



# Point of order!

## A delegates' guide to key terms used at UCU Congress

### Introduction

The Congress of the University and College Union (UCU) is the supreme policymaking body of the union. It meets annually, and branches and local associations of the union, and regional committees, are entitled to send delegates. The members of the National Executive Committee also attend as delegates. Motions submitted in advance by branches and other bodies are debated and when passed, form the union's policy. Congress also provides an opportunity to meet informally, and for members, the National Executive Committee and officials to network.

Time is allocated to the two sectors of the union: the Further Education and Higher Education sector conference meetings. 'Congress' is used in these notes to mean both the overarching event (UCU Congress and the sector conferences), and more specifically the Congress business itself; efforts have been made to put these references into context.

The work of Congress is organised by the Congress Business Committee (CBC), elected at Congress. It has four members from the higher education sector, and four from the further education sector.

Much Congress jargon is explained in the union's rules or the Congress standing orders. Congress standing orders are included at the back of the printed Congress agenda; rule books are available at the registration desk. This guide is intended to provide a quick explanation of the key terms and practices which you are likely to encounter at Congress. CBC hopes that it will help delegates understand the key terms and procedures and use them more effectively, and that delegates have an enjoyable and productive Congress.

## GUIDE TO KEY TERMS USED AT UCU CONGRESS

*'SO' refers to Congress standing orders.*

**Aggregation:** A process which links together two or more small branches not entitled to a Congress delegate in their own right (under 100 members), or links these small branches with larger branches, normally within close proximity to one another, solely for the purpose of nominating delegates to Congress. The aggregation process has no other constitutional or organisational significance. Aggregation applies only to Congress delegates, and not sector conference (rules 17.1-17.3).

**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 as a branch circular at least 10 working weeks before the first session of Congress, and reproduced in the printed agenda delegates collect on arrival at Congress (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 16. The Chair is responsible to Congress or Conference for the conduct of business, including the interpretation of rules and procedures, subject to challenge from Congress or sector conference on the Chair's ruling (SO 26). 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 where they are sufficiently compatible in content, the Congress Business Committee may decide to composite them into a single motion for debate at Congress or at one of the sector conferences. Compositing amendments may also be created as part of this process (SO 49v).

**Conduct:** The conduct of delegates during business sessions is regulated by a number of standing orders, both in terms of the debates themselves (SO 20, 21, 23) and conduct more generally (SO 33, 34, 37).

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 the body elected at Congress to organise the business of Congress. Half the Committee is elected at Congress each year for two year terms, two members elected by each sector conference. 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, and on the acceptance of motions submitted after the deadline (SO 46-52; also SO 7, 10, 11, 12, 22).

**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 22). (Note: the majority of motions do not create consequentials.)

**Deadlines:** The key deadlines for submission of business 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: for institutions with over 100

members, one delegate for every 400 members or part thereof. Institutions with under 100 members go into the aggregation process (see aggregation). For sector conferences, delegate entitlement is by branch, and every branch, however small, is entitled to at least one delegate, with one delegate per 400 members applying for larger branches (rules 17.1 -17.3).

**Elections:** Members of the Congress Business Committee are elected each year at Congress (SO 53-60). National negotiators for HE and FE are also elected, as are USS negotiators. If necessary there may be an election for the appeals committee. Nominations to these bodies are called for ahead of Congress.

**Emergency motion:** See 'late motions' below. 'Emergency motion' is often used to describe the second type of late motion – one submitted during the course of Congress in response to an urgent situation (SO 12).

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

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

**Late motions:** There are two kinds of late motion:  
i) 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 but must be 'urgent, timely and require a decision of Congress'; they must be notified to CBC at the earliest possible opportunity, and if they meet the above criteria, they will be taken as business if

two-thirds of those voting in the relevant conference vote to do so (SO 10).

ii) 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 (SO 12). Also referred to as an 'emergency motion'.

In either case if a conference votes to accept a late motion it is then treated in all other respects for debating and voting like any other motion.

**Motions and amendments:** Motions may be submitted by branches and local associations, which 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 submit two motions and two amendments to Congress and to each sector conference. The NEC may submit motions and amendments to Congress and the NEC's sector committees may submit them directly to the relevant sector conference. Motions and the amendments to them form the substance of the business before Congress and the sector conferences. 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). The NEC's annual report provides the structure for the ordering of motions at Congress. An NEC member may move each section of the report during the course of Congress. In addition, the NEC submits motions and amendments to Congress, and these will be moved by members of the NEC. The NEC's sector committees fulfil a similar role in respect of sector specific business.

**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 22). The Chair may propose to do this, for example, if the debate demonstrates that one particular clause in a motion is controversial whilst all other points are unopposed.

**Point of information:** A delegates may from raise a 'point of information'. This is an informal procedure not referred to in the standing orders. This is a brief factual question (for example, asking if a certain piece of information relevant to a motion is available). It is up to the Chair whether to take and how to deal with points of information.

**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 in hand can continue. (SO 26)

**Private session:** Meetings of Congress include one or more private sessions (sometimes called 'closed' sessions) which guests and the press cannot attend. Rule changes, finance and other business which is to do with the internal affairs of the union is taken in private session, and only UCU members and UCU staff may be present (SO 36, 49vi).

**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 must be taken at once, without debate (SO 30).

**Quorum:** The quorum for Congress shall be 150 members and for sector conferences, a fraction of 150 proportionate to the membership of each sector (SO 18). Motions which have been submitted by eligible bodies, must have been passed at quorate meetings (SO 3).

**Reference back:** The way Congress may express its disapproval of a statement in the NEC's Annual Report is to refer back a particular numbered paragraph or paragraphs. Such proposals are taken immediately before the vote to accept that section of the report (SO 27).

**Remission** A motion, part of a composited motion, or amendment may be remitted if Congress or the relevant conference votes to do so. Remission provides a means of avoiding a vote against a motion, and requires the NEC to consider the matter before the next meeting of Congress (SO 24).

**Right of reply:** No speaker shall speak twice on the same motion or amendment, except that the mover of the motion shall have a single right of reply which may be exercised at any time before the vote is taken (SO 21).

**Rules, and rule changes:** The UCU rules govern Congress, and provide the authority under which Congress standing orders operate. Congress is also the opportunity for these rules to be amended. 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 should usually instruct the sector committees, which execute policy and decide on sectoral matters in between meetings of sector conferences.

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

**Single debate:** Group of motions and/or amendments can be taken together to facilitate debate (in which case all motions are moved and all debate taken before motions are voted on) (SO 22). 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:** Speakers moving motions may speak for no longer than 5 minutes. All succeeding speakers, including movers of amendments, may speak for no longer than 3 minutes. Speaking times can be reduced by a simple majority vote of Congress (SO 19).

**Speakers:** The Chair will inform delegates of the procedures to follow should they wish to speak. 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. All speakers should state their name and branch before beginning their speech.

**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 61). Congress may amend its standing orders by the same procedure as is required to alter rules.

**Voting:** Voting at Congress is normally by a show of voting cards. In 2018, it is intended that electronic voting will be in operation.

The regional officials and regional support officers of the union are usually appointed as tellers if a vote is conducted by card vote (SO 38-42).

Where the majority vote is in favour, a **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 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 prior to the opening of Congress. After that they may seek permission of Congress to withdraw it by notifying CBC, who will report it to Congress. Withdrawal requires a simple majority of those voting. (SO 14)