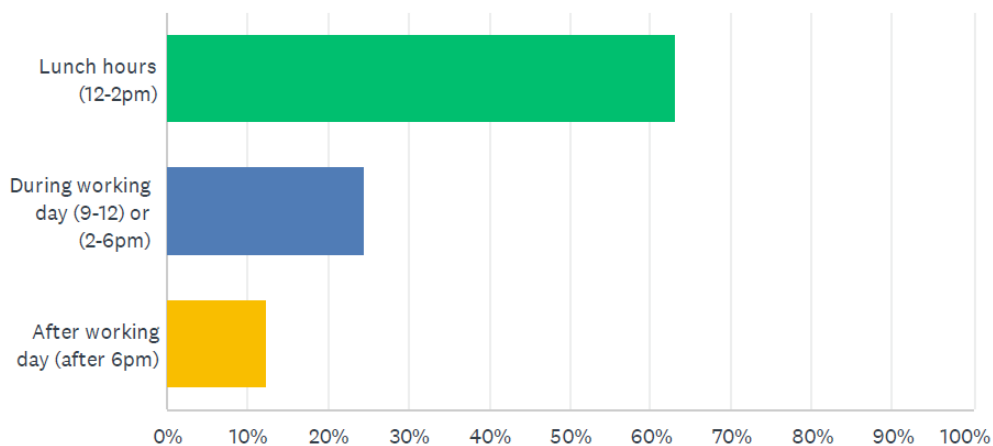


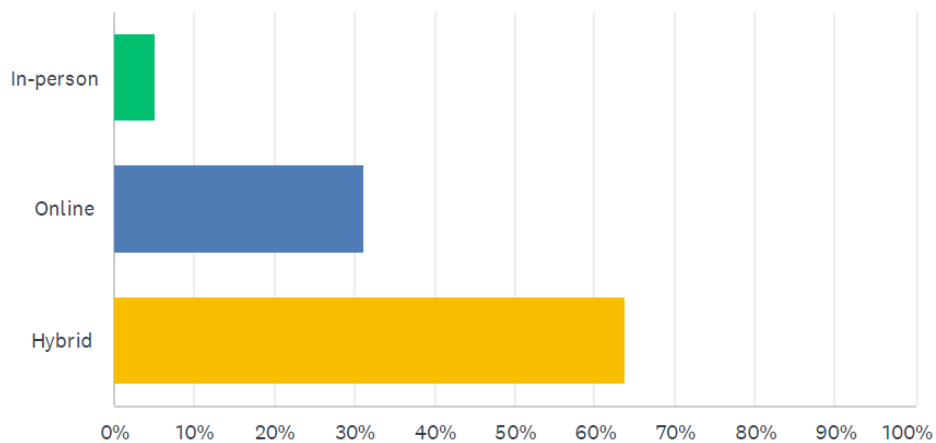
Results of Southampton UCU member survey, November-December 2024

The branch asked members' views in an online survey in November and December 2024. The aim of the survey was to identify members' general priorities and concerns, but also ways of increasing engagement and recruitment. Thank you to the 57 members who took the time to respond and to share generously and candidly their views on what Southampton UCU might do better or differently.

1. What would be the best time for UCU meetings? [56 responses]



2. What would be the best format for UCU meetings? [57 responses]



3. What are your main concerns or issues at work currently? [57 responses]

Workload / high administrative load / stress	23
Job security, HE funding, over-reliance on overseas UG and PG students	7
Lack of resources (space, labs etc) due to growth	6
Bullying / poor line-management	5
Academic governance (transparency and democracy in decision making)	5
Bureaucratic processes / incompetent systems	4
Equality (particularly in relation to disabilities and differences)	4
Promotion/advancement	3
Casualisation	3
Pay	3
Integrity of our degrees (in relation to admissions of international students; and handling of AI); lack of management respect for our work.	2

Heavy workload is still by far the main concern of our members. Some related issues such as the burdensome bureaucratic processes and lack of resources are also mentioned frequently. Members often link these to University's strategy for growth. The other three of UCU Four Fights (casualisation, pay, equality) are mentioned, but less prominently.

The second main concern is the national picture in the sector and the job security. A few members have expressed concerns about the integrity of our degrees in the context of reliance on international students.

Worryingly, bullying and poor line management seem to be still frequent issues, which matches to the branch's experience through casework. Members also note the lack of transparency and democracy in University decision-making.

The branch's response:

We have been consulted on the Workload Principles Project and will hold the University accountable for their implementation. It is a first step towards improvement, and we will continue to remind the University that the workload problem can't be resolved by spreading workload but only by reducing it through the hiring of more staff or less growth.

