

Special higher education sector conference, 9 September 2021 – HE dispute(s), including New JNCHES, USS, TPS, and any possible links between them

198 delegates were sent a unique voting link. 185 delegates voted. Not all delegates voted on every motion. Note that the 'registered abstention' figures in this report indicate only delegates who actively selected the option to abstain.

Summary of voting

	Title	Vote
1	Timing of Industrial Action on USS	LOST
2A.1	Amendment	CARRIED
2	Enact HESC motions HE12 – launch the USS ballot now	CARRIED (as amended)
3A.1	Amendment	LOST
3	Defend USS defined benefits	CARRIED
4	Take action, defend USS defined benefits	CARRIED
5	Defending Defined Benefit	REMITTED
B4	Conditional Indexation of USS	CARRIED
6	Defend USS defined benefits by lobbying MPs	REMITTED
7A.1	Amendment	CARRIED
7	Campaigns over pay/Four Fights and USS	CARRIED (as amended)
8	Ballot members over the 2021-22 pay round	CARRIED
9	The pay/Four Fights campaign	CARRIED
10	What a win looks like (up to point c.)	FELL
10A.1	Amendment	FELL
10A.2	Amendment	FELL
10	What a win looks like (point d.)	FELL
11	Separating Four Fights and USS Negotiations	LOST
12	Combining Four Fights and USS Disputes	CARRIED
13	Building on successful member led action	CARRIED

The number of votes cast for each motion and amendment, followed by the text of the motion (as amended, if the motion was carried as amended), is set out overleaf.

1 Timing of Industrial Action on USS Bangor University

LOST

Votes in favour 49

Votes against 92

Registered abstentions 7

SHESC notes:

1. that the recommendations of the Superannuation Working Group (SWG) were adopted at HESC on 2/6/2020;
2. the SWG recommendation that we negotiate, campaign and lobby for the protection of USS member benefits at current levels and pressure employers to reject cuts to future benefits;
3. the SWG recommendation that we use all the campaigning and industrial tools at our disposal up to and including a ballot for industrial action.

SHESC believes that a strong result in an industrial action ballot is more likely to be achieved if the ballot comes at the culmination of an effective member-led campaign, which takes time to organise.

SHESC therefore resolves that a ballot on industrial action is called when HEC judges that the USS negotiators have had sufficient time to explore all options with the employers' representatives and the USS Trustee and branches have had sufficient time to organise for victory.

2A.1 Compositing amendment UCL

CARRIED

Votes in favour: 78

Votes against 54

Registered abstentions: 15

Replace "to defend the USS DB scheme on the basis of its HESC mandate" with "to defend the USS DB scheme on its current basis".

2 Composite: Enact HESC motions HE12 – launch the USS ballot now Imperial College London, University College London

CARRIED (as amended)

Votes in favour 79

Votes against 52

Registered abstentions 11

HESC notes that:

1. the June 2021 HESC motion HE12 was passed with amendment 12A.1 committing the union to organise a member-level campaign and ballot members for industrial action over the summer from June to September, should the employers not join UCU in pressuring USS and the pensions regulator to cancel the 2020 valuation in favour of a new 2021 valuation using an "evidence-based moderately prudent approach".

2. the employers did not do so. But HEC failed to enact motion HE12.

HESC resolves to

- a. ensure HEC does not repeat this mistake
- b. immediately begin the balloting of members for industrial action to defend the USS DB scheme on its current basis, on a schedule sufficient to enable members to take action in the Autumn Term.
- c. implement the public campaign among members outlined in the aforementioned resolution.

3A.1 University of Kent

LOST

Votes in favour 62

Votes against 69

Registered abstentions 17

Point numbered 2, after 'The ballot should be disaggregated, and should run,' delete remainder of clause and replace with 'for at least 7 weeks, giving branches sufficient time to run an effective GTVO campaign.'

Add:

HEC commits to fully support branches facing job cuts, enabling co-ordinated ballots and industrial action over local issues with national disputes.

