



THE MEGAPHONE

The Strathclyde UCU Newsletter

Issue 7 February 2022



“Direct action is, ultimately, the defiant insistence on acting as if one is already free.”

(David Graeber, 2009)

Welcome to Issue 7 of The Megaphone

Colleagues, friends, comrades and fellow workers,

Once more we find ourselves engaged in industrial action in defence of our pensions: our deferred wages. The changes to the USS, which will see a typical member face a cut of 35% to their guaranteed retirement income, have been shown to be entirely unnecessary. In opposing this attack on our pensions, the union is not being unreasonable.

The UCU have asked employers to increase their contributions by an amount which USS has already stated they can afford to pay. An alternative put forward from the union, that would have protected our pensions with a higher contribution from our employers and from members, was dismissed. We have been given *no alternative* but to defend ourselves with industrial action and so, we will be on strike on 14-18 February and 21-22 February. And we are preparing to fight beyond this, if necessary.

But we are not striking in protest, we are not taking action as some sort of *gesture* against the injustice we face. We are striking to *win*. We are not in the least interested in ‘glorious defeats’. We are only interested in victory and we will act imaginatively and resolutely to that end. We are tired of having to fight for what is rightfully ours, but we are determined and we intend to win.

Join us on the picket lines, on the rallies and demonstrations! Let those who have eyes see our determination and those with ears hear our cry “Hands off our Pensions!”

In solidarity

Dek Keenan
Branch Chair
Strathclyde UCU

This guide offers guidance, information and advice about our forthcoming action. [This FAQ](#) is also comprehensive.

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Before Strike Action

Communicating with students, management, each other

Strathclyde UCU committee remains hopeful that Universities UK (who represent the employers on USS matters) will return to meaningful negotiations.

UUK represent individual employers, and they negotiate at the instruction of these employers. You, and students, can write to Sir Jim McDonald via his Personal Assistant via mary.bennett@strath.ac.uk asking him to intervene. Please copy us in (ucu@strath.ac.uk). Next week sees the start of a series of actions to defend our pensions, set against the year on year deterioration of working conditions and pay, with inequalities stark and vast. Showing support through direct action (picketing, writing to your MP, engaging with students and so on) is vital at this stage.

[Talk to your students](#), and ask for their support. Posters and leaflets should be prominent in your department—put them on your doors and notice boards (ask your departmental rep, or collect them from our office in the Livingstone Tower). Talk about the dispute on social media if you use it and [follow Strathclyde UCU here](#). UCU have made [videos and graphics](#) available to help explain the disputes.

Instructions to mitigate strike action

We are aware that some members have been instructed to take steps to mitigate strike action in advance, either in their roles as line managers, as GTAs being asked to conduct teaching, or professional services colleagues being asked to develop plans to work around striking colleagues and/or yourselves. To be clear: **you are under no legal obligation to inform anyone of whether you are taking strike action, before said action occurs. This means that none of us can or should assume anything about our colleagues' participation, and thus we should not be acting to mitigate our own strike action in advance.**

Some specific advice:

- If, in a teaching role, you are asked whether you will take part in strike action, so that cover can be arranged, you are not required to answer, and we ask you not to. It is not appropriate for anyone to arrange cover for any modules you are responsible for, as they do not know whether or not you will participate in action. Employers should not be asking for this information, so please not feel obliged to furnish them with any response.
- If, as a postgraduate student, you or anyone you know are approached with regard to covering teaching, we ask you to decline.
- If, as a member of professional services staff, you are asked to take actions to specifically mitigate strike action, we advise you to indicate that you do not know which members of staff will or will not be participating in action, and are thus not in a position to develop a mitigation strategy. If you are placed in a position where you are directly instructed to develop contingency plans, we encourage you to request precise details and instructions be provided with regard to said plans, and that you query how any information that went into forming said instructions was gathered.
- If, as a line manager, you are instructed to ask staff whether they intend to take part in industrial action, we ask you to not do so, as staff are under no obligation to tell you. Relatedly, it is entirely appropriate for you not to undertake to mitigate specific staff members' strike action in advance, as you cannot know who will choose to take part in this action.
- If, as any member of staff, you are asked to make plans to mitigate your own action, you are not obligated to do so, as you do not have to inform the university of your decision to take part in action ahead of time.

If any members need assistance in navigating requests to pre-mitigate action, please [get in touch](#) and we will offer support.

