Building local bargaining project paper

BUILDING TO WIN

1.   Introduction

Our union is crucially important. Without UCU members, there would be no post-16 education. Without post 16 education there would be no art, no science, no philosophy, no medicine. There would be no film, music or culture. There would be no research or teaching. We wouldn't have libraries full of knowledge, and we wouldn't have a labour market full of skilled workers. We wouldn't have fulfilled people capable of critical thinking or compassion. We have survived, and at key moments won key battles for UCU members, during the last 14 years of the Conservative government. But it is important that we do more than this. It is important that we grow our union, grow our strength in every UCU branch, and become a powerful force to be reckoned with in every college, university, continuing education center, and prison where we have UCU members.

To achieve this UCU is launching the *Building to win,* a local bargaining initiative which was a significant part of my campaign during the general secretary election. The initiative recognises that to build power in our sectors, we must build power in every single UCU branch. This means building capacity for local bargaining, and giving branches the training and tools they need to engage in that bargaining.

Your role in shaping this has been important. Members' engagement meetings held back in June have already made a difference to the initiative. This paper works from the initial 100-day briefing on Building local bargaining (one for FE, one for HE), the feedback received, provides an overview of project goals and initial objectives, outlines steps that all branches will be encouraged to adopt, and specifies the approach to be taken in a limited number of pilot branches.

2.   Project goals and objectives

The high-level goals and the 2024/25 objectives for the project are outlined below.

Goal 1: Head office support

For UCU head office to provide branches with relevant workforce and employer information, bargaining advice on key issues, and template claims

Objectives:

1.1 By the end of November 2024, the Organising & Bargaining Information System (OBIS) will be released for both FE and HE, and briefing sessions will have been held in locations across the UK.

1.2 By the end of November 2024, guidance and model claims on key issues will be made available to all branches, and a briefing session will have been held in locations across the UK.

Goal 2: All branches encouraged to engage members and submit a collective claim

For UCU head office, regions, and nations to encourage all branches to engage in collective bargaining with their employer over a priority issue that local members have identified as a key issue.

Objectives:

2.1 By the end of September 2024, all branches will be provided with materials to help them engage the local workforce and identify the key issues of local concern.

2.2 All branches will be encouraged to survey their members during October 2024 and select one issue on which to focus their organising and bargaining activities for the next 12 to 18 months.

2.3 During November 2024, all branches will be encouraged to select and notify head office and their regional/national office of the issue they wish to pursue (Note – in some cases this may be a more foundational organisational matter)

Goal 3: Building for effective bargaining

For UCU head office to provide a branch briefing on the link between effective bargaining and higher levels of membership, a higher level of participation, and more and better supported local representatives.

Objectives

3.1 By the end of November a briefing session on building for effective bargaining will have been held in locations across the UK.

Goal 4: Selection of Strategic pilot branches

For Head office, regions and nations to provide additional support in a small number of strategic pilot branches pursuit of local bargaining aims.

Objectives

4.1 By the beginning of October, branches will be informed of the criteria for selection as a pilot branch and regional offices will make contact with potential pilot branches.

4.2 By the end of November, pilot branches will have been selected.

4.3 At the beginning of December, head office will arrange a briefing for all pilot branches.

3. All branches

All branches are being encouraged to engage members in collective bargaining with their employer.

A model survey to gauge members views, and that branches can adapt, is attached as Appendix 1.

When considering what issue would be good for your branch to organise and bargain around, the checklist 6 (pp25-26) in the UCU guide Building effective bargaining is a useful starting point.

Some branches may also consider that they are currently not sufficiently organised, at the moment, to submit a claim to their employer. Branches may wish to conduct a quick check on how well they are organised by using one of the following checklists:

- Short version of the branch health check - Appendix 2 to this paper
- Long version of the branch health check – Appendix 3 to this paper.

Please note that the model survey and checklists are examples of tools that branches may find useful. Branches are advised to speak to their regional/national officials to discuss the best approach in their locality.

Member briefings on Building to Win will be held on:

- [Monday 28th October - briefing at the Mechanics Institute, Manchester](#)

- [Tuesday 29th October - briefing at the Renfield Centre, Glasgow](#)

- [Friday 1st November - briefing at Aston University, Birmingham](#)

- [Thursday 7th November – briefing at UCU head office, London](#)

Places will be limited. **Note the deadlines for registration of each of the event (21 October for Manchester, 22 October for Glasgow, 25 October for Birmingham, and 31 October for London).**

4.   Strategic pilot branches

Although it is important that all branches are encouraged to engage members in building our capacity for effective local bargaining, it is also sensible to use our time and resources better – in terms of staff time, members' time, and members' money. There is merit in focusing on a limited number of strategic targets for particularly intensive support in pursuit of local bargaining aims.

