

Special HESC Four Fights, Wednesday 20 April - results of voting

209 delegates were sent a unique voting link. 200 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.

	Title	Vote
2	Call for indefinite strike action	LOST
3	Indefinite action Four Fights	LOST
4	Escalate to indefinite action with local consultation	LOST
17	UCU HEC invitation to ACAS collective conciliation and local negotiations	LOST
5	Composite: ASOS and strike	CARRIED
6	Industrial action plan (without points 3 and 4)	CARRIED (without points 3 and 4)
7	Planning and supporting the Four Fights coupled with USS dispute	CARRIED
8	Assessment boycott as a core part of our UK-wide strategy	CARRIED
9	4 Fights - Escalating industrial	LOST
10	Motion on marking boycott for Four Fights and USS disputes	CARRIED
11	Four fights continued and marking Boycott	LOST
12	Escalation of Four Fights Dispute	LOST
13	Next steps in the disputes	CARRIED
14	Planning now for action next academic year (without point ii)	LOST
15	Strike action during induction Autumn 2022	CARRIED
	Motion to remit motion 16	LOST
16	Working towards a long-term strategy for the four fights campaign	LOST

18	Building towards a transformational UK-wide dispute on pay	LOST
19	Taking effective industrial action	LOST
20	Striking out of teaching term	CARRIED
21	Co-ordinating effective UK-wide action	CARRIED
23	Maximum effective action	CARRIED
24	Call for a return to aggregated strike ballots	LOST

Motion 2 Call for indefinite strike action

LOST

Votes in favour	9
Votes against	171
Registered abstentions	19

Conference believes that:

1. The current pay degradation, workloads, inequality and job insecurity across the Higher Education sector are completely unacceptable in the fullest sense of the word, meaning that winning this dispute is not optional.
2. Employers have shown that they are prepared to wait us out when there is an end date in sight.
3. We cannot return to work until these issues have been resolved fully, and our action needs to reflect that, as well as taking into account the employer's increasing unwillingness to negotiate.

Conference resolves to call for the UK-wide escalation of the ongoing strike action to indefinite strike action to take place during the next available mandate leading up to, alongside and if necessary beyond the marking boycott.

Motion 3 Indefinite action Four Fights

LOST

Votes in favour	66
Votes against	109
Registered abstentions	24

SHESC resolves to:

1. Call 'indefinite' strike action in the Four Fights dispute commencing one week after the beginning of a marking and assessment boycott. Indefinite is defined as consisting of notification for the following 12 weeks of the mandate.
2. Reserve the right to call off some number of dates of this action subject to weekly review by asking delegates from striking branches their views on the employer response at that point. Dates will be potentially called off one week at a time, via the mechanism of a single issue branch delegate meeting.

Branches will be given flexibility to opt out of specific time periods related to holidays, reading weeks and term dates, in consultation and in agreement of the HE officers, and with the goal of maintaining roughly equal strike dates across branches.

Motion 4 Escalate to indefinite action with local consultation

LOST

Votes in favour	82
Votes against	99
Registered abstentions	19

SHESC notes

1. That the four fights dispute is based on a set of clear and winnable demands.
2. The dedication and determination of our members during the recent industrial action
3. That our action so far in this round has not led to meaningful negotiations with the employers.

SHESC believes:

- a. We need a serious escalation in our industrial action to achieve a win on the four fights.
- b. That this includes the need for the four fights to continue to be coupled with the USS dispute, with any strike days being taken on the same dates.

SHESC resolves:

- i. To instruct HEC to call a significant programme of strike days that are locally consulted upon and coordinated UK-wide, and includes a marking and assessment boycott.
- ii. For strike days to be called as a form of indefinite action, meaning striking on every day that will have an impact on the employers with no end date.

