

Higher education special sector conference, 19 April 2023 to debate and direct the future of our disputes - decisions on motions

Motion HE1 LOST

For: 75, Against: 91, Abstentions: 21

HE1 Solidarity, struggle and reconciliation University of Sussex

Conference notes that:

1. UCU branches show outstanding dedication to our struggles and unite around collective action through deliberation and disagreement.
2. UCU leaders, negotiators and officials should be commended for their committed work.

Conference believes that:

- a. we inherited UCU from our predecessors who fought for the rights we enjoy. We must look after our union with care for future generations.
- b. internal fractures are being aggravated to the detriment of solidarity and effective action.
- c. Collegial criticism, self-reflexivity and accountability should replace accusation, to restore trust and heal wounds.
- d. Union democratic structures must be trusted with those tasks.

Conference resolves to:

- i. recommend internal solidarity events which,
- ii. celebrate local wins and support branches undergoing disputes.
- iii. exchange knowledge and perspectives between national leaders, committees, members.
- iv. enact rituals of reconciliation, for example, putting oneself in the shoes of another with role play to develop empathy and understanding.

Motion HE2 PASSED without clause i

Motion HE2 clause (i) LOST

For: 73, Against: 108 Abstentions: 10

- i. continue joint industrial action in the two disputes to maximize pressure on the employers.

Motion HE2 (without clause i)

For: 114, Against: 57, Abstentions: 19

HE2 USS and Four Fights King's College London

SCHESC notes

1. UUK's expressed intention to restore benefits by April 2024, depending on the 2023 valuation, and to explore the restoration of benefits lost between April 2022 and April 2024 but without guarantees.
2. No Four Fights offer from UCEA but rather an imposed pay cut and promises of three working parties.
3. UCU's acceptance that local circumstances might prevent implementation of the recommendations.
4. The threat to national bargaining from reliance on local negotiations.

SHESC believes

- a. Winning national ballots and coupling action in the two disputes provided a unique opportunity to transform the Higher Education sector.
- b. Continuing action is key to unconditional agreements fully restoring USS benefits, Four Fights success and the fight for a publicly funded HE.

SHESC resolves to

- ii. continue each dispute until UUK or UCEA make tangible concessions, with guaranteed commitments, in the respective disputes.

Motion HE3 PASSED

For: 98, Against: 86, Abstentions: 7

HE3 Composite: Decoupling the Four Fights from the USS dispute Southampton University, University of Sussex

HESC notes:

1. Positive progress towards resolution of the USS dispute including the UUK/UCU joint statement.
2. Resolution HE6, passed at Conference in Summer 2022, to 'maintain the link between the two disputes until sufficient progress is made in one or both to justify separation'.

In the light of the proposal negotiated between Employers and UCU in the USS dispute, HESC believes that sufficient progress has been made in the USS dispute to justify separation of the two disputes.

HESC further notes that in future it may be necessary to call action in one of the two disputes only, or to different timescales, in order to maximise leverage in that specific dispute or to meet specific deadlines.

HESC therefore resolves to formally separate the Four Fights and USS disputes, in order to maximise the effectiveness of any future calls for industrial action.

For the purposes of the forthcoming rebalot and MAB, separate the two disputes for the planning of further industrial action, reflecting that sufficient progress has been made in the USS dispute.

Motion L1 LOST

For: 20, Against: 159, Abstentions: 12

L1 Marking and Assessment Boycott – Four Fights University of the West of Scotland

Conference notes the strategy to ballot, strike and act nationally has forced the employers into negotiations for the first time since 2019 and delivered results on all four claims.

These gains are against the backdrop of 30% membership density and UCU being the only one of five JNCHES unions with a national strike mandate.

It is now crucial we avoid splitting the membership. A MAB would take place under the threat of UWS stating they will deduct 100% pay and other employers likely to follow suit with punitive measures.

Now is the time to build our union in readiness for future campaigns.

Therefore, Conference resolves:

- To call off the Marking and Assessment boycott scheduled to begin on 20 April 2023 if fewer than two-thirds of members vote 'reject' in the Four Fights consultation.
- To Immediately launch the most ambitious recruitment drive in UCU history.

Motion HE4 PASSED

For: 124, Against: 59, Abstentions: 11

HE4 Supporting a marking and assessment boycott (MAB) University of Warwick

SHESC notes:

1. delegates at the January BDM voted by 56% for a MAB to begin on 17 April.

SHESC believes:

- a. a marking and assessment boycott can be an effective tactic to win our demands
- b. branches must not be allowed to suffer punitive pay deductions in isolation.

