

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.

## Stay online until it's safe, protect jobs, & bail out Higher Education!

For the first UK universities to open, the start of term has been the predictable shambles when it comes to so-called "Covid-security". St Andrews has asked its students to observe a "voluntary lockdown" for the weekend. Manchester Met has a cluster of cases on campus which have been linked by local media to a party in halls. Some students have been confined to their flats. In large areas of northern England bans on household mixing mean they are not allowed to visit friends' or parents' homes.

UCU has rightly called for all teaching that can be moved online to be moved online, but the financial pressure to get hall rents in has led management in the majority of institutions to insist they will do at least some face-to-face teaching. A small handful, including UCL and Birkbeck, have opted to be fully online - proving that it can be done. But the Government is also to blame here for its failure to provide a bail-out sufficient to cover the lost income (rents provide a much bigger percentage for some institutions) and for its insistence against all the evidence that people should get back to the office.

Management has often tried to justify the return to campus with claims that students want face-to-face teaching. But while staff are doing our best, discussion and small group work in enclosed spaces is high-risk and cannot be effectively delivered in its normal form with social distancing.

Already many US universities (which start term earlier) as well as Sciences Po in Paris have had to shut down campuses. The situation facing UK institutions is entirely predictable.

Campus union branches have been fighting running battles through the summer to ensure that management produce adequate health and safety policies to safeguard workers from the as-yet-unknown long-term impacts of Covid. There are varied tactics. Anglia Ruskin has declared a formal dispute, while some branches are holding off in favour of supporting members who cite Section 44.

We may quickly reach a point where the number of self-isolating staff and students makes an online switch inevitable. That could have been avoided. **The national campaign for online is a good start, but it needs to be backed up swiftly with a clear industrial strategy.**

## Stay safe 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! As we return to work during a pandemic that is well into its second spike, this right is more important than ever. **Familiarise yourself with it. Talk with your workmates about it. Raise it with your union branch.**

More information here:

<https://www.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](http://www.workersliberty.org/HE)



# Staff-student solidarity & collective workers' action in HE to fight Covid-cuts!

## In Unison? Support Paul Holmes!

Workers' Liberty activists in the Unison public services union, which also organises in HE, are supporting Paul Holmes in the coming general secretary election (ballot 28 Oct to 27 Nov). We urge

Holmes to demand prompt investigation by his employer into the (undisclosed) allegations on which it has suspended him, and by Unison into the (undisclosed, apparently different) allegations on which it too has suspended him.

**Campaign Twitter: @Paul4GenSec**

## National Cuts Round Up

The latest figures suggest the number of students attending university this year hasn't fallen nearly as much as was feared earlier in the summer. But it remains to be seen whether management will now hire back or replace all the staff whose contracts weren't renewed or who were made redundant.

Many universities and colleges have made major cuts to staffing in the past few months. At Portsmouth half the English Literature staff are facing redundancy. At Canterbury Christchurch staff have been put on short-time working at 80% of normal pay. Reading is trying to enforce a pay cut of between 5 and 15% across the board, with a threat

of 500 redundancies and a plan to fire and rehire staff. Liverpool John Moores have announced up to 150 redundancies, Bangor 200, and there are over 100 in the first 3 Cambridge colleges to announce (more are expected). Apart from the consequences for individual staff, these pay cuts represent a de facto breakdown of the national pay bargaining system that has up until now meant pay grades across institutions remained more-or-less comparable. Sheffield also tried to introduce a fire and rehire staff, but withdrew it after the A Level fiasco led to better-than-expected student numbers.

**We need all HE unions to organise nationally coordinated campaigns to confront these cuts and bring local disputes together.**

## Fighting Cuts at Goldsmiths!

The dispute at Goldsmiths over cuts, including potentially huge reductions in staff, continues to develop.

Immediate issues are over treatment of staff on Fixed Term contracts including Associate Lecturers and others. Many have in recent weeks been invited to "end of contract" or "non-renewal" meetings. Others are still awaiting to hear their fate. Many of these lecturers are disproportionately female and from Black, Asian and ethnic minority backgrounds.

Other issues have been the non-replacement of staff who have taken voluntary redundancy and reduced hours to staff with caring responsibilities in exchange for a pay cut.

Staff numbers are reducing but workload has not. The branch has launched a campaign, "I Object" which argues that remaining staff, as the cuts are made, will suffer an unacceptable increase in workload. The campaign urges staff to tell managers they do not intend to work on jobs previously allocated to others; the branch is using Equalities and Health and Safety as grounds for objections.

**It is to be hoped that the campaign can build essential solidarity and awareness around the college as the broader dispute is escalated.**

More can be found on this here:

<https://goldsmithsucu.org/2020/08/25/i-object-say-no-list/>

## Workers' Liberty 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)

Mon 28 Sep Solidarity with the Hong Kong Protests!  
Mon 5 Oct Class struggle and the pandemic  
Mon 12 Oct Fighting university cuts

Mon 19 Oct Marxism, racism and the police  
Mon 26 Oct The Russian revolution: what happened and why does it matter?  
Mon 2 Nov What is socialism?  
Mon 9 Nov The fight for trans rights  
Mon 16 Nov The alt-right and how to fight it  
Mon 23 Nov Solidarity with the Uyghurs!  
Mon 30 Nov Why socialist feminism?  
Mon 7 Dec: Class struggle environmentalism