

13/06/2023

# The University Worker

A rank-and-file  
strike bulletin

## A Surprise From Above is Never as Shocking as One From Below

We are now another pay cheque into the MAB. At the start of the dispute, university management threatened high levels of deductions, including 100% and 80% in some cases. Regardless of whether this is legal (it's likely not) it was evidence of how seriously management took the threat of the MAB.

In lots of cases managers have relied on self reporting for members to find out who is actually participating in the MAB. It shows, yet again, how little they engage with the actual work of universities. If papers don't get grades and assessment boards are boycotted, there is little managers can do to graduate students themselves. They know that when the action really bites, they've got nothing to protect them. That's why they threatened deductions beforehand.

Over the last few days, cracks are starting to show on the side of management. There have been more step-downs from the threat of 100% deductions, with the pre-MAB confidence starting to falter. There have been statements from senior management to UCEA asking to get negotiations going again.

So far, there has been little movement on the national dispute. The threat of deductions hasn't worked. Many branches (including those in the reports) have shown themselves willing to take immediate strike action. There are now local strikes planned to go ahead at a range of universities. These strikes are working to force open those cracks on management's side.

UCU members and branches have shown a willingness to throw themselves behind this action for the Four Fights issues. This is building our leverage. Given the scale of our action, when UCEA returns to negotiations (and they will) we must get more than some rubbish small percentage rise or vague wording about solving casualisation, equalities, or workloads.

This dispute is also showing the contradictions of higher education in Britain. As recently reported, about a third of universities are now in deficit, with others propped up on fees charged to international students (which make up around a fifth of the student population). There are now some Vice-Chancellors breaking cover and calling for changes to the funding model of universities.

We cannot leave it to managers to continue mismanaging higher education, whether or not the calls for funding are answered. We also can't leave it to managers to shape the debate on funding in higher education. Clearly, the model of shifting huge amounts of debt onto students is not a sustainable or fair way of funding higher education. But neither is the waste of money on managers, vanity projects, dodgy investments, and competition with other universities.

Instead, we need to keep the MAB going to force the debate on funding higher education. We don't want to go back to universities that use precarious contracts, high workloads, or low and unequal pay. However, this is only the start of what we want to change. We want to fight for a future of higher education in which workers and students have control of their institutions. It is when we take industrial action - whether MAB or striking - that we can build the power actually needed to do this.



Morning scab.

# **REPORTS:**

## **Brighton**

On 4 May 2023 the University of Brighton informed staff members that they intended to sack up to 130 members of staff, saving £7.3 million, with approximately 400 academics in the pool at risk of redundancy. This attack on members came as a complete shock, in part because the University had spent over £50 million on building projects in the last two years. The huge spend on new buildings is part of a plan apparently intended to allow the University to grow student numbers. But members rightfully questioned what use these expensive buildings would be if staff teams were decimated with no-one left to teach core modules. The student-staff ratio is already the 97th worst in the UK at Brighton. If the Senior Management Team (SMT) at Brighton intends to increase student numbers with over 100 fewer lecturers this will clearly create worse conditions for all. If anything, staff numbers need to be increased.

Instead, management are breaking the backbone of the institution – us the staff. They would love to get us in a grubby little room and be complicit in their action. They want us to stand aside while they throw people out on the street. Never mind that staff have been working all the way through lock down and have done everything imaginable to keep the university going. They couldn't care less. Well, you know what we told them? Fuck right off! Because we don't want to see 130 redundancies. We don't want to see 100 redundancies. We don't want to see 50 redundancies, 25 redundancies, 1 redundancy. We want to see 0 redundancies. It is our labour that keeps the university going. That is what SMT have forgotten. But you know who hasn't forgotten that? Our students.

Hundreds of our students marched through the streets of Brighton and ended outside the Vice Chancellor's (VC's) office chanting for her to resign. Students have been at the forefront of the battle to save staff because they know it is their learning conditions that will be affected. That is why on 25 May students decided to occupy the VC's Office with one demand... no redundancies. Hell bent on making the situation worse the University decided to seek a court order to throw the students out. Instead, the judge delayed the hearing until 16 June, placing an arrest block on the occupiers. The local newspapers and radio have been providing daily updates. The VC's response has basically been to stick her fingers in her ears and sing lalala.

Our University has 250m in reserves. These redundancies are a choice not a necessity. Staff and students have had enough. After eight years of managed decline, they are now calling for the VC to resign. 1400 have

taken part in a vote of no confidence in the VC. So far only 6% of them have faith in her management. 94% think we should fire management not front-line staff. They want to take the universities back! If management think any of us will be going quietly they've got another thing coming. Take up in the national marking and assessment boycott has increased and academics are joining the union in droves.

The fightback has already started. We are balloting for industrial action and calling on union branches to support. If you haven't already please pass a motion at your branch, donate to our hardship fund and come to the Saturday 10 June rally at 11am at The Level in Brighton. We are already causing chaos with marking boycott, and we'll be causing chaos with strike action again shortly. Until they accept that not one member will lose their job we will not stop.

Since this report was submitted, Brighton UCU has received the following ballot result in their fight against redundancies: Turnout: 61%, In Favour of Strike Action: 90%

For a model motion and more info on the rally go to: [tinyurl.com/SaveBrightonUni](http://tinyurl.com/SaveBrightonUni)

## **Goldsmiths**

On the 1st June, Goldsmiths Senior Management Team confirmed that they will be retracting the threat of 100% deductions for Marking and Assessment Boycott (MAB) participation. This came only hours after Goldsmiths UCU emailed members details of a branch vote on strike action which would take place the following Wednesday - this concerned whether to take indefinite or targeted strike action in response to the threat of 100% deductions.