3 Defend USS defined benefits Lancaster University

CARRIED

Votes in favour 69

Votes against 65

Registered abstentions 12

SHESC notes the threat to USS defined benefits of massive contribution increases or benefits being slashed as a result of the Covid 2020 valuation.

SHESC believes that it is very likely that the current UUK proposal to cut our benefits, supported by USS, will be passed at the next USS JNC so that employers can save on their contribution.

SHESC instructs HEC to:

1. Declare a dispute with UUK over the employers' failure to push for a 2021 valuation.
2. Organise a ballot over USS. The ballot should be disaggregated, and should run from last week in September 2021 to last week in October 2021, for industrial action in November/December 2021.
3. Ensure that industrial action is escalating.
4. Produce USS campaign and communication materials immediately for branches.
5. Start preparing for a massive GTVO.

4 Take action, defend USS defined benefits University of Glasgow

CARRIED

Votes in favour 73

Votes against 66

Registered abstentions 9

HESC notes the threat to USS of massive contribution increases or benefits being slashed as a result of the Covid 2020 valuation.

HESC believes

- 1 USS is able to afford current benefits at current or lower costs so there is no need for these changes.
- 2 If not stopped, this could easily become the first step in introducing full DC.
- 3 Industrial action is necessary to defend the Defined Benefits (DB) scheme.

HESC instructs HEC to

- a. Call for a ballot and strike action and ASOS, with strike action to start in week of 11 November. An indicative timetable is HEC on 17 September, ballot from 24 September to 25 October. The subject of dispute should be the employers' failure to take measures to defend DB.
- b. Organise massive GTVO campaign and produce materials to support this.
- c. Encourage members and branches to build support amongst students, other trade unions and the local community.

5 Defending Defined Benefit University of Dundee

REMITTED

Votes in favour of remitting 92

Votes against remitting 49

Registered abstentions 7

Conference notes the jump in USS asset values to about £85 billion.

Conference believes that:

1. All the evidence shows that current benefits can be paid from 26% contributions or less.
2. Affordability for lower paid members should be obtained by maintaining current benefits at lower costs.

Conference instructs negotiators to:

- a. Defend current benefits for member payments no greater than 9.6% and payments for lower paid members of 0% and 4%.
- b. Put forward demands for reform of scheme governance to increase UCU representation on the board of the USS Ltd, to increase transparency and improve oversight of the USS executive, and to withdraw the DB scheme from Master Trust regulation.

B4 Conditional Indexation of USS Bangor University

CARRIED

Votes in favour	88
Votes against	49
Registered abstentions	10

SHESC notes:

1. Principle 5 of the 2021 SWG report which calls for the exploration of Conditional Benefits on terms acceptable to UCU members.
2. the Joint statement from Cambridge and Oxford universities and their UCU branches on Conditional Indexation

SHESC believes that:

- a. a contribution rate of 25-30% of salary should be sufficient to secure a good pension for staff who are members of USS, but that the USS Trustee's current approach to risk makes it difficult to obtain good value for money.
- b. Conditional benefits might make it possible for USS to continue as a collective, mutual, multi-employer scheme with an ability to invest for the long term in growth-seeking assets.

SHESC therefore resolves that UCU should initiate exploration of the feasibility and promise of Conditional Benefits (or Conditional Indexation).

6 Defend USS defined benefits by lobbying MPs Lancaster University

REMITTED

Votes in favour of remitting	115
Votes against remitting	24
Registered abstentions	9

SHESC notes the threat to USS defined benefits of massive contribution increases or benefits being slashed as a result of the Covid 2020 valuation.

SHESC believes that it is very likely that the current UUK proposal to cut our benefits, supported by USS, will be passed at the next USS JNC so that employers can save on their contribution.

SHESC instructs HEC to produce a letter for USS members to send to their MPs requesting their support in resolving the USS dispute by: derecognising UUK as representing the university sector, raising the issue with the Work and Pensions Committee and raising shortcomings in the Pensions Act 2004 that need addressing.

