

# Winning the HE Dispute

Here are some notes and suggestions for the work activists will be undertaking in their branches and regions.

1. **Preparing for the strike on 31<sup>st</sup> October in your workplace**
2. **Supporting weaker branches**
3. **Reporting on the strike**
4. **Building the work to contract**
5. **Campaigning**

Not everyone will be able to do everything on this 'job list'. If you can do only one thing, make sure your workplace is picketed effectively on the 31<sup>st</sup> October. It is a strike day, so the important thing is to make the strike as solid as possible.

## 1. Preparing for the strike on 31<sup>st</sup> October in your workplace

Picketing – this is the number one priority. It is important to have all main buildings or sites picketed effectively. Picketing has two main purposes: (a) to persuade all union members to respect the ballot and the democratic decision of the majority to come out on strike and (b) to publicise the dispute.

It is sometimes not possible to station pickets on every site or every side entrance, especially if you work at an HEI with many campuses, buildings and entrances. It is sensible for branch committees to identify picket locations outside buildings/entrances where many staff work and, if possible, can be viewed by passing traffic and pedestrians.

It is a good idea to pass a resolution at a branch meeting or send out a message calling on all members to do their session on the picket lines. If more pickets turn up than expected picket organisers can always send them to additional buildings.

If there is time a role play session can be organised for new pickets where more experienced reps help them by acting out the sort of dialogues that can take place between pickets and staff intending to go into work. This can be fun and can help members understand what to say (or not to say) on the picket line. It's important to explain to people who have not picketed before that it is not about violent confrontations or something very frightening to do.

Useful sorts of things to say on the picket line include:

Are you a union member? Please respect the ballot. I do. I would have gone in to work if the ballot had gone against action.

Are you happy with a 1 per cent pay rise?

How do you feel about rising fuel prices?

UCU calculates you have lost 13% in the value of your pay since 2008. Are you working 13% less hard than in 2008?

Do you think you would get an annual pay rise if there was no trade union here?

Since 31<sup>st</sup> October is Halloween there may be some costumes and posters with themes such as 'ghouls of neo-liberalism'. This may be good for press coverage. We should, however, make it plain that HE staff are angry about our pay. We are not just having a day of street theatre. When picketing do not wear Halloween costumes with masks which cover the face or very scary costumes, since this could be misrepresented as intimidation.

Branch meeting – if possible a branch meeting should be organised in the days leading up to the dispute. This should not deal with all the planning details which the branch committee or officers should be arranging. It should present to members a clear plan of action for the 31<sup>st</sup> and for the subsequent work to contract. It should also be an opportunity for members to ask questions about genuine concerns and for officers to gauge where support for the action is strongest and where

further support may be needed, e.g. by reps talking to members about why they should support the strike.

Strike rallies (and demos) – these should be organised in central city locations, where possible. If there are two or more universities in a city, it is good to plan these jointly. You may prefer a public square or an indoor venue. Some branches may also want to organise a local demonstration, if there is time and resource. Speakers at rallies may include sympathetic NUS reps/students, someone from the local trades union council and reps from other unions. It would be good to get someone from the Communication Workers Union, since they are out on strike on 4<sup>th</sup> November. As a minimum there should be one speaker from UCU, UNISON and UNITE, the three unions out on strike on 31<sup>st</sup> October.

Joint union work – this is important for building the confidence of all unions in taking forward the dispute. Joint union leaflets and posters from UCU/UNISON/UNITE are on the UCU website. Leaflets should be distributed widely in your workplace, calling on members to support the action and on non-members to join a union. A joint union leafleting session one morning or lunchtime would be a good idea, if it can be organised by your Joint Union Committee. You might also want to produce a local joint union message, with local reps from each of the three unions explaining why they support the action. This could take the form of a local leaflet or video clip.

Some of you may have GMB members in your workplace. The GMB has balloted its members with a recommendation to accept the offer. Please keep a friendly dialogue going with local GMB reps. We respect the fact they cannot call their members out on strike on 31<sup>st</sup> October, but some of them will be sympathetic to our action and there is no reason why they cannot be invited to joint union lunch-time strike rallies.

