

WHY WE STRIKE HOW WE WIN

COUNTERFIRE UCU MEMBERS

The university strikes this week are crucially important. They are about rolling back the attacks on our conditions from employers, who want us to work harder for less money in real terms, and to deny us a decent income when we retire.

Staff in 58 universities across the country are taking action to defend pensions and employer failings on pay, casualisation, conditions and equalities. Some of the employers' attacks are taking on draconian local form. Staff at Goldsmiths in London are engaging in three weeks of continuous strike action after management announced 52 redundancies as part of a restructuring package.

After two decades of deteriorating pay and conditions, and more recently major staff sacrifices during the pandemic to keep the sector going, we deserve better than to be treated like dirt. The marketisation of education means the conditions of staff are worsening, while vice chancellors and others who run the universities pick up huge bonuses and vastly inflated salaries.

The losers in all this are not only staff but students, who are praised as 'customers' but whose education is narrowed by constant reliance on metrics, while they are taught by overworked and underpaid – and often casualised – lecturers.

It is critical that we have a show of force up and down the country. Employers will be looking closely, and we must show them that we mean to fight until we win.



This is a critical time for our union and we must take the bull by the horns.

COUNTERFIRE

The three days of strikes this December are important but are unlikely alone to bring the employers to the table with a better offer. We have no choice but to escalate in the New Year if we want to succeed. In the three-week ballots on the USS (pensions) and '4 fights' disputes, more than 50% voted in both ballots, which shows that there is great depth of feeling in our union.

We should use the strike days we are taking in December to organise branch meetings and pass resolutions calling on the union nationally to escalate strike and action short of a strike for next term. We cannot afford to engage in the kind of minimalist action short of strike we have at present that does not go beyond working to contract. More universities are likely to be out in the new year as the union will re-ballot several dozen more institutions which just missed the 50% threshold on the previous ballots.

Like our colleagues in Goldsmiths, we should be prepared to take action for much longer at the start of next term. We should also press for a strategy of hitting early and hitting hard next semester to cause maximum disruption. Strike action should not be seen as a tokenistic negotiating tactic rather than the hard blow that we need to land a knock-out punch.

We have every reason to feel confident. Our employers depend on us to deliver teaching, produce world-leading research, and perform the necessary administrative tasks that make things tick at universities. The sector is awash with cash. The problem is not that there isn't money, it's that the market demands sacrifices by staff to better compete against other institutions. It's time we end this madness and put staff, students and education first.

We are striking at a time when there is growing discontent among working people about pay and conditions and a rise in the number of strikes. Inflation is rising, which means a real terms pay cut and that affects us all. We have every interest in linking up with other workers facing the same sorts of challenge, with other unions taking action, and with students whose interests lie in supporting the strike.

Solidarity across our sector and throughout the trade union and working class movement is the way to win.

COUNTERFIRE

