

SUCU Annual Report 2025

President's Report

Robyn Orfitelli

2024-25 has been my third and final year in the role of Branch President for Sheffield UCU and as chair of the staffside trade unions, and so writing this report has felt particularly impactful. I looked back at previous AGM reports from my three predecessors, and was struck by on the one hand a sobering litany of challenges thrown at the staff of this university by management, and on the other, the nearly bottomless depths of this branch to rise to resist those challenges. We've had clear collective victories, like pushing back and stopping the university's attempt to fire-and-rehire all staff, and getting a new sector-leading GTA contract implemented; we've had bittersweet partial victories, like fighting against the closure of the Archaeology department, in which we successfully stopped the threats to staff jobs but couldn't stop the closure of the department; and we have had moments of defeat, like being unable to stop the implementation of the New Schools project. And we have had hundreds of pieces of individual and collective member casework, and dozens of discussions on how our branch democracy should work, what industrial action strategy is best at a given moment, how to recruit, how to work with the other unions, and how to replicate our victories and learn from our mistakes.

We won't win every single challenge we take on, but the thing that matters is that we are taking these challenges on. We organise together because we believe that workers have rights that shouldn't be eroded, and in fact that we should improve our conditions, both for the next generation of higher education workers, but also, just for ourselves, right now.

The challenge facing us this year is one of the most fundamental and frightening ones that workers can face: formal structural change and threats to jobs. On top of the New Schools project, which was already likely to lead to major restructuring, the Vice Chancellor and UEB announced their goal to reduce the yearly staff budget by £23 million pounds. This dramatically changed their previous claims that New Schools was about the student experience, reducing workload, and standardising our practice to be what we always worried it would become: a cost cutting exercise.

Even in isolation, a single restructure is inherently disruptive and stressful, and full of uncertainty not just for the staff in scope, but for all work areas that interact with them. Employers should use these processes judiciously, and with full appreciation of the disruption they cause, and time should be permitted to allow the new structure to 'breathe', and to review whether the change actually achieved the goals it was meant to.

I think this branch knows that this is not the approach that our current university leadership has taken. Since the Vice-Chancellor arrived at the University of Sheffield, he has overseen dozens of restructures, which is already an abnormally high amount of formal change, which has seen hundreds of staff in scope, some as many as 3 or 4 times over the course of 7 years. That pales in comparison to this year. In this academic year alone, ~12% of staff are or have been in scope for a restructure.

This is not normal, it is not healthy, and it is not necessary – and we cannot allow university leadership to portray it as if it is. The Vice Chancellor and UEB are making decisions that make it harder for us to do our jobs well, and they are not holding themselves accountable for the negative outcomes of those decisions, or for the well being of staff and students.

So once again we are organising together, this time to fight against these threats to the jobs of our colleagues, friends, and in some cases, family. We are in dispute trying to hold university leadership to account for the

decisions they are making which hurt us, our students, and this university. In the Autumn, we came together and over 10% of staff at this university voted that they have no confidence in our VC and UEB. Just last month, the students of this university also voted in a referendum of no confidence, and to support any strike action taken by the staffside trade unions in defense of jobs.

Whatever practical decisions we make in terms of how to take the dispute forward as a branch, we have to make them together. And we won't all agree with any given decision – that's a guarantee. But we have to hold ourselves accountable in a way that management don't, to have the discussions, to listen to each other even -- especially -- when we disagree, and to act collectively and to support each other.

I want to end by saying as I did last year how grateful I am to be part of this branch. This work is so difficult. It might be the most difficult thing we do in our careers. But being part of a union is the most valuable thing we can do in a workplace, and it is the best thing we can do for ourselves.

Treasurer's Report

Louise Ritchie

Last financial year the branch benefited enormously from the support of a permanent branch administrator. This support has been invaluable given I was new to the Treasurer role and this necessitated quite a bit of learning on my part (so thank you Rosie). I am pleased to report that the branch finances continue to be healthy.

Our income comes from the 'local' element of your monthly subscription, graduated according to income (see section 1 below).

