

University and College Union

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To	Branch and local association secretaries, special conference delegates
Topic	minutes of the Special higher education sector conference, 17 May 2024 called to identify a strategy for branches to mount a significant, coordinated, sector level response to threats to jobs, disciplines, T&Cs, including attacks on TPS and academic freedom
Action	For adoption
Summary	Minutes of the special HE sector conference 17 May 2024
Contact	Shahenda Suliman (Head of HE), Christine Bernabe (HO administrator)

Special Higher Education sector conference

Friday 17 May 2024, 09:30 – 13:00

On-line conference

Minutes

1 Opening and welcome

- 1.1 Maria Chondrogianni, Vice President and Chair of sector conference welcomed all and opened sector conference. Brief introductions were made.

2 Chair's business

- 2.1 The Chair stated that sector conference met the quorum. The agenda for business was found in circular UCU/2137 which had been circulated to all delegates. The Chair read out instructions and format to delegates, adding that she was not happy with some of the arrangements, for example the lack of challenging the Chair. Moreover she explained the process in which speakers would move, second and speak to motions and asked all to keep in mind Standing Order 36 for the smooth running of business.
- 2.2 A test vote was carried out (74 delegates voted in favour, 17 against and 34 abstained)

3 Report of the CBC

- 3.1 At the Chair's invitation, Alan Barker moved the CBC agenda. The CBC chair expressed concerns that this sector conference was taking place so close to

Congress and that the online format did not allow challenges from the floor. In moving the report, delegates were asked to note the consequential set out in relations to motions HE8 and HE9. The CBC chair wished all a comradely debate and hoped decisions made would contribute to useful union policy.

- 3.2 The report was ADOPTED by a vote (117f / 4a / 10abs). The principles to allow conference was APPROVED (114f / 12a / 9abs)

4 Update from Head of HE

- 4.1 Shahenda Suliman, Head of HE gave a verbal report to sector conference. The Head of HE updated on recent UCEA meetings as well as additional meetings held. The negotiators anticipated a final offer next week. With regards to 'offers' made, the Head of HE explained UCEA had shifted only marginally and in response to the unions further negotiations, were to go back and seek a revised offer. Negotiations on the TORs were being re-negotiated and UCEA had been made aware of the other elements of the claim which affected members and include climate issues, pensions and national agreements including the post-92 national contract and HE2000.
- 4.2 The Head of HE updated briefly on the scale of redundancies across the UK and work the UCU campaigns launched under the banner of 'Reclaim HE'
- 4.3 The verbal updates were NOTED.

5 Debate of motions

- 5.1 The Chair introduced the debate of motions and asked delegates to note consequential as had been stated by the CBC chair. Any business not heard owing to time, would be remitted to the HEC.
- 5.2 Delegates were called to move and second motions as per the agenda.

Defending jobs and disciplines

HE1 HE-sector redundancies support and campaign, Higher Education

Committee was moved by Rebecca Harrison, HEC and seconded by David Harvie, HEC. There was no opposition to the motion which was CARRIED (139f/1a/3abs)

HESC notes:

1. Mass redundancies in HE, and members' extraordinary efforts to resist them.
2. That probable declines in 2024–25 student applications, and uneven student distribution, are ongoing concerns.
3. The success of the Organising and Bargaining Information System (OBIS) project in FE campaigns.

Believes:

- a. Campaigns against redundancies will be most effective when informed by research, and when branches collaborate to share experiences and tactics.

Resolves to establish an anti-redundancy campaign that –

- i. Investigates HEI finances, relevant corporate interests, and equalities data of those targeted for redundancy, with findings included in OBIS.
- ii. Updates redundancy guidance for branches.
- iii. Schedules time for knowledge-sharing in branch officer meetings.
- iv. Offers legal support to affected branches, and shares information about evidencing legal claims with members.
- v. Seeks test cases of, for example, trade union victimisation, and supports such cases at employment tribunals.

HE2 A Threat to One is A Threat to All: Solidarity with branches in dispute

University of Glasgow was moved by Marion Hersh, HEC and seconded by Christina Paine, London Metropolitan (in the absence of Elena Heffernan). There was no opposition to the motion which was CARRIED (130f/10a/5abs)

Conference deplores the increasing threats to branches, jobs and courses, particularly in Arts and Humanities.

Conference affirms the importance of collective solidarity and support in fighting these threats and not leaving branches to fight on their own.

Conference believes that marketisation and insufficient funding are a major factor in these threats.

