

UK University and College Union presides over 10 percent pay cut at Sheffield's private college

Our reporter
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After months of the union's obfuscation, the last-minute suspension of strikes and repeatedly downgrading workers' expectations and wage demands, members of the University and College Union (UCU) at the University of Sheffield International College (USIC) voted to accept the latest derisory offer made by Study Group.

Around 80 educators at USIC became the very first to stage a strike at a private higher education provider in the UK last November with three days of stoppages.

On an 85 percent turnout of UCU members, 68 percent voted to accept the employer's offer with 32 percent rejecting. The deal struck with the connivance of the UCU means the workforce will receive, for the 2022/23 academic year:

- ? 3 percent payable from September 1, 2022
- ? 2 percent for staff earning less than £44,000 p/a, payable from January 1, 2023
- ? 1 percent for all staff payable from January 1, 2023

For the 2023/24 Academic Year:

- ? 4 percent for all staff, payable from September 1, 2023.

The pay settlement over two years means just 10 percent for staff earning less than £44,000 per year and 8 percent for staff earning more than £44,000.

The vote to accept comes after the union suspended five days of strike action due to begin February 13 to ballot on the revised pay offer.

USIC UCU's Twitter account stated shamefacedly February 21, "Branch negotiators have not made binary recommendation on this offer. We acknowledge this is still a real terms pay cut, but that employer has moved significantly as a result of strikes. We have stressed

more strike action will be required to win further improvement."

UCU's emphasis from the start has been on preventing a broader struggle emerging in the private education sector and merging with that of educators at other UK universities, further education colleges and schools.

Study Group has the measure of the UCU's conciliatory tactics and has shifted very little over the course of the dispute—a couple of percentage points. The deal designed and suggested to management by the union represents nothing short of a disastrous ten percent pay cut over the next 24 months. Rather than pressuring management for concessions to the workers, the UCU has pressured the workforce to grant concessions to the corporation. It was the UCU's idea to press for a two-year deal that was eventually adopted by Study Group.

USIC educators rejected a 5 percent offer from Study Group in October and returned an 84 percent majority for strike action. Yet come the new year and two brief strikes, and the union returns to the workforce with another de facto pay cut.

The sellout by the UCU at the USIC came at the same time as the union at the national level suspended the remaining seven days of national strike action scheduled for February over pay, working conditions and pensions. The national strike involved 70,000 lecturers and other university workers at all 150 higher education (HE) institutions in Britain.

The UCU's original 13.7 percent pay demand for HE members nationally has long since been surrendered. USIC UCU members initially called for a 12 percent pay rise, which was immediately downgraded by union

representatives to a more “reasonable” nine percent, then to eight percent and finally to 10 percent across this year and next.

The UCU’s shutting down strikes is only the latest example of the trade union bureaucracy’s suppression of the class struggle and rank betrayal of their members’ interests after months of strikes that began last summer. This includes the sell-out of 40,000 BT workers in December. UCU leader Jo Grady is a leading figure in the “Enough is Enough” campaign, established to provide a left fig leaf for a union bureaucracy overseeing defeats of the working class.

On the USIC picket lines earlier in the year, full-time lecturers and those on short-term contracts stood together with homemade placards refuting the claim that a cost-of-living increase was unaffordable. These showed graphs of the salaries of senior Study Group managers, with the number on more than £100,000 a year trebling in the past years and director positions advertised for up to £130,000. Study Group management and the UCU union leaders both occupy this income bracket.

Meanwhile the starting rate for a full-time lecturer at USIC is approximately £32,000, well below the national average of £38,131. Office and support staff are recruited at full-time rates barely above the minimum wage.



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