A MANIFESTO FOR A MODERN EDUCATION UNION

UCU General Secretary Election
April 2019
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. FOREWORD 3
   1.1 A manifesto for a modern education union 3
   1.2 An affordable strategy that holds managers to account 5
   1.3 No shortcuts: beyond party politics 6

2. BUILDING THE UNION 7
   2.1 Comprehensive subscription reform to help our FE, precarious, and low-paid members 7
   2.2 Increased funding to strike against casualisation 8
   2.3 Empowering national committees and the members they represent 8
   2.4 Task groups: putting members’ expertise and experiences to use 8
   2.5 New approaches to negotiating 9

3. CASUALISATION AND PRECARITY 10
   3.1 Towards national bargaining on job security 11
   3.2 Learning from our professional services members 11

4. PAY 12
   4.1 Local bargaining in FE 12
   4.2 HE pay erosion entrenches privilege and threatens the profession 12

5. EQUALITY 14
   5.1 Nationally coordinated casework 14
   5.2 National bargaining on non-pay equality issues 15

6. HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT 16
   6.1 Compensating the material costs of anti-immigrant policies 16
   6.2 Campaigning against surveillance and the security state 17
7. WORKLOAD, HEALTH, AND SAFETY 18
  7.1 A national workload reporting service 18
  7.2 A research-driven, proactive campaign against irresponsible metrics 19
8. PENSIONS 20
  8.1 National coordination to protect TPS institutions 20
  8.2 Securing the future of USS 21
9. MY ROLE AS GENERAL SECRETARY 22
  9.1 Fostering accountability 22
  9.2 Making UCU structures accessible 23
  9.3 Conclusion 23
  9.4 Acknowledgements 23
1. FOREWORD

1.1 A manifesto for a modern education union

A career in education is more than just a job, and education is not a commodity. Education develops people’s capacities, challenges them, communicates values, and creates lifelong opportunities. It is a source of dignity and community. But the system we work in is eroding those ideals. Education is being turned into a dysfunctional consumer market, and the people who provide it into a cost to be minimised.

This election comes at a pivotal moment for the UK education sector. UCU has an opportunity to elect its first General Secretary who works on the front line of teaching, research, and administration in tertiary education—who knows how hard all those things are, how important they are, and what they really mean to the people who benefit from them. As a Senior Lecturer in Employment Relations, I research trade union organising, employment relations and regulation, industrial action, pay and casualisation, and the causes of labour market inequalities. I am an active and experienced branch officer, a member of the USS National Dispute Committee, and I was recently elected to UCU’s National Executive Committee with 80% more first-preference votes than any other candidate. Since the USS pension dispute began in 2018, I have played a vital role in organising members by drawing upon my research skills and my experience as a branch officer.
Our union’s membership is passionate, talented, and knowledgeable, from Higher to Further, Adult and Prison education, from professional services to teaching and research staff. I want to embrace that expertise, draw upon our lived experience, and foster a proactive approach to meeting the challenges we face. As General Secretary of UCU, I will transform the union into a force for positive change, not only for those who work in the sector, but for our society as a whole, for our students and our future students.

A manifesto is not a shopping list of demands or a set of superficial treatments for the symptoms of a sector in crisis. This document is meant to drive a conversation about the future and purpose of education in this country, and show where we, as UCU members, must go next. It is about building a union that truly embodies our values and commitments as workers in a public education sector.

In this manifesto, I pledge to work towards:

• Wide-ranging, ambitious subscription reform to rebuild our membership in Further Education and increase participation among lower-paid and casualised staff in all sectors (2.1).

• Redistribution of UCU funds to provide more support for collective industrial action (2.2).

• Empowerment of national committees to represent and communicate directly with casualised members and other specific constituencies that are currently marginalised (2.3).

• The creation of new, dynamic, research-informed task groups to campaign on specific issues affecting multiple sectors, constituencies, and campus unions, including (2.4):
  o Surveillance and the security state (6.2);
  o Metrics and marketisation (7.2).

• New approaches to the negotiation process (2.5).

• The creation of national ‘branch coordination’ officers to help us build towards meaningful national bargaining on employment security (3.1) and equality (5.1).
• National pay claims to include the demand for employers to pay all extra fees imposed on EU and non-EU immigrants, including visa fees and the NHS surcharge (6.1).

