

STRIKE BULLETIN #1



@jamescummings

Wed 1st Feb began with news that government ministers were worried about the scale of industrial action that would be taking place throughout the day. They were right to be worried!

Up to half a million workers belonging to multiple trade unions walked out in the biggest industrial action in more than a decade. Teachers showed their collective might with the closure and semi-closure of thousands of schools, and Newcastle city centre was thronging with striking workers including civil servants, rail workers and university staff. The atmosphere at the morning march and rally (pictured above) was electric.

Here at Newcastle Uni UCU we are proud to once again join the fight for fair pay and conditions for tens of thousands of workers in Higher Education. Readers will need no reminder of the issues which have brought us to this point, but let's revisit them anyway. Stagnating pay, including a 17.6% pay cut relative to inflation between 2009 and 2019. Workloads out of control, with the average academic working over 50 hours a week. An average gender pay gap of 16%, disability pay gap of 9%, and black/white gap of 17%. A third of all academic staff on fixed-term, insecure contracts. And devastating cuts to our pensions of up to 40%, based on a dodgy valuation undertaken as markets plummeted in 2020.

The mismanagement of UK Higher Education has had dire consequences for students as well as staff. Its broken funding model has left many institutions awash with cash while others contend with deficits, and recent changes to the student loan system have left students saddled with debt for longer. Needless to say, these issues are structural; indeed, they are ultimately symptoms of a marketized, financialised, neoliberal system in which education is a commodity rather than a public good. It's time Higher Education changed course for the good of students and staff.

Your union needs you!

17 further days of strike action are planned for February and March 2023. We're not demanding the earth: a pay rise in line with inflation; restore the cuts to our pensions; and agree action plans to reduce the pay gaps, grant security of employment to the workforce, and reduce the workload.

If you haven't been involved already, please join us in the fight! Email the branch with your ideas for vibrant, colourful picket lines and creative ideas for fundraising. Together we can win! ucu-office@newcastle.ac.uk

Students protest in support of striking staff

A university celebration event attended by students and staff was disrupted last month by a group of students protesting against poor pay and working conditions for staff. The students held banners up to a window outside the event during a speech by Vice-Chancellor Chris Day, but were quickly pounced upon by security and condemned by senior managers.

NCL Student-Staff Solidarity said on Twitter afterwards: *"We wanted to use this event, where many staff (including upper-management) and students were in attendance, to highlight student solidarity with the ongoing UCU disputes. University staff are overworked and underpaid. Their working conditions are our learning conditions, and their struggles are a detriment to our education and wellbeing as students."*

You can see more pictures of the incident on the group's Twitter profile @nclsolidarity. The protest comes after a number of indicative polls undertaken by Newcastle University Students Union (NUSU) over the past year showed continued student support for industrial action by lecturers and other staff.

Branch offers solidarity to striking nurses, posties & rail workers

As well as preparing for industrial action in our own union, branch reps and committee members have been busy paying solidarity visits to other picket lines across the city in recent weeks and months. December saw Newcastle Uni UCU members visit striking posties at the Royal Mail, nurses at the RVI, charity workers at Shelter, and rail workers at Central Station. Many such visits have been reciprocated on our own picket lines by representatives from unions such as Unison and Unite.

Regular attendees of our branch meetings will also know that we have made several considerable donations to other UCU branches across the country, such as Birkbeck and Roehampton, where mismanagement of the institution (and indeed the sector) has led to the threat of widespread redundancies and course closures. We have also lent our support to student initiatives to tackle the cost of living crisis.

With everything that is happening in the world at the moment, it's easy to be despondent. But the work of trade unions can and does make a huge difference in people's lives, underpinned by our values of compassion, cooperation and mutual solidarity. There is so much to be done! Please contact your branch to find out how you can help. The union makes us strong! 🤝

UCU Members: The Fighting Funding is for YOU!

"I can't afford to go on strike!" We've all heard it. But please don't let this stop you from joining us. The UCU has a national fighting fund which in previous strikes has paid up to £75 a day for up to 11 days to striking members: not a lot, but not nothing. We await news from national UCU as to whether this will be increased in the present dispute. To access the fighting fund after strike deductions have been made to your wages, google "UCU Fighting Fund" and click onto the application page (including terms and conditions) by logging in with your registered email and UCU membership number. You will need to upload a copy of your payslip which shows a deduction from your wages. Newcastle University payslips can be downloaded at <https://myapps.ncl.ac.uk>. If you need help with this, or your situation is a little more complicated, feel free to contact our branch (details overleaf). Newcastle Uni UCU also has its own local hardship fund specifically aimed at assisting those who may have more urgent needs. See our website for further details: <https://ncl.web.ucu.org/uk/>

Preparing for further strikes – get involved!

Strike Committee Report, Fri 3rd Feb 2023

- We will have **in-person and online drop-ins** for people with questions, and there will be an 'ask here' table (with a person able to answer) during the pickets. The first one will be Fri 10th Feb 10-11am on Zoom: <https://newcastleuniversity.zoom.us/j/87162807503>
More days / times will follow!
- **Fundraiser:** get in touch with ucu.office@ncl.ac.uk if you want to help out. We will have an afternoon/evening for students and staff, with music and hopefully some other unions will join us too!
- **Student-Staff Solidarity:** plans are underway for Q&A with students and a lecture to NUSU. Ideas for how to increase student-staff solidarity, please do tell us! Also check out the awesome Student-Staff Solidarity group on Instagram: @ncl.student.staff.solidarity
- **New members:** we have recruited a significant number of new members since November, which is great. We will welcome them via schools and reps, and make sure get familiar with what the union is and does, and how they can contribute.
- **Picket activities:** can you dance, sing, perform, do a play, do something creative? If you want to do this during a picket day, please feel free to do so. If you need things or people to support, get in touch!
- **Check your emails for details of next meeting**

