

SHU UCU – Emergency Branch Meeting 5 November 2025 (online)

There were 79 members present at the time of the poll for the motion.

1. Branch Secretary Update

The Negotiating Secretary gave an update:

- At the most recent meeting with University management there was no further movement on the branch demand for no compulsory redundancies. Management refused UCU's offer to call off industrial action if they would pause the current plans for compulsory redundancies until the Spring of 2026.
- Management still say savings of £31 million to be made and aiming for a £5 million surplus.
- Branch is pushing for savings to be made from non-staff pay and querying expenditure in areas such as consultancy, where savings could be made.
- Some progress on AL contracts and the implementation of the 2.5 multiplier being used. Negotiations around zero hour contracts is ongoing. -
- There was a refusal to acknowledge past mistakes made by UEB in the handling of the university's finances. They have accepted mistakes were made but have refused to apologise publicly saying it is a 'diversion.'
- Design Futures: all staff who applied for VSS have had it accepted.
- CRESR: the plan to reduce a G8 post to G7 will not go ahead.

There were wide ranging comments and questions from members, including: greater transparency around the costs of consultancy fees, including the use of external provider/consultants in the delivery of the Hallam Ready scheme which has been introduced to replace the Foundation year courses; the brutal nature of the communication to staff about VSS and restructuring; the importance of challenging the rhetoric of austerity at SHU and its financial position and more broadly the inadequate and disparate way in which staff are communicated with.

2. Strike Update and Information

Information for Members:

- Access to the National strike fund has been confirmed and email with information of how to apply has been sent to members today 5/11/2025. Members can claim from the third day up the 8th day.
- Members, especially ALs and those on casualised contracts, are encouraged to apply from the local branch fund as well. Information about how to apply is on the branch website.
- There are 2 rallies taking place during the dispute period:
The first is on Monday 17th November, starting at 12.30 in Barker's Pool, City Hall. This is a joint rally with the University of Sheffield UCU, who are also on strike.
The second rally is one for our branch with date tbc. We have requested that local MPs attend.

- Extensive strike resources for members on the branch website, including FAQs, slides and leaflets to share with students, a template letter to send to your MP and what to do before, during and after the strike.
- The FAQs have an updated section for Researchers
- Members were asked to encourage their Course Reps to contact the Students' Union with a motion which supports the current industrial action being taken by UCU and to demand that the SU take a more robust stance in support of staff who face further redundancies.
- Picket information: Each strike day there will be a picket, 8-11am, at Collegiate, HoTC and at the Owen Building, City Campus. Please check branch website for further information.

3. Emergency Motion: SHU UCU Motion: In Defence of Laura Murphy and Academic Freedom

The motion was proposed by Ruth Beresford and was seconded by Nick White

A retired member spoke against the motion.

The branch then heard from Laura Murphy about her case and she summarised some of the key risks to SHU and its research staff because of the university's handling of the matter. One of the main points made was that staff in SERI are not covered by defamation insurance.

There were a range of questions and observations from members, including the proposal to instigate a collective grievance against the university by those colleagues in SERI.

This UCU branch notes:

- *Our member – Prof Laura Murphy – was ordered by the University to cease her research on supply chains and forced labour in China for 9 months (February to October 2025)ⁱ, after the university terminated her research team and returned all their grant funding in autumn 2024.*
- *Central to this case is the trading of Laura's academic freedom for access to the Chinese student market (evidenced in the following quote from a university official: 'Attempting to retain the business in China and publication of the research are now untenable bedfellows'ⁱⁱ).*
- *This is not the first time Sheffield Hallam University has interfered with academic free speech – see the case of Palestinian-born academic Shahd Abusalama in 2022ⁱⁱⁱ.*
- *No researchers in the entire Social and Economic Research Institute (SERI) are currently covered by insurance against any 'defamation, libel or slander' claim^{iv}.*

This UCU branch believes:

- *The restrictions on Laura's research represent an egregious interference with her rights to academic free speech (safeguarded under law^v).*
- *The implications for any member of staff engaged in critical research on powerful interests is chilling.*
- *This case demonstrates how the marketisation of Higher Education is incompatible with free academic enquiry.*
- *Many questions regarding Laura's case remain unanswered, including:*
 - *Who within the university leadership team is responsible for the decision to restrict her research?*
 - *What advice did the University attempt to procure from legal specialists, government or the security services?*
 - *How much grant money was returned or turned down due to the termination of Laura's research?*
 - *How are researchers in the Social and Economic Research Institute be able to undertake their work in the absence of insurance?*
- *Any fines the University faces for breaches of the law should not be paid for through further job cuts.*

This UCU branch resolves:

- *To demand greater union and staff representation in governance at Sheffield Hallam University, including but not limited to input into revised policies and protocols regulating research, research ethics and defamation risk.*
- *To campaign for a full public inquiry into these events (including full and unredacted disclosure of all relevant documents).*
- *To campaign for a wider government-led review of the ways in which commercial considerations are eroding academic free speech.*

The meeting voted on the motion:

- For: 73
- Against: 1
- Abstain: 2

The motion was passed.

ⁱ <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/nov/03/uk-university-halted-human-rights-research-after-pressure-from-china>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cq50j5vwny6o>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/university-settles-palestinian-academic-press-leaks-case>, <https://novaramedia.com/2024/11/04/a-palestinian-academic-thought-her-ordeal-with-her-employer-was-over-then-it-reached-out-to-the-jewish-chronicle/>

^{iv} <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cq50j5vwny6o>

^v <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/16>