

University and College Union

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To	Branch and regional committee secretaries
Topic	Unconfirmed minutes of the on-line special Further Education sector conference, Saturday 13 April 2024
Action	For approval / adoption
Summary	Unconfirmed minutes of the special Further Education sector conference which took place on Saturday 13 April, to debate FEC's 'levelling up the sector' strategy and decide next steps, including whether to move to an aggregate ballot.
Contact	Paul Bridge (Head of Higher Education) conference business, pbridge@ucu.org.uk

Special Further Education sector conference, online on Zoom

Unconfirmed minutes

(an attendance list can be available)

1. Opening and Welcome

- 1.1. Maxine Looby, President elect, Chair of the FEC and Chair of this special conference, welcomed all delegates. It was noted that the conference met the quorum required and the final agenda had been circulated in UCU2123A, along with two documents with relevant information: FEC's 'Levelling up the sector' strategy, and a 'New Deal for FE' strategy.
- 1.2. The Chair gave full details on the format of the meeting which included a list of speakers and timings, Zoom web format used, recording of the conference solely for the purpose to help with minute taking, and conduct of business. A Transcriber was available to assist with access issues. Delegates were also asked to note that all business would be taken in close session – no tweets, social media allowed, and real time voting will be undertaken by Civica CES.
- 1.3. A test vote followed (53f / 7a / 9abs)

2. Formal Business

- 2.1. The Chair invited CBC to move the conference report which was presented by Chris Jones, CBC and NPTC Group of Colleges. In his brief address to sector conference, delegates were asked to note specific items on the agenda as it relates to motions ruled out of order and consequentials which arose owing to the contradictory relationship of some motions in the first section of business. Chris then extended best wishes for the conference.

- 2.2. The Chair invited Paul Bridge, Head of Further Education, to address conference and Paul gave a summary of the events which had taken place leading up to this special sector conference. Paul welcomed the delegates in attendance, thanked them for participating on a Saturday and extended solidarity to FE branches in dispute. Paul highlighted that branches had requisitioned the SFESC and over 100 delegates and 80 branches were at the conference, which indicated the significance of the decisions to be made and the strength of the UCU democracy in FE. In his address Paul highlighted the FEC's 'Levelling up the sector' strategy, and a 'New Deal for FE' strategy, referred to the motions and the strategic direction they were advocating the union take, the lack of a consensus on when to launch and aggregate ballot, the need for a new national bargaining agreement, and the need for a joined up campaign the union can unite around. Conference was encouraged to give as much thought to a unified strategy as possible and to consider carefully the risks associated with holding a national aggregate ballot at this time, and the need to build branches and involve them at the heart of the unions decision making. Paul commented that the employers will not voluntarily agree to binding national bargaining and that UCU needs a critical mass of members and a large majority of branches engaged and leading the campaign for a new settlement in FE. We are not there yet but making progress and this conference was a key moment in the development of the campaign. Paul concluded by wishing all delegates well and looked forward to implementing the decisions made.
- 2.3. The Chair then called for two votes to be taken so that the conference could proceed, and sector conference AGREED the following;
- The principles on which conference was taking place by a vote 58f / 3a / 5abs;
- To adopt the CBC report by a vote of 50f / 4a / 10abs.
- 2.4. Delegates were provided with contacts details if they could not operate the online voting system.

3. Debate of motions

- 3.1. The Chair opened the debate of motions on the agenda and called for movers and speakers to be ready to move and second motions. Delegates were asked to note the process required to enable this and reminded of the consequential which the Chair read out:
- If motion 1 (or motion 2) is passed, motions 3, 4, 5 and the final phrase of point iii in motion 6 ('and to ballot members in an aggregated ballot') will fall.***
- 3.2. Motions 1 to 6 in Section 1: Levelling up campaign and aggregated ballot were taken in one debate.
- 3.3. Speakers in the debate on these motions, along with the movers, included Kathryn Sherry, *Trafford and Stockport college group*, Alison Gaughan, *Kirklees College*, Brian Hamilton *Novus*, John Fones, *FEC/Bridgewater & Tauton College*,

Simon Warne, *Colchester Institute*, Safia Flissi, *South & City College, Birmingham*, Elaine White, *Bradford College*.

- 3.4. A second test vote was also undertaken to ensure delegates were able to vote before voting on the motions (63f / 3a / 13abs).
- 3.5. Right of replies were exercised by movers of motions before the votes.

