

Wolverhampton UCU AGM and Branch Meeting

26th April 2023

Present: 25 members

Apologies: KD

AGM:

Ballot to merge branches: Carried with a very large majority with 96% in favour.

Election of officers and committee posts:

Chair: Paul Barrow nominated, seconded. Elected.

Vice-Chair: Edda Nicolson nominated, seconded. Elected.

Secretary: Karin Dannehl nominated, seconded. Elected.

Deputy Secretary: Pending nomination.

Membership Secretary: Edda Nicolson nominated, seconded. Elected. Also to act as communications co-ordinator.

Treasurer: Pete Walton nominated, seconded. Elected.

Equality: Maren Hancock nominated, seconded. Elected.

Anti-casualisation: Pending nomination.

Committee members: Lisa Burbidge-Brown, Matthew Murphy, Metka Potocnik Aidan Byrne (casework co-ordinator), Catherine Lamond, Kieran Bott (PG rep), Sam Pryke and George Gosling (communications), Adrian Priest, Lucy Poole (Academic-related), Ben Andrews, Daisy Black, Phylomena Badsey, Lee Crofts

Health and Safety committee member: Pending nomination.

Local TU council reps: Edda Nicolson, Penny Welch to continue. Metka to join the group.

Branch meeting:

Sam P raised the question of having a communications officer. Edda N explained the thinking behind having one. The chair suggested the inaugural branch committee discusses it and elects a candidate. The Twitter account is thriving; we have Instagram (run by George G), the website and a dedicated UCU wlv.ac.uk email address. A team of colleagues need to look after all these comms for consistency and message design; Edda volunteers to be one as Membership Secretary and one of the three officers with official access to the membership lists. Sam P and George Gosling will also share these jobs.

Industrial action/MAB:

We have formally entered the MAB (20th April) and HR has circulated a questionnaire. UCU wrote to the interim VC protesting their deduction stance and they have refused to back down so far – a letter

was received today claiming that we have no mandate (we do) and that disruption is unacceptable: that's the point of a strike. Colleagues have concerns about the boycott. Members noted the false claims in the VC's letter; that universities have made different decisions on deductions (none; 50%; 100%: UoW is currently in the middle). This feels like an attempt to break the union. UCU has been reasonable so far: maintaining supportive links with students is important and the administration of grades rather than impacting students is the priority. Members should not volunteer information through the link circulated by HR – we only legally have to respond retrospectively when asked. We aren't at that point as yet. The current questionnaire covers April/May: most members won't need to respond to it as yet; the VC says staff will be asked individually – this will create a lot of work for administrators. IT seems that they will not currently make assumptions about participation or not. As always members should refuse to give management advance notice of intention to take industrial action. The irony of 50-100% salary deductions for colleagues with minimal marking could be used for embarrassing publicity. The question of what the marking period is remains unclear; the management form asks for days to be listed. WLA does not currently specify marking periods/times and a blanket deduction does not reflect individual circumstances, and therefore constitutes illegitimate punishment for lawful trades union action. Members also noted that the form overlooks the roles of non-academic staff who have major roles to play in marking and assessment; we should make this clear to the VC. **Catherine L** highlighted the 'partial performance' aspect which management believe is legal, regardless of the proportion of work marking constitutes. Enforcing a reasonable interpretation of the law is going to be extremely difficult, but a media campaign may help. **MP's** view is that only research is entirely independent/original and rooted in individual expectations. Colleagues discussed specific situations – people are exposed at different levels and times.

Edda N summarised the current position. We are working out a response to the VC's latest communication, taking into account members' concerns and UCU advice. A 100% deduction may well result in us advising members to withdraw all labour; 50% deductions could see us contact line managers halfway through each day and leave work. We cannot be compelled to work for free. Neither side wants a mass walkout and we don't think management could administer it. She suggests a form of mark and park, generating a feedback form for students including a general grade; to reiterate that all student support remains available, but grades will not be input until the MAB ends; that in return management formally recognise that marking does not constitute 50% of our time – perhaps 5%, or a non-specific deduction we could accept (the calculations are difficult and vary for everyone). However, if UoW is unwilling to budge, members deducted 50% should lodge an individual grievance and flood HR with cases they can't handle – insisting on procedural and contractual rights is important. However: this might be seen as undermining the national boycott, and management are apparently confident that the boycott will fail in any case. Other members felt that local variations of the boycott were acceptable, would maintain student goodwill and reflect the differing situations colleagues face. Being militantly reasonable makes management vindictiveness much easier to shame in public.

Previous boycotts were painful but brief.

The meeting agreed to mandate the negotiating committee to raise these options without specifying an acceptable number.

A petition for colleagues, students and UoW graduates is being written – a link will be circulated when it's done.

Sam Pryke is attending Congress as our delegate. There is a motion to censure or express no confidence in the General Secretary. **SP** explained the background – the decision to call off the remaining February strike dates as a gesture of goodwill to help negotiations, which proved not to be the case – many members found this to be undemocratic and unacceptable. One motion is to censure Jo Grady for this decision; the other is to express no confidence, which might constitute a resigning matter. Members who expressed a view split between not supporting either motion or to support censure but not no confidence.

AOB: a member raised the issue of new and informal appointment procedures to senior roles, cutting out qualified colleagues. We will return to this concerning development in more detail and raise it with management. Other colleagues added additional examples. **MP** proposed a schedule of MAB support/check-in meetings.