Online Module Content

Strike action is a withdrawal of labour. This includes labour through teaching, whether it be face to face, online, asynchronous or via TikTok.

During Strike Action

Practicalities of Strike Action

Your branch is now formally calling you out on industrial action on the 14-22 February as part of our strike mandate in the USS pension dispute.

Whilst Strathclyde UCU only has a strike mandate for action relating to the USS pension dispute, 21-22 February coincide with action being taken across the country to fight against ongoing inequalities, known as the 'four fights'.

When you are on strike, you do not work.

This includes time before 9am and after 5pm and includes any activity which is part of your work such as teaching, administration, meetings, emails relating to work, marking, research, updating Zoom, writing bids, completing doodles, events, or conferences where you are *directly or indirectly* representing your employer. **Don't do any work!**

The University has confirmed that it will be deducting pay on the basis of 1/365th of your annual salary per strike day for the February strike days. All work you do on strike days will therefore be both **unpaid** and **undermine your own sacrifice**.

You can read the University's FAQs on industrial action [here](#), but please take our advice where there are differences in the messaging.

Research-only contracts:

If you are on a research-only contract and you are taking strike action, you should not work and should follow all other advice.

We have heard from several research-only members who have expressed concern that their strike action does not have an impact on the University. It does: the university's work will be slowed down and your email auto-responses will go to your funders, partners and colleagues. Your presence and solidarity on the picket lines will help the branch's action.

Research-only externally funded contracts:

If you are employed by the University on an externally-funded contract and you take strike action you should not work and you should follow all other advice.

If your employment contract is with an external funding body, or any other body or agency, you should not strike. However, working on a project that is funded by a research council or charity body in most cases will still mean that your contract is with the University, allowing you to strike. We can advise if you are not sure.

Hourly-paid and GTA contracts:

If you are employed on an hourly-paid or GTA contract and you take strike action you should not work and should follow all other advice. Hourly paid staff can apply for financial support to cover loss of earnings; please see further details below.

PLEASE NOTE: in order to be eligible to claim from the fighting fund, all GTA members must ensure that they have 'standard free' membership, not student membership. Membership details can be updated via [MyUCU](#) (you may need your membership number, which you can find in the email welcoming you to UCU).

PGR student members:

PGR members who are not contractually employed by the University are encouraged to show support to the ongoing action, via messages of solidarity, or joining pickets in support. New (December 2021) national guidance for PGR members is [available here](#).

Research leave:

If you are on research leave and you take strike action you should not work and should follow all other advice.

Annual leave/parental leave/sickness absence:

If you are not at work for these reasons during strike action, you cannot strike. This is the only 'dispensation not to strike' that our members have, and we encourage you to donate any earnings to the local hardship fund if you can.

Non-members

All staff who are part of a bargaining unit have the [same protections and rights](#) with regard to participating in legally called industrial action. This means that staff who are not part of UCU may still participate in strike action without fear of dismissal or discrimination, if they choose to do so. However, being a member provides you access to collective support from UCU. We encourage all who support the strike and are wishing to join the action, to also join UCU [here](#). You can do that up to and including the point when you begin taking industrial action. More details on the rights of non-members can be found [here](#). Please talk to colleagues and encourage them to join – it's never too late!

Picketing

Please join one of our picket lines. The pickets at this branch are scenes of joyous protest, creativity, home-baking, poorly performed music, poetry, fancy dress and gallows humour. We will be picketing all major University buildings, and you can collect placards and at the union office at the entrance to the [Livingstone Tower](#) (ground floor, enter through the main doors situated on the right of the security office) from 8am. Due to Covid only Lynda and one other person will be allowed in the office at any one time, so please do use the window to pick up placards and such like.

Some guidance:

- Don't come if you feel unwell, and please take a LFT prior to picketing
- Wrap up warm, we are in Glasgow remember
- Wear a mask – unless exempt - and respect people's personal space
- Come along with witty and jolly chants which we can repeat *ad nauseam*
- Bring a whistle. Or drum. Or old frying pan. Anything that makes a noise basically.
- Don't be intimidated – we are all equally part of the union and there for one another

Making picketing more accessible:

We appreciate that being outside for extended periods of time, often standing up, and holding placards can be challenging. Here's some advice on how to make that process easier:

- Wear clothes appropriate for the weather. It is more wearing to stand in the cold than it is to walk. Gloves and extra socks are frequently invaluable.
- Feel free to bring along a small camping chair or similar if you need one, but do take care not to block the pavement or prevent anyone else's access to the building.