All branches will be asked if they would like to be considered as one of the pilot branches. **The deadline for applications for 2024/25 is Friday 15th November.** It would be helpful to discuss your application with your regional/national official first. Expression of interest should be registered using [this form](#). **Please note that briefings for all the pilot branches will be held on 11th and 12th December. If your branch is expressing an interest to be a pilot branch, please pencil in those dates in case you are selected.** You will only need to attend one.

Criteria for the selection of pilot branches

The following criteria shall be used when considering applications for pilot branch status:

- ***Workforce engagement on the bargaining issue*** – can the branch demonstrate that the workforce (members and non-members) supports the pursuit of a specific bargaining issue. Or, is the branch willing to employ a variety of methods to engage with the workforce to select a bargaining issue?

- ***Organisational capacity*** - does the branch have capacity, or potential capacity, to engage effectively in collective bargaining? Is there membership growth potential? Is the branch willing to engage in a mapping exercise? Will the branch engage positively with work to use local bargaining as a means of improving organisational capacity (e.g. membership, number of and development of representatives)?

- ***Employer engagement*** – what is the likelihood of engagement from the employer on the issue at hand (i.e. Will the employer enter into meaningful negotiations over the issue?). Is the branch clear that the objective is to reach agreement with the employer?

- ***Outcome*** – are there credible prospects of a positive outcome from collective bargaining (e.g. If considering a local FE claim, have we checked that the employer has financial resources to afford a pay rise?); are there prospects of a beneficial impact for the union through increased membership and/or enhanced branch capacity?

- ***Strategic considerations*** - will there be wider positive ramifications for the union if we win against this particular employer? Are there reasonable prospects of building effective bargaining agency within the branch for the future? Is this branch already part of existing plans (for example, regional office development plans).

Support available to pilot branches

We are developing the package of support pilot branches can expect. The aim is to take a more intensive approach to the entire bargaining process than is normal for UCU. Practices to be modelled in pilot branches will include (but not necessarily be limited to):

- Workplace mapping.
- Widespread, systematic use of one-on-one conversations at every step of the campaign, from recruitment of new members to developing the bargaining agenda to preparing for any action that needs to be taken.
- Identification and recruitment of leaders as well as activists to unofficial and official roles.
- Power mapping and analysis of the employer's financial position.
- An open, democratic, high-participation (and disciplined) approach to bargaining at every stage, from formulation of demands to the conduct of negotiation meetings.
- A step-by-step escalation plan involving one or more structure tests that need to be passed before industrial action or any other high-risk action is called.

What support can pilot branches expect?

As indicated, head office will arrange a briefing for all pilot branches on 11th and 12th December 2024.

The starting assumption is that a successful campaign will take at least 6-18 months. During that period staff will need to assist branches to:

- Carry out or commission basic research
- Provide formal and informal training
- Attend negotiations
- Meet or contact reps on a very regular basis (ideally once per week)
- Help produce comms and campaign materials
- Play some part in the mapping the workforce, conducting one-on-one conversations etc. (although members should do the bulk of this).

An indicative timeline for pilot branches

There is no hard and fast rule and local circumstances will need to be taken into account, but an indicative timeline for these initial pilot branches could be:

Weeks	Dates	Milestone	Notes
1		Initial briefing with staff/agreement of organising and bargaining strategy	
2 to 6		Survey/engage members on key issues	
2 to 6		Map the workplace	
2 to 6		Power analysis/alongside an ideal time for negotiations	
3 to 8		One-to-one conversations/workplace/departmental meetings	
3 to 8		Identification and recruitment of potential leaders	

9		Agree organising committee	Possibly necessary in branches with a large committee
10		Bespoke organising and negotiating training provided	
12		Agree draft claim	This can be prepared much earlier
12		Branch/Organising committee to develop an ideal timetable for negotiations and structure tests	Do not underestimate the time
13 to 14		Major engagement with members over draft claim	
15		Submit claim to employer/management	Pilot to submit claim in 3 months
		Negotiations	
		Ongoing engagement with members and structure tests	

All branches may find this timeline as a useful guide.

5.   Summary

Once again, thanks to members, branch activists, and staff for their helpful feedback to the initial ideas outlined in the 100-day briefing.

I hope all branches will engage with their members and agree what's the key issue to be pursued with their employer this year and next. I also want to say whilst this document outlines specific activities for pilot branches, we will be sharing a parallel support plan for branches who are not selected as pilots, so all our branches can participate in building power, and building the union.

For those branches who want to express an interest in being a pilot branch, please do so by no later than Friday 15th November using [this form](#).