7A.1 Anti casualisation committee

CARRIED

Votes in favour 146

Votes against 17

Registered abstentions 19

After 'conference notes: 5' Add:

'6: That 33% of HE employees are on casual contracts (HESA data). Increasing casualisation is detrimental to both casualised and permanent workers, directly reducing job security and conditions, indirectly damaging sector pension schemes by increasing opt-out.'

Add at end (after 'Four fights and USS')

'Conference resolves that campaigns incorporate clear communications on how casualisation affects all members in 4Fights and USS disputes, and specifies visible actions for all members to carry out, with the General Secretary allocating extra resources to deliver this.'

7 Campaigns over pay/Four Fights and USS Newcastle University

CARRIED (as amended)

Votes in favour 120

Votes against 53

Registered abstentions 8

Conference notes:

1. The ballot on the 2020-21 pay 'award' which produced an 86% rejection by members
2. The branch delegate meetings in April to canvas opinion on the pay campaign
3. The employers' unacceptable offer for 2021-22 of 1.5%
4. The motions calling for action over pay/Four Fights at HESC (HE1-5), and on USS (HE12) all of which were carried

5. The amendment HE2A.1 committing the union to coordinate the fight over pay with the fight to defend USS as a defined benefit pension.
6. That 33% of HE employees are on casual contracts (HESA data). Increasing casualisation is detrimental to both casualised and permanent workers, directly reducing job security and conditions, indirectly damaging sector pension schemes by increasing opt-out.

Conference believes that now is the time to set the timetable and organise the ballot for action, not for further consultation and prevarication.

Conference calls on HEC to implement the HESC motions and organise the campaigns over pay/Four Fights and USS.

Conference resolves that campaigns incorporate clear communications on how casualisation affects all members in 4Fights and USS disputes, and specifies visible actions for all members to carry out, with the General Secretary allocating extra resources to deliver this.

8 Ballot members over the 2021-22 pay round University College London

CARRIED

Votes in favour 126

Votes against 50

Registered abstentions 7

HESC notes

1. That the 2021-22 pay round has resulted in UUK recommending employers impose a 1.5% increase, and no progress on casualisation, equality, workload or redundancies.
2. The success in increasing GTVO turnout in 2019 by placing both ballot papers in the same envelope.

HESC resolves to ballot members over the 2021-22 pay round, in the same envelope as USS where possible.

9 The pay/Four Fights campaign University of Brighton, Grand Parade and University of Brighton Moulsecoomb

CARRIED

Votes in favour 97

Votes against 69

Registered abstentions 15

Conference notes

1. The unresolved disputes with UCEA over the 2020/21 and 2021/22 pay claims.

2. The need for an industrial campaign to defend USS by members in pre-92 institutions.
3. Despite the pandemic, student numbers have continued to rise, making the HE sector richer than ever.

Conference believes pensions are deferred pay. Defending pensions is inseparable from fighting over pay, pay equality, casualisation, redundancies and workloads.

Conference resolves

- a. To ballot all HE members for industrial action in pursuance of the 2021/22 pay claim.
- b. The ballot should be disaggregated and run concurrently with the USS ballot, or as soon as possible thereafter if that is impossible, with a view to action beginning in November.
- c. Strike action should be escalating and indefinite, and coordinated where possible with action over USS.

10 (up to and including point c.) What a win looks like University of Nottingham

FELL

Conference notes:

1. The failure of employers to recognise and address the root causes of the USS and 4Fights disputes
2. The widespread frustration and disappointment of members at this failure
3. The need for a clear answer to the question: what does a win look like? when planning industrial action
4. The USS dispute, whilst complex, can achieve a clear win
5. A cut to pensions is a cut to pay

Conference resolves:

- a. To prepare for ballot on USS and identify a simple and clear battle cry around which members can rally
- b. To fully support branches in in the GTVO campaign
- c. To develop an IA strategy that includes strike, and other forms of creative action, that maximise the opportunity for the union to achieve its objectives

10A.1 University of Swansea

FELL

Add at end of motion 10 (i.e. as continuation to paragraph d. with comma after 'for now'):

and develop a medium to long-term strategy on pay and equalities, given that there is little evidence that a repeat of previous industrial action will result in a

successful outcome and further unsuccessful action can only weaken the union's negotiating position for future bargaining rounds.

