

The HE Worker is a bulletin produced by supporters of Workers' Liberty working in higher education. Workers' Liberty is a revolutionary socialist organisation, active in the trade union movement, fighting for a socialist alternative to capitalism and Stalinism.

## Support the rent strikes, and demand the government bails out Higher Education!

The emergence of the more virulent and deadly Covid-19 variant, soaring case numbers, hospitalisations and winter deaths have pushed back students' return to campus. The case for a major Government financial bailout of the HE sector is now more compelling than ever. And we need this soon.

The multiple stresses in the system are testing everyone. Staff were at breaking point before Christmas. Students at over 50 universities are organising rent strikes in protest at being forced to pay for accommodation and services they cannot use. Despite tensions between management pressures and the demands of the rent strikers, HE staff should engage with and support this movement. We are their most natural ally in the battle against marketisation.

Within our workplaces and union branches, we must make the case for staff-student solidarity and a Government bail-out to ensure the needs of students and staff aren't pitted against one another. Our goal is a fully publicly funded and free education service. We won't win that without building links and working with student activists. That means that we must get

involved with and support the student movement.

UCU at various levels have rightly supported the strikes, while so far the other main HE unions, Unison, Unite and GMB, are quiet. Their short-termist, sectional calculations are preventing them from finding and cultivating allies among the students, and from foregrounding what really matters: getting out of this pandemic as soon as possible, and protecting the jobs and livelihoods of those who work and study in universities.

University finances are being squeezed by the mounting costs of health and safety measures, reimbursing students, and income losses. They will try to shift losses on to staff in the form of pay freezes and cutting jobs and courses, which will also harm students.

The unions must unite with each other and with students to support those defending their jobs and disciplines. **Society has the resources to see off the pandemic and end the evils of inequality it has exposed: but we must first demand this and then organise to win it. We must unite the workers' and students' movements to win.**

*- A Uni of Nottingham Unison Activist*

## Safety at work: Use Section 44!

If something at work is not safe, if you believe that it places you or others in serious and imminent danger, then you have the right to not do it.

**You can leave a dangerous workplace, refuse to return to it, or take reasonable measures to protect yourself and others. Who says so? The law says so.**

This law was put to the test at the start of the year by the National Education Union with their No Return to

Unsafe Schools campaign. They forced a huge government U-turn on mass school re-opening. HE workers and unions can learn from this.

If management try to force HE workers back to work on unsafe campuses during this second wave, we too should consider how to collectivise Section 44 rights.

**Familiarise yourself with it. Talk with your workmates about it. Raise it in your union branch.**

More information here: [workersliberty/covid-action](https://workersliberty.org/covid-action)

Workers' Liberty members active in HE host regular online discussions, debate ideas and write on our blog. You can find out more about these by following the QR code, or visiting: [www.workersliberty.org/HE](https://www.workersliberty.org/HE)



# Staff-student solidarity & collective action to fight Covid cuts!

## McAnea elected Unison General Secretary

Establishment candidate Christine McAnea has won the Unison General Secretary election, on 47.7% of the vote. The combined votes of her three challengers, all ostensibly to her left, could have beaten her. Paul Holmes, who Workers' Liberty supported, proved to be a serious contender, getting 33.8%. [See the full break down here](#). Overall turnout,

8.9%, was once more scandalously low. NEC elections start soon but the left choice will not be obvious as Holmes and many of his supporters have quit the broad left Unison Action and are standing separately.

**We need a united left, that chooses its candidates democratically, or the right will continue to dominate the union and squander its enormous potential!**

## "UCU Commons": Few answers

Ahead of elections for the UCU National Executive Committee, supporters of General Secretary Jo Grady, have rebranded as 'UCU Commons'. [More here](#).

While in policy terms many of their values (on free education, equality and so forth) are very reasonable, the emphasis on UCU members as 'professionals' rather than workers draws an unnecessary line between academic and related staff, and administrators, cleaners and estates staff.

On strike action, their desire for 'clear and achievable' goals sounds like common sense, but all too often this type of rhetoric is used to undermine ambitious industrial action in favour of aiming low.

**Workers' Liberty activists in higher education believe in a rank-and-file, industrial trade unionism. We aim to smash the barriers that stop workers organising against our common enemies, and for militant grassroots-led activity. We believe in one union for HE staff and that the structures we build on campus should be driven by these core principles.**

## HE staff campaigns round-up

Across the UK, HE workers are responding to the pandemic with action. We need to increase their number, build their militancy, and link them up nationally. If we don't, the impact on us will be severe.

Strikes at Goldsmiths, Liverpool University and University of East London (UEL) are planned in response to mass redundancy announcements. Alongside work stoppages, more disruptive assessment boycotts are being discussed. Boycotts can offer staff greater leverage than picket lines when battling management. Tactics that maximise our bargaining position should be spread more widely, and especially those that fundamentally pose the question of where power lies in the workplace.

Cambridge UCU launched its recognition campaign this term, being just one of three public universities without recognised UCU branches. This has begun as a [petition](#), and we understand a public meeting and further action is being organised.

Unfortunately, Manchester Metropolitan were beaten by the anti-union 50% turnout threshold in their ballot over health and safety (just a dozen votes short). MMU activists now need to work out what action short of a strike can now be called. Workers' Liberty oppose all laws that curtail independent worker-led action. We support the [Free Our Unions campaign](#).

This is just a snap-shot of the activities that are happening in the UK. If there are campaigns building at your university, [let us know](#).

## Campaigning: Who's who?

Campaigns defending staff & students have sprung up throughout the pandemic. Here are just a few:

**Pandemic PGRs:** are organising to win funding extensions for PG students hit by reduced research time. See [@PandemicPGRs](#) for more.

**Unis Resist Border Controls:** campaigning against

hostile environment measures on campus, and supporting international students struggling with fees due to the pandemic. Find out more: [@UnisNotBorders](#), & [unisresistbordercontrols.org.uk](#)

**#CoronaContract:** fighting for contract extensions for casualised HE staff. [More linked here](#).

**UCU: Fund the Future:** national union campaign for HE funding & online-only teaching. [More linked here](#).

## Workers' Liberty Open Student Meetings!

School student, undergrad, masters, PhD? Join our student meetings, Mondays, 6-7PM. Zoom link here: [www.workersliberty.org/students](http://www.workersliberty.org/students)

**1 Feb** Labour under Starmer: fighting for socialism  
**8 Feb** 2010-2021: activist lessons for rent strikes  
**15 Feb** **Workers' Liberty student & HE staff meeting: Democratise the University!** [Join here](#).