

# HIGHER EDUCATION PAY DISPUTE

*Our future is at stake – keep up the fight*

**UCU members have demonstrated beyond all doubt that they are prepared to fight over pay.**

We have taken strike action on six separate occasions in the last year, including three strike days jointly with our EIS, Unison and Unite colleagues. This is more strike days than in the last pay battle in 2005-6. This was only possible because across the UK, members, reps and activists responded to the call for action.

Pay and the cost of living is now a national political issue. The TUC has called a demonstration in October under the slogan "Britain Needs a Pay Rise".

But our dispute faces a crunch point. After three one-day strikes and three two-hour strikes, the University and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) was still able to impose the same 1% offer with which they began the year.

We are now moving towards a marking boycott in the Summer Term, starting 28 April, with the employers threatening to "lock out" staff who participate.

UCEA is calling on its member universities to take a hard line to break the Union, potentially crippling our ability to take action over exams in the future.

## Detailed plan

We need to get organised. A credible plan to defend members would start with a clear declaration that the Union would call strikes of all members, including those not participating in the marking boycott, if an employer made good this threat. *Instead there has been silence from the UCU on this issue!*

Every time an employer threatens pay docking we need to call on all members to rally round. Local strikes must be followed up by rapidly escalating to a national strike call unless employers back down.

## The deadly delay

The decision by the right-wing majority on the HEC in December to delay the marking boycott from January to April sent a damaging signal to the employers.

Strike action in the Summer Term can still be effective, as Kings' and other colleges demonstrated in 2009. But the delay means that the majority of teaching will be over by the time the marking boycott starts.

## Talks

Now the same section of our union leadership are putting their faith in talks with the employers. But after another year of pay cuts, "Catch Up, and Keep Up" now means RPI+15%.

The argument of the Right is that it is a strength that the union is about to threaten hard-hitting industrial action at the same time as going into talks with the employers. Yet true strength depends on an ability to wield it.

We have to assume that the talks are unlikely to deliver a serious pay offer. Although there has been some movement by the employers in response to our action thus far, we have to keep preparing the action on marking.

## Employers' rhetoric

The employers are bound to make the lowest offer they think they can get away with that would allow the UCU negotiators to recommend that the HEC call off the action and ballot their members. We know their arguments, and their tactics are easy to predict.

They will plead poverty. They will say that the £2bn surplus from fees and pay cuts has already been spent. They will say some employers can pay more, but others cannot afford to meet the claim. At the same time they will repeat the threat of 100% pay docking.

We can expect a small carrot and... a very big stick.



## GET BEHIND LAMBETH COLLEGE

Lambeth College UCU members voted 95 percent on a 70 percent turnout in our ballot for strikes over management's attempts to introduce new contracts.

These would mean teaching staff would lose two weeks holiday, work longer weekly hours and additional contact time, sick pay would be drastically cut, redundancy notice time reduced and staff required to take on unlimited additional duties without pay.

Unison members at the College are also balloting for strikes and have won their indicative ballot with a resounding 85 percent in favour.

Our first well-supported strike day was 1 April, the day the contracts were due to be imposed.

We will name a date for the start of indefinite strike action after Easter.

These new conditions would adversely impact the education we provide and would also set a dangerous precedent for the rest of FE.

That is why UCU has designated the strike 'a local dispute of national significance'.

## Support the strike

Indefinite strikes will be costly, so we need your solidarity.

Please send hardship donations and messages of support to

Mandy Brown, branch secretary at [mandybrowncow@yahoo.com](mailto:mandybrowncow@yahoo.com)

However, our side has great power. A marking boycott can paralyse the progression and graduation process for large numbers of students. A small number of staff can stop the process.

This is not something our managements can afford to ignore in their brave new £9,000 fee 'market'.

## Our response – keep organising the marking boycott

We must keep preparing for the marking boycott. We have to make every effort to prepare for an effective marking sanction from 28 April:

- Continue the discussion with members and Student Unions
- Call General Meetings for the very start of term to review preparations for the marking boycott
- Hold school and department meetings to arrange the detail of the boycott
- Set up Action Committees, open to all members, to carry the action through locally
- Send email reminders to members about the Work to Contract and the start of the boycott
- Plaster campuses with the UCU marking boycott posters.

## An acceptable offer?

What would an acceptable offer look like? The simple answer is that *it should be for members to decide*.

This means that the Union must not suspend the action pending a ballot. This would call off the marking sanction just as it was about to start, and would create a fait accompli.

The only way of giving members a real choice is to maintain the action, put the proposition to branches, and consult branch delegates at an emergency Higher Education Sector Conference.

But if there is a ballot, branches must call branch meetings as early as possible to allow members to discuss it collectively.

Note that the decision concerns a settlement on both 2013-14 and the 2014-15 pay claim. So it must be seen as a 'two year deal', even though technically it is for one year.

Our dispute was to "Catch Up and Keep Up". Unless the employers commit to a settlement that *both recoups this year's pay cut and is clearly above RPI for next year, then we would have lost the campaign*. It would be delusional to imagine otherwise.

## UCU Left fringe meeting at Congress 2014

**For a fighting democratic union:  
Defend post-16 education,  
stop cuts and privatisation**

**Thursday 29 May, 7pm**

**The Mechanics Institute  
103 Princess Street,  
Manchester M1 6DD**

## What is at stake?

The impact of decisions we will make over the next few weeks will not be limited to this pay dispute.

The employers are seeing a windfall from high tuition fees and low pay. Employers across the sector, including the Russell Group research-intensive universities, are seeing increasing student numbers as a gold mine.

This new gold rush creates speculative capital investment, new buildings and new campuses, and it is here that surpluses are being spent.

A tuition fee market place inevitably creates winners and losers. The Government's long-term goal is clear: "elite" institutions with tuition fees of up to £30,000 a year, and the others offering cut-price degrees, with staff on worse terms and conditions, set by local bargaining.

The biggest challenge to our union is to the integrity of the sector as a whole, and National Pay Bargaining within it.

An end of National Pay Bargaining would mean a free for all. Employers could set their own salary scales – as at LSE – or make offers dependent on accepting performance related pay or more aggressive performance management ("capability") policies.

## The rewards of timidity

Defeat in the pay campaign would be one thing, but surrender by the HEC would be disastrous.

It would be a green light for many employers to pursue local bargaining, and for others to revisit performance-related pay, and an increase in casualised contracts.

The future of our Union's bargaining position, and the nature of the Higher Education sector, are at stake.

We can still win this dispute, and we should be going all out to do so.

## The future of our union

Two key factors allowed UCU to take action over pay.

The first factor was that there were UCU Left representatives at the top of our union who argued that pay was a key issue on which members would be prepared to fight.

This got us the ballot for industrial action in the first place, and made joint strike action possible with Unite, Unison and EIS.

The second factor was the resilience of many thousands of rank-and-file members, some who called themselves "activists", and many who, at the start of the campaign at least, did not.

It is members' steadfast determination that has got the union to the current point. The success of the dispute depends on ordinary members.

The dispute proves that leadership matters. We need to be better organised, and we need more left activists on the Higher Education Committee.

If you are not yet a member of UCU Left then please consider joining us. Secondly, please support the campaign to elect Lesley Kane as Vice President of UCU.

## Join UCU Left today

Fill in the form below and send it  
c/o 17 Barfield Road, Leytonstone, London E11 3AF  
Or join online at [www.uculeft.org](http://www.uculeft.org)

Name .....

Address .....

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Institution & UCU branch .....