

## **Report – Birmingham HE Briefing, 27th September**

A number of UCU branch reps met yesterday (27th Sept.) in Birmingham to discuss the next stage of UCU's current dispute over rates of pay, the gender pay gap and the number of casual contracts in HE. It is one of 4 regional briefings – the only 3 are in Manchester, London and Glasgow

### **Context**

- It is current UCU policy to escalate to an assessment and marking this Autumn. This was approved [at UCU Congress earlier this year \[website\]](#). See [the schedule \(pp. 5-6\) \[PDF\]](#).
- UCU's Higher Education Committee (HEC) is meeting on 14th October 'to carry-out conference wishes in respect of future industrial action'. Our UCU ballot in May still stands
- Unison and Unite will not be joining us in joint industrial action following their recent ballots. They had planned to take action in early October
- Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) have made a final 'draft' offer [\[PDF\]](#), and universities are implementing it this academic year.
- UCU position: [the pay offer is still 1.1%, 4.8% below our claim \[website\]](#). While the gender pay gap and casualisation proposals in UCEA's offer are welcome, they are well short of the 'nationally agreed action for institutions to reduce the proportion of staff in casual and zero hour contracts' as proposed [in UCU's claim \[PDF\]](#).
- 4 questions were sent to branches before the briefing to frame discussion. Please see [the University of Bristol UCU response \[PDF\]](#).

### **The Mood of the Birmingham Briefing**

- In terms of University of Bristol UCU, we presented our position, as determined at our Bristol UCU EGM, 14 September: UCU should rebalot members nationally as regards the current pay dispute.
- The context had changed, a lot has happened over the summer to put it mildly - Brexit and job security; HE reform; the August/September shift in focus away from the pay dispute to members' early term commitments. UCU needs to take another temperature check with its membership.
- While we at Bristol had a decent turnout, the issue of casualisation in HE employment has moved up the agenda, and as branch we were fairly solid compared with our regional brothers and sisters, we could not say in good faith that we had the critical mass of membership support needed for one of the most difficult potential phases in industrial relations in UCU's and Bristol's recent history. We should also note: we now have a membership of over 1,000.
- Bristol also stressed the need for a 'plan'. Why not move HEC forward from the 14th to convey a sense of urgency?
- Our position was, more or less, echoed by Warwick (with more emphasis on the HE Bill). Bath and Leicester reps spoke up for pressing ahead. A successful pay dispute would aid, not hurt all our other campaigns and objectives. Bath reported that Bath membership were keen for further action following consultation.
- Other branches in our South West/West Midland region - Exeter, UWE, Oxford Brookes, Aston, Derby, Staffordshire, Marjon, Nottingham, Wolverhampton - were less positive and echoed many members' concerns here at Bristol about escalation.

## **What Next?**

- By 30th September, UCU will have conducted the last of its consultative regional briefings.
- HEC meets on the 14th and will come to a decisions drawing on points made in consultative regional briefings.
- The options would appear to be HEC *a)* goes with the Autumn assessment boycott, *b)* postpones it until later in the year in an effort to re-enter discussion with the employers or *c)* reballots
- At our EGM, members raised a number of issues they wanted UCU to focus on – one could also mention *workloads* in this context.
- These issues, though, will not simply receive greater attention and impetus because we have stood down from the pay dispute. UCU is lobbying on these issues as is – on indefinative leave to remain for EU staff, on the TEF, on workload agreement – so the question is: what action builds on that lobbying?
- While diverting our resources, redirecting our time and motion across UCU may be necessary to protect jobs and terms, to reduce workloads, to stop the most egregious elements of HE reform, it is not sufficient.