The accounts below (in section 3) are for the full year from September 2023 to August 2024, audited by UCU head office, and for the three months from September to November 2024 (interim accounts). There have been no income or expenditure out of the Hardship Fund or the Salary Sharing Scheme over the last 12 months, so these remain in the same position as at last year's AGM (Salary Sharing Scheme - £0.01; Hardship Fund - £7179.33)

Our branch funds have stabilised in 2023/24, standing at £106,414 (a very small increase of £13 on 2022/23). This sees us sustain a more normal operating budget and overall we are operating on a sound financial footing. Our main expenditure is for our Branch Administrator.

We are required to keep minimum reserves sufficient for one year's routine expenditure, which includes the salary plus on-costs for our administrator. This comes to roughly £50k, which means our 'free' reserves are less than our balance, and in a 'normal' year this would be comfortable. Given we are about to embark in industrial action I would stress the warning made by the two previous Treasurers. Our current local funds could not sustain actual strike pay, just hardship payments for a relatively small number of participating members and would not sustain payments to support protracted industrial action. The current hardship fund stands at just over £7000.

In preparation for industrial action, I would recommend that the branch transfer some surplus funds from our operating accounts to the hardship fund. My recommendation is that this total £25,000, which is 21.75% of our reserves, and would leave us with still significant headroom above our minimum required reserves.

I had hoped to continue in this role for several years, but unfortunately due to a change in my personal circumstances this is no longer possible and I will be standing down at the AGM. Thank you to everyone who has supported me in the role and on the committee this year.

Reports

Below are:

1. UCU national and local subs rates from September 2024. The 2025 subs will be announced after Congress.
2. Donations and subscriptions since the last AGM (April 2024 to March 2025)
3. Financial Reports
 - a. The audited accounts for the last UCU financial year, to 31 August 2024, approved by UCU head office.
 - b. An interim financial statement for the first three months of 2024/25 (September to November)

If you have queries or comments or would like to see the accounts do contact me via the SUCU office or at l.e.ritchie@sheffield.ac.uk.

1. UCU subscription rates 2024/25

The tables below set out the national subscription rates which have applied since September 2024.

The local subs change at the same rate as the national subs, as agreed at our 2013 AGM.

Subscription rates from Sept 2024			
	Monthly national subscriptions		SUCU local
	including political fund	excluding political fund	subscriptions
£60,000 & above	£30.48	£30.17	£4.06
£40,000-£59,999	£26.32	£26.05	£3.86
£30,000-39,999	£22.60	£22.36	£2.76
£22,000-29,999	£17.50	£17.32	£2.28
£15,000-21,999	£10.48	£10.38	£2.24
£5,000-14,999	£4.54	£4.50	NIL
Below £5,000	£1.00	£0.99	NIL
Retired/attached members	£3.08	£3.03	NIL

2. Donations and subscriptions April 2024 to March 2025

Affiliations and Subscriptions

28/01/25	Sheffield Trades Union Council	£499
28/01/25	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament	£25
28/01/25	Labour Research Department	£329.50
12/02/25	Campaigning Against Climate Change	£25
12/02/25	National Shop Stewards Network	£50
12/02/25	Justice for Colombia	£120
03/02/25	Cuba Solidarity Campaign	£40

28/01/25	BRICUP	£100
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Note: We will be subscribing to Hazards Magazine once we have received the paperwork.

Donations

22/04/24	Shut Off the Lights	£100
21/06/24	Goldsmiths UCU	£500
28/06/24	Sheffield Transformed	£150
04/10/24	UCU ETC	£200
08/10/24	Equation Nottingham	£50
25/11/24	BRICUP	£200
12/12/24	Unite UCU	£500
20/02/25	Nablu Palfest	£200
20/02/25	Bens Centre	£200
21/03/25	Goldsmiths UCU	£100
24/03/2025	SYMAAG	£200

3. Financial reports

The accounts for the UCU financial year ending 31 August 2024 follow, together with the interim accounts for the current financial year, September 2024 to November 2024.

- These accounts were prepared by the branch accounting service. We receive quarterly summary accounts as well as the full end of year accounts.
- The accounts for 2023-24 have been signed off by UCU head office.

