

SUCU GUIDANCE AND INFORMATION TO MEMBERS ON INDUSTRIAL ACTION

Updated 12th February 2018

It is still possible that the increasing number of Vice Chancellors speaking out publicly will persuade Universities UK to return to negotiations ahead of the action planned for 22nd February.

Our advice between now and then is that you should write to Sir Keith Burnett - send him an impassioned plea to help save our pensions on vc@sheffield.ac.uk and copy us in (ucu@sheffield.ac.uk). Ask him to exert pressure on UUK. [Talk to your students](#), and ask for their support. Come along to one of our [meetings](#), get in touch with your [departmental rep](#), talk to your colleagues and ask them to [join us](#). [Posters](#) and [leaflets](#) should be prominent in your department - put them on your doors and notice boards. Talk about the dispute on social media, if you have it.

We'll be sending you a lot of email over the next ten days. Please read them, and talk to us if you need to - we are here to support you. We know this is tough and we're committed to ensuring that all of our members are supported to undertake the action asked of them.

Here is the latest information for members. This is a long document, but it's important - please read it all!

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Strike Action

UCU members are asked to take strike action on the following dates:

FEBRUARY 2018					
Week 1				Thursday 22	Friday 23
Week 2	Monday 26	Tuesday 27	Wednesday 28		
MARCH 2018					
Week 3	Monday 5	Tuesday 6	Wednesday 7	Thursday 8	
Week 4	Monday 12	Tuesday 13	Wednesday 14	Thursday 15	Friday 16

When you are on strike, you do not work.

The University has let us know that they will be deducting pay on the basis of 1/365th of your annual salary per strike day. This represents an improvement on the previous practice of deducting at 1/260th, i.e. the deductions will now be lower per day.

We don't yet know what arrangements will be in place to ensure continuity of service in USS. We'll update you when we have that information.

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

Action Short of a Strike

Members will also be taking action short of a strike starting **Thursday 22 February** and continuing until further notice. This includes:

- working to contract
- not covering for absent colleagues (unless your contract specifies that you do)
- not rescheduling lectures or classes cancelled due to strike action
- not undertaking any voluntary activities (that is, work you have a choice about. This will differ by contract but, for example, working on a Saturday is voluntary for many members)

Working to contract means abiding strictly by the terms of your employment contract.

If you're 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. Contact us for further advice if you need it.

Taking action short of a strike does not mean that you can refuse a reasonable request from your manager to undertake something that isn't covered by the examples above.

How reasonable any request is will depend on the terms of your contract and custom and practice. If in doubt - or if your actions are challenged by someone senior to you - temporarily suspend your action and contact us for guidance.

The University is unlikely to make punitive salary deductions when you are legitimately working to contract.

Notifying the University

You will receive a terse email about notifications of strike action, usually from Andy Dodman, the University's Chief Operating Officer. Here are the key things to know:

You are **NOT** required to formally notify anyone in advance of 22nd February that you are intending to take action. If your manager asks you in advance, you can reply that your union has advised you that you shouldn't answer this.

If your manager asks you whether you are taking action short of a strike on or after 22nd February, you should answer them truthfully.

If your manager asks you after strike action whether you took it, answer them truthfully.

It is a reasonable request for a manager to contact you on the morning of strike action to ask whether you are at work, and you should answer them truthfully. Please don't respond to work email on a strike day, though (see [further information and resources](#) for help on out-of-office responses).

If you experience problems or need guidance on notifications, get in touch and we'll help.

Financial Support for Strike Action

UCU Fighting Fund

Members can claim strike pay after the third day of action for up to £50 per day, to a maximum of £500 over the 14 days of action. Financial support will be prioritised to lower paid members and those on insecure contracts. There's full information and details of how to apply [here](#).

We strongly encourage you to apply to the fighting fund if you need to.

If you can manage without, or claim a lower amount, please do.

