

University and College Union - University of Bradford Local Association (LA)

Annual General Meeting, 8th June 2011

Agenda Item 4

Committee Report 2010/11

1. Introduction

This year local issues seem to have been dwarfed, latterly, by the huge shock to the sector following Browne and the government's decisions over fees. Arguments as to the logic and fairness of the changes are well-rehearsed. There remains, however, a huge 'known-unknown' as to what will actually happen to recruitment in 2012. Clearly these changes are generating a great deal of uncertainty. Coupled with the government's reckless pledge on immigration and the targeting of 'easy' gains in reducing overseas student visas, there are legitimate concerns about the impact on the University of Bradford.

At the national level too, members have been involved in the first national industrial action in 5 years with strikes over pensions and the pay offer. Feeling locally is running high, particularly over pension changes which seem to be motivated more by employers trying to save money rather than any interest in the health of the scheme or in the overall reward package on offer to staff.

The need for a union voice

Clearly there is a lot of short term pressure and there will be a temptation to cut (staff) costs and increase workload in the coming months. One can recognise the pressures, but this does not mean bowing to management pressure to do more and more from existing already stretched resources. Indeed, in an era where the student experience is paramount, to try to make savings by following a 'low-road' strategy of intensification and stagnant pay – or by introducing competition between staff through individual or team-based performance related pay – would be damaging to morale, damaging to the student experience and damaging to the University. We hope that our management do not dally with such short-term, self-defeating strategies. However, it is only by standing together, as a union, making sure that our voice is heard we will ensure that sensible and fair outcomes are achieved.

This year the LA has experimented with a new Blog and a Twitter service to keep members up to date with developments between General Meetings and to take quick polls of the membership. We hope that you have found these useful and welcome feedback at any time.

Union democracy

Your LA Committee is comprised of volunteers who do a tremendous amount of work on your behalf, supporting individuals and working to ensure fair policies and processes, work that is often not directly visible until you need help. They have our thanks and I am sure that they will have yours.

However, as a union and a Local Association we are led by you, the members. Please do let us know your thoughts, ideas and opinions at any time. This is more important as we move into such uncertain times. You can do this in a number of ways:

- Comments on the Blog
- Comments by email
- Discussion at General Meetings
- Acting as a Departmental Representative
- Joining the Local Association Committee

2. Review of 2010/11

The work of the committee can be broadly divided into 2 main areas: personal case work, and negotiations with the University on issues that affect the work and conditions of service of academic and academic related staff. A brief review of these areas of activity from 2010/11 follows:

2.1 Personal Case Work

Personal case work continues to be a major part of the LA's work and it currently has 4 personal case workers that regularly take on cases. In 2010/11 the LA has supported 37 members bringing new personal cases since the last AGM. In addition, 19 members continued to receive support for complex cases opened earlier that remain unresolved. Fixed term contracts continue to feature heavily in case work with 8 new cases requiring support this year. Case workers also dealt with 5 new cases of stress (4 citing workload as being the cause) and 5 members were supported in the grievance procedure.

Due to the large number of cases and the few case workers available, the LA aims to recruit and train several more case workers during the next session for what is rewarding and very worthwhile work. Training is available and volunteers are always welcome! (contact our Personal Cases co-ordinator if interested)

2.2 Redundancy issues

Part of our national dispute with employers over the 2010 claim is their failure to discuss the possibility of national redundancy avoidance principles. The threat of redundancy remains a real one across the sector. The UCU is opposed to all compulsory redundancies, and is prepared to impose its most serious sanctions against institutions that make staff compulsorily redundant and those that fail to enter into full and meaningful negotiations with the Union.

In parallel with the national pressure, locally the LA has, in conjunction with Regional Office, been seeking to establish a local redundancy avoidance process at the University of Bradford. Two meetings have been held with local and regional officials from all the campus unions and senior University management and more are scheduled. In addition, the University of Bradford has hitherto failed to deal with the ending of fixed term contracts in an appropriate way under the law (technically there has been a failure to consult and seek mitigation, where required) despite campus unions repeatedly reminding the University of its obligations. We are hopeful that this summer will see us reach an agreement with the University on both these fronts ensuring that our processes are fair and equitable for all staff and that jobs are protected.

