

# UK lecturers and students speak as higher education strike enters second week

Our reporters  
21 February 2022

*World Socialist Web Site* reporters spoke with strikers yesterday and distributed the statement, “UK university workers begin strikes against attacks on pensions, pay and conditions—Unite education workers and students! Build rank and file committees!”

## University of Leeds

**Angela**, who teaches academic English to postgraduate international students, said higher education workers are striking because “Workloads increased massively [during the pandemic] and this hasn’t been taken into account. Last year we didn’t get a pay rise at all. Our main concern is for younger staff and those that are casualised. The marketisation of the universities is having a massive impact and this university is not going in the right direction.”

She added, “The pandemic has had an impact on our struggle as colleagues who were out in [spring] 2020 against pension cuts aren’t out now. There is a [government] narrative that students have suffered, and that narrative has been used against us. There are lots of students who are sympathetic to us.”

**Gabriella** teaches in the School of Business. Asked why university workers were striking she said, “People know it is probably the last chance to stop the cuts for this pension scheme ... The cost-of-living crisis means people are worried about losing pay by going on strike but they are also worried that ultimately the amount of money we would lose if we don’t go on strike is higher.”

She said, “I think the marketisation of higher education is the biggest part of the picture of what we are fighting against and that’s why we should find solidarity with the students because they are those paying the cost of this marketisation...”

“Students can get loans but then they have to pay this back when they are working, so this is another form of

disciplining the working class. This is a system that is not sustainable. We are becoming more and more like a private institution and so this is incredibly dangerous. It changes the relationship with our students and changes the quality of any discussion about education.”

## Sheffield Hallam University

**John**, a lecturer, said, “I’m picketing today over the main issues of casualisation, increasing workloads, inequality and low pay.”

“This affects the whole Higher Education (HE) sector. For example, at the University of Sheffield (TUOS) they’re on strike over massive cuts to their pensions. If I was working over there, my annual pension would have fallen by about a third ... They’re cutting it for ideological reasons because they want everyone on a private pension...”

“Other universities were out last week, and we weren’t because we’re not in the same pension scheme, we’re on the Teachers’ Pension Scheme (TPS) because of the separate history of polytechnic institutions. It’s one big struggle, it’s not two struggles.”

“There’s the same issue over contributions to the teachers’ pension. They’re threatened with being fired-and-rehired on contracts where the schools trust doesn’t have to contribute to the pension fund anymore. It’s disgusting.”

“We do this job out of a sense of duty and to make a difference, not because we want to make lots of money. We have the deferred gratification of knowing that we should have a decent pension when we retire. When they take that away, who’d want to do this job? Many colleagues are considering leaving the profession.”

“We’re seeing undergraduate numbers drop because more prestigious universities, for example the University of Sheffield, take them on, but they don’t

have the resources to service these students. We've got the resources, but they're taking them on. So, they have to take on lecturers who haven't taught the topics before. It's not focussing on quality, or thinking about the next generation, or the wider social benefits.

"We thought there'd be a longer-term plan rather than throwing everything to the market. Marketisation causes disorganisation across the sector. Everything is chaotic because they're following the drive for money, they want to keep money coming in. They need money because they're taking on lots of new buildings.

"This disorganisation and chaos causes us real stress. If I manage to get a good night's sleep two nights a week, I'm lucky. We're told to redesign modules as resources are constantly cut. We need good organisation to focus on quality, not the production of a mass-market commodity."

Speaking about the divisive role of the National Union of Students, John said, "At this university, the National Union of Students is against the strike. The students' union has pretty much been taken over by management. They don't support the strike but advise students how to work around it."

### **Glasgow University**

**Diarmaid Kelliher**, a human geography lecturer, said, "We have two separate disputes, one of them pensions. There are very significant cuts to our pensions. The other dispute, what we call the Four Fights dispute, is about pay, equality, workload, casualisation. So, there are two separate things there, but they are interconnected as part of general attacks on our pay and conditions...

"There's that then there are all the equality issues. There are a huge amount of people on insecure, fixed term contracts."

Asked his thoughts on the University and College Union's efforts to keep the disputes separate, Diarmaid replied, "We have struck over them simultaneously and repeatedly, so it's not like we view them as entirely separate things, but it is difficult. It's not just that there are different institutions, some institutions are going to go on strike over one thing, and they are not going to go on strike for another ... There are also different employers' organisations and negotiation mechanisms. We are all employed by different people. It is important to keep those disputes linked and link these to broader arguments about how cuts in pensions are cuts in

deferred wages."

On the pandemic, he replied, "People like being able to teach people in person. But obviously there are health and safety issues ... Universities were saying you can do teaching in person, or you can do it online. Now they are saying you can do it in person *and* online, *you can double your workload*. There is no consideration.

"I think it is really important to make sure that people who need to work from home can do so, and also that there are mechanisms to monitor the effect on workload. It has been really terrible for people with care responsibilities, these have rocketed during the pandemic".

**Evans**, a student, was on the picket line supporting the lecturer's strike. He said, "The strike is something that affects many people. It's necessary to stand in solidarity, to try not to be selfish, to think of others, to care for their future and your future. It will affect you; you have got to keep that in mind."

Asked his thought on the growing war danger in Europe, Evan said, "It is being inflated, it is being exaggerated by the West, trying to sell weapons and hype up another war. The arms companies are demanding a new source of income after the end of the Afghan war. They have decided that the new source will be Ukraine. They are just hyping up a war that is very unlikely to happen. Russia doesn't have much of a reason to invade."

WSWS reporters explained that the major NATO powers were seeking the eventual carve up of Russia. He replied, "Yes, they have a lot of natural gas, oil and a lot of untapped resources in Siberia, so they are definitely wanting to carve up Russia for those reasons. I don't agree with Russia personally, but they are not the bad guys in this situation."



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**