

Higher education in the UK is in deep crisis. The House of Commons Education Select Committee report Higher Education and Funding: Threat of Insolvency and International Students says TWENTY-FOUR institutions face insolvency and closure this year.

Marketisation and VC mismanagement has driven the sector into the ground, leaving 30,000 jobs officially lost over the last three years, not including the many thousands of hidden job losses among casualised staff.

But these redundancies have not averted a crisis. They have made the situation worse. First the dying Conservative Government and now a stumbling Labour administration in Westminster have enacted a policy of letting the VC's do what they want and "letting the market rip." It is not working.

Within UCU, it is almost impossible to keep up with the number of local branches balloting and taking action over job cuts, removal of members from TPS and the outsourcing to subsidiary companies.

Yet there has been no attempt by UCU nationally to launch a sector-wide fightback to unite these disputes.

We cannot continue like this

Sector Conference has to mark the point at which we all agree to stand together and fight for the sector, our colleagues, our students and our disciplines. Support all motions that push for getting an industrial action strategy back.

Support all late and emergency motions which seek to build a sector-wide fightback.

And let's all agree to build the fightback together after Conference is over.

Strategy & tactics to defend HE

Going into Congress, there is only one motion before HESC arguing for a big-picture strategy to take on the existential crises affecting HE. **Motion HE21** links threats from the funding crisis with those posed by AI, and it calls for international student and staff protection as part of the political campaign for HE.

Every day it seems that there is a new local dispute to save jobs, disciplines, campuses or pensions. Grassroots capacity to plan and execute a sector-wide fight has been weakened because so many branches are already knee-deep in local disputes. The lack of national strategic action makes HE21 the most important motion before HESC, as it sets the stage for a strategic engagement: political and industrial. **Support Motion 21.**

Amendments HE21A.1 and 2 are both 'friendly' and should be supported.

We have several motions that focus on the tactics needed to defend HE. After years of campaigning for aggregated ballots so we can all stand together, **HE2** calls for disaggregation by default. We should debate this seriously. This may now be a necessary temporary step to allow a wider defence of HE.

Support HE3, HE11, HE19 and HE20 which will help challenge the marketisation and privatisation of the sector. **Support HE11A.1** seeks to widen the fightback, echoing the calls in HE21 but overtly adding national industrial action to supplement a political campaign.

The UK-wide Post-92 Agreement (and HE2000), which prevented institutions undercutting each other, is under intense pressure. **Support HE4, HE8, HE9 and HE18 and amendments. Support HE26**, which is an important motion challenging the use of private security firms to monitor free speech, this motion should be strongly supported.

Freedom of speech is also curtailed by the government and its quangos, so **support HE27**

Pensions

Teachers Pensions Schemes

Post-92 institutions face a series of attacks that undermine members' pension rights. This includes moving staff out of TPS and into USS or inferior local schemes, or moving staff into subsidiary companies without pension provision. **HE14 - HE17 and their amendments should be supported.**

USS - and Conditional Indexation

While access to TPS across the post-92 sector is under an open existential threat, a new and more insidious threat to USS lurks beneath the surface. This concerns employer proposals for 'Conditional Indexation' (CI) a plan that removes the index-linked formula that ties USS pensions to CPI inflation.

UCU's policy position, which was arrived at when USS was claiming a deficit, is "critical engagement". In other words, not to agree to it but to explore what the employers are proposing.

But every negotiator knows that if we are not careful, such engagement encourages the employer(s) to push for more. Thus, it is essential that periodically Conference delegates democratically debate whether any benefits of engagement outweigh the risks.

Multiple branches have been debating this proposal, and have got behind motion **HE13**. They think, and

quite rightly, that in fact the risks of CI are significant, and negotiators should be focusing instead on improving member benefits.

But last year, a similar motion challenging UCU's current policy of critical engagement was ruled to 'fall' because the report of the Superannuation Working Group was taken first and then ruled to supersede it.

Unfortunately, the USS SWG report (**HE12**) may be used to repeat this undemocratic trick. Although the printed agenda sent out to delegates is not explicit, if the same procedural rule is applied this year as last year, if that report is passed, motions opposing it will be ruled out of order.

This year it is imperative that we do not allow this to happen again.

Therefore, we should **oppose HE12** (supporting 'UCUBAN94' the report) **as a whole** and **take it in parts**. That means that voting would take place on recommendations separately. Then we would encourage colleagues to **support all except recommendation 2** in the report.

If the Chair tries to stop the recommendations being taken in parts, delegates should oppose **HE12**.

If recommendation 2 in HE12 falls, motion **HE13** can be taken and won. Amendment **HE13.A1** is important, and **HE13.A2** is also ok.

Equalities

The rise of the far right exposes all equalities groups to greater risk. We must firmly and visibly defend the rights of women, parents, migrants and black members in HE and of course recognise the intersectional effects; **support HE5, HE6, HE23, HE28, HE28A.1 and HE10**.

The growing racism of the government, mirroring Reform, affects students too; **support HE24, HE22 and HE25**. The impact of a racist political narrative spreads beyond our workplaces, home and abroad, and requires wide political resistance. **Support HE29**.

Challenging the CBC report

The SWG report must be challenged as explained above. It is always important for delegates to weigh the balance between democratic accountability and the loss of conference time.

Several motions which were ruled out of order might be put back on the agenda if there is appetite for further challenges beyond challenges around USS.

B14 is ruled to be for Congress but submitted to HESC. It is about HE and focused on international students, so ruling it out of order is not credible.

B15 is ruled to be for Congress but was submitted to HESC. It is about a campus tour of "Voices for Palestine", i.e. one based in HE!

B17 is ruled to be for Congress but was submitted to HESC. It is about welfare not warfare (also existing policy), with specific resolutions to keep arms traders *off campus*, so again, it is based in HE.

B18 is ruled to be for Congress but was submitted to HESC. It is about the safety of LGBTQ+ staff and students, who are increasingly at risk with the universities' overseas campuses.

These are all very important motions that hopefully all members are in support of, and want the union to take forward.

UCU Left is committed to building a democratic, accountable campaigning union that mobilises & involve members in defending & improving our pay & conditions and defending progressive principles of education.

Please consider joining – more info at uculeft.org or scan QR.