SHESC calls on HEC to:

- i. notify a MAB immediately
- ii. announce that punitive pay deductions in any institution will be met with strike action
- iii. prepare for possible strike action by notifying employers immediately of ten days of strike action to commence in late May
- iv. adopt the practice of notifying further bouts of action before the previous bout has concluded
- v. in consultation with branches, call off strike action week-by-week if the employers agree not to make punitive deductions
- vi. make an emergency appeal to boost the Fighting Fund for branches suffering punitive deductions.

Motion HE5 PASSED

For: 110, Against: 80, Abstentions: 4

HE5 Industrial action: MABs, strikes, and BDMs University of Liverpool, University College London, London regional committee

SHESC notes and reaffirms the core elements of the strategy set out in Resolutions 5 and 6 carried in both SHESCs April 2022.

SHESC calls on branches to ready members for a marking and assessment boycott (MAB) explaining that it will require a higher level of organisation than hitherto, with daily strike committee meetings open to all members to:

1. organise the MAB, fundraising and salary sharing
2. decide whether strike action for punitive deductions should be taken or called off
3. send delegates to BDMs (or national strike committee meetings)

SHESC calls on HEC to:

- a. notify to the employers a series of weeks of strike action commencing in late April to support the ASOS
- b. fortnightly: call BDMs with voting (or national strike committee meetings)
- c. in consultation with branches, call off strike action week-by-week if the employers agree not to make punitive deductions

Motion HE6 PASSED

For: 107, Against: 73, Abstentions: 11

HE6 Responding to 100% MAB deductions University of Manchester

SHESC notes

That delegates at the January BDM voted by 56% for a Marking and Assessment Boycott (MAB) to begin on April 17, to target all final/end of year summative assessments beginning that month.

That during previous MABs multiple employers have threatened to deduct 100% of pay for members who have taken part.

SHESC resolves

To call on UCU to announce that confirmation from any HEI of their intention to deduct 100% of members' pay for taking part in a MAB will be met with immediate

notification of strike action in response, with no set end date for said strike action provided until the threat of 100% deductions is explicitly withdrawn.

Motion HE7 PASSED without clause 2d.

Motion HE7 clause 2d LOST

For: 75, Against: 83, Abstentions: 34

d Moving all Black, disabled, women and non-binary staff up one spinal point (adding an additional one for those at the top of the scale) and simplified promotion criteria for them with reasonable adjustments.

Motion HE7 (without clause 2d)

For: 139 Against: 34 Abstentions: 15

HE7 Winning Four Fights University of Glasgow

SHESC believes that the proposed pay offer is a real terms pay cut and that the proposed negotiations will not reduce equality pay gaps, casualisation and workloads.

SHESC mandates:

All negotiators should be involved in further negotiations not just GS.

Use MAB to aim for:

1. Pay increase of at least CPI.
2. UK agreements required to be implemented in institutions with minimal variation, including:
 - a. Approach similar to OU one to moving all hourly paid, variable hours and simple staff to permanent fractional contracts
 - b. At least 95% of staff, including GTAs, on open-ended contracts without funding end date.
 - c. Bridging arrangements with institutions providing at least one year of funding for contract research staff.

Motion C4 PASSED

For: 159, Against: 19, Abstentions: 7

C4 The ever-increasing casualisation and insecurity in HE needs addressing urgently London regional committee

SHESC notes that:

1. insecurity is one of the "Four Fights", alongside pay, inequalities, and workloads
2. insecure employment in HE continues to grow. 66% of research staff and 43% of teaching-only staff are on fixed-term contracts, and women, people with disabilities, and people from ethnic minorities are disproportionately included.
3. the outline agreement reached at ACAS as a basis for future negotiations with the employers does not explicitly include anything to address casualisation and insecurity, other than a brief remark on zero hours contracts

SHESC believes that insecurity is key in the Four Fights and must be explicitly addressed in any resolution to this dispute.

SHESC resolves that any future negotiations and agreements must include substantial, measurable, and timely proposals to address all forms of job insecurity, casualisation, and precarity.

Motion HE10 PASSED, as amended by 10A.1

Amendment 10A.1 PASSED

For: 98, Against: 43, Abstentions: 21

HE10A.1 University of Sussex

Delete:

'Conferences believes a satisfactory resolution of the USS dispute requires

- i. Adoption of an investment strategy and valuation methodology appropriate for an open and immature pension scheme.
- ii. Restitution to members of the excessive contributions imposed since 2018.'

Replace with:

'Conference believes restoration of trust in USS requires

- i. On 1 April 2024, restoration of future benefits to pre-April 2022 levels for 26% and augmentation of benefits lost in 2022-2024.
- ii. Beyond 2023, adoption of an investment strategy appropriate for an open, immature scheme designed to yield long-term growth, and a valuation methodology that is transparent, moderately prudent and stable, and restitution or compensation to members of the excessive contributions imposed since 2018.'