• A standardised, accessible ‘Stress Survey’ for reporting overwork in our branches (7.1).

• A proactive national campaign against the use of Teachers’ Pension Scheme contribution increases to justify attacks on staff in post-92 institutions (8.1).

• Regular surgeries held by the General Secretary and other key elected officers, open to all members (9).

• Adoption of proposals by UCU’s Democracy Commission to reform the role of General Secretary and make it more accountable (9.1).

1.2 An affordable strategy that holds managers to account

The vision mapped out here is financially realistic and sustainable for our sector and our union. The current funding arrangements for Further and Higher Education are a consequence of Conservative austerity policies that are economically unsound and unjustified, as well as socially harmful. In Further Education, cuts have been direct, and brutal. In Higher Education, the cost of funding has largely been transferred to students and future taxpayers. In either case, there was no need for staff benefits and working conditions to bear the brunt. All Higher Education employers can afford to meet recent national pay and pensions claims made by UCU, and more. Further Education employers, too, have been paying their staff much less than they can afford, and less than FE branches have campaigned for.

Employers will place the burden of responsibility on us, by saying what they have always said: that meeting our demands will lead some weaker institutions to make people redundant or even go bankrupt. In worst case scenarios, mismanagement of our colleges in FE has resulted in a government bailout. It remains to be seen whether the same will happen in HE. We have learnt since the beginning of the USS dispute that pensions are affordable and that our employers can cover the cost of large contribution increases, contrary to what
they had claimed. The financial case is in our favour. But if redundancies do happen and institutions do go out of business, that will not be our fault.

UCU has accepted and internalised the idea that staff are supposed to mitigate their managers’ worst failings. But it is managers who cause redundancies. It is managers who have redirected spending to overambitious capital projects. Managers created a system in which colleges and universities can go bankrupt. And when managers have an opportunity to work with politicians who promise to change that system, they *lobby those politicians behind closed doors* to keep it as it is. We should never feel ashamed, guilty, or uncertain about asking for what we are entitled to and deserve: we should take confidence from recent experience that our demands are fair and in the sector’s best interests.

**1.3 No shortcuts: beyond party politics**

The proposals offered here involve concrete actions which I will work with UCU’s national structures to carry out during my term as GS. They do not depend on wishing and waiting for a transformative social-democratic or socialist government, or on any legislative or regulatory change. As things stand, we cannot trust any parliamentary party to do the right thing on the issues that matter to us, like immigration and border controls, Brexit, or direct funding of education and research. Nor can we trust even a friendly future government to succeed in implementing a progressive post-16 education policy. We need a practical roadmap to building our own power, regardless of the larger political circumstances we find ourselves in.
2. BUILDING THE UNION

At the same time as we fight for a properly funded, financially sustainable, humane, and inclusive tertiary education sector, we must also ensure that our union embodies those qualities.

2.1 Comprehensive subscription reform to help our FE, precarious, and low-paid members

As General Secretary, I will seek to reshape our union to make it more affordable and accessible to the most materially disadvantaged workers in each sector. Above all, this means accelerating and expanding UCU’s reforms of our subscription rates. In the current system, fees for the lowest paid staff are proportionally much more expensive than for staff on higher wages, and there are steep thresholds between subscription bands. But we can go further than simply rectifying this state of affairs. It is time to consider other incentives to recruit more members: not only special rates for workers whose monthly income is not fixed, but also special initiatives to make membership affordable in areas like Further Education, where membership has declined and we need to rebuild. We must also ensure that rates do not keep increasing at a higher rate than pay, as they did in the last year. Moving to a more progressive subscription system will remove a significant obstacle in the recruitment of low-paid and casualised staff and help us to build a union that reflects the composition of the whole workforce.
2.2 Increased funding to strike against casualisation

As a result of the USS strike, our membership has finally recovered to the level it was at before its steep decline in the last few years. Many new members are younger, casualised staff. It is time to take stock of our expenditure and prioritise their needs. We can open up and liberalise UCU’s fighting fund, which appears to have been underused, despite record levels of action and donations over the past year. UCU can afford to be more proactive and welcoming in encouraging members to draw on the fund, and more responsive in the way the funds are administered. At the same time, we can save money elsewhere by capping our spending on professional development activities like grant-writing workshops, and other service activities provided by the union that should be provided by employers. In recent years, expenditure on such activities has increased. Given the challenges the sector is facing, this is not where we should be funnelling our resources. Individualised career support is never a substitute for strong collective bargaining.

