core priority for UCU's equality work, but too many members and staff in UCU report that they experience racism within the union itself. It's vital that we hold ourselves to the highest standards on inclusive practice so, along with the Black Members' Standing Committee and the staff unions, the union has established a robust, independent, and external review of racism at all levels within UCU. Under the current timetable this is due to commence in July 2024, and conclude later this year. We are committed to learning lessons on how to do better for all our Black members and Black staff, and undertaking whatever recommendations it produces.

## **INITIATIVE 2: Improve monitoring and support for equality casework**

When members face discrimination at work, the local branch is their first port of call. Unfortunately, many members do not feel that their experiences of discrimination are properly understood or treated with sufficient seriousness by reps and staff who are there to support them. We want to ensure that every member can be confident to approach UCU with their concerns, so we are taking steps to ensure our approach to casework meets their needs:

- **Enhanced equality monitoring:** to better understand how much of our casework links to different forms of discrimination, and to inform how we can improve support and campaigning.
- **Expert support for casework:** we recognise that some forms of casework – for example, that which links to sexual violence or racism – would benefit from dedicated expert support. We will recruit caseworkers to provide expertise in these areas to enhance our approaches in dealing with these cases.
- **Reviewing training for reps:** it's crucially important that all reps understand the insidious nature of workplace discrimination. We will be reviewing our training for reps to further embed understanding of equality issues and ensure local branches are well-placed to respond to members' concerns.

## **INITIATIVE 3: Reinvigorate local equality bargaining**

In addition to casework, we need to ensure that all branches feel confident in bargaining for equality at a local level. From equality pay gaps analysis to campaigns on specific issues like employer support for immigration costs or LGBT+ inclusion, we want to ensure that every branch can include equality demands within local claims. We will develop a new training package for reps on bargaining for equality, supported by a framework and model claims on a range of equality issues.



## **INITIATIVE 4: Improve accessibility of UCU materials and services**

UCU aims to ensure that all our activity is fully accessible to members, but we recognise that we have a way to go to make the ambition of ‘accessibility as standard’ a reality. To support us in progressing on this, we will:

- **Promote UCU’s ‘accessibility as standard’ checklist, developed by the Disabled Members’ Standing Committee, to branches and regions to support inclusive practice in local engagement activity as well as encouraging branches to put pressure on employers in this regard**
- **Commission expert advice to support us in identifying how UCU’s wider member-facing activity and materials can be made as accessible as possible.**

## **INITIATIVE 5: Reviewing barriers to inclusion in prison education**

UCU members working in different sectors face many common equality challenges, but others are sector-specific. In recent months, UCU’s Black prison educators have come together to highlight the issue of racism as a workplace hazard in prisons – linked to specific challenges around working in the prison estate and with a disproportionately Black prison population. We will support the development of this campaign and establish some wider work to examine the broader challenges to equality and inclusion in prison education.

## **INITIATIVE 6: Defending academic freedom and freedom of speech**

In recent years we have seen an increase of culture war attacks on campus. This has been particularly evident through attacks on free speech, exemplified most starkly by Michelle Donelan’s extraordinary false accusations against two academics over their posts relating to Palestine. These attacks – designed to sow division and hate – must be resisted, so we will redouble our defense of academic freedom. This will include work to highlight the real threats to academic freedom – managerialism and marketisation – through our lobbying activity and beyond.

## **INITIATIVE 7: Supporting professionalism and autonomy**

UCU has undertaken extensive work in recent years to highlight the damage which overbearing inspection regimes and bureaucratic excellence frameworks are doing to our sectors. We will refresh our campaigning work on the need for alternatives to the approaches currently adopted by Ofsted and the Office for Students, and make a renewed push for staff and student voice to inform how our sectors are developed.

## **INITIATIVE 8: Capturing your voice**

What has been outlined here is work that has already been identified as a priority. The general secretary election allowed me the opportunity to hear from many of you about where you felt the union fell short, and where we could improve. But I know there are many members who did not participate in those debates, and who do not (for various reasons) engage with their branch locally. And so we will be launching more direct forms of member engagement so that everyone can feed into the union’s equality and policy work.