Motion 17 UCU HEC invitation to ACAS collective conciliation and local negotiations

LOST

Votes in favour	59
Votes against	121
Registered abstentions	20

HESC notes:

1. UCEA's refusal to engage with UCU proposals regarding the 'four fights'.
2. ACAS offers collective conciliation over pay, enabling but not imposing agreement.
3. Universities should negotiate with UCU branches on workload, equality and casualisation as a basis for UK-wide agreement.

HESC believes :

- a. UCEA should be invited to address the pay dispute through ACAS conciliation.
- b. UCEA's refusal to bargain on three of the four fights could be addressed by local negotiations.

HESC resolves:

- i. To instruct HEC to invite UCEA to enter ACAS conciliation on pay, with UCEA refusal prompting further industrial action.
- ii. That ACAS conciliation be conditional on extension of any current ballot mandate from 6 to 9 months.
- iii. That HEC assist UCU branches to engage in local negotiations on workloads, equality and casualisation, assessing successes after 9 months.

Motion 5 Composite: ASOS and strike

CARRIED

Votes in favour	98
Votes against	83
Registered abstentions	18

SHESC notes

1. The intransigence of the employers over both HE disputes.
2. The growing support for a marking and assessment boycott among members.

SHESC believes

- a. That a marking and assessment boycott can be an effective tactic

- b. Branches must not be allowed to suffer punitive pay deductions in isolation.

SHESC calls on HEC to

- i. Initiate a marking and assessment boycott at the earliest opportunity in all branches with a mandate.
- ii. Notify bouts of ten days of strike action commencing in late May to support the ASOS
- iii. Call BDMs before notification of further action.
- iv. Adopt the practice of notifying further bouts of action before the previous bout has concluded.
- v. Make an emergency appeal inside and outside the union to boost the Fighting Fund for branches suffering punitive deductions.

Motion 6 Industrial action plan

CARRIED (without points 3 and 4)

Votes in favour	100
Votes against	74
Registered abstentions	19

HESC resolves UCU will:

- 1. Identify summer term dates with each branch.
- 2. Call a boycott of all summative marking from the start of summer term.
- 5. Ask branches to delegate two officers to coordinate with ROs and Head of HE to enact this plan.
- 6. Call weekly Branch Delegate Meetings with voting powers to continually monitor the UK-wide situation.
- 7. Ask members not taking ASOS to pledge a day's pay a week to local hardship funds.
- 8. Call an emergency appeal for the central Fighting Fund.

Motion 7 Planning and supporting the Four Fights coupled with USS dispute

CARRIED

Votes in favour	115
Votes against	68
Registered abstentions	17

SHESC notes that attacks on job security and casualisation and the proliferation of 'fire and hire' tactics. Huge rises in the cost of living. Despite these circumstances UCU branches in Cambridge, Manchester, RCA, Open University and elsewhere have won concessions or have forced negotiations on casualisation. In many branches UCU membership among casualised members has dramatically increased, particularly among PhD students who teach as GTAs and in other types of insecure and underpaid roles. SHESC believes that these local successes are the result of branch initiatives in conjunction with a raised profile for anti-casualisation through the Four Fights dispute.

SHESC resolves:

1. To call effective UK-wide strike action during the current academic year under the Four Fights dispute combined with a marking boycott
2. Not to 'decouple' this action from the USS dispute
3. To provide UK-wide campaigning support for branches engaged in local anti-casualisation disputes during the UK-wide strike days.

Motion 8 Assessment boycott as a core part of our UK-wide strategy

CARRIED

Votes in favour	129
Votes against	60
Registered abstentions	11

Conference notes:

1. Observing that the neoliberal university depends on data streams as never before, and is particularly vulnerable to their closure;
2. Recalling that in 2016 an assessment boycott at Newcastle University over the draconian 'Raising the Bar' targets-based performance-management scheme was spectacularly successful in winning the dispute after one full day of ASOS, galvanising students and their parents to pile pressure on university management over concerns around graduation and stage progression;
3. Noting that in recent ballots support for ASOS has generally been consistently high;
4. Recognising that not all members take part in a single activity at any one time, but holding that assessment boycotts are nonetheless one of the most powerful tools at our collective disposal.

