

Students Supporting the Staff Strikes! Info. Sheet for Students University of Birmingham



Students of Birmingham!

If you've logged into Canvas this week, you'll have seen a link at the top with an FAQ from the Uni on the staff strike. This page is full of misinformation, and as students who stand in solidarity with striking staff whether they be academic or support staff, we feel you guys should know the truth. So, here's a real-life myth busting FAQ about the strike.

Who will be striking?

The Uni says: there should be very little impact on your studies as few staff voted for the strike. The truth: For the academic staff, 78% of members voted in favour of strike action on pay, equality and conditions. For the ballot on pensions justice, this increased to 82%. That's before we get on to the support staff in Unison who voted overwhelmingly for three strike days through this period. The truth is the Uni can't know who will be striking, and many non-union members will also strike in solidarity and will not cross the UCU picket line.

What will be happening? Should I still go to Uni?

The Uni says: the majority of sessions will be going ahead, and the rest of campus will be open and operating. They also say you should turn up for your classes and lectures anyway. The truth: It won't just be lecturers on strike. Academic related staff in IT and librarians will also be on strike. Support staff will also be out on 28th November, 29th November and 2nd December. Staff will be picketing at the entrances to major departments on campus. You should not come to Uni during the duration of the strikes, except to support staff on the picket lines. Even where staff do choose to come to work, you should show solidarity with striking staff and not attend or use Uni facilities. The Guild will be open and providing study space, and due to its location, this will not count as crossing the picket line.

Why are staff striking?

The Uni says this is a part of a national dispute about pay increases and pension contributions rising, so there is little individual Unis can do to change things. They say the USS pension scheme is in deficit and Unis can't afford to pay more. The truth: There are four key areas of dispute, some of which are simply ignored by the uni. Lecturers want a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. Real terms pay of academic staff has dropped by 17% in the last decades. Secondly, they want an end to insecure contracts and sector. Young academics are often hourly paid, and don't get paid for prepping for seminars or properly for marking our essays. Thirdly, they want an end to the gender and BAME pay gap. UoB's gender pay gap is

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above the national average and the vast majority of senior managers are men. Lastly, the USS (Universities Superannuation Scheme) has increased employee pension contributions while simultaneously reducing pension benefits.

The truth is the Uni can and should act to help break the deadlock. When the VC David Eastwood isn't driving round in his chauffeur driven car or running his private company that brings over wealthy international students, he is also part of the USS board, and holds a lot of influence. UoB is not a bystander in this process and has it within its capacity to agree to staff demands. At the very least, senior managers could speak out in support, just like the VC at Essex who agrees Unis can afford to pay more into staff pensions, especially when they have booming surpluses like Brum!

You pay shitloads of money every year to these institutions, and they give us so little in return. You should be pissed off, but direct your anger at the Uni, who won't negotiate, not striking workers. Remember they won't be getting paid during the strike!

What happens to my teaching time? Will things be rescheduled?

The Uni says: they expect staff to reschedule sessions and there may be catch up labs, seminars etc.

The truth: Striking staff have not taken the decision to strike lightly. They do not want to cause disruption to your learning, and many will be making extra resources available on Canvas for you. However, upon completion of the strike, UCU members will be taking action short of a strike, meaning they will not be rescheduling missed lectures etc or working all of the extra unpaid hours they currently do.

What if I'm on a Tier 4 visa?

During the duration of the strike, you should continue with independent study, and office hours will recommence at the end of the strike as normal. If you are an international student on a Tier 4 visa, the Uni will ensure you are not penalised during the strike period. Remember, the working conditions of staff are our learning conditions, and they are striking to secure better conditions for the future, which will have a net positive outcome for us. The University are required to monitor attendance only once every two weeks and it is their responsibility to put these arrangements in place, not ours.

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I've heard lecturers won't be using Panopto?

Strikes are disruptive and the point is not to mitigate them but to get the Uni to treat staff better so that we have a fair and sustainable education for everyone. The Uni have in the past used Panopto recordings to cover for staff who have been sacked and have used them for disciplinary investigations against lecturers. As part of the current action UCU are calling on lecturers to take down Panopto recordings relating to the dispute period so that the Uni cannot use these to break the strike. Lecturers have been told to share any existing recordings with students with disabilities, so please contact your lecturer if this applies to you! For more info on why Panopto is problematic please see:

<https://www.redbrick.me/dont-blame-lecturers-panopto-policy-breach/>

What can I do to help?

1. Don't cross the picket line! Join striking staff on the pickets and don't attend your timetabled classes or use Uni facilities for the duration of the strike. Doing so undermines the movement and shows the Uni you are OK with their inaction!
2. Lobby the VC! Make your voice heard and let the managers know you want the Uni to act to make conditions better for staff and students. If you're pissed off at the strike and want a refund or think the unpaid wages should go into student hardship funding or mental health support on campus – he's the one to write to! vc@bham.ac.uk
3. Support your lecturers! Let them know you support the cause. Even a simple e-mail can keep up their morale and help them know they are doing the right thing. It means a lot.
4. Join the movement! Check out the UoB students supporting staff strikes Facebook group and attend the rally in the Green Heart on Monday 25th November at 12 Noon:

Student group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/565505877532818/>

Strike event: <https://www.facebook.com/events/785828295190204/>



UoB students supporting staff strikes

DON'T CROSS THE PICKET LINE!

Their Working Conditions are our
Learning Conditions

**JOIN THE PICKET FROM MONDAY 25TH NOV
UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM**