

UCU SHU Emergency Branch Meeting

4 March 2026

There were 95 members present (74 online / 21 in person).

The minutes from 14 January and 25 February UCU SHU branch meetings were approved.

This was a single issue meeting for the branch on its response to the employers' announcements so far on cuts and changes to pension arrangements.

The Negotiating Secretary clarified the recent communications from the Vice-Chancellor stating that SHU's University Executive Board (UEB) had "been in discussions with the trade unions about pensions." Negotiators have not agreed to any pension changes, and made the union's position and opposition clear in those meetings.

The Branch Secretary gave an update on the employers' threatened cuts and changes to pensions stating that this is an emergency situation with huge budget cuts including £16m from jobs and £8m in changes to pension arrangements.

There are still no final plans on changes to pensions, but we do know that there are a number of options being floated including moving from TPS to another pensions scheme, which would necessitate TUPEing teaching staff to a wholly owned private subsidiary company. This could remove staff from national framework protections.

There are huge unanswered questions about the implications of this for research funding. Proposals to put new staff on a different defined contribution pension scheme would be divisive and would never be acceptable.

The employer has only provided broad figures, and there is a lack of detail. We have looked at figures and can see many areas where cuts saving £90m could be made instead, including in capital spend, equipment spending, one-off costs and the proposed London campus.

We will present this alternative budget to the UEB and push for them to seriously engage with us properly before laying down a final plan.

The Branch Secretary summarised that now is the time to fight back. Even without full details, the committee has decided at this stage that the huge risks and level of threat means that we must go into dispute. We will be having a short eballot of members for strike action imminently, followed by a statutory ballot and effective action to negotiate and fight to protect members' jobs and pensions. The Branch Secretary noted that the new Employment Rights Act now means the mandate for strike action has been extended to 12 months.

The Branch Secretary also noted the magnificent effort that brought in significant donations to the local strike fund during the last dispute – and that we will need to repeat this time.

There followed an impassioned discussion from the floor, including questions and comments covering:

Request for pensions officer from UCU to talk to committee and Branch; subsidiary company would erode hard-fought for terms and conditions and create different tiers in workforce; research staff potentially on different contracts to teaching staff; disaster of taking out of collective bargaining framework; it's not inevitable!; members urged to fight, get involved, consider becoming a rep; a sector wide issue or are SHU hoping to be pioneers?; need to act now; how to take effective action focusing energy to hit modules and maximise impact; public pressure as vital including political pressure on councillors in run up to May elections; idea of meeting with Sheffield City Council re impact of spiral of decline on the local economy; officers to approach to board of governors who approve SHU plans; the scale of the crisis; concerns around impact on research and funding; ideological shift in the business of the university; coming out of national framework agreement would mean losing collective voice; need to recognise we are a strong union that does a huge amount of work and makes an impact; members urged to consider becoming a union rep; conflict of impact on students; acknowledge support we've had from students and support their struggles; sale of SHU real estate; timing strikes for most impact; being prepared for long haul and significant strike action; this is an existential threat; we can take action regardless of time of year; TUPE never ending well for workers; press coverage including Sheffield Tribune and BBC; support for Laura Murphy for speaking out for academic freedom and during ongoing enquiry.

There were requests for the dispute flyer to be emailed to members.

The meeting was informed about the national UCU meeting on post 92 university branches facing pension attacks, online on Monday 9 March. Details will be emailed to members.