

# Surrey Branch



# Newsletter



## The HE Pay High Jump

We all get used to it. The dripping tap scenario.

It could be the leaky gutter outside your bedroom window. Brambles growing over your garden wall. The mounting bill pile perched on the mantelpiece.

It could be your pay.

Higher education pay, in fact, which has declined in real terms by 21% since 2009.

In general however, perhaps a few percent a year is hardly noticeable, or perhaps only a momentary annoyance when you notice your commuting cost has risen out of line with your pay packet.

Now imagine you had lost that 21% overnight,

or that your pay was a lot more complicated. For some HE staff, on a precarious contract, pay may not be certain. Or manageable. Or enough. UCU needs a mandate in order to pressure UCEA into negotiating nationally on this issue.

The Trade Union Act 2017, designed to frustrate direct action, is not just a hurdle, it is a high jump. Expecting Branches to reach a 50% turn-out threshold although not required for any council or government election, stacks the odds against establishing a strong hand in UCU negotiations.

It is essential that UCU is not paralysed and rendered ineffective. We really do need members to post that ballot paper. We need to keep reaching for that bar—and over it.

# JNCC Meetings...

The Joint Negotiating and Consultative Committee meetings are a platform for directly influencing University policies and procedures in order to make a positive difference for staff and UCU members. The UCU Branch at Surrey puts forward its position, concerns and recommendations on a wide variety of issues, looking to improve the long term welfare of those affected by proposed changes, and acting as the voice of UCU members. The JNCC consists of the University Senior Management Team, HR, and representatives of the three recognised Trade Unions: UCU, Unison and Unite. Here, we report on some important discussions affecting the UCU membership.

## Reporting back on the Autumn JNCC.

### Business Update

The University provided a general update via a presentation. Key messages:

- Many challenges in the sector at present
- Undergraduate applications are down – causing financial pressure
- Positive position in international league tables
- Challenges for Surrey in UK league tables
- Significant increase in student population since 2014,
- NSS falling since 14/15 (70th in NSS scores)
- Staff:Student ratio has stayed consistent or risen above so this has not been the cause for dipping NSS
- Fee reduction could equate to £20m/year
- Pressures on generating surpluses to re-invest are a continual challenge. Need to control costs and maximise revenue.
- Research Park contribution; without this, the University would be running at a loss.

The Research Park enables the University to break-even.

In response, UCU requested a breakdown of staff/cost increase.

### HR Systems Update: Appraisals

The University reported back that 600 staff participated in the online appraisal pilot this year and feedback has been helpful. Not all functionality has been switched on for the appraisal process (for this year the previous process has been replicated on the system).

In response, UCU raised concerns from members about pre-set targets and the fact that the online system does not enable individuals to challenge/disagree. Unite also pointed to technical issues on submission of the appraisal document.

The Head of HR asked that all feedback be submitted directly to the Project Team or to himself.

## *...The Voice of UCU*

### **Staff Survey Results**

The three campus unions asked if the free form comments will be released.

The University responded that the survey itself is confidential and for management use. The University does not want wider circulation of free-form comments. This is its final position. In addition HR noted that there is a need to encourage high engagement and the University does not want to damage the integrity of feedback...

### **Academic Probation Targets**

Within this JNCC, UCU questioned the consistency of research targets and the link to REF (in regard to probationary lecturers). The University stated that targets are set locally, balancing discipline norms. With regard to the REF, anyone who has research in their contract will be submitted, this includes probationary staff. Setting of the targets are about what will drive the individual and University forward, and with the expectation that all staff will be REF ready. For those who have passed through probation, expectations will be higher. HR also noted that there are plans to review probation as a project in 2019.

### **Course Architecture Project (Nous)**

UCU again requested information as to when the NOUS report will be shared.

The University responded this time with the reply that this is a commercially sensitive report but they will review their ability to give a further update.

### **Right to Reply/SurreyNet & NetNews**

Unison noted that the recent HR update about the ballot and pay negotiations was one-sided and they asked for right of reply to all staff. This was refused.

HR stated that they have a duty to communicate to all University staff whereas Unions are responsible for members and have 'every right to communicate to that group'.

**If you have any questions regarding JNCC meetings, would like access to JNCC Minutes, or would like to get involved in any way, please do not hesitate to get in contact with us:**

Colette Maxfield, UCU Branch Administrator: [cmaxfield@ucu.org.uk](mailto:cmaxfield@ucu.org.uk)



## SURREY UCU OPEN LETTER TO VICE-CHANCELLOR RE USS DEVELOPMENTS

We write with concern as to the recent developments regarding the USS pension scheme.

