

Birkbeck Pensions Action

UCU members taking action short of a strike (ASOS)



Update: where we are now on pensions?

UCU's two 2 days of strike action in March demonstrated the depth of feeling against the employers' proposals on pensions. It also resulted in some concessions:

- The employers wanted USS members to pay an additional 2% in pension contributions. This has been reduced to 1.15%.
- The CARE scheme proposed for all USS members will not be introduced to those already in the final salary scheme.
- Employers proposed removing members from the final salary scheme if they took a break in employment for 6 months. This has been extended to 30 months.

However, the fact remains that we are now facing a 2 tier system with new entrants getting a significantly inferior scheme. Beyond the need to show solidarity with new entrants, we know that once the majority of USS members are in an inferior scheme, the employers will come back and at-

tack the final salary scheme again.

Another major sticking point in the last round of negotiations was around the issue of redundancies. If a member of staff aged 55 or over is made redundant, the employers currently increase their contribution to the pension scheme so no detriment is suffered by the individual. The employers no longer want to pay this. With increasing job insecurity this is a major concern.

Strong mandate

So over the summer UCU balloted all members about the changes to the USS pension scheme again and again the majority of members voted in favour of action – 77% in favour of taking action short of a strike.

In the meantime this week, we are starting a 'work to contract' as part of action short of a strike. The idea is to refuse to undertake extra duties or work outside of our contracted hours.

UCU's national 'action short of strike' will escalate until the employers agree to negotiate. Currently UCU asks you to:

- Work no more than your contracted hours where your hours are stipulated in your contract. Where no hours are specified, you should not exceed the 48 hours specified in the Working Time Directive.

- Perform no additional voluntary duties, such as out of hours cover, or covering for colleagues (unless such cover is contractually required),
- Undertake no duties in breach of health and safety policies.
- Only set and mark work where you have a contractual obligation to do so. Boycott external examining.
- Attend no meetings where your attendance is voluntary.

ASOS in Birkbeck

An Open Meeting on 12 October discussed what this means for Birkbeck. It

agreed that everyone should meet with their colleagues in their team, course or department to decide what kind of ASOS would work in each area and feed back to UCU.

For example, Academic staff have no specified hours of work; much of what they do is not specified in their contracts and is essentially voluntary, such as participation in meetings. Academic-related (e.g. Library, ITS and administrative) staff have contracts that require them to work no more than 40 hours per week (inclusive of lunch breaks).

3 things you can do to show your support

1 Put a poster up on your door

Available to download from: <http://defenduss.web.ucu.org.uk/>

2 Set up an email auto-response

"PLEASE NOTE: There may be a delay in me dealing with your email

as I am participating in UCU industrial action by "working to contract" to defend my pension. To find out more about this dispute please visit: www.ucu.org.uk/defenduss"

3 Social networks profile picture

Change your Facebook and twitter picture to show your support. Available to download from: <http://defenduss.web.ucu.org.uk/>



WORKING TO CONTRACT DEFENDING USS

Progress on hourly-paid negotiations

Since we last reported to you over the summer, the pace of negotiations has picked up considerably, with a series of fortnightly meetings between College management and Birkbeck UCU that have made progress towards a settlement. Though there remain significant hurdles we are able to report the following developments:

Most staff are in the process of being mapped to national and locally agreed grade structures. The Matching letters are in the process of being sent out by HR, notifying you of where you have been mapped onto the grade in comparison to full time colleagues.

If you have not heard by the end of October, please tell us. You have the right to appeal if you feel that you have not been mapped to the appropriate grade and we encourage you to exercise your right of appeal in this case. Tell us if you would like support for an appeal.

The thorny issue of multipliers (the calculation of how many hours preparation you put in in addition to contact hours) is still under negotiation. Birkbeck UCU and the College have agreed to set up focus group panels with full time and sessional colleagues in each school who will meet to come up with realistic assessments of the time spent on preparation and other related tasks.

It is hoped that this will be done towards the end of October. You may be approached to sit on such a panel. We would strongly recommend that you agree to do this as your input should result in a significant improvement in wages, terms and conditions. Though the panels' conclusions will be non-binding on

both sides they will hopefully form the basis of a settlement of one of the biggest obstacles we have faced thus far.

Since the summer there has been a change in our negotiating team. We have lost the services of James Brown, who has left the college. James has been an unstinting part of the negotiations since they started and we shall greatly miss his negotiating skills. We have been joined by three new colleagues, Simon Berhman, Clem Marques Cardoso and Simon Hewitt.

Significant progress includes a 5% increase in pay for staff paid below £38,21 per hour, which will be paid immediately, whilst negotiations on other elements arising from the assimilation process continue. However there remains much to be achieved and though there are reasons to be hopeful, there are still big problems to be overcome.

