UCU Industrial Action

Many of you will know by now that the University and College Union (UCU), the trade union representing academic and academic related staff, has announced [18 days of industrial action](https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/12759/University-strike-dates-in-February-and-March-confirmed) in February and March, with the first day of action on 1st February. This is a national strike impacting all UK universities. It is important to note that local relations between UCU and the University continue to be constructive.

Taking strike action is a very difficult thing to do and something we consider only as a last resort – we are not paid when we are on strike. However, the reason I, and other university staff across the country, are on strike is explained below.

The nature of the dispute is between the employers (universities) and their employees (staff). Striking is always the last resort, but union members have voted for strike action to defend their right to: 1) receive a fair pension, 2) be paid at rates that allow them to meet the real cost of living, 3) job security, 4) equality in the workplace for women, BAME and disabled staff, and 5) wellbeing through manageable workloads. Key aspects of the UCU position are that:

* Staff have lost on average [35% their pensions](https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/12128/Dispute-far-from-over-says-UCU-as-employers-force-through-pension-cuts) – these cuts were made because of a valuation of the pension scheme taken in March 2020, when financial markets had crashed, and which both employers and the union agree is fundamentally flawed.
* Pay has fallen steadily since 2009, which means in real terms staff earn on average 25% less than they did in 2009.
* [OVER 3500 of academic staff work in higher education work on zero hours contracts](https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/12469/FAQs#Why_is_tackling_casualisation_a_priority_in_the_pay_dispute?_).
* Many colleagues experience significant pay discrimination. [Figures from last year](https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/12469/FAQs#Why_are_we_linking_pay,_equality,_workload_and_casualisation_in_one_dispute?_) indicate that men earn 16% more than women, BAME colleagues earn 17% less than their white counterparts, while disabled staff earn 9% less than staff who do not have a disability.
* [UCU's 2021 workload survey](https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/12905/UCU-workload-survey-2021-data-report/pdf/WorkloadReportJune22.pdf) (published June 2022) showed that academic staff are working on average 2 extra unpaid days each week.

UCU members want to be at work, the most important and enjoyable part of which is giving students the best possible learning experience. I know that having your teaching cancelled, or staff unavailable to reply to your queries, will cause you disappointment and frustration, but I hope that you can understand my – and colleagues’ - reasons for taking strike action, even if you may not agree with them.

This dispute threatens the long-term ability of universities to recruit and retain high quality staff, while growing inequality also affects both students and staff, with poor working conditions meaning poorer learning conditions. UCU members believe this is something worth protesting, and therefore, as a UCU member I, like many colleagues, will be taking part in the strike action.

If you would like to voice your opinion on the strikes, whether in favour or against, you could email our Vice Chancellor. A personally written email is always the most effective however, UCU do provide a template you can use [here](https://www.ucu.org.uk/email-your-Vc).

Many thanks for your understanding and I hope, as everyone does, the strike will be effective and called off sooner rather than later.

Kind regards,

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For more information on the dispute please see: <https://www.ucu.org.uk/rising>