- If you have a medical condition that might require immediate access to a toilet, feel free to use the one closest to you regardless of whether or not it is behind a picket.
- Feel free to take a break from the picket if you need one.
- Please read and familiarise yourself with [UCU's guidance on picketing](#). **If in doubt, please seek advice from the picket supervisor or a committee member.**
- **Most importantly, don't push yourself too hard. All contributions to this action are valuable and welcomed.**

COVID safety:

COVID safety is very important for this branch. Please take all reasonable precautions including physical distancing and mask wearing where needed. We also encourage all members to take regular lateral flow tests and not to attend the pickets if you test positive, or have any symptoms.

UCU's guidance on COVID-safe picketing is [here](#), and we encourage all members to read and abide by it.

Events

Our syllabus for the next two weeks looks like this, although all plans are provisional and dependent

Monday 14: pickets from 8am, visit from General Secretary Jo Grady then joining the UCU Scotland rally at the Buchanan Street steps around 11.45am

Tuesday 15: picket line poetry – check [@StrathclydeUCU](#) for more details

Wednesday 16: online demo from 12noon – [CLICK HERE TO JOIN](#) Password: STRIKE

Thursday 17: pickets from 8am, joining Glasgow Unison at 10am outside City Chambers

Friday 18: pickets from 9.30am, joining the Climate Strike Demo at the Buchanan Street steps around 10.45am

Monday 21: TBC

Tuesday 22: pickets from 8am, with transport provided to take members to Holyrood, where we will join UCU Scotland and NUS Scotland to defend education.

Following Strike Action

Action Short of a Strike

As of Monday 7 February members at Strathclyde are taking action short of a strike starting and continuing until further notice. UCU is conducting escalating ASOS, which consists of **working to contract, not covering for absent colleagues, not rescheduling any lectures or classes that were missed as part of strike action, not undertaking any voluntary activities, and not sharing materials related to lectures or classes that will be or have been cancelled as a result of strike action.** These actions are described further below. Please note the ballot we voted on covered a wide range of ASOS activities, including a marking and assessment boycott as part of ASOS. We have a mandate for that action but it has not yet been called for. We will update you further if this changes.

UCU's national webpages detailing Q&As related to Action Short of Strike are [available here](#).

Working to contract

Working to contract means abiding strictly by the terms of your employment contract. If you are in any doubt about what you are required to do, check your contractual documents—your offer letter, statement of main terms and conditions and/or any staff handbook.

Taking action short of a strike does not mean that you can refuse a reasonable request from your manager to undertake something that is not covered by the examples above. How reasonable any request is will depend on the terms of your contract and custom and practice. If you are unsure whether a request is reasonable -- for example, if a manager makes a request and does not provide a concrete reduction of workload in writing, you can inform your manager that you are seeking trade union advice on this matter and will respond in due course.

If you are a professional services member of staff, you too are covered by ASOS and working to contract and there is specific guidance for PS staff from UCU nationally [available here](#).

Not Rescheduling

As of 7 February 2022, ASOS includes not rescheduling classes and lectures that were cancelled due to strike action. Prior to this, our advice was not to take any steps to reschedule any teaching on your own initiative, and ask for appropriate support if asked to do so by your manager. This includes any scheduled teaching activity which would have taken place on one of UCU's strike days and applies to all UCU members, not just those directly responsible for the relevant lecture or class. You should refuse to reschedule this activity when asked, stating in response that you are supporting UCU's action short of a strike.

Not sharing materials related to cancelled activities

As of 7 February ASOS covers removing uploaded materials related to, and/or not sharing materials related to, lectures or classes that will be or have been cancelled as a result of strike action. You should remove any materials that you have already uploaded on to MyPlace if it relates to classes, seminars, teaching or any other form of work that would otherwise have occurred during the strike days. Remember – the performance rights for these belong to you.