2.3 Empowering national committees and the members they represent

Making union membership affordable is necessary but not sufficient. We need to improve representation and participation of marginalised groups of members at the same time. Our national Anti-Casualisation Committee does not have access to information about casualised members of UCU, and it is not currently able to communicate directly with our casualised members. Our Equality Standing Committees do not receive regular data about equality cases in our nations and regions. These committees deserve to be given the resources and tools to mobilise their own constituencies.

2.4 Task groups: putting members’ expertise and experiences to use

Formal committees do not have to be the only way members can participate and contribute to the Union. Not everybody has the capacity or means to stand for election and attend regular committees for years at a time. And yet we know from past disputes, including the recent USS strike, that our members are creative and passionate individuals. We are more than able to produce
research-informed, and experience-based, solutions to the problems we face. I will trial member task groups for specific issues facing the union, placing motivated and knowledgeable members at the centre of our national campaigning. Task groups will complement and advise our national committees, and give ordinary members experience and a voice. Our employers don’t always recognise or reward our expertise, but our union will.

2.5 New approaches to negotiating

We can learn a lot from our international trade union colleagues. I would like to explore ways in which we could innovate in our collective bargaining. Alongside our traditional approach to negotiation, we should consider adopting alternative approaches that might deliver more for our members: in particular, open negotiations. Open negotiations are used elsewhere by other trade unions to incentivise negotiators to make the strongest possible case, avoid unnecessary compromises, expose employers’ attempts to misinform employees, and leave their representatives with nowhere to hide.
Our work, including our relationships with students and colleagues, thrives on stability. But jobs in Further and Higher Education are becoming less secure. Insecure employment further marginalises those who are already underrepresented, especially women and BME staff. Almost everyone in UCU agrees that this is a central problem, but they do not agree about how to tackle it. In Further Education, we are only just starting to take action on a local level. In Higher Education, the union has all but given up on the prospect of securing a national agreement on job security: we are told that employers will never come to the table to discuss anything other than pay. And yet recent pay ballots do casualised members a disservice by pretending that their interests, along with equality issues, will be given as much weight as the pay claim in national negotiations. Our casualised members cannot be blamed for doubting whether they really are a priority for the union.

Another way to proceed, which has led to significant victories, is to advance local claims in individual branches. As General Secretary, I will build on these isolated successes by appointing national ‘branch coordination’ officers for anti-casualisation, who will gather information from multiple branches in all sectors and use it to formulate a realistic, concrete framework to put to employers in national or local claims.
3.1 Towards national bargaining on job security

We need to recognise that job security is just as important as pay, and set our sights on a national bargaining framework that takes it into account. This is eminently achievable, and tertiary education unions in other countries can show us the way. We can start with specific actions that raise standards for casualised workers throughout the sector. One is to weight our pay claims more progressively in favour of the lowest paid staff, who are disproportionately likely to be on casual contracts. Another is to expand the remit of our ongoing USS campaign to include more casualised and lower-paid staff in the Scheme, by enrolling staff at lower grades, and introducing a tiered contributions system. The point is to disincentivise casualisation by closing the gap between the remuneration of casualised workers and those on permanent contracts.

3.2 Learning from our professional services members

There are other ways to strengthen our collective action over casualisation. The impact of casualisation on professional services staff is often overlooked: constant restructuring and redundancy programmes, grade drift, and deprofessionalisation hit professional services first, before they spread to teaching staff. Our students would be shocked if they learnt the full extent of the precarity faced not only by many of their teachers, but also by staff in their institutions’ course offices, counselling services, libraries, and IT support teams. This is partly because for most of our professional services colleagues, the risk of speaking out about their precarious circumstances, either to the students they support or the general public, is too great. And yet the influence and esteem which they enjoy with their students and colleagues can make their actions all the more effective. It will not be possible to take robust national action against casualisation without supporting our professional services members, and the forms of industrial action which they are best equipped to lead.
4. PAY

4.1 Local bargaining in FE

Low pay in Further Education is an urgent issue. Without a meaningful national bargaining framework, branches have been forced to act locally. The low turnout among FE members in recent NEC elections indicates a collapse of confidence in the union's ability to fight for them on a national level. This makes the local action which many FE branches are taking against their employers all the more impressive. Members in FE are determined to withstand the systematic onslaughts we have seen to the sector: in terms of funding cuts from government, appalling management of colleges and institutions, the degradation of pay, and slashing of terms and conditions. As a union we have to work even harder to support the current FE fightback, and rebuild the sector.

