

Pearson facing teacher unions protests at AGM

Jamie Nimmo, The Evening Standard, London, 28 April 2016

While most disgruntled shareholders are using AGMs to voice their anger at huge pay packets, Pearson is bracing itself for a protest of a different kind.

The FTSE 100 education publisher is preparing to face angry teachers' unions at tomorrow's annual meeting at Savoy Place, a few doors down from its Shell-Mex headquarters on the Strand.

The coalition of unions, made up of over a hundred shareholders, has put forward a resolution calling for an end to its part in controversial "exam factory" testing in the US and privatisation of schools in developing countries.



American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten

The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) is leading the protests, which will also involve members of the National Union of Teachers and trade union Unison from the UK.

They will hand in a petition at Shell-Mex before lobbying and handing out leaflets round the corner outside the AGM.

City analysts have rejected the resolution, which requires 75% support, as "irrelevant"

given that those protesting together only own a fraction of the company.

However, the unions argue that those commenting from the Square Mile are oblivious to Pearson's "poisoned brand" in the US.

AFT President Randi Weingarten said: "There is a fork in the road at this moment and if they choose the path of short-term profits, doubling down on flawed education strategies we will do everything in our power to make sure the world knows that. That is what shareholder governance is about."

She added: "The UK is a year or two behind the United States in changing of policy. Because there's been this backlash in parents and educators throughout the United States, I think you're going to see the same thing in the UK."

Pearson declined to comment, but previously said: "The resolution does not take account of the significant review we published for shareholder in January 2016.

"We recognise that there are opportunities in the US for fewer and better tests. We would welcome AFT into this conversation."

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