



## Point of Order!

### A delegate guide to Congress terms

The Congress of the University and College Union (UCU) is the supreme policy-making body of the union. It meets annually, and branches (and regional, devolved nation and some other committees) are entitled to send delegates. National Executive Committee members are also members of Congress. Motions submitted in advance by branches and other bodies are debated and when passed, form the union's policy. Congress also provides an opportunity for members, the National Executive Committee and officials to meet and discuss ideas, at fringe meetings and informally.

This guide is intended to help delegates understand the key terms and procedures used in formal business. The full standing orders of Congress appear at the back of the agenda document.

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*'SO' refers to Congress standing orders – these appear at the end of your agenda.*

**Amendments to motions:** see 'Motions'

**Annual Report:** the Annual Report of the National Executive Committee is used by CBC to structure the business at Congress. It is published before the Congress motion deadline and forms part of the Congress documents (SO 2).

**Chair:** The Chair of Congress is normally UCU's President, and sector conferences are normally chaired by the Vice President elected for each sector. The arrangements to be made if these officers are not available are set out in SO 24. The Chair is responsible to their conference for the conduct of business, including the interpretation of rules and procedures, subject to challenge from conference on their rulings (SO 36).

If a challenge to the Chair's ruling is being dealt with, or the Chair wishes to move a

motion or speak in debate, they will ask another officer to take the chair.

**Compositing:** where motions and/or amendments have been submitted which are on the same subject and are sufficiently compatible, the Congress Business Committee may decide merge them into a single motion – this is called compositing. Compositing amendments may also be created as part of this process (SO 61v).

**Conduct:** The conduct of business – such as timing of speeches, right of reply – is regulated by a number of standing orders, (SO 29, 30, 31).

Conduct more generally is also referred to (SO 43, 44, 47, 48). The NEC has issued guidance on expectations of delegates' behaviour – this document is included in your Congress bag.

**Congress Business Committee (CBC):**

The Congress Business Committee is elected at Congress to organise its business. The committee comprises four HE members and four FE members (two members are elected from each sector each year, for a two year term). The Congress Business Committee receives and orders motions, which are then sent out to branches as the committee's first report.

Following the receipt and ordering of amendments, CBC issues its second report, which forms the substantive Congress agenda. Congress is asked to adopt this report. There may be additional reports made by CBC to Congress dealing with late or emergency business.

The Committee's recommendations include whether business is in order, on the compositing of motions, on the acceptance of motions submitted after the deadline, and the timetable of business (SO 58-64; also SO 7, 10, 11, 12, 25).

**Consequentials** A 'consequential' is the effect that passing one motion (or amendment) may have on other motions or amendments. If two motions cannot both be passed as policy because they conflict, the chair will announce in advance what will happen if the first motion voted on is passed. Usually it will mean that another motion (or amendment) will 'fall' – which means no vote is taken on it, it is lost by default due to Congress's decision on the first motion. Sometimes, only one clause of a subsequent motion will fall.

CBC advises the Chair, who advises Congress, of where consequentials occur (SO 32). (Note: the majority of motions do not create consequentials.)

**Deadlines:** The key deadlines are set by rule 16.7: Motions must be submitted at least eight working weeks and amendments at least three weeks, before the opening of the annual Congress. (Note that two weeks around Easter are not defined as 'working weeks', meaning that the deadline for motions usually falls 10 weeks before Congress.) The calling notice of Congress (usually issued in January) informs branches of the deadlines for submission of motions

and amendments. The deadline also appears in UCU's calendar issued each year in July.

**Delegate entitlement:** Congress delegate entitlement is calculated on the basis of the number of members in an institution: one delegate for every 400 members or part thereof. (rules 17.1 -17.4).

**Elections:** Members of the Congress Business Committee are elected each year by their sector conference (SO 61), as are negotiators for HE and FE, and USS negotiators. Nominations to these bodies are called for ahead of Congress. Since 2024, Congress elects members of the Conduct of Members Committee (rule 13).

**Emergency motion:** See 'late motions' below. (SO 12).

**Further Education Sector Conference**  
(see Sector Conferences)

**Higher Education Sector Conference**  
(see Sector Conferences)

**Hybrid Congress:** The standing orders now allow Congress to be held on a hybrid basis. (SO 18-21). Delegates participating remotely are able to vote on motions and make requests to speak in debate.

**Late motions:** There are two kinds of late motion:

i) Late motions submitted after the deadline for motions but before the start of Congress: these may be submitted by the bodies who can ordinarily submit motions, approved in the usual way, but must be 'urgent, timely and require a decision of Congress'. If CBC considers they meet the above criteria, they will recommend that such motions are ordered onto the agenda; a two-thirds majority of those voting in the relevant conference is required (SO 10).

ii) Emergency motions relating to matters which arise while Congress is meeting: these need to be submitted to CBC in the name of at least 10 delegations. CBC will make a recommendation on acceptance to the Chair, who will put this to the conference; a two thirds majority is required to order the motion(SO 12).

In either case if a conference votes to accept a late or emergency motion it is then treated

in all other respects for debate and voting like any other motion.

**Motions and amendments:** Branches may each submit one motion and one amendment to Congress, and two motions and two amendments to the sector conference relevant to them. The union's equality standing committees, employment special interest group committees and regional committees may also submit motions and amendments as may the NEC. The NEC's sector committees submit motions them directly to the relevant sector conference. Motions must be no more than 150 words, amendments must add no more than 75 words. (rule 16.7.1-16.7.5; SOs 3-5)

**National Executive Committee (NEC):** The NEC is the principal executive committee of the union, responsible for the execution of policy and the conduct of the general business of the union between meetings of Congress (rule 18.1). An NEC member may move each section of the report during the course of Congress. The NEC's motions and amendments are moved by members of the NEC.

