

Ideas & Proposals from the Strike! National Activists' Meeting
Hosted by Goldsmiths UCU
Friday 16 March, 2-4pm

Present: Staff were present from Goldsmiths, Birkbeck, Essex, Leeds, Salford, Open University, Birkbeck, SOAS, Queen Mary, City University, Warwick, Ruskin College Oxford (and students mostly from London universities)

Agenda: to address immediate, short and long term visions for the strike and associated actions in higher education.

Outcome: A steering group composed from these and other organisations nationally will be formed to realise action points listed below.

Ideas for THIS WEEK ...

- Hold info picket lines at your university's entrances throughout the day informing students about the developments in the dispute, as well as raising wider issues related to education, governance and fees. Host student-staff assemblies to link pensions with student struggles, come together to stage pantomimes and dramatised 'elections' for new VC's etc. Write leaflets with students so that the message makes sense to them
- Buy some coloured cloth (choose a visible colour) and safety pins and get supporters of the strike, students and staff to wear these. This will help keep the common struggle alive in the corridors and in the classrooms.
- Get one small activity per day going on your campus that everyone can engage in.
For example:
Day #1 - Collect signatures for FOI Request for UUK
Day #2 - Have a lunch time meeting on tuition fees and/or Visa policing on campus
Day #3 - Contact all local unions in the area and get a roundtable set up with them to discuss union's further plans for action and how they can help
Day #4 - Have a common potluck lunch
Day #5 - Have a demo and then a party to build the bonds, talk shop and dance
- Meet with Unison members, catering, cleaning and security staff on campus to discuss to effect of the strike on them, build alliances
- Adopt a union branch in another part of the country and start building a knowledge exchange with them. We need to be there for each other! Work with local branches in high profile locations like King's Cross, FE and secondary schools to increase public support.
- Give your branch reps and volunteers a deserved break and take them out for a meal and a drink to show your appreciation for all the work they have put in
- Membership drive to build power for the next action

Starting Points for ASOS Principles

Action short of strike action (ASOS) continues once we are back at work. During ASOS, UCU members:

- Should not work more than 35 hours per week. Normal working hours, unless specified, are 9-5 with a one-hour lunch break.
- Should not respond to work-related emails outside working hours.
- Should not cover for absent colleagues. Unless your job is wholly or predominantly about covering for other staff, you should refuse to provide cover.
- Should not reschedule lectures or classes. This includes any scheduled teaching activity which would have taken place on one of UCU's strike days and applies to all UCU members not just those directly responsible for the relevant lecture or class
- Should not undertake any voluntary activities. This means that where you have a choice as to whether you undertake some work, you should not do it. Unless stated in your contract you have no obligation to work on weekends (including attending open or applicant days) or in the evening. Any external commitments, such as external examining, also fall under voluntary activities.
- Should officially book all of their annual leave entitlement.

14 DAYS TO WIN: Preparing for next round of strike actions

- Target our audience better: UCU materials are too technocratic and did not do the job of explaining the wider context of frustration and anger. We need to create our own material, with an explicitly political narrative (demand for free education, rejection of the neoliberal university...)
- We need to think carefully about continuing to engage students in the next round, as we may not have sustained support: Provide SU funding for leaflets and flyers, use the student-staff communication channels more effectively, get the students involved in crafting the messages that we give to the students
- Step back and listen so that students and colleagues of colour can step forward and don't forget the racial politics.
- Organise to protect staff members on Tier 2 visas and not allowed "unauthorised absences" from work for more than 10 days consecutively, and 20 days overall
 - Pressure VCs to not report colleagues to the Home Office
 - Pressure the government to suspend these particular visa requirements in case of strikes, by taking this debate to the parliament

- Do a local membership drive between now and the next strike, organise events, fundraisers, a new members' welcome event where "how the union works" is explained, including acronyms like HEC
- Pressure sympathetic college management to be more active in pressuring UUK; expose and publicise management responses concerning industrial action to individual colleagues and students
- Engage in subvertisement: target branding of universities on all the platforms that they are on - open days, twitter, facebook, snapchat, instagram...
- Negotiate with management on docking pay for strike days: request no deductions for striking staff, request no deductions for striking casual staff, request spreading the deductions over several months (see successful outcome from Leicester UCU branch at <http://www.uculeicester.org.uk/ucu/strike-day-pay-deductions-agreement/>)

Strikes

- Scheduling strike days
 - Make branch-specific decisions for the 14 days, focusing on what will hit hardest locally - dates must be scheduled for before 19 June, the current ballot is valid only until then
 - In addition to branch-specific days, have the nation-wide strike days coincide with other strikes (cleaners' strike in late April, FE strikes)
 - Hold teach outs, assemblies and other modes of staff-student participation for the days of the strike
- Targeting assessments
 - An assessment boycott is not on the table because we haven't balloted for it
 - But we can arrange the strike days to target the marking period, to make exams ungovernable
 - It will not be effective to target exam dates (they'll hire invigilators)
 - Might be more effective to target marking periods, since most institutions have short turn-around dates, and delays may end up disrupting exam boards. Delaying the graduation of existing students will affect intake of new students. (It was noted that some universities are changing rules so that students can graduate without exam boards; it was also noted that delaying graduation will affect life plans of students on Tier 4 visas)
- Targeting student recruitment (events, duties) might be even more effective
- Targeting research activity... We haven't sufficiently discussed what it means for industrial action to target research activity, it might be a good idea to have a collaborative / collegiate discussion on:
 - How do we make the withdrawal of research visible?
 - How do we withdraw our research labour from the university but not from ourselves insofar as it is part of our existential sustenance?