Conference calls on HEC to mandate an assessment boycott as a core part of our UK-wide strategy for all branches in the four fights and pensions dispute, alongside the currently-tabled and future industrial action.

Motion 9 4 Fights - Escalating industrial action

LOST

Votes in favour	79
Votes against	110
Registered abstentions	11

Conference notes:

1. That there are sufficient surpluses within Higher Education to address the decline in real terms pay, the shameful pay gaps and the scourge of casualisation and rising workloads;
2. That employers have backtracked on promises gained after the 2019-2020 industrial action and have refused to engage in meaningful consultation with UCU;
3. That the future of HE is at stake and that we need to re-double our efforts to bring employers to the table for meaningful negotiations.

Conference resolves:

- a. To escalate industrial action by moving towards a marking boycott. Interfering with the award of degrees will hurt employers and is the strongest weapon UCU has not used;
- b. To give branches maximum local discretion about when to take industrial action as assessment timetables differ from institution to institution
- c. To support further industrial action with a vigorous fundraising campaign to support the central fighting fund.

Motion 10 Motion on marking boycott for Four Fights and USS disputes

CARRIED

Votes in favour	126
Votes against	60
Registered abstentions	14

Conference believes

- a. That successful action over the four fights and USS will require intensification of industrial action.
- b. That a marking boycott is one option to achieve this and should be a priority for the next round of industrial action.

Conference resolves

1. To call for marking boycotts at the earliest opportunity.
2. That UCU's UK officers MUST communicate with local branches in issuing industrial action notices to ensure dates are maximally effective.
3. That boycott organisation will be coordinated through regular, scheduled Branch Delegate Meetings to share best practice and decide on strategy.
4. That local branches should coordinate local fundraising and cross-subsidise wages from those not affected to those likely to have pay docked.
5. Where local branches cannot cross-subsidise or fundraise, they will be prioritised for central funds, and other branches (especially any not passing the threshold) should consider donating directly to their strike funds.

Motion 11 Four fights continued and marking boycott

LOST

Votes in favour	37
Votes against	146
Registered abstentions	17

Conference notes:

1. UCEA's 1.5% pay offer does not keep staff pay level with inflation;
2. Employers have not made sufficient progress on UCU's demands concerning decasualisation, equality and workload. Conference believes UUK's rejection of UCU's USS proposals makes a 'win' on the Four Fights imperative.

Conference resolves to:

- a. continue the call on UCEA for a £2,500 pay uplift on all points;
- b. call on employers to support the creation of new JNCHES;
- c. prepare for a marking boycott, ASOS, and calls for external examiner resignations if employers do not agree to, or negotiate on, points a and b.

Motion 12 Escalation of Four Fights Dispute

LOST

Votes in favour	72
Votes against	98
Registered abstentions	29

Conference believes that the consequences of the Four Fights dispute will be hugely significant for the future of the sector. Employers have repeatedly tabled real-terms pay cuts and an offer of 0% while inflation spikes, alongside rampant precarity and

redundancy threats. This approach is destroying employment conditions in our sector and the effects of this will be felt most keenly by casualised HE workers.

Conference further believes: Given the employers have a massive financial interest in undermining our terms and conditions, it will require a significant escalation of industrial action, meaning weeks of strikes rather than days, combined with an assessment boycott to win.

Motion 13 Next steps in the disputes

CARRIED

Votes in favour	118
Votes against	71
Registered abstentions	11

Conference notes the successful strategy employed by Liverpool UCU to defeat redundancies at their institution, viz. a marking boycott, followed by the threat of industrial action affecting the following academic year.

Conference calls:

1. on HEC to schedule a ballot of members for all-out industrial action in the USS and Four Fights disputes, in order that action should commence from the beginning of the academic year 2022/2023;
2. on HEC to develop a strategy that can sustain strike action over months rather than weeks;
3. on the General Secretary to use her public platform to promulgate the intent of rendering the first semester of the next academic year non-viable; in particular, to make this intent known to potential international applicants.

