University of Brighton

FAQs: Industrial action by UCU – February 2020

When is the next strike action taking place?

The University and College Union (UCU) is planning a second round of strike action planned to take place over the next two months. Members of the UCU at the University have been asked to take 14 days of further strike action during February and March and these have now been confirmed as:

- **Week 1**: Thursday 20 and Friday 21 February
- **Week 2**: Monday 24, Tuesday 25 and Wednesday 26 February
- **Week 3**: Monday 2, Tuesday 3, Wednesday 4 and Thursday 5 March
- **Week 4**: Monday 9, Tuesday 10, Wednesday 11, Thursday 12 and Friday 13 March

What is the strike action all about and is the dispute affecting all universities? And what is the University of Brighton doing to resolve the dispute?

This second round of strike action follows on from that which happened before Christmas. This is part of a national dispute about pay and pensions involving the lecturers’ union, UCU.

This University is one of 22 institutions where action is being taken over pay. At a further 47 institutions strike action is being taken over both pay, and pensions.

UCU’s pay dispute is on four issues – pay, job security, equality and workloads. On the matter of pay, we are one of 147 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) which take part in national pay bargaining and as such this dispute can only be resolved nationally. We took the decision locally to pay the award offered through these negotiations, worth 3.5% to those staff in the lowest grades, last year so that colleagues did not lose out financially.

You can view the pay and benefits the University offers to its staff here: [https://www.brighton.ac.uk/about-us/working-with-us/jobs/benefits-and-facilities.aspx](https://www.brighton.ac.uk/about-us/working-with-us/jobs/benefits-and-facilities.aspx)

On the remaining three issues we have been working with our local Trades’ Unions for some time to make progress:

- **Job security**: Over the last three years we have seen the number of colleagues who are on indefinite contracts increase and around 95% of teaching staff at this University are now on permanent contracts. In addition to these colleagues we also employ Hourly Paid Lecturers, although these accounting for 1.35% of our total pay bill. Some of the remaining colleagues on fixed-term contracts will be staff who may, for example, be providing maternity cover or who may be on secondment. We have a clear code that sets out the limits of use of hourly paid lecturers and we carefully manage the number of staff on fixed term contracts via the Recruitment Authorisation process. We are currently negotiating a new framework for the use of fixed-term contracts with our Trades’ Unions.

- **Equality**: Our gender pay gap is below the sector average and we are committed to closing it further. For teaching staff, the gap last year was less than two percent. As a
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result of our proactive approach we are one of only 14 institutions with a Race Equality Charter Bronze Award, became a Stonewall Top 100 employer in 2019. We have recently launched leadership development programmes targeting female and BAME colleagues. The University is also a Disability Confident Employer, supporting people with disabilities to apply to work at the University and progress through the University.

- **Workloads**: We actively seek to regulate and manage the workload of our academic staff which already includes an allowance of 20% of their time to pursue research and scholarly and professional development. We have established both an Implementation Oversight Group and a separate joint monitoring group with the Trades’ Unions. This has been overseeing the implementation of our university-wide Workload Allocation Model (WAMS) which has been developed over the past three years to improve the transparency and consistency of academic workload allocations across the University. As a result we are seeing year-on-year improvements in a majority of schools and we continue work to do this across all schools.

These are key issues that fundamentally contribute to a positive working environment and we remain committed to a constructive partnership with our Trades’ Unions to ensure further progress.

**Are all staff at the University going on strike?**

No. Staff who are members of UCU can take part in the action should they choose to do so. All other members of staff and UCU members who choose not to take part will be working normally. During the last round of industrial action approximately 206 staff took action on each of the days strikes called. Whilst not all colleagues are members of UCU and would have the right to strike, for information as at the end of January 2020 1,453 colleagues work in academic schools and a further 1,150 work in professional services (headcount figures).

**Will University buildings/facilities be closed during the strike?**

No. We expect all our buildings including school offices, halls of residence, libraries, hospitality outlets and computer rooms to be open as normal. We also expect that most of our facilities will also be open as normal but if you have concerns about any specialist facilities please check with your School office before travelling in.

**Will I still be able to access support services and my SSGT?**

Yes. We expect all student support services, including SSGTs, to be available as normal. Students can also access the Big White Wall.

**How will I know whether my teaching sessions will take place?**

We anticipate limited disruption in most schools. However, UCU members who are striking do not need to inform the university in advance that they are doing this. So do please check your personalised timetable for cancellations on a daily basis during the strike period and look out for studentcentral announcements. Your Head of School will contact you.
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should they believe that there may be sustained disruption as a result of strike action in your School.
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Am I entitled to a refund on my fees if my learning was disrupted by the strike action?

We are monitoring the impact of the strike on student learning and, where there is a loss of learning opportunity, what plans are being put in place to address this. Some of our students may also be contacted by their tutors or lecturers with information about the plans that they have put in place.

We are encouraging any student who feels that they have been materially disadvantaged by the strike action to raise a formal complaint which will be considered on an individual basis and handled in line with our Complaints Resolution Procedure.

What should I do if I have an assessment due during the strike period?

All deadlines for all assessments on all modules affected by the industrial action during the strike period will be moved to ensure no student is disadvantaged. Any assessments following the strike will not be based on any lost learning opportunities which are not subsequently possible to address prior to the assessments. For module not affected by the industrial action, current assessment arrangements and deadline will remain unchanged.

Will any allowance be made for lost learning on the grading of assessments and examinations?

Adjustments will be made to assessments and examinations where appropriate to ensure that no students are materially disadvantaged as a direct result of the strike action.

What happens to any teaching that I might miss during the strike?

We want to reassure you that no student will be unfairly disadvantaged because of the strike. Colleagues across the University will be working together to ensure that, should there be an impact on your educational experience, that there will be opportunities to address this.

Will students still be able to graduate or progress?

Confirmation of degrees awards and decisions to progress from one year of study to the next will not be affected by the industrial action. Our University procedures and regulations are designed to work to the benefit of our students and make provision for special arrangements to be put in place to deal with situations of this nature. All School Examination Boards have been issued with advice on how to deal with assessments that may have been affected by these difficult circumstances, including the award of degrees on the basis of an incomplete set of results.

If there is a picket line does that mean I can still come into Uni?

Yes. All students, non-striking staff and visitors are legally entitled to cross a picket line and should not be obstructed from doing so.
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My course has requirements on attendance, how will the strike action affect this?

We will ensure that any absences due to strike action are noted and no students will be disadvantaged by this. If you are a Tier 4 student please be assured that should any of your contact points, including classes, seminars, lectures or meetings with tutors and supervisors be cancelled, this will be recorded as an authorised absence and have no impact on your attendance record or visa status.

Will my placement be affected?

We do not expect any work placements to be affected.

Who will support me on my placement if my personal tutor is on strike?

Any students on placement requiring any support should contact their School office.