Our Branch is aware that, arising from the JEP report and the decisions of UCU and UUK to endorse JEP's recommendations, USS has stated that it will now undertake a fresh valuation of the USS pension scheme using March 2018 data. We are also aware that this new valuation requires participating employers to be consulted on the assumptions used to value the scheme's liabilities; i.e. Technical Provisions (TPs), and it is from these assumptions that the level of contributions employers and members will pay for pension benefits is determined (the USS draft TPs:

<https://www.ussemployers.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachemnt/2018-technical-provisions-consultation.pdf>)

The JEP estimated that if all its recommendations were implemented, current benefits (minus the match) could be secured for 29.2% - 3.2% higher than the current 26%, but substantially lower than the 36.6% previously proposed by USS itself.

In the new TPs, USS states that it is not persuaded of the case for two of the proposals made by the JEP - the postponement of de-risking in the first 10 years and the smoothing of contributions over two valuation cycles.

However they also say that, even without

implementing these two recommendations, contributions can be as low as 29.7% if they can agree suitable contingency arrangements with the employers. Without such agreement, contributions would be higher at 33.7%.

We are aware that the USS consultation with the employers finishes in mid-February. We wish to take this opportunity, on behalf of our Surrey UCU members, to ensure that this University will be calling for the full implementation of the JEP, including those recommendations that USS is not yet convinced by. This is in the interests of both sides since the more JEP recommendations that are implemented, the lower contributions can potentially be.

To be plain, we are asking for assurance that this University:

- calls for the full implementation of the JEP
- responds positively with a view to securing the lowest contributions possible to discussions around contingency
- supports further work by JEP to make proposals for a methodology for future valuations which would potentially have the support of all sides

We look forward to your response which we formally request to communicate to Surrey UCU Members.

Thank you

Surrey UCU Committee

## Anti-Casualisation: UCU Action

Over the last twenty years, casualisation has become a feature, not a bug in the university sector. UCU now estimates that more than half of UK academic staff are employed on some form of insecure contract. These might include PhD students who teach during their studies, external or 'visiting' lecturers, or the large numbers of academics who depend on short fixed-term or hourly-paid contracts for their living. Fixed-term contracts are now overwhelmingly the norm for early-career academics, who increasingly find themselves facing the prospect of regular upheaval, moving from place to place, year on year, to chase a series of low-paid, short-term posts.

The precarity of so many insecure contracts undermines the viability of careers in the sector, undermines the quality of teaching, and harms student learning. Staff on casual contracts regularly report that their hourly rates do not pay them for the amount of preparation and marking or assessment work they have to do. There is a constant pressure to cut corners because so much of the work is

effectively unpaid. A report by UCU in 2015 found that 40% of university staff on insecure contracts said they earned under £1,000 a month. Almost a fifth (17%) said that they struggled to pay for food and a third (34%) said that they struggled to pay rent or mortgage repayments. A similar amount (36%) said that they struggled to pay household bills like fuel, electricity, water and repairs.

The national employers' body UCEA has refused to agree action to tackle precarious work nationally, and UCU has launched a new survey in order to access up-to-date information on the current picture: <https://yoursay.ucu.org.uk/s3/The-costs-of-casualisation>

If categorizing your contract is confusing (fixed term, zero hours, temporary, part time etc), please choose "other" box and elaborate in the box given. If there are any other sources of confusion or concern not covered by the survey, do not hesitate to get in touch directly so that we can assess as a Branch the picture at a local level: **Contact: cmaxfield@ucu.org.uk**



## Representing individual members: an introduction to casework

**12th February 2019, Carlow St.**

This is a course for reps who are new to representing individual members or those who are considering becoming more involved in the direct representation of individual members. This course is designed as an introduction and you should look to completing the Rep 1: Induction after this course. More experienced reps may find this course useful in order to update their skills and look at current best practice.

This course will enable you to:

understand the UCU legal support scheme and Recourse

- understand the role of the rep
- understand how to communicate effectively with members seeking advice and represent them in meetings with management
- identify sources of support and information for members seeking representation
- understand the importance of using individual cases for collective organisation and describe the circumstances and ways in which this can be done
- develop a collaborative approach with the member and manage their expectations
- maintain confidentiality and conflicts of interest
- assert your own rights and take care of your own well being when handling personal cases
- increase your understanding of procedures and processes related to individual representation
- outline systems for dealing with individual casework in your branch.

**Please get in touch: [cmaxfield@ucu.org.uk](mailto:cmaxfield@ucu.org.uk)**

## Join UCU today!

Join UCU now, it takes only 10 minutes online: <https://www.ucu.org.uk/join>

Alternatively you can ring the Membership Team: 0333 207 0719

Non academic staff at University of Surrey could choose to join our sister union UNISON. Academic-related staff may consider joining UCU or Unite – contact a representative to discuss which is most suitable for you.



Unions are effective through the strength of their membership. Members can contribute in ways that suit their personalities, spare time, skills and capabilities. All queries on this subject will be warmly welcomed: [cmaxfield@ucu.org.uk](mailto:cmaxfield@ucu.org.uk)