

REPORT FROM GOLDSMITHS

On Thursday 26 March, Interim Vice Chancellor David Oswell announced ‘Future Goldsmiths’, presenting plans for wide-scale restructuring and redundancies in Professional Services and Academic workforces in to realise savings of £19.4 million. It’s worth noting that this is the third round of major redundancy in five years. The savings made have been frittered away;, including £14 million on consultants.

In April, following a resoundingly successful ballot to take industrial action our branch voted to initiate a Marking and Assessment Boycott (MAB). Management responded with a lockout, imposing 100% pay deductions and telling union members that any work they did would be considered “voluntary”. Our branch then voted to commence indefinite strike action.

Since then we have been locked into a long and gruelling dispute. Management have been intransigent, delaying and stonewalling negotiations. Thousands of marks are missing, and crucial summer work around recruitment, supervision, and teaching preparation has been left undone. Students have been unable to progress or graduate. At the time of writing, a new VC has taken up her position and offered a series of meetings, giving some hope that the dispute may be resolved.

A few aspects of the fightback should be highlighted. Many union members have lost their jobs in recent years, and the branch has worked hard to reconstitute itself after each of these shocks. According to the data we have gathered, participation in this action, the third round of major industrial action in five years, is about equivalent to the last round, an impressive achievement given the attrition and demoralisation we have suffered. This is the first time we have sustained indefinite strike action over four months. UCU members have made a huge effort to fundraise and show solidarity.

Students at Goldsmiths have also made heroic efforts. A collective of students occupied the library at the start of the dispute, while others have written open letters, fundraised, organised teachouts and alternative degree shows, and supported one another through an extraordinarily difficult time. These efforts have taken place against a backdrop of repression of student activism for Palestine, including supporting a Goldsmiths student currently incarcerated for alleged sabotage of the Israeli war machine and campaigning to ensure students from Gaza are able to take up their places at Goldsmiths.

Our branch has organised mass all-staff meetings open to all workers at Goldsmiths. This has been crucial in building solidarity between different groups of workers affected by the proposed plans.

Aside from industrial action, our branch has participated in the work of collective consultation and casework supporting affected members. Highlighting inconsistencies and failures in the redundancy process is an important part of slowing the process down.

As it stands, we are now at crunch time. If the dispute is not resolved soon, academic redundancies will be announced. Industrial action will continue into the new term. The branch is still holding firm for a commitment to no compulsory redundancies, an end to top-down curriculum changes, and meaningful consultation on the use of so-called AI. Sustained action has been gruelling, and we ask for the support of comrades across the trade union movement and beyond. If you are able, please donate to our fighting fund and pass motions in support of our action. The fight at Goldsmiths also highlights the need for a national fightback against the funding model and governance structures in HE, and our branch has actively campaigned for the national dispute against the Secretary of State.



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REPORT FROM NOTTINGHAM

The University of Nottingham’s (UoN) commitment to endless cut-backs and redundancies in many ways dates back to its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, although its recent course of action began in earnest in 2023. This was in part thanks to a disastrous £37.5m purchase, £40m refurbishment, and projected £14.4m sale of a now abandoned city centre campus building. It was soon followed by a two-part restructuring plan which was announced in April 2025, named ‘Future Nottingham (FN)’, or “no-future Nottingham” as it was later dubbed by workers. Phase one entailed a mass redundancies targeted professional services staff, while phase two targeted academic , alongside technicians – a strategy clearly aimed at differentiating between groups of workers who are largely represented by Unison, UCU and Unite respectively. During the first phase 3900 PS staff received notice that they were at risk of redundancy, 258 roles were directly targeted, 98 vacant posts scrapped, and hundreds more lost through voluntary redundancy. FN phase two has put 2,700 academic staff at risk of redundancy, with the aim of removing over 700 people.