Briefings for all the pilot branches will be held on 11th and 12th December 2024. If you're expressing an interest, please pencil in those dates in case you are selected. You will only need to attend one.

Jo Grady
UCU general secretary

Appendix 1: model email message and draft survey for members engagement by branches (October 2024)

Template message to members

Subject line: Tell UCU about your issues at [name of employer]

Dear [First name],

Overworked? Understaffed? Pay not keeping up with the cost of living?

UCU reps and officials have been talking about the most frequent issues people bring up when they talk about life here. But we need you to give us a fuller picture of what's really happening on the ground.

For that reason we have launched a new staff survey. To take the survey all you need to do is follow this link: [insert link if you're using an electronic survey].

Completing the survey will give you a real say and put you and all your colleagues in a position to organise for the changes you want to see in your workplace. It only takes [specify] minutes to complete.

Best wishes,

Named branch officer (it is better to use a name than "the branch committee")

Sample staff survey

We are seeking responses from both UCU members and non-members. We hope that it will enable UCU to address and deliver on issues that really matter to you at [insert name of employer].

Issues

1. What are the top three issues that you would like to see UCU tackle at [insert name of employer]?

Please rank your priorities 1, 2, 3 (with 1 as the most important)

[Insert your own issues but, for example]

- Level of pay
- Unequal pay
- Gender pay gap
- Race pay gap
- Workload
- Stress
- Job security
- Casualised contracts
- Bullying and harassment
- Grading
- Family friendly policies
- Training/career development
- Creating a sustainable workplace (environmental issues)

2. Are there any other issues that you believe UCU should be campaigning on?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, please provide details:

UCU and you

3. Are you a member of UCU?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

4. If you are not a member, please tell us why have you not joined UCU? (Please tick all that apply.)

- ☐ I didn't know there was a union I could join
- ☐ No-one has ever asked me to join
- ☐ I don't believe in trade unions
- ☐ The union isn't for people like me
- ☐ Joining a union could damage my career prospects
- ☐ I am on a fixed-term contract so I won't be here for long
- ☐ The union isn't effective
- ☐ N/A

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5. To enable follow-up on any of the issues raised, please provide your contact details:

Name:

Department/school:

Email:

Mobile number (optional):

[If in Higher education]

6. Which of these categories would you put your job in?

Tick as many as apply.

☐ Academic-related and professional services staff

☐ Lecturer

☐ Professor

☐ Research Associate

☐ Tutor

[If in Further education]

6. Which of these categories would you put your job in?

Tick as many as apply.

☐ Teaching

☐ Teaching support

☐ Advanced teaching and training

☐ Admin

☐ Management

☐ Other - enter here

7. As an employee, are you:

Full time or part time?

☐ Full time

☐ Part time

Permanent or fixed term?

☐ Permanent (open-ended contract)

☐ Fixed term

I consent to UCU's ongoing processing of my personal data, including UCU making further contact with me in relation to the issues covered in the survey. My response will only be accessible by UCU reps and staff. Any more widely circulated and/or published analysis of the survey responses will be anonymised.

☐ Tick to indicate consent

Once completed please return to: (insert local contact details) [If using paper copies]

Appendix 2: Basic organising checklist (short version)

Membership

- Do you know how many members you have?
- Is membership density well above 50%?
- Do you know if areas of the workforce are under-represented (location, department, job-type, protected characteristics)?

Organisation

- Are all branch officer posts filled?
- Do you have a departmental representative structure?
- Does every member have a departmental representative?
- Does recruitment and development of representatives appear on your branch committee agenda?
- Have all representatives attended at least one training course?
- Are there regularly updated local sources of information (e.g. newsletter, website, regular email) for members?
- Do members get involved in tasks for the branch?
- Does the branch canvass/survey members and potential members on the issues affecting them?
- Does the branch meet regularly?

Bargaining

- Has the branch got a current claim they are actively negotiating with the employer?
- Do members know what issues UCU is currently pursuing?
- Do potential members know the issues the branch is dealing with?
- Are members in control of the negotiating position of the branch?

Appendix 3: Checklist (long version): How well is your branch organised?

Completing this exercise should help the branch get a general sense of the arrangements for formal collective bargaining at an institutional level, and secondly it provides an opportunity for the branch to reflect on its level of organisation.

It is a tool, not a test.

