

Build the marking boycott

This is a dispute we can win

The pay campaign is a winnable dispute. UCU and our sister unions have been effective in making the case that the cash is available to fund our claim. It's common knowledge that universities are sitting on £1 billion surpluses while our pay has declined by 13% in the last three years.

Even the mainstream press now refer to our Vice Chancellors, with their excessive pay rises, as 'fat cats'.

What is at stake?

Winning this dispute is important in defending the pay of our members from year on year pay cuts. But a victory would also strengthen the UCU and its branches in defending jobs and working conditions.

A defeat would be a green light for VCs to further marketise the sector and introduce a raft of other policies such as performance related pay.

If we win the current campaign the confidence of our members and the credibility of our union will increase enormously. This is what leads members to join the union. A stronger union with a victory under its belt weakens our employers.

Preparing for the boycott

The marking boycott starts on 28 April. This is a powerful weapon in UCU's armoury and, if implemented robustly, has great potential for a quick victory.

All branches and activists need to use the time ahead to prepare and ensure this sanction is fully understood and supported by members. Branches should kick off the action on 28 April with an activity that brings members together, such as a rally or stunt.

Working with students

Students have powerful leverage in this campaign. It is crucial that we work with local student unions and student groups from the outset.

The NUS national position argues that 'lecturers and other staff in our universities and colleges should be

properly supported and remunerated'.

The full NUS position is on their website: www.nus.org.uk/en/news/trade-union-industrial-action-in-he-and-fe/

In our increasingly marketised institutions the voices of students as 'the consumer' are often heard more readily than those of the unions – so student pressure will play a crucial role in the marking boycott.

Some students will understand our concerns; others may disagree with us. Either way, if they make their views felt to the Vice Chancellors it will make a difference.

- Organise, alongside NUS where possible, an open meeting for UCU to inform students about the marking boycott.
- Adapt a version of the UCU template letter to students for your local institution, including the name and email contact of your VC. UCU resources are on this link: <http://fairpay.web.ucu.org.uk/he-resources/>
- Discuss with the student union how to encourage a mass campaign of student emails to VCs expressing their worries about the effect the marking sanction may have on their graduation.
- Organise a mass poster and leafletting campaign to alert students to the impending action.
- Unite and Unison members should be invited to campaign with us.

In pre-1992 institutions academic-related members who don't have marking duties can play an important role in publicising the action and working with the student unions.

Pressure from students will also bolster our action and could lead to a victory very early on.

Building the confidence of members

We need to organise meetings on the marking boycott immediately to galvanise members, build their confidence and discuss any local idiosyncrasies.

- Meetings in departments and faculties will help build support and strength on the ground.
- Regularly scheduled activists' meetings can be a forum for members to raise issues as they arise and seek support, encouragement and solutions from other union members.
- Arrange for speakers to visit departmental meetings. Speakers can use the UCU template notes and FAQs at: <http://fairpay.web.ucu.org.uk/instructions-for-the-marking-boycott/>
- Contact UCU for national speakers at your meetings. This helps spread the arguments for the marking boycott and build confidence.

Call for a Special Sector Conference

The marking boycott will involve us in a huge battle with the employers. We need a Higher Education Sector Conference to bring activists and branch representatives together to build confidence and ensure that the dispute is in the hands of the lay membership.

The regional briefings were well-attended and evidently popular as a way of bringing branch reps together.

We have seen some employers flex their muscles with their draconian reaction to the two-hour strikes and therefore we need to discuss a collective response to punitive pay docking that doesn't leave branches isolated.

We need to demand that any offer is brought back to the membership before the action is called off! Pass the following motion:

'This branch resolves to requisition a recall HESC under rule 16.10. This sector conference should be called to discuss the conduct of the current pay dispute, including the preparation for the marking sanction after 28 April and the union's national response should punitive pay docking occur'

We've started so we'll finish – UCU can win this battle.