

## **Staff Voice meeting with Hugh Brady and Claire Buchanan, 4 July 2018**

The following four reports are outcomes from UCU's #WearetheUniversity conference held on 11 June. Our sister unions Unison and Unite were also in attendance at the conference and they have added comments specific to the staff they represent. These topics were discussed and debated on the picket lines during the recent industrial action and are seen as key areas where the joint trade unions wish to work with senior management.

We want Bristol University to become a place where staff feel they are heard and listened to and have real input into decisions made; where they have control over their own work and can choose to stop work in order to have a good work/life balance; a place where staff can have open-ended, year-round contracts, contracts which pay fairly for all the work done and which recognises the experience all staff bring through long-service; a university which recognises and celebrates the differences in our staff and one which works tirelessly to remove any barriers in their way.

### **University Governance**

The recent industrial action has highlighted and exacerbated longstanding concerns amongst staff about university governance. This was one of strands of our Bristol UCU branch conference in early June. The central problems are a lack of democratic legitimacy in decision-making compounded by a lack of transparency about the information, especially financial information, that underpins decision-making. We need a more democratic mode of governance that better reflects our values as a university community. Decision-making is currently too centralised. Power needs to move away from the centre, and towards staff. A more devolved approach to governance is needed. This will require both structural and cultural change. If, however, we are to learn the lessons of the dispute, and to move on as a university, such change is essential. It will not be accomplished overnight, but we outline below some concrete steps designed to initiate the process of discussing and achieving better governance at Bristol.

#### Potential Ways Forward

- Review of governance by group of staff and students, including representatives of trade unions and early career academics, to report end of 2018
- The group could consider (along with submissions from staff) the following set of proposals
- Board of Trustees
  - Elected element needs to be restored incorporating provision for gender balance
  - Staff presence should include some designated representation from union officers
  - Greater diversity in lay membership: certain kinds of private sector experience, especially financial services, are currently over-represented
  - Mayoral/City nominee to Board of Trustees: despite presence of various local bodies in make up of Court, this does not necessarily create a strong link between the university and the city within the Board of Trustees
  - Staff and Student representation on the Remuneration Committee – the recent Halpin Review at Bath proposes this, and it would be best practice.
  - Improved communication from Board of Trustees to university community
  - Senate should be strengthened, and better supported to do its essential work
  - An elected chair of Senate
  - A return to Senate determining the order of business, and which items are to be prioritised for discussion
  - Greater transparency in financial data provided to Senate
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Representation for professional services staff. Professional services staff have experienced a wave of restructurings in recent years yet lack any form of representation akin to Senate for academic staff. We note that the Halpin Review of Bath floats the possibility of a Senate-like body for professional services staff.

There is certainly a deeply felt need to address the lack of voice and representation for professional service staff across the University.

### **Staff Mental Health : workload, stress & bullying**

This session was held in response to significant staff feedback, identifying staff mental health as of critical importance to UCU members. This was unsurprising to UCU branch officers who can see mental health issues proliferating in case work across the institution. At the session, there was acknowledgement that the University is discussing mental issues more openly, but concern that resource is focussed too exclusively on provision for students. As the anniversary of the Time to change pledge approaches, it was felt important to ask UoB to redress this balance. In this brief report, the areas of chief concern are outlined, along with practical suggestions from members as to how the situation might be improved.

In seeking to support students, staff

- asked for more guidance (especially for new teachers making the transition from student to staff) about signposting/ available support
- call on UMT to delineate more fully what the corresponding investment in staff support, as the *Time to Change* anniversary approaches, will consist of

Staff were warmly supportive of the forthcoming UCU pilot to address stress and workload as a Health & Safety issue. This is a national initiative which uses health and safety legislation to conduct meaningful workload audits. The pilot will take place in the Law School.

There was strong concern that student expectations around response times and staff availability has become unrealistic, and that seeking to satisfy these expectations is adversely affecting staff mental health. Staff feel that they need the explicit support of the University, at the most senior level, in reestablishing sensible and reasonable parameters. More specifically:

- Request that a comms etiquette is developed, and rolled out to students as part of the induction programme, to make clear what is reasonable in terms of staff time/contact hours/response times
- Request that this is developed internally for staff-to-staff contact too - eg, the development of an out-of-hours email policy/ to calendar meetings responsibly, etc

Another issue that stimulated much conversation was online marking, which many staff feel causes serious detriment to physical and psychological health. It was unclear what health and safety evaluation had been carried out, prior to implementation, to consider such issues, as screen reading, RSI, and the administrative burden.