SUCU Hardship Fund

Your first port of call should be the central fighting fund - UCU nationally has vastly more resources than we do locally. We recognise, though, that national strike pay may still leave some members experiencing hardship; either because of the level of deductions or because of their personal situation.

Members who are sole-income households, or are on precarious or part-time or temporary contracts, may be particularly affected. Please make an application for support [here](#) - all the information you submit will be treated as confidential.

The SUCU Hardship Fund is made up of solidarity donations and branch funds.

Student Support for Strike Action

UCU and the NUS are sister unions, and we have support for this action from them both nationally and locally. A motion was passed unanimously at Sheffield's SU Council before Christmas in support of the action, and an [open letter and petition](#) calling on Sir Keith to speak out to defend staff pensions was launched this week.

We are working closely with the SU on this action and we are incredibly grateful for their support and solidarity.

Please talk to your students about the action, and ask them for their support. We know the details of this dispute are complicated and hard to grasp quickly - the headline message is that this is an unprecedented attack on our pensions. Our working conditions are their learning conditions, and we'd like them to join us in writing to Keith Burnett directly with messages of support, asking him to exert pressure on Universities UK to go back to negotiations ahead of the 22nd February. The email address is vc@sheffield.ac.uk.

You can use the video [here](#) and download a letter [here](#), or adapt it, to help with talking to students about the action.

Teach Out Programme and Pickets

We're thrilled to have put together a programme of alternative events for strike days. Members from across the University will be delivering talks in the Students' Union in the afternoons of all strike days on a whole host of topics that showcase some of the fascinating work we do here. We have events lined up for the first three weeks of action at the moment.

As soon as the programme is fully finalised, we'll share it with you - in the meantime, if you'd like to volunteer to deliver a talk, please contact our Education Officer, Jess Meacham, on jess.meacham@sheffield.ac.uk.

We are also taking volunteers to join the picket lines! Contact us on ucu@sheffield.ac.uk with 'picketing' in the subject line to get involved.

Further Information and Resources

Upcoming meetings

We'll email you about these and publicise them on [twitter](#) - please do come along. If you're having a departmental UCU meeting and you'd like a branch officer to come along too, get in touch.

At the moment the schedule looks like this:

USS Roadshow, Tuesday 13th February, 1.00 - 2.00pm in LT2, Medical School.

USS Roadshow Thursday 15th February 1.00pm - 2.00pm, Geography Building, C03 – with Paul Bridge, UCU's Head of Higher Education.

USS Roadshow Monday 19 February, Council Room, Firth Court 1.00 -2.00pm, Firth Court

General Meeting Thursday 1st March, 1.00 - 2.00pm, Hicks LT5

Background to the dispute

You're probably already aware that we've got really stuck in on the pensions issue. There's an enormous amount of information on our blog, and in particular [on the 2017 valuation](#) (i.e. the source of our current dispute). Please read - we're very aware that this is complicated, but our Communications Officer, Sam Marsh, does a superb job of breaking the information down. If you're at all confused about the background or want more detail, that's the place to start.

Email auto-responses

We recommend that you set these up starting from the 22nd February and leave one or the other on depending on the date until the dispute is over. If you need help setting up an auto-response, see [here](#).

ON STRIKE: I am on strike today until [date] as part of UCU's industrial action over the USS pension. Your email will not be read and you will need to resend it on [date]. If you would like further information about why UCU is taking action, please see the information [here](#).

WORKING TO CONTRACT: I am working to contract as part of UCU's action short of a strike over the USS pension scheme. There may be a delay in my response due to workload issues. If you would like more information about why we're taking action, please see the information [here](#).

An Appeal from your Branch Officers

We need your help. This is voluntary work on our part - the paid time we get to undertake UCU business, which is called facility time, doesn't remotely match the work on our own time we do on behalf of all our members. We support individual members through casework, negotiate policy, contracts and terms and conditions, campaign on important issues facing the sector and much besides.

If you'd like to get involved with any aspect of the current dispute, or are interested in otherwise becoming more active in SUCU, please fill in the form [here](#). We would love you to get involved.