

Emergency Resolution: Backing UCU in the Pension Dispute

Proposer: Madeleine Colledge (Postgraduate Education Officer)

Seconder: Jonathan Squire (ENV School Convenor & Chair of the Education Committee)

Union Notes:

1. Universities UK have stated their intention to make significant reform to the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) pension scheme, which UEA academic staff are a part of.
2. These reforms would result in a switch from a Defined Benefit Scheme to a Defined Contribution Scheme which does not guaranteed a final pension that is equal to the amount you have contributed over your period of employment.
3. The University and Colleges Union industrial action ballot over the USS pension scheme closed on 19th January 2018.
4. On January 22nd UCU announced the result of its ballot for industrial action – 88.1% of members nationally voted in favour of strike action.
5. UEA UCU has voted in favour of industrial action, with 68.5% of 596 ballot holders submitting a vote, and 87% of those who voted supporting strike action.
6. Some UCU members are PhD students who work within the University as Associate Tutors. These UCU members are therefore also members of UEA's Students' Union.
7. The proposed changes to the pension scheme will disproportionately affect young academic staff who would be estimated to lose £208,000 from their pension over the lifetime of their academic career under the new scheme.¹
8. In 2014 UEAs Student Union voted in favour of backing UCU industrial action against proposed changes to the USS pension scheme – a strike that was recognised as largely successful.
9. On consulting with the School Convenors from across the university, who have consulted with their course reps, the Education Committee has voted in favour of supporting strike action.

Union Believes:

1. While industrial will cause disruption for students, a workforce that is well paid and remunerated in their retirement is in the interest of students.
2. UCU has repeatedly stood in solidarity with Students Unions, joining students on demonstrations and opposing the rise in tuition fees.
3. That the relationship between academic staff and students in Higher Education is one of partnership and should be mutually supportive.
4. UEA Students Union's support of industrial action will strengthen UCUs negotiation hand, therefore reducing the period of dispute and the length of disruption to students.

¹ <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/opinion/letter-shrinking-pensions>

5. One of the biggest threats to Higher Education and student experience is academic staff leaving the profession due to deterioration in working conditions.
6. Postgraduate members of the Students Union should receive unwavering support from us in their role as students who teach.
7. UEA Students Union recognises that this is representative of a larger culture within business and the public sector. In standing in solidarity with the strike we are not only supporting staff but also students whose future employment, well being, and social security may also be affected by these changes.
8. There is a public sector pensions crisis in this country, caused by complex factors like and ageing population and global economic factors- but it won't get solved by attacking public sector workers who have also faced sustained attacks on their pay, nor will it be solved by pitting "the young" against "the old."

Union Resolves:

1. To support UCU in their call for industrial action, and release a public statement to this effect.
2. To mandate the Student Officer Committee to put forward time and resources to effectively explain the position of staff and the reasons for the strike.
3. To work in partnership with UCU to run 'teach-in' sessions during any period of industrial action, which will involve teaching events on a range of topics or issues, that could bring staff, students and the SU together to discuss ideas or work on projects.
4. To directly support any postgraduate students participating in strike action.
5. To lobby to ensure that during periods of action, the University makes arrangements that ensure maximum communication with students that might be affected, and maintenance of delivery of services for students.
6. To publicise the support services we offer for students affected by the industrial action.