4.2 HE pay erosion entrenches privilege and threatens the profession

In Higher Education, the union has not taken enough advantage of the national bargaining framework which it has at its disposal. Since the 2016 Trade Union Act imposed a 50% turnout requirement on strike ballots, successive real-terms pay cuts, on their own, have not motivated enough branches to break that threshold. The union has not succeeded in framing pay erosion as an urgent issue, in the way it managed to when the guaranteed element of the USS pension scheme was under threat. But pay erosion is an urgent issue. At a
moment when universities are conceding a need to diversify their workforces in the name of equality, suppressed salaries are taking us in the other direction: they are turning both professional services and academic jobs into culturally prestigious but materially unrewarding careers, for privileged people who can afford to ‘take the hit’ of a low salary.

Staff from affluent backgrounds benefit disproportionately from their ability to soak up the pressure of low pay before progressing to higher grades. They win the early-career rat race, while staff without independent means find their academic achievements unrewarded. This must be part of the reason why the sector has made so little progress to reduce the gender pay gap, not to mention the severe, but still not properly quantified, ethnicity pay gap. Weighting pay claims even more decisively in favour of low-paid staff will go some of the way towards addressing this. Just as importantly, it will send out a message to all of our members that low pay is a moral and social stain on our professions, as well as a source of personal precarity and financial hardship.
5. EQUALITY

Discrimination is endemic in Further and Higher Education. As a union, we tend to deal with inequality on an individualised, case-by-case basis, with little scope for national collective bargaining. Casework takes an enormous amount of labour – emotional and physical – from dedicated branch representatives. Again, the way forward lies in proper, systematic, national coordination of branches’ current efforts to address the issue.

5.1 Nationally coordinated casework

At present, UCU has no central hub for equality-related casework data, and no in-house legal team to deal with these issues in a specialised way. As General Secretary I will create positions for specialist, full-time equality casework officials. These officials will collate information, identify emerging trends and patterns of discrimination, target potentially high-profile cases for special assistance, and work towards precedent-setting legal challenges and broad-based agreements with employers. When, for example, there is a spike in the use of performance management to dismiss members with disabilities, or in the use of Non-Disclosure Agreements to silence victims of bullying, sexual harassment, or racial discrimination, our equality specialists will be ready to bring the problem to the attention of the national equality committees, helping them to publicise it more widely and feed it back into our national and regional casework training and campaigning. This will be a valuable mechanism for naming and shaming the worst employers, and amplifying and celebrating our best casework successes.
5.2 National bargaining on non-pay equality issues

UCU has not successfully negotiated with employers on a national level over issues that are unrelated to pay. At the heart of any trade union struggle is a fight for equality: issues like sexual harassment and transgender rights, and maternity and paternity rights. In both FE and HE, the national bargaining frameworks should be expanded to include these things. UCU should be demanding not only an improvement to the pay spine, a plan to close the ethnicity pay gap, or a reduction in casual contracts: we should be calling for and working towards a national collective labour agreement that recognises how different forms of material deprivation and discrimination intersect with and compound one another, and aim for a comprehensive solution. When UCU next goes on strike over pay, this should be a mandatory additional requirement if employers want to bring us back to the negotiating table.
6. HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT

6.1 Compensating the material costs of anti-immigrant policies

The Hostile Environment is not happening somewhere else. It is happening in our classrooms, offices, and research events. The government’s Prevent strategy and immigration controls are conspiring to turn professional services staff and educators into de facto police officers and border guards. BME students and staff are all becoming targets, even as the whole of our immigrant community experiences xenophobia in the wake of Brexit. Colleges and universities cannot claim that they are ‘international’ when they fail to challenge, and often aggressively over-enforce, the worst tendencies of the Home Office. Meanwhile, fees for work visas have increased by 500% in the last decade, and staff generally have to bear the costs of visas for themselves and their families, with no help from their employers, on top of the international health surcharge for access to the NHS. As a union, we must insist in our national pay claims that all employers reimburse international staff for these unfair fees until such time as they are abolished.
6.2 Campaigning against surveillance and the security state