Strathclyde UCU recommend you take the following steps in relation to online resources:

- Members should not deliver synchronous classes on strike days, either in person or on Zoom.
- Where teaching is substantially asynchronous, members should not release material corresponding to the strike period. The principle for asynchronous material is that the amount of material that is not released should be proportionate to the amount of labour that is withdrawn.
- For example, if the natural unit of material is one lecture and you would normally give three lectures on strike days, then you should not release three lectures' worth of material. If the natural unit of material is one week then you should not release one week's worth of material (corresponding to 14-18 Feb) and should also not release material on 21-22 Feb.

We will offer further guidance on this at our picket line meetings.

Not covering for absent colleagues

Unless providing cover for colleagues is explicitly part of your job description you should refuse to provide cover. Examples of this could include refusing to take on the duties of a colleague taking sick leave.

Where you feel absence cover is part of your role, or you are part of a team where duties are shared, you should feel confident to ask your line manager which activities you should deprioritise to accommodate this absence cover within your workload.

Not undertaking voluntary activities

Where you have a choice whether to undertake some work you should choose not to do it. This can include for example, partaking in weekend open days for some staff, declining certain meetings etc. If you are unsure which

activities are voluntary check your contractual documents, speak to your line manager, or contact the branch for advice.

Where activities are voluntary but you feel they should be formally reflected in your workload, e.g. academic citizenship activities, contributions to EDI work, you should raise this with appropriate managers.

Notifying the University

Prior to strike action

It is your legal right **NOT** to formally notify anyone in advance that you are intending to take strike action. If your manager asks you in advance or during action you are under no obligation to answer, and indeed we would encourage you not to. If this occurs during face to face conversation (including online) you should reply that your union has advised you that you should not answer this.

After strike action

If your manager asks you after strike action whether you took it, and whether you are participating in action short of a strike, answer them truthfully.

University management may ask you to complete a notification form following our strike action, and they may also request confirmation that you are taking action short of a strike.

You should provide confirmation that you took part in strike action after you have returned to work and when asked to do so by a University manager, but not one for action short of a strike. We are only contractually obliged to work our hours; the bosses can no longer expect to receive additional labour for free.

ASOS notification

Despite the additional elements of ASOS which have now been implemented, we continue to recommend members not fill in any form that may be presented to you. Union negotiators will address this if and when necessary.

Financial Support for Strike Action

Below we give details on how you can apply to the central UCU fighting fund, and the local UCU hardship fund. We recommend that the first port of call for members who need financial support be the central fighting fund, as UCU nationally has vastly more resources than we do locally. We know that national strike pay may still leave some members experiencing hardship, however, either because of the level of deductions or because of their personal situation, and our local hardship fund is available and able to support members in these circumstances.

Most importantly, if you need financial support in order to be able to participate in strike action, then we want you to know that you are encouraged to apply. Our members are in a wide array of financial situations, and we do not want these to be an impediment to your participation in this collective action.

Please ask us if you have any questions.

UCU Fighting Fund

Members will be able to claim hardship pay from the central UCU Fighting Fund from their second day of strike action. This differs from our previous actions. Members earning below £30,000 pa will be able to claim £75 per day, and members earning more than this will be able to claim £50 per day. Full details about how to claim, and a link to the

application form, can be found [here](#). We are awaiting confirmation on a potential increase in the daily rate provided to members and will write you as soon as we have learned whether this has been increased. **We strongly encourage you to apply to the fighting fund if you need to.**

SUCU Hardship Fund

The SUCU hardship fund is made up of solidarity donations and branch funds, and is designed for members who are disproportionately hit financially by taking part in industrial action, e.g. sole-income households, members on hourly-paid, part-time or fixed-term contracts, people who have recently had periods of lower pay due to parental/adoption/sick leave or other industrial action, or due to other personal circumstances. Claims from lower paid members and those on insecure contracts will be prioritised.

To apply to the SUCU hardship fund, please email the branch office via ucu@strath.ac.uk. All information will be treated as strictly confidential. It will be seen only by the SUCU administrator and the small number of SUCU committee members responsible for agreeing payments.

Donations to the fighting and hardship funds

This section contains information on how to donate to the central UCU fighting fund, and the local Strathclyde UCU hardship fund. If you know any organisations or individuals who might be in a position to donate to either or both, please do let them know this information! As we state above, we want members to be financially supported so they are able to take part in industrial action without impediment, and a strong fighting fund is crucial to our action.

We ask members who have a dispensation not to strike (due to e.g. long term illness or parental leave) to consider donating your earnings for strike days to either the central UCU or local hardship fund.

