

14 January 2019

University and College Union

Meeting of Democracy commission

Location UCU, Carlow Street Head Office

Date 7 December 2018

Confirmed minutes

Present Mark Abel, Caitlin Adams, Vicky Blake (in the chair), Cecily Blyther, Sharon Broer, Alison Chapman, Martin Chivers, Rachel Cohen, Jacqueline D'Arcy, Jeff Fowler, Ann Gow, John Hadwin, Jane Harvey, Margot Hill, Kirsty Keywood, Kerry Lemon, Lesley McGorrigan, Sam Morecroft, Denis Nicole, Keith Simpson, Sean Wallis

In attendance Paul Cottrell (National head of democratic services and acting general secretary), Catherine Wilkinson (Head of constitution and committees and minute-taker)

1 Apologies for absence

1.1 Apologies were received from Alan Barker, Douglas Chalmers, Lindesay Dawe, Nina Doran, Geraint Evans, Martha Harris, Elane Heffernan, Pat Hornby Atkinson, John James, Chris Jones, Rhiannon Lockley, Jess Meacham, Christina Paine, Nita Sanghera, Saira Weiner and Justin Wynne.

2 Chair's business

2.1 The chair welcomed Sharon Broer (West Midlands) and John Hadwin (South East) who had filled the two regional seats previously vacant.

3 Minutes of the meeting 25 October 2018 (DC/07)

3.1 The commission AGREED two amendments to the minutes of 25 October set out in DC/07:

- an amendment to 4.10 to specify that minutes would be made available on the UCU website
- an amendment to 4.12, last sentence to read 'The commission NOTED that it should produce a report, which, in addition to its recommendations, could also list further work that might improve aspects of the union's functions but which the commission had not dealt with, and include further elections if required.'

3.2 With these amendments, the minutes were APPROVED.

4 Timing of special Congress (DC/08)

- 4.1 Catherine Wilkinson (head of constitution and committees) introduced paper DC/08, which set out information around the possible timing of a special Congress. The paper confirmed that the Congress venue in Harrogate was available on Tuesday 28 May.
- 4.2 The option of extending Congress on Friday 24 May rather than Tuesday 28 May was raised; the venue's availability was not known.
- 4.3 The commission discussed the ability of members to attend an extended Congress event, and the difficulty of the commission completing its work to the very tight timetable that would be required. The need to consult within the timetable was NOTED, including the need to consult with UCU staff. The option of reporting during Congress' scheduled time in 2019 was raised. Accountability in the form of recall was suggested as a priority for making recommendations to Congress 2019.
- 4.4 Following discussion the committee AGREED:
 - 4.4.1 To make an initial report to the annual meeting of Congress 2019, which could include rule changes, and to seek any extension of time that may be possible within the days on which Congress is ordinarily scheduled to ensure sufficient time
 - 4.4.2 To make a final report to special Congress meeting to be held in November 2019.
- 4.5 During the discussion Paul Cottrell (national head of democratic services) clarified that:
 - 4.5.1 rule changes could be passed at a special Congress
 - 4.5.2 the Commission's motions would need to be put onto the Congress agenda by the NEC.
- 4.6 The commission concluded that it did not automatically cease to exist as a body at the close of the next Congress meeting, and expected to exist until it had made its final report to a special Congress meeting.
- 4.7 The commission AGREED to schedule two further meetings as follows: Friday 11 January and Friday 22 February 2019. The difficulty of meeting in early March was NOTED; possible dates would be canvassed after the meeting. The Congress motion deadline and NEC meeting date of 15 March was NOTED.

5 Email address and communication

- 5.1 The chair raised the issue of an email address by which members could provide comments and suggestions to the commission. Following discussion of the possible options, the committee AGREED that a dedicated email address would be publicised on the website for this purpose. Catherine Wilkinson undertook to collate emails received and make these available in the Sharepoint site, updated weekly as minimum, or more often depending on the volume of communications

received.

- 5.2 The commission AGREED that their minutes should be made available on the democracy commission page of UCU's website and noted that this page could be developed further. The email address would be added to the page. Attention would be drawn to it in the Friday email.

6 Mechanisms by which to recall or hold elected representatives to account, and how to consult

- 6.1 Martin Chivers undertook to start a spreadsheet recording comparative information from other unions, including whether they had any mechanism for the recall of elected officers and general secretary.
- 6.2 The commission NOTED that UCU's model local rules included a means for removing an officer or committee member from office, which was relevant to the commission's discussion.
- 6.3 The commission AGREED that consideration of recall also had to include consideration of the filling of any vacancy created.
- 6.4 Paul Cottrell confirmed that there were legal constraints around the issue of removal from office.

7 Organisation of working groups

- 7.1 Following discussion, the commission AGREED that there should be five working groups:
- A. Recall (of elected representatives and GS) and triggers (for recall)
 - B. Accountability (other than recall) and transparency
 - C. Structural issues/implications, including the role of paid officials
 - D. Conduct of disputes
 - E. Engagement and representation (including gaps in representation and ability to access union structures)
- 7.2 The commission worked through the lettered points in 4.1 of the minutes of 25 October meeting, noting their relevance to one or more of the working groups. The work of the groups was not limited to these points, however.
- 7.3 In relation to B, Accountability and transparency, it was NOTED that the draft minutes of the recent NEC meeting had been made available within two weeks of the meeting, as required by a recent NEC standing order change. The agenda for the meeting, however, had not been published in advance in line with Congress resolution 9.
- 7.4 The issue of tracking progress to implement Congress policy, and the ability to find UCU policy by subject matter, was raised.
- 7.5 Members present expressed their interest in the different working groups.

- 7.6 The commission AGREED that members should upload position papers relevant to the working groups to the commission's SharePoint site. A folder would be set up for each group. In respect of working group papers:
- i. Contributions did not have to be long, and short contributions were welcomed
 - ii. Documents did not have to be in the final form; the aim was to start and focus debate
 - iii. Overlap between groups, and between what individuals might work on, was noted but should not deter contributions
 - iv. Some working groups may produce concrete proposals by 11 January, others may result in initial work which then requires consultation
 - v. Documents should state at the top what the issue is that is being addressed
 - vi. Members could indicate what they were working on in an action log for each working group
 - vii. A folder would be set up for papers to be placed in, if and when the author decided it was in a form to be circulated for 11 January meeting.

8 Membership information (DC/09)

- 8.1 The commission NOTED the membership figures set out in paper DC/09, which covered a range of demographics, provided for information.

9 Any other business

- 9.1 The commission AGREED that the five working groups identified should be included in the information on the commission's work on UCU's website.
- 9.2 The commission NOTED that due to the Christmas break the agenda and papers would not be circulated a full seven days before the 11 January meeting.