

THE UNIVERSITY WORKER

Rank and File Strike Bulletin of the UCU dispute: Week 2

REPORTS FROM THE PICKET LINE

Cambridge management are instrumental to the USS changes - explicitly desiring to undermine competitor institutions - so unsurprisingly, support for the strike was high. Architecture students set the tone with an 8am "Strike to Win!" banner drop as around campus, strong pickets formed. By lunchtime, over 1,000 staff and students joined in a vibrant yet militant rally, giving way to a spontaneous demonstration of hundreds around campus to chants of "Every strike, Every time: We'll be on the picket line!".

On the 22nd over 500 Students, faculty, administrators & education workers rallied in central **Glasgow** in support of the UCU strike, with solidarity expressed from other unions and campaign groups.

At **Sussex** we've had the largest mobilisation in over 5 years. With 350 students out on campus buses were blocked from entering campus. We held multiple demos, soft picketed lecture theatres as well as flash occupied management buildings. We have walk outs and even larger mobilisations planned over the next few days. The only direction is forward!

The strike at **Goldsmiths** got off to an electrifying start. John McDonnell, Owen Jones and Sally Hunt spoke to a huge crowd. A number of organised students gathered outside the warden's office to deliver signed complaint letters but were barred access by police officers.

At **Exeter**, the first two days of strike action saw a great show of strength on six picket lines across Exeter and Penryn campuses, and the start of our teach-out programme. Turnout on our march and rally was overwhelming - with representatives from students and other unions in solidarity - that the large venue couldn't squeeze everyone inside. We're ready for the picket lines again on Monday morning.



What is this? The University Worker is a rank-and-file bulletin produced by academic workers. This strike is the biggest in the history of HE - we need to win.

Help us distribute! There will be 61 picket lines across the country. We want to be on all of them. Download the PDF from notesfrombelow.org and print some out.

The first two days of strike action have had a huge impact.

Up and down the country there were strong picket lines, student solidarity rallies, occupations at universities and UUK's head offices.

After just two days, UUK have invited UCU to the negotiating table, with talks set to take place Tuesday 27th of Feb. UCU have accepted to meet, while keeping up the planned strikes for Monday-Wednesday this

At **Senate House** the last 2 days of strike action have been a revelation - revealing a revitalised UCU branch and unprecedented solidarity between unions, as IWGB members both joined picket lines and stayed away en masse. Already there is talk of combining forces as the IWGB sends out ballots in advance of the biggest outsourced worker strike in HE history.

On the first day of strike action, **RHUL** management contracted in security from the STM Security Group to "manage" the picket lines. Staff were told that congregating in numbers larger than six around the main building was considered to be "overwhelming" and were asked to split and demonstrate elsewhere. Students answered this call on the second day by demonstrating at the front gates and managed to turn cars away before marching through the campus in a defiant show of solidarity.

At **Warwick**, the first 2 days of picketing have been a resounding success. More than 150 workers, many of whom early career staff on insecure contracts, turned up on both days, with great student support - and the rest of campus felt like a ghost town! The programme of teach-outs at the Free University of Warwick continues this week. This Monday, casualised staff organised through Warwick Anti-Casualisation are holding a themed day of picketing against precarity, to highlight connections between pension cuts, precarisation and the role of Warwick and its subsidiaries in driving casualisation in HE forward.

On the first day of the USS strike UNISON members at **Birkbeck** Library in London refused to cross the picket line, causing the library to unexpectedly shut down four hours early, and further emphasising the wide support for the strike across the college.

The strike has been great the last couple of days, at **SOAS**. All university buildings have been picketed and we have had between 30 and 100 people on the picket lines throughout both days. It seems, however, that most students and staff are simply voting with their feet by staying away. The building has been virtually empty on both days. In addition, students who did unfortunately cross the picket lines have reported that colleagues who are not respecting the strike are considering cancelling their classes because of how few students have been turning up. On Friday, the Islamic Society also held its Jummuah prayer outside so as not to have to cross the picket line to access the prayer room. Colleagues have started to have discussions about the future of the strike on the pickets and raise concerns about the union calling the action off before a good deal is on the table.

week.

But what is on the table? UUK explained in a statement that "talks would not re-open the Joint Negotiating Committee decision made on 23 January". In short, this means that UUK are not prepared to discuss the major changes to the USS pension Scheme. Time is running out to conclude national bargaining, which ends on the 30th of June. If there is no agreement, the national strike could fracture into local battles. This would break down our collective power.

Our response needs to be twofold.

First, we need to continue to build the strikes despite the offer from UUK. Second, as academic workers, we are only prepared to negotiate our victory. We have voted for strike action to defeat the pensions changes, anything less is a failure. We will not accept UUK or UCU bargaining away our future in retirement.

As rank and file academic workers, we need to be prepared to challenge both UUK and UCU. To continue the discussions on the picket lines and the bulletin, we are planning to host a meeting to discuss the outcome of the strike. The meeting will be announced soon, via this bulletin and online.

UPCOMING: JOIN THE UCU DEMO IN LONDON ON THE 28TH

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