

BUILD A MASS CAMPAIGN TO DEFEND U.S.S.

We are in the fight of our lives to defend USS. Members are reading Sally Hunt's emails, and they are furious.

Only three years after we took a massive hit, losing Final Salary, ostensibly to save the scheme, the employers, the trustees and the government Pension Regulator are back for more.

In the 2014 round, UCU Left warned that by accepting a sliver of Defined Contribution we would open the door to further detrimental changes, simply by lowering the threshold when DC kicked in.

Now the employers' organisation UUK has gone further and faster than anyone then imagined – proposing to drop the DC threshold to zero.



Photo: Geoff Dexter

The employers have declared war on your pension and on UCU

The employers are proposing an immediate double-whammy.

Our pension will be volatile and risky because we – not the trustees or employers – will bear the risk of stocks and shares fluctuating.

A crash in the market could wipe out our pension. Many private sector pensioners have lost their pensions in this way. Individual portfolios are much riskier than pooled pension investments so to compensate we will be compelled to 'de-risk' ourselves.

'Defined Contribution' should really be called Undefined Benefit.

Worse, the employers plan to cut their contribution to our pension from 18% to 12% (the remaining 6% going to USS' deficit recovery pot).

Having created a virtual deficit black hole, our pensions will be cut to fill it!

The result is that future pension accrual will be at most three-quarters (20/26) of its current rate.

The employers' assault is backed by corporate vultures on the inside

of the Department for Work and Pensions.

The investor in-house journal the IPE recently quoted a senior DWP official who described the current situation as 'the last chance to change the DB sector' (tinyurl.com/ipe-last-chance).

USS is the largest private sector DB scheme in the country and it is being manoeuvred onto the rocks.

These changes will also generate a longer term crisis as the scheme 'de-risks': that the pension will not be worth investing in, and wealthier members may simply seek to move their pension out of the scheme.

The idea of shared risks, that we are all in USS together, is undermined by individual stocks-and-shares portfolio.

What do we need to do?

Already across the country branches are getting organised. Every activist and rep has a historic responsibility on our shoulders. We have to take ourselves extremely seriously.

We need to build a rank and file movement to defend our pensions. We have three tasks, and we need

to persuade as many members as possible to become activists and campaigners to help us do these.

First, we have to get the vote out

We need to pursue a relentless campaign to convince members that they should vote, and vote yes in the industrial action ballot.

This leaflet contains some arguments you can use to convince doubters. But there will be many more. The simplest argument is this: *if we don't fight, we lose.*

Invite the general secretary, or members of the HEC to your meetings to speak. Organise regional rallies. But most of all get up to speed with the arguments and be brave! We all need to be ambassadors for the action.

Branches should call open meetings to discuss the USS dispute – in central locations and in departments and faculties.

Create an action committee starting with regular activist meetings to go through the detail of the branch 'get the vote out' strategy, review which departments seem to be organised and plugging the gaps.

Most of all, bring people together – members are angry but it is also possible to despair faced with the enormity of the task.

Second, we will need to put the action on

This will not be 'business as usual'. We cannot approach the action in a tokenistic way.

The HEC voted for a ballot for escalating strike action in the Spring Term, with lectures cancelled, not rescheduled – something that UCU has never said before. The ASOS at this stage is designed to reinforce the strike.

This will have an immediate effect on our students.

We need to build alliances with student unions, campaigns on campus for free education,



Students – and student unions – can be won over to supporting our strikes

Labour students etc. making the argument that we have been forced into taking this action and we are fighting to defend the pensions of the next generation of staff.

Our fight is part of a wider fight to defend pensions across society. Wherever students end up, we are fighting to ensure that they are not forced to work until they drop dead.

A marking boycott

Third, we need to prepare the ground for a marking boycott aimed at hitting examinations if the employers do not give way.

There will be a second ballot in March/April 2018 identifying the start date of the marking boycott.

The employers will blame UCU. They will threaten drastic pay docking.

But we are proposing a marking boycott while we still have a live strike ballot for escalating strikes, and we can escalate locally and

nationally perfectly legally in pursuit of the dispute should HEC decide our tactics change.

Make no mistake, if we are able to carry it out the industrial strategy proposed by the HEC would bring campuses to a halt and put huge political pressure on the employers to make concessions.

There will be an impact on students' education.

If the marking boycott holds, some may not graduate. But we are fighting for their futures as well. It is not necessary for a 100% marking boycott to have this effect, as 2006 proved.

We have to build organisation and participation, starting with the campaign to get the vote out in the strike ballot.

Members who have never taken strike action before are beginning to recognise the threat to their pension.

We need to build a mass campaign to defend USS.

Join UCU Left today

Fill in the form below and send to UCU Left,
c/o 17 Barfield Rd, Leytonstone, London E11 3AF
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