

Bradford University strike: Campus staff resist job cuts and course closures under “Transformational Change” plan

Barry Mason
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A five-day strike by University and College Union (UCU) members at the University of Bradford, in West Yorkshire, ended July 25. The stoppage was part of escalating opposition to the university’s targeting hundreds of jobs and entire academic departments. Its “Transformational Change Program” (TCP) involves £16 million worth of cost-cutting, halving the number of faculties from four to just two.

The UCU branch voted for strike action in May, by a 67 percent majority on a turnout of 57 percent. A UCU press release on May 28 warned that 230 professional services staff and over 90 academic posts were already under threat, with more than 200 additional academic roles expected to follow. At an all-staff meeting, the university’s chief financial officer confirmed the aim was to cut staffing to 2019 levels—amounting to around 300 full-time equivalents, and over 300 total staff once part-time roles are included.

Departments set for closure include Chemistry and Film & Television, with deep cuts also looming in Archaeology, Biomedical Sciences, Engineering, Pharmacy and Peace Studies.

The assault on Bradford’s Chemistry department is part of a broader offensive across UK universities. An April 1 article in *Chemistry World*, the magazine of the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC), reported the proposed closures and noted similar developments at Aston University and the University of Hull, which both announced last year that they would end their chemistry courses.

Toby Underwood, head of professional standards at the RSC, condemned the short-termism behind such decisions. He pointed to RSC research showing that “the growth of jobs in chemistry is expected to outstrip that of the wider UK workforce by 30 percent over the next decade,” and that chemical sciences are “eight times more likely to look for green skills than the UK average.” He warned, “The cutting of entire departments will have long-term ramifications for our economy and society at large.”

The Film & Television department, with around 400

undergraduate and postgraduate students, is one of the largest in the country. It houses *Bradford City of Film*, a project recognised by UNESCO for celebrating the city’s rich film history and industry links. Courses at the department are supported by a unique partnership with the National Media Museum. This act of vandalism, shuttering courses that contribute to cultural life, is a bitter irony with Bradford awarded “City of Culture” status for 2025.

UCU suspends action, management digs in

UCU members voted for a 10-day programme of industrial action. The first walkout was held on June 30, with four more planned for July 7, 8, 10 and 11. These were suspended to allow for talks with university management which proved worthless. The five-day strike was held July 21-25, with a lobby of the university council meeting on July 23.

But the UCU is conducting a war of attrition against its own members. This was confirmed at an emergency general meeting (EGM) of the Bradford UCU branch on July 17, called to “update” members on the TCP and associated talks, after the previous four days of action were suspended. A UCU report from the meeting stated, “Negotiators were clear that management had failed to respond positively to UCU demands despite their being given the time and space to do so by the branch (postponement of 4 days of action).” Management rejected even an extension of the voluntary redundancy (VR) scheme and had provided only “limited and inadequate financial information.”

Yet even with management even refusing to extend the VR scheme, the report merely concluded that “further escalation may be necessary,” with another EGM to consider strike action coinciding with the start of term.

The UCU is smothering all opposition to the jobs cull and department closures, resting on the caveat that job losses are acceptable so long as they are not compulsory. Ahead of the first walkout, UCU General Secretary Jo Grady declared, “Bradford staff have no choice but to down tools because they refuse to see important courses cut, jobs axed, and staff and students pay the price for management’s financial failings. The vice-chancellor now needs to extend the consultation period and rule out compulsory redundancies. If she refuses to do so, there will be sustained disruption on campus.”

The events at Bradford are part of a broader offensive against Higher Education in Britain, with 10,000 jobs threatened nationally at half of all institutions, driven by austerity, marketisation and profit. Universities across the country are imposing brutal cuts to courses and staffing levels, with or without formal redundancy programmes. The UCU branch at Queen Mary University of London compiles a live record of the nationwide cull under the heading *UK HE Shrinking*. It reports on “All the redundancies, restructures, reorganisations, and closures taking place across the UK Higher Education (UKHE) sector.”

It notes, “Many universities are shrinking staff by not renewing fixed-term contracts, reducing hours of fractional contracts, or failing to implement agreed pay rises. These cuts are not as visible but are equally impactful, reducing programmes, stretching remaining staff, and delaying support for students.”

Its latest post, updated July 21, listed the following cuts over the previous two weeks:

- Aberdeen: Extended severance scheme
- Anglia Ruskin: £4.3 million cuts, 80 full-time equivalent (FTE) posts at risk
- Birmingham City: Up to 340 redundancies
- Bradford: Threatening compulsory redundancies
- Bristol: 45 jobs at risk
- De Montfort: 80 job cuts, fire-and-rehire strategy
- Derby: Merging four colleges into two
- Goldsmiths: Another voluntary severance round
- Greenwich: 300 jobs threatened
- Hertfordshire: Compulsory redundancies underway
- Lancaster: 400 FTE posts to be cut, 50 already lost to VS
 - Leicester: Plans to shut departments of languages, chemistry, and education
 - Loughborough: Half of Research Development Managers at risk
 - Newcastle: Averted compulsory redundancies
 - UEA: Again facing job threats

This wave of cuts nationally is being overseen by the Labour government of Keir Starmer. As in the National Health Service, rail, postal and local government services,

Labour is enforcing drastic cost-cutting and bleeding out public services to funnel more wealth into the hands of the oligarchy and billions into the coffers of rearmament and war.

While university staff responsible for teaching, research, and student support are told to accept job losses and “efficiencies,” the total remuneration package for Professor Shirley Congdon, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Bradford, is £293,000—placing her in the top 1 percent of income earners in the UK.

This obscene disparity between academic and support staff and senior executives is replicated across the higher education sector.

Break the isolation imposed by UCU officials: build rank-and-file committees

The UCU is salami slicing opposition, reducing it down to local disputes and is enabling the job losses through “consultation” with management, under the fig leaf of avoiding compulsory redundancies. This serves only to entrench an endless round of cuts, with wave after wave of betrayal. The UCU sold out national action over pensions, pay and conditions during the 2022–24 strike wave. It has proven time and again it will not lead a real fight to defend higher education.

To defeat the Transformational Change Program and the broader attack on higher education, workers must take the struggle out of the hands of the Grady led bureaucracy. This requires the formation of rank-and-file committees—democratic organisations of struggle that unify university staff and students across campuses, linking with workers in other sectors facing the same onslaught.

What’s needed is not polite appeals for consultation used to smooth the way for cuts, but a determined, coordinated **fight to defend education as a social right**, including the abolition of tuition fees, full public funding, and the overthrow of a system that subordinates learning and research to corporate interest and profit. That fight must be armed with a socialist programme and led by new organisations of class struggle.



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