

Report: Joint Staff Committee Meeting of 17 October – by Andy Kilmister

This was the first JSC meeting of this academic year and Alan Reeve, Bob Langridge, Linet Arthur and I attended as UCU representatives together with four colleagues from Unison. There were a large number of items to consider and, as has happened for the last few meetings, we ran out of time to consider them all. This is largely because of the insistence by the management side that meetings are limited to ninety minutes only. The time limiting of meetings is one of a number of reasons why we have become concerned over the last few years about an apparent management tendency not to take the committee seriously. Of course, this raises questions about how seriously they also take the negotiation and consultation with recognised trade unions to which they are ostensibly committed.

As a result of these concerns, we have spent a lot of time over the last year discussing the constitution and functioning of the JSC. Unison colleagues have taken the lead on this and have put in a lot of work. There still remain some outstanding issues, however. One of these is the extent to which the committee has as part of its remit the terms and conditions of workers at Brookes who are not formally employed by the university. Allowing these issues to be discussed at the committee is important for any consideration of outsourcing or pressure on Brookes to sign up to the Living Wage Campaign. We are continuing to press management on this. Another issue is the extent to which management commits itself to encouraging staff at Brookes to join the appropriate trade union.

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Report: Women's Forum of 24 October – by Antonia Mackay

The first Brookes UCU Women's Forum was held on the 24th of October, where members and non-members identifying as female, were invited to discuss their experiences of working at the university. The informal gathering, included discussion of topics such as the role of Subject Coordinator, the AL policy, the perceived value of female academic voices within the context of senior management and the results of the 2018 staff survey. Attendees were able to voice both personal and general concerns about working conditions, and the Forum drew up a series of goals to be taken forward to UCU Branch Executives. The meeting illuminated the urgency for UCU to commit to the representation of female academics at HEIs, and given the success of the Forum, Brookes UCU are pleased to announce that the Women's Forum will become a regular feature in the Branch calendar. We encourage any members who were unable to attend the meeting and wish to raise either personal or general points about working conditions for women academics, to contact the branch Equalities Officers.

(from page 1) We see such encouragement as an important sign that the role of recognised unions as representing all staff in the institution and not simply being one interest group among others is acknowledged. However, some differences between our view of this and that of the management side remain and again we are continuing to push on this question.

The other big issue which was discussed at the 17th October meeting was the state of the university finances and the aftermath of the voluntary severance scheme. While the university met its overall recruitment targets through clearing in August, there is a continuing downturn in admissions, with a fall of around 300 both between 2016 and 2017 and between 2017 and 2018. The future of the Harcourt Hill site remains in question and we were told that a decision on whether to continue with developing that site or alternatively consolidating provision in Headington would be made by March 2019. While the decision of the university not to enforce compulsory redundancies this summer was obviously welcome, we will have to remain vigilant for the future in case that threat returns.

We also discussed the recruitment of a new HR Director. The trade unions will be involved in one of the informal panels when interviews take place but we were concerned that we were not consulted on the terms of reference given to the recruitment consultants.

Owing to time pressures we could not take up a number of other issues such as electronic submission of assignments, the proposals regarding removing examinations in semester one, and the current management veto on proceeding to stage three of the grievance procedure. These have been referred to a number of other meetings, including one which is planned with Anne-Marie Kilday in her new role as Pro Vice-Chancellor for Staff and Student Experience.

If any members have any issues which they would like us to raise at the JSC then do let us know and we will do our best to raise them effectively.

2018 BALLOT ON INDUSTRIAL ACTION – by Bob Langridge

As you are aware, recently UCU has balloted its membership in higher education over the below inflation pay deal offered to its members by the employers nationally. This decision was not taken lightly but, bearing in mind that this below-inflation pay offer comes after a number of below-inflation pay increases in the past, UCU felt that you should be consulted on the matter. However, we now have to ballot under the terms of the 2016 Trade Union Act in which institutions are required to pass a 50% turnout threshold for any industrial action not to be declared illegal. Brookes, along with all but six other branches, failed to meet this threshold. Consequently, although there was a majority for taking strike action and action short of a strike, any such action has been declared null and void by the failure to meet the 50% threshold.

The results for Oxford Brookes UCU in full are as follows:

Strike Action: For: 66.39%, Against: 33.61%, Turnout: 38.78%

Action Short of Strike: For: 75.63%, Against: 24.37%, Turnout: 38.78%

This result is not unusual for a post-92 institution; indeed, it is better than that in many. However, given the degree of public scrutiny of our participation in union democracy now being much greater, the employers are much more aware of our collective strength or weakness. Your branch officers will continue to represent your interests locally, and refocus efforts on recruitment and organisation around issues affecting staff at Oxford Brookes.



Emergency Open Branch Meeting:

21st November, 12 -2pm in Gibbs 117

We are holding an emergency meeting of the Oxford Brookes UCU Branch to which all members and non-members are invited.

It is vital that as many staff as possible attend, since we will be deciding whether to declare a dispute with the employer on several issues that have been unresolved for some time and are of growing concern in the Branch. These are: workloads and work related stress; grading and progression (eg the use of lecturers to lead modules, and the lack of opportunity for progression to higher grades); and the Associate Lecturer policy linked to precarious and 'zero hours' contracts.

Our Regional Official – Nick Varney – will be the main speaker who will give his perspective on all of the above, and what effective action we might consider taking; and he will also be invited to provide feedback from the union's side on the recent ballot results and implications for the future organisation of trade disputes.



White-Throated Hummingbird

Executive Committee & Faculty Reps 2018-2019

Branch Chair – Alan Reeve
(arreeve@brookes.ac.uk)

Branch Co-Chair – Bob Langridge
(blangride@brookes.ac.uk)

Branch Secretary – Andy Kilmister
(akilmister@brookes.ac.uk)

Treasurer – Stephen Hurt
(shurt@brookes.ac.uk)

Health & Safety – John Lo Breglio
(jlobreglio@ed.ac.uk)

HSS Rep – Alon Lischinsky
(alischinsky@brookes.ac.uk)

HLS Rep – Stewart Thompson
(sthompson@brookes.ac.uk)

Business School Rep – Andy Kilmister
(akilmister@brookes.ac.uk)

TDE Rep – Tim Jones
(tjones@brookes.ac.uk)

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