Motion 1 No move to an aggregated national ballot in 2024/25, Richmond upon Thames College was moved by Lucy Corr, *HRUC, Richmond upon Thames College* and seconded by Helen Kelsall, *NEC/FEC, Trafford College Group*. **The motion was CARRIED (53f / 32a / 3abs)**

Conference notes:

1. The success of the Respect FE campaign
2. The New Deal for FE strategy setting out an alternative strategy to win in FE.

Conference believes:

- a. That we must build branch organisation and unite around the New Deal for FE strategy to win national binding pay bargaining.
- b. That the FEC should regularly check in with branches and members to build support for the 2024/25 campaign via branch briefings, surveys and consultative e-ballots.

Conference resolves:

- i. That the FEC and FE officers should immediately implement the New Deal for FE strategy and Respect FE campaign after this conference around the 2024/25 national claim.
- ii. That there shall be no national aggregated ballot in 2024/25.
- iii. That there shall be no future national aggregated ballot until there strong membership support, an FE sector conference decision, and a new national bargaining agreement in place.

Motion 2 Respecting the decisions of the FE sector, Eastern and Home Counties regional FE committee was moved by David Hunter, *City College Norwich/E&H counties* and seconded by Thomas Lynds, *Milton Keynes College*. **The motion was CARRIED (57f / 25a / 5abs)**

Conference notes:

1. SFESC April 2023 Motion 4 and Motion 5 which instructed FEC to campaign for at least a year for national binding bargaining in the FE sector and to subsequently call an FE sector conference before any move away from Respect FE or towards an aggregated ballot.
2. FESC May 2023 motion FE2 calling on FEC to begin to prepare for an aggregated ballot from January 2024.

Conference believes:

- a. FEC did not adhere to SFEC April 2023 motions 4 or 5 when it met in February and called an aggregate ballot for this academic year.
- b. That the timescale envisioned by FEC for winning an aggregated ballot and national dispute is unrealistic.

Conference resolves to instruct FEC to:

- i. continue with the Respect FE campaign, with no aggregated ballot this year
- ii. use local pay claims to build branches in preparation for a future aggregated ballot.

Motion 3 Composite: No one must be left behind, Merton College, CCCG City and Islington (Camden Road), South and City College Birmingham, New City College Tower Hamlets (Poplar), Further education committee was moved by Sean Vernell, *FEC/Capital City College Group* and seconded by Regine Pilling, *Westminster Kingsway*. **This motion FELL.**

Notes:

1. In 1993 the sector was incorporated and with it the break-up of national bargaining and the introduction of the market and competition into the sector.
2. Since incorporation the FE sector has become the worse funded sector within education. Before incorporation FE lecturers were better paid than teachers.
3. The Respect pay campaigns
4. This year only 60 college/employers awarded 6.5% in part or whole
5. Before that only half of the colleges that entered disputes were given pay awards
6. The disparity of pay in colleges e.g. highest pay grade for lecturers is as low as c£30-34k, many on c£39k with highest paid at c£49k .
7. College staff are paid on average £9k less than school and sixth form teachers
8. The NEU won 6.5% for all their members with an aggregated ballot and national strike action
9. The AoC willingness to enter exploratory talks over binding national agreements
10. Wales FE won national binding agreements; the EIS-FELA won binding sector bargaining in 2015.
11. Labour's New Deal proposals for binding Fair Pay Agreements and intent to bring these in within 100 days of taking office.
12. The General Election (GE) this year.

Believes that:

- a. The break- up of national bargaining has institutionalised localised bargaining leading to a disparity between colleges and regions of pay and conditions.
- b. By having no national agreements that are binding on colleges/groups has led not only to one of the most unequal public sector organisations but also has allowed the sector to be the most underfunded. Binding sectoral bargaining would be significantly better than what we have now
- c. There is a confluence of interests between opposition parties, trade unions and some employers to bring about binding sector bargaining.
- d. We have made some gains over the last 5 years with locally coordinated campaigns and are better prepared for national action.
- e. Our “wins” are not spreading to all branches, we are leaving behind many members
- f. Members want a mass campaign to make an impact on pay and conditions together.
- g. A national campaign will ensure our voices are loud enough to be heard
- h. We can achieve binding sector agreements.

Resolves:

- i. To support FEC’s levelling up strategy, and campaign for parity with school teachers.
- ii. Call upon UCU to include the demand for binding agreements in UCU’s GE Manifesto work
- iii. Support and mobilise for the lobby of MPs and Parliament in the autumn.

