

University of Leeds University & College Union

USS pensions: What happened?

The UCU pension ballot resulted in 67% accepting the compromise proposal for USS scheme changes. The next steps are a 60 day consultation process - another chance for you to give your views, and we'll be circulating advice and guidance.

The changes involve:

- Ending the Final Salary scheme, replaced by a Career Average scheme for all.
- Ungenerous 'accrual' rate (each year worked adds 1/75th average annual salary to your pension).
- Contributions on earnings over £55K move to a 'Defined Contribution' scheme where benefits depend on the stock market, rather than a known sum to rely on.
- Monthly contributions up to 8% of salary, compared to 7.5%/6.5% now for Final Salary/Career Average members (and the latter also get a small increase in benefits).
- Employers' payments go up to 18% (but down to a low 12% on earnings over £55k).
- If inflation (CPI) goes over 5% this won't be reflected in your pension payments.
- 'Overly prudent' assumptions imposed - these generated the fund's 'deficit'.
- 'De-risking' strategy imposed - sensible investments replaced with low interest government gilts, creating more 'deficit' and a potential downward spiral.

Your branch is aware that many of you are shocked and disappointed at the results of negotiation. The shift in ballot positions from 87%/78% votes for action short of a strike/strike action to 67% accepting very similar proposals needs careful consideration by the union locally and nationally. We understand the issues were complex, and some members were worried that the original employers' proposal might be imposed instead.

At Leeds we have fought hard and pushed to influence the union nationally.



Areas for debate, as we reflect upon the recent action and the outcome, include:

- was it right to suspend the marking boycott at a time when it could have been effective?
- should action not have been escalated to a strike that could have involved all members?
- the effectiveness and timing of the UCU's own counter-proposals;
- strategic decisions taken by elected members at union bodies and congress, and how those decisions were interpreted.

We would conclude that stronger branches are needed to ensure future disputes are member-led. So please get involved - come to meetings and join UCU actions and activities.

School of Healthcare saved

At the end of 2012/13, University Management initiated a review of the School of Healthcare under a false premise. The School was not in deficit, but had a declining surplus. Counselling & Psychotherapy, Health Sciences, Pharmacy and Social Work were all deemed 'at risk'. UCU, alongside a fantastic campaign by healthcare students, ensured the plan was defeated. A resolution was found for all the threatened disciplines. The progress over the

last year coincided with the departure of Michael Arthur and the retirement of the then MHS Faculty Dean. But without the activity of the unions, the university scalpel would have decimated Healthcare at a time when the training of future NHS staff couldn't be more vital. This is the logic of a university driven by metrics rather than education for societal and human need.

Casualisation of the Student Education Service

UCU, together with the other campus unions, has objected to posts in the new Student Education Service being advertised as temporary. We have been assured that existing fixed term contracts will be reviewed and, where people are eligible, they will be converted to permanent contracts. Any members in this position who haven't heard from management yet, please contact the branch.

OneIT – changes on the way

The university has invested a huge amount in the OneIT project. The last IT staff meetings, told us that the next stage includes 'efficiency projects' and 'organisational design', and that the deficit will need to be addressed, though "it isn't the intention of the University to outsource everything". This sounds to your union like there may be some job losses planned, or 'red-circling' where jobs are downgraded. Please encourage IT colleagues to join UCU so we can represent them and fight back if this happens.

Casework

UCU caseworkers offer assistance and support to members with problems at work, including protecting salaries, renewal of fixed term contracts, discrimination, harassment, workload issues and more. Since a lot of cases are private to the individuals concerned you probably won't be aware how much casework goes on - but this branch has dealt with 26 new cases since September, often with

successful outcomes for members. If you'd like to volunteer as a caseworker please contact ucu@leeds.ac.uk - training will be provided. If you need personal assistance, see <http://www.leedsucu.org.uk/assistance>

Anti-casualisation campaigning



UCU is stepping up its campaign against the scandalous casualisation in universities, and wants to recruit and support more casualised staff. Some PG students at Leeds have teaching contracts which look remarkably like zero hours contracts! (see <http://bit.ly/1CqIsR3>). Please get in touch with the branch (see below) if you are in a similar position.

UCU national elections

Elections are open for seats on the UCU National Executive Committee. Please use your vote - we need strong leadership for the future! Read the candidates' statements at <http://bit.ly/1IDixLi>

Senate and Council elections

Please support candidates with union affiliations so that members have a stronger voice on the University's governing bodies.

Not a member? Join now!

In these difficult times, university staff have never needed a union's protection more. It's easy to join at <https://join.ucu.org.uk>

Contact us:

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