

Rhiannon Lockley (she/her) – Midlands representative, Higher Education

Report on HEC – 2nd July 2021

I am reporting as one of your three Midlands HE representatives on my first HEC, which took place on 2nd July 2021. I imagine members are keen to hear about updates in relation to what is happening with national HE disputes: this is not currently possible to circulate due to long-standing and sensible arrangements around embargoing anything which might be sensitive to release tactically so I will not address that part of the business here but instead say that updates on this will follow from HQ and that I will answer anything I can at regional or branch meetings once this is permitted.

Chair's address

Justine Mercer, our president elect, welcomed HEC including new members to the new HEC and explained the procedure of the meeting. Following on from our late Nita Sanghera, it is good to see the Midlands represented at the top level of our union. She outlined that some of the debate for the meeting is confidential which means it is not to be shared by NEC, with outcomes being communicated through official channels. This does mean that this will be reflected in my report of the meeting but I aim to communicate what I can including transparency over how I voted as a Midlands representative where possible.

Discussion: JNCHEs

Paul Bridge (national head of HE) led a discussion where he reported that he had feedback from a number of branches on the extraordinary member meetings on the four fights that we have been asked to hold. This discussion and subsequent votes are currently embargoed but I will discuss what I can once it is indicated to me that this is possible! Thank you to branches in the Midlands region who gave me sight of feedback which is very helpful to me as a rep in listening to debate and votes taken.

USS motions

As a post-92 member I did not take part in debate or vote on USS matters but once updates on this section are circulated by HQ I can hopefully answer questions about what was discussed in this section of the business within the parameters of what I am cleared to discuss (or direct you to the two pre-92 reps Midlands reps Chris Grocott and Emma Battell Lowman for anything they can help with).

Motions from members

As part of the business of HEC, members can write motions and ask HEC representatives to move them. These normally need to be submitted two weeks before HEC meet. If you have any issues you

would like me to bring to HEC (or NEC) on your behalf please do contact me on riannonlockley@hotmail.co.uk

Supporting sustained local action

As you will be aware, **Liverpool University** are treating members outrageously in the extensive action they are taking to defend members in HELS who are being made redundant. The branch are being docked full pay whilst still being expected to carry out the rest of their duties for participating in an assessment boycott. The strength and length of action the branch have taken means redundancies are now reduced by an incredible 26 from 57 to 21, and the branch have been attending in large numbers to repeatedly agree to fight on for those still at threat.

A motion was heard calling for

- UCU to mail all members asking them to consider donating £4 or more to the Liverpool strike fund
- Actions to be put in place to speed up access to the strike fund.

This motion was **passed**. I stood on a mandate that the union must always do what it can to support members when they take industrial action so I voted **in favour** of this motion.

You can donate to the Liverpool UCU strike fund here: please do support our members there who are showing incredible resilience and solidarity! <http://ulivucunews.org.uk/hardship-fund/> . On the matter of redundancies I would also like to remind members that we continue with the [boycott of Leicester University](#) and also request to keep sharing the [petition](#) and also to send messages of support to the branch to ucuatucb@outlook.com in support of University College Birmingham members as they resist a big attack on jobs.

Defend the arts

This motion had the intention of speeding up mobilisation of a national campaign to defend the arts and coordinate resistance in HEIs facing arts cuts based on the policy passed at Congress which would without this motion need to wait for the Education committee to meet in the Autumn to get going. The motion called for

- The Chair of the Education Committee to immediately set up an **Arts and Culture Campaign Group drawn from representatives of HE institutions potentially affected by the cuts** in order to launch and coordinate the campaign to defend the arts

Institutions in the Midlands have already been facing arts/humanities cuts, including recently humanities at Aston which has been partly resisted and also an attack on Music at Keele. I voted **in favour** of this motion as I see this work as urgent. This motion **passed**.

Against the gig economy in our universities

This motion noted the practice in institutions including UAL, Goldsmiths and RCA of putting short course tutors/lecturers on 'independent contractor' status or 'terms of engagement', denying them worker and/or employee rights, including union representation. The motion called for the following:

- Issue a statement supporting those forced to work on such contracts and condemning HEIs who are normalising the elision of crucial employee rights.
- Task the officers and the legal support team to explore ways of supporting anti-casualisation campaigns (such as the one by Goldsmiths' SC tutors), including potential financial support.
- Seek out other similar cases to support.

This motion responds to the ever-increasing array of tactics in casualising the workforce, atomising workers and attacking basic employment rights. I voted **in favour**. This motion **passed**. On the topic of this diversification of ways to break the relationship between institutions and workers, members who are not aware may be puzzled and alarmed to hear of the latest exploits of Coventry University as they move to put SMT into a subsidiary company – more to follow on this.

Motions on “Rhodes must Fall” and “Making HE safe for trans and non-binary staff and students” fell due to business closing before they were heard.

Please do contact me at rhiannonlockley@hotmail.co.uk for queries, and to let me know any way I can support e.g. meeting members at branch meetings, amplifying branch campaigns.

West Midlands members – please watch out for an update shortly on a regional solidarity rally (online) where we will be coming together to support the branches in dispute or campaigning in our region.

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