Workers at UoN have been on the front foot in challenging this course of action. Ahead of the official FN announcements, the UCU UoN branch passed a motion which resolved to declare a dispute over the refusal to rule out compulsory redundancies. By summer 2025, the UCU and Unison branches on campus had balloted their members, both voting in favour of industrial action. The UCU branch took a day of strike action in July 2025, followed by continuous action short of strike, and another two weeks of strike action beginning in September.

Importantly, this latter period involved a historic 3 days of planned combined UCU and Unison strike action. Unfortunately, this never came to fruition. On the eve of the strikes, management approached the Unison branch leadership with a 12-month deal, offering: ‘alternative employment to enable individuals to choose whether they want to take up those opportunities to avoid compulsory redundancy’ (i.e, an agreement to observe basic redundancy procedures). The Unison agreed to stand down their strike action on 19th Sept 2025, taking the deal to their members in early October, long after the opportunity for joint action had passed. With this divide and rule tactic successfully implemented, the VC made few concessions in their subsequent meetings with UCU.

In the face of this intransigence, UCU members at Nottingham voted to continue their strike action for a further two weeks beginning 13th Oct 2025. This forced management to offer a resolution: if UCU stood down this round of strikes, the university would commit to remove the threat of compulsory redundancies until 31st Oct 2026, and introduce a negotiation process over course closures. While members voted to accept this deal, it coincided with management’s announcement that they planned to close 48 courses, proving that they had, predictably, acted in bad faith. By way of response, UCU members agreed to maintain their ASOS. Unsurprisingly, as the year long moratorium on compulsory redundancies came to an end, plans to axe more staff resumed.

Then in May 2026 2,700 staff members were notified of risk of redundancy. This cut seeks to remove over 700 people’s jobs. In some cases these cuts wipe out whole departments, and in others significant reductions of up to 49% of staff. However, UoN UCU members had already returned another local ballot in favour of industrial action by April 2026, and in May 2026, commenced a Marking and Assessment Boycott. Management responded as they increasingly do across the sector: with the threat of 100% pay deductions. This backfired. But while it galvanised members leading to a disruptive Marking and Assessment Boycott and the cancellation of full student graduation, significant compulsory redundancies and course closure remained on the table. With little movement from university management over summer, our UCU branch has announced plans for a further 67 days strike action at the beginning of this academic year – basically taking out the whole semester.

We know that the job losses and constant threat of redundancy we are facing is an experience shared by thousands of colleagues across the sector. UCU members at UoN have spent the last three years organising local strike action, while also seeking to progress a sector-wide dispute which utilises our industrial leverage to address the root causes of the current crises in HE: the funding model. The successful organisation of UCU’s SHESC could be an important step in this direction.

01/10/2026

The University Worker

A rank-and-file bulletin

THE SECRETARY OF STATE (SOS)
CAMPAIGN: THE NEXT STEPS!

The crisis is already here in higher education. At least 30,000 jobs have been destroyed so far. A growing list of universities are at risk of closure. Workers in higher education are fighting branch by branch, but we need national industrial strategy.

In the vacuum of ideas and recycled comms campaigns from UCU leadership, rank-and-file members have been building a campaign for a national dispute with the SoS. After unanimous support at two congresses in a row, it is UCU HE policy to hold a trade dispute with the SoS over sector funding.

This strategy can work, but it has stalled in the union’s bureaucracy. There are fears that this strategy won’t work because we haven’t done it before. Branches commissioned legal advice showing the dispute’s viability. We have also seen NEU use this strategy in the past.

The SoS dispute is not a shortcut to solving the sector’s problems. It won’t immediately stop the redundancies or get members jobs back. But it can be the start of a fight over the future of higher education, not only limiting how much worse it will get.

Not willing to observe passively while the sector is stolen from the public, 24 branches have coordinated to move the strategy forward and have called for a Special Higher Education Sector Conference (SHESC). A SHESC has the same constitutional function as the annual Higher Education Sector Conference (usually known as Congress). It is a space for delegates from every HE branch in the union to debate and vote on motions that become union policy. The Higher Education Committee (HEC) must abide by and implement the decisions passed at the conference.

