

Coventry University Group slammed for anti-union dirty tricks



UCU members at Coventry University show their disgust at a packed general meeting.

Almost 10,000 academics from across the UK have now signed UCU's petition, condemning the CU Group for its dirty tricks. Local politicians, alongside dozens of UCU branches are writing to the Vice Chancellor of Coventry University in protest. Hundreds of UCU members have tweeted their outrage to the University's twitter account.

A host of organisations have expressed their support and outrage including Education International, the National Union of Journalists, the Trade Unions Coordinating Group in Parliament as well as UCU branches at Anglia Ruskin, Coventry University, De Montfort, Glasgow Caledonian, Hugh Baird College, Lewisham and Southwark college, Sheffield University, Strathclyde University, South and City College Birmingham, Sunderland University, UCLAN and the University of Wales. We've also had messages from Coventry's Unite Tom Mann branch, Tower Hamlets Labour Party, Momentum Trafford and many more. This campaign will keep on building, across Coventry and the whole of the UK.

UCU has launched a national campaign in support of our members at CU Group and its national officers have pledged to use 'all possible means' to ensure that staff in the CU Group get independent union recognition. The story was covered in the Coventry Observer here: <https://coventryobserver.co.uk/news/coventry-university-warned-over-anti-union-tricks-amid-staff-pay-row/>

What happens now?

Fake union

CU Group's dirty tricks have massively backfired. Any credibility that its Staff Consultative Group had has now disappeared in a puff of smoke with the revelation that it's been registered as a union, in secret, as part of a legal manoeuvre. UCU is investigating the legal status of the SCG and we are considering all possible actions including seeking to have it de-recognised. We are aware that some people are under pressure to participate, which is shameful in itself. Our advice would be not to participate but that if you have no choice about attending, tell us and don't do anything that exposes you but continue to make the case for UCU to be recognised. Continue to do so but make the case that you want UCU to be recognised in line with your statutory rights. CU Group say they're not opposed to a voluntary recognition agreement, let's see the colour of their money.

Meaningful negotiations about meaningful recognition

UCU's view is that the University and the CU Group are using their clever dirty trick to try to persuade us to accept a recognition agreement that limits what we can talk about with them to a level below what you are legally entitled to. That's a shameful and shabby approach. We've made clear we're happy to talk but that we are not interested in any recognition agreement that would give you less than you are legally entitled to. Until this is agreed, our campaign will continue to grow.

Growing campaign

Coventry University has form in attempting to stop staff in its subsidiary companies from having union recognition. It tried it once before and failed and it will fail again. UCU will never tolerate attempts to destroy independent union organisation, which is why the union has launched an escalating campaign. This campaign will look to draw in support from across the region in which the University is such an important player, across the sector in which Coventry is so keen to position itself as a 'modern' and 'entrepreneurial' university and across the nation. We've made a great start and in the coming weeks you will see much more.

What you can do

Keep talking to the union about what's happening in the CU Group, keep checking the campaign page here to see the support that's building:

<https://www.ucu.org.uk/covunishame>

Are there new colleagues at work? Show them this newsletter and ask them to sign the petition of support for recognition:

<https://www.ucu.org.uk/cucoventryrecognition>

Talk to your colleagues about the need to join the union. Now more than ever, you need a strong independent voice at work:

<https://www.ucu.org.uk/join>

Union-busting: Long in the planning... short on foresight

Using Freedom of Information legislation, UCU was able to reveal that CU Group's dirty tricks were considered back in March 2016 under advice from the University's own HR department. Here's the key passage highlighted below:

If the union can show (e.g. from results of a questionnaire or simple poll) that over 50% of those in the bargaining unit would support union recognition, the CAC can order recognition immediately. If they cannot show this level of support, the CAC can require a ballot. A majority of those voting, and at least 40% of those eligible to vote must be in favour for recognition to be granted.

Where recognition is the result of following the statutory recognition process, there is also a statutory de-recognition process but an employer can only apply to de-recognise a union 3 or more years after it has been recognised.

Voluntary Recognition

It is open to employers and unions to voluntarily recognise a union, in which case the above procedures are not required. Where a voluntary arrangement is agreed it is usual to enter into a formal agreement, detailing which employees the union will represent and for what purposes etc. The Agreement may also contain provisions relating to ending the recognition arrangement.

One potential benefit of entering into a voluntary recognition agreement is that no other union could then submit an application for statutory recognition, so, for example, if recognition was implemented for UNISON, this would prevent another, such as Unite or UCU, from progressing through the statutory process.

But did anyone stop to think what the consequences would be? Here is what CU Group staff say:

"This is a despicable act and a new low that I could never have predicted that they would stoop to and is absolutely deliberate."

"I think this is a very underhanded tactic. I am not surprised!"

"People are very angry they will fully support any action the union will take".

Now Coventry University's name is being freely associated with union-busting. Wouldn't it have been easier to negotiate a proper recognition agreement? What are they so afraid of?

Join the University and College Union

If you've supported our petition but you're not yet a member, take the next step and join us today. Our subs are matched to your earnings and you can claim tax relief up to the value of 2/3rds of what you pay. So you get most of what you pay in back! Here's how to join: <http://join.ucu.org.uk>

It's got to be better than joining a fake union set up by your management as a way to stop you having an effective voice.