

UCU SHU Branch Meeting

6 May 2026

There were 137 members present (124 online and 13 in person).

There were no corrections to 15 April and 29 April 2026 draft Branch meeting minutes.

The Chair gave a warm welcome to members, with thanks and congratulations on exceptionally good ballot results.

1. Negotiating Team update

Members of the Negotiating Team gave an update:

- There have been no meaningful negotiations from the Employer.
- The result of the statutory ballot for industrial action is the strongest for a UCU branch of our size, with 88% vote in favour
- This put us in a strong negotiating position and moving forward with strike action providing leverage at negotiations.
- Sustained action may mean loss of pay for members and we are lobbying hard to get extra support from UCU national strike fund, as well as support from local strike fund.
- Negotiators continue to challenge the Employers' rationale for proposed cataclysmic cuts and shredding of members' terms and conditions.
- The Government is preparing an announcement to intervene with TPS (Teachers Pensions Scheme)
- Still waiting on final figures for Voluntary Severance Scheme.
- Now is the time to start building the campaign. Members were encouraged to attend 7 May joint union meeting.
- Meeting to coordinate with other UCU branches is being organised to build solidarity.
- A large public meeting is being organised.

2. Proposed subsidiary company

Branch officers reported on the threat of the employer's proposals to create a subsidiary company.

- This would fragment union membership and erode collective and national bargaining. There are still no legal guarantees or assurances against this and erosion of terms and conditions in the future.
- Negotiators have asked the employer for their plans if no subsidiary company, but have had no response. We could potentially be prepared for situation such as that at Solent UCU branch.
- New provisions against fire and rehire come in January 2027.

3. Research

Branch officers gave an update:

- Unit of Assessment Coordinators (UoACs) have expressed their discontent and anger over the co-opting of research allocations (Significant responsibility for Research SRR / Significant Research Poterntail SRP) by the UEB to define future employment and pensions for academic staff.
- The implementation process had not been thought through, until late in the day and communication has been poor and different across areas. UoACs have felt compromised by the processes that they are being asked to deliver and with insubstantial time to respond to requests that have been last-minute and disorganised.
- Following union intervention, decisions will be delivered on 8 May to all staff who applied / submitted their update, this will allow them to have this information with the VSS decision window. There are a pool of staff who were either: off sick, did not apply, did not realise the implication of their application or not for SRR, did not put in as good an application as they might have had they known the impact of the outcome. UCU will support those staff to challenge these situations alongside research mentors.
- Union is working with team on REF code of practice and how the appeals process will work. There will be UCU representation as well as discipline specific representation in the appeals process. Members urged to send questions and evidence to UCU mailbox.
- In addition we will be preparing a communication to Research England about the impact of decoupling outputs on members and the way in which universities are using that for their benefit - i.e being able to make people redundant through VSS / VR or move them into another company, but still being able to use their outputs for two years. We will also outline the impact of subsidiary companies on research environment / research potential.

4. Strategy for industrial action, strike mandate and dates

The meeting discussed different options for strike dates and action in the context of the scale of the attacks and the strength of the mandate.

There was a range of questions and comments from the floor including: it's now or never!; thank you to the negotiators and the union; questions about the national strike fund; reassurances about any potential agreements coming back to the branch this time; the harder we go in, the shorter the action might need to be; we have to make sure that action works – responsibility for others in HE.

Members were presented with four different options for format of strike action to vote on:

1 Are you in favour of taking strike action asap as follows?

Total	113
5 days / 4 weeks	41
4 days / 4 weeks	22
2 days / 4 weeks	25
1 week continuous	24

2: Are you in favour of targeted strike action over the summer?

Total	113
Yes	71
No	19
abstain	23

3. Are you in favour of striking big at the start of semester 1?

Total	113
Yes	98
No	8
abstain	9

5. Motion: Lack of Confidence in the Board of Governors Independent Review into Academic Freedom

Proposed: Bob Jeffery

Seconded Nick White

Motion: Lack of Confidence in the Board of Governors Independent Review into Academic Freedom

This UCU branch notes:

- *In November 2025 Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) made headlines around the world for its treatment of our member, Prof Laura Murphy.*
- *The release of documents show that restrictions were placed upon Laura's research, while university employees balanced support for her research against recruitment from the Chinese international market, and seemingly responded to directions from the Chinese 'National Security Service'.*
- *SHU only reversed this course of action after intervention by Laura's legal representatives.*
- *The Board of Governors subsequently commissioned an 'Independent Review' into the University's handling of this case, but will not make the Review's Terms of Reference public, nor commit to publishing its findings in full.*

This UCU branch believes:

- *This union has rightly identified the Laura Murphy case as 'chilling' in the way that it strikes at the heart of academic freedom, which was seemingly sacrificed at the altar of commercial considerations.*
- *That the precise framing of any Review is crucial. Due to the weight of evidence that has been released into the public domain, it is clear that Laura Murphy's academic freedom was interfered with, it is clear that commercial considerations weighed on the university's decision-making, it is clear that senior members of staff were involved in that decision-making, and it is clear that the university did not simply run afoul of new legislation not fully understood (the National Security Act 2023), but was breaching laws that have been in existence for decades (Education (No. 2) Act 1986).*
- *Given this context, the lack of a commitment to transparency from the SHU Board of Governors regarding the Independent Review is both lamentable and fundamentally unacceptable.*

This UCU branch resolves:

- *To campaign for a commitment from the SHU Board of Governors to full transparency regarding both the Terms of Reference of the Independent Review and the timely publication of its findings.*
- *In the absence of such transparency, call for a) a vote of no confidence in the Board of Governors and b) undertake a truly independent UCU-led inquiry into these issues.*

The meeting voted on the motion:

- For 99
- Against – 0
- Abstain – 7

The motion was carried.