We will need to continue to put pressure on the college to honour its commitment to a better future for part time teaching staff. We need you to continue to tell us directly if you notice any deterioration in your contracts, terms and conditions in the interim between now and the final settlement.

If you would like to notify us of changes in conditions, or if you have query or comment on the negotiations, please do not hesitate to contact us directly at: www.bbk.ac.uk/ucu/campaigns/SLHP

Redundancies — who's next?

Colleagues may already have heard that the Business Relations Unit has been closed with most of the staff being made redundant. UCU believes that the justification for the closure of this central service was both weak and disingenuous.

With UCU's intervention, staff were able to leave with more generous payments in line with the VSER scheme but these were not genuine voluntary redundancies. There was little attempt to take into account staff views

during the consultation period and there was no serious offer of redeployment. Staff felt they had no other option but to leave.

UCU are concerned to ensure that what has happened with BRU should not set a precedent. Imaginative thinking and forward planning are vital if Birkbeck is to survive the present adverse HE climate.

Which central service will be attacked next and its functions devolved to schools?

Pensions action

Continued from page 1

We will work closely with UNISON to ensure other colleagues don't end up working additional hours to compensate for the UCU 'work to rule'.

We will also work together with the Students' Union to ensure we have their support. A student briefing for use in lectures will explain what is happening and why this action has been forced upon UCU.

There will also be occasional events — such as a 'reclaim your lunch hour' event with sandwiches, leafleting and meetings with students to draw attention to the issue.

All colleagues are asked to use an automated 'out of office' email replies explaining that we are taking action.

What next?

It is clear that employer negotiators are out of step with

many of individual institutions (regrettably, Birkbeck has yet to make any public comment on the employers' behaviour). The immediate need is to encourage individual heads of institutions to pressure their negotiators to return to the table.

If this initial 'work to contract action' does not result in the employers agreeing to reopen negotiations, then the action will escalate. Next steps could include rolling strikes and/or a boycott of student assessment (which could result in partial deductions of salary).

It is highly likely that we will be joining forces with other public sector and education unions to take a day of strike action on 30th November.

More information can be found on the Birkbeck UCU website www.bbk.ac.uk/ucu/news/ASOS



Education White Paper

'No Confidence' motion for Academic Board

English Higher Education is by all accounts in crisis. As the new term begins, Birkbeck staff and students – like their colleagues nationally – face deep uncertainties about the future quality and autonomy of our university system.

The Coalition's White Paper on Higher Education reinforces the sweeping and unmandated changes to university funding and regulation, chiefly aimed at engineering some kind of market in our sector.

This process has already severely disrupted the life of our College, generating unpredictability around student recruitment and institutional planning, whilst distracting academics from the day-to-day business of teaching and research.

The consequences of imposing such a radical overhaul are already visible in Birkbeck: a stratification of quality and price where Schools charge differentially for the same activities, and where the College is forced to compete for students, space and resources with new, for-profit providers under a market rigged by quotas and controls.

As a College with a proud tradition in research-led teaching, the narrowly instrumental view of 'student satisfaction' championed in the White Paper is especially disturbing. Ideological notions of 'consumer choice' and 'perfect information' trump scholarship and research as markers of educational quality in the White Paper. Interests other than the welfare and autonomy of our universities are driving the Coalition's policy on Higher Education.

The proposed reforms will seriously compromise the quality, range and content of teaching and learning at Birkbeck as elsewhere, subjecting them to the capricious laws of the market, not the principles of critical and independent scholarly inquiry.

In light of all this, UCU and other Birkbeck unions have launched an e-petition in support of a No-Confidence Vote in David Willetts to be tabled at the Academic Board on 16 November.

We want to convey the strength of feeling across the College over these radical reforms. Please add your name to the petition.

You can find this on www.ipetitions.com/petition/birkbeck-no-confidence. More information including links to the White Paper and

the Alternative White Paper and details of a meeting planned for November 10th is on www.bbk.ac.uk/ucu/news/Govt



**REJECT THE WHITE PAPER.
DEFEND UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY.**

Support the **No-Confidence Vote** in Minister for Science and Higher Education David Willetts at **Birkbeck Academic Board**

BY SIGNING THE PETITION BEFORE NOVEMBER 15TH:
www.ipetitions.com/petition/birkbeck-no-confidence/

Supported by Birkbeck UCU, Birkbeck UNISON, Birkbeck Students Union

Health & Safety Update

Anti-Stress & Bullying Week 7-13 November

UCU has announced its first Anti-Stress and Bullying Week in further and higher education in the UK. Aims for the week are to raise members' awareness about stress and bullying; to investigate the scale of the problem in your workplace; and to identify and develop strategies for negotiating to overcome poor employer practice.

