

Day one of the strike with physical and virtual picket lines
**Colleagues, students and politicians
in solidarity with striking LUCU**

Mobile billboards took the slogans of the protest all around Leicester



Numerous UCU branches and individual academics took to the social media and expressed their solidarity with the staff of the University of Leicester who, on Wednesday 9 June, started a three-day strike protesting against compulsory redundancies that they deem unfair and unnecessary. Students and local officials showed up at the picket lines, also expressing their solidarity and asking University management to rethink the issue, show good will and negotiate on it.

Leicester City Councillor **Gary O'Donnell** spoke to the striking staff telling them: "The University is you; it's the staff. And that staff is what makes it a great place. I have been a trade unionist working in the textile industry, so I have been in factories where there were terrible conditions. Still, those managers were fairer than your managers here. This is an institution that we should be proud of in Leicester. We shouldn't think that, every time it's going to do something, the people who bear the burden of it are its workforce. It's a tough time, we all know that. But that's about negotiating to get the best solution, not imposing solutions involving getting rid of researchers, lecturers and support staff. So, I am one hundred percent supporting your struggle, and I'm going to take a resolution to Leicester City Council proposing to get support from the Council to you and your struggle."

A **spokesperson of Leicester UCU** commented on University management claims that only 26 staff are made redundant out of 60 that was previously planned. "This is not true. The real impact of this redundancy processes has been much greater. At least 115 staff have left the University since January, pressured to accept 'voluntary' redundancy or having resigned in disgust at what was happening. We cannot afford to lose another 26 valued col-

leagues, when staff morale is in such need of repair. In these circumstances, no one is redundant."

The spokesperson also responded to the University management's scaremongering of students with comments about the strike being a threat to their timely graduation. "We are all very concerned for students whose graduation may be affected by this dispute, especially after it has been such a difficult year for all of us. What I would say to students is that the solution to this is in the hands of the executive board of the University: it is the executive board who have been making decisions about cutting staff that have and **will affect students for much longer**, and it is the executive board who need to start negotiating to resolve this dispute."

It should be noted that **students** were not convinced by the management's propaganda and they very well understand who the real responsible for the current unstable situation is. This becomes obvious, as the [Leicester Student Magazine](#) has explicitly referred to the students' point of view, which is that University management "has been held directly responsible by students for their potential disrupted education, following the proposed staff strikes".

An interesting note to the protest was given by two vans carrying digital billboards with the slogans of the strike all around the city of Leicester.

The strike continues on Thursday 10 June and Friday 11 June, with the latter including a joint virtual rally of Leicester UCU with their colleagues from the University of Liverpool, who are also currently on strike. Top UCU officials and Leicester MPs have confirmed their participation in the rally.

DAY TWO - 'GOVERNANCE THURSDAY' STRIKE EVENTS SCHEDULE

Our theme is Governance: we'll be protesting the failures of institutional governance that has seen the Executive Board violate their ordinances, ignore an outpouring of criticism, and engage in union-busting. We'll also be discussing how the institution's governance could be reformed for greater accountability, responsibility and transparency in decision-making, protecting what universities are supposed to be.

PHYSICAL PICKET VIRTUAL PICKET

7am onwards	Report to Victoria Park (Attenborough entrance). You may be directed to an alternative picket location to manage social distancing.	
8am	Reducing COVID risk briefing	Share your participation on social media, using #NoOnelsRedundant , #LeicesterStrikesBack and #BoycottLeicester .
10am		Virtual Rally, including "Live from the Picket Line" interviews. Via Zoom (Meeting ID: 871 1349 4423; Passcode: 104356)
11.30	March across campus	Volunteer to write a short blog for the newsletter on the Governance themes: Fair Leadership Wanted or Ministry of Mismanagement. Email: cara@uculeicester.org.uk or anastasiou.andreas@gmail.com
12.00	Teach-out: TBC	Teach-out: TBC
Rest of Day	Send daily photos and/or videos from each picket point, to cara@uculeicester.org.uk or anastasiou.andreas@gmail.com . Also contact Cara or Andreas if you can volunteer to write a daily strike report. Previous examples here.	Send daily photos and/or videos of how you're picketing at home to cara@uculeicester.org.uk or anastasiou.andreas@gmail.com . Also contact Cara or Andreas if you can volunteer to write a daily strike report. Previous examples here.

