

UCU Scottish Retired Members Branch

Branch Secretary's Annual Report 2020

24th November 2020

I became the branch secretary at the 2019 annual meeting in January 2020. This meeting was postponed from November 2019 due to the ongoing industrial action. From April 2020, the branch has continued with its normal cycle of meetings via Zoom.

Meetings:

The branch has maintained a busy schedule throughout 2020, despite the COVID-19 lockdown. All branch meetings moved to ZOOM from April 2020. Arrangements for the UCU Scotland retired members on 24th November have been made using Microsoft Teams as the platform via UCU Scotland. Branch Meetings were held on the following dates 23rd January and 2019 AGM, 19th March, 21st April, 16th July, 25th August, 29th September and upcoming 24th November and 2020 AGM. Some actions arising are summarised below.

UCU Scotland business and congress:

The branch proposed a motion to congress regarding the protection of pensions and to further back up motions passed in 2019. This called upon UCU not to support any future attempts to reduce the benefits of those retired and in receipt of pensions such as USS or TPS. This was passed.

The branch has pursued changing the rules about electing the UCU Scotland president and other officers. Currently this does not involve input from retired members. This is complex and involves options for making rule changes that may have other implications. Discussions with UCU Scotland about how to proceed are ongoing with Alastair Hunter who was co-opted to the committee. A position paper from Alastair Hunter posed the issue initially in 2019. It noted that anomalies in the UCU rules for elections of Scotland President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Secretary and Equalities Officer 'effectively disenfranchises' retired members.

UCU 2020 Congress:

Two motions were submitted.

Firstly, a rule change: In Motion B5 'Rule change: Geographically-elected members of the National Executive Committee Scottish retired members branch' we proposed amending the rules to reflect the situation in Scotland *"In UCU Scotland two of the geographically elected members shall be the President and the Honorary Secretary, elected by all members of UCU Scotland. Should an entitlement to a third member arise, that member shall be elected by members of the Higher Education Sector in Scotland"* also that *"With the exception of UCU Scotland, geographically-elected members will be elected by and from members in the relevant Sector, whose institution is based in that geographical constituency."*

The motion was ruled out by the Congress Business Committee on the grounds that "*Motion B5 would create an internal conflict within the rule book*". This problem is now being pursued with Officials at UCU Scotland as noted above.

Secondly, as a response to our problems in getting motions considered in UCU Congress in 2019, we opted early in 2020 to seek further consideration at the 2020 congress. This would allow the flexibility for retired members to raise legitimate issues relating to their livelihood. The full motion is:

SFC14 Addressing the representation of retired members at Congress Scottish retired members branch Congress notes RMBs are only permitted to submit motions to main Congress. Congress further notes motions from RMBs on pensions, a legitimate concern to retired members, have been rejected because pensions business is reserved to sector conferences. To address the effective disenfranchisement of a category of members in an area of direct concern to them, Congress instructs NEC to consider how this issue might be addressed and include:

- 1. the introduction of a session in Congress where wider pension matters are discussed, recognising that the details of the two schemes remain the preserve of the relevant sector conference.*
- 2. the addition to the CBC guidelines of a sentence to the effect that where an RMB submits a motion to Congress which is deemed by CBC to be sectoral but which is of clear and legitimate concern to retired members, said motion may be added to the appropriate sectoral business.*

This motion has yet to be considered.

Congress was scheduled to take place as an 'on-line interim Congress meeting' on 28-30 October 2020 with me as branch delegate. It was cancelled on the day citing IT problems with the 'bespoke' system than UCU had commissioned. No further details were given. There has been no communication since about the reasons or alternative arrangements for congress.

Pensions monitoring:

The branch has maintained a careful watching brief on developments regarding pensions. This is one of our most important functions. Committee member, Philip Burgess is on the EC of the National Pensions Convention and maintains a close watch on national issues across the UK. USS has been a major concern for many, and we are also monitoring developments closely. I have maintained a watch on possible pension reforms and the USS status and their ongoing consultation with UUK.

In the UK parliament, the 'Pensions Bill 2020' has progressed almost to its final stages and passed its third reading in the commons on 16th November 2020. It started in the Lords in January and only entered the Commons on 16th July 2020. There are several amendments currently in play before it gains Royal Assent soon. It will open the door for a third type of pension arrangement called 'Collective Defined Contribution (CDC) Schemes'. This means no apparent change for current

pensioners on USS or TPS, but could hold out many major changes in the future and impact how USS might be reformed or relaunched.

Communications:

The Membership secretary, Brian Martin, has been very active in developing our recruitment, communications, and www site. Our plan is to raise our profile and seek ways to recruit new members from those coming near to retirement. Brian Martin has set up designated branch email sites for officers and general communications to avoid overlap with our personal emails. A recruitment letter surface mail shot to all members has been sent. I have been in communication with other UCU branches in Scotland and other retired branches across the UK.

The future:

The upcoming Scottish Parliament elections are in 2021. UCU has been working on a 'HE Manifesto' since the summer and the branch has provided some input. This is an ongoing process and the theme of our AGM this year is discussion of the future of HE in Scotland.

The change in *modus operandi* of universities about automated and online teaching is a growing concern. To this end, we have contributed to the debate through a response coordinated by our membership secretary, Brian Martin, 'Response to the UCU Scotland paper, The Automatic University, June 2020 for UCUS Education Committee and Executive'. There have been extensive inroads made by 'automated' online teaching in the COVID-19 crisis and these are likely to persist well beyond. The experience and thoughts of retired members adds valuable insights and context into the various developments in teaching – good and bad over the years.

Acknowledgements:

Terry Brotherstone has led the committee ably all year and coordinated the issues to be addressed. All the committee have been active in our endeavours and I am grateful for their efforts. These have been challenging times, yet we have risen to meet them and adapted to the new environment.

Mike Larkin Branch Secretary