Details on donating to the central UCU fighting fund can be [found at this link](#).

If you wish to donate to the Strathclyde UCU hardship fund please contact Lynda Holmes via ucu@strath.ac.uk

Equalities Resources

Information for migrant members

Since the UCU industrial action in early 2018, there have been changes to the immigration rules that make explicit that unpaid leave for the purposes of industrial action is exempt from the reporting duties for sponsors of Tier 2/skilled worker and Tier 5/student visas.

The change was announced in July 2018 by Sajid Javid (see full statement [here](#)): “It is not the Government’s policy to prevent migrant workers from engaging in legal strike action; and, to date, I am not aware of any case where a migrant worker has had their leave curtailed, or been removed, as a result of having engaged in legal industrial action. However, to put the matter beyond doubt, I will be making changes to the guidance and Immigration Rules for migrant workers (under the Tier 2 and 5 immigration routes) and their sponsors.”

You can view the updated rules [here](#), and the updated guidance for sponsors [here](#).

Information for expectant parents

Some government benefits, including statutory maternity pay, rely on an employee having a certain length of ‘continuous service’. [From uk.gov](https://www.gov.uk):

“Taking industrial action doesn’t usually mean that your employer will say you’ve broken your period of continuous employment with them. This begins when you start working for your employer and ends on the day your employer uses to calculate your length of service.

“However, if you take industrial action, your employer will reduce your length of service with them by the number of days you were on strike. This is important when working out your pension and things like statutory redundancy pay.”

This means that staff who are planning to access maternity pay should not be deemed by University Management to have disrupted their continuity of service by exercising their legal right to participate in industrial action.

Student Support for Strike Action

UCU and the NUS are sister unions, and they fully support our action. Indeed, in the coming days NUS and UCU will stand together on various platforms and take action alongside one another. They understand that improved terms and conditions for staff will result in a better learning environment for students. Larissa Kennedy – the NUS UK president - issued this statement in late 2021:

“NUS stands in solidarity with staff who have voted for industrial action over these past few weeks. The sad truth is that increasingly staff on the ground have only seen more work for less reward. Time and time again, we’ve seen staff across universities go above and beyond to keep their institutions running, and students learning, and they have been met with cruel and untenable conditions and remuneration. There remains huge pay disparities between senior management and frontline staff, not to mention the appalling gender and race pay gaps. The situation is unsustainable for staff, and ultimately, that affects the support students receive, the quality of their learning and their wider student experience.”

Please talk to your students about the action, and ask them for their support. Our working conditions are their learning conditions, and we urge them to join us in writing to Sir Jim MacDonald directly with messages of support, asking him to exert pressure on Universities UK and UCEA to go back to meaningful negotiations immediately. The email address for his Personal Assistant is mary.bennett@strath.ac.uk

Other resources and information

Email auto-responses

We recommend that you set these up starting from the first day of strike action and leave on until the dispute is over. If you need help setting up an auto-response, see [here](#). Note that, if your hours of work do not explicitly include weekend work, then it is entirely appropriate to set this auto-reply from the end of the day on Friday 11 February.

ON STRIKE: I am on strike today as part of UCU’s industrial action over the unnecessary and unfounded attacks upon USS pension scheme. Your email will not be read and you will need to resend it on 23 February.

ACTION SHORT OF A STRIKE: I am working to contract as part of UCU’s action short of a strike over the unnecessary and unfounded attacks upon the USS pension scheme. There may be a delay in my response due to workload issues.

You might like to include links to further information about the disputes in your out-of-office messages, or direct any students you work with to alternative sources of support. Please consider leaving a link to the UCU fighting fund for those who wish to support the action.

Get more involved! We aren't a cult. Promise.

Many of Strathclyde UCU's reps, committee members and activists have become involved because of periods of industrial action in the past, and we hope that this dispute too will produce a new generation of active UCU members.

YOU are the branch, and the more you can do to help, the easier it will be for all of us. As well as the current dispute, we need volunteers to support individual members with casework, to negotiate with the university, to sit on promotions appeals panels, to campaign, to analyse policy, and much else. Come along to one of our meetings, [get in touch](#) with the committee, talk to your colleagues and ask them to [join us](#).

If everyone does a little, none of us needs to do a lot...

Speak to a committee member if you would like to get more involved, or feel free to email ucu@strath.ac.uk.