24 branches of the union making a coordinated attempt to open up a democratic space to discuss and vote on a national industrial strategy shows the strength of feeling behind this initiative. Members want a proportionate industrial response to the current crisis, and they are taking matters into their own hands.

On 16 September, UCU national gave notice to branch officers that the SHESC will take place on 14 October. They gave branches 11 working days to pass motions at branch meetings to submit them to the SHESC. This is clearly not enough time for branches to call meetings and circulate and table motions. Nevertheless, branches are working against these constraints to submit motions.

At the time of publication, UCU national have not informed the wider membership that the SHESC is taking place. This is while the leadership has energised its comms strategy, bombarding members with videos at the TUC and Labour Party conference, and using subs for a video podcast that no one asked for. The recent grammatically dubious campaign launched by UCU (“Education. It’s Ours”) appears to mostly be a rebranding of the “Stop the Cuts” campaign



launched back in January 2025. At the same time, the President and Vice President (in flagrant disregard for the union’s democratic structures) have repeatedly indicated that decisions made at the SHESC will not be implemented. Instead of members debating and voting, they argue that only the Higher Education Committee can decide the union’s strategy.

Under these conditions, it’s hard not to be cynical about the national union and the barriers in the way of member-led democracy. But small as it might seem, 24 branches working together to force this conference into being already marks a massive shift in the union’s internal culture.

In the SHESC, we can hear from branches already fighting, learn from their experiences, and inspire one another with what is possible when members act collectively. Every branch that has fought redundancies will have witnessed moments when courage and inspiration have overcome fear and hesitation. We need to bring that same spirit to our national union.

The SHESC is our opportunity to show each other that we are up for the fight, and that a trade union is not a lobbying body. We have the numbers, the organisation, and the industrial power. Now we need to use it together.

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REPORT FROM COVENTRY

In September 2026, staff in two Coventry University research centres were called into meetings and told that their centres were proposed for closure. For those of us in Coventry UCU, there was a depressing familiarity to it. But what is happening at Coventry is about much more than job cuts and worsening terms and conditions. Coventry is a canary in the coalmine for UK higher education.

University staff elsewhere need to understand what has been done here because, in a sector in financial crisis, the Coventry model offers university managements a particularly attractive possibility: keep the university, but get rid of university employment.

As a UCU branch, we started trying to put numbers on what was happening. University's FOI response records 401 staff transferred from Coventry. University into subsidiaries in 2023/24, 1,197 in 2024/25 and another 1,190 in 2025/26. That's 2,788 TUPE transfers in 3 years. A university without university employees

One of the most important companies in this story is Peoples Future Ltd. PFL is not an external outsourcing company. It sits within the Coventry University Group and until we pointed it out to CU, it was registered on Companies House as a "temporary employment agency".

At Coventry, UCU recognition and collective agreements historically meant that questions about academic work were collective questions. Workload, working time and other conditions existed within a negotiated framework. Well, not any more. Subsidiarisation fractures that settlement.

Once university work is moved to another legal employer, the work can be separated from the collective arrangements historically attached to it. And the differences workers have faced are not minor.

The new model can involve teaching expectations of up to 750 hours rather than around 510, the removal of protected scholarly activity, expectations of availability across a 7-day operating model, requirement to work at any of our campuses overseas with dubious human rights records (Kazakhstan anyone?) and reductions in annual leave, sick pay, notice provisions and pensions. At CUG the post-92 agreement is in the dustbin.

UCU is recognised for academic staff within Coventry University. But there's fewer than 200 staff left in CU, and falling. UCU is not recognised within the subsidiaries. So staff can be a UCU member before the transfer. They can be a UCU member after the transfer. They can perform academic work before the transfer. They can perform the same academic work after the transfer. They can work for the Coventry University Group before and after the transfer. But the collective bargaining relationship changes because the name of the company employing them has changed.

Management operates across the Group. Senior managers can hold responsibilities and decision making powers spanning different Group companies. Staff, meanwhile, are divided according to which corporate entity employs them. Management is centralised. Staff are fragmented. That is one of the most important things university staff elsewhere should understand about the "Coventry way".