The University doesn't seem to be in a financial position that will necessitate cuts for now, but the branch is preparing for this possibility by training reps to respond to redundancies. We also ask members to support the national 'Stop the Cuts' campaign. We have contributed to the strike fund of a number of universities on strike over compulsory redundancies. We note that some members would like to have more information on national campaigns and elections, which we will do through weekly emails and in meetings (members should already be receiving UCU's national 'The Friday Email' about these union-wide issues, but if not, please let us know).

We continue to spend a lot of our time and energy supporting members through casework. To be able to continue, we need more caseworkers, so please do consider joining the team (email ucu@soton.ac.uk).

Regarding academic governance and policies, we had a team of negotiators involved in the 'Modernising the Governance' project who fought hard to maintain the same level of employment guarantees. We are currently in negotiations with management regarding the dispute that arose from this project.

Some quotes:

'Always being asked to "just" do this extra something with no adjustment to workload allocation.'

'Being expected to self-train in own time.'

'Being asked to do more, with the same (or fewer) staff, as well as unrealistic and stress-inducing deadlines which arise as part of a cycle of management not paying attention, then panicking, then pottering along as normal.'

4. What should be the branch's priorities within the next year or two? List up to 3. [53 responses]

Workload	19
Pay and contracts	13
Casualisation	7
Sector and/or university finances	5
EDI, accessibility	5
Resourcing teaching/ maintain quality of teaching	4
Quality of management at all levels	4
More caseworkers	4
Membership recruitment/engagement	3
Policies and procedures	3
Academic freedom	2
Working from home (in context of parking fees and increased admin load)	1
Less senior managers, more grassroot staff	1
Support international staff with visa	1
Covid safety	1
Sustainability (environmental)	1
Academic governance	1

Summary and response:

These responses are consistent with answers to the previous question and put workload at the top of our list of priorities. Several of these issues are included in national pay negotiations; locally, our main way of protecting pay and contracts is through casework and rigorous review of any changes that the University wants to make to its policies and procedures. It is a painstaking and time-consuming job for the branch but a crucial one. We regularly raise issues of bullying and poor line-management at the Joint Negotiating Committees and tackle it through casework.

We note that casualisation is high on the list and we are pleased to report on the beginning of some progress in that matter, after years of the branch nagging University's management. The branch is being consulted as part of an HR anti-casualisation project. If you want to get involved, please get in touch.

We would be keen to get more volunteers to tackle the other issues listed above (including recruitment, support for international staff, sustainability and academic governance). We need your ideas, but also your time and activism to make more progress on more areas.

5. What could the branch do to increase members’ engagement with the union? [38 responses]

We note that members have provided fewer responses to this question. Workload is often mentioned as a reason for not engaging.

See our detailed responses in the table below to your comments. The main take-away for us is that we need to share success stories and tell you more about all the work we are doing. Now that we have obtained better access to agreed facilities time for the branch officers and caseworkers (a total of 1.8 FTE as opposed to just 0.4FTE before), and some of this time will be allocated to improving comms.

We also need more departmental reps. Here is the list of departments where we don’t have one at the moment:

- Business School
- Economics
- Engineering Enterprise
- English
- Enterprise
- Estates and Facilities
- Faculty Operations
- Finance
- Gerontology
- Global Recruitment, Admissions and Marketing
- Health Sciences
- Human Development and Health
- Human Resources
- Law School
- Medical Education
- Ocean and Earth Science
- Optoelectronics Research Centre
- Research and Innovation Services
- Social Statistics and Demography
- Student and Education Services
- Widening Participation and Social Mobility.

Please come forward if you want to become a rep. or support unofficially. The rep. role is as big or small as you want it to be or have time for, but having a point of contact in each department/area would already be a significant help to the branch.

Survey comments		Branch response
Share success stories or info on what we do (including through short videos or flyers)	9	Point taken! We are starting to do this.
Appointing reps in all departments	4	We are trying hard, and it has been our priority but in some departments, nobody has come forward. See list above.
Reduced/shorter meetings	3	We formally need General Meetings to ratify policies and vote motions. Some of you noticed and appreciated that we kept meetings to time.

