

We know that lots of you will have questions about the upcoming industrial action from Thursday 24 November 2022. We've pulled together this guide to help answer as many of them as possible.

WHEN WILL THE STRIKES HAPPEN AND HOW LONG FOR?

The University and College Union (UCU) have asked their members to go on strike on three dates – Thursday 24 November, Friday 25 November, and Wednesday 30 November.

Some (but by no means all) of UCU's members will strike, and all other staff are expected to work normally on these days.

WHAT ARE UNIVERSITIES AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS DOING TO HELP ME COPE WITH ANY IMPACT OF THE STRIKE?

They really care about your experience and want you to get the best possible learning and teaching during the strike. They will be doing their best to put on replacement teaching or provide resources so that you don't miss out.

WHAT IF TEACHING IS CANCELLED?

They will do all they can to provide teaching or other ways to learn. Because individual union members don't always tell universities when they are going on strike, it is hard for them to know when teaching might be cancelled. They will work hard to let you know as soon as possible and to offer alternative teaching or resources, so you don't miss out.

WHAT IF I CAN'T ATTEND RESCHEDULED CLASSES OR LECTURES?

You should talk to student services, your lecturer or course leader and let them know. During a strike, teaching may be cancelled and rearranged for another time. Universities know some of you have other commitments like looking after children or a job, so they will do all they can to accommodate these.

WHY ARE THE STRIKES HAPPENING?

The strikes are taking place because of changes that needed to be made to the USS pension scheme – which around 200,000 university staff are members of.

Other strikes are taking place over the 2022-23 pay award and working conditions, for which [UCEA](#) represents universities.

At least once every 3 years, the USS pension scheme needs to undergo an assessment of its financial health. The USS Trustee Board (made up of independent pensions experts and UCU and UUK representatives) concluded that more money had to go into the scheme.

Changes to the level of pension ('benefits') was the only way to keep the scheme affordable, so more staff weren't forced to opt-out or left without a workplace pension.

Some University and College Union (UCU) members have voted to strike because they want these changes to be reversed. They think the scheme outlook was overly pessimistic and want benefits to stay the same and employers to pay much more.

Without these changes, staff would be paying much higher contributions during a cost of living crisis and employers would have had to have found savings from elsewhere - employers must balance what they pay towards pensions with investment other budgets such as teaching and student services.

Employers care about their talented staff and want them to have a secure financial future in retirement. Since 2009, the employer contribution rate has risen by 53% and is far higher than in most other private sector schemes .

Employers fully respect the right of UCU members to express their concerns about these important matters and recognise that those voting to support industrial action would not have done so without having strongly held views or concerns.

However, these changes were needed to keep the scheme affordable, and staff will still get a good pension – USS pensions remain among the most generous in the private sector.

WHAT IF I HAVE A DISABILITY AND THE STRIKES WILL AFFECT MY STUDIES?

Universities realise that the disruption caused by strike action may make it even more difficult for you and they will do all they can to help.

Speak with student services, your lecturer, course leader or disability support team straight away. They can then work with you to put alternative teaching arrangements or support in place.

I'M AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT. WILL THE STRIKE ACTION AFFECT MY VISA STATUS?

No. There should be no problem with your student visa as universities will continue to monitor your attendance as normal. If any classes or contact points are missed because of the strike it is recorded as authorised absence. If you are worried speak to your university and they will confirm the arrangements.

WHAT ABOUT EXAMS OR ASSESSMENTS?

Don't worry. If you have missed out on teaching because of the strikes, universities have tried and tested academic procedures to make sure you are not disadvantaged in exams and assessments. If in doubt, ask student services, your lecturer or your course leader.

CAN I CLAIM ANY COMPENSATION?

This depends on the effect of the strike on you and is considered on a case-by-case basis. You would need to request compensation from your university. Any compensation would be based on your university's policies and they will consider any extra help and support put in place. If you are unhappy with the outcome you can make a formal complaint to the relevant independent body which can include compensation.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MYSELF?

There are a few things you can do before and during the strike:

- Watch out for regular communications from your university about the strike and what they are doing to help.
- Ask your lecturer if they are going to be on strike so you can plan ahead.
- Prepare for strike action by asking your lecturer for advice and guidance on what to study and for any notes in advance.

Most importantly, if you need help please talk to your university. We are all here for you and we want you to get the best out of your time at university. If you have a worry or a problem, get in touch.

WHAT IF I WANT TO COMPLAIN ABOUT THE IMPACT OF THE STRIKE ON MY STUDIES?

Universities will do all they can to make sure the strike action by UCU members doesn't seriously impact on your studies, but they know that any disruption is unsettling. If you are worried please speak to your lecturer or course leader. If you want to make a formal complaint you must do this to your own institution. They take all complaints very seriously and will get in touch with you as soon as possible to see how they can resolve them.

If you are unhappy with the outcome of the complaint, you can take the matter further with the relevant independent body. They will consider your case and whether you may be due any compensation.

You must complain to your own university first and give them a chance to respond before taking your complaint further.

If you are in England or Wales you should contact the [Office of the Independent Adjudicator \(OIA\) in England and Wales](#)

If you are in Scotland you should contact the [Scottish Public Services Ombudsman](#)

If you are in Northern Ireland you should contact the [Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman](#)