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# UCU position on trans inclusion

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UCU has a long history (from predecessor unions) of enabling members to self-identify whether that is being black, disabled, LGBT+ or women. At recent Congress' and further and higher education conferences, policy has been made on more options than binary genders on forms (FE conference 2017), using the acronym LGBT+ to ensure an inclusive approach to gender identities which is different to that assigned at birth and/or their sexual identity being other than heterosexual (Congress 2017), gender-neutral toilets and facilities (Congress 2017), support campaigns to remove the requirement and practice of gender assignment at birth (Congress 2017), promotion of non heteronormative and non binary identities (FE conference 2014).

UCU women's conference passed an advisory motion in 2017.

***Women's conference reaffirms:***

***That our women's structures within the union belong to all self-identifying women.***

***That our movement must be a safe space for all women.***

***That our strength is our collectively in fighting the structures that oppress women and that there is vital work to be done in building and channelling our collective strength.***

***Women's conference asks:***

***That the women's standing committee work with the LGBT+ standing committee and any other interested structures within our union to develop a plan to build and channel this collective strength.***

UCU is a democratic organisation with its policies and priorities decided at the annual Congress. This is the decision making body of the union. National committees, regions and branches all send motions for debate to the annual Congress. Motions are voted on by delegates from branches and regions and, if they are agreed, they become policy. UCU policy underpins and steers national, regional and branch action. This is where UCU's policies on equality including trans rights have been decided and agreed.

UCU has a long history of enabling members to self-identify whether that is being Black, disabled, LGBT+ or women. UCU supports the right of all women (including trans women) to safe spaces and the continuation of monitoring that can help identify discrimination against women, men and those who identify as non-binary. UCU also supports a social, rather than a medical, model of gender recognition that will help challenge repressive gender stereotypes in the workplace and in society. UCU supports trans rights and, as champions of equality, we welcome the increased visibility and empowerment of trans and non-binary people in our society. The UCU Women members' conference 2018 agreed a motion reaffirming trans women are to be included in all UCU women's organising agendas and actions. It is our responsibility to promote equality and ensure the provisions of the Equality Act are implemented and adhered to by our members and in the sectors where we organise. This is also written into our rules. Our rules commit us to ending all forms of discrimination, bigotry and stereotyping.

UCU is committed to an intersectional approach within all its work. The concept of intersectionality has at its core an understanding that within marginalised groups there are a number of different identities, such as white women, Black women, disabled women, cis women, trans women. Listening and trying to understand difference within groups, from an intersectional position, is key to building the strength of the group as a whole. An intersectional approach is committed to discussing experience of discrimination with each other,

understanding where there are differences, where there are similarities and form solidarity. This is UCU's position. The strength of the Union is to bring members together and to build bridges rooted in equality. UCU believes that for true solidarity we need to be speaking to and working with each other and acknowledging and celebrating our intersectional differences. Equality is central to how UCU organises and ensures all members have voice and representation.

There has been argument that debating gender identity is a matter of academic freedom. UCU supports academic freedom and believes academic freedom is essential to extending knowledge and understanding, fostering critical thinking and expression, and therefore to the development of a civilised democracy. Moreover, we believe that the marketisation of post-secondary education is narrowing the parameters by which academic and academic-related staff are able to undertake teaching, scholarship and research without interference and that a commitment to enhancing academic freedom is one of the reasons why we continue to oppose key policies such as the Research Excellence Framework, the Prevent strategy and the casualisation of the workforce. As part of our work in this area, we have also submitted an allegation to UNESCO regarding inadequate protections for academic freedom in the UK.

UCU also believes academic freedom is bound up with other civil liberties and human rights so therefore does not give the right to discriminate. Commitment to equality and opposition to discrimination is built into UCU's rules. Rule 6. 1 states that 'all members and student members .. shall refrain from all forms of harassment, prejudice and unfair discrimination whether on the grounds of sex, race, ethnic or national origin, religion, colour, class, caring responsibilities, marital status, sexuality, disability, age or other status or personal characteristic.' An important aspect of this, in progressing equality, is to understand when something is discriminatory, and to understand what discrimination groups of people face. Acknowledging and seeking to understand ties in with UCU's commitment to intersectionality.

The debate around gender identity has in some quarters become bitterly divisive. This is of significant concern to UCU as we seek to enable understanding and celebration of intersectional diversity. UCU opposes any violence, intimidation, bullying or disrespect towards any group that faces

discrimination.