10A.2 Anti casualisation committee

FELL

After 'conference notes: 5' Add:

6: That 33% of HE employees are on casual contracts (HESA data). Increasing casualisation is detrimental to both casualised and permanent workers, directly reducing job security and conditions, indirectly damaging sector pension schemes by increasing opt-out.

After 'Conference resolves: d)' add:

Conference resolves that campaigns incorporate clear communications on how casualisation affects all members in 4Fights and USS disputes, and specifies visible actions for all members to carry out, with the General Secretary allocating extra resources to deliver this.

10 (point d) What a win looks like University of Nottingham

FELL

Conference resolves to continue the campaign for the 4Fights with vigour, determination and all means possible, bar strike action for now.

11 Separating Four Fights and USS Negotiations Glasgow Caledonian University

LOST

Votes in favour	70
Votes against	107
Registered abstentions	6

SHESC notes:

1. the importance of an improved JNCHES settlement in the fight against casualisation, damaging workloads, race and gender inequality, and pay erosion;
2. the need to fight back against the continuing threat to our pensions, particularly USS.

SHESC also believes that:

- a. these are two distinct campaigns, targeting different employer bodies, UCEA and UUK, where the latter involves pre-1992 universities only;
- b. the USS dispute cannot be resolved at JNCHES, and pay and conditions cannot be negotiated with UUK or the USS Trustees;
- c. binding the issues together into a single dispute hinders the work of our two teams of national negotiators;

- d. and that making success in one campaign reliant upon success in the other hinders success in both.

Therefore, SHESC resolves to continue to campaign on both issues in a co-ordinated manner, while pursuing a resolution in the two disputes independently of each other.

12 Combining Four Fights and USS Disputes University of Leeds

CARRIED

Votes in favour 110

Votes against 66

Registered abstentions 7

HESC believes that:

1. The four fights and USS issues are inextricably linked. Low pay, pay inequality and job insecurity mean poorer pensions and a worse retirement, and some members cannot afford pension contributions.
2. Solidarity between different groups of members (casualised/permanent, different pay grades, equality groups, academic/related, pre- and post-92 branches) was hugely important during the 2019-2020 industrial action.
3. Continued solidarity will be vital to winning the disputes and for building the union.
4. It is therefore crucial not to separate the disputes or give priority to either.

HESC resolves to:

- a. Coordinate the four fights and USS campaigns, highlighting the links.
- b. Give parity to both disputes in strategic planning, balloting and publicity, ensuring that all affected branches have a voice in developing the dispute strategy.
- c. Ballot and take action on both disputes concurrently.
- d. Coordinate action with sister unions, if possible, to improve effectiveness.

13 Building on successful member led action University of Dundee

CARRIED

Votes in favour 87

Votes against 81

Registered abstentions 15

Conference notes:

1. the failure of HEC to hold a Special HE Sector Conference in the first two weeks of August 2021 on the topic of HE dispute(s), including New JNCHES, USS,

TPS, and any possible links between them and consequently the missed opportunity to initiate industrial action at the start of academic year 21/22 when the impact on employers would have been greatest.

2. the success of member led actions in resisting attacks by employers on our terms and conditions of employment
3. the growth of member led UCU Solidarity Movement and its support for industrial action in defence of pension, pay and conditions

Conference resolves

- a. To move immediately to disaggregated ballots for industrial action in respect of pension, pay and conditions.
- b. To co-ordinate joint action across the disputes and highlight the wider crisis of funding in post-16 education.