

Why are UCU striking?

Today the strike begins. In response to the assault on their USS pension scheme, the lecturers and all those who stand in solidarity with them will be forming a picket line on the steps of SOAS. Let us recall exactly how this conflict began, and why it is important for all students and workers of SOAS to support the strike in order to fight the privatisation of higher education.

Most academics in the UK are members of the USS pension scheme. It is set up with roughly 18% contribution from the employer, and 7% contribution from the employee. Most importantly, all members of the pension are **guaranteed** pensions based on the exact amount of time they worked – this is called a **Defined Benefit Scheme**.

When the UK Pension Regulator assessed the future stability of USS, the collective body of university employers (UUK) lobbied for a model that they termed “prudent”, meaning that it took the worst case scenario into account. The model gave a prediction for USS’ stability **if all university employers were to simultaneously go bankrupt**, with the conclusion that USS pensions held a scandalous deficit of £17.5 billion.

With this in mind, UUK decided to cancel the existing Defined Benefit Scheme, and move on to a **Defined Contribution Scheme**: pensions in which individual members each take on the risk of their own pension’s investment on the stock market, without any guarantee of actually receiving their full sum at the end of their careers. Outsourcing the risk to the employee means that pensions could be reduced to as little as half of their current sum.

There are two important points to note here. First of all, the likelihood of all universities going bust is zero. This outlandish scenario would be one of the greatest political crises in the history of the UK, and could not possibly be allowed to happen. In reality, the USS pension scheme **actually has a significant surplus** and is predicted to maintain this

Students: Cut class—form mass pickets!

Solidarity is more than a nice word. It’s a physical activity. It means not going into uni and joining our staff to form a *mass picket line*.

During the next four weeks, university staff will be standing outside convincing their workmates not to go to work. The strike can be short lived and successful only if the university machine is shut down.

But every cog of this machine needs to come to a halt. The Students’ Union knows this, and has decided to close its on-campus services in solidarity. Us students need to push this further by refusing to use the library, the careers service, and all common and study rooms. Most importantly, we need to physically stand beside our staff and make our voices heard.

As opposed to what Deborah Johnston implied in her last email (20th of February), it is not unlawful for pickets to exceed six people. This is just a government recommendation - individuals and unions cannot be liable to proceedings for simply not following it.

So don’t step into uni. Make some noise. Help us distribute this bulletin. Tell your friends and coursemates not to cross the line. Cut class and form a mass picket!

in the next decades to come. Secondly, the new Defined Contribution scheme would absolve the universities of all responsibility for their workforce - it is simply a guise for universities continuing to **make higher education into a commodity rather than a human right**.

With this in mind, it is absolutely vital that all workers and students support the strike! We cannot stand by as the government and university management continue to destroy our education and workplaces, and irreversibly destabilise the futures of our lecturers.

**DON’T CROSS THE PICKET LINES!
SUPPORT LECTURERS!
STAND IN SOLIDARITY!**

“TUPE” - What is it and What does it Mean?

Throughout all this time, we have learnt about the end of outsourcing at SOAS which will take concrete shape in August this year. We all know that SOAS promised and reaffirmed that all employees who are working for these kinds of companies shall be transferred to SOAS from September onwards and – it is worth pointing out again – on the same terms and conditions as staff currently employed by SOAS. But do we all know and understand how this process of transfer will be realised? Do we know what this process exactly implies and what rights we have as workers?

The intention of this bulletin is to address these types of questions in a clear and concise way, which will certainly help our entire community to better understand the scope of the process.

The process of in-house transfer is referred to in British Law as “TUPE”, meaning the “Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2014”. According to TUPE, we have every right to be represented, advised and informed in the course of the entire process. Furthermore, the law provides that, as a guarantee in the course of transfer, the terms and conditions that workers “enjoy” at the time of transfer are maintained without any alteration. This also means that they cannot be modified to the detriment of the workers. However, in case the new company (SOAS) has different terms and conditions, those who are transferred **may also ‘benefit’ from it**.

Another guarantee provided by this law is the fact that no worker can be dismissed as a consequence of the transfer itself. In case of contravention - that is unfair dismissal - this guarantee is enforceable at the labour court under threat of punishment.

Nonetheless, it must be noted that, despite the “protection of workers”, enshrined in law, the same law also holds the possibility that, over the course of transfer, workers are made redundant. In other words, this redundancy is in fact a type of dismissal or termination of employment for economic, technical or restructuring reasons. As the new company, SOAS **might put forward** exactly the reasons mentioned above to initiate the redundancy process, saying that they would not need all of the existing staff. Hence, it is vital that we remain focussed and vigilant! We have to maintain our demands, insisting that SOAS cannot make use of these methods to dismiss workers by any means.

Management: the Ultimate Tory Stooges

All the different parts of our community are angry about their own conditions, and rightfully so. Students suffer under fees, academics' pensions are under attack, and non-academic staff are trampled on with insecure contracts and outsourcing. Since fees were introduced, and especially after caps on student numbers were removed in 2014, management have done everything possible to (a) save money by cutting community welfare, and (b) continually expand with no regard for the actual purpose of the institution: providing a good and accessible education. In short, these parliamentary acts infuse management with the reckless competitive spirit that directs private corporations. The ethos of Tory-style austerity is unmistakable.

Privatisation of higher education means getting rid of corporate responsibility for the community, and outsourcing this responsibility to individual workers and students. This is the red thread that connects the exorbitant university fees, the current scandal of lecturers pensions, and the relentless marginalisation of non-academic staff: all for the sake of profit and maintaining competitiveness. Universities manufacture financial crises, such as the USS pension deficit myth (see page 1), in order to continually expand, with constant expenditures on new buildings and facilities, so that the institution can fit in more students to pay higher fees.

In the fight against privatisation, all must stand together - this is only the beginning of attacks that start from parliament and are implemented by their stooges: our very own university management!