One of the debates around gender identity is that there is a perceived conflict between trans rights and women's rights. This is not new, for many years some feminist groups have been opposed to trans women being part of the organising agenda and activities. This has often been situated in a challenge that trans women are or at least have been men and therefore part of the oppressive machine against women. Trans women state that this position is core to the discrimination they face and prevents them being able to have the rights they need to live full lives. Saying or implying that trans women are really men denies trans women their right to be women

The nature of the debate is around what gender is and how it functions as a social construct. In terms of gender identity equality the term cis gender is used to describe when someone's gender identity corresponds to the sex assigned at birth. Trans is the opposite of cis.

Some feminists argue that gender is an oppressive social construct formed by means of societal stereotyping. The process of stereotyping, it is argued, begins when someone has their sex assigned at birth. Being assigned as female has attached to it societal stereotypes about what it means to be female, and what it means to be a woman. Trans people however use gender identity positively as a tool to confirm that their sex was assigned incorrectly at birth. Trans people who transition from one gender to another want to be known in their 'confirmed' gender. This is important and central part of being able to be identified in the correct gender.

Some trans women argue that when they were assigned as male at birth and had a gender, being a man, forced onto them by means of societal stereotyping they did not relate to this and experienced social alienation as a result. Debating trans gender identity puts trans people's being into question and creates fear and distress. However discussions about what it means to be a woman in society, enables all women to have voice and listen to each other.

The fight for women's rights is far from won. For too many women, sexual harassment and domestic violence is a daily reality, alongside unequal pay and other forms of discrimination at work, including maternity pay and leave. UCU will continue to campaign hard to protect the rights of working women.

Looking at different experiences of what it means to be woman, or Black / disabled LGBT+, is at the heart of an intersectional approach and involves listening and seeking to establish understanding and solidarity in struggle against oppression and discrimination.

Engaging and listening the voices of diverse intersectional groups within the women's and across all UCU organising enables us to recognise, celebrate and find solidarity within UCU. This in turn builds our capacity to fight for women's and all equality rights.

### **NEC Statement reaffirming UCU's commitment trans inclusion**

UCU supports trans workers' rights and, as champions of equality, we welcome the increased visibility and empowerment of transgendered and non-binary people in our society. It is our responsibility to promote equality and ensure the provisions of the Equality Act are implemented and adhered to by our members and in the sectors where we organise. This is also written into our rules. Our rules commit us to ending all forms of discrimination, bigotry and stereotyping.

UCU has a long history of enabling members to self-identify whether that is being black, disabled, LGBT+ or women. At UCU's annual congress and further and higher education conferences, policy on gender identity has been developed over many years.

UCU supports the right of all women (including trans women) to safe spaces and the continuation of monitoring that can help identify discrimination against women, men and those who identify as non-binary. UCU also supports a social, rather than a medical, model of gender recognition that will help challenge repressive gender stereotypes in the workplace and in society.

The fight for women's rights is far from won. For too many women, sexual harassment and domestic violence is a daily reality, alongside unequal pay and other forms of discrimination at work, including maternity pay and leave. UCU will continue to campaign hard to protect the rights of working women.

UCU is aware that the debate around gender identity has in some quarters become bitterly divisive. Our strength is to bring members together and to build bridges rooted in our values of equality. UCU opposes any violence, intimidation, bullying or disrespect towards any group that faces discrimination, and from whichever quarter. Trans people, including students and staff in tertiary

education, face physical and verbal abuse, prejudice and discrimination, marginalisation and misrepresentation. UCU is fully committed to providing practical support and policy guidance for reps and trans members in challenging discrimination and harassment.

### **UCU publications related to gender identity**

[https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/8600/Guide-to-Gender-Identity-May-17/pdf/Guide to gender identity may 17.pdf](https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/8600/Guide-to-Gender-Identity-May-17/pdf/Guide%20to%20gender%20identity%20may%2017.pdf)

[https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/8824/Non-binary-gender-identity-guide/pdf/Non-binary\\_gender\\_identity\\_guide.pdf](https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/8824/Non-binary-gender-identity-guide/pdf/Non-binary_gender_identity_guide.pdf)

[https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/8602/LGBT-a-guide-to-language-in-use-May-17/pdf/LGBT\\_language\\_May\\_17.pdf](https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/8602/LGBT-a-guide-to-language-in-use-May-17/pdf/LGBT_language_May_17.pdf)

### **UCU statement on academic freedom**

<https://www.ucu.org.uk/academicfreedom>

### **UCU allegation to UNESCO/ILO regarding academic freedom**

<https://www.ucu.org.uk/academic-freedom-allegation-unesco>