



Meeting of: Migrant Members Equality Conference

Location: INNSiDE Manchester, 1 First St, Manchester M15 4RP and online

Date: Saturday 18 November 2023, 9.30 – 1.00pm

Unconfirmed minutes

Present: In person

Eiman Abdel Meguid	Queen University Belfast
Omer Aijazi	The University of Manchester
Cynthia Akwei	LJMU
Melek Alemdar	The University of Manchester
Miriyam Aouragh	University of Westminster/Harrow
Maha Atal	University of Glasgow
Thomas Bartsch	Loughborough University
Minjie Cai	University of Greenwich
Michael Carley	University of Bath
Maria Chondrogianni	University of Westminster
Anastasia Christou	Middlesex University
Stephen Desmond	Solent University
Abdul Elghedafi	University of Aberdeen
Poulami Somanya Ganguly	Queen Mary, University of London
Mary Esther Jennings	Eastern Region Retired Members Branch
Daniel Keeler	Canterbury Christ Church University
Zoulika Lamamra	University of Teesside
Laura Loyola Hernandez	University of Leeds
Gertjan Lucas	University of Nottingham
Sophia Lycouris	The University of Edinburgh
Moona Ma	University of Northumbria
Justine Mercer	University of Warwick
Iman Naja	The Open University
Shakthi Nataraj	University of Lancaster
Themesa Neckles	University of Sheffield
Katherine O'Brien	The University of Manchester
Robyn Orfitelli	University of Sheffield
Mark Pendleton	University of Sheffield
Levent Piskin	University of Dundee
Arad Reisberg	Brunel University
Abdul Sobratee	Sheffield College
Vivek Thuppil	Bangor University
Meghan Tinsley	The University of Manchester

Cecilia Yu	University of Warwick
Yashi Yuan	University College London

Present: online

Idil Akinci	University of Edinburgh
Simona Capisani	Durham University
Ndidi Chidomere	University of Derby
Kiran Groodoyal	Lewisham College
Nikolas Mavroudis	University of Reading
Ahlam Sawsaa	University of Huddersfield

In attendance

Jenny Sherrard	Head of Equality and Policy
Swati Patel	Equality Administrator (Minutes via online)
Seth Atkin	Equality Support Official

1 Welcome and housekeeping – Introduction by Laura Loyola-Hernandez, Chair of the Migrant Members’ Standing Committee, (MMSC)

- 1.1 Laura Loyola-Hernandez welcomed all delegates.
- 1.2 Laura Loyola-Hernandez introduced herself as Chair of MMSC, Jenny Sherrard, (Head of Equality and Policy as well as Equality Support Official for MMSC), Swati Patel (Equality and Policy Administrator) and Vivek Thuppli (Vice Chair of MMSC).
- 1.3 Laura Loyola-Hernandez outlined some housekeeping rules, code of conduct during conference as well as the role and function of the conference.
- 1.4 The conference is being held in a hybrid format.

2 Conference Business

- 2.1 Minutes of Migrant Members’ conference December 2022
- 2.2 The minutes of the Migrant Members’ Annual Conference 2022 were agreed as a true and accurate record.
- 2.3 Report from the Migrant Members’ Standing Committee
- 2.4 Robyn Orfitelli (MMSC member) highlighted that in January 2023 MMSC hosted a joint trade union hybrid conference on issues of importance to migrants. All trade unions in UK were invited and several attended to talk about issues around health checks, visa fees and refugee status.
- 2.5 There was a legal expert talking about migrant issues, FBU talking about direct action and speakers from JCWI and Refugee Buddy Project.
- 2.6 The conference led to a lot of connections within the trade union movement as well as grassroots activists’ organisations. The ideal scenario would be to hold

this on a yearly basis, to constantly bring together different groups of people who are organising on behalf of migrants in different ways.