- Request a health and safety audit to be conducted on the effects of online marking

There was great anger at the degree to which staff space has been eroded on campus. Related to this, much negative feedback is beginning to emerge as New Ways of Working (NWOW) is rolled out.

- Request that some staff social space, comparative to that which has been lost in the Hawthorns, is developed as part of the Campus Heart programme
- To investigate the impact of NWOW; UCU to submit paper to next JCNC

With regard to staff roles, staff questioned how appropriate the work that staff are asked to do at different levels of seniority is, and to

- Request that big admin roles, for example, have good quality accompanying CPD programmes/academic specific training

There was discussion around the extent to which UMT retain a model of a 'typical' academic, and realise that a diverse workforce do not approach their jobs in an identical way:

- Timetabling constraints seen as a particular issue here
- Enthusiastic support for the review of promotion progression criteria that is already underway

The introduction of MyERP has been a source of stress for some of our low paid and vulnerable members. We have feedback that many members haven't seen their pay slip since ERP as they are computer illiterate and their line-manager is too busy to help them. Members are feeling bullied about this in some cases. Further to this is that all reporting of sickness and requests for flexible working are MyERP based - again this is difficult for many staff who do not directly work with IT systems for their job. We are also concerned that retired staff can only receive a physical payslip unless they pay £5.00 per month. We seek:

- A paper-based quick help guide sent to all staff on grade D or below highlighting who they can go to to seek guidance
- Mapping of who hasn't logged onto their UOB account for more than 2 months and then direct targeted support
- The provision of free physical payslips for retired staff who request them

## **Challenging Casualisation**

Casualisation – the employment of staff on short-term, fixed-term and/or precarious contracts – is a major concern and grievance for Bristol UCU members. Increasingly, it is being identified as a major Higher Education Sector cause for concern.

A recent *BBC* online piece, [‘Could you cope with eight different jobs a week?’](#), captured a HE sector in which ‘you've got no security...you've always got to be scouting for work for the next term or academic year’. In a recent UCU survey of staff on insecure contracts over half of the respondents said that they struggled to pay the bills.

At ‘Challenging Casualisation’, a session of the recent Bristol UCU half-day conference #wearetheUniversity (11<sup>th</sup> June), University of Bristol UCU members with experience of casualisation spoke of the difficulties of planning, of professional development, and of maintaining family life, when faced with a series of short-term contracts, constantly reapplying for their job.

The stories shared at ‘Challenging Casualisation’ are familiar ones for Bristol UCU reps. They include teachers and researchers employed on a series of 10-month contracts while performing essentially the same role, underpaid hourly-paid staff treated differently than comparable staff, and staff in non-progressible roles pressured to perform tasks outside their job description for no future reward other than to lose patronage. Session participants also noted how little the much vaunted ‘student experience’ is served by staff on sub-optimum terms and conditions – bad ‘staff experience’. For all parties, be that an overly risk averse employer or a risk-burdened stress employee, with precarious employment comes the degradation of organisational learning, the means to share institutional knowledge as well as incentives for staff to plan and develop their roles and responsibilities in the medium to long term

We believe a University anti-casualisation policy and approach should be a top institutional priority at Bristol. We argue it is to the benefit of the institution to see staff being securely employed as a rule. Our key starting demand is that the University of Bristol formally enter into negotiations with University of Bristol UCU to reach agreement on addressing casualisation at Bristol. Bristol UCU wishes to see a reduction the use of precarious terms of employment and institutional acknowledgment of the unnecessary damage to the ‘staff experience’ of precarious working condition. A public commitment by the University would be welcome.

Bristol UCU's aim is to submit a formal claim. The claim has to be based on an accurate appraisal of the scale of casualisation at Bristol and we look forward to working with the University to establishing what patterns of employment are at the institution.

