

It was the first time that BECTU had participated in Prospect's biennial conference as the union's largest sector, but our delegates made a major contribution to the event. The conference was a larger affair than the BECTU annual conferences, with nearly 400 delegates gathering at Birmingham's International Conference Centre from 3 to 6 June.

More than 80 motions were debated, and while they covered a wider range of issues, many would have been perfectly at home on the BECTU agenda.

Brexit, health & safety, deregulation and outsourcing were major themes. And the keynote guest speech was made by BBC Director General Tony Hall.

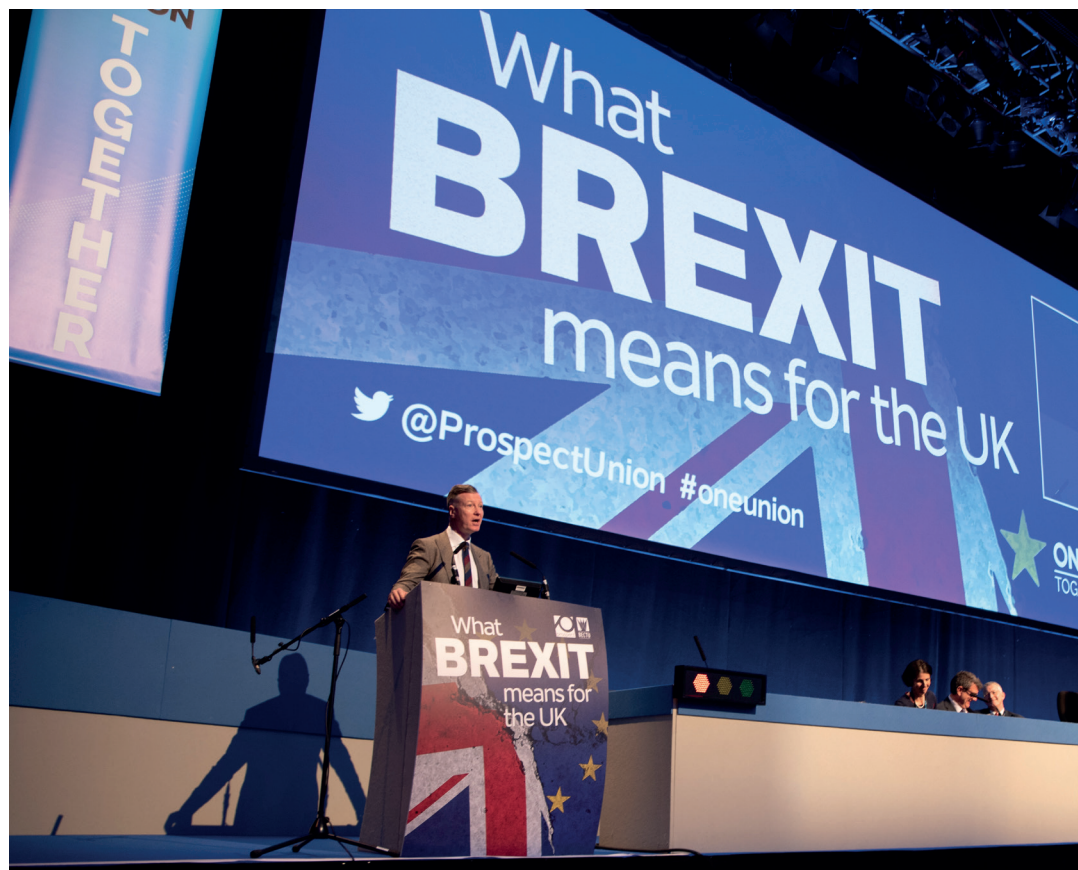
Opening conference, Prospect General Secretary Mike Clancy talked about the merger with BECTU and the targets for membership growth that were set when the unions merged, which have now been exceeded. He said that since the merger the BECTU sector is growing faster than ever, and also that the rest of Prospect is growing too giving the combined union "an unparalleled level of expertise".

The first three motions debated at conference were on race equality, and the first delegate on the rostrum was Riaz Meer of Yorkshire & Humberside freelance branch and a key player in BECTU's black members' committee.

The motions committed the union to supporting the work of BECTU's black members' committee, campaigning against race discrimination, addressing under-representation of minority ethnic groups in the workplace, building BAME membership of Prospect and developing BAME members as union activists.