Less hard left/activist language, be more inclusive of moderate views	3	It's important to differentiate between the branch and UCU nationally here. While some members might be annoyed and demoralised by the factional infighting and 'hard left' rhetoric at the national level, other members share these views. The branch is trying to respect the diversity of opinions of our members. Our Executive Committee and reps represent a variety of views, and we try to operate by consensus where possible; where consensus cannot be reached, decisions are taken democratically in accordance with UCU's rules.
More socials	3	That would be nice, and we'll try to schedule more, but please come as attendance has been very poor at recent socials.
Alternate meeting times/diarise early (to avoid clashes)	2	We will try to vary meeting times, but it's very difficult to diarise GMs early, as their timing depends on many different factors that are beyond our control. We always try to give as much notice as we can.
More events on Avenue campus	2	We will try to have at least one meeting a year on Avenue.
Friday weekly email/short email summaries	2	You might have noticed that we are back to the Friday weekly emails.
Organise induction for new members	2	This is a very good idea which we are intending to implement.
Influence national level	1	We will continue to consult you and convey your views when asked by UCU national.
Teams group	1	We do have one, join here
Act on local issues	1	We are very busy responding to new policies and raising the concerns you have shared with us.
Provide lunch	1	We do this already when general meetings are in-person or hybrid.
Be present during induction process	1	In-person inductions have been replaced with SharePoints since Covid, and this has certainly impacted our recruitment. We are pushing for improved access to new employees, including to get joiners list but the University has so far refused.
Create local courses led by members	1	Good idea – we could revive our 'workshop' series. Please send ideas and proposals to the branch.
Pay more attention to professional services	1	It is a very important point, and the fact that the exec role (academic-related staff officer) and rep positions are vacant doesn't help. Please get in touch if you would like to put yourself forward for this role.

Other interesting suggestions: ‘Invite members to describe a typical day/week for shared knowledge’; Encourage members to attend at least one meeting per year’.

6. What could you do to increase members’ engagement with the union? [36 responses]

Many respondents recognised their lack of engagement and inability to do more because of high workloads, caring responsibilities or lack of energy. Here are a few suggested ideas:

Share progress/success through flyers or in meetings; talk to colleagues about union	11
Organise meetings/events in my school	3
Spend time with members to listen to them	2
Effective casework	1
Find reps in all departments	1
Online surveys	1
In-person activities	1

Ultimately, to build the union nothing replaces corridor chats or informal discussions between colleagues. We have only one union, we need to take care of it collectively. It’s all our responsibility!

7. What could the branch do to increase our membership? [44 responses]

As above, we need to work on self-promoting ourselves better. There are good ideas of campaigns (e.g. ‘recruit a member’) that we could organise on top of our regular stalls and our attempts to get back into the induction process. However, the branch officers are overstretched and if we want to do more, we need more members to volunteer. We will also continue to organise regular informal meetings to listen to your concerns and suggestions.

Promote successes	12
Do more face-to-face recruitment and engagement events	6
Have less strikes	4
Use university comms (e.g. Sussed, weekly mailers) and events (e.g. ECR inductions)	3
Increase visibility on campus (posters)	3
Being less left-wing and less focused on Gaza	3
Have a bottom-up approach: collect stories/concerns from members	3
Regain access to induction	2
Lobby UCU national for lower fees	2
Facility time for reps/ support rep work	2
Focus on local action	1
Focus on safety at work	1
Raise awareness of TU history	1
More socials	1

Thanks for this kind comment: ‘I have been really impressed by local work done by the branch. I think this detailed scrutiny of changes of policies at UoS is so important (somebody needs to keep an eye on this, or anything could appear through the backdoor!). I wasn't aware of this, and wonder if this could encourage greater membership (through prospective members being more aware). To be honest, I find the national UCU campaigns pretty off-putting and from a very narrow political philosophy. However, the hard work put in by the local branch, scrutinising reams of paperwork from the Uni centre is really laudable, and I happily pay my membership to ensure that continues.’

We note that several members cite too many national strikes as a reason for under-recruitment (and, in other sections of the survey, for their own disengagement with Southampton UCU). It is worth us stating here that local branch execs have essentially no control over strikes called by UCU's National Executive Committee (NEC), but when called on to take strike action the exec is obligated to do so, and to encourage our members to do so, regardless of how we might personally or collectively feel about this. We strongly encourage members who feel their views on this, or any other issue, are not reflected by the decisions and actions UCU takes at a national level, to engage with annual NEC and Officer elections, to stay up to date with national disputes, and to lobby their regional Higher Education Committee (HEC) representatives when ballots and strikes are called.

8. What could you do to increase our membership? [36 responses]

Several members said they were ready to help with recruitment on the condition that they are better informed about the branch's activities and are provided with recruitment material. We hope that the weekly emails will give you a better sense of what the branch is working on but if not, please get in touch. You are also very welcome to collect recruitment material from Union House at 19 Hartley Avenue, Highfield, Southampton SO17 3QZ. Please email beforehand ucu@soton.ac.uk to make sure our branch administrator is there to meet you.

Talk to members or new staff	12
Support reps	2
Distribute leaflets; support a coordinated campaign	2

Many thanks for all your ideas and for giving us a sense of how you feel about the university, UCU in general and the branch. Please continue to report any issues, concerns or suggestions to your local rep or the branch (ucu@soton.ac.uk). It is the only way for the exec to represent you. And get involved – the more active and better organised we are, the better prepared we will be in the event of threats to members jobs, terms and conditions.

Southampton UCU, 10/04/2025