

IN THIS ISSUE OF HE NEWS: NATIONAL NEGOTIATIONS AND CONGRESS UPDATE

- ❖ **Dispute with UCEA**
- ❖ **UCU Congress and HE Sector Conference**
- ❖ **USS Pension Review**
- ❖ **Joint Union Campaigning - United for Education**
- ❖ **Defending National Bargaining**
- ❖ **Cutting Management Excess not staff jobs**
- ❖ **Workload and Equality Implications of Staff Cuts**
- ❖ **Academic Freedom**
- ❖ **Research Assessment and Performance Management**
- ❖ **Staff on Casual Contracts**
- ❖ **Censure and Academic Boycott**
- ❖ **HE Sector Conference motions**
- ❖ **Membership Records**
- ❖ **UCU Fighting Fund**

UCU in dispute with UCEA over job security

UCU's Higher Education Sector Conference on 31 May heard how at a meeting of New JNCHES on 28 May, the HE employers revised their offer in response to the trade side claim. The employers made the following proposals:

- To consolidate the 0.4% pay offer.
- To undertake further work at officer level to develop a framework relating to training, development and apprenticeships within the sector.

The employers continued to refuse national level talks on job security, claiming that they could not interfere with institutional autonomy. On a number of occasions over the past two years, UCU representatives have explained to the employers that we are not seeking to negotiate institutional staffing levels at the national level. However, we are convinced that a national framework agreement on redundancy avoidance would be beneficial to the sector, particularly in the current climate.

UCU's negotiators gave the employers notice of a dispute on their continued refusal to try and reach agreement with us over our claim for national negotiations leading to jointly agreed proposals to improve job security across the sector. EIS also lodged a dispute on the same grounds.

It is clear from the discussions that took place at the HE Sector Conference that our members regard the employers' refusal to enter negotiations on this matter as irresponsible and unacceptable.

There will now be a series of further meetings under the dispute resolution procedure but Sector Conference reinforced previous decisions that the union should commence necessary preparations for industrial action so that national strike action could commence at the beginning of the Autumn term should a satisfactory offer not be made.

Congress and HE Sector Conference

The UCU annual congress – the supreme UCU's supreme policy-making body of the union – met this year from 30 May to 1 June. Congress also includes separate annual meetings of UCU's further and higher education sector conferences, where policy particular to these areas is decided. These took place on 31 May. Reports on decisions and policy motions adopted by HE Sector Conference can be found below.

USS Pension Review

Sector Conference deplored the attack proposed by the university employers on the pension scheme to which large numbers of our members belong - the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) - and resolved that UCU will declare a national dispute with the employers over its future. This would continue until the employers' representatives' proposals for changes are withdrawn and negotiations reconvened on UCU terms.

This followed an on-line consultation of UCU members, for which the very high turnout of (60.5%) more than doubled the previous record for a UCU online consultative ballot indicating how important staff see defending their pensions. An overwhelming majority (96%) of those who responded rejected the proposals from the Employers Pensions Forum to reform the USS. A similar number (97%) supported proposals from UCU aimed at sharing costs fairly between employer and employee, which would ensure the stability of the fund and protect members' benefits without the need to introduce a two-tier pension benefits system.

For further details on the USS review, see: <http://www.ucu.org.uk/usschanges>

Joint Union Campaigning - United for Education

Branches/LAs are encouraged to work with sister unions on their campuses to campaign on the issues raised in our national claim (job security, pay, and national framework issues). Branches/LAs are reminded that materials are available at:

<http://defendhighereducation.org.uk/>

Further to this ongoing campaign, the major education unions in both the HE and FE sector (ATL, EIS, UCU, UNISON and UNITE) have joined forces with the National Union of Students (NUS) to form an unprecedented sector-wide coalition; 'United for Education' to oppose the cuts in post-16 education. This will involve a day of action on 21 June. Branches/LAs are encouraged to hold discussions with sister campus unions with a view to holding a campaigning event and maximising participation on this day of action. Campaigning materials can be downloaded from

<http://unitedforeducation.org.uk/>

The closer working relationships established with the other HE trade unions during the past 12 months was noted by HE Sector Conference. In particular, conference welcomed the joint campaigning work, both locally and nationally, under the '5 unions, 1 demand - defend higher education, defend jobs' banner; and the local examples where joint approaches have been taken to a range of issues, including pressing employers for equality impact assessments.

