UCU

Goldsmiths University and College Union

Why are we striking?

For a decent pay award...

Since 2009, UCU members in higher education (HE) have had **pay cuts** resulting in an average cumulative loss of 13%. At the same time, money from student tuition fees is pouring into the HE sector, creating an **operating surplus of over £2 billion**.

Not everyone, however, is in the same boat. The assault on wages is happening at the same time as an unprecedented boom for those at the top. **Over 2500 people in higher education earn more than £100,000 a year;** at Goldsmiths, this number has increased from 1 to 4 in the last year! Half of all vice-chancellors earn over £242,000 a year, with **our own Warden receiving a 9% pay increase this year**. Meanwhile, ordinary staff face increased casualisation, rising workloads and cuts to pensions.

...but in the context of the Government's assault on universities

Youth unemployment now stands at nearly one million. Yet instead of investing properly in post-16 education, the government has trebled tuition fees and scrapped the Education Maintenance Allowance in order to drive down demand for continuing education during a recession. It has, however, shown not just disregard for the lives of young people but staggering incompetence in overseeing its own market reforms. The budget of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills will have to be **cut by some £1.4 billion** in the next two years to pay for the increased demand for loans, a substantial part of which is generated by students in private colleges that have few of the restraints placed on publicly regulated institutions. **This is a market literally out of control**.

We are told that - just as university and college employers "cannot afford" a decent pay rise despite money in the bank - market reforms of further and higher education were necessary at a time of austerity. But **the government's introduction of fees and loans was never about saving money**. It was designed to massage the public accounts and demonstrate its love of free enterprise. Yet the claim by universities minister, David Willetts, that the recent sell-off of student debt from the 1990s - worth £890 million but sold for £160 million - represented 'good value for money, helping to reduce public sector net debt' is laughable. Not only is his understanding of what constitutes 'good value' demented; the idea that reducing the country's net debt by 0.000133% is of any significance is risible. This is not about good value but about an ideological commitment to free markets - whatever the cost to the public.

And the cost has been huge – not simply in terms of massively increased student debt, but in widening social inequality. Since 2010/11, part-time undergraduate numbers have fallen by some 40%, with a 27% drop in postgraduates. Even the official regulator, HEFCE, admitted that these decreases '**are likely to have implications for equality and diversity**' and to have a disproportionate impact on non-traditional students, mature students and men from disadvantaged backgrounds. This is at the same time that young people living in richer parts of the country are between six and nine times more likely to go to selective universities.

The pay dispute must be seen in this wider context: **a neoliberal restructuring of post-16 education that is set to reward the wealthy and to target the poor, and to introduce competition, market forces and private actors into the delivery of higher education whenever possible.**

In this context, the pay dispute should be fought not simply as a battle over a few hundred pounds but also over **the future of an education system** being ravaged by the ideological desire of successive governments to make it function just like any other private institution.

Strike on Tuesday 3rd Dec