The Hostile Environment also affects our research. Colleagues from overseas are refused visas to attend conferences and project meetings in the UK. And all non-EU staff, as well as students, are subject to intrusive ‘right to work’ checks and other measures as part of the surveillance that comes with the Hostile Environment. The 180-day rule prevents many non-EU lecturers from conducting in-depth research abroad for fear of violating the requirements of their visa. Academics can be forced to leave the country if they spend too much time overseas.

Powerful staff-led campaigns like International and Broke and Unis Resist Border Controls have laboured too long without official support. As General Secretary of UCU, I will create a dedicated task group for surveillance and security issues in colleges and universities. This is a growing scandal throughout our education sector, and whatever happens in the wake of Brexit, it will not simply go away.
7. WORKLOAD, HEALTH, AND SAFETY

‘Workload’ and ‘Health and Safety’ are often treated as separate issues, in the way our branches deal with them and in the agreements which we make with our managers. But this is not the case. Conditions in Further Education have fostered not only unpaid overtime, but also a kind of ‘workload creep’. The streamlining of course offerings and cutting of dedicated services such as dyslexia support, student advice, and counselling has transferred those burdens onto the teachers themselves. This comes at a moment when austerity has left FE students in greater need than ever, and it takes a traumatic toll on frontline educators suddenly laden with unfamiliar administrative and pastoral roles on top of teaching duties. In Higher Education, the ‘rationalisation’ and centralisation of professional services staff is having similar consequences. Expectations are unforgivably high, and the mental and physical health of all staff is at stake.

7.1 A national workload reporting service

Excessive workloads are causing injuries. Our managers’ idea that resilience and wellbeing training will help, rather than exacerbate the problem, is an insult to staff. Instead, UCU needs to collect and report on the toxic culture of overwork that pervades Further and Higher Education. One-off press releases from UCU’s national HQ are not sufficient recognition of the problems encountered by branches, and their efforts to deal with them. It is time to
create an online, nationwide workload reporting service. This service will provide standardised online ‘stress audits’ which branches can distribute to their members without overburdening reps and committee officers. If branches need extra support, they will be able to request that UCU’s national officials, up to and including the General Secretary, make direct, escalating interventions with their managers and representations to the Health and Safety Executive. Overwork is endemic in the education sector. We must take extra care to avoid duplicating it in our union's structures and activities.

7.2 A research-driven, proactive campaign against irresponsible metrics

The scourge of overwork cannot be addressed without challenging our managers’ implementation of intellectually bankrupt, counter-productive tools for measuring our performance: from university rankings to government initiatives like dysfunctional data management systems in Further and Adult Education, or the statistically unsound, unethical Teaching Excellence Framework. As General Secretary, I will set up a cross-sector task group bringing together member representatives and experts in a number of relevant areas, not only to raise member awareness but also to identify where our leverage lies. This is an area where I hope that our professional services members can come to the fore, pioneering and leading new forms of collective action against metric-fuelled mismanagement.
8. PENSIONS

The USS and TPS pensions are not just guaranteed retirement income. They bind our sectors together. By forcing all employers to make the same payments for the same pension promises, they act as brakes on further marketisation and the stratification of our workforce, and they discourage institutions from over-leveraging themselves with debt to the detriment of students and staff. Employers did not try to end the USS pension guarantee because they could not afford to pay for it – they could, and still can. They tried to end it because they wanted to extend and intensify the Conservative Party’s failed market experiment, whereby poor employers have suffered, already-rich institutions have expanded uncontrollably, and the sector has played its staff off against each other. They wanted to end their obligations to each other and to their employees.