- 2.7 Laura Loyola-Hernandez talked about support provided to migrant members via FAQs around the industrial action. A particular focus on the FAQs was around marking and assessment boycott (MAB).
- 2.8 A webinar was held in June with Bindmans, the solicitors who deal with immigration law as it intersects with employment law.
- 2.9 Migrants are in a disadvantage whilst taking industrial action as they have to report in advance of participating in MAB.
- 2.10 There is an impact of the rising immigration costs with visa fees being increased by 15-20% and the immigration health surcharge will go up by 66%. This has an impact on migrant members but also on those with family members who may wish to come over.
- 2.11 MMSC has been involved in a campaign organised by Migrant Voice to change the policies around visa fees.
- 2.12 MMSC through the General Secretary have written a letter to the Prime Minister demanding him to revoke the visa fees increase and urging him that the public sector pay increase should not come on the back of migrants.
- 2.13 MMSC will be involved in campaigns to ensure that the Labour Party take steps to reverse some of the anti-migrant policies implemented by the present Conservative government.
- 2.14 MMSC have ensured that the Friday email has a link to what rights migrants have regarding attending protests due the current criminalisation of protest and direct action.
- 2.15 Universities are increasingly obligated to visa monitor for students and MMSC is taking this issue seriously. Some branches have reported that some universities are tightening the method in which they do visa monitoring for international students. At present MMSC have sent out a survey to find out how universities are tightening visa monitoring and once this data has been collated, to use the data to resist Home Office asking universities to become immigration enforcement authorities. Branches were encouraged to complete the survey.
- 2.16 The next steps MMSC are planning is for a further push to campaign employers against the immigration and visa fees which migrant members have to pay, and which are continuing to go up.
- 2.17 MMSC also want to look at the intersection of migrant PGRs.
- 2.18 There was a query by a PGR who has been informed that she is not able to join a standing committee as a PGR. Jenny Sherrard informed the conference that PGRs have not been able to stand as members of a standing committee. However Jenny Sherrard will get clarification and inform delegates at the conference whether PGRs can join a committee.

- 2.19 The chair informed conference that the standing orders for the Equality conference and committees have not been changed to include PGRs. In order to change the standing orders, if there is an agreement at the Migrant Members Conference, Laura Loyola Hernandez and Vivek Thuppil, as NEC migrant reps can recommend to the Equality Committee for the standing orders to be changed. If approved by the Equality Committee, then it would go to NEC.
- 2.20 Laura Loyola Hernandez and Vivek Thuppil can ask at NEC for the standing orders to be changed to include PGRs so they are able to be nominated for seats on the equality standing committees.
- 2.21 As there were no objections from the Migrant Members Conference or MMSC, there will be a recommendation to the Equality Committee to include PGRs to be able to be nominated for seats on the equality committees.
- 2.22 Co-options to Migrant Members' Standing Committee
- 2.23 There are vacancies for 5 two year term seats and 2 vacancies for a term of one year.
- 2.24 Laura Loyola-Hernandez explained that MMSC meets three times a year online and encouraged members to join the committee. The aim of MMSC is to ensure that UCU supports its migrant members.
- 2.25 Motion to Migrant Members' Conference

Motion 1 Supporting employees with UK work visas fees and 'Immigration Health Surcharge'

Proposer: The Open University

Conference Notes:

1. A 15% increase in UK work visa and 20% increase in Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) fees charged from 04/10/23, costing thousands of pounds.
2. The announced 66% increase in Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS) fees from £624 to £1,035 a year, from 2024.
3. Visa fee reimbursement is a taxable benefit unless for a new employee applying from outside the UK.
4. Continuing staff must pay IHS and visa application fees every time their contracts are altered, for example, length extended, hours (FTE) increased or new contracts issued.
5. Some employers offer loan schemes; but the cost remains.
6. Some HEIs support staff with such expenses, including Durham, Bath, Sussex, Exeter, Dundee.

Meeting resolves:

That UCU campaign for, including within national Joint Claims (JNCHE/FE-JNC)

- a. Employers to re-imburse fees for visas, ILR, and the IHS, for all

- employees,
- b. Increased use of permanent contracts, alongside workload management that does not utilise contractual changes.

Iman Naja from Open University moved the motion and Katherine O'Brien from University of Manchester seconded the motion.

Votes for the motion:

28 in favour 0 Against 0 Abstentions

The motion was passed unanimously.

3 Workshops: capturing the migrant experience within UCU

- 3.1 The aim of this session was intended to be an open, constructive and critical space where migrants can voice their opinion of what it has been like to be part of UCU, particularly round industrial action and what UCU can do better in terms of providing support.
- 3.2 The conference was divided into three groups to hear from delegates their experience of being in UCU, especially around casework and industrial action.
- 3.3 The feedback from the groups included:
- experience of being a migrant in HE,
 - about bullying and harassment and being pressured to comply,
 - universities not caring about migrant staff's health and safety,
 - migrant staff's visa status being weaponised,
 - actively being discouraged from joining the union,
 - migrant staff reluctant to take out grievance as the system was perceived to be broken,
 - post-doctoral researchers working in terrible conditions including doing unpaid labour and on precarious contracts as well as being on visas,
 - impact on mental health due to the trauma experienced by migrant staff on precarious visa in HE,
 - universities pressuring supervisors,
 - migrant staff being actively discouraged from participating in industrial action with the threat that if they participate, then they could lose their visa,
 - migrants being subject to other countries immigration regulation as well as being subject to double taxation,
 - there is discrimination against migrant staff in terms of getting promotion,
 - even though a university has a policy of reimbursing visa fees, some migrant

