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National Dispute with Employers – Prepare for action

2011 looks set to be a critical year for the future of the Higher Education sector. The entire fabric of higher education in the UK is under attack from the coalition government's proposed reforms. It is vital that we are at the forefront of attempts to defend the sector from this vicious onslaught.

Whilst making clear our own views on the devastating impact on the quality and scope of higher education provision that these cuts will have and the impact this will have on those who wish to attend university in the future, we must also look after the interest of our own members and protect our jobs, pay and pensions.

On 25 November, the special Higher Education Sector Conference in Manchester agreed that two parallel ballots should be organised in connection with our disputes with the employers: One in relation to the unacceptable response to the national

claim under consideration through the New JNCHES bargaining machinery; the other linked to the employer-driven attack on the USS pension scheme.

The Higher Education Committee met on 10 December and agreed a timetable for balloting and industrial action should the dispute not be resolved. As agreed previously at the HE special sector conference (and in order to facilitate parallel ballots), this will involve serving notice to the employers of our intention to ballot shortly after the meeting of the USS board on 20 January to consider its response to the response to its 'consultation' on the employer pension reform proposals.

The Higher Education Committee has agreed a balloting period of 2nd February to 2nd March should the disputes not be resolved by then.

We urge branches and LAs to arrange meetings for late January and February to explain to members the need for a 'yes' vote in a possible ballot on the national trade union claim and (in pre-1992 Universities) for a 'yes' vote to defend the USS against the employers' attacks.

National speakers can be arranged by contacting Christine Bernabe at cbernabe@ucu.org.uk.

'Prepare for Action' campaigning materials have been prepared and are available from our campaigns team. Please contact Justine Stephens, Head of Campaigns: jstephens@ucu.org.uk.

The Prepare for Action leaflet can also be downloaded directly here: http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/fa/prepare_cutsfightflyer_Dec10.pdf

The Prepare for Action poster can be downloaded here: http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/hl/prepare_cutsfightposter_Dec10.pdf

We urge you to utilise these and distribute them as widely as possible.

Please be assured that we are seeking to resolve this dispute without the necessity for our members to take industrial action. However, we hope you will work with us to secure a strong 'yes' vote should ballots be necessary.

Defending Your Pensions – USS

Industrial action over changes to university pensions is inevitable if the board of the

Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) continue to ignore pension scheme members' views.

Given the failure to consult properly, UCU staged our own national referendum – open to UCU members and non-members alike at the end of 2010.

The results of the referendum released on 14 December showed overwhelming opposition to the employers' plans. Out of 31,000 votes cast 96.3% voted against the employers' proposals.

The USS board will meet on 20 January to discuss how it reacts to its own recent consultation exercise. This sham consultation had a response rate of around 5% of USS members compared to the one in five (21.6%) who voted in UCU's online poll. See:

<http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=5190>

Teachers' Superannuation Scheme (TPS) Dispute

The Union's National Executive Committee voted, at its meeting on 17 December 2010, to also ballot members on the proposed changes being made by the government to the TPS. This is an unprecedented cross-sectoral dispute for UCU, as it encompasses members in pre-1992 HEIs and in Further Education. Both these groups will be balloted at the same time, though in separate ballots, from 22 February to 14 March.

For the letters regarding the dispute sent to all institutions and the government

minister concerned see.

http://www.ucu.org.uk/circ/UCUHE81_att1.pdf and

http://www.ucu.org.uk/circ/UCUHE81_att2.PDF Further information and campaign materials in relation to this ballot will be circulated shortly.

Ballot Timetable

The timetable for industrial ballots for members in HE is therefore as follows:

*HE members will be balloted over protecting jobs and pay from 2 February-2 March.

*HE Pre-92 University members will be balloted over the proposed changes to the USS pension scheme between 2 February – 2 March.

*HE Post-92 University members will be balloted over the proposed changes to the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS) from 22 February - 14 March

'A Future that Works': Joint Trade Union – Student Demonstration, Manchester 29 January

On Saturday 29 January UCU is joining with the TUC and the National Union of Students to host a national demonstration in Manchester, under the slogan, 'A Future that Works'.

The march and rally is also being supported by Unite, UNISON, PCS and the NUT. It will highlight the impact of government cuts on young people.

Manchester has been chosen because the north-west has the highest number of young people claiming job seeker's allowance in the UK and young people will be particularly badly hit by the cutting of education maintenance allowances (EMA), tripling of university tuition fees and the cutting of youth services.

The march will assemble at 10.30am at the Manchester Museum near to the Oxford Road junction with Brunswick Street. The march will then head down Oxford Road, onto Wilmslow Road and turn right onto Platt Lane, arriving at Platts Fields Park for a 1pm rally. Speakers will include Sally Hunt, General Secretary, UCU, Kay Carberry, TUC, Aaron Porter, NUS, Len McCluskey, General Secretary elect of the Unite union, Matt Wrack, General Secretary FBU and Kathy Taylor, Vice President, UCU.

For more details see:

<http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=5185>

The UCU National Executive Committee has also agreed to back a demonstration called on the same day, January 29 in London by a number of anti-cut groups. More details will be issued on this as soon as we have further information.

