

FAQs

Strike action at the University of Leeds

What am I expected to do during a strike?

Your union will only take strike action once every other avenue of influence has been exhausted and when your branch officers think there is no other way to make members' views clear. It is a very serious sanction and that's why we ask that every member observes the strike. Every member who does not observe the strike is directly undermining the union's bargaining power and making it harder for the union to protect all its members. When we call a strike we ask that members do not come into work and do not reschedule their classes. The best possible thing you can do is contact your local rep and volunteer to help out on the picket lines. It isn't illegal, it isn't dangerous and it can be fun.

Do I have to tell my employer that I am taking strike action?

In order to fulfil legal requirements, employers have been provided with statistical information about UCU members taking industrial action, but not individual names. You are under no obligation to inform management in advance as to whether you will be taking part in strike action or action short of a strike. However, if your Human Resources department ask you AFTER the strike whether you took action, you should answer truthfully.

What about my students?

We are a union of professionals and we know that our members don't like taking any action that affects students. It is the same for many public services. However, when we take action, we are generally making a case for greater investment in or defence of the quality of the service we provide. In the case of job cuts, for example, we argue that our students will be hurt far more by management's actions than by our own. Observing the strike is defending the interests of staff and students alike. Undermining the strike might feel like the right thing in the short term but it will only serve to encourage management and we will all suffer more in the longer term. Formally, it is management's responsibility to explain to students if classes are to be cancelled on strike days. However, you may wish to talk to your students before the strikes explaining why the union is taking this action.

Am I breaking my contract by taking strike action?

All effective industrial action is likely to be a breach of your contract of employment. But because UCU has carried out a statutory ballot and the action has been formally called, the law protects workers from dismissal whilst taking part in lawful industrial action or at any time within 12 weeks of the start of

the action and, depending on the circumstances, dismissal may also be unfair if it takes place later.

How much money will I lose?

You should expect to have a day's salary deducted for taking part in the strike. Precedent in most Universities is 1/365 and Leeds has always followed that precedent. Any loss greater than this would be challenged by the union.

How will it affect my pension?

In previous one-day strikes it has been the experience of the UCU that most university employers do not withhold superannuation contributions and therefore participation in strike action generally does not affect pensions. Also, institutions that do choose to withhold contributions usually make provision for members to make up pension and AVC deficits from their pay. In other cases the effect on the length of service of a day's strike is actually very small. Further advice will follow, but if you are concerned about any effect, contact Justine Stevens at UCU (jstephens@ucu.org.uk).

What is the law on picketing?

Peaceful picketing is entirely legal. Picketing should be carried out at or near an entrance or exit from a site at which the pickets work. When others who are not in dispute come into work or use these entrances or exits, pickets must not interfere with them. This includes encouraging them to support us.

The legal categories of people permitted to picket are:

- UCU members in dispute
- former employees who have lost their jobs for reasons connected to the dispute
- UCU officials and NEC members supporting members in dispute, providing they are accompanying union members who work at the location.

Leeds UCU officers will provide full advice on picketing to ensure legal compliance, and you are urged to help out on picket lines.

I have a promotions interview on one of the proposed strike dates. What should I do?

Individuals should advise management that they are unable to attend X due to industrial action and ask them to agree to another date. The promotions procedure may well contain something around the person being unwell/unable to attend. If management refuse this reasonable request, the union should raise it as it may be discrimination on the grounds of being a trade union member.