

Branches wanted #ReviseAndResubmit, but HEC votes to accept...

Now vote 'No' and continue the fight #RejectUUKdeal

The Higher Education Committee (HEC) has voted to move to immediately ballot members on the UUK proposals to establish an Expert Panel to examine the USS valuation and in doing so end our pensions dispute.

This vote – in which the fulltime officials proposal, backed by the majority faction on the HEC the Independent Board Left (IBL), was voted through by 10 votes to 8 – ignored the overwhelming majority of branch delegates.

Delegates reported their membership wanted further clarification and amendment to the UUK offer.

37 branches had publicly reported a majority for further negotiations to take place before a ballot before the meeting. Not surprisingly the call for a vote at the meeting was ignored.

The decision to ballot members on the current UUK offer is already unravelling with UUK now saying their support for the proposal is 'conditional upon the suspension of industrial action.'

Those who argued that the offer required a 'revise and resubmit', in other words clarification about what it actually committed the employers to, were right to be worried that it could all be meaningless.

They wanted certainty over what was meant by the difference was between 'guaranteed' and defined benefit, how much 'comparable' differs from the status quo and whose 'affordability' for example.

Where do we go from here?

Our action has had a transformative effect on UCU, its membership and the universities we work in.

We now feel our power and have built relationships between ourselves and with our students that never existed before the strike. We have a membership on a scale never seen before and an active participatory membership which is completely new.

Yet we do not have a leadership in our union that reflects this new found confidence. Nor do we have a democracy

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commensurate with the memberships' desires for accountability.

Indeed UCU's view that members would need to be balloted for all-out strike action if they reject the UUK offer is simply hysterical fearmongering.

If members want all out strike action they will be the ones who decide it, not fulltime officials.

We know that fourteen days of strike action, and the threat of another fourteen, has had UUK falling over themselves to find a settlement.

Simply accepting any offer UUK throw at us is to undermine these new strengths in the union. Now the membership have to stamp their authority on the leadership of UCU.

We have to actively campaign for a rejection of the offer in the forthcoming ballot. This means holding meetings to debate and explain what is wrong with the offer.

What UCU leaders are putting forward doesn't go far enough in removing the ambiguity and double meaning in the text of the UUK offer. *As one delegate to Wednesday's meeting suggested, it is full of Trojan horses.*

We want a pension scheme which is stable and will not be cut at every twist and turn of the rigged valuations USS come up with. Members want their pensions equality proofed.

Our members certainly don't benefit from seeing their colleagues getting lower pensions because they face discrimination and casualisation.

Democracy

But we need to go further. We need to hold the leadership to account. Members should sign and circulate the petition opposing the UUK offer (tinyurl.com/USS18) and have their branch pass a resolution calling for a Special Higher Education Sector Conference (SHESC).

The HE Sector Conference is the highest decision making body in HE within UCU. It has the power to overturn the majority of the leadership and re-impose the members will.

Then there is the organising of activists in the union. We cannot leave our union structures to be dominated by those whose own interests come above those of the membership.

UCU London Region have now called a national activists meeting to build a rank and file network which can provide the leadership UCU officials and the majority of the elected lay members refuse to do (details in box).

Finally, we have to organise an alternative to the conservative block in our union, the IBL.

Ever since the union's formation the IBL have been the dominant majority on the union's elected bodies. It is the IBL's influence that has worked with the fulltime bureaucracy to undermine past disputes. They opposed the USS pensions dispute and have sought to undermine it at every step of the way.

At the HEC vote all UCU Left members on the HEC voted against the proposal and to demand further negotiations.

UCU Left is the grouping within UCU which have been the driving force in the development of the USS pensions dispute. It seeks to build a rank and file group within the union on a principled basis. We would urge all activists to join and build UCU Left and help to transform every level of our union.