This motion is to be viewed as independent to any action affecting the remainder of the academic year 2021-2022.

Motion 14 (without point ii) Planning now for action next academic year

LOST

Votes in favour	77
Votes against	96
Registered abstentions	14

SHESC notes that recent industrial action has been planned reactively, undermined by failures to:

1. ballot for action during summer 2021
2. pre-plan effectively timed escalation.

SHESC believes that

- a. ineffective action risks demoralisation, undermining the union
- b. effective action must be pre-planned democratically in consultation with elected branch delegates and vigorously implemented by the union centrally.

SHESC resolves:

- A that the General Secretary now coordinate preparation of an industrial action plan for the academic year 2022-23, including
 - i. aggregated ballots to maintain mandates for action throughout
 - iii. a timetable for escalation of strikes in 2022-23
 - iv. marking, admissions and worktime-survey boycotts
 - v. immediate, united UK-wide responses to punitive ASOS deductions
 - vi. contingencies to foreseeable events
 - vii. transparent negotiations and decision making.

The plan should consider:

- the UK employer negotiations calendar
- the teaching terms of institutions.

- B the HEC modify and activate the plan if the disputes are unresolved on 1/7/2022

Motion 15 Strike action during induction Autumn 2022

CARRIED

Votes in favour	143
Votes against	45
Registered abstentions	12

Conference notes:

1. the continued decline in pay which has led to a real terms pay cut of over 20%
2. persistent inequalities in relation to insecure contracts, disability, gender and ethnicity
3. rampant work intensification and a decline in conditions which has led to widespread work-related ill health
4. the spectre of [more, concerted] attacks on staff in the TPS
5. an employer which refuses to engage in meaningful negotiations
6. the absence of an effective strategy to address the problem of ASOS-related

pay deductions

Conference believe that an effective industrial action strategy must:

- a. be informed by the views and experiences of members on the ground
- b. take account of local variations in delivery patterns and activities

Conference resolves to recommend strike action of at least 5 consecutive days in the induction period of the academic year 2022/23, with exact timings to be locally determined in order to have maximum impact.

Motion 16 Working towards a long-term strategy for the four fights campaign

LOST

Motion to remit motion 16 was LOST

Votes in favour of remitting	60
Votes against remitting	116
Registered abstentions	24

Vote on motion 16

Votes in favour	80
Votes against	87
Registered abstentions	27

This conference notes the 4F campaign deals with the most difficult, underhanded, and creeping issues the Union faces as a result of the commercialisation of HE.

This conference celebrates action taken by thousands of members over the past six months.

This conference resolves to:

1. Undertake a mapping exercise of membership within 6 months, engaging all membership, especially underrepresented groups such as ARPS and casually employed members. To explore specific solutions to the issues of the 4F Campaign, locally and UK-wide.
2. Hold a special conference within 10 months on impactful action post-COVID, with special streams on ARPS, pay gaps and casualisation.
3. Demand a real term pay rise that reflects the soaring cost of living.
4. Work closely with sister unions, UK-wide and locally, to identify common issues and organise common action.

Motion 18 Building towards a transformational UK-wide dispute on pay

LOST

Votes in favour	89
Votes against	105
Registered abstentions	6

Special sector conference notes:

1. The strength, feeling and desire for a significant and transformational award across all four fights.
2. The capacity of branch committees and the membership to organise GTVO campaigns is waning, and this presents a potential threat to the movement.
3. That time is required to build a strategic claim that enables over 50% of UK membership to participate in the action.

Special sector conference resolves to:

- a. To build towards a significant and transformational pay award in 2023/4.
- b. To engage members in consultation on bargaining and the 2023/4 claim at the branch and regional level.
- c. To use the time to engage with sister unions engaged in JNCHES to progress the joint claim with the intention of joint dispute and action.
- d. To strongly consider the use of an aggregated ballot for any industrial action resulting from the 2023/4 claim.