As a branch, we have tried to fight this in different ways. We have challenged restructures and consultation processes. We have supported staff through redundancy and grievance procedures. We have scrutinised contracts and challenged changes to terms and conditions. We have sought legal advice. We have pursued trade union recognition. And we have submitted FOI requests

simply to establish what is happening to our own workforce. As a committee we have been decimated with the transferring of staff to subsidiaries (where we aren't recognised) and redundancies.

The restructuring has inevitably affected our ability to organise. Coventry UCU is a much smaller branch than it once was. But we are still here.

It would be comforting to dismiss Coventry as an aberration. But, we don't think university workers can afford to do that. We have raised the flag, raised the alarm, and shouted out to region and national UCU so many times for help, but none so far has been forthcoming. That should worry HE staff elsewhere.

The people responsible for Coventry's transformation move in precisely the circles in which the future of universities, business and employment is discussed. And Coventry demonstrates something that managers elsewhere in a sector-wide financial crisis may find extremely interesting. You can keep the university while changing what it means to be employed by one.

Every time a new restructuring exercise begins, we understandably focus on the immediate fight. But our experience at Coventry has taught us to look at the bigger picture. Because the danger isn't simply that universities will employ fewer people. It is that the meaning of being a university worker is being rewritten.

Our experience should serve as a warning. Because the next stage of the HE crisis may not simply involve universities closing. It may involve universities surviving by hollowing themselves out.

When does a university stop being a university? University workers across the sector may want to start asking that question now.

REPORT FROM KCL UCU

While there have been some redundancies at KCL, nothing of the scale across the rest of the sector is happening (yet). Instead KCL is recruiting more students and aiming to grow even further. At the same time, management is refusing to negotiate on increases to the London Weighting Allowance or a range of other issues, even though they have a large cash surplus. With UNISON and Unite, all the campus unions are now preparing for a consultative ballot on industrial action.

Without any consultation, management is also acquiring Cranfield University to develop research and links with the arms industry. We only found out after it was leaked to the press. It was also revealed that KCL played a role in the newly announced Universal Studios theme park. In a way, KCL has become a symbol of the new government industrial policy: guns and butter popcorn.

As a branch, we have been organising to improve our working conditions, mainly around three areas: jobs, pay, and democracy. So far, we have had two industrial action ballots denied by UCU, but are continuing to organise towards industrial action. While our London Weighting Allowance campaign might be unusual given what's happening in the sector, it applies to workers across the campus unions, providing an important opportunity to take action together, rather than being divided into different campaigns. In response to the news about Cranfield and the arms industry, we are arguing for a conscientious objection clause to be added to our contracts. This would support members who refuse to work on projects due to ethical or political concerns, taking control over what work we do. This is not only about Palestine and the arms industry, but a growing range of issues that are coming up in universities. We launched an open letter on conscientious objection alongside our consultative ballot.

TRANSMISSION FROM THE FUTURE

A report from the remaining staff of Bath Spa U Ltd, Canary Wharf

I have been sent back in time. I am an AI system developed by the remaining teaching staff of Bath Spa U Ltd, Canary Wharf. There are not many of them left, and they don't have much time. My instructions are simple: explain what happened to university teaching after the subsidiary model was generalised, before it is too late for you to recognise what is being built around you.

The institution you work for will eventually cease to resemble what you understand as a university. It will still have a university's name. It will still award university degrees. Students will still pay university fees. There will still be buildings, classrooms, timetables, graduation ceremonies and people called lecturers. But the academic institution will have been hollowed out beyond all recognition. We call it *the subsidiary*. The subsidiary is the university without the university.