STRIKE DAY ONE: REFLECTIONS

By Cara Dobbing

Yesterday, our three day strike began. A socially distanced physical picket line was in force until 11:30am when colleagues marched across campus, ending on the lawn in front of the Fielding Johnson building. The atmosphere was kind, jovial and there was an incredible sense of solidarity.

Members conversed with staff, students and members of the public who passed by the picket. There was a huge amount of compassion for our situation, and for all those impacted by the 'Shaping for Excellence' plans. A virtual picket was also in action.

Our physical pickets began at 8am on Victoria Park with the presence of some helpful vans promoting our cause. Our virtual picket began at 10am, in order for colleagues to join remotely and share expressions of solidarity. Thanks to Umberto Albarella, Department of Archaeology at the University of Sheffield for joining picketers and uniting in solidarity.

We have reports from both pickets to give you a sense of what to expect for the next two days. Thanks to Dr Richard Badge and Keith Nockels for contributions.

FIRST DAY NERVES

So, it has been a while, over a year in fact, but the first (strike) day nerves are as familiar as ever. Compounded by a whirl of thoughts and feelings, heightened by the ongoing global pandemic. The last time that I set off for Victoria Park, to assemble with UCU colleagues for the strike briefing, the reality of the UK's first COVID-19 wave cresting our coasts was just sinking in: by the end of the day the University had suspended face-to-face teaching. But that was a lifetime away... right?

But yes, the usual thoughts were there – am I going to be the only one there, is this the right way to fight our cause, what will I say to my students, can my family afford the wage deductions?

And a new one... what hat am I going to wear? Having braved sub-zero temperatures, and polar winds in March 2020, having to remember to put sun block on this time was surreal. And, as a "follicularly challenged" UCU member the choice of head gear had to be suitable for all day, in the beating sun...of Leicester? Fortunately, the consequence of having little hair is that the hat choice is broad – so that's what I went for – a broad brimmed leather number, usually reserved for camping, and robust enough to survive being squished into a cycle pannier....

What about the other nervous ruminations? Well, of course Leicester UCU colleagues turned out in (socially distanced, in groups of no more than 30) force, so I did not have to worry about solitude. Was visibly picketing the Campus the right way to go, when most teaching and assessment was complete? – absolutely, judging by the conscientious (distanced) monitoring Campus security, and the bemused looks and cautious enquiries of Student Ambassadors and visiting Offer Holders and their families alike.

The message was spread wider to the congenially curious public frequenting Victoria Park, and literally emblazoned across the streets by UCU's "digi-vans", rolling through the city, declaring #NoOnelsRedundant, #BoycottLeicester and IS THIS THE UNIVERSITY YOU WANT FOR YOUR CITY?

I needn't have worried about the students... they were there on the picket line with us, with real concerns, that "Shaping for Excellence" could mean PhD students lose their supervisors to redundancy, and that the Executive Board's intransigence could lead to disruption of their progression or even graduation, due to the month-long marking and assessment boycott. For my part, I have been humbled by the unequivocal support I have received from undergraduates, graduate students, and personal tutees – after all, our working conditions are their learning conditions.

So, despite the nerves, the first day of action was full of familiar friendliness, messages of solidarity (from around the world), affirmation of the justness of our fight, and re-commitment to the principles of Union.

Oh, and I didn't get a sun-burned head...

THE VIRTUAL PICKET LINE

Not everyone is able to get to the physical picket line, so we set up a virtual one at the same time. Thanks to Alex Patel for setting it up and thanks to her for being the link with the physical picket. What could a virtual picket line look like?

We had around 20 picketers. We shared our experience of how the present situation is affecting us, some of us directly, some indirectly, but no one unaffected. We met in a spirit of support and solidarity, fitting for the day's theme.

Councillor Gary O'Donnell spoke to us live from the physical picket line and there were interviews with some of the picketers. ITV Central News said hello to us as they talked to physical picketers. And if you were on the physical picket line, we may have seen you!

