

Manifesto for the **2016 Scottish** **Parliament** elections



Introduction

UCU is a trade union representing 6,500 academic and related members in the higher education sector. We are the largest trade union in Scotland's universities and, across the UK, the largest post 16 education trade union in the world. UCU is not affiliated to any political party, enabling us to offer a critical analysis on policy and political developments.

Higher education and its importance to society, the economy, and the life chances of Scotland's people has played a significant role in recent elections. From the debate around tuition fees; the funding of research and academic freedom during the referendum; through to the current debate on widening access; higher education is an issue at the forefront of Scottish public life. This is as it should be. We look forward to higher education being key to the policy areas debated during the forthcoming Scottish Parliament elections.

This manifesto is designed to be both a resource for UCU members and those interested in the future of higher education when questioning aspiring politicians during the election, but also to contribute to the national discourse around the election. The tone of the debate in which the future of higher education is considered and what issues are raised tells us a lot about that state of Scotland at the present time and our hopes for the new Parliament. It is right that UCU members, as the professional staff delivering the teaching, research and support services that makes our universities world beating, play a full part in that debate.

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Higher education funding and opposing tuition fees



UCU Scotland supports university being free at the point of access and for students not to have to pay tuition fees. Access to higher education should be dependent on your ability to learn and not your parents' income. The scrapping of tuition fees remains a popular and important policy and the which we ask political parties and candidates for the Scottish Parliament to retain. It is the case that Scotland,

to our shame, has a poor record on widening access. We do not believe that introducing tuition fees would be a positive step towards widening access to higher education. Rather it would simply add more debt onto students without guaranteeing that the poorest students would benefit. The problems around student support and the lack of bursaries for those students who need them needs to be addressed. Higher education, including student support, needs to be properly funded as a whole. Rather than advocating taking money from one group of students who leave university in debt to better fund another group who also leave with debt, we should look to properly fund the whole system. We know that higher education benefits the students who attend university, but it is also hugely beneficial to society in general and to our businesses who benefit from the increased knowledge, innovation and access to the skilled graduates our universities produce. Higher education contributes to a functioning participatory democracy and society's capacity to address shared challenges. Therefore UCU believes that higher education should be funded through progressive taxation. We would look for political parties to consider using the current and additional powers on differential income tax coming to the Parliament to appropriately fund higher education in Scotland.

UCU at a UK level has also argued for the introduction of a business education tax to pay for the scrapping of tuition fees across the UK and which could be collected as part of corporation taxation affecting only the largest companies. While corporation tax remains reserved this is not something that the Scottish Parliament could look to implement unilaterally but we would be keen to see the Scottish Government post May 2016 consider the measure and work with colleagues in the UK Parliament to promote this approach to the UK Government on the basis that there would be consequential for the Scottish education budget.

Widening access

We look forward to the Commission on Widening Access reporting and its ideas being taken forward by the new government. We are hugely supportive of the work done by institutions in outreach and developments in contextualised admissions, and also in linking funding to outcomes in outcome agreements. To be successful, widening access to universities will also require there to be an increase in the number of students overall, and also for further education to be adequately funded so that it can continue to play the crucial role it does in opening up and maintaining access to education. We also believe it is important to recognise the key role staff play in widening access and, in particular, in retaining students from non-traditional backgrounds. The experience of students once they get to university is crucial to whether they continue studying or not, and staff are critical to this. It is members of our union who are active as professional staff providing centralised support services, and as academic staff designing and delivering the courses studied. Union members are aware that the support they give and the amount of time they have to support students can have a direct impact on a student's success in their studies and their ability to stay on the course itself. Our members are of course happy to provide the required support but believe this needs to be factored into their workload, the staff student ratio and the type of contract they are employed on.

Casualisation

One of the other major issues our members face is the increasing casualisation of the workforce, the increased use of zero-hours and other atypical worker contracts. An investigation carried out by UCU in 2013 found that universities and colleges were more than twice as likely as other workplaces to use zero-hours contracts. Even more worryingly the use of these casual zero-hours contracts was more prolific in Scotland than elsewhere, with two-thirds of institutions using them. Local UCU branches are in discussion with a number of universities about reducing or outlawing the use of these exploitative contracts with varying degrees of success. While employment law is reserved we would welcome any initiative or pressure from the Scottish Government and politicians to end the use of these contracts. For a sector which receives over £1 billion of public funding each year to rely on zero hour contracts for many of their staff is fundamentally wrong and something our members expect politicians to be addressing.