Motion 19 Taking effective industrial action

LOST

Votes in favour	84
Votes against	98
Registered abstentions	17

Conference believes that:

1. The Higher Education Committee (HEC) has failed to adequately consult with branches to coordinate meaningful dates and ensure that all branches take industrial action at effective times.
2. Conference believes that the actions of local branches are central to a successful dispute and sector-wide action should take place based on input from branches as to when action will be most effective.

Conference demands that:

- a. Effective dates for further industrial action for each branch are immediately identified.
- b. UCU must then notify the relevant employers of branches' intent to take action based on when it is most effective, within legal timeframes.
- c. All future industrial action is informed by identifying the most effective times and form of action, with branches consulted well in advance of a ballot.

Motion 20 Striking out of teaching term

CARRIED

Votes in favour	93
Votes against	88
Registered abstentions	18

SHESC believes employer intransigence on Four Fights necessitates maximised impact of strike action from staff in all roles.

SHESC notes:

- 1. Strike action tends to be called only during term time.
- 2. Major works such as IT upgrades are generally scheduled out of term, allowing the opportunity for strike action to have significant impact on academic related activities.
- 3. Research funder deadlines and conferences are generally outside of term, allowing the opportunity for strike action to have significant impact on funders and visibility to international colleagues.
- 4. Researchers who choose to strike are sacrificing their wages and outputs, with career implications, regardless of the date of strike action.

SHESC calls on HEC and officers to adopt a strategic approach to the Four Fights dispute which explicitly does not rule out the option of strike action at any time of year in consultation with branches who are asked to identify their own points of leverage.

Motion 21 Co-ordinating effective UK-wide action

CARRIED

Votes in favour	154
Votes against	40
Registered abstentions	6

SHESC believes:

1. That a UK-wide, co-ordinated attack on assessment must be based on input from branches about the marking timetable that identifies when strike and ASOS most effectively target assessment in each branch.
2. The Liverpool dispute (2021) showed that marking boycotts need to be complemented with sustained industrial action and need the full involvement of all members including those with no assessment roles.

SHESC resolves:

- a. To demand that an emergency meeting be held between branch officers and HEC, the General Secretary and UK Officers, to discuss effective dates for further industrial action.
- b. To ensure this dispensation is not limited to Liverpool but to all branches, granting them the autonomy to take action when it is most effective in this dispute.
- c. To ensure all future industrial action is informed by identifying the most effective times and dates for all local branches to take action against each employer.

Motion 23 Maximum effective action

CARRIED

Votes in favour	161
Votes against	33
Registered abstentions	5

Conference notes:

1. Decisions taken at previous Conferences to maintain the link between Four Fights and USS
2. The pattern of days over Feb/Mar that did not reflect the above
3. The number of branches who were striking in Reading Weeks and/or school holidays

Conference believes:

- a. We need to exert maximum force on the employers by having the maximum number of branches out at any one time
- b. Effective action is disruptive action

Conference resolves:

- i. To maintain the link between the two disputes until sufficient progress is made in one or both to justify separation

- ii. To consult branches in detail as to which dates to avoid
- iii. To allow limited local variation to minimise as far as possible strike action on unproductive days while maintaining maximum effective action overall.

Motion 24 Call for a return to aggregated strike ballots

LOST

Votes in favour	89
Votes against	94
Registered abstentions	17

UCU's current strategy of running disaggregated ballots in UK-wide disputes has not recently been successful. In the 2021 Four Fights ballot only 54 branches initially met the threshold for action on an overall turnout of 51%. While aggregated ballots would have enabled industrial action across the sector, disaggregated ballots have enabled university leaders to characterise disputes as enjoying only the support of a minority. This weakens our negotiating hand, risks damaging solidarity across the sector, and weakens the public impact and media profile of the action.

Conference

1. instructs HEC in future to make aggregated ballots the default position in future sector-wide industrial disputes
2. resolves to provide support to branches with low turnouts to enable them to increase these.