

University of Bath UCU

Branch meeting 20th January 2015

Present: 31 members
Apologies from 8 members
Tim Barrett in the chair

USS pension dispute

Tim explained that the main purpose of the meeting was to discuss the rapidly changing circumstances of the USS pension dispute. Members are being invited to vote on whether to accept the employers' latest proposals.

The branch committee had met on 16th January and issued the following statement to members:

UCU has suspended the assessment boycott for a further period to allow time for members to be consulted about changes to the employers' proposals for the future of the USS pension scheme. In the next few days you will receive a message from UCU head office inviting you to take part in an online ballot. Your branch committee has examined the changes to the employers' proposals and is strongly recommending that we REJECT the current offer.

We acknowledge there are some very minor improvements on the original proposal, in particular:

- *a reduction in the accrual rate from 1/80 to 1/75 of salary for every year of service*
- *a modest increase in the 'cap' - the point at which your pension moves from defined benefits (DB) to defined contribution (DC) - from £50k to £55k.*

For more details see <http://defenduss.web.ucu.org.uk/>

We remain concerned that:

- *current final salary members in mid-career could lose over 10%, despite paying more in contributions*
- *new staff in the Career Re-evaluated Benefits Scheme would make some small gains but at the cost of even more contributions*
- *a DC scheme would be created alongside the DB scheme. DC schemes transfer all risk to members. Under the current proposals, employers will have a built-in incentive to shift as much of the pension scheme as possible into the DC section.*
- *USS would provide benefits that are still worse than those provided by the Teachers Pension Scheme*
- *some employers have indicated that they want to have more control over the DC scheme, suggesting that that part of USS at least would cease to be national*

We are also disturbed that the recent negotiations have taken place on the incorrect assumption that USS faces a serious deficit, despite the fact that the projected deficit is based on a valuation of USS assets that has been thoroughly discredited, not least by some of the employers themselves. For these reasons we urge you to reject the proposals.

Following discussion the meeting agreed the following resolution to be sent to UCU General Secretary:

University of Bath UCU:

- a) Continues to question how existing promises on pension made at the start of employment can be unilaterally torn up;*
- b) Continues to challenge the underlying assumptions on the scheme valuation being used to justify any changes to USS;*
- c) Calls for a more robust defence of the principle of Defined Benefits pensions, and that if there is a cap it must be indexed to a defined percentile of the salary distribution, rather than CPI;*
- d) Calls again for a Special HE Sector Conference to debate the campaign to defend pensions in HE;*
- e) Calls for the resumption of action, including strike action, to defend the principles agreed at the September HE Special Sector Conference.*

Facilities time agreement with the university

UCU, UNISON and Unite have a joint agreement with the university which allows each union a specified amount of paid time for one or more of each union's representatives to carry out trade union roles. The university allows UCU 1.0 FTE for this work, but currently only provides 0.6 FTE of backfill (money paid by HR to a member's department to compensate for time spent on TU work).

In 2014 Marie Morley (0.3) and Hedley Bashforth (0.2) were both allowed backfill. During Marie's illness HR agreed to pay one of UCU's hourly paid members to cover for Marie. This was Chris Roche, who received training as a branch rep from UCU SW Region, and provided invaluable support in an emergency.

At our AGM in December 2014, Chris was re-elected to the representative roles he hold within the branch and the branch secretary (HB) asked HR to continue with this arrangement. HR have so far refused to accept this, saying:

"The backfill arrangement in the Facilities Agreement is there to backfill a certain number of hours lost by a department through the time off for trade union duties / facility time taken by a member of their staff. It was put in place to balance out the impact on departments across the University. Certain departments with proportionately greater numbers of representatives were being disproportionately affected before this arrangement was put in place. Backfill is not there to cover all of the facility time of an accredited representative.

To backfill a representative on an ongoing basis the representative needs to have substantive hours (and role) that can be backfilled and this is not the case with Chris who currently has a casual contract."

This decision has serious implications for our branch, and for its ability to operate effectively. It also means that hourly paid members of UCU cannot act as representatives.

HB said he would ask HR to reconsider their decision, and take advice from UCU Regional Office. The branch agreed to enter into dispute with the employer if the decision is not reversed.