

Election runs
from 27
January-
1 March

Sean Wallis

We are fighting for the future of Higher Education. UCU needs leaders who lead

*UCU NEC elections:
Vote Sean Wallis for
London and the East HE*

I am standing for UCU's National Executive Committee (NEC) because we are in a fight for the future of Higher Education, its role in society, and our trade union.

When employers plan to slash pensions by a third and hold down pay while inflation spirals, we have to recognise what is at stake. VCs mutter about 'spilling our blood'. Goldsmiths management are mounting major offensives on members.

We need a union leadership that takes its responsibility seriously, and is prepared to hold their ground when we are in a serious fight.

I spent seven years on the NEC before. I am one of the Left members of the 2018 Higher Education Committee from 'old' universities who consistently voted for action and against a sell-out of the USS dispute. I am a UCU branch president and a national negotiator for UCU. I know what a tough fight looks like.

But UCU should be more than defenders of the status quo. We have to fight for the future of the University.

Every time I have stood for national election, I have argued the same basic point:

The basic idea of a University is under attack from a Government and a political class who fear a critical, independently-minded, University-educated populace. We need to respond by mobilising our own members: both in their own immediate interests, over pay and conditions, and in a wider defence of the University ideal.

The last time I stood was in 2016, when HE faced further deregulation in the form of the Higher Education and Research Act. Through the UCU, and through organisations like the



Convention for Higher Education, Campaign for the Public University and Council for the Defence of British Universities, we organised a grass roots opposition that blunted some of the worst excesses of the Tories' plans.

But five years on, and ten years of the tuition fee market system, that market is ripping our sector apart. Costs are mounting, with universities borrowing £10bn+ for capital projects and the student loan debt mountain exceeding £160bn.

We Can Win

The new value system of Higher Education is based on market competition and employer self-interest, not academic excellence, science or safety. Employers are attacking the USS pension, cutting pay, driving up casualisation and workload. They are consulting each other over breaking up national pay bargaining, so that they can cut pay in poorer parts of the UK. And when students demand tuition fee rebates for lockdown teaching, they demand staff work in unsafe conditions in the pandemic.

We need to fight back, and we need a leadership that leads.

We can win. At UCL we fought off an attempt to rewrite our college Statutes. Last year we persuaded colleagues to stop the IHRA "working definition" of anti-semitism being

imposed on the university by management.

For the Future

But not every decision that colleagues make in the name of free speech is always right. I believe it was a step backwards for UCL to break links with Stonewall, and I stand shoulder to shoulder with transgender colleagues and students.

But even as we may disagree about one decision – perhaps because we disagree – I am clear that we have to unite to defend the idea of a university as a community of independent academic and academic-related colleagues. We must defend our democratic institutions within the university, senates and academic boards, against a management that would dearly wish them gone or bureaucratised.

We are fighting for the future, not just of higher education but wider society.

Universities are not mere teaching factories. They are essential for the future of society.

It has taken a pandemic to make the public aware that universities are where independent science comes from, and we are not just teaching institutions. We know that academic freedom and research transparency are crucial to win public trust in publicly-funded science. But what is true for the pandemic is doubly so for the fight against climate change.

Defending education means reversing Government cuts and dismantling the fees and loans system. It means standing up for ourselves, fighting for our own pay, pensions and rights.

I am a member of UCU Left, a hard-working branch president and a staunch defender of research staff. Vote for me for a union that represents you and fights for you.

For more information about the UCU Left platform and candidates [click here](#).