

# PUTTING THE HE PAY CAMPAIGN BACK ON TRACK

## Escalate strike action with other unions

## Escalate ASOS

## Honour the democratic decision of Sector Conference

### Rescuing the pay campaign

**Every branch needs to hold meetings in the first two weeks after the Christmas vacation and pass motions to put the pay campaign strategy back on track. Branch officers need to be instructed to take a message for an escalation of the campaign to the four regional consultation meetings planned for late January.**

### A shameful decision

The decision of the HEC in December was nothing short of a disgrace. Despite the overwhelming vote of branch delegates at the national HE Sector Conference, the majority group on the HE Committee voted, in defiance of Conference policy, to de-escalate the dispute rather than to ratchet it up.

It decided to go for two-hour strikes instead of two day strikes and to postpone the marking boycott to April instead of escalating in January.

### The democratic deficit

This is simply an astonishing position. First, four well-attended regional meetings with branch delegates were held in September to discuss policy and strategy.

The HE Committee of the union has now simply ignored the action plan supported at these meetings. Second, the proposals for the complete U-turn in strategy were tabled on the day of the HEC so that the elected members did not have the opportunity to digest them.

The Chair of HEC first saw these proposals just 30 minutes before the meeting! Third, this 'new' strategy has been adopted with no proper consultation with branches regarding its effectiveness and feasibility.

To amend the strategy in order to improve it would have been understandable. However, the only possible interpretation is that the majority on the HEC (led by the Independent Broad Left) wants to wind down the campaign.

### What is wrong with 2-hour strikes?

- \* joint action with other unions is much more difficult;
- \* only a small percentage of UCU members will be teaching or at meetings during any 2-hour period - getting colleagues to interrupt a class, or to get them to leave a building, is immensely more difficult than persuading them not to go in to work in the first place;
- \* they are divisive as only few members' work will be affected though all will be asked to declare themselves on strike (a magnification of the problem of one-day strikes);
- \* aggressive employers may target small numbers of staff for intimidation.
- \* the impact of a series of 2-hour strikes is unknown in terms of salary deductions and TPS contributions.

### What is wrong with postponing the marking sanctions?

The marking boycott aspect of ASOS is at the heart of the campaign, as every member and every Vice Chancellor knows.

The outcome of the dispute will be determined, in large part, by whether a marking boycott interferes with the summer graduation process. That is why it is a pivotal element of the UCU campaign and why the employers are so hostile to this form of action. Postponing the marking sanctions means that;

- \* much marking will already be completed;
- \* nearly all teaching and planning will have been completed, so any UCU response to aggressive employers will be dramatically weakened;
- \* the immediate impact of a semester one marking boycott will have been lost;
- \* maintaining the momentum of the dispute is much more difficult.

## Low pay still an issue

UNISON calculates that around 4000 workers in universities do not receive the Living Wage. Moreover an increasing number of union members are feeling the impact of successive pay rises below the rate of inflation. The recent announcement that train fares will increase on average by 2.8 per cent is just another reminder of why Higher Education staff cannot afford to settle for a 1 per cent pay rise for 2013. During the vacation some of us were surprised to read that the Director General of the CBI has advised UK employers to give workers a pay rise. (Pay workers more, CBI tells Britain's bosses, Guardian 30th December 2013)

<http://www.theguardian.com/money/2013/dec/30/pay-workers-more-cbi-firms>

It appears that even some employer representatives recognise that pay has fallen too far behind. Low pay is not an issue for Vice Chancellors and Senior Managers whose pay has risen by 8 per cent!

## Winning the campaign

This campaign can be won. Those who still claim that we should not be fighting over pay, despite the decision of the national conference, are undermining the union's ability to fight on every front. Those on the HEC who do not want to fight over pay need to think of two things: those colleagues who are low on the pay scale who cannot afford their mortgages and utility bills with these cuts in real income; and those in Unison and Unite who are in a similar predicament, and who depend on UCU to lead a battle over pay. Unless the UCU fights no one in HE can easily win a pay battle.

## How to win

1. Hold branch meetings in the first two weeks of the Spring term to reaffirm support for the campaign and for the strategy of escalation adopted overwhelmingly by the delegates at our national conference and pass a branch motion to that effect. Send it to the HE Department, and to the Chair of the HE Committee (see details at end);
2. Send representatives to the branch consultation meeting at the end of January who will strongly argue for the reinstatement of the strategy of escalation (see end for details);
3. Mobilise the maximum support for any action that is called (even if it is only 2-hour strikes) since lack of support will be used by the majority on the HEC to call off any further action;
4. Build strong links, and if possible hold joint meetings, with the other trade unions, and liaise with them about intensive recruitment campaigns in the Spring;
5. Plan a series of meetings (jointly with local students' unions, if possible) and distribute paper

and electronic bulletins to explain to students how the dispute is developing. Explain how and why ASOS will be intensified, and that the action will be targeted at institutions' procedures and graduation ceremonies rather than students' education.

6. Discuss how to develop a collective and mutually supportive culture in every school or programme area so that staff can organise an effective marking boycott, and resist any pressure from their managers or attempts to get marking done by 'scab' labour;
7. Prepare all members for the escalation of the dispute, and make preparations for an immediate response to any managerial threats;

Finally, vote in the forthcoming NEC elections only for those candidates (UCU Left and others) who are in favour of carrying out the decisions taken through our democratic procedures, and are committed to winning the campaign.

**We owe a victory not just to ourselves to defend our pay, but also to the quality of education for this and subsequent generations. Our union's capacity to resist the worst of neoliberal privatisation and the marketisation of higher education depends on us winning this fight over pay. Let's not allow the doubt and vacillation of some of our leaders to undermine this campaign.**

## Model motion for branch meetings

This branch reaffirms its support for the pay campaign and the strategy of escalation agreed by delegates at the HE sector-conference. It calls on the HEC to escalate strike action (of at least 24 hour duration), with other unions if possible, and to bring forward the marking boycott to the earliest possible date in the Spring term and to prepare for a robust response to any aggressive behaviour by the employers.

## Details of briefing meetings in January;

Tuesday 21st January – Birmingham  
Friday 24th January – Manchester  
Wednesday 29th January – London  
Thursday 30th January – Glasgow

### Email the following with comments;

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