Conference gave overwhelming support for the motions proposed by BECTU's Yorkshire and Humberside Freelance branch, the NEC and the Rosyth Royal Dockyard branch.

Meer told how the black members' committee is currently fighting the employers in the TV industry for proper robust equality monitoring and leading the Federation of Entertainment unions in this campaign. It is working in the theatre industry to address under-representation of BAME workers, and working with sister unions to try and improve the



PROSPECT CONFERENCE

BECTU MAKES AN IMPACT

Hundreds of delegates, dozens of motions – but BECTU delegates made their presence felt and found much in common with their fellow delegates at Prospect's biennial conference reports **Janice Turner**

Pressing issue:
Prospect General Secretary Mike Clancy addresses conference on the threat to British industries of a hard Brexit

scandalously low number of BAME workers in the UK film industry. "We speak directly to employers, regulators, quangos, politicians of all political stripes, and government. And in all our discussions we are never afraid to speak truth to power. In our discussions our strength – and we are strong – comes from you."

Satnam Ner, who was the first black President of the Scottish TUC, congratulated Prospect on behalf of the NEC for its progress over the past two years, mapping and monitoring Prospect's BAME membership, establishing a successful BAME development programme, and its BAME working group.

Ner argued that diversity in numbers in the workplace is not enough: BAME employees need to be included, and research shows that too many organisations fail on diversity and those that do also fail on inclusion. He urged delegates to look around and see whether the membership of the union reflects that of society. "If the answer is no it shows just how much more work we need to do."

David Lincoln of the Rosyth Royal Dockyard branch called on the union to continue the rollout of the BAME member and rep development programmes, showcasing exemplar branches, establishing an organising award around equality to recognise



branch efforts and challenge branches to achieve proportionality within their committees.

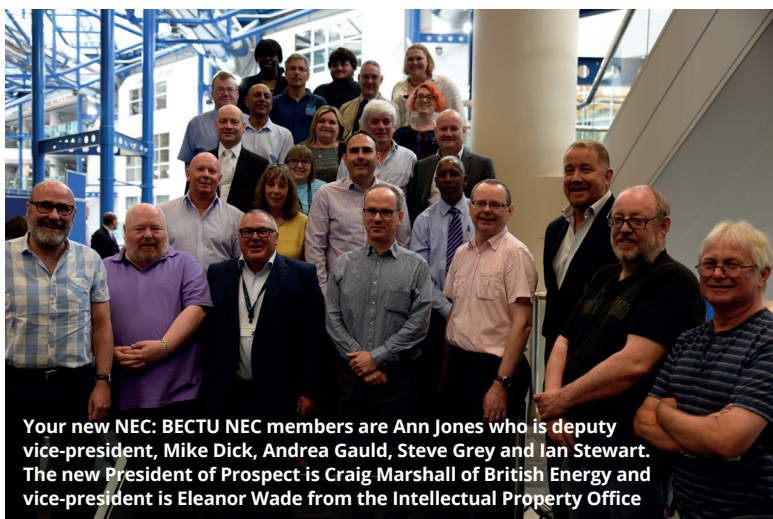
BREXIT

Brexit was a theme running through conference. Delegates from all over the Prospect industrial sphere were expressing growing alarm at the dangers faced by this country if its departure from the EU is mishandled.

Delegates backed a motion from EFRA (Dept for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) branch calling on the union to oppose hard Brexit. Ben Pye said: "The UK is sleepwalking to a hard Brexit: it is like lemmings walking off a cliff."

Next was a motion on the rights of non-UK EU nationals since the referendum. Michael Scullion (EFRA) highlighted the contribution EU nationals have made, both in his workplace and to the economy as

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Your new NEC: BECTU NEC members are Ann Jones who is deputy vice-president, Mike Dick, Andrea Gauld, Steve Grey and Ian Stewart. The new President of Prospect is Craig Marshall of British Energy and vice-president is Eleanor Wade from the Intellectual Property Office

a whole. The common thread was the uncertainty faced by non-UK EU nationals living and working in the UK with just 42 weeks to go before Brexit.

Delegates from ITV, the archaeologists branch, UKRI and Media City all gave their perspectives and supported the motion which was carried by a wide margin. It commits Prospect to continue to speak up for these members to secure their current rights up to and beyond Brexit.