staff are not being reimbursed their visa fees,

- discussion around how caseworkers can become more knowledgeable about immigration issues as some caseworkers seem hesitant to take on cases pertaining to immigration issues,
- discussion on should caseworkers get more training on immigration law or if regional UCU should provide more training or if UCU should provide more accessible resources for caseworkers,
- the legal team is saying that not many members are asking for legal assistance particularly in the intersection of employment and immigration but when members are trying to access legal assistance, they are not being granted access to the legal scheme. This needs to be improved so that migrants do have access to the legal scheme when it is needed, especially for complex cases,
- in one of the groups there was positive feedback from the casework support or other support received by being a member of the union,
- there are challenges in recruiting staff from migrant background to UCU,
- UCU needs to work out strategies in recruiting migrant staff to become members, especially when employers are trying to stop staff joining a union,
- Awareness raising about issues within migrant communities including the concept of the ideal migrant as well as racism within migrant communities,
- Embedding anti-racism work as core work of UCU,
- UCU trying to set up a buddying system across UCU branches by pairing longer standing members with newer members which could be facilitated without a formal committee.

4 Panel Session: Policy reflections – what should the next government be prioritising to support migrants in the UK?

- 4.1 Maha Atal of MMSC outlined the format of the panel session.
- 4.2 This conference is taking place when UK will be heading into a general election, so it would be good to think about the broader policy context around migration issues both in the national and local grassroots level, as it relates to the education sector and to UCU members.
- 4.3 Maha Atal then introduced the speakers. Lizzie Dearden is former Home Affairs journalist of the Independent who has reported extensively on migration and asylum policy. Lizzie Dearden has previously reported on the Mediterranean refugee crisis from Italy and Greece.
- 4.4 Gareth Griffiths is a volunteer at Pobl I Bopl (People to People) which is a Welsh charity that helps refugees settle in North Wales by providing support, services and signposting. He has been with the charity shortly after it was set up about 13 years ago. In his working life Gareth Griffiths has been an academic in three

different business schools for the last 30 years.

- 4.5 Maha Atal commenced by asking Lizzie Dearden's thoughts on the judgement by the Supreme Court, that the Rwanda policy was unlawful and the direction of debate around asylum seekers, refugees and undocumented migrants will be going into a general election from the main political parties.
- 4.6 **Lizzie Dearden**
- 4.7 Lizzie Dearden outlined that the government were expecting to lose the judgement due to the argument being made by the Home Secretary that Rwanda was safe because of the promises made by the Rwandan government. The Supreme Court pointed out that it was the court's role to make factual assessment of the facts on the ground. The facts on the ground are that Rwanda is an autocratic one party state which kills and tortures its opponents. Refugees were shot died in 2018 when there was a protest against reduction in food ration. There are issues over judicial independence or its asylum processing capacity.
- 4.8 The Supreme Court said that the government cannot say that Rwanda is safe because the Rwandan government has promised that it will be safe. Israel did a similar deal with the Rwandan government, in that Israel sent its asylum seekers and refugees to Rwanda to have their claims processed there, with a promise of housing and support. Instead, a lot of them were trafficked to neighbouring countries, some were detained, some disappeared and some died trying to journey back through Sahel and Sahara to the Mediterranean to get to safety. Rwandan government did not deny the evidence and the UK government had not even actually looked at what happened to refugees and asylum seekers sent from Israel, when it signed up to the deal with the Rwandan government.
- 4.9 The Supreme Court said that the UK government cannot ignore the past and just take Rwanda's promises, when they have violated those promises in the past. The government is trying to get around this by putting Rwanda's promises on a more legal keel. They are now going to sign a treaty which will contain specific promises to ensure that refugees are not sent back to their country of origin and that even when refugees and asylum seekers claims have been unsuccessful once processed, they will support them and allow them to stay in Rwanda.
- 4.10 Rishi Sunak has said he is going to bring in emergency legislation and thus make MPs declare Rwanda safe in primary legislation which would be harder for domestic courts to overturn.
- 4.11 The government's policy is to stop the boats but there is no evidence that the Rwanda deal will deter refugees and asylum seekers from coming to UK.
- 4.12 Labour have said that they will scrap the Rwanda deal and they probably will fight it in Parliament. All the other parties would back scrapping the Rwanda deal.
- 4.13 Only legal migration would stop the irregular crossings but there is no one in main stream politics calling for increase in legal safe routes of migration because

the rhetoric by this right-wing government of stopping the boats has been weaponised and progressive arguments are not being heard.