Good governance and academic freedom

The Scottish Parliament is currently considering the Scottish Government's Higher Education Governance Bill. The substantive elements of the bill, namely elected chairs of governing bodies and trade union nominees sitting on university courts alongside student representatives, are supported by Scottish Labour and the Green Party. These measures are supported by NUS Scotland, the STUC, and all the education unions, and are part of proposals for which UCU has campaigned over many years. We believe that making the governance of our universities more democratic, transparent and accountable can only be a good thing and can cement the sector's international standing by ensuring that institutional decision making is made in the interests of the whole university community. For that reason we are grateful to those politicians supporting the measures contained in the bill for more democratic governance.

As well as reforming governance the bill also includes a proposal to make a small improvement to the 2005 legislation on academic freedom. While the proposal is modest and limited to bringing academic freedom to include pursuing new ideas, it is a measure which we fully support. During the bill's early consideration it has been attacked by opponents as an attack on the autonomy of institutions. Some opponents have also suggested that the bill will weaken academic freedom. We believe that nothing could be further from the truth. UCU Scotland fully supports the autonomy of our higher education institutions but notes that there is a clear distinction between the autonomy of institutions to make decisions clear from government interference and the academic freedom of staff employed in the institution. The conflation of these two ideas is simply wrong.

Gender pay gap



Despite some recent progress we continue to see a very real difference in the pay between men and women in higher education. Research carried out by the Times Higher Education in 2015 showed that women academics were paid around £5,700 less than their male counterparts (THE, 2 April 2015). The variance in institutions was 11.3% on average with the largest gap 27%. This will reflect the shortage

of women in promoted posts – an issue that needs to be addressed – but even looking at senior professorial grades alone there is still discrepancy. The same picture occurs at the professorial grade in Scotland, with women professors earning 6.6% less than their male counterparts. We want to see mandatory equal pay audits in the sector, an honest appraisal of the scale of the problem we face and then Scottish Funding Council involvement and if necessary ministerial input, to put in place a concentrated effort to close the gap. Additionally, we are also asking for each party standing in the Scottish Parliament elections to carry out and publish the results of an equality impact statement on their manifesto.

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The future of higher education – resisting two tier universities and defending the four year degree

A small minority of voices in Scotland propose from time to time that Scotland should move towards a two tier model of higher education. This would consist of some universities focusing predominantly on teaching with less funding for research. In this model they would concentrate instead on catering for students from diverse backgrounds including those from social-economic deprived backgrounds. This approach would see other more ‘elite institutions’ receive and attract more funding to pursue world leading research intensive activities, with less emphasis on teaching. UCU Scotland believes that moves towards such a model would be a fundamental mistake and that there is real benefit in our universities all being organisations engaged both in teaching and research and striving to increase access. We are clear that there is an invaluable link between teaching and research, and benefits for both students and institutions to research-led or research-informed teaching. We should of course encourage all of our universities to be the best they can be in furthering the boundaries of knowledge, research and education, but this should not mean that we have premium institutions which are out of reach to students from lower social-economic backgrounds. The same division is sometimes applied to staff too, with staff active in research being regarded as more valuable to the institution than those focused more on teaching. Both research and teaching are essential to the wellbeing of an institution and should viewed as such.

Similarly we also feel that the four-year degree must be retained. The four year degree gives graduates an education the depth, breadth and flexibility of which is recognised worldwide. Some universities are looking to offer specific, shortened courses where these meet a limited demand. Private organisations seeking to profit from the higher education sector also push for this, in order to allow them to break into the sector and make easy pickings with ‘teaching factories’. This is not the role of higher education in a forward-looking society, and therefore we believe that the four year degree should remain the cornerstone of Scottish higher education.

The Prevent duty

The Prevent duty (section 26 of the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015) places a duty on institutions including universities to have due regard to preventing people from being drawn into ‘extremism’. In Scotland institutions themselves are broadly attempting to fulfil their requirements in a collegiate manner although the duty itself still places demands on staff which we consider unreasonable. UCU policy is opposed to the duty which we regard as being contrary to academic freedom and freedom of speech and which will force our members to spy on their students.

Fee waivers and SUSPS

UCU Scotland members have been instrumental in encouraging institutions to provide fee waivers for students coming into the UK as refugees and also through the SUSPS (Scottish Universities Supporting Palestinian Students) programme from Palestine. In light of previous support from the Scottish Government we would want to work with the new government to see how this work can be supported financially and otherwise and be developed in the new Parliament.

What you can do

If you are a UCU member in Scotland or just someone interested in the future of higher education in your country then consider contacting your candidates and asking them their views on the subjects contained in this manifesto. Let us know what they say by contacting UCU on mmathison@ucu.org.uk. We’re also asking UCU branches to consider organising hustings meetings inviting all the candidates who cover the area(s) where their institution is based to a public meeting to be quizzed on the future of higher education in Scotland. For advice on holding a hustings meeting contact UCU Scotland.

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