Delegates also backed a motion committing the union to continue to campaign on the UK's membership of Euratom. Malcolm Forshaw (EDF Energy) highlighted the important work of Euratom in regulating the nuclear energy industry as well as in other areas like medicine and research and asked: "However did we reach this mess?" He said that Prospect had already achieved important concessions on Euratom and that the motion was needed to make sure this work continued.

Peter Clements rounded off the debate for the NEC by highlighting the impacts on Sellafield, Europe's largest nuclear facility and a major employer.

The session ended with a debate on two emergency motions. The first,

from members of the BT Northern Ireland branch, sought to step up the union's campaigning on Brexit including a new ask for the people to have a vote on the final Brexit deal.

The second covered the impact of a hard border on the island of Ireland and was put forward by BECTU's southern Ireland branch. Following a passionate debate, delegates backed both motions.

Moving the first motion Claire Mullaly (BT Northern Ireland) said: "We must be bold and on the right side of history."

By backing the motion, Prospect would campaign on the rights and interests of members; for the public to be given a say on final deal; and that if the deal was rejected by the public, the government should argue for an extension of the transition period to negotiate further, she concluded.

General Secretary Mike Clancy spoke in favour of the motions on behalf of the NEC. He said that just as a trade union branch would put the outcome of a negotiation with an employer back to members, so too should the government put the outcome of their negotiation back to the people.

Some delegates reminded conference of the need to maintain the union's party political independence. However, the conference backed the motion by a wide margin.

PANEL DISCUSSION

"It's time to be honest, it's a total mess." That was the verdict of Hilary Benn MP, chair of the House of Commons Brexit select committee, on Brexit progress.

He was speaking on an expert Brexit

Setting the scene: BECTU's Riaz Meer (left) opened the first debate at conference. Below: the conference hall



panel during conference alongside CBI chief economist Rain Newton-Smith and Martin Rolfe, the CEO of NATS (formerly National Air Traffic Services). The panel was chaired by broadcaster Ayesha Hazarika.

The panel painted a worrying picture of a Brexit process that has stalled, is confused, and often based on the wrong priorities.

In response to a question from Ngozi Ugochukwu from the BBC, Hilary Benn painted a harrowing picture of the agony of EU citizens left in limbo due to Brexit and expressed his concerns that lack of Home Office capacity might lead to EU citizens being mistreated in a similar way to the recent Windrush citizens.

The discussion was a sobering reminder of the extent of the questions still unanswered and a call to arms for members to continue to fight to influence the process in support of the values and priorities of the union movement.

DEREGULATION

Prospect members voted overwhelmingly to condemn the twin trends of deregulation and outsourcing. They also called for a new approach focused on high standards and keeping services in house.

The initial motion on deregulation was moved by members from the Health and Safety Executive branch.

Members recounted their experience of the government's deregulatory agenda that is too narrowly focused on cutting costs and does not take into account wider considerations of social value.

This point was echoed by Aaron Curtis (Air Traffic Control Officers) who argued that too often businesses see regulation as red tape, instead of recognising it as a critical safety function, and that too many businesses were marking their own homework.

As Curtis pointed out, if you are sending people thousands of feet in the air in a metal tube it is essential that the proper regulation is in place. He said that Prospect is well placed to make this argument because it is well represented in both the regulators and the industries they regulate.

The motion was supported by the NEC, with the argument made that Brexit will mean more and more regulatory areas being brought back into government control, meaning it is



Keynote speaker: BBC Director General Tony Hall (centre) with Mike Clancy and Gerry Morrissey

Tony Hall speaks to the regions

BBC Director-General Tony Hall has reiterated the BBC's commitment to the nations and regions of the UK and set out the corporation's unique ability to change the UK's nations and regions through investment, partnership and support. In a speech to delegates he framed the BBC's actions within the context of the public service ideals that drive both the corporation and those who work within it.

"What we've done here [in Birmingham] and in Manchester – in our creative hubs in Cardiff and Glasgow, Belfast and Bristol – has shown just what an impact the BBC can have as a catalyst for boosting a region's economy and creativity, jobs and skills, ambition and opportunity. It's the kind of difference only a really bold, public service intervention can make," he said.

The BBC had helped to bring much more to areas of the UK than simply its

programmes and broadcasting. Hall described the unique way the corporation can act as a catalyst for development. He said: "I'm a passionate believer in the impact we can have through our convening power... By acting as a ringmaster, if you like. It's another public service ideal: bringing partners together and making things happen that would otherwise not be possible."