# **IMPROVING PARTICIPATION IN OUR UNION'S DEMOCRACY**

**During the general secretary election, I made it clear that I thought our democratic structures were long overdue a review and overhaul.**

**In the next 5 years I want to see us create a much more democratic and pluralistic culture in our union. Widening participation at all levels and creating a sense of ownership of the union by all of its members.**

Currently only a small percentage of our members participate in the democracy of our union. Not enough are active in branches, and the representatives that attend and vote at democratic events on behalf of members are often not properly answerable to those members. Far too many members find our internal culture to be byzantine, off-putting and needlessly antagonistic. Members deserve to understand how decisions are made and by whom.

## **Surveying the members**

Any review of the union's structures needs to start with the members. Not just the members who currently sit on the union's UK-wide elected committees. But the members who have never sought this level of involvement in the union. Members who are the lifeblood of the union, and who feel the impact of decisions that are made. Decisions that, while they may support, it is not always clear they understand. For more people to feel like the union is truly theirs, this needs to change.

A union of 120 000 members will always contain a plurality of opinions. But when it really matters, how do members' voices become decisions that can harness strength and unity? How do members' challenge decisions they do not support, and how are those elected to make decisions for them accountable. We will undertake a review to better understand this.

## **Initiating a review**

I thought it would be helpful for me to sketch out some questions and areas of enquiry that will drive the initial stages of a review:

### **Area 1: Assessing what members understand about the current structure**

- **How do members think decisions are currently made?**
- **Do members know who represents them at local, regional and national level?**
- **How do members hear about democratic decisions and debates? Specifically, debates taken at our national committees (such as the national executive committee, the higher education committee, and the further education committee) who take key decisions about what happens industrially in our union. And decisions taken locally which impact on members at their institutions.**
- **What do members understand to be their role once decisions that affect them have been taken?**
- **Do members currently feel like they can make their views heard in the current structure?**

### **Area 2: What do members want?**

- **How do members want to engage at branch level?**
- **Do members want to be heard outside of being represented by their branches?**
- **What expectations do members have of those who represent them on elected bodies?**
- **Is there a role in industrial disputes, and in other contexts, for more member consultation?**

### **Area 3: How do we expand the number of voices being heard?**

- **Not all members want to get involved in the union's formal decision-making structures – and under any structure this would remain true. But how can we still ensure their voices are heard and taken into account?**
- **How can members feed into decision-making in a way that respects the broad participation of members and also the role of democratically-elected bodies?**
- **How should the union be reaching out to get members' views? What would increase the ownership of decisions?**
- **How do we deal with complex and contentious areas of discussion?**
- **What deters members from becoming involved?**
- **What would encourage members to become more involved?**

### **A review of the union's structures**

The outcome of an initial exercise to hear the views of members will shape how we approach a review of the union's structures. But any review will, as it progresses, also involve feedback from those who currently, and have recently, served on the union's committees. This will include exploring how committee members understand their current role, the existing strengths and limitations, and the relationships between different parts of the union's structures.

This review may expand to include information from beyond UCU, to give greater input to matters such as:

- **What alternatives might there be to the kind of structure currently used by UCU?**
- **Are there ways to allow and encourage discussion of different ideas without the sometimes adversarial win/lose of decision by motion?**
- **At all levels, how can good-faith discussion of different positions be encouraged, without hostility?**

The aim is an effective and modern union with more accessible structures, in which more members' voices are heard. The changes we need to make to get there may not be obvious at the outset. We should not be seeking to be prescriptive here, nor steer any review down a path favoured by any one grouping.

We will seek members' and representatives' views on any recommendations before they progress to the union's Congress to be put into place. There may also be recommendations that can be implemented without rule changes, for instance through communications, training and development.

### **Keeping you informed**

I said I wanted to engage with members in the development of our plans to review our methods of participation, and I will. What has been presented here is a draft based on member views and feedback provided during the GS election, and will develop as we gain feedback on it. As well as organising branch briefings, I will arrange online webinars for members who want to be informed and get active.

I want to hear from as many members as possible during the forthcoming months whilst we determine the final scope of the review, and the various methods we will use to generate the information we need to make recommendations. Hearing from members who don't regularly engage with the union – or find the union difficult to access – is going to be vitally important if we are to improve what we do for all of our members.