4.14 Gareth Griffiths – Pobl I Bobl (People to People)

- 4.15 Gareth Griffiths commenced by saying that he recently retired after 30 years in business schools of various universities. Business schools attract mainly international students so he has been teaching them for the past 30 years.
- 4.16 Pobl I Bobl (People to People) is a charity in Bangor, North Wales, which supports refugees and asylum seekers, some of whom go onto programmes at Bangor and other universities. The volunteers are a cross section of people from the community, who would like to help people who are in vulnerable situations especially in light of the present government's rhetoric of creating a very hostile environment for refugees and asylum seekers.
- 4.17 The charity provides help and support for those refugees and asylum seekers who have settled in the area. Even though the Welsh government has some powers with the Welsh assembly, the refugee situation is that the UK government is very heavily involved and they settle refugees across the UK. Wales, north of England and Scotland have to take a certain quota of refugees.
- 4.18 Pobl I Bobl assist refugees to resettle by providing clothes, furniture and sometimes food for families. The refugees are supported by the local authority but sometimes the local authority support is inadequate and sometimes the local authority has delegated the duty to support to Red Cross. The support provided by the local authorities is not consistent and sometimes there is a shortfall in the provision provided.
- 4.19 Pre Brext Pobl I Bobl also collected clothes and sent them to Lebanon and Greece. Some of the supporters have spent time in the Greek camps and Care for Calais in France, helping refugees.
- 4.20 Pobl I Bobl provides English classes and trips out. A lot of the refugees have been traumatised by their experience so Pobl I Bobl organises social outings.
- 4.21 Bangor is a small town which makes it harder for refugees and asylum seekers to settle as opposed to bigger cities where there may be a community from the refugees' country of origin, as well as more liberal thinking people living there.
- 4.22 On the other hand some families in Bangor embrace the refugees and provide them with daily support. There are some people who are not accepting of the refugee community. Pobl I Bobl has had some online abuse but it has been very small.
- 4.23 Most people are supportive, helpful and help the refugees in Bangor. Bangor has the sea and mountains. Pobl I Bobl takes the refugees walking in the mountains, kayaking, provide drumming workshops, keep fit classes, food events, etc to take the refugees mind off from their daily life which can be difficult.
- 4.24 Pobl I Bobl has taken refugees to Snowdonia on a litter picking excursion.

- 4.25 All Welsh universities, promoted by the Welsh government, dedicated some of the halls of residence to Ukrainian refugees when the war started.
- 4.26 A colleague of Gareth Griffith is doing research into the learning needs of refugee school children, teenagers, students at FE colleges and at universities'. The research found that there is a requirement for more bilingual teaching assistance, better communication and translation services, provision for learning English and Welsh and schooling that has been missed which requires more support for the children.
- 4.27 Gareth Griffith concluded by reading from a quote from a report produced in 2019 "Inclusion without adequate amount of support in place or appreciation of the difficulties that the learner faces means that integration and access to future economic prospect remain elusive".
- 4.28 Schools in UK need to provide assistance to refugee children to catch up by providing additional academic skills development.

5 Q&A for both sessions

- 5.1 **Q.** Is there good practice at universities in supporting refugee students and academics?
- 5.2 **A.** Universities have given scholarships but it is a very small number and the criteria is that the students should have great CVs and high academic qualifications.
- 5.3 **Q.** How to navigate the difficult situation of supporting migrants in universities and branches in an environment which promotes hostility towards migrants?
- 5.4 **A.** There is a lot of ignorance and some people are unable to put themselves in the shoes of refugees. Some people have been very supportive and progressive in their views but Bangor is in a rural area as well as being a poor area. The people who are struggling with the cost of living crisis are resentful of migrants. Asylum seekers have £46.00 per week to live on for everything including food, so they have to access a food bank on a Sunday and some people living in Bangor accessing food banks are resentful of the asylum seekers accessing food from the food banks, whilst other people going to the food banks are more understanding.
- 5.5 When people have one to one conversations, there can be some understanding and empathy with the plight of migrants. Unfortunately the rhetoric from the government and the right wing press does not help the situation.
- 5.6 **Q.** Policy makers have been looking to squeeze net migration further and a lot of it has been targeting HE sector. 25% of staff in HE sector are international. The fees which international students have to pay are a source of revenue for universities. The increase in visa fees and health surcharges impact migrant staff. What can UCU members be doing to push the policy agenda in a more productive direction?
- 5.7 **A.** There is disagreement within the Cabinet about this issue because the net

migration has been rising for years and so certain section of the government want to concentrate on the small boats migration.