Conference calls on HEC to

1. Provide information and support for branches for developing local, regional and developed nations' hardship funds.
2. Establish twinning and multi-branch support scheme to enable branches not (yet) in dispute/under threat to support those that are.
3. Organise political campaign for free education and much greater HE funding and build support for this campaign from students, trade unions and sympathetic MPs.
4. Negotiate a sector-wide moratorium on job cuts and subject/course closures.

HE3 Fighting for everyone in HE, Academic related, professional staff

committee National Negotiators' Report to UCU Higher Education Sector Conference, 30 May 2024 was moved by Amy Ryall, Academic related Staff committee and seconded by Vicky Blake, HEC. There was no opposition to the motion which was CARRIED unanimously (145f)

SHESC notes:

1. Cuts to departments, disciplines, and associated work areas across UK HE threaten all job types in our sector
2. Such cuts and further job losses via administrative "consolidation" correlate to workload intensification

SHESC calls on HEC to ensure:

- a. Democratic involvement of members across all job and contract types, vital to building the strong, coherent industrial and political strategies we need to defend and develop UK HE
- b. Updated branch guidance on defending all job and contracts types must be developed with clear pathways to access support, founded upon solid data and intersectional analyses
- c. Clear strategy and campaigns are developed in close consultation with UCU representative structures including specialist committees (ARPS, Anti-Casualisation, Climate and Ecological Emergency) and Equality standing committees, and our regional and devolved structure
- d. Accessible campaign materials, events, and community engagement reflect and emphasise the breadth and value of work undertaken by members across our whole membership.

HE4 Defend the creative arts, Higher Education Committee was moved by Rhian Keyse, HEC and seconded by Cecelia Wee, Royal College of Art. There was no opposition to the motion which was CARRIED (139f/0a/9abs)

Conference notes:

1. Proposed cuts to funding for performing and creative arts courses at English universities next year, announced on 4 April
(https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/w4ojdzdr/2024-04-04-ofs-annual-guidance_spg_fy2024_25.pdf)
2. These cuts come in the context of multiple attacks on UKHE including redundancies and restructuring proposals especially affecting arts and humanities courses.
3. HE30 (2023) resolved to set up an Arts and Culture Campaign Group.

Conference believes:

- a. Such cuts are an ideological attack on the creative arts, working class students and the jobs of UCU HE members.
- b. These cuts disproportionately impact students from marginalised backgrounds, limiting access to the arts for all but a privileged few.
- c. This is a matter of urgent national importance for UCU.

Conference resolves:

- i. To defend creative arts courses in all institutions as a social, cultural & economic good
- ii. To enact HE30 of HESC 2023.
- iii. To call on the General Secretary to urgently lobby government and opposition parties in opposition to these cuts.

HE5 Languages Teaching, University of Durham was moved by Laura Campbell, HEC and seconded by Marion Hersh. There was no opposition to the motion and the motion was CARRIED (145f/0a/2abs)

SHESC notes:

1. 2024 has seen continued threats of closure of Arts & Humanities departments in UK universities, with modern languages a frequent target in HE.
2. The closure of numerous languages departments in the past 10 years.

SHESC believes:

- a. Languages as a discipline risks losing critical mass to be sustained as an academic discipline.
- b. Language teachers experience amongst the poorest terms and conditions of employment in UKHE.

SHESC resolves:

- i. Call on UUK to recognise the strategic importance of, and to cease closures of languages departments at Universities;
- ii. Include a call to standardise contract terms and conditions and career pathways for language teachers across UKHE in line with equal pay principles previously agreed through the Higher Education Role Analysis (HERA) in future JNCHEs negotiations.

Strategy and campaigning including general election

HE6 Supporting a Convention for Higher Education and Goldsmiths demonstration, London HE regional committee was moved by Sean Wallis, HEC and seconded formally by the Chair. There was no opposition to the motion and the motion was CARRIED (127f/17a/7abs)

SHESC notes

1. The crisis in HE, leading to UUK and UCEA lobbying for high fees and implementing mass redundancies.
2. The roots of this crisis lie in the 2010 fees and loans market system, with the English model increasing pressure on HEIs in other nations.
3. The need to build a broad political consensus in defence of higher education.
4. The partial success of the broad-based 2016 HE Convention initiative in lobbying Government to amend the Higher Education and Research Act.
5. UCU's latest Reclaim HE campaign.

SHESC resolves

- a. To support calls for a reconvened Convention for Higher Education initiated by London Region (date to be determined).
- b. To send a speaker to this event to discuss UCU's campaigns including Reclaim HE.

- c. To build and advertise this event.
- d. To support and mobilise for a national demonstration at Goldsmiths University, called by Goldsmiths and London Region UCU.

