



Speech to education unions' strike rally, 24 April 2008

Sally Hunt, UCU general secretary

Sisters and brothers

Here we are today at this fantastic rally and looking round this room I feel a mixture of enormous pride and deep sadness.

Pride because here we are, the members of two teaching unions, acting in unity in pursuit of our vision of education

Sadness, obviously, that our respective employers have yet again failed to react with imagination and understanding to our justified claims.

But sadness, above all because this rally takes place in the shadow of the tragic loss of our great friend Steve Sinnott.

I wish he were here today.

I wish he was here because I have lost a good friend.

And if he'd been here, he would have been proud to see the members of two teaching unions standing up to fight against employers and a government that expects us to put up and shut up because we love our jobs.

He'd have been proud to see us united in defence of our vision of education – a vision which has no place for the market and all it brings with it - crippling competition, social segregation and the historic crime that is privately controlled education.

More than anything, I wish he was here because the unity we see in this room today is the perfect expression of everything Steve held most dear

Steve was passionately committed to unity among teachers and as long as we are united in defence of our schools, our colleges and our communities, we will know that we are paying him the greatest possible tribute.

Like you, I know he would not want us to mourn but to organise and campaign together to defend education and to build a better system, one that delivers real social justice.

So we continue to stand with you, our brothers and sisters in the NUT in pursuit of fair pay for teachers. We know that like us, you have been offered below-inflation pay awards by employers who expect you to accept falling salaries, while the government pours money into bailing out high-rolling gamblers in the city of London.

And we are confident in standing with you because our members gave us the loudest and clearest message in our ballot, voting overwhelmingly to take this action today.

They did this because the reality is that working life in our colleges is getting worse.

You can measure this in crude statistics:

- College incomes have increased by over 17% over the last 6 years, and college principals have given themselves nice pay rises out of this
- The average colleges principal – and believe me, a lot of them are very average – has seen their pay increase by 50% more than teaching staff.
- But colleges are paying less of this growing income on staff. Frontline teaching staff are seeing nothing for their efforts.
No, in weird world of Further Education, college principals count their rising salaries while staff work longer hours and receive less for their effort.
- The majority of lecturers deliver more than 800 hours teaching time in a year and in a recent survey, 82% of them reported rising levels of workload-related stress.
- Lecturers in our colleges remain the lowest paid education professionals, indeed the lowest paid of all comparable professions.

The figures are stark enough.

But you can also measure it by meeting and talking to lecturers.

Everywhere I have gone, lecturers have told me that the educational world they love is being destroyed – their work micro-managed and their time squeezed until they can't go on.

They are told they have to deliver world-class skills, become more professional – MORE professional – while at the same time, the employers tell us flatly, they won't pay a professional wage. At the moment, they won't even pay a living wage.

How do they keep a straight face? How do they expect us to take them seriously?

And that is leaving aside the disastrous policies that are promoting marketisation in our education system:

- the disastrous funding systems that promote internal competition

- the erosion of the right to learn and the reinforcement of social segregation – the complete reverse of widening participation!
- the creeping encroachment of privateers into our schools and colleges through initiatives like Academy Schools, Train2Gain and the growing enthusiasm for joint ventures between colleges and private companies.

When you add all this up, it's no wonder we are here today, and it's no wonder that we have to be united.

We cannot let our employers and misguided government policies wreck our education system. We cannot stand by and let them destroy everything we value.

Our task is clear to us.

We have to stand up for our vision of education – a system fit for a modern democratic civil society, not a system that defends privilege, rewards wealth, promotes division and teaches working class children to settle for training.

Our vision is different because it comes from the experience and the values of the people who teach, the people who make a difference every day, the people who transform lives.

Our two unions will work together to promote the right for all to learn, from the cradle to the grave

We will work together because we know that the only way to do this is through publicly funded, democratically controlled and properly resourced schools and colleges, open to all.

And if necessary, we will say this again and again and again, because we know we are right

Brothers and sisters, today is a tribute to you

It's a tribute to the passion and pride you show in your work

It's a tribute to your commitment in standing together in solidarity to defend the things you love.

Our great unions are pledged to work together and together we will strive to build the kind of education we can all be proud of.