Motion 4 Composite: Winning the levelling up campaign, Westminster Kingsway College, CCG City and Islington (Camden Road), Further education committee was moved by Regine Philling, *FEC/Capital City College Group* and seconded by Tom Whittaker, *City of Bristol College*. **This motion FELL.**

Notes:

- 1. The 600m extra over two years given to the sector.
- 2. The government decision to re classify FE.
- 3. The GE is likely to be in the Autumn.
- 4. The FEC decision to implement SFESC and FESC motions to ballot to enable action in the new academic term.
- 5. The college census date in October.

Believes:

- a. Our campaigning has forced the AoC to agree to have 'exploratory' talks over binding agreements
- b. Strike action prior to the census date gives us additional leverage and visibility.
- c. It will take England-wide escalating strike action, alongside demonstrations and lobbying, to win our claim.

Resolves:

- i. To support the FEC's Levelling up campaign strategy.
- ii. If we are successful in winning the ballot to call escalating strike action from September.
- iii. Call an education day of action in our localities on one of the strike days.
- iv. Convene a strike committee at the end of the first wave of escalating strike action to review and decide the next steps.

Motion 5 Move to an aggregated ballot, Loughborough College was moved by Phil Baker, *Loughborough College* and seconded by Richard McEwan, *FEC & New City College*. **This motion FELL.**

Conference calls on the FEC to arrange a national aggregated ballot in June with the intention of calling a national strike of all branches in September 2024. The demands of the strike should include;

1. An above inflation pay rise to level up the sector with mainstream schools.
2. Nationally binding pay scales, based on the current best in the sector
3. Nationally agreed work load agreement based on the current best in the sector.

The latest campaign based on local branch bargaining did not harness the power of the whole sector. Individual colleges claimed that their finances would not be able to pay an above inflation pay rise and threatened cuts to jobs and working conditions.

A national ballot will pressure the government into funding and running the sector properly in line with mainstream schools.

Motion 6 The Respect campaign: Unity in Action, City of Liverpool College was moved by Bob MGill, *City of Liverpool College* and seconded by Nina Doran, *FEC & City of Liverpool College*.

Resolves point iii FELL; To campaign for a binding national agreement and to ballot members in an aggregated ballot.

The motion was CARRIED as amended without point iii (point iii FELL)
41F/32A/13Ab

Notes:

1. In 2023/2024 only 60 college/employers awarded 6.5% in part or whole
2. There are still significant disparities for college lecturers in England in both pay, and terms and conditions.

Believes:

- a. We have made some gains over the last 5 years with locally coordinated campaigns. However, not all members have had the benefit of these gains.
- b. The time and conditions are right now for us to take national collective action.
- c. The sector needs a binding harmonised national contract for pay, and terms and conditions of employment.

Resolves:

- i. To evidence the disparities, with data, to show the current range in pay, and terms and conditions across the sector in England.
- ii. To produce briefing papers to send to all members explaining the importance of binding agreements.

Motion 7 Levelling up, leave no one behind: winning the ballot, Merton

College was taken as a single motion. The motion was moved by Peter Evans, *West London College/FEC* on behalf of Merton College and seconded by Richard McEwan, *New City College/FEC*. **This motion was CARRIED (41f / 30a / 3abs)**

Notes:

1. The decision of sector conference for an aggregated ballot to be implemented following the FESC prior to the summer break.
2. Our claim for binding national sector agreements, a national workload agreement and a 10% pay increase.

Believes that:

- a. All three issues are linked. We want binding agreements on pay and workload for all members.
- b. The last Respect campaign mainly focussed on pay and not on binding agreements and workload.
- c. To convince members to turn out in the ballot, the case for binding and our workload demands must be clear to members as well as pay.

Resolves for:

- i. UCU to produce a petition 'Levelling up, leave no one behind: binding pay and workload agreements for all.'

- 3.6. The Chair moved on to Section 2 of the agenda : Branch opt-out of aggregated ballot. Delegates were asked to note motions 8 and 9 would be taken in one debate. Movers and speakers were called.
- 3.7. Speakers in the debate included Monica Lawson, *New College Swindon*, Anita Jarvis, *SW Regional Committee*, David Hunter, *City College Norwich*, Helen Kelsall, *FEC/NEC & Trafford College Group*, Simon Warne, *Colchester Institute*, Suzanne Toole, *Bolton College*, Peter Bicknell, *Lewisham College*, Sean Vernell, *FEC & Capital City College Group*, John Fones, *FEC & Bridgewater & Taunton College*, John Wooldridge, *York College*, Tom Whitaker, *City of Bristol College*.
- 3.8 Right of replies were exercised by movers.