3.a.1. Income & Expenditure Account 2023-24

September 2023 – August 2024

Income		<i>Totals</i>
Subscription Income	65,962	
Donations received	3,325	
Charges on Income		
Subscriptions Payable to Head Office	10,955	
Subscription Collection Charges	293	
Total Effective Income:		58,039
Expenditure		
Travel	472	
Telephone	120	
Printing & Stationery	10	
Catering	458	
Donations	2,755	

Subscriptions/Affiliations	590	
Miscellaneous	661	
Repairs & Renewals	601	
Clerical Assistance	25,802	
Pension	3,832	
Hardship Support	21,595	
Admin/Ins Cost	156	
Accountancy Fees	1,000	
Legal Fees	0	
Total Expenditure:		58,026
Net Income/(Expenditure):		13

3.a.2. Balance Sheet 2023-24

September 2023 – August 2024

		<i>Totals</i>
Fixed Assets	0	0
Current Assets		
Bank	99,935	
Bank – Hardship Fund	7,179	
Bank - Salary Sharing	0	
Cash	0	
Prepayment Card	0	
Current Liabilities		
Creditors and accrued income	1160	
		1160
Total Assets less Current Liabilities:		12
Accumulated Funds		
B/fwd	106,401	
Surplus/(Deficit) for the year	13	
		106,414

3.b.1. Interim Income & Expenditure Account 2024-25

Year to date September 2024 – November 2025

Income		<i>Totals</i>
Subscription Income	16,668	

Donations Received	0	
Charges on Income		
Subscriptions Payable to Head Office	2,450	
Subscription Collection Charges	66	
Total Effective Income:		14,152
Expenditure		
Travel	0	
Telephone	30	
Printing & Stationery	0	
Catering	11	
Donations	450	
Subscriptions/Affiliations	0	
Miscellaneous	9	
Repairs & Renewals	44	
Clerical Assistance	7,631	
Pension	1,008	
Hardship Support	0	
Admin/Ins Cost	36	
Accountancy Fees	250	
Legal Fees	0	
Total Expenditure:		9,469
Net Income/(Expenditure):		4,683

3.b.2. Interim Balance Sheet 2024-25

Year to date September 2024 – November 2024

		<i>Totals</i>
Fixed Assets	0	0
Current Assets		
Bank	104,608	
Bank – Hardship Fund	7,179	
Bank - Salary Sharing	0	
Cash	0	
Prepayment Card	375	
Prepayments	0	
		112,163
Current Liabilities		
Creditors and accrued income	1,066	

		1,066
Total Assets less Current Liabilities:		111,097
Accumulated Funds		
B/fwd	106,414	
Surplus/(Deficit) for the year	4,683	
		111,097

Membership Report

James Cranch

I am reaching the end of a four-year stint as membership secretary.

In that time I have supported the branch through eleven live ballots and two consultative ballots over eight separate balloting periods:

- July-August 2021, a successful consultative local ballot (on our dispute over Archaeology);
- October-November 2021: two successful disaggregated national ballots (on USS, and on pay and conditions), and, nearly simultaneously, a successful local ballot (on Archaeology);
- March-April 2022: two successful disaggregated national ballots (on USS, and on pay and conditions);
- September-October 2022: two successful aggregated national ballots (on USS, and on pay and conditions);
- February-March 2023: two successful aggregated national ballots (on USS, and on pay and conditions);
- September-November 2023: an unsuccessful aggregated national ballot (on pay and conditions);
- January-February 2025: a successful consultative local ballot (on our dispute over the University's response to the financial crisis);
- February-March 2025: a successful local ballot (on our dispute over the University's response to the financial crisis).

The industrial action conducted over this time has been unprecedentedly intensive; so too has the administrative support required to enable it. However, no matter how much it has, at times, seemed like it, it would be a mistake to remember my time in the post as just one ballot after another.

I have supported our network of departmental contacts. This year has seen unprecedented changes in that network, and I have inducted 25 new contacts (so far!). Part of this is a coordinated response to the dozen or so contacts who have left the university over the course of the VSS period, taking with them an incalculable wealth of experience. But part of it also has been a spontaneous display of resilience by the branch, with workplace after workplace deciding to bolster themselves against the ravages of management.

