

# Striking Further Education workers speak from the picket line at London college

Our reporters  
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*World Socialist Web Site* reporters spoke with picketing educators outside the Working Men's College in Camden, London during this week's Further Education (FE) strike in England. Workers at 17 FE colleges began a three-day walkout on Wednesday.

**Louise**, a tutor in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), told us that she was on strike not only for pay, but to stand with her colleagues: "I'm a salaried member of staff so I get paid in the holidays, but there are other members of staff who are ESOL tutors that are sessional [hourly paid] so they don't get paid."

Around 80 percent of tutors at the college are sessional and many "really want to be salaried, so I think that as part of the strike we should also be protesting about that. In further education everybody should be salaried."

"There are many teachers that have worked here for several years that are still sessional so that means they don't get the same pay as salaried staff."

"Also, I'm out striking because the ESOL department where I work, there are fewer ESOL classes now because the government has cut the funding for adult education."

Last year local authorities were told by the Labour government to cut 2 to 3 percent from their adult skills funding. According to *FE Week* the cuts for the 2025-26 academic year totalled around £30 million, after years of real-terms cuts.

Another tutor, **Amanda**, spoke about the impact of these cuts to adult education. Out of only a few hundred tutors "we've lost 15 members of staff through voluntary redundancy and a couple more through compulsory redundancy."

In ESOL "they've had to close some classes." Before the redundancies last year there were around 600

learners, which has gone down to around 500. She continued, "unless we get more money from either the mayor's office or central government, we're going to lose staff and students in courses."

Amanda pointed out that the economy lost £480 million every week due to low adult numeracy, so in the long run, "if you fund people's education, you're going to save money."

**Kara**, an ESOL tutor, told us that adult education "has really suffered more than almost any area."

She explained that FE workers are already struggling with the cost of living, yet "we've had no pay increase this year at all. Instead, we were offered some extra days of holiday. But actually, you know, bills are going up, my rent is going up, everything is going up and we need our wages to go up at the same time."

Kara told us that "the government talks about getting people into work, the government talks about lowering the money they spend on benefits, the government talks about integrating migrants into society, the government talks about having a more cohesive society. And I think all these things are things that colleges like ours actually really support. Colleges like this often attract learners that maybe are sort of more on the margins of society and coming to a college like this can be also the first step in helping them to develop their confidence which, you know, is the first step towards employment."

She said adult education is central to the community, since "in addition to all the classes that we have which obviously directly support people with employment, we offer loads of services, extra services also with getting into employment, with employability coaching and all this stuff. So, when the government talks about that being a priority and at the same time is cutting adult education, which is what is going to help people get

there, it doesn't make sense to me, it's short sighted."

Another worker in the ESOL department saw "ever-increasing waiting lists for classes; it's really high demand. Everybody agrees it's an important skill for people to have. People need ESOL but they're not matching the demand with the funding we need; we just keep seeing our funding go down so we're able to put on fewer classes and that means more and more learners going on the waiting list."

Pickets did not believe Prime Minister Keir Starmer's promise to "have a look" at the pay gap between colleges staff and school teachers.

One striker said, "What I'm seeing is a lot of anti-immigration rhetoric coming from the Labour government that seems to be quite in line with what we've heard from Reform and the Conservatives. I don't hear any emphasis on the importance of ESOL for integration and the positive case for ESOL. All I'm hearing from the government is what they perceive as the negative sides of immigration."

If migrants learn English "that would benefit everyone, that would mean they're more likely to get a job, more likely to integrate in the community."

"It just doesn't make any sense to me to be on one hand complaining about the perceived problem of have too many migrants here and then also slashing the funding to things like ESOL which would actually help people integrate better."

Strikers saw the dispute as one not just with the college, but with the government. One said, "The government needs to step up and give us the funding we need so that we can take care of our staff and also be able to meet the demand of the community. We're here to serve the community and we're not able to meet the demand at the moment."

Cutting education is "a case of the wrong priorities." It's "especially disappointing that they say there's not the money, they say we need growth and *then* we can invest in public services, but suddenly they're able to produce huge amounts of funding for things like defence. It doesn't really square up, it doesn't make sense to me."



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