

07/07/2023

# The University Worker

A rank-and-file  
strike bulletin

## **SNATCHING DEFEAT FROM THE JAWS OF VICTORY!**

The Marking and Assessment Boycott (MAB) has been an enormous test for UCU members. Across universities, we have risked deductions - sometimes as high as 100% - to hold the line on the MAB. We've risked being unable to pay our bills, stopped our students from graduating, and thrown higher education into chaos.

While this has been going on, the Higher Education Committee (HEC) have decided to meet and discuss the way forward for our dispute. Apparently, despite the massive implications this has for all of us, they still haven't shared the motion that was approved. They claim confidentiality about decisions that affect us.

We have published the motion in full below. This will be controversial to some, but democracy dies in the dark, and the farcical "confidentiality" of HEC is bureaucratic bullshit. The past week has felt like gaslighting on mass for those who have read this motion. The right wing of the union will call our anger hysteria and our actions 'toxic'. But it is clear they have voted for a motion explicitly aimed at standing down our action.

The only news we've been given as members is that the general secretary has written to UCEA. This doesn't give the context that it's being done to call off the dispute. For those of us doing the MAB this has come as a surprise. We're getting to the point where some university managers are calling on UCEA to negotiate, marking boards are being overridden, graduations are looming, and the media are picking up on the disarray of the sector. But by communicating to UCEA the decision taken by HEC, the union leadership has revealed our hand and squandered our hard-won leverage.

Across the strike wave, there have been disappointing sellouts from union leaders. The postal workers have been sold out, the same with Nurses and NHS workers, while many other disputes are still going on. Like other union leaders, ours don't believe that we can win.

We're all used to the bureaucracy trying to sell us out, but the question is why now? While it operates almost entirely remotely from the struggles we've been fighting in our universities, the HEC has changed. There is a new composition of right-wing members, who now have the capacity to push through things they had only attempted previously. The attempt to call off the MAB is a signal of what is to come.



We pushed for a MAB and indefinite strike at the start of this year. We are argued that this would be the sharpest way to resolve the dispute. We were told it wasn't possible and we needed to wait until the summer. Well, we're here now. We made the MAB happen with little support from the bureaucracy. We were forced onto their timeline and now they want to call it off.

For those of us who actually have to go back to work if another "pause" or sell out happens, this is simply not good enough. University managers have shown extreme contempt for staff and students. Universities are never going back to normal - whatever that could mean. There is no draw that can be achieved, either we win or lose. Waiting to fight again in the new year, no matter how successful a month of recruitment in October, is not good enough. No one wants to prolong this dispute with another tepid scattering of strike days in the new year. How many times must the membership reject this prescribed strategy of demobilisation that bureaucracy is so desperate to shove down our throats?...

...We have the leverage of a summer MAB now. That does not carry over into future action if we are forced to pause.

Let UCEA negotiate with our elected negotiators, but we do not want to pause the MAB. Our demands are clear: we want a substantial above-inflation pay rise and concrete national agreements on casualisation, equality, and workload. Anything else is a sell out.

If HEC thinks they can call us off like some kind of stage army they are wrong. Members need to urgently meet in their branches. Let us discuss how the MAB is going and how we can increase the pressure. This is our dispute and leadership has to be earned.

We are angry and tired. We have been fighting this campaign for years. Our leverage has revealed the rotten core of our financialised universities and the disunity inside UCEA. It would be a disaster to give it up now. We don't want to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory, we want to win this dispute.

## **WHAT CAN YOU DO?**

- Talk to other members about what is happening
- Share this bulletin: <https://notesfrombelow.org/article/university-worker-7th-july-2023>
- Sign and share the open letter: <https://tinyurl.com/UCUSM-MABstate>
- Call for an EGM in your branch, vote to keep the MAB on and communicate your position to the HEC and the Gen Sec
- Get in touch with us if you want to write or suggest an idea
- Keep in touch - we're working on some ideas to escalate our action against the employers - and the union if we have to. You can join the WhatsApp announcement group here:



## **TEXT OF THE HEC MOTION:**

### ***Negotiating a suspension of the Marking and Assessment Boycott***

*HEC notes that:*

- *The MAB has seriously disrupted many UK HEIs*
- *Marking as assessment will mainly cease following Summer graduation*

*HEC believes that:*

- *Without any new offer from UCEA, UCU should seek an interim agreement that will allow the MAB to be suspended as soon as is practical, and facilitate accelerated negotiations on outstanding matters*
- *This suspension would ensure members do not continue to suffer punitive deductions over the summer, and help sustain future industrial action*
- *The terms of any suspension should recognise the unfairness of the deductions, and seek redress from the employers*
- *These terms should also recognise that staff are entitled to take leave and undertake other commitments without detriment, and should not be required to complete work missed due to the MAB*

*HEC resolves:*

- *To instruct the General Secretary and the national negotiators to seek an interim agreement as proposed above, subject to member consultation*

*On this basis we advocate the following:*

**OCTOBER** — Grow The Union Month / Ballot Preparation

**NOVEMBER/DECEMBER** – National Industrial Action Ballot

**JANUARY ONWARDS** — ACTION

*We understand that some members will worry that this leaves too big of a gap between our current mandate and the next wave of action, but we can fill that not only by building the union but also using our communications and media strategy to put maximum pressure onto the employer.*

HEC voted 20-19 in favour of the motion.

## **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.