I have developed new ways of handling the very sensitive personal data which the membership has entrusted to us for purposes which are sometimes very complex, and been active in chasing UCU's national office for support in doing so.

Over the course of my time in the role, the branch has gone from one adept and committed branch administrator (Jane Rodger) to another (Rosie Strathearn-Brady). I performed administrative support and helped maintain a sense of continuity and stability in the interim.

Perhaps the best thing I've done is taken the opportunity to get to know a lot of members: particularly, of course, my fellow committee members, my fellow caseworkers and my fellow departmental contacts, but I have corresponded with a large number of our members at large, through good times and bad. I trust I'll continue to see many of them around the place.

It was great news to learn that Trevor was interested in succeeding me, particularly as I'm sure he'll do a wonderful job. I intend to help make it easy for him to do so: I will spend the remainder of my time in office writing down some of the things I've learned and continuing to try to evolve good systems for keeping track of our thousands of members spread over dozens of buildings.

Personal Casework Report

Oli Johnson

This report provides a summary of branch casework activity over the 2024-25 academic year. Casework continues to be a busy and high impact area of branch business and we have seen a significant spike in the numbers of members approaching the branch for support in recent months driven by a combination of factors including (but not limited to) vacancy management and the associated collapse of the redeployment process, increasingly aggressive tactics in relation to performance management, escalating and unrealistic workload expectations and the prevalence of restructures.

Casework overview

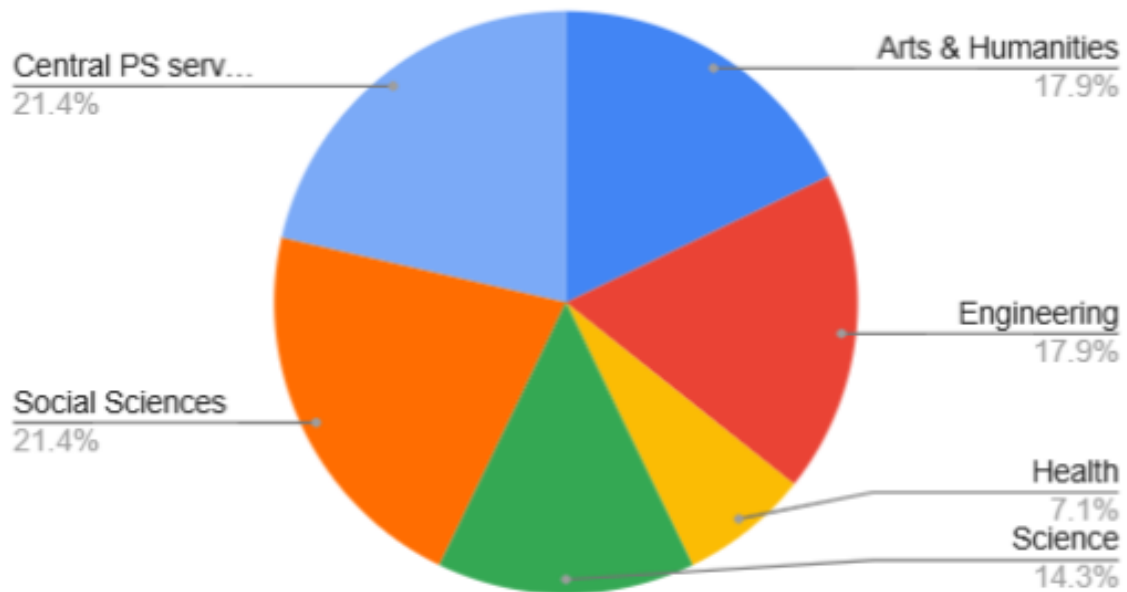
In total we have had 65 new requests for support in the period 1 August 2024-14 April 2025. To provide a year-on-year comparison:

- 1 Jan 2025-14 April 2025: 13 new cases
- 1 Jan 2024-14 April 2024: 34 new cases