Effective negotiations

1. Does the branch have an up-to-date recognition agreement?

2. Does the agreement include?
   - consultation rights
   - negotiation rights

3. Do management negotiate on all contractual matters (e.g. new terms of appointment)?

4. Does the agreement include (or is there a separate) facility-time agreement?

5. Does the agreement include a formal disputes procedure?

6. Is the branch a formally constituted joint union/management negotiating committee?

7. How many UCU representatives are there on the negotiating committee?

8. Is a pre-meeting arranged for the UCU representatives?

9. Is a pre-meeting arranged for the trade union side (if you negotiate with other unions)?

10. How often does the joint committee meet?
    ( ) Every month   ( ) Every term   ( ) Other

11. Are there regular discussions to progress matters between the formal meetings?
    ( ) Yes   ( ) No

12. Who attends the discussions with management?

13. Do management use the joint processes in sufficient time to allow for changes to be made prior to implementation?
    ( ) Yes   ( ) No

14. Do negotiators report back to each branch committee meeting?
    ( ) Yes   ( ) No

15. How are the wider membership involved kept informed of/involved in the negotiations? Please tick all that apply
    Regular email updates/newsletters   ( )
    Branch meetings   ( )

16. How is a final draft agreement approved? Please tick all that apply
    By the branch committee   ( )
    By a branch meeting   ( )

Local consultative ballot   ( )

17. Is the negotiating team determined by local rule or elected?
( ) Determined by local rule   ( ) Elected

18. Have all the UCU negotiators attended a negotiating skills course?
( ) Yes   ( ) No

Building the Organising Team

1. Are there regular, scheduled meetings of the branch committee/workplace representatives?

2. Are the main officer positions filled?

3. Do you have a departmental reps structure?

4. Do you know which department reps/committee members represent which members?

5. Does every member have a departmental rep?

6. Are new reps/activists offered mentoring & shadowing opportunities with more experienced reps?

7. Are members encouraged to become active in UCU?

8. Are members invited to take on particular tasks for the Branch?

9. Are members invited to contribute their ideas and opinions at general meetings?

10. Is there a network of activists who will help out with the organising work of the union?

11. Does your branch have a plan to increase and sustain the number of Branch Committee members?

12. Does recruitment of new reps appear on your branch meeting agenda?

13. Does the Branch committee reflect the profile of the institution in terms of race, gender, age, job category etc?

14. Does your branch have safety, learning, equality and environmental reps?

15. Do the committee and the department reps keep in touch regularly (min. once a month)?

Mapping and charting

1. Is there an accurate local membership database?

2. Does the committee receive termly lists of leavers and joiners?

3. Does the committee receive annual lists of different types of staff?

4. Is membership density above 50%?

5. Do you know where members work, what they do, their age, gender and who their rep is?

6. Do you know what each of your member's attitude to the union is?

7. Does the local membership database record the involvement members have had with UCU?

9. Do you do the same for potential members?

10.Do you know what percentage or how many of your members have:

Attended a UCU meeting in the past?
Recruited a new member?
Been involved in any campaigns?
Undertaken any form of union activity?

11. Do you know how many members you have?

12. Do all members know who their dept rep is?

13. Do all members know how to contact the Branch?

Communication and Profile Raising

1. Do members know what issues UCU is currently dealing with?

2. Do potential members know what issues you are dealing with?

3. Has the branch committee discussed its approach to communications (e.g. frequency, length.format)?

4. Does the Branch arrange activities that members can get involved in?

5. Does the Branch run any social/fun events?

6. Do members of the committee, dept reps and members talk to members and potential members informally about union matters?

7. Does the Branch hold regular meetings of members?

8. Is there a regular local newsletter for members?

9. Has the Branch a social media presence?

10. Are UCU posters displayed in the workplace?

11. Are there notices displayed telling people about UCU and how the Branch can be contacted?

12. Does the Branch take part in inductions for new staff?

13. Does the Branch send out a welcome letter to new staff?

14. Does the Branch send out a new member's pack to all new members?

15. Does the Branch have an agreement with the university for union information to be sent out with induction materials for new staff?

16. Does the Branch publicise its successes?

Campaigning and Issues

1. Does the Branch know what issues members feel strongly about?

2. Does the Branch campaigning on any issues at the moment?

3. Do you know what campaigns have been run by UCU in the past 12 months?

4. Does the Branch develop campaign plans?

5. Does the Branch canvass/survey members and potential members about the issues affecting them?

Recruitment and Sustainability

1. Does the Branch know how many potential members there are in the workplace?

2. Does the Branch know where potential members work, their age, gender etc?

3. Does the Branch have a list or database of this information?

4. Does this list/database record whether these potential members have been approached to join and what their response was?

5. Is it someone's job to ask potential members to join UCU?

6. Is it someone's job to ask new staff to join UCU?

7. Does the Branch have special recruitment materials relevant to the workplace/particular groups of staff to accompany the standard membership form?

8. Does the Branch set recruitment targets?

9. Does the Branch have a plan to increase and sustain the number of committee members and department reps?

10. Does the Branch provide lists of members and potential members to reps?

11. Does the Branch evaluate membership retention rates?