**Order of business:** The order of business is determined by the Congress Business Committee and takes into account the sections of the NEC's Annual Report in determining the way in which the motions are grouped.

**Parts – motion taken in parts** A motion or amendment can be taken in parts for voting purposes (SO 32). This may be proposed if, for example, the debate demonstrates that one particular clause in a motion is controversial whilst all other points are unopposed.

**Points of order:** The Chair is responsible for ruling on points of order – these relate to the way in which business is conducted under the standing orders. Congress delegates may raise points of order, or challenge the Chair's ruling. The point of order or the challenge must be resolved before the substantive business can continue. (SO 36)

**Private session:** Meetings of Congress include one or more private sessions (or 'closed' sessions) which guests and the press cannot attend. Rule changes, finance and the

union's internal affairs, as well as industrially sensitive matters, are taken in private session, and only UCU members and UCU staff may be present (SO 46, 61vi).

**Procedural motions:** Procedural motions provide a means for delegates to propose changes to the way in which the business before Congress at a particular time is being handled, generally with a view to expedite business or to shorten debate: 'that the question be now put' (ie that the vote on the motion under debate should be taken straightaway), or to 'move next business' (moving on with no vote being taken on the matter under debate). Subject to the Chair's discretion, and if they are seconded, such motions are taken at once, without debate (SO 40).

**Quorum:** The quorum for Congress is 150 members and for sector conferences, a fraction of 150 proportionate to the membership of each sector (SO 28). Motions which have been submitted by eligible bodies, must have been passed at quorate meetings (SO 3).

**Reference back:** Congress may express its disapproval of a statement in the NEC's Annual Report by referring back a particular numbered paragraph or paragraphs. Such proposals are taken immediately before the vote to accept that section of the report (SO 37).

**Remit** (proposal to): A motion or amendment may be remitted to the NEC if Congress votes to do so, or a sector conference motion can be remitted to the relevant sector committee. Remission provides a means of avoiding a vote against a motion, and allows the NEC (or sector committee) to consider the matter before the next meeting of Congress (SO 34). Any delegate can move remission.

**Right of reply:** A delegate can only speak once on a motion or amendment, except that the mover of a motion has a right of reply which may be exercised at any time before the vote is taken (SO 31) – but is customarily taken at the end of the debate.

**Rules, and rule changes:** Proposals for changes to the rules must be submitted by the same deadlines as other motions, and

must include a 'plain language' statement of the purpose that the rule change is intended to achieve. A two-thirds majority of those present and voting is required to pass rule changes (rule 37).

**Sector committees (HEC, FEC):** The Higher Education Committee and Further Education Committee are each composed of all the NEC members of the relevant sector (rule 18.6). The NEC standing orders refer to their business as the 'professional and employment matters which are particular to the sector'. Sector conference motions instruct the sector committees, which execute policy and decide on sectoral matters in between meetings of sector conferences.

**Sector Conferences:** Congress includes within it meetings of the higher education and further education sector conferences, made up of delegates from branches in the relevant sectors, to consider employment and professional matters particular to that sector (rule 16.1).

**Single debate:** Group of motions and amendments can be taken together to facilitate debate (in which case all motions and amendments are moved, and then all debate taken, before all the votes are taken) (SO 32). This allows speakers to raise points on more than one related motion in a single speech and allows all aspects of related motions to be debated before Congress takes its decisions.

**Speaking times:** Standing orders state that delegates moving motions may speak for up to 5 minutes; all other speakers, 3 minutes.

**However, it is common for these speaking times to be reduced and for the agenda to set out this intention in advance (as it has been for 2025):** 3 minutes for movers of motions, 2 minutes for all other speakers. This variation requires a simple majority vote of Congress (SO 29).

**Speakers:** The Chair will inform delegates of the procedures to follow should they wish to speak. Usually, delegates wishing to speak will be asked by the Chair to come to the front row of the hall, and sit in seats designated for those speaking for or against the proposition under debate. Delegates participating online can submit their requests

to speak within the online platform and these will be communicated to the chair. All speakers should state their name and branch before beginning their speech. The chair will not always be able to take all speakers.

Delegates unable to come to the front of the hall can request use of a roving mic from their seat in the hall.

**Standing Orders (and suspension of standing orders):** Congress standing orders, which determine how the business of Congress is generated and how Congress then deals with it, are provided to delegates and are referred to throughout these notes. A standing order may be suspended by a vote supported by at least two thirds of the members of the relevant conference present and voting (SO 73). Congress may amend its standing orders by the same procedure as is required to alter rules.

**Voting:** Voting at hybrid Congress is conducted electronically (SO 49). Remote delegates cast their votes in the online platform.(SO 49-54).

Where the majority vote in favour, a motion is **passed** or **carried** (there is no difference in meaning).

It may be passed **nem con**, which means there is no opposition (though there may be abstentions – delegates who register a vote neither for nor against).

It is **unanimous** if no delegates vote in opposition or abstain.

Occasionally, uncontroversial motions are passed **by acclamation**, where support is demonstrated by applause.

**Withdrawal:** The proposers of any motion or amendment, or all the parties to a composite motion, can withdraw it up to 10 working days before Congress. After that they may seek permission of Congress to withdraw it by notifying CBC. Withdrawal requires a simple majority of those voting. (SO 14)