Motion HE10, as amended

For: 128, Against: 19, Abstentions: 19

HE10 Restoring trust and value to USS University of Dundee

Conference notes

1. A 2023 valuation of USS conducted on a “no surprises” basis implies little change in their inappropriate investment strategy and flawed valuation methodology.
2. The long-held position of UCU that pre-2022 USS benefits could be funded for a contribution rate of 26% (8% members, 18% employers) by prudently investing for long-term growth.
3. The recent public statement from USS that future benefits could be funded for about 26% using their current approach.

Conference believes restoration of trust in USS requires

- i. On 1 April 2024, restoration of future benefits to pre-April 2022 levels for 26% and augmentation of benefits lost in 2022-2024.
- ii. Beyond 2023, adoption of an investment strategy appropriate for an open, immature scheme designed to yield long-term growth, and a valuation methodology that is transparent, moderately prudent and stable, and restitution or compensation to members of the excessive contributions imposed since 2018.
- iii. Genuine governance reform that gives control of USS to stakeholders.
- iv. Removal from leadership positions of those who are complicit in the gross mismanagement of the USS scheme.

Motion HE11 PASSED

For: 124, Against: 16, Abstentions: 22

HE11 Restore USS benefits in full before contributions reductions are considered University of Oxford

Conference notes:

1. The surplus in recent USS interim valuations and associated reduction in projected contributions
2. Volatility in recent USS valuations and interim valuations
3. UUK misrepresented to employers the cost of UCU proposals which sought to prevent the April 2022 USS benefit reductions

Conference believes:

- a. The 14th March 2023 UUK and UCU joint statement on collaboration toward USS benefit restoration is welcome
- b. Market volatility could be used to argue that benefit restoration is not “demonstrably sustainable”

Conference resolves:

- i. To use our industrial action mandate to gain a commitment from UUK that contributions reductions can only be considered once benefits, including inflation caps and the DB salary threshold, have been fully restored to the level they were in March 2022, and benefits lost between April 2022 and the date of restoration have been recovered in full.

Motion HE12 PASSED

For: 142, Against: 19, Abstentions: 16

HE12 Meaningful, democratic, transparent and informed consultation University of Birmingham

SHESC notes that:

1. it is essential for members and branches to have regular democratic input into the direction of the current disputes.
2. members should have the right to vote on the offers tabled for both the Four Fights and USS disputes once the HEC considers the offer has the potential to settle the dispute.
3. there is widespread confusion among UCU members regarding the state of the current dispute.
4. voting to consult members on the pay negotiations appears likely to trigger a pause, although this remains unclear.
5. UCEA’s statement indicates that joint unions have accepted a no-strike clause, although this remains unclear.

SHESC resolves:

- a. To consult members in an even-handed way and with information presented transparently, using FAQs to help inform members, and highlighting the real terms nature of any pay offer.
- b. To clarify the correct decision-making process, in terms of UCU rules, when deciding how to proceed with industrial disputes.

Motion HE13 PASSED

For: 129, Against: 42, Abstentions: 13

HE13 Informed decision-making University of Glasgow

SHESC notes that:

1. not all nationally elected negotiators have been involved in all negotiations;
2. when this has occurred, non-participant negotiators appear to not have been briefed or consulted;
3. this has resulted in negotiations being conducted and decisions made by small sub-groups.

SHESC believes that:

- a. All elected negotiators should be involved at all stages.

SHESC instructs HEC:

- i. to ensure that all elected negotiators are involved in negotiations, or where that is not possible that any absent negotiators can be and are briefed and consulted after every meeting or at a mutually agreed frequency;
- ii. That no surveys or consultations are sent out to branches or members on the disputes without the agreement of and a public report by the full team of elected negotiators;
- iii. That no consultation on pausing industrial action or closing a dispute is made without a formal recommendation voted on by HEC.

Motion HE14: REMITTED

For remittance: 96, Against: 70, Abstentions: 7

HE14 Formal consultation on offers if the disputes continue University of Essex

Conference notes:

1. #ucuRISING has achieved a historic aggregated ballot success and received offers from UCEA and UUK.
2. the importance of successful negotiations with which lead to offers on pay and pensions.

Conference believes that if we continue with the pay and pensions disputes that any offer from UCEA and UUK on the ACAS-negotiated offer on pay and conditions, and

pensions that HEC deems to be a significant improvement on the offer presented on 15 March 2023 should be put to members along with explanatory commentary and/or recommendations from the full negotiation team.

Conference resolves, if the pay and pensions disputes are not settled, that HEC formally consult members on any further offer from the UCEA and UUK which HEC deems to be a significant improvement on the ACAS-negotiated offer presented on 15 March 2023 and provides explanatory commentary and/or recommendations from the full negotiation team.

Motions HE9, and HE15-25, were not taken.