HE7 Building a political campaign over proper HE funding, London HE regional committee was moved by Sean Wallis, HEC and seconded formally by Hector Hamilton, University of Southampton. There was no opposition to the motion which was CARRIED (146f/5a/5a)

SHESC notes

1. The current funding crisis is primarily due to high tuition fees, plus high inflation
2. UUK has called for £12k+ tuition fees
3. The crisis is deepest in Arts & Humanities
4. UCU's opposition to tuition fees and graduate taxes
5. The forthcoming General Election

SHESC believes that a hike in fees would likely intensify the crisis.

SHESC resolves

- a. To publish a Manifesto for Higher Education emphasising UCU policy, the current crisis and how to resolve it in the interests of students, staff and parents
- b. To demand an incoming Labour Government:
 - Abolish the 'hostile environment' - including for overseas students
 - Cover additional employer TPS contributions
 - Restore the block grant to match the fee shortfall
- c. To organise a political campaign, aimed at MPs and candidates, to call on political parties to support this Manifesto
- d. To call a national demo and lobby of Parliament
- e. To run this campaign alongside every fight over redundancies and course closures.

Note – the Chair reminded conference of the CBC advice on consequential that if motion HE8 (point c) is passed, motion HE9 point b falls.

HE8 Call to action: reclaim our universities as a common good, University of Edinburgh was moved by Sophia Woodman, University of Edinburgh and seconded by Dyfrig Jones, HEC.

Sol Gamsa, Durham, proposed that resolves c and d be taken separately.

Sean Wallis, HEC, proposed that resolves c is taken separately.

Other speakers in the debate included Mark Abel (HEC), Jo Edge (HEC) and Chloe Wallace (University of Leeds). Sophia Woodman exercised a right of reply.

Sector conference AGREED to take resolves c separately by a vote of 111f/42a/4abs.

Sector conference AGREED to take resolves d separately by a vote of 87f/48a/19abs.

Resolves c was LOST (53f/97a/8abs)

To prepare a multi-year industrial action strategy following extensive consultation with members and to ballot for industrial action only after this consultation process, depending on outcome

Resolves d was CARRIED (79f/65a/12abs)

To give this strategy maximum chance of success by building membership density and entering into partnership agreements with other HE unions.

HE8 was subsequently CARRIED as amended (resolves a, b with resolves d as c)

Conference notes:

1. Destructive marketisation in UKHE has caused a multi-dimensional crisis imperiling HEIs, particularly impacting the humanities and social sciences
2. Resolution requires rethinking models of HE funding and student distribution
3. The current UK government has been persistently hostile to universities and critical thought, and won't address this crisis constructively
4. Solidarity across differently situated HEIs is vital at this moment

Resolves:

- a. To launch a public campaign emphasising HE as a common good, showing that the value of research and education cannot be reduced to market metrics
- b. To propose alternative models for funding and student distribution to ensure sustainability of HEIs
- c. To give this strategy maximum chance of success by building membership density and entering into partnership agreements with other HE unions.

HE9 Resisting the employers' offensive, University of Brighton was moved by Ryan Burns (University of Brighton) and seconded by Toby Lovat (University of Brighton)

HE9A.1, University of the West of Scotland FELL as there was no mover in attendance.

In resolves 'a', after 'organise', delete 'strike committees to synchronise action and'; replace with 'networks of support across the sector to'

Speaking in the debate on HE9 were Grant Buttars (HEC), Matilda Fitzmaurice (HEC), Donna Brown (Royal Holloway UoL) and Dyfrig Jones (HEC). Ryan Burns exercised a right of reply.

HE9 was CARRIED (87f / 53a / 11abs)

Conference notes the wave of attacks on jobs, terms and conditions, and educational provision in a growing number of HEIs.

Conference believes:

1. The calling off of the Four Fights and our subsequent failure to reach the aggregated ballot threshold have encouraged the employers to go on the offensive.
2. The attacks are locally implemented but employers are coordinating with each other.
3. Employers aim to weaken and discipline UCU and fracture the sector through a race to the bottom.
4. Fighting rearguard actions institution by institution will not be enough to stop the attacks.

Conference resolves:

- a. To organise strike committees to synchronise action and deliver maximum solidarity for branches in dispute.
- b. To develop a strategy which includes returning to UK-wide action in academic year 2024-25.
- c. To take advantage of election year by mounting a political campaign alongside campus and student unions in defence of jobs, contracts, courses and research.