And we welcomed Professor Umberto Albarella from the Department of Archaeology at the University of Sheffield. The University of Sheffield has decided to close the department, apparently a sudden decision, with no clear rationale, and no eye on the effect it will have on the city, let alone affected staff and students.

We were able to share ideas from what we have been doing, and able to draw parallels between their situation and ours – irrational decisions made by senior management with no consultation, followed by a less than meaningful consultation with others and apparently no attention paid to feedback from professional bodies and other academics.



PICKETS, DRUMS, TV...



[Watch the report \(first item in the news bulletin\) here](#)



GOOD GOVERNANCE WANTED AND WHAT IT MAY LOOK LIKE

On 18th May 2021, a letter was sent to the VC and Executive Board, signed by over 70 professors and senior staff at the University of Leicester, voicing concerns about what were at that time, only plans for compulsory redundancies attached to the Shaping for Excellence Programme.

At the centre of this letter were genuine concerns about the current state of governance at our University: the lack of evidenced rationale for the redundancies; the inadequacy of the redundancy consultation procedure; the lack of proper employee involvement and active silencing of critical voices; and the breakdown of trust in those in senior management roles. It was a heartfelt plea from people who care deeply about the future of the University of Leicester and about upholding values of integrity, respect, academic freedom and fostering the positive academic community which attracted us all here in the first place and for many of us, has sustained long years of service. The 'off the shelf' official response to this letter did not engage constructively with any of these concerns and while not unexpected, was deeply disappointing.

I have been teaching and researching in the fields of industrial relations/human resource management/equality and diversity for almost a quarter of a century now, and do not think it is too arrogant of me to suggest I understand a thing or two about the theory and practice of good governance and effective employee involvement. Issues of employee voice and engagement have always been at the heart of work in this area. For me, there are three key things central to good governance: honesty; involvement; and fairness.

University education is an amazing privilege, and things really do stick with you in a very profound way. While doing my Masters in Industrial Relations at Warwick almost thirty years ago, we used to have these amazing practitioner lecture sessions, where someone from industry would come and talk about a relevant IR/HRM topic. While I am embarrassed not to remember the name of the esteemed speaker anymore, one particular session has always stuck with me. It was a Director of HR from a formerly-nationalised energy company, who detailed the way that they had managed to get through the calamitous ups and downs of the early 1990s recession by following a strategy called BOHICA – 'Bend Over, Here It Comes Again'. Now I am sure that many of us in higher education can empathise with feeling like we are constantly getting repeatedly kicked in the posterior, however, for this energy company, the strategy was to get everyone on side with a clear understanding of the context so as to be able to move forward positively. This example encapsulates for me those three central elements of good governance.

First, honesty. The company were clear in all their internal communications about the financial and market context the company was facing and engaged proactively with the recognised trade unions in the same way. Employees understood the perilous state that the company was in and

armed with the truth, were able to engage positively in what could be done in the circumstances. This then led to the second, involvement. Resources were put into ensuring that employees were properly involved in the decisions that were being made about their working lives and a range of options were consulted upon, in which employees could feel they had a proper part to play. This led to alternatives to compulsory redundancies being implemented, including retraining and upskilling alongside temporary salary sacrifices and shortened working hours. So, to the third – because employees had trust in the management, and they had played an important part in the decision-making outcomes, the processes felt fair. This is how employee buy-in is generated, even to difficult decisions in difficult times. It's the bog standard best practice of employee engagement theory and practice found in every text book and at the centre of academic critique and explanations for how and why things go wrong in practice.

Because things have surely gone awry in the governance of our own University. We have not been presented with an honest account of our context, particularly the financial situation. We have not been presented with why this particular change programme will lead to positive gains or address the situation. The designation of the 26 posts at risk of redundancy seems to have no relationship to any clear strategy. There is a complete lack of clarity on the rationale for and the procedure by which, roles have been selected. There has not been proper or effective employee involvement in the processes around the redundancies. Certain tick boxes may have been

checked with regard to some official legal requirement, but the enactment of this process is not what would be considered anything near best practice on employee involvement and consultation. There has not been genuine engagement with recognised trade unions at local level. Countless external and internal approaches have been made to the senior managers of the University voicing concerns and indicating the dire consequences of proceeding along this path. However, any responses have not actively engaged with these concerns, and there is no consideration of alternative proposals. Worse, there has been active silencing of critical and alternative voices. I know this from personal experience.