Motion 8 The path to victory begins with local branches, New College Swindon was moved by Monica Lawson, *New College Swindon* and seconded by Anita Jarvis, *SW Regional Committee*. The motion was **CARRIED 51F/30A/2Ab**

SFESC notes:

1. The willingness of members to fight on pay, workloads, and national bargaining.
2. The success of the Respect FE strategy coordinating branches in last year's dispute.
3. The new FEC strategy of 'levelling up the sector' and move to a national aggregate ballot.
4. The lack of detail contained in, debate on and branch involvement in that strategy.

SFESC believes:

- a. Branches are essential to the proper functioning of UCU democracy and decision-making.
- b. Strategy should be debated and democratically agreed by branches.
- c. The move to an aggregated ballot is too soon.
- d. There is no clear path to victory because it is unclear who we are in dispute with.

SFESC resolves:

- i. To allow for branch exclusions from any national action, dependent on local context.
- ii. To retain local power to build branch capacity, density, and organising power whilst a long-term strategy is constructed and employed so that we can achieve our aims.

Amendment 9A.1 Eastern and home counties regional FE committee was moved by Simone Warne, *Colchester Institute* which was accepted by the mover of the motion and **CARRIED 54F/21A/7Ab**.

Replace i. with: "i. That, until national binding pay bargaining is achieved, any FE branch will be able to opt out of any national dispute or aggregated ballot by passing a motion to that effect at a quorate branch meeting."

Motion 9 Branch control over involvement in national disputes, City College Norwich was moved by David Hunter, *City College Norwich* and seconded by Helen Kelsall, *FEC/NEC*. **The motion was CARRIED as amended by 9A.1 52F/32A/1Ab**

Conference notes:

1. That until national binding pay bargaining is achieved, FE college branches negotiate with their employer, not with the government.
2. That motion 7 at SFESC April 2023 called for a mechanism for branch exclusions from national campaigns.

Conference believes:

- a. There are many reasons a branch may want to opt out of a national dispute or ballot.
- b. That each branch is best placed to make its own decision to stay in or opt out.
- c. That solidarity in a national dispute must be built and cannot be imposed.

Conference resolves:

- i. That, until national binding pay bargaining is achieved, any FE branch will be able to opt out of any national dispute or aggregated ballot by passing a motion to that effect at a quorate branch meeting.

3.9 The Chair asked delegates to note that motions 10 and 11 in Section 3: Local agreements will be taken in one debate. Speakers of motions were called.

3.10 Speakers in the debate were Lucy Corr, *HRUC*, Monica Lawson, *New College Swindon*, David Hunter, *City College Norwich*, Anita Jarvis, *SW Regional Committee*, Brian Hamilton, *Novus*, Sean Vernell, *FEC*, Cecily Blyther, *Petroc*, Nina Doran, *FEC*.

3.11 Rights of replies were exercised by the movers.

Motion 10 No national ratification of local agreements in FE, Richmond upon Thames College was moved by Lucy Corr, *HRUC* and seconded by Monica Lawson, *New College Swindon*. **The motion was CARRIED (49f / 26a / 5abs)**

Conference notes that motion 7 at SFESC April 2023 resolved that if national binding pay bargaining is in place, the appropriate ratification process shall be followed.

Conference believes that it is not the role of the FEC to instruct branches on the settlement of local agreements in the absence of binding national pay bargaining.

Conference resolves that national ratification of local agreements in FE shall not take place unless and until national binding pay bargaining is in place.

Motion 11 Local settlements in FE disputes, City College Norwich was moved by David Hunter, *City College Norwich* and seconded by Anita Jarvis, *SW Regional committee*. **The motion was CARRIED (49f / 28a / 3abs)**

Conference notes:

1. That until national binding pay bargaining is achieved, FE college branches negotiate with their employer, not with the government.
2. That motion 7 at SFESC April 2023 called for FE branches to have the right to negotiate pay and conditions with their employers.

Conference believes:

- a. That members have the right to accept or reject any offer from their employer that their branch committee places before them.
- b. That solidarity in a national dispute must be built and cannot be imposed.

Conference resolves:

- i. That at any time, branch committees may present any offer from their employer to branch members.
- ii.* That decisions over whether to accept such an offer may be made at a quorate branch meeting or by a simple majority vote in an eballot of branch members.

4. Close of conference

- 4.1. The Chair brought conference to a close and expressed her enormous thanks to all for their attendance and pleased that sector conference business had been covered. In closing the Chair stated that it was important that members are listened to and the FESC has been a great example of that. She also extended her thanks to UCU staff who had provided support, CIVICA for the online voting and wished everyone best wishes for the weekend.
- 4.2. Conference closed.