HE10 Resisting job cuts, University of Liverpool was moved by Peta Bulmer (HEC) and seconded by William Hardman (University of Liverpool). There was no opposition to the motion which was CARRIED (120f / 14a / 6abs)

SHESC notes:

1. 50+ employers are pursuing redundancies
2. UCU has failed to develop a national strategy for resistance to redundancies
3. Forthcoming general election

SHESC believes:

- a. Moving to redundancies is a choice for many of these employers
- b. The funding crisis arises from the marketisation of education and mismanagement of university finances in competition within this market
- c. Leadership responsible for institutional financial distress should be accountable

- d. Combining industrial action with political action increases our leverage in stopping these redundancies.

SHESC resolves to:

- i. Ask employers for transparency and accountability of finances leading to proposed redundancies
- ii. Organise a series of national demonstrations ahead of the general election, starting in summer 2024
- iii. Focus political work on the constituencies where redundancies are identified
- iv. Require parliamentary candidates to endorse a UCU manifesto for jobs and an end to marketisation

HE11 Maximising political influence for a stable and fair HE sector, Higher Education Committee moved by Vicky Blake (HEC) and seconded by Anna Zueva (University of Huddersfield) was CARRIED (135f / 1a / 6abs)

Conference believes:

1. Ongoing crises require a coherent, democratically informed political strategy, maximising all avenues to secure a stable, accessible HE and research sector
2. We must lobby for progressive change at the General Election and beyond, holding MPs to account

Conference asks that UCU's general election work includes developing articulations of existing UCU policy including (not limited to):

- a. Proper public funding for HE from taxation and employer levies to address endemic instability
- b. Addressing the damaging impact of competition between institutions & over recruitment of students in some HEIs at the expense of others
- c. Long term stable budgets that facilitate and require institutional planning to maintain disciplines and departments with stable employment on sector-wide terms and conditions
- d. Ending costly, time consuming, damaging exercises including REF and TEF.

HE12 Learning from Fair Work Convention work in Scotland, Glasgow Caledonian University was moved by Douglas Chalmers (Glasgow Caledonian University) and seconded by Marion Hersh who asked that point 4 **only** of the motion be remitted

4. no inappropriate use of zero hours contracts;

This was LOST by a vote (48f /75a/18abs). Douglas Chalmers exercised a right of reply. The motion was CARRIED (125f/4a /16abs);

Conference notes that Fair Work First is the Scottish Government's policy to ensure employers that receive Scottish Government grants are upholding best

practice workplace policies, recognise trade unions, and promote workplace diversity.

Specifically employers awarded public funding must demonstrate that they meet the following criteria:

1. payment of at least the real Living Wage;
2. provide appropriate channels for effective workers' voice, such as trade union recognition;
3. investment in workforce development;
4. no inappropriate use of zero hours contracts;
5. action to tackle the gender pay gap and create a more diverse and inclusive workplace;
6. offer flexible and family friendly working practices for all workers from day one of employment; and,
7. oppose the use of fire and rehire practice.

Conference asks the HEC to look at the lessons of UCU Scotland's campaigning for this and consider how this might help our overall UK campaigning.

HE13 Acknowledging devolution in our UK campaigning, Glasgow Caledonian University was moved by Douglas Chalmers (Glasgow Caledonian University) and seconded by Eurig Scandrett (Queen Margaret University). There was no opposition to the motion which was CARRIED (121f / 10a / 7abs)

This Special Conference acknowledges the differences between the Scottish academic (HE2000) contract and the 'national' post-92 academic contract operative in England and Wales.

Conference believes that it is important that any strategy for unified campaigning by the union takes into account the devolved nature of our working conditions.

Conference therefore asks that the HEC ensure that:

- 1 Any campaigning on working conditions or pay acknowledges the above, and therefore ensures that any 'strategy for mounting a significant, coordinated, sector level response to threats to jobs, disciplines, T&Cs, including attacks on TPS and academic freedom' operates in a manner which takes the devolved nature of Higher Education into account.
- 2 Any resourcing of campaigns, conferences or co-ordination on this, also takes into account the devolved nature of Higher Education in the UK.

Terms and conditions

HE14 No to divisive and inequitable appraisal schemes, East Midlands HE regional committee was moved by Christopher Pritchard (Nottingham Trent University) and seconded by Agnes Flues (HEC). The motion was CARRIED (132f / 0a / 2abs)

Special Higher Education Sector Conference notes that:

1. The 1992 contract states that appraisal should be linked to development and not to any performance related pay.

Special Higher Education Sector Conference Believes that:

- a. It is concerning that schemes in some institutions have inequitable and divisory pay implications in a non-transparent manner
- b. Such pay implications have the potential to be discriminatory, are unfair and are not fit for purpose.