2.3 Local Policy and Single Issues

The LA has also been negotiating with management on a number of policy initiatives. Those that concluded in 2010/11 are:

- **Revised role profiles and promotion.** Last summer, HR established staff focus groups and sought to rewrite the role profiles that cover all grades and which form the basis of the jobs and pay structure at the University. The aim was to make the grading structure and its description more accessible. Regrettably, UCU's view was that the proposed changes had the opposite effect and threatened to lead to jobs being effectively downgraded. After 60 or more hours of lengthy discussion and negotiation a new set of role profiles was finally agreed, which maintains the original job scores but adds clarity of expectations. This was no small task, but a highly important one in that it underpins the whole jobs and promotion

structure of the University. An initial promotion process (entitled 'regrade') has also been agreed, but this is on the proviso that over the summer a new career development policy is agreed (looking at moves from grades 7 to 8 and 8 to 9). This will underpin the expectation, already embedded in the new role profiles that grades 7 and 8 are 'training grades' and should lead, organically, to promotion to the main grade for research, professional and academic staff.

- **Hourly paid contracts** – a new policy has been agreed between the UCU LA, Regional Office and University to ensure fairness in the use of hourly-paid staff, who in many cases are actually working on short fixed-term contracts. This is about to be formally signed-off by the UCU national ratification panel as it sets a precedent in the sector. The policy's aim is to ensure fairness in the terms and conditions of their employment and to ensure that the University discharges its responsibilities towards staff on these contracts, in place of the current often very casual arrangements.

Other issues/activities

- **Researcher's workshop.** The LA held a workshop in October with National Organiser Ronnie Kershaw and Leeds UCU member Chris Pickering. The focus was on employment rights of researchers, organising for success and to share ideas, tactics and practices from across the University and sector. Some of the themes raised in this workshop are being addressed through the discussion around promotion and career development. Others will form part of the LAs work and it is envisaged that more workshops will be held in 2011/12
- **Anti-Bullying workshop.** The LA held an anti-bullying workshop with regional and national support in May. The aim was to consider what constitutes bullying, what members and the LA can do about it and to assess the University's approach. The LA is following this up with calls for a review of the Dignity and Respect policy and plans for more workshops in 2011/12 to tackle what is perceived to be a growing issue at Bradford.
- **Grievance policy.** Last year we reported on the new grievance procedure. Our experience of the new policy leads us to believe that the operation of the actual policy is seriously flawed and we will be holding further discussions with management to ensure that the grievance policy and its related investigations process is properly operated and is robust and fair to all parties.
- **Senior staff recognition.** It may surprise many members, but the University has decided that it does not recognise UCU for negotiating terms and conditions of staff above grade 10, even though our Procedure Agreement indicates to the contrary. Many professors and senior staff probably do not realise this. UCU do not seek to become involved in the setting of pay for individual members, but there are important procedures such as performance review and the new spine points above grade 10 that have been introduced without negotiation with UCU. As pressures on the sector increase, there may be more changes to the terms and conditions of this staff group. We are campaigning for recognition of our members above grade 10 – please continue to let us know your thoughts on this.

Looking ahead

- **Workloads** – the University is proposing to look at workloads in 2011/12. The LA has raised concerns about academic staff workload models on several occasions in the recent past and will continue to push for a fair and equitable allocation and transparent models. In addition, the LA has raised concerns on several occasions about the workload impact of any staff reductions, which is a central health and safety concern. We must remain vigilant during any reviews – please report your concerns (over existing or revised workload allocations and processes) to the LA.
- **Staff terms and conditions in the world of fees.** We expect that in this highly uncertain environment and tight financial situation, University management may be seeking more

'flexibility' from staff. UCU is not against change, but any changes need to be fair, equitable and efficiency-enhancing in a true sense (not work intensification). They also need to be agreed with staff and their representatives, rather than imposed. We will keep you posted on what we learn but please do contact the LA with any queries or concerns.

3. National action and Conclusions and looking ahead

Members from across the HE sector are again facing very challenging times. We face a second ballot on escalating action against the imposed changes to the USS pension scheme and the failure of the employers' representatives to enter any meaningful negotiation on a settlement.

In relation to this, we will be asked to take some difficult decisions over disruptive action from as early as August. In addition, Congress requires the union to ballot for action if a reasonable pay settlement is not tabled by the employers. Their latest best offer was £100 per annum increase. Although times are hard in the sector and for many workers and families, pay in our sector is beginning to fall back and the hard won increases of recent years – which only began to close the previous gap – are quickly being eroded. In both cases, the issue is one of fairness.

It is important that we debate these difficult issues as a union. For this reason we aim to hold a detailed discussion at the AGM so that the LA can best represent your views to Regional and National UCU forums.

4. Volunteer – get involved!

We are all volunteers, undertaking our various roles in addition to our normal duties – and the more there are of us, the stronger we will be and the better we can make the situation for all.

At several points we have highlighted issues that we need you to keep us informed about. We have also indicated ways you can get more involved. Please, do consider how you can help your LA to help us all – and volunteer in any way you can! (If interested in finding out more please contact d.ewen@bradford.ac.uk)

Dave Ewen and Gary Slater, LA Co-Presidents, On behalf of the UCU LA Committee, June 2011