Conference also congratulated the national trade union side for effectively resisting

employer attempts to create divisions amongst the five unions during the 2009/10 negotiating round.

Defending National Bargaining

Sector Conference denounced the plans by two HEIs, South Bank University and Staffordshire University, to break from national bargaining on pay. Such moves were described as threatening UCU policy on pay catch-up and future pay levels at these institutions.

Conference resolved to support the branches at Staffordshire and South Bank in resisting the attempted break from national bargaining – including preparation for industrial action – and to work to prevent any UCU branches from doing local deals that undermine national bargaining or conditions of service.

Cutting Management Excess not staff jobs

Conference noted that vice-chancellors' salaries, following an average 7% rise in 2009, have risen to an average £193,970 a year, with 80+ earning significantly more than the Prime Minister. In addition, there has been a massive increase in the number of senior managers in universities earning more than £100,000 a year whilst also receiving generous private health insurance and pension benefits. However, the vast majority of redundancies announced within our sector have targeted main grade academic, academic-related, and support staff.

Conference therefore agreed that, rather than hitting these grades, any payroll savings should primarily come from a reduction in

management excess, and, if necessary, a rationalisation of senior management posts.

Workload and Equality implications of staff cuts

As well as expressing grave concern about staff cuts, delegates at conference warned about the inevitable consequences in terms of the undermining of the quality of course provision, student services and the workload of remaining staff. The consequent stress that the latter would cause was emphasised.

Conference agreed to continue to campaign on these themes. It was agreed that the union would continue to call for equality impact assessments of any cuts to be carried out and for strenuous efforts to ensure that such cuts did not impact disproportionately on women and underrepresented groups.

Academic Freedom

Conference welcomed the re-launch of the UCU's academic freedom statement (see <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=3672>) and called for branches and local associations to promote it widely amongst the membership and to contact VCs and principals asking them to endorse the statement. Conference supported the development of a new UCU 'academic alert' system and called upon the union's Higher Education Committee (HEC) to prioritise the defence of academic freedom in 2010-11.

Research Assessment and Performance Management

Conference denounced aspects of the new REF framework proposed to replace the RAE, particularly the 'impact agenda', its divisive and arbitrary nature and the insufficient

consideration given to equality implications. This had also led to unreasonable and stress-inducing research performance management procedures being introduced at some HEIs. HEC was therefore instructed to campaign against the REF and call for a boycott of it in its current form.

Staff on Casual Contracts

A number of debates addressed the precarious position of staff on casualised contracts in HE, reaffirming the union's position in calling for improvements to their terms and conditions, greater protection against redundancy and continued recruitment and campaigning activity.

Censure and academic boycott

Conference also approved a new censure and academic boycott policy as detailed in HE circular UCUHE56 see

<http://www.ucu.org.uk/circ/UCUHE56.pdf>

HE Sector Conference policy motions

Aside from the above, motions were adopted on a range of industrial, policy and professional issues at Conference. These ranged from the governance of HEIs, to equal pay and a range of equality issues, to the provision of higher education in Further Education institutions. For full text of all motions considered and adopted see

<http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=4652>

Membership Records

Your assistance is essential in ensuring the smooth running of our communications, democratic structures and ability to run industrial action ballots.

As you will be aware, the current industrial relations environment is very challenging. If it is necessary to ballot for action, it is important that we minimise the risk of legal challenge to the accuracy of our membership records.

Our membership administrators have already contacted all branches/LAs asking you to look at the membership list we hold for you and update it. If you have not done so already, you need to send amendments to your membership department contact.

We understand that branches/LAs are busy but this task needs to be prioritised as a matter of the utmost urgency.

UCU Fighting Fund

Although taking strike action is a last resort, sometimes it is necessary to do so in order to combat intransigent managements. It's always tough to lose a day's pay, and so UCU has set up a fighting fund to support members facing difficulties as a consequence of supporting the union's actions.

HOW TO DONATE

Make a direct bank transfer, or set up a regular standing order, to:

Account name: UCU Fighting Fund

Sort code: 08-60-01

Account no: 20179432

Reference: 'Fighting Fund 2010'

or send a cheque (payable to 'University and College Union') to:

Fighting Fund 2010
Finance Dept
University and College Union
Carlow Street
London NW1 7LH