Special Higher Education Sector Conference Resolves to:

- i. Encourage branches to share information about appraisal schemes with their region, and for regional offices to share information about institutional appraisal schemes with each other, therefore enabling regional offices to continue to support branches in challenging institutional practices linking appraisal and pay.

HE15 Defend the maximum teaching year in post-92 contracts! , Nottingham Trent University was moved by Christopher Pritchard (Nottingham Trent University) and seconded by Stefan Hunt (Nottingham Trent University). There was no opposition and the motion was CARRIED (135f/0a /1abs)

Higher Education Sector Conference believes that:

1. The post-92 national contract is vital in safeguarding the workload of our members
2. Institutions are increasingly pushing the limits of the safeguards integrated within the contract
3. Non-traditional courses, such as apprenticeships and those in education and health, may have non-standard academic years that may breach the maximum teaching year provision within the national contract
4. The normalisation of teaching beyond the maximum teaching year, without negotiation and explicit agreement with UCU, is unacceptable.

Higher Education Sector Conference resolves to:

- a. Develop guidance for branches to support them in proactively challenging situations where the contractual maximum teaching year is exceeded
- b. Develop a way to share and disseminate information about situations where the maximum teaching year is exceeded, and any local agreements between UCU and institutions regarding specific courses to potentially impacted branches and regions.

Other matters

HE16 Composite: Branches' financial and budgetary awareness and Freedom of Information strategy, University of Nottingham, University of Aberdeen was moved by Andreas Bieler (University of Nottingham) and seconded by David

Anderson (University of Aberdeen). Diana Jeater (University of Liverpool) spoke in support of the motion. The motion was subsequently CARRIED (119f /4a /5abs)

SHESC notes:

1. The growing number of HE institutions (HEIs) attacks on jobs, terms and conditions;
2. HEIs claim that the financial challenges are sector-wide;
3. employers regularly refuse to share financial and planning information with unions and frequently refuse to honour FOI requests for management information on the grounds of commercial sensitivity
4. UCU branches have successfully challenged compulsory redundancies;
5. Congress 2024 motions ROC4, ED1, HE22 among others
6. branches may not have expertise in understanding employer calculations of deficits, covenants and financial reporting.

SHESC believes:

- a. Branch officers and activists require financial literacy to challenge job cuts and other savings plans;
- b. Respective expertise in this area is available amongst members, UCU staff and external consultants;
- c. While HE funding urgently needs reform, financial management in many HEIs is poor.

SHESC resolves:

- i. To instruct HEC to establish an HE finances working group, drawing on expertise from members and UCU staff to support branches with analysis of financial statements and budgets;
- ii. Create and share detailed financial analysis of universities' financial position within regions, to create precedents for branch negotiations.
- iii. To engage external consultants for specialist financial expertise upon request by a Branch
- iv. To develop training on analysis of university accounts, financial statements and budgets for branch officers and activists, and on how to write effective FOI requests
- v. To provide support to help branches lodge appeals with the Information Commissioner
- vi. To explore the potential for branches to be formally twinned to file requests on each other's behalf, thereby protecting members from victimisation.

HE17 Opposing restrictions for worker migrants in the UK, University of Oxford was moved by Timothy LaRock (University of Oxford) and seconded formally the the Chair. There was no opposition and the motion was CARRIED (130f /2a /0abs)

Conference notes that on December 4, 2023, the Home Secretary announced an increase of the minimum salary for a Skilled Worker Visa up to £38,700 annual salary, an increase of the partner visa minimum income, not allowing social care workers to bring dependents, and a review of the Graduate Visa.

Conference believes that:

1. The higher education sector depends on international migrant workers.
2. Salary thresholds affect migrant workers.
3. Restricting Visas for family members is a cruel measure.

Conference resolves:

- a. To call UK universities to rise salary thresholds for university workers so all posts are above the minimum visa threshold
- b. To call the UK Government to maintain and improve the Graduate Visa
- c. To call the UK Government to reinstate migrants' right to bring dependents and partners
- d. That our Union campaigns for the repeal of these measures and restrictions.

6 Close of sector conference

- 6.1 The Chair expressed her delight that all business had been taken and extended solidarity to university students across the UK, Post-16 education staff and students, branches under attacks as well as UCU staff and the Black members committee.
- 6.2 The Chair thanked the CBC colleagues for all hard work as well as all the UCU staff who had supported this sector conference and made it possible. She was looking forward to seeing everyone at Congress following which sector conference was officially closed.