

## **Kingston UCU members vote for industrial action: 70% vote to strike, 92% for action short of a strike, on a 60% turnout**

**WE'RE AT  
BREAKING  
POINT**

### **Branch Meeting: 1pm Wed 10th November.**

We will hold a **branch meeting** this week to discuss these results and the next steps. The meeting will be on Zoom at **1pm on Wednesday 10th November**. Members should check their inboxes for the link.

We've been asked to discuss proposals for: a day of strike action this month, and an aggregated reballot of all branches in the new year with a view to taking industrial action across all universities in the spring. The General Secretary has also recommended focusing the Four Fights campaign on casualisation. We can also discuss ideas for action short of a strike.

The feedback from our meeting will go to a branch delegates meeting on Friday 12th November to inform the decisions of the Higher Education committee as to what action to take. UCU is a democratic organisation - make sure your voice helps set our national policy as a union by coming to this meeting.

Kingston UCU branch smashed the anti-union 50% minimum threshold brought in by Conservative government in 2016, with a significant turnout of 60.1% of members voting in the national [Four Fights ballot](#) over unsafe workloads, pay deflation, casualisation and pay injustice. In just three short weeks, department contacts, activists and branch committee members worked tirelessly to talk to colleagues and get the vote out, signing up many new members in the process.

**70.4% voted in favour of taking strike action and 92% voted in favour of taking action short of a strike.** Nearly twice as many members voted this time than in the last ballot in 2019 (when Kingston had a turnout of 32%).

**This vote sends a loud and clear message.** Kingston staff have had enough of shrinking pay, and growing gender, ethnicity and disability pay gaps. Kingston staff have had enough of ever-expanding, unsustainable workloads damaging our physical and mental health, and the number of us stuck on insecure hourly-paid, fixed-term and zero-hours contracts, never knowing if we'll have a job the coming year and waiting months to be paid when we do get a contract.

**Kingston staff have had enough** of being ignored, taken for granted and treated as disposable.

In the middle of a global pandemic we went above and beyond to support our students, continue our research, and rapidly switch to online and blended delivery and working from home. We were rewarded by senior management with senseless [course closures and job losses](#), massively increased workloads, invisible leadership and lack of a coherent strategic direction beyond further threats to cut courses and jobs under the auspices of [KU22+](#). No amount of Wellbeing Wednesdays will make good this assault on our working conditions, professional lives, personal circumstances and family relationships, or address the root workplace causes of our deteriorating mental health.

**Staff do not vote for industrial action lightly.** Losing pay through strike action will have an impact when many of us are already struggling to cover the rising cost of living. But clearly **we are at breaking point**, and the same is the case across the sector. Nationally, 70% voted for taking strike action, and 85% action short of a strike on an overall turnout of 51%. 54 out of 146 passed their individual thresholds for the vote to count, but if it had been aggregated (rather than disaggregated branch by branch) members at all 146 universities could have taken coordinated industrial action.

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## It is now up to our employers to address these concerns and avoid strikes

On the other dispute over USS pensions held at pre-1992 institutions, 76% voted for action on a 53% turnout, with 37 out of 68 branches passing the threshold. In both ballots, several branches were short by just a few (even as little as 1 or 2) votes.

**It is now up to the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) to avoid strike action having to take place.** Kingston University can use its voice in the UCEA to make sure they come back to the negotiating table with a decent pay offer (rather than another real-terms pay cut) and concrete, nationally-agreed, time-specific actions to reduce workloads, close the pay gaps, and eliminate the use of casual contracts.

In the [last letter from the Chief Executive of the UCEA](#) laying out preconditions for negotiation there was not a single mention of casualisation, insecurity, or the zero hours or hourly-paid contracts which affect 1/3 of academic staff in HE (c. 75,000 people). Facing further strike action and action short of a strike, including at places like Kingston who didn't make the threshold last time, puts the pressure on them to change course.

### Kingston senior management can also take independent steps to address staff concerns NOW:

- They can immediately reinstate suspended undergraduate Politics courses.

- They can retract threats in the KU22+ plan to 'eliminate' even more courses and commit to no redundancies as part of it.

- They can meaningfully consult and negotiate with us over issues of workload, casualisation and inequality rather than continuing to ignore us, drawing on the experience of their own staff on the front line rather than wasting money on dodgy data from external consultants.

- They could instantly lift the years-long moratorium on HPL conversion, and make sure all staff relied on year upon year to deliver teaching, research and professional services are on permanent contracts with access to full employment benefits and career development.

At the very least the VC could deign to attend Joint Negotiating and Consultative (JNCC) meetings as per our formal Trade Union Recognition Agreement.

The situation of deteriorating working conditions and growing job insecurity we currently face is unsustainable.

As the [National Union of Students have stated](#), it affects the support we are able to give students, the quality of their learning and the wider student experience. **Our working conditions are students' learning conditions.** We are fighting to be able to do our jobs, teaching, research and professional work, the best we can. We are fighting for a better education system, where students are not taught by staff who are overworked, insecure, sick with stress, and looking to leave.

### We are fighting for the future of higher education.

We need all members actively involved. If it comes to strike action and/or action short of a strike, we need our branch to be even more organised than in the get the vote out campaign. We need more departmental contacts, people to sit on strike committees, people on campus and digital pickets, people involved in social media campaigning, and people to run teach-outs and events. See below.



### Your branch, your union!

With industrial action potentially imminent it is crucial for Kingston members to get involved. The branch is only as strong as its members are active. There are many ways to participate, and even small-scale actions make a difference:

- Come to branch meetings
- Sign up to the branch [discussion list](#) (personal email recommended)
- Be a departmental contact (see notice right)
- Become a [KU UCU Rep](#) (training and work time allocation available)
- Share your skills and time! Your help is needed with publicity, research, events organisation, education, design...
- Talk to colleagues in your department about branch activity, and encourage them to [join the union](#).

### Departmental Contacts Needed!

To fight back together against attacks on jobs and conditions we need to ensure all members know what's going on across the university and can make their voices heard. Kingston UCU are looking for departmental contacts to: share branch publicity, feed local issues to the wider branch; and invite new staff to join. If interested, email [kingstonucu@gmail.com](mailto:kingstonucu@gmail.com) and/or Comms Officer Maggie Gray.

### Staying in touch

Email: [kingstonucu@gmail.com](mailto:kingstonucu@gmail.com)  
Website: [kingston.web.ucu.org.uk](http://kingston.web.ucu.org.uk)  
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