

25/11/2022

# The University Worker

A rank-and-file  
strike bulletin

## Indefinite strike now!

Friday's picket lines, like Thursday, had members out in force. Energy remains high for our strike. However, there is also a palpable anxiety for what happens next. There were big questions on the picket lines about how we build upon these days' of strike action? What will the strategy going forward be? And, ultimately, how can we escalate action to win this dispute? On Monday night, the University Worker called an open meeting. Around two dozen rank and file university workers from across the country came together to discuss these questions. The perspective at the meeting was near unanimous: we need indefinite strike action from the start of next term. We can't trust the union leadership to agree with us on this strategic question.

We already know that prior to the launch of this campaign, Jo Grady and the leadership of the union wanted to push through a strategy of postponing any industrial action. Delaying action to build the union would have been disastrous, opening the gates wide for an employers' offensive. However, this strategy was pushed back, leading to our successful aggregated ballot and current strike action. Despite the fantastic ballot results and first few days of action, we find ourselves in the ridiculous situation of being told to trust that there is a strategy for escalation. For anyone involved in previous UCU campaigns, trust has always been in short supply. As rank and file members, not only are we locked out of the backroom meetings where these strategies are discussed, but we're also told that the outcomes are secret.

This does not mean we can't push for what we know will be effective. We must organise and prepare for indefinite strike action even if the union leadership hasn't called for it, and force their hand on this matter. This is not the first time the rank and file has forced the leadership to act - and it likely won't be the last.

Some university workforces, such as Queen Mary, are already pushed to this option by their particularly punitive employers. By threatening to withhold 100% of pay until work missed by this round of strike action is rescheduled, workers will essentially be locked out unless they cease their industrial action. We can't leave these branches on their own again. We are stronger together, and by taking indefinite action nationally, we turn the tables on our employers who are trying to victimise us into accepting a bad deal.

It's obvious we need to escalate our action next year if we're actually going to win this. A day here or there will not, and has not, put enough pressure on our employers. A marking boycott from next term on its own can be circumnavigated by management, mitigating its disruption and allowing students to progress the term, whilst potentially leading to our entire pay being docked. However, indefinite strike action puts the pressure on management. Students sit assessments for content they have not been taught, and it threatens no end to the disruption caused by the withdrawal of our labour until a decent deal is put on the table.

If we don't escalate, we risk our employers simply waiting out our action and proposing yet another shit deal to the union. We must be vigilant for any deals that sell our action for less than we know it to be worth. We don't want to simply return to the pension levels of 2018, we want better pensions. We don't want meek and toothless promises on the four fights, we want above inflation pay rises that make up for what we've lost in the last decade. We want action now on casualisation, equality, and workloads.

Indefinite strike action would obviously bring challenges, but these are nothing compared to what faces us if we don't go for it. Let's all push together - on the picket lines, in our branches, and within the union at-large - for an indefinite strike from next term.

## Report from QMUL

At QMUL striking staff face 100% pay deductions indefinitely if they do not make up teaching cancelled during the strike. The policy is on the books at several universities, but so far only QMUL has dared to use it. QMUL's outrageous response to lawful strike action is intended to set a new norm in UK HE industrial relations. UCEA and UUK know they cannot ignore workers, they know they don't want to stop exploiting us, so they are trying to break us. The policy is meant to force us to accept an offer of another real terms pay cut. Employers always accompany threats like these with bad faith offers intended to try and split the union.

But, the policy actually shows management's weakness: it shows UCEA on the back foot, scared of the power of unionised workers. Management knows the ground is opening up under them; and that with each new policy, staff come back fighting harder. So desperate are QMUL management for data on who is striking and who is doing ASOS they've set up a student snitch form. But management efforts are backfiring: picket lines at QMUL were strong last week, with many joining who have not stood on pickets before.

What is happening at QMUL will happen everywhere if we don't fight it. No worker should be going to work under

the threat of their labour being made voluntary. Branches in this situation should not be left to fight alone. If UCU enters a national marking boycott in the new year, more branches will face these threats. The only response must be escalation to indefinite strike action, as QMUCU members voted for earlier this month. Indefinite strike action is a powerful weapon the employers have never faced before, but members need to begin to prepare for it now and co-ordinate the action at a national level.



## Report from KCL

Personally, I have cancelled both of my classes which fall on strike days. I spoke with students about this in advance of planned action. On the other strike days I have withdrawn my labour by not marking students' work or responding to emails. I have spoken with students to suggest that they contact management to ask where their fees are going, given the 25% rise in student numbers alongside a 4% increase in staff. I have made time to attend the pickets as well as to prioritise health and family over these three days.

The picket lines themselves have been lively, with strong turn-outs and support from the student body. It is heartening to see professional services staff, organised in Unison, striking alongside their academic counterparts.

*- UCU member at Kings College London*

## Student solidarity actions across the country

Across the country, students have been joining our picket lines and supporting our strike action. As well as this, we've seen solidarity actions on a number of campuses. At the University of Sheffield, students have occupied the Hicks building and blockaded its entrances on a number of days. At the University of Strathclyde, students disrupted a conference at the university that crossed the picket line, and had charged delegates hundreds of pounds to attend. At UCL, students organised a campaign against their students' union attempt to use a referendum to repeal their pro-strike position - resulting in an even higher turnout and vote by students for the SU to act in solidarity with the strikes. As the strike progresses, no doubt we will see these actions multiply and escalate.

IT'S A PARTY!

## STRIKE FUNDRAISER

JOIN US FOR A POST-PICKETS PARTY TO RAISE MONEY FOR LEEDS UCU, UNISON & UNITE

HYDE PARK BOOK CLUB  
27-29 HEADINGLEY LANE  
LEEDS LS6 1BL



SUNDAY DECEMBER 4  
4PM TO 9 PM

For tickets, scan the QR code or go to  
<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/strike-fundraiser-its-a-party-tickets-469066920787>

## **Report from USIC**

UCU members at the University of Sheffield International College began a 3 day strike over pay and terms and conditions on Monday. The college operates under the branding of University of Sheffield but is in fact outsourced to a multi national corporation called Study Group. This strike is the first ever strike in an outsourced private higher education provider in the UK organised by UCU or any other union.

Members recently decisively rejected a deal offering most staff a 6% pay increase. Our pay claim is for a 12% pay increase and for pay progression, a review of work-loading and an additional uplift to the salaries of low paid student support staff.

The strike has been lively, with students from the college and elsewhere in the city joining the picket lines, and national officers of the UCU including Vicky Blake and Janet Farrar visiting to show the support of the union.

Today, on the final day of the strike, members will be joined by pickets from the University of Sheffield who share a building with the College, before joining the rally of striking workers in Sheffield which includes postal workers and teachers as well as the other UCU branches in the city.

## **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 150 picket lines across the country. We want to be on all of them. Download the PDF from [notesfrom-below.org](http://notesfrom-below.org), print some out and hand them out at your university!

## **Write a strike report!**

Help us communicate between branches and write a strike report from your picket line. You can find a strike report form at: [www.tinyurl.com/universityworker](http://www.tinyurl.com/universityworker)

## **Picketing is legal!**

'It's illegal to have more than 6 people on a picket line' Sound familiar? It's wrong. This rule comes from a government written set of guidelines for picketing which are not legally binding. Pickets of over 6 people aren't illegal. Anyone can attend a support demo beside a picket, including students.



**UCU:**

**CALL**

**INDEFINITE**

**STRIKE**

**ACTION**

**NOW!**