### *UNISON's position on casualisation within HE*

The higher education sector appears to be increasingly relying on staff employed on casual, short term and precarious contracts. There is a lot of focus, understandably on academic colleagues and the drift towards the casualisation of academia. The tendency for higher education employers to use casual staff has also

grown in professional services staff. Here at Bristol we have developed our own in house agency for employing temporary staff. Whilst we are sure we all appreciate there is sometimes a need for flexibility, when employing staff i.e. for covering unexpected spikes in service use, events and other short term issues, as a Branch we have some concerns that the service means fewer permanent and longer term roles are available and that staff working via TSS have less favourable conditions as well as not having as much recourse to action when dealing with workplace issues such as bullying, contractual disputes etc. There are some concerns we have around potential equality issues with TSS workers - information about this group of workers is hard to come by despite requests to TSS management.

Casual employees have less of a stake within the University, less of a voice and the concept of casual staff erodes at the concept of community, which we would argue, is an important part of what makes up a University. A University is something slightly different - it is diverse, it is about ideas and a feeling of belonging - staff having no stake in that puts at risk these important ideals.

We note a report following some [research from UCL](#) about casual, zero hours contracts and their effect on workers' health and not long after this over 100 staff on casual contracts, at UCL, felt desperate enough to take [strike action](#) - this highlights some of the cognitive dissonance at play here: 'we all recognise the harmful effects of casualisation yet it appears to be increasing'.

We seek a public commitment to:

- reduce the use of temporary or casual staff
- to provide statistics on staff working via TSS
- provide information about the campus trade unions to temporary and casual staff

## **Equalities**

Bristol UCU has recently been focussing on the Gender Pay Gap, culminating in the submission of the Gender Pay Claim and the ongoing negotiations thereof, so this session represented an opportunity to explore "equality" issues with a wider lens, looking at different characteristics and issues, beyond, but also intersecting with gender.

Discussion was focused on the question, "What would a truly equal university look like?" Below are the key ideas and ambitions to come out of the discussion, grouped thematically.

## **Representation**

Quotas and women-only shortlists, to bring significant changes in representation

Collective, shared goals

Minorities at the top

Accessible, inclusive language as norm, at all levels

Diversity will be represented in university materials – diversity image bank

Open university – not just inclusive but also engaged with local communities

## **Fair pay**

Continue gender pay audits and conduct audits too, such as BAME pay audits

HPTs/PGRs paid for hours they work

PGRs get proper training – paid

## **Promotion/progression**

Progressing pathways should reflect diversity of roles in the university

Identify and nurture people for possible promotion.

Review staff stuck at levels

All posts should be progressible

## **Built Environment**

Mobility – an eco transport system to facilitate easy access to different parts of the main precinct and the different sites of the University.

All buildings to be fully accessible, any new buildings should have this as a requirement as soon as planning begins.

Communal spaces for staff

Adequate working spaces – safe and appropriate

### **Student life/access/curriculum**

Empowered students

Tuition fees abolished

Review and actively check course material

Decolonise curriculum - 'diversity' should also apply to course materials and curricular content

More scholarships to increase representation in student body from all sections of society

### **Support services**

Having porters and people to help – NOT NEW WAYS OF WORKING but dedicated people

Centralised mental health service – visibility and specialised

Free childcare on campus for ALL, staff and students

Senior tutor in each school for staff as well as students

### **Culture**

'Digital sunset' (no emails after a certain time/weekends) – how to do so fairly and as a real choice

No hot desking for anyone ever

Visibility of senior management – share our working practices, including hotdesking (if we have to do it.)

Abolish fear – people feel free to speak as they wish

No bullying

Removing hierarchical titles

Collective incentives structures – group awards

Parental leave – more equality

Support for other caring responsibilities

### **Management and Governance**

More accountability from senior management

Abolish the senate: no VC – all senior posts elected

No REF no TEF, no KEEF, no fees

Line management structure review

Democratic procedures introduced into the university – policy, vision, strategy

Voting system on key decision-making

Genuine mechanisms for staff feedback (a staff survey that actually has a use) – JNC can review SS results – micro-level can be involved as well eg research groupings

Staff should be able to assess units, research groupings, etc – anonymously

Anonymous complaints procedures

Equalities SWAT team to check process, procedures, etc – with genuine oversight and power to make policy and intervene (that is, not like current EDI committee) – representative of the university (not just SMT)

There are a number of EDI committees across the University, but it appears there is no coherent structure, and no sense that anyone knows what is going on. Sharing best practice?