

# STRIKE AND MARCH FOR EDUCATION

**T**ens of thousands of UCU members at universities and colleges across Britain are set for a battle over the future of education and how staff are treated.

In 61 universities\* strikes are planned in defence of pensions while 16 further education colleges will strike for decent pay.

The assault on the USS scheme, which would dramatically slash the value of workers' pensions, has led to an amazing vote for strike action in the universities (88 percent) on a high turnout (58 percent). That result drives a coach and horses through the Tories' anti-union ballot thresholds.

Rightly UCU has laid out a programme of hard-hitting strikes, starting with two days (22-23 February), three days (26-28 February), four days (from 5 March) and five days (from 12 March). That's fourteen days of strikes in less than a month.

28 February has also been designated a day of action against workplace racism by the union. We should take the opportunity to publicise the national Stand Up To Racism demo on 17 March (see overleaf).

## Further education ballot

UCU members at 16 further education colleges have voted overwhelmingly to fight for decent pay in the face of a derisory wage-cutting 1 percent pay offer and over a series of local issues. We need to make sure their action is co-ordinated with university strikes.

Many UCU branches report their biggest meetings for years and people joining the union to be involved in the strikes.

The fight in the universities and colleges is not just about pensions and pay. It is equally about opposing the endless marketisation of education.

\* As we go to press universities that didn't get through the 50 percent threshold are rebalancing to join the action.

## The UCU Left is supporting the following candidates in the NEC elections

<b>Vice President FE</b> Nita Sanghera	<b>North East FE</b> Saleem Rashid	<b>UK-elected FE</b> Margot Hill, Richard McEwan, Naina Kent
<b>London &amp; East HE</b> Sean Wallis, Ioanna Ioannou, Rachel Cohen, Paul Anderson	<b>North West FE</b> Carol Cody	<b>Women members HE</b> Sue Abbott, Pura Ariza, Marian Mayer
<b>London &amp; East FE</b> Sean Vernell, Julia Roberts	<b>Northern Ireland HE</b> Peter Collins	<b>Women members FE</b> Elaine White, Martha Harris,
<b>North East HE</b> Jeff Fowler, Steve Lui (Sun Chong Lui), Mike Lammiman	<b>UK-elected HE</b> Julie Hearn, Mark Abel, Elio Di Muccio, Sunil Banga, Jo McNeill	<b>Land-based education</b> Eleni Michalopoulou
	<b>UK elected HE (casual vacancy)</b> Marion Hersh	<b>More info at:</b> <a href="http://uculeft.org">uculeft.org</a>

The resistance is about putting staff, students and education first, not profit:

- The pay of vice chancellors and managers has become a national scandal at the same time as UCU members face a bonfire of their pensions – and students are paying over £9,000 a year tuition fees.
- The issues of casualisation and the gender pay gap have been at the forefront of recent disputes.
- The issues of sexual harassment on campus, access for BAME students and the rows over “decolonising the curriculum” expose how much the “for profit” ethos has failed staff and students.

It's very encouraging that the National Union of Students has put out a joint statement with the UCU backing the action in the universities.

UCU has to win these fights. But that means members on the ground shaping

the dispute. The London Region of UCU has called for a mass demonstration on parliament on Wednesday 28 February. This is the fifth day of strikes – and the day the FE colleges come out for the first time.

This demo can take the fight to the heart of the problem, the Tories. We should mobilise everywhere for it.

London Region has also called an activists' meeting on Tuesday 20 February to get people involved with building the demo. This is a really good initiative.

We need strike committees, teach-ins (and outs), lobbies of MPs, strike rallies and urgent calls for support from students, trade unions and the wider community.

## Leadership

It's important that we're honest about how we got here. In recent years the UCU leadership has pulled back from key fights in the universities in the face of the threats of pay docking.

This time UCU general secretary Sally Hunt has argued hard for a fight. But ordinary members have to make sure that there is no retreat.

UCU elections for vice president and the national executive are on now (and run until 1 March). We need to back fighting UCU Left candidates.

It's great that the shadow chancellor John McDonnell has already backed UCU's action. But we're going to need the Labour Party and the whole trade union movement to throw their weight behind us.

It'd be great to see Jeremy Corbyn in Downing Street. But we haven't got the luxury of waiting until the next election to fight.

If UCU wins the battle over USS in the universities and pay in the colleges it will be a victory for staff, students and for everyone fighting back against the Tories and austerity.

## Further Education Colleges to strike too

College lecturers are fighting a below-inflation one percent pay offer. Their 48-hour strike, starting on 28 February, will be followed by three days of action if bosses do not make any significant concessions.

The UCU has rightly described the one percent offer as a “kick in the teeth”. It said that college workers have suffered a 23.6 percent real terms pay cut since 2008.

But meanwhile CEOs are giving themselves big pay packets, so workers know there’s money in the bank.

College lecturers voted by 92 percent for strikes on a turnout of 63 percent. The strong vote met the Tories’ 50 percent turnout threshold and shows the scale of anger that exists.

## Show me the money

Universities are now repositioning themselves as competitors scrambling to expand, to recruit students and build bigger campuses.

The pricing of undergraduate fees at £9,000 in 2010, the removal of the cap on student numbers in 2014, and the passing of the HE Bill into law last year, have together created a gold rush on campuses.

University managements are obsessing about their market position. As a result they want to dump their responsibility for picking up the risk that their competitors go bankrupt. Currently all remaining universities shoulder this cost. But until the HE Bill became law, the university funding councils prevented bankruptcy in favour of planned mergers and the obligation to teach courses to completion. This has changed.

On top of this, the entire HE fees-and-loans market is encouraging a race to the bottom in pay and pensions.

Investment is going into new

buildings, new campuses and new managers to manage them.

Universities are borrowing money to build, and to borrow money they want to cut their liabilities. The biggest liability for employers on their books is a Defined Benefit pension scheme.

Meanwhile it turns out that the majority of vice chancellors are involved in setting their own massively inflated pay.

That’s very interesting when you think that vice chancellors pay went up by 56 percent during the period 2006-16, to an average of £257,904.



# March for education Back Called by UCU London region pension & pay strikes

**Wednesday  
28 February,  
12 noon**

Assemble:  
Malet Street,  
London  
WC1E 7HY

For a march to Parliament  
Nearest ☉: Goudge St  
Not to be flyposted



UCU Find out more at: [uculondonregion.wordpress.com](http://uculondonregion.wordpress.com)

**NATIONAL  
DEMONSTRATION**



# MARCH AGAINST RACISM

**SATURDAY  
17 MARCH**

Assemble 12 noon,  
Portland Place,  
London W1A 1AA

Organised  
by Stand  
Up To  
Racism

Backed by  
the UCU

- No to racism, Islamophobia, & antisemitism
- Stand up to Trump – no state visit
- Refugees and migrants welcome
- Defend free movement & EU nationals
- Unite against the fascists in Europe
- Black Lives Matter