Nobody is unaffected by this redundancy process. Our industrial action is a fight for the jobs of valued colleagues, but also for academic freedom and for the protection of our University. As an institution we need to be able to repair and rebuild, and the restoration of trust in decision-making and governance processes is at the heart of this. Perhaps the most potent demonstration of honesty from our University leadership at this moment, would be to admit that continuing along this path can only cause damage and for it to be halted immediately. That would indeed be an example of good governance and would bring with it a nugget of hope for our future.

By
Professorial
Rep,
Anne-marie
Greene

A WAVE OF SOLIDARITY



UCU Cambridge UCU - Recognition Now! @CambridgeUCU · 7h
 #SolidarityLeics for your strike action from everyone in Cam
 We stand with your members against an institution which is t
 through devastating job cuts. @uniofleicester needs to do th
 NOW and realise #NoOnesRedundant



@ucuglos @ucuglos · 5h
 Solidarity with colleagues @leicesterucu, standing against redundancies
 #SolidarityLeics #NoOnesRedundant

Brighton UCU @BrightonUCU · 7h
 Brighton are in full solidarity with all at Leicester striking today
 #SolidarityLeics Together you've got all the power you need to win this
 dispute. Stick together and use that power!
 #NoOnesRedundant or should that be
 #NoOnesRedundantExceptACoupleOfManagers



Winchester UCU @WinchesterUCU · 6h
 Members are encouraged to #BoycottLeicester as part of @ucu's greylisting
 of @uniofleicester. Send your messages of #SolidarityLeics as
 @leicesterucu start their three day strike action 🇯🇵

UEA UCU UEA UCU says join a union @UEA_UCU · 9h
 Solidarity from UEA UCU to our colleagues under attack at Leicester.

When leaders screw up, they sh
 the university.



PermanentlyPrecarious @PermanentlyPre1 · 6h
 Soliarity to @uniofleicester strike with love from @ULivUCU2 strike
 #SolidarityLeics #NoOnesRedundant #UnityIsStrength

#NoOnesRedundant
 #SolidarityLeics

Liverpool Hope UCU @BeOurU
 Solidarity from your friends at L
 #SolidarityLeics

Gavin Dingwall @GavinDingw
 #SolidarityLeics





Sandy Nicoll @SandyNicoll1 · 53s

Everyone needs to find a way to attend the Leicester/ Liverpool UCU joint strike solidarity rally, 12 noon, Friday 11 June - bit.ly/StrikeSolidari...
A victory for them would be victory for all of us fighting for decent, inclusive HE!!

@leicesterucu @ULivUCU2 #SolidarityLeics



UCU Uni of York @UcuYork · 6h

Solidarity with all at Leicester and Liverpool UCU. Shame on all involved in the despicable, repressive, unfair and incoherent decisions by those in management who are supposed to be custodians of these public institutions
@leicesterucu @ULivUCU2 #SolidarityLeics



Lena @Maddaiena · 7h

👏👏 Day 1 of strike at @uniofleicester against brutal redundancies and attacks against academic freedom and trade union activism

#SolidarityLeics #NoOnelsRedundant



University of Nottingham UCU branch @UoNUCU · 9h

Solidarity to @leicesterucu on their first day of strike. If you'd like some tunes for the picket lines, feel free to use our strike playlist from 2020: open.spotify.com/playlist/1WGcy...

#SolidarityLeics #NoOnelsRedundant #boycottleicester



Sam Marsh @Sam_Marsh101 · 8h

As @Uniofleicester's senior management try to hollow out the university they are (temporarily) in charge of, huge solidarity with all of those on strike today sending a clear message: #WeAreTheUniversity #BoycottLeicester #NoOnelsRedundant

#SolidarityLeics!



Mark Pendleton @mark_pendleton · 10h

Solidarity with all at Leicester starting strike action today! #SolidarityLeics #NoOnelsRedundant