On the 15th May, Goldsmiths UCU had passed a motion which gave management until Friday 2 June to reconsider the threat of 100% deductions before the branch moved to take strike action. One day before that deadline, management was forced to see reason and withdraw this entirely disproportionate measure. It has been confirmed that the College will instead be deducting 50% of salaries for the same three week period for participation in the MAB. This remains a disproportionate retaliation to our action and the branch will reconvene to decide how to respond. But this is a massive step-down from 100%.

This is a testament to the power of collective action in challenging our employers' intimidation tactics. It should give every member of the union absolute confidence in...

the effectiveness of the ongoing MAB.

This step-down should also have significant ramifications for branches facing deductions, as managers across the sector see our victory as an institutional indictment of the 100% deduction policy. As more and more branches prepare for strike action, the momentum is building behind a rank-and-file fight-back against coordinated attacks from sector managers. The compounded effect of strike action + MAB is working to force managers to back down. Now is the time to make use of this tactic!

## **UCL**

Workers at UCL taking part in the Marking and Assessment Boycott face probably the highest deductions in the sector, with employers deducting a flat rate of 10% of people's whole annual salary for anyone taking part in any way. Despite staunch opposition from academic staff, expressed through a vote UCL's Academic Board condemning the deductions and urging the Provost to reconsider, UCL are sticking to their guns.

As a union branch, we've responded by trying to set up a salary sharing scheme across the university. But with deductions as steep as this, it is going to be extremely tough. If any other branches or unions can donate to our fighting fund then please get in touch.

The struggle will reach something of a climax this Friday, when UCL academics vote on whether to reject UCL's current plans for "mitigation", plans which involve graduating students with missing grades, no dissertation marks, no external oversight and no second marking. We see this as a clear attack on academic standards. UCL's position seems to be that if you pay for a degree, you should get one, no matter what.

UCU members elsewhere, most notably at Cambridge, have adopted similar tactics and succeeded in rejecting planned mitigations which would devalue the degrees we award to students, all while management pretends to be acting in their best interests.

It's important to also set our local UCU struggle in its proper context. UCL has made record profits over the last few years. Yet it has also engaged in a programme of vicious cuts to departmental budgets and is now supporting a plan to "cut costs" by forcing all security staff to reapply for their jobs, firing 40 security officers and downgrading everyone else's contracts in the process. Some security guards stand to lose **£13,500** from their annual salary, in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis, due to these changes!

This a grim example of Fire-and-Rehire in a university supposedly committed to "changing the world for the better". UCL, and their subcontractor Bidvest Noonan, have even brought in famous asset stripper Martin Howes for this process, whose team have been suspending and disciplining various union reps in an attempt to intimidate workers from fighting back against the proposed changes. Despite this, IWGB members at UCL voted unanimously for a strike ballot, aiming to strike by the start of July, and local IWGB and Unison reps have been coordinating together to fight back against this restructuring.

## **What Is The University Worker?**

The University Worker is a rank-and-file bulletin made by university workers (both academic and non-academic).

We want to use this bulletin to share what's happening at different universities, and build our collective power to win our disputes.

## **Want to write for The University Worker?**

We regularly publish reports, both in the bulletin format (like this) and online.

We want to use this space to share reports about the UCU strikes, more interventions, and to build communication between branches and workers in universities.

If you have something that you would like to write or want to get involved with the distribution network for any of the bulletins below

You can contact Notes from Below on the form here: <https://notesfrombelow.org/contact>



**The University Worker** 📢 🗨️  
WhatsApp group





## Casualisation: Our Red Line

by **The University Worker** / April 24, 2023

## The University Worker: 24th April 2023

by **The University Worker** / April 24, 2023



## UCU Marking and Assessment Boycott

by **The University Worker** / March 30, 2023

## A Road Map for Branch Activists to Organising a Successful Marking and Assessment Boycott

by **The University Worker** / March 30, 2023

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### Our Demands

As union officials negotiate at ACAS, and we demonstrate outside, we want to remind both them and the employers what we're fighting for. The absence of any communications on the specific demands of the non-pay elements of the Four Fights has been a big concern for all members. This concern has not been helped by the replacement of our elected negotiators with less accountable union officials. Below you can find a clear articulation of our demands for all Four Fights and the USS dispute. We cannot let vague rhetorical promises about security and improved conditions take the place of concrete demands. We want the implementation of specific sector-wide provisions which will bind employers to meaningfully improving our working lives.

parental leave provision for all casualised employees, FTE annual holiday pay for termly contracts, end to all employment agency subsidiaries in HE, Acting Up allowance paid to all hourly paid staff taking on extra responsibilities, improve job security for researchers, assimilate all casualised teaching staff to the national pay structure, review the use of hourly paid lecturers in post-92 universities, and bring outsourced workers back in house on specified timescales.

**OUR DEMAND ON USS:** Finally, although not part of four fights, our demands around the USS pension scheme are simple: reverse the cuts proposed in 2018 and fight for improved pensions for all. This would still put us in a position where earlier entrants into the scheme receive a final salary pension, while later entrants have career average. However, it is a start. We don't think this will be won with "experts", whether on joint panels or pontificating on twitter. If it will cost more, the em-

**OUR DEMAND ON PAY:** The original pay demand was for RPI



## Let us be crystal clear: this is shit

by **The University Worker** / Feb. 17, 2023

## How to strike and still get paid

by **Anonymous HE worker** / Feb. 9, 2023