

# Dundee school students stage anti-cuts strike

**Wayne Scott and Eoin Lesslie**  
Students Defending Dundee Schools

150 school students walked out of Harris Academy in Dundee on 1 April and marched on Dundee City Council.

The walkout was organised by Students Defending Dundee Schools (SDDS), a citywide school student campaign group set up to oppose the council's £4 million cuts to school budgets and proposals to merge Advanced Higher classes into a 'city campus'.

SDDS has grown out of petitioning across Dundee schools against the 'city campus' plans. School students see the merging of Advanced Highers as a cut and an attempt to run education on the cheap.

Pupils will face the inconvenience of having to travel across the city to attend classes previously available at their own schools.

Despite being presented with a petition with several hundred signatures opposing the plans the Scottish National Party (SNP) council has dismissed the concerns of pupils, parents and staff and begun implementing the plans.

Students from Harris and Morgan academies along with Youth Fight for Jobs organised a 100-strong protest outside the council's education committee on 28 February linking opposition to the city campus to

wider education cuts in the city.

The SNP administration continued to ignore the concerns so plans for a walkout and mass demonstration were made.

Anger increased when on 28 March SNP councillor Liz Fordyce, now termed by school students as the 'Iron Lady of Dundee', refused to rule out school closures in the council's review of education ending in December 2011.

Hundreds of school students have joined the SDDS Facebook group and took part in organising the walkout. Local newspapers and the STV website covered the walkout plans and SDDS activist Eoin Lesslie was interviewed on local radio.

In response the council rushed out a statement calling on pupils to stay in classes. One SNP councillor, when told of the plans by a family member even used Facebook to privately message SDDS to try and defend their cuts policies and discourage action.

This just made us more determined to organise. Pupils massed at the school entrance and were met by lines of police and teachers. They boldly walked out despite some teachers warning them to stay in classes and preventing a number of pupils under sixteen from leaving. A large number of fifth and sixth year pupils made it out and began marching.

Despite our concerns about possible trouble with the police, once



photo Leah Ganley

they realised we were determined and organised with our own stewarding, they were very cooperative.

As the march passed through residential areas into the city centre people of all ages came out onto their front steps to applaud, shout encouragement and join in the chanting.

Once the Harris pupils crowded into the city square they were joined by students from other Dundee secondary schools, swelling the number of protesters to near two hundred.

School students made speeches calling for a mass campaign involving all students in Dundee to fight the cuts and oppose the city campus plan.

We then marched to Tayside House, the main council office, and

were met with applause by council workers coming out of offices. A delegation was sent in to demand that the education convenor or a representative from the SNP administration meet with us and receive our petition.

Disgracefully it was left to admin staff to explain to us that all the councillors had gone home early and not one manager of any department was in the building. Low paid council workers will be angry to find out that council leaders making cuts can't be bothered to work a full day.

SDDS made an appointment with the education convenor and handed over our petition. The council should be warned that this will not be the last protest and that opposition to the cuts will only increase.

## Fast youth news

### Tuition fees hike

Of the 24 universities that have so far announced the tuition fees they are intending to charge from 2012, 16 are planning the maximum £9,000 a year for all courses. This makes the government's claim that the average fees will be significantly below £9,000 laughable. Supposedly we shouldn't worry though as universities will only be able to charge the maximum fees if they show they are offering enough support for poorer students. And yet even before the fee hike, the top rated universities seem to be struggling with this. Oxford and Cambridge have seen no improvement this year in the proportion of students from state schools that they intake – less than 60% for both.

We need mass protests at universities as they announce their fee rates which call on managements not to implement the Con-Dem increase.

### Save EMA!

Research by the Institute of Fiscal Studies think tank shows that many students from poor backgrounds will be worse off with the government's new bursary scheme than they were with Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). Students eligible for free school meals will lose an average of £370 a year according to the study. The number of students guaranteed support is being reduced from 650,000 to just 12,000 which will undoubtedly mean many decide they cannot stay on in further education. YFJ demands the immediate reinstatement of EMA and that local councils match EMA funding for students unable to get bursaries from central government.

### TUC youth award

YFJ activist Nick Parker has been awarded the TUC youth award 2011. This is the third year in a row that a young member from the PCS civil servants' union has won the award showing the worth of a well-organised, fighting young members' network, as has been developed in PCS. Nick's hard work campaigning against cuts in his home town of Lincoln, organising the PCS in Jobcentre Plus call centres and fighting for decent jobs for all young people with YFJ was recognised at the recent TUC young members conference.

### Jarrow march for jobs

Youth Fight for Jobs' march from Jarrow to London is gaining support. YFJ has received donations of £100 from Hull trades council and £300 from London RMT as well as £90 collected on the 26 March demonstration. The march will start in Jarrow, south Tyneside on 1 October and arrive in London on 5 November with protests as the march goes through towns along the route. It commemorates the 75th anniversary of 200 unemployed men from Jarrow marching the same route. Youth unemployment is rapidly approaching one million which shows the complete failure of the mainstream parties to provide a future for young people. March with us for job creation not job cuts! See [www.jarrow2london2011.wordpress.com](http://www.jarrow2london2011.wordpress.com) and [www.youthfightforjobs.com](http://www.youthfightforjobs.com) for more information.

## Leicester: still angry with Clegg



photo Leicester YFJ

**Suraj Shah**

Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition candidate for Rushey Mead ward, Leicester

On Friday 1 April, Nick Clegg came to Leicester to hold a question and answer session at Showcase Cinema in the Highcross shopping mall. It was the first time he held such an event in the East Midlands without his 'partner in crime' David Cameron.

Showing Clegg's cowardice, people had to give their details to the police before being allowed inside to ask questions.

Youth Fight for Jobs helped organise a protest of up to 100 people outside.

The fact that so many came out shows that working people and

students are still outraged by the tuition fees increase and attacks on our right to a decent education. Voices chanting "Nick Clegg shame on you!" echoed through the area around the protest.

We found support from passers by and some even joined the protest. This shows the anger that exists at the Liberal Democrats for caring more about power than the working people who put them into their positions.

Some of the young people on the protest had voted Lib Dem, and were furious at the way Clegg betrayed them.

Many of the protesters realised the need for an alternative to the three main parties – a party that opposes all cuts and puts ordinary people before the profits of big business.

[www.youthfightforjobs.com](http://www.youthfightforjobs.com)

## Save Hackney youth services!

**Suzanne Beishon**

London Youth Fight for Jobs

Youth workers and young people from Hackney, east London, protested outside the council's Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee to demand an end to the savage cuts that will decimate the services used by young people in the borough.

Whilst Hackney has one of the highest youth unemployment rates and highest rates of gun and knife crime in the country the council is pushing ahead with plans to merge Hackney Youth

Services with the Youth Offending Team, resulting in the loss of 91 posts out of 181.

The merger will mean youth workers are re-named, taking them out of nationally agreed youth worker terms and conditions. Alongside this the council proposes large funding cuts to youth centres across the borough and big cuts in the Connexions youth advice service.

Protesters spoke to a Labour member of the committee before the meeting who claimed to not know the details of the cuts we listed. She said as far as she was aware youth services were protected!

We will be making our case against cuts in the next committee meeting and will present a petition signed by young people and youth workers from across the borough.

The cuts to youth services nationally make up a large proportion of many councils' budget cuts. Young people's futures are under attack through the cutting of EMA student payments, raising university fees, joblessness and attacks on benefits.

At the same time councils are now removing the few insufficient services that help young people find work, develop socially and culturally and give them an alternative to hanging around on the streets.



photo Paul Mattsson