

THE FIGHT IS ON TO DEFEND EDUCATION

Tens of thousands of UCU members are set for a battle over education and how staff are treated. In 61 universities strikes are planned in defence of pensions and education.

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.

Universities that didn't get through the 50 percent threshold are re-balloting to join the action.

Further Education ballot

Meanwhile 19 Further Education colleges are balloting up until 12 February over a wage-cutting 1 percent pay offer and 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 fights in the universities are not just about pensions and pay. They are equally about opposing the endless marketisation of education.

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

Vice chancellors' and managers' pay 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 in an

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

Vice President FE
Nita Sanghera

London & East HE
Sean Wallis,
Ioanna Ioannou,
Rachel Cohen,
Paul Anderson

London & East FE
Sean Vernell,
Julia Roberts

North East HE
Jeff Fowler,
Steve Lui (Sun Chong Lui),
Mike Lammiman

North East FE
Saleem Rashid

North West FE
Carol Cody

Northern Ireland HE
Peter Collins

UK-elected HE
Julie Hearn,
Mark Abel,
Elio Di Muccio,
Sunil Banga,
Jo McNeill

UK elected HE (casual vacancy)
Marion Hersh

UK-elected FE

Margot Hill,
Richard McEwan,
Naina Kent

Women members HE
Sue Abbott,
Pura Ariza,
Marian Mayer

Women members FE
Elaine White,
Martha Harris,

Land-based education
Eleni Michalopoulou

More info at:
uculeft.org

increasingly “stack ‘em high” culture.

The issues of casualisation and the gender pay gap have been at the forefront of recent disputes while 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 alike.

That's why it's so encouraging that the National Union of Students has put out a joint statement with the UCU backing the action in the universities.

Shaping the dispute

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 (the fifth day of strikes). We should mobilise everywhere for this demo.

London Region has also called a capital wide activists meeting on Thursday 15 February. 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.

It's also important that we're honest about how we got here. In recent years the UCU leadership 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 president and the national executive are on now (and run until 1 March). We need to make sure that fighting UCU Left candidates are elected.

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

We want 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 it will be a victory for staff, students and for everyone fighting back against the Tories and austerity.