In Scotland some UCU members will be working in HEIs where EIS also has recognition and members. Please maintain dialogue with EIS colleagues. They are currently balloting and we hope they will join the action soon.

## **2. Supporting weaker branches**

The role of regional HE committees is vital here. It is important that your branch sends delegates to the Regional Committee and is in touch with other members in the Region.

If you are in a strong branch and you know a nearby branch is less well organised and may not organise picketing or build the strike day effectively please make sure your branch or HEC member makes contact. There has been a UK-wide aggregated ballot. UCU would like all members to respect the ballot.

## **3. Reporting on the strike**

It is a good idea for branch officers to keep an estimate of numbers of members involved in picketing and on strike. It is also useful to have information on teaching and other events which did not take place. Pictures of pickets, local strike rallies and demonstrations, empty car parks (if you still have car parks) etc. should be sent to Head Office for posting on the national website. Publicise success of the action to the local press and on UCU networks.

Employers will ask people about their intention to strike and whether they took part in the action. UCU's position is we do not advise employers in advance, since there is no reason to assist in minimising the impact of our action. We should, however, answer honestly after the event. It is in the union's interest for the highest number possible to be counted as being out on strike. Some employers will send out letters stating that unless staff reply they will deem them to be out on strike and deduct a day's pay. In this event members should do nothing. A few employers require strike breakers to cross the picket line and sign themselves in on strike days. This makes the situation clear. Some HEIs will ask staff to self-report that they were on strike. It is important members do this. If members have already booked holiday/annual leave for a strike day, they can cancel this day's annual leave so that they are counted as being out on strike. This strengthens the union's

action, since most employers count those on sick leave and on holiday along with those working on strike days.

#### **4. Building the work to contract**

For UCU the strike on the 31<sup>st</sup> is the launch of the action. The next day, 1<sup>st</sup> November, is the beginning of the work to contract. Branch committees should be considering how they can build the work to contract, how they can educate members about their contracts, and how they can make visible work that is not being done as a result of the work to contract. Here are some possible activities for branch committees:

- Send a leaflet or message out to members in your branch reminding them of their contract
- Encourage members to check with a branch officer or rep if they are unsure whether a particular activity falls within their contract
- Encourage members to book their holidays and take them (including a decent break at the end of term)
- Encourage members not to take work home at evenings and weekends
- Where members have defined working hours in their contract, encourage them to log their hours and then ask their manager which work should be prioritised if they cannot do it all
- Encourage members to use the UCU workload calculator <http://www.ucu.org.uk/workload>
- Hold workplace briefing meetings on the contract (these can be done on a site or department basis as well as whole branch meetings)
- Discuss at the branch meeting a standard message to be added to work email signatures along the lines of 'I am a UCU member and am working to contract as a result of a trade dispute over the 2013 pay award. Therefore replies to email messages may take longer than usual'. This could be a useful move if enough branch members are prepared to do this.

You may wish to invite the Vice President (Liz Lawrence) to speak at your branch or regional HE committee on workload protection.

#### **5. Campaigning**

After picketing for strike days and the work to contract have been organised, branch committees should then consider campaign actions to support our case in the dispute. Branches should select one good campaign initiative that can be done between now and the end of term, e.g. leafleting graduation ceremonies. UCU Left can help with producing and sharing model leaflets for such events. It is good, where possible, to organise these campaigns on a joint union basis and to involve students.

Campaigning is good for morale. Members can feel they are not doing anything in between strike days and this can lead to concern about whether our action is having an impact.

Some branches are also actively campaigning against use of zero hours' contracts. This issue is not part of current dispute over the 2013 pay award, but is part of the context, in that the employers failed to negotiate meaningfully on this issue.

**Build the 31<sup>st</sup> October strike**

**Build the work to contract**

**Win the dispute**