

UCU AGM Reports – May 2024

Secretary:

It's fair to say that it's been a busy time to start my role as Branch Secretary, having commenced in the role in May 2023!

Last summer, a lot of our time was invested in ensuring frequent communications with Branch members to provide updates on the industrial action, and the marking and assessment boycott. We endeavoured to communicate updates with our local members as soon as we can to keep all abreast of developments, whilst also allowing members to give their say on next steps both locally and nationally through consultative polls on a number of occasions.

The Branch Executive have also been working hard to challenge the responses from the University and senior management in response to the marking and assessment boycott – not only through our 'open letter' questioning the emergency mitigation processes introduced by the University, but also through providing evidence whereby the University has deviated from its normal quality assurance policies and practice.

Following the end of the industrial action, attention immediately turned towards the threat of compulsory redundancies – and our attempts to mitigate these as best as possible by encouraging the University to look at non-pay cost savings and to consider alternative options such as voluntary severance. Hours and hours were spent examining data with regards to University finances, staff-student ratios, recruitment figures, and questionable 'market intelligence' – it was something of a crash course in industrial relations and employment law. However, we feel that the Branch has emerged from this period in a resilient state thanks to all of the work of Branch members across the University, and this has forced the University to adopt a more cautious and measured approach to the ongoing cost-saving exercise by opting for a broader voluntary severance scheme.

Our Branch membership at Brookes has declined slightly over the last 12 months, with a number of members leaving through voluntary severance, and other issues such as cost-of-living pressures cited as main reasons for leaving... although this is the context of significant growth over the last 5 years, and on average we have retained a greater proportion of members than UCU branches across the country. We will continue to push to further expand our membership numbers and density across the Faculties over the coming months – which will be important to achieve given the ongoing financial situation of University.

Looking forward, we'll be pressing the University on the following policy issues:

- 1) Workload planning and research allocations
- 2) Associate Lecturer / anti-casualisation policy
- 3) Financial accountability and cost-saving strategies
- 4) Adherence to terms of Framework Agreement and National Contract

HLS:

It was very pleasing to see a number of colleagues from HLS on the picket line on strike days and supporting the marking and assessment boycott. Our next step now is to recruit more members from HLS to join the UCU, and this will be a key goal as part of the Union-wide recruitment campaign over the coming months – and particularly so given the fragmented nature of HLS across Headington, Marston and Swindon.

I've been involved in casework and representation for Faculty members relating to various matters, including issues relating to workload planning, parking issues for colleagues, hotdesking, occupational health support, contractual arrangements, amongst others.

More recently, I've been advising colleagues in OSNM on the terms of the voluntary severance scheme – HLS had previously been spared from the threat of job losses, but has now been targeted in certain areas in the recent voluntary severance scheme.

Finally, if there are any Faculty-related issues in HLS that I can support with, then please do let me know.