

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.

Lower workload, improve Health & Safety: Demands for Higher Education unions!

Lockdown 2 has begun with universities subject to ambiguous government guidance. On the one hand they are expected to stay 'open' (not that they ever closed, but instead put in enormous effort to deliver teaching online). On the other they are told 'to consider moving to increased levels of online learning where possible'. In an outrageous piece of interference with universities' autonomy, Michelle Donelan, the minister responsible, then announced that in-person provision should continue, with no regard for whether that was the best solution from the point of view of pedagogy or public health.

Meanwhile many students have understandably ignored the government guidance and voted with their feet, opting to return to parents' homes and study online. Besides the Covid rules, hanging over students' heads is the threat of being made to repay part of their student loan, which is higher for those who live away from parents/guardians. The government ought to be making it clear that repayments will not be required from those who opt for online study during the pandemic, but instead they are doing everything they can to avoid bail-outs

for universities and to protect the interests of property investors who want to keep student rents.

At a national level UCU has run an impressive media campaign for online teaching, but it has been a struggle to back that up with local action. Some UCU branches have successfully pushed for the national position that all teaching that can go online should (in line, as we now know, with SAGE's advice in September). But many university staff have been forced to continue with in-person provision. Others still face intransigent managers, although there is evidently an element of guerrilla action with some staff and indeed whole departments switching extra components online unofficially. Several UCU branches have already initiated formal disputes, but ballot results will come too late to force a switch before Christmas.

The focus now shifts to what happens over the break and in January. Two large migrations of students away and then back to university risks making the Covid situation substantially worse. The national union needs to start an industrial campaign now of ballots on workload and health and safety to force the safer option of online where possible in January.

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



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

Unison Member? Vote 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](https://twitter.com/Paul4GenSec)

HE workers: In the fight together

HE institutions employ a huge range of workers on very varied terms of employment and pay rates: from eminent professors to casually employed teachers, from service directors to admin and library assistants, from IT technicians to maintenance, grounds and catering staff. And we are represented by a variety of unions.

Where I work, low paid cleaning workers represented by Unison benefited from the support of better-off academics represented by UCU when we organised a living wage campaign together (not forgetting the contribution of many students). We had a partial victory: the uni agreed to pay the Voluntary Living Wage although not to join the Living Wage Foundation.

Unison repaid the favour when UCU were on strike in 2018-2020, donating to the strike fund, not covering UCU work, visiting picket lines... but hold on a minute! Visiting picket lines? Why weren't we organising our own strikes around our own members' pressing needs? Why didn't we organise a joint strike with UCU that could bring management to its knees?

Unison like every union has its own internal dynamics, strengths and weaknesses. The fact is we

are not as well organised in HE workplaces as UCU. This creates problems not just for Unison but for UCU. UCU are currently campaigning for online teaching only. But Unison worries that if all teaching goes online, and especially if students leave the campuses, many of their members - catering and halls staff primarily - might lose their jobs. Unison is torn; lacking confidence in its own ability to defend jobs, it fails to support the demand that protects everyone's safety!

The tensions between the interests of different unions - different groups of workers - can only be eased and ultimately eradicated through building the strength of all unions together. We must support each other in our separate struggles but also campaign for common goals. No to job insecurity and casualisation, outsourcing, and discrimination!

Yes to high health and safety standards, good facilities and amenities, decent pay and pensions, and respect for our unions! Activists should not compete or pursue sectional interests but cooperate, for we are ultimately parts of one working class that stands or falls together.

By a Unison Activist in Nottingham

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. [@PandemicPGRs](https://twitter.com/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](https://twitter.com/UnisNotBorders), & [unisresistbordercontrols.org.uk](https://www.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 Student Meetings!

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

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| 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 |