QAA Review of 'Academic Infrastructure' - comments sought

The QAA's "Academic Infrastructure" contains key guidelines about how academic standards should be set and maintained, and about the quality and enhancement of learning opportunities. Following an evaluation QAA is now

proposing a revision and restructuring of the existing Academic Infrastructure
http://www.qaa.ac.uk/news/consultation/AI/academic_infrastructure_consultation.pdf

QAA proposes that, instead of consisting of the **current four separate elements** the Academic Infrastructure should be restructured as a single Code of Practice for standards, quality and enhancement, incorporating all the elements of the existing Academic Infrastructure, supplemented by some brand new sections (e.g. student support and student representation).

UCU will be responding to the consultation exercise and would welcome comments on the proposed changes. We are particularly keen to hear from members who have responsibility for quality assurance arrangements in their institution. Please can you send in your comments to Rob Copeland, UCU policy officer rcopeland@ucu.org.uk by no later than Friday 18 February.

Public Information about higher education – new consultation launched

The role of public information about higher education is a live issue and was a central concern in the Browne Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance. HEFCE is currently consulting over the development of a Key Information Set (KIS) for each course, which would be published on universities' and colleges' web-sites. While it draws on existing requirements HEFCE is proposing some new pieces of information, including the

cost of tuition fees, an overall total of weekly expected study hours and an average salary in the first year after completing the course.

We would welcome comments on the new KIS proposals:
http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2010/10_31/

Please can you send in any comments to Rob Copeland, policy officer rcopeland@ucu.org.uk by no later than Friday 18 February.

The National Student Survey (NSS) remains one of the most important sources of public information. UCU has recently published a discussion paper entitled 'The impact of student satisfaction surveys on staff in HE and FE institutions':
http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/8/d/ucubrief_studentsatissurveys_oct10.pdf

Student complaints procedures – do they tie in with university disciplinary and capability procedures?

A number of branches have contacted the national office regarding student complaints procedures. UCU is keen that students should have access to an effective complaint procedure, but we have found a number of cases where the procedure is used to short circuit staff disciplinary or capability procedures. Is this an issue at your higher education institution? If so, can you send further details to Rob Copeland, policy officer rcopeland@ucu.org.uk

Student and graduate 'internships' – what is happening at your university?

In recent years there has been a growth in the number of graduates taking up unpaid 'internships' to gain work experience.

Some of these initiatives are being organised by higher education institutions (e.g. the Graduate Internships funded by HEFCE

<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/econsoc/challenge/interns.htm>) and involve

placements with external organisations and professions. A number of national

campaigns have been launched to safeguard the rights of interns – for

example, the TUC's 'Rights for Interns'

<http://www.rightsforinterns.org.uk/>

and Intern Aware

<http://www.internaware.org/>

UCU would like to know whether 'internships' or unpaid student work are being used *internally* within HEIs. For example, are graduate interns being employed in universities in 'learning support' roles and if so are they receiving any appropriate professional training for this? Has the work done by graduate interns been subjected to any form of job evaluation to determine the pay rate? If you have any information about 'internal' internship schemes please can you contact Rob Copeland, policy officer

rcopeland@ucu.org.uk

Mental Health and Hidden Discrimination among HE Staff

The HE department at Head Office, working closely with the Policy team and Equality unit are seeking to develop a better

understanding of the problems of discrimination, victimisation or harassment facing staff with hidden and/or mental disabilities working in the HE sector.

HESA data is available which shows the proportion of staff per HEI with a declared mental health condition. However, this gives us only a partial understanding, particularly where mental health disabilities are not disclosed. We are therefore seeking to collect more detailed data on the equality issues faced by HE staff with hidden and/or mental health disabilities, and the successful outcomes that have been obtained by UCU intervention. If you have comments or information in relation to the problems faced by HE staff with such disabilities, or examples of best practices in the sector, at the branch or institutional level, we would like to hear from you.

Please email (in confidence): Stefano Fella, National Industrial Relations Official, sfella@ucu.org.uk

Staff Governors' seminar – Thursday 14 April, London

The Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (LFHE) is organising a seminar for staff governors serving on HEI governing bodies (such as University Council and the Board of Governors).

UCU has been involved in developing the agenda for the seminar and contributors include Sally Hunt, General Secretary of UCU; Dr Gavin Reid, Elected Council Member, University of Leeds; and Mike Shattock, Visiting Professor at Institute of Education, University of London and author

of Managing Governance in Higher Education will involve.

Details of the seminar, including how to register, are available on the LFHE website:

<http://www.lfhe.ac.uk/governance/events/staffgovernors.html/>

If you are having problems getting your institution to agree to your involvement in the governance seminar or for further details please contact

bbeckles@ucu.org.uk or
rcopeland@ucu.org.uk

Annual Meetings – Specialist Employment Groups

Calling notices will shortly be going out for the annual meetings of the specialist employment groups in HE, to be held at UCU head office, London. Please take note of the following dates:

- Academic Related staff annual meeting, 16 March 2011
- Annual meeting for staff on casual contracts, 11 March 2011
- Annual meeting for UCU members employed by MRC/NIBSC and GE Healthcare (Imanet), 4 March 2011

For more details of annual members meetings see:

<http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2669>

Membership Records

We would like to thank all branches/LAs and Head Office and regional staff who have co-operated in updating our

membership records over the last few months. Your assistance is critical in ensuring the smooth running of our communications, democratic structures and ability to run industrial action ballots.

Any branches/LAs which have not done so already need to send amendments to their membership department contact 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