He described five public service ideals. First was serving everyone with quality, including providing impartial and accurate news "at a time when trust is at such a premium and information is so contested, the need for an impartial and accurate BBC is greater than ever."

Second was the need for the BBC to represent everyone – to give voice to as many different people and opinions as possible.

The third shared ideal was supporting education – including great programmes

like *Blue Planet II* – "incredible world-leading shows... that actually managed to move the needle in the debate on plastics – literally helping to bring about a sea change."

His fourth ideal was of public service as ringmaster, acting as a catalyst, and finally his fifth ideal was "living our values". Hall reiterated the BBC's commitment to closing the gender pay gap by 2020 and an equal split of men and women across our airwaves by the same year.

He argued for a strong BBC for the UK. "This is important, not only to us, but to the country ... It needs us to carry Britain's voice and influence to the world at a crucial moment, when we are looking to redefine our global relationships and reshape our international identity. This is about much more than the BBC. It is about the need for a public service renaissance; a renewal of public service values at the heart of British life."



BECTU delegates
Mark Foris and
Chester Yang

essential there is a proper national debate about the future of regulation.

OTHER DEBATES

Among the other debates of conference was one that committed Prospect to campaign for reform of the Companies Act in order to “empower employees of any company with more than 100 employees/ subcontractors to be represented in executive board level decision-making.”

Another noted a recent TUC debate welcoming the Lucas Plan 40th

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Anniversary conference. The Lucas Plan was a pioneering effort by workers at arms company Lucas Aerospace to retain jobs by proposing alternative, socially useful applications of the company’s technology and their own skills. The motion instructed the NEC to examine ways of widening discussion on this issue.

International issues were also discussed, with conference voting to express solidarity with the Georgian Trade Union Federation and lobby politicians to pressurise the Georgian government to bring in laws that comply with ILO conventions. And there was much discussion of pensions, with the NEC being instructed to raise awareness of the gender pension gap.

BECTU chief Gerry Morrissey commented at the end of conference: “BECTU delegates should be proud of the positive impact they have made in this, their first Prospect conference. The trade union movement has always believed that unity is strength, and this was proved here once again.” ●

Race equality campaign



Prospect media officer Balihar Khalsa presents the survey findings

The shocking findings of a survey into racism at work are the catalyst for a new campaign by Prospect.

In a recent survey of the union’s BAME members, of whom more than 500 responded:

- 45% reported that they had seen racist behaviour in the workplace;
- 24% said they had been racially abused and did not feel comfortable reporting it;
- more than half (51%) were aware of white colleagues having been promoted despite having a similar level of experience or expertise;
- 46% were aware of a white colleague with less experience or expertise being paid more than them;
- more than half (52%) were not confident that colleagues would support them on issues relating to their race.

Perhaps most shocking of all was the long list of insulting names that the members reported having been called by colleagues.

In a break-out session attended by more than 50 delegates, Prospect director of communications and research Andrew Pakes said that the rulebook made clear that equality was an issue that involved the whole union. “We want to put together a union campaign, not just an equal opportunities campaign,” he said.

The delegates discussed the union’s draft action plan and literature and their views will be used to inform and develop the plan further.



Award winners: BT Adastral Park YPN committee won the Young Member award in the 2018 recruitment and organising awards. The judges, Prospect President Denise McGuire (centre) and BECTU joint-President Jane Colclough (right), chose this committee as the young reps overcame barriers to speak to more than 400 graduates and increased youth membership

Health and safety is a priority

Conference made crystal clear the importance it attached to health and safety when it insisted on continuing to debate policy proposals on the issue, overturning a ruling that the section had run out of time.

Delegates overwhelmingly supported a motion calling on Prospect to adopt all the core and enhanced standards that had been set out in the government’s Farmer/ Stephenson *Thriving at work*

independent review of mental health and work.

Celia Hutchison of BBC Media City NorthWest branch said: “If people feel confident to be open about the mental stress they are experiencing and their mental health problems it would help all of us challenge the working practices that can cause these mental health problems.”

More new policies committed Prospect to:

- challenging funding cuts

that have jeopardised local authorities’ capacity to fulfil their statutory duties in relation to school improvement and children’s services;

- raising awareness of the menopause within the union’s health, safety and wellbeing guidance, provide links to other useful sources of information, investigate whether other action is required and report back to the 2018 conference.