8.1 National coordination to protect TPS institutions

Managers are now bringing the same destructive market logic to bear on TPS institutions. The government’s valuation methods demand a 7% increase in employer contributions to provide the same benefits as before, with no possibility of cutting benefits. FE colleges are fortunately protected, for now, but post-92 universities are not. Individual post-92 employers will try to manufacture a sense of crisis, arguing that their institutions urgently need to make significant cuts, including redundancies, in order to afford these increases. As the USS dispute demonstrated, we cannot take them at their word. Even poorer employers are running surpluses, and sitting on substantial
unrestricted reserves that will allow them to soak up the cost of TPS over several years while reconsidering their business model in a way that minimises the impact on staff. And we must not forget that the TPS increases are not set in stone. They are tied to economic growth, and a recovery will make this a temporary crisis rather than an irreversible one. Employers can weather the storm.

There is no need to wait for any working group or joint panel to confirm this for us. We need a coordinated national campaign, learning from USS, to get the message out as early and clearly as possible that the TPS contribution increases do not justify immediate cuts to staff costs.

8.2 Securing the future of USS

We must not forget that the future of USS is still far from secure. Members won an extraordinary victory in April 2018 by forcing employers to withdraw their proposal to abolish guaranteed pensions for members. The courage and conviction of striking branches to come together to reject a deal agreed by our own General Secretary, which would have involved massive cuts to benefits in order to preserve a small guaranteed element, has been rewarded – for now. The first report of the Joint Expert Panel shows that USS benefits can be maintained as they are, with no need for contribution increases above the rate we were paying before the strike. But experience shows that we cannot trust USS’s managers to respect an expert consensus. When the Panel issues its second report, dealing with the longer-term future of the Scheme, there needs to be a full and frank reckoning. Our employers could work with us to overhaul USS’s governance and widely discredited valuation methodology, if they wanted to. They could even help us to transform USS into an ethically invested, socially responsible scheme that combats, rather than accelerates, climate change, and expands its membership to include lower-paid and casualised staff. If elected, I will do whatever it takes not only to secure USS, but also to reform and improve it.
9. MY ROLE AS GENERAL SECRETARY

I don't want to be a General Secretary you only recognise from an email signature. You will see me in your branch and region, on picket lines, and interacting with members via social media as well as with the press. Part of listening to members means meeting with them. I will establish regular regional and online General Secretary surgeries, where you can come and meet with me and other union officers, tell me about your experiences and worries, and ask me questions.

9.1 Fostering accountability

The role and powers of the General Secretary came under unprecedented scrutiny during the USS strike. This culminated in an embarrassing event for our union. Walkouts and protests at our annual Congress prevented two motions about the General Secretary's conduct from being debated. Fortunately, this year's Congress is set to consider rule changes, proposed by the recently established Democracy Commission, which will make the General Secretary more accountable to members. I not only promise to abide by any rule changes agreed by Congress and other relevant parties: I strongly encourage Congress delegates to vote for all of the recommended changes to the GS's role that have been put forward.
9.2 Making UCU structures accessible

I have already mentioned the barriers to participation which our subscription rates and committee structures raise for many members. Another problem lies in the way we present information to members. Our website is full of valuable research and information, but difficult to navigate. Our bureaucratic procedures confuse and obstruct our members. Compared with other trade unions, we seriously under-use technological innovations like mobile apps and social media. These can be as useful for very serious activities, like confidential harassment reporting, as they are for building solidarity and camaraderie across branches. Staff in our sector keep up to speed with the latest developments in technology and the larger media landscape, and it is time we took advantage of that.

9.3 Conclusion

The proposals I have outlined in this document will open up the union to people who have felt excluded, making it more affordable, accessible, and representative of the entire tertiary education workforce. But a manifesto is more than the sum of its parts. I want to engage members in a process: of determining our common goals, discovering and building our capabilities, and realising how much power we have when we translate our shared knowledge and interests into action. Once we truly represent the sector, we can become a union that shapes and directs policy, rather than reacting to it. We need to build forms of solidarity that do not exist yet, across career paths, institutions, sectors, and generations, in defence of public education. Vote for me and with me, to vote for that change.

9.4 Acknowledgements

This manifesto is the product of countless conversations I have had with many people over the last decade. In the course of writing it, I have also benefitted from detailed input from friends and colleagues in all sectors of the union. I cannot thank everyone personally for their input, but I would like to give special thanks to my friend Nick Hardy for his assistance with the editing process.