- 5.8 Suella Braverman when she was Home Secretary was looking to cut net migration by changing the rules around bringing dependents into UK as an international student and as a post graduate student in particular.
- 5.9 The Home Office is currently doing an internal review at present. The Office of National Statistics is due to release its figure of net migration shortly. Following this the government will decide whether it will cut net migration by not allowing dependents of international students or use some other way of cutting net migration.
- 5.10 **Q.** Is there any way that UCU can influence policy makers to highlight that international students generate revenue for the economy? Is it possible to formulate discussion for voters who are concerned about immigration that international students generate revenue for the UK economy?
- 5.11 **A.** Suella Braverman's policy of not allowing dependents of international students was not popular within the wider government so UCU could make the case to policy makers. If any universities do calculations of how much revenue international students bring in, this can be shown to policy makers. If the issue is about dependents, and UCU can show case studies of the beneficial contributions being made by dependents, to counter Suella Braverman's argument that dependents are sponging from the state.
- 5.12 **Q.** Migration law and policy is complex. Are there resources which can be accessed by UCU members?
- 5.13 **A.** Migration Observatory at University of Oxford pull together information on a range of migration issues which is helpful. Free Movement website tends to specifically concentrate on refugee issues but they run a lot of good research and statistics, as well as explain legislation which tends to change a great deal.
- 5.14 **Q.** It is difficult to challenge the stop the boats rhetoric as it is accepted as a popular view. A lot of polls show that people are a lot more accepting of immigration now. Is there any way of bridging this disconnect?
- 5.15 **A.** The government designs its slogan and if Labour says anything against it, the government will counter by saying that Labour is for no borders. Although it is not true, it sticks in the public's mind. As it is so close to election, Labour has become wary and so has driven their agenda to the right.
- 5.16 A lot of people are not supportive of the Rwanda deal and a lot of people do not understand the Rwanda deal. Due to the rhetoric from the government it is difficult to explain to people that the Rwanda deal is not voluntary and that refugees and asylum seekers do not have any legal routes to enter UK. It is not in the government's interest to educate the UK public about why people are coming to UK via illegal routes. Therefore it is important to educate people about what is driving the migration crisis and how the government's policy is actually implemented. The toxic environment is being stoked up by certain politicians

and the right-wing press.

- 5.17 **Q.** How can marginalised people make their voices heard?
- 5.18 **A.** It is challenging for marginalised people to have their voices heard.
- 5.19 **Q.** There is a conflict in Middle East at present and at some point the conflict will lead to refugees trying to come to Europe, like it happened in Syria. Is anything that can be done to prepare and influence the debate? There is no discourse of how much migrants contribute positively to the countries where they migrate.
- 5.20 **A.** There have been studies showing the benefits that migrants have created. There are good stories and newspapers do cover them. However journalists only know those positive things are happening if they are told about them. Lizzie Dearden explained that she can only write a story if someone comes to her with a story. If any UCU members has a positive story about students or lecturers, they should contact journalists. The narrative about migrants needs to be changed so that they are shown in a positive light rather than being shown as helpless and dependent on the state.
- 5.21 **Q.** The history of colonialism is not taught in UK schools. It is difficult for the public to then understand why people are migrating as they have not been educated about this country's past. Also the media's portrayal of migrants is usually very negative.
- 5.22 **A.** Lizzie Dearden pointed out that she was not taught about colonial history and it was only in her degree course she learnt about the partition of India. A lot of the public's perception of immigration is due to lack of historical education about colonialism and the empire.
- 5.23 There are a lot of complexities involved around the whole migration debate including the media coverage.
- 5.24 Maha Atal thanked Lizzie Dearden and Gareth Griffiths.

6 Close of conference

- 6.1 Laura Loyola Hernandez thanked all delegates for attending the conference.

The Conference closed at 1.00pm.