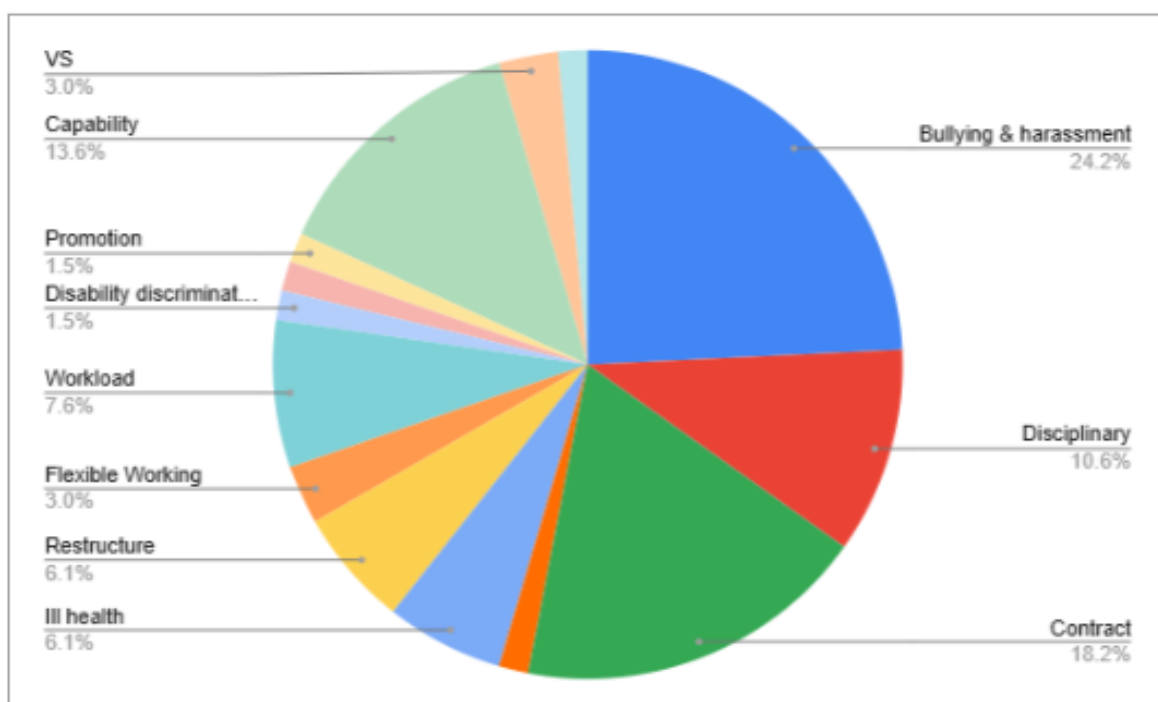
A breakdown of new cases over the period 1 August 2024-14 April 2025 is as follows:

Casework by Faculty area (1 August 2024-14 April 25)

Faculty



Casework by type (1 August 2024-14 April 25)



Casework structure

Cases requiring ongoing casework support are picked up by our excellent team of 25 caseworkers. The casework team includes a number of newer caseworkers, who undertake a period of shadowing before taking on lead roles.

Cases requiring a TU representative for a one-off meeting. More recently, a wider team of Meeting Support Reps has also been established in order to support the increasing demand for representation at meetings, where members may require more immediate assistance rather than a longer-term caseworker relationship.

Cases requiring advice only are dealt with by Rosie, the branch administrator, Oli, the casework secretary, and Trevor, the casework deputy.

Cases requiring less urgent advice are invited to attend a casework surgery, which is a chance to talk to a small team of caseworkers and to identify possible next steps, including escalating to ongoing casework support. Surgeries are held roughly every six weeks, however we have held two additional surgeries this year to help manage the increased demand.

Casework has, with the permission of members, fed into collective negotiations around workload, casualisation and the development of University processes including the disciplinary procedure and the grievance procedure.

I would like to offer an enormous thank you to everyone who has been involved in casework this academic year including our amazing team of caseworkers, and Rosie and Trevor for the enormous efforts and care they have put into this important and high impact area of Union work.

We are urgently in need of new caseworkers to join our team. Please contact o.johnson@sheffield.ac.uk if you would like a chat about what is involved.