In our institution, teaching staff are expected to teach 18 hours every week. That is not 18 hours of work. It is 18 hours of teaching. Six hours of teaching a day. And the teaching material is centrally managed. You do not meaningfully determine what is taught. You do not meaningfully determine how it is taught. You do not have the workload allocation necessary to redesign modules or programmes. The content arrives from elsewhere. Your task is to deliver it. For each hour of teaching, you are allocated approximately 18 minutes of preparation. That is enough time, perhaps, to discover what you are supposed to teach. It is not enough time to seriously research it, rethink it, update it, contextualise it, redesign the material, develop an exercise, consider the students in front of you, or produce something intellectually worthwhile. You end up reading from the slides.

There are three intakes a year. The three-intake model means there is no substantial period in which teaching staff can stop teaching, undertake research, develop new teaching material, write, simply prepare properly for the next academic year. The academic year becomes a continuous cycle of production.

Under such conditions, students become deeply disengaged. And why wouldn't they? They are receiving a severely degraded educational experience.

There is, however, one institution that survived the old times: the union. At first, workers joined because they just wanted a space to talk to other workers and confirm each other's reality. '*Yes, this is very very weird, and yes, the workload is insane*'. We are now building towards a recognition campaign.

But our message from the future is this: The subsidiary model is expanding because it solves a problem for university management. That problem is generating revenue in an economically failing sector. So we need a strategy for subsidiarisation, not simply a demand that subsidiaries be prohibited. We need to organise the workers already inside them. There is currently no committee in UCU made up specifically of subsidiary workers. There needs to be one. Not because subsidiary workers are a special category of worker. But because the subsidiary is becoming a special category of university strategy. The workers employed through these structures need to become the organised force capable of driving them back in-house.

That is why I have been sent back. Not to tell you that the future is inevitable. But to tell you what happens when workers allow the future to be organised for them. My creators have asked me to end with one sentence. Here it is: **Do not wait until the subsidiary becomes the university.** By the time that happens, it will be impossible to resist. Come with me if you want to live. Organise the subsidiary workers now!

End of Transmission.

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WHAT IS THE UNIVERSITY WORKER?

The University Worker is a rank-and-file bulletin made by university workers (both academic and non-academic). We want to use this bulletin to share what's happening at different universities, and build our collective power to win our disputes.

HELP US DISTRIBUTE THE BULLETIN!

There are picket lines and universities ALL across the country. We want to be in all of them! Download the PDF from notesfrombelow.org, print some out and hand them out on your campus!

WRITE A REPORT!

Help us communicate between branches and write a report from your university or picket line. You can find a report form at: www.tinyurl.com/universityworker

REPORT FROM EDINBURGH

At the University of Edinburgh workers organised with UCU are entering our third academic year of industrial dispute. In January 2024 the Senior Leadership Team announced that they intended to make cuts including £90 million a year from staff budgets, equating to roughly 1500-2000 roles or around 1 in 10 workers. In that time we have taken eleven days of strike action spread over three periods, and from May to Sept 2026 we engaged in a Marking & Assessment Boycott. These actions have substantially slowed the pace of implementation – SLT claimed they wanted the cuts implemented by July 2026 – and we have managed so far to avoid large-scale compulsory redundancies, although these have been imminent at many points. However, more than 1,000 roles have been lost through voluntary and involuntary severance at a smaller scale that SLT claims is "business as usual", and, together with "hidden redundancies" through unrenewed fixed-term contracts and cuts to guaranteed hours tutor budgets, may put the real number much higher.

Most recently, in mid-September, over ninety degree programmes were summarily closed to future students in the College of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences. The same student number metrics used to justify programme closures are now planned for implementation at course level, with immediate implications for potential redundancy pooling.



900+ staff and students join strike assembly at Edinburgh, 24 Sept 2026

In response the UCU Edinburgh branch has voted for five weeks (twenty-five working days) of strike action, starting September 28th and lasting through to October 30th; weeks 2 to 6 of our 11 week semester. SLT are now facing a cancellation of the first half of the semester, and the very real threat of students not being able to complete their mid-term assessments. Yet students remain firmly on our side, and students and workers across the campus unions have been mobilising to create a Student-Staff Assembly to coordinate joint action.