

# UCU HE DISPUTES

- **BUILD THE ACTION**
- **STAND UNITED  
TO WIN**

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University and College Union (UCU) members have said 'enough is enough'. The impressive UK-wide turnouts in both the USS and Four Fights ballots are a strong indicator of our anger. They show a mood to push back against exploitative working conditions, casualisation, relentless attacks on our pension, and the pay insult of 1.5%, which is effectively a massive pay cut when real inflation is now 6%.

It was no small feat to achieve these ballot results on two UK-wide disputes, run side by side, with a short ballot window of just under three weeks. Breaking the 50% threshold nationally for the first time in Four Fights is also a significant step for UCU. If the ballot had been aggregated together, every member would now be able to take strike action.

The 58 branches taking strike action from 1st to 3rd December are launching the dispute on behalf of the whole union, signalling to the bosses and government that we are serious about the fight we face. Escalating the action – both in terms of the action taken and the number of participating branches – will be an important part of the strategy moving forward, starting with more branches joining industrial action next term, pending the outcome of the re-ballots.

There is also potential for other campus unions to join us. EIS, representing lecturers in Scotland, and Unison are both balloting their members. A cross-union university strike would be a huge step forward, maximising the pressure on employers to negotiate meaningful improvements to the pay and conditions offer, and withdraw USS pension proposals.

Staying strong and united throughout the industrial action ahead is crucial if we want to make meaningful gains. That includes resisting management attempts to divide and bully us back to work. Some employers are threatening punitive, strike-breaking measures, including threats to dock

pay in the Christmas payroll, and deducting 100% of pay for action short of strike. This shows how threatened they are by our action.

We must be prepared that both strikes and action short of strike can put increased pressure on members. But also that the very issues at stake – low pay, insecure work and excessive working conditions – can make sustaining action difficult. Therefore, linking up with local trades union councils, and appealing for solidarity from other unions will be critical for building solidarity. Branches should also appeal for trade union donations to the local strike pay fund.

UCU must call for a meeting of all public sector unions, so that we can join with local government and NHS workers also fighting back against the Tory government on pay. Such a united front will strengthen our disputes. A decade ago, virtually to the day, two million public sector workers in 29 unions went on strike together to fight Tory attacks on our pensions as part of their austerity offensive.

Regional protests of striking and non-striking branches must be built to help sustain the action, maintain members' confidence, and draw in students to support the campaign. Staff and student solidarity is critical.

Management are yet again shamelessly attempting to divide us: outrageously using the student mental health crisis – a crisis of their own making – to attack the strike. But students are not blind to the attacks. We have already received wide support from students who are also affected by poor pay and working conditions. Socialist Students is building support for our strike among students.

The official backing of the National Union of Students (NUS) is a welcome development and has given a boost to many members. Further work is now needed to put this support into

action as well building staff-student solidarity at branch level.

We know that the marketisation of higher education has eroded our conditions at the cost of quality research and learning. These fights are vital to improve our conditions and protect our retirement. A victory will be a huge step forward for the union. However, as long as higher education is led by pro-market senior managers, under the regulatory scrutiny of a hostile Tory government, any achievements will need to be defended.

Many members are drawing the conclusion that to solve the constant attacks we face, we need to go much further, and turn the tide on marketisation. To achieve that, we need a political as well as industrial strategy.

UCU is not affiliated to any political party, yet our union leadership continues to appeal to a Labour Party that, under Keir Starmer, cannot be trusted to deliver the policies staff and students need. Starmer is clearly set on showing big business that he is as safe for them as Tony Blair was.

The Socialist Party appeals to UCU members to stand as candidates in next year's local elections, along with other trade unionists and local campaigners, on a platform of no cuts and for free education. This will be an important step in developing a new left political vehicle for workers, including those who work in colleges and universities. The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), with support from transport union RMT, is ready as a platform for standing anti-cuts candidates.

There is enormous wealth being hoarded by the super-rich. We fight for a socialist society in which the wealth is democratically owned and planned, by the working class, to ensure quality of life for all.

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