At Birkbeck, HR's records of the number of cases of 'work related stress' that have been identified is very small indeed. This may indicate that workplace stress & bullying are not an issue or alternatively that concern about the consequences is leading to under-reporting.

Please let me know if you've been unfortunate enough to be affected by this so that the size & scope of the problem

can be quantified.

Next Safety Committee meeting- 23 November 2011

Please let me know of any concerns you have regarding health & safety which I will bring up at the Safety Committee next meeting.

On-line marking

One issue for the meeting concerns on-line marking, which a recent staff survey

has shown to be a matter of concern. The introduction of on-line marking could be considered to be a significant change in working practices (this is an area of working practice that is covered by legislation).

All correspondence will be treated in the strictest confidence.

Richard Carabine, Birkbeck UCU Health and Safety Officer r.carabine@bbk.ac.uk

AUTUMN GENERAL MEETING

Thursday 24th November 2011

Room 532, Main Building 12.30-2pm

The Autumn General Meeting will be an important opportunity to review the progress of UCU's 'Work to Contract' at Birkbeck and to plan the next steps. Be there.

Come and meet other UCU colleagues, hear our Regional Officer speak on the campaign over pensions and pay and have your say in UCU's strategy for the rest of the year.

Subscription Rates

UCU subscription rates for 2011/12 can be found on www.bbk.ac.uk/ucu/membership/ together with the rates for the previous two years for comparison.

As you will see, the local rate has been maintained the same as in 2010/11 and there has been only a small increase in the national rate.

Please remember that your UCU subscription is an allowable expense against tax so you should include it under 'professional subscriptions' in your tax return.

Please contact either of us with queries on membership and subscriptions.

Trevor Fenner trevor@dcs.bbk.ac.uk (Treasurer)
& Keith Mannock keith@dcs.bbk.ac.uk (Membership)

What is...?

The Joint Staff Committee?

At Birkbeck, relations between UCU and management are governed by a Procedural Agreement which places obligations on both sides. It states that changes to 'customary and contractual' conditions of employment may only be introduced by mutual agreement. Any changes are formally agreed at the Joint Staff Committee, before being presented to Governors for approval, and the JC is also the forum for settling any disagreements. The JC is chaired alternately by the Master and by the unions and each meeting is in two parts, one for all Birkbeck unions together; the other for matters specifically concerning academic and related staffs. You can find out more—and see a copy of the Agreement—on www.bbk.ac.uk/ucu/about/What_we_do. The next meeting of the Joint Committee is on 23 November.

Your local Birkbeck UCU contacts

For contact details of all UCU Committee Members and a full list of Departmental Representatives, see the UCU webpages at: www.bbk.ac.uk/ucu/contact/

UCU officers & Committee:

Joint Presidents - Kate Purcell (academic related), Mike Berlin (academic/sessional staff), John Kelly (academic); **Secretary** - Annette McCone; **Membership** - Keith Mannock; **Treasurer** - Trevor Fenner; **Welfare** - Rebecca Gumbrell-McCormick (VP Academic), Thanos Zartaloudis; **Equality** - Alex Colas; **Pensions** - Nick Pronger (VP Academic Related); **Health & Safety** - Richard Carabine; **Environment** - Kezia Barker; **Committee** - Sophie Hope, Clem Cardoso, Laura Salisbury, Simon Behrman, Dominic Janes, Stephen Parrott, Patricia Costall, Linda Milbourne, Simon Hewitt-Horsman.

UCU Departmental Contacts:

External Relations - Annette McCone; **ITS** - Alan Forth; **Registry** - Simon Eades; **Biological & Chemical Sciences** - Jane Nicklin; **Computer Science** - Keith Mannock; **Economics, Maths & Stats** - Nigel Foster; **English & Humanities** - Jo Winning; **Geography, Environment & Development Studies** - Paul Watt; **History of Art & Screen Media** - Patrizia di Bello; **History, Classics & Archaeology** - Eleni Liarou; **Iberian & Latin American Studies** - Carmen Fracchia; **Law** - Daniel Monk; **Management** - Sean Hamil; **Media & Cultural Studies** - Tim Markham; **Philosophy** - Sam Fremantle; **Politics** - Alejandro Colas; **Stratford** - Garmon Ap Garth.



UCU is the largest trade union and professional association for academics, lecturers, trainers, researchers and academic-related staff working in further and higher education throughout the UK.

Join UCU today: www.ucu.org.uk/join

Birkbeck UCU

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