



Joint UCU-Unite Press Release

14 March 2023

Workforce at Queen's University to take strike action to defend pay and pensions

UCU striking on 15th and 16th March, Unite the union on 16th March

Both Unite and UCU at QUB are set to take further strike action at Queen's University as part of their ongoing industrial dispute with management over fair and equitable pay, pensions, and precarious employment practices. The strike action follows ballots held by both Unite and UCU at QUB which provided a strong mandate for industrial action up to and including strike action at Queen's.

The UCU action is to continue on the 20th, 21st and 22nd of March and the union has action short of a strike in force continuously. Unite's strike action is also set to continue with further strike dates identified in April.

Professor Sean O'Connell, President of the UCU at Queen's said,

“UCU QUB members welcome the opportunity presented on March 15th to take industrial action in tandem with workers in a variety of other sectors. Like so many others, university staff have seen real earnings plummet by over 25% in the past decade. University senior managers have recently imposed a further real terms pay cut that will bring that pay decline to approximately 30%.

“The decline in our pay has been accompanied by soaring financial reserves in the UK higher education sector. Queen's has financial reserves of over £700m and the sector as a whole has billions in reserve. The money is there to provide a REAL pay increase to university staff and we will continue taking action until the university vice chancellors make that happen.”

Unite Regional Officer Joanne McWilliams called on management to deliver a pay increase for her union's members, which includes large numbers of administrative, library, technician and bar staff at the university.

“Despite the fact that Queen's has huge and growing financial reserves, it remains a low-pay employer. Many of our members working for the University are on pay rates at or little above the minimum wage. In a recent survey of our members at Queen's, one in five said that they had been forced into reliance on food banks. This is just not acceptable.

“The offer on the table is considerably below the current rate of inflation and offers no protection for the lowest paid in what is the worst cost of living crisis



in decades. The size of the increase for those at the bottom of the pay scale is less than half that at the top. Our members are determined to win a decent pay increase and respect from this employer.”

Professor John Barry, also of UCU at QUB said,

“I have been forced to take strike action by an intransigent management that refuses to stop stealing pensions, which are deferred wages, or offering us below inflation pay rises, end employing people on precarious contracts, invest in staff to reduce workloads and end the gender, race, and disability pay gaps in the sector.

“Since 2009 our wages have been cut by 25%, yet QUB, along with other universities have enjoyed substantial yearly surpluses. Our working conditions are our students' learning conditions.

“Those working in UK Higher Education and not yet a member of a union should consider joining us. ‘The larger the picket the shorter the strike’ and the greater the chances of improvements to our pay and working conditions.”

ENDS...

For further information or an interview, contact UCU at QUB email either UCU-Officers@qub.ac.uk or s.oconnell@qub.ac.uk; or contact Donal O’Cofaigh, Unite Campaigns, Communications & Press (NI), tel. 07810 157926