

Massive vote for strikes to defend pensions...

All out to defend pensions and pay

WE ARE ON THE VERGE OF strikes across 61 pre-92 universities, where UCU members have delivered a massive 88 percent vote to back strikes and 93 percent to back action short of strikes, on a 58 percent turnout.

Now hard-hitting strike action has been announced starting on 22-23 February and escalating to 3 days, 4 days, 5 days, that's 14 days of strikes in a one-month period.

In Further Education, 16 colleges in London and 4 outside London have started a ballot on pay this week for escalating strikes to win a 3 percent above inflation pay award.

These branches are also fighting over "part two claims" including fractionalisation, holidays, contact time and workloads. FE branches could be striking by the end of February.

The ballot turn-out in the universities was well over the 50 percent demanded by the Tories anti-union laws.

Future of staff

The strikes in our universities will be the biggest wave of action in this sector for many years. The outcome of the action may determine the future of staff, students and university education for many years.

The employers are attacking the USS pension scheme, proposing to scrap the collective defined benefit scheme and replace it with an individual defined contribution scheme. Members would be expected to pay in more, and could lose a third or more of the value of their pensions.

A dubious set of assumptions and a pessimistic revaluation of the scheme by the employers has led to the belief it is in crisis. In fact the USS pension scheme is in good health. But the employers aren't listening to rational arguments.

This is the logical conclusion of the



privatisation and marketisation of our universities. In the rush to expand student numbers and build new property portfolios, vice-chancellors are shifting the balance of risk onto staff whilst reducing their own institution's liabilities.

The same forces that have driven up student fees are attacking wages, conditions and pensions. We face a choice between the market or the public university.

Strike committees

We need strike committees organised on every campus and every UCU region to push the campaign forward. We need protests, pickets, rallies and demonstrations to get our arguments across and put the employers under pressure.

Colleges and universities should twin with striking universities. We should fight to build support from our students and other campus unions. We need a national demonstration to mobilise the full power of our union and call on the movement to support our action.

UCU should coordinate strike action to unite higher and further education.

A "second wave" of USS branches (who didn't quite hit the 50 percent threshold) and FE branches are moving to ballot too, so that even more UCU members are set to join the fight.

Every UCU branch and region needs to

be a council of war, doing everything they can to build the strikes and build the union.

We're not alone. Many student unions are already speaking out in support of UCU's action in the universities.

Shadow Chancellor, John McDonnell has backed the UCU.

We need to capitalise on that support to mobilise public opinion. We should also seek guarantees from a future Labour government to underwrite our pensions and end the cycle of 3 year revaluations.

This is one of the biggest fights UCU has ever faced, but it's a fight we can win.

We are supporting the following UCU Left candidates in the NEC elections

UCU Elections are running from 1 February—1 March. The UCU Left has played a key role organising to get these fights off the ground. We all need to campaign to get a fighting left majority on the union NEC, including Nita Sanghera as Vice President.

Vice President FE

Nita Sanghera

London & East HE

Paul Anderson

Rachel Cohen

Ioanna Ioannou

Sean Wallis

London & East FE

Julia Roberts

Sean Vernell

North East HE

Jeff Fowler

Mike Lammiman

Steve Lui (Sun

Chong Lui)

North East FE

Saleem Rashid

North West FE

Carol Cody

N. Ireland HE

Peter Collins

UK-elected HE

Mark Abel

Sunil Banga

Elio Di Muccio

Julie Hearn

Jo McNeill

UK elected HE (casual vacancy)

Marion Hersh

UK-elected FE

Margot Hill

Naina Kent

Richard McEwan

Women members HE

Sue Abbott

Pura Ariza

Marian Mayer

Women members FE

Martha Harris

Elaine White

Land-based education

Eleni Michalopoulou