

Unite National Industrial Sector Conference 2015

Education Report by Robert Liddell

The conference started with the Joint Plenary Session this was chaired by Tony Woodhouse, after the recent Terrorist attacks a minutes silence was observed. Len McCluskey the General Secretary gave the keynote address and report, reflecting on the changing political situation within the UK. The election of Jeremy Corbyn and the election of the Tory Government with the repeated attacks on the Trade Union Movement with the Trade Union Bill and the continuing Austerity Cuts. This was followed by the Assistant General Secretary's Report. There was a Q &A session one of the most entertaining questions was why Unite were booking delegates into the Hilton Hotel whilst the union cannot get a foot in the door for recruitment to the union. Guess where the Scottish delegation was staying?

Nominations were then taken for the Standing Orders Committee for the NISC 2017 the following were elected:-

Sharon Duncan – Health – Scotland

Ian Evans – Health – South East

Susan Matthews – Local Authorities – London & East

Steve O'Donnell – Finance & Legal – London & East

Sharon Graham gave a presentation on the Unite Industrial Strategy and was going round all the Sectors to give more information for the industrial sectors and feedback from the sectors.

The Sector Conferences took place with the rest of the morning was given over to some presentations from Legal, PSI, Shadow Spokesperson for FE & HE the Education Sector Report and Sharon Graham on the Industrial Strategy with reference to Education. I suggested that one important data that should be included in the information within our sector is membership of pension schemes. Sharon Graham has taken this on board.

The afternoon session consisted of 12 motions being proposed and seconded a brief synopsis of each of these follows:-

MOTION 1 – NISC

Attacking University Finances by Restricting International Student Visas

This concerned the limitations on Visas and the impact this can have on recruitment of International students to UK Universities. Motion Carried

MOTION 2 – NISC

Rejecting the PREVENT agenda – not all Muslim students are terrorists!

This concerned the Government PREVENT agenda for HE, this motion moved to reject the PREVENT restrictions placed on our legal rights and to support Students Unions to oversee their own student societies without prejudice.

**MOTION 3 – East Midlands
Fair Pay**

This concerned the ratio of the lowest paid to namely the highest earner a ratio of no more than 12:1 is suggested. Some University principles are earning up to £600,000. The motion proposes a max of 12 times the real living wage currently capping the highest earner at about £120,000 much discussion followed this motion. I suggested we turn it on its head and ensure that the lowest paid get a 1/12th of the highest paid and therefore if a HE wishes to pay the University Principal £600,000 then the lowest paid would have to be paid £50,000. This was well received even by the proposer of the motion. Motion Carried

**MOTION 4 – East Midlands
Living Wage**

This concerned campaigning for a real living wage for all employees including under 25 year olds etc. I supported this motion and pointed out that Caledonian University has become a living wage employer as have others in Scotland and that the way we approached it was to remove the lower points from the HERA scales and suggested this is what we should campaign for is to remove the lower points nationally on the HERA scales. Motion Carried

**MOTION 5 – Ireland
For the Student not for Profit**

This concerned the current funding situation in Northern Ireland requires the nationalisation of FE and HE in the remit of the Northern Ireland Executive. Motion Carried

**MOTION 6 – London & Eastern
Universities 24/7 Opening**

This concerned the on going pressure to extend our universities opening times to students and the public during evenings and weekends. Motion Carried

**MOTIONS 7 & 8 – London & Eastern – North East, Yorkshire & Humber
Trade Union Bill**

These two motions were taken together they concern the strategy to oppose this bill by Unite much discussion took place within lengthy debate the National Officer enquired about how many had lobbied their MP's and if so how many had talked face to face and how many had a Tory MP they could lobby. On behalf of the Scottish delegation I asked for some clarification of what's a Tory MP? This was well received! Both Motions Carried

MOTION 9 – North East, Yorkshire & Humber

Sector Strategy

This concerned forming a strategy for the sector taking account of the Trade Union Bill, 'predicted' global recession 2016/17 and the crisis in FE sector. Motion Carried

MOTION 10 – Scotland

Independent Pay Review for the UK Education Sector

This concerned the way forward for pay award for the future to redress the poor pay awards the sector has received since 2008. It suggests going forward to negotiate for an Independent Pay Review to be carried out for the UK Education Sector. Much debate took place on this motion with major concerns raised, regarding some institutes paying cleaners well to previous pay reviews where it showed a 36% fall in income but no redress was given. In my right to reply I pointed out that the good examples will help with the poorer employers but it was not just about pay but the on going costs of living like Energy costs, Rent, Mortgages, and Food etc. I explained that the mechanism for the Pay review is to have all parties to agree upfront and abide by its outcome good or bad. It came through in discussion that Unite may have to consider what is best for its own members in the Sector rather than have UCU have a large say in negotiations due to the large number of members in the sector. Motion Carried

MOTION 11 – South East

Privatisation in Higher Education

This concerned the weakening of collective bargaining in the HE sector due to increased privatisation of services. Motion Carried

MOTION 12 – South West

UCEA Failure to comply with the 2006 National Framework Agreement

This motion was withdrawn.