- How do we divert research towards strike related activities? How do we bring our research skills more effectively to our activities around the industrial action this time? Think more creatively about teach-outs that will involve collective turn-out from colleagues who have been on strike but not on the picket line?
- Many of our members are librarians, course officers, and other professional staff - ensure that they remain a visible, active and recognised part of the action

UCU

- Draft Emergency Motion for UCU Conference ('back pocket' motion in the event of a proposed deal before UCU conference):

OUR PENSIONS ARE NOT FOR SALE

Congress congratulates members on the phenomenal strike action and action short of a strike taken by members in the USS pensions dispute. Conference notes:

- that it was the anger and resolve of members that brought negotiators back to the table;
- that thousands of new members have joined UCU during the dispute;
- the overwhelming rejection by branches of the negotiated offer on 12 March 2018

Congress thanks students for their fantastic support and understanding throughout this difficult period. Congress authorises negotiators to adhere to the following principles in seeking a final settlement to be put to members:

- No deterioration to the pension that members will receive on retirement,
 - Not to accept the argument that USS is in deficit
 - No fixed time limit should be imposed on any offer
 - No rescheduling of work for which pay has been deducted as a consequence of industrial action.
- Take branch decisions clarifying to HEC what we will and will not accept in the negotiations with the UUK
 - Build a strategy for avoiding what happened on Monday-Tuesday last week and the 12 hour turnaround time we were given: Had we not mobilised, the deal with UUK would have been rubber stamped by the HEC. Put pressure on the Union HQ to clarify a democratic process for the next round (see motion from Kent University at the end of this document)
 - Get UCU representatives on the governing bodies of colleges
 - Build a long term strategy for the union that is proactive rather than reactive (a weak defence mechanism against worsening conditions): we can start with a manifesto for education that will be adopted by the UCU
 - Form BME groups on every campus that are autonomous, but have an effective platform on the UCU branch

- Challenge the policy in practice that disables staff on lower pay grades to join UCU as it produces disabling divisions when organising campus struggles

Other proposed actions

- Sign this petition calling for the government to underwrite the USS scheme (100K signatures will grant a debate in parliament):
<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/214210>
- Sign this petition and resign from your Athena Swan post:
<https://platform.organise.org.uk/campaigns/open-letter-to-equality-challenge-unit>
- REF boycott: if interested in organising a cross-college REF boycott, write to Nicole Wolf at Goldsmiths: n.wolf@gold.ac.uk
- Broaden our efforts to other unions in the university (cleaners strike) and beyond: support the Further Education strikes, organise visits to other trade unions for support
- Start engaging with embassies (international students) to put pressure on government
- Organise a massive media event, such as a road blockade
- Target college / departmental / committee meetings with mass sickies (i.e. several people call in sick at once)

Suggestions from and for students

- Organise a student strike - withhold assessments until the dispute is resolved
- Organise a collective fee strike within the framework of a wider call for free education - demand tuition fee reimbursement for all students for 14 days (rather than on the basis of individualised calculations of missed teaching hours) - contact Goldsmiths SU for more information.
- Target open days with student demos
- Push for free education

The University is Ours, Longer term goals

- Build a movement to Free Education from marketisation (The University is Ours/ We are the University)
 - Take back the partnership between staff and students
 - Push to end fees

- Create a University is Ours manifesto to go to UCU Congress on how this movement will be built
 - Stand together to fight bullying, victimisations and intimidation
- Fight for autonomous universities: boycott metrics, boycott NSS, populate the university with different kinds of work, moving out of self-serving paradigms to collective paradigms that directly support local and trans-national struggles
- Fight the border regime (boycott monitoring and visa reporting)
- Fight for autonomous universities: take over the governance of our universities, push for collective budgeting at the departmental level and up, create regular staff-student assemblies to hold managers accountable, design modules for staff and students to re-think their universities, expose our universities' participation in gentrification and neo-colonial projects,

UCU Motions

1. Branch Approved University of Kent UCU motion for UCU Congress

No Deficit, No Capitulation and Democratic Reform Inside UCU

UCU Kent congratulates members in the strike action in the USS pensions dispute. UCU Kent authorises negotiators to adhere to the following principles:

- No deterioration to the pension that members will receive;
- Not to accept that the USS is in deficit;
- Demand an extension to the June 2018 deadline;
- No rescheduling of work for which pay has been deducted.

UCU is a member driven organisation and this dispute has shown how powerful the membership of UCU are. In light of this UCU Kent demand that:

- Any resolution to the current dispute must have the full consultation and endorsement of the UCU membership;
- Members must have the ability to debate executive proposals in a timely manner with due diligence;
- Congress authorises a review of democratic UCU governance to expand democratic processes within UCU and strengthen members' participation in national policy decision-making.

2. Branch approved motion submitted from Goldsmiths UCU to National Congress

The University is Ours!

Congress believes that democratic governance of our universities is vital so that all staff and students can participate fully in how their institutions are run.

Congress instructs the HEC to develop a toolkit and to actively campaign for good democratic governance based on the following principles:

- Governing bodies and all relevant sub-committees should be representative of the diverse communities that each university serves.
- Governing bodies and all relevant sub-committees allocate equal votes to staff and student representatives and community members.
- Staff and students should have an official voice through the creation of a 'General Assembly' that is part of the formal structures of governance of the institution.
- Democratic elections should be held for all chairs of university committees within the formal structures of governance; for Heads of Department/schools; for Deans and Pro-vice chancellors or their equivalent, and for Vice-chancellors or their equivalent.