



The boycott of assessment and marking activity

A briefing note for students

Members of the University and College Union (UCU) will begin a comprehensive boycott of all setting and marking, course work and assignments until a resolution to the pensions dispute can be reached.

We know that students will be concerned about the impact the boycott is likely to have and we want to explain what is happening and why.

What is included in this boycott?

Under such a boycott, UCU members in universities will cease to carry out all work relating to setting and marking, course work, assignments and this therefore includes all student work submitted for assessment.

Does this action cover all students?

Yes. The boycott covers any setting or marking which contributes to the award or classification of any degree, certificate, diploma or any other academic or professional qualification. It also covers progression from one stage of study to the next (for example from an MPhil to a DPhil).

UCU members will carry out all other duties – teaching classes, giving lectures etc – as normal.

Why are university staff taking this action?

UCU is in dispute with the university employers body (UUK)* over the significant and permanent destruction of our pensions. This is not a decision we have taken lightly. Our members don't want to take any action which damages the interests of students. But UCU members, your lecturers and support staff, deserve the right to a fair and decent pension.

But what is this dispute about?

The employers body have made devastating proposals to our pensions. They would mean:

- the loss of thousands of pounds every year
- a worse pension than that of colleagues who work in the 'new' universities who are in the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS)
- a potentially serious problem in recruiting and retaining the best staff.

Is your pension scheme sustainable?

Yes, projections of a deficit made by the University Superannuation Scheme (USS) are strongly contested by UCU and our financial experts. Since 2011, the fund's investments have grown by £8bn and the returns on these investments have

*UUK – Universities UK is the employers' (vice-chancellors and principals) representative body

outperformed average earnings and inflation. Last year, the fund's highest paid employee received a pay increase of 50% (to £900k) in reward for 'sustained performance'.

Isn't your action just selfish?

We believe that it's in your interests that universities are able to recruit and retain the best staff. We believe these proposals put that in jeopardy.

UCU is trying to negotiate with the university employers body (UUK) to ensure that our members get a fair pension, one which many of them have been paying into all of their working lives.

We know that this action will cause you disruption

None of our members, your lecturers and support staff, come to work wanting to take any kind of action that negatively impacts on students.

Our members are the people who support, teach, conduct research and provide a world-class education for millions of young people and they are passionate about what they do. But we cannot stand by whilst devastating and permanent changes are made to our pension scheme.

The fact is that every day that the university employers body (UUK) are allowing this dispute to roll on is another day that they are disrupting the quality of your education. They need to resolve this dispute now by providing proposals that protect pension benefits and ensure the sustainability of the fund.

The employers could end this dispute today

The bitter truth is that this dispute is unnecessary. The employers body (UUK) could end it today if they wanted to because we know that the pension scheme is sustainable and that the option is there for a fair settlement.

Stand with us

When you enter higher education, you have a right to know that you can expect high quality teaching and contact time. When you see disruption, it is natural to feel angry at your lecturers or their unions.

But we would ask that you please think about the facts of this dispute and the devastating impact the proposals could have on our members, your lecturers and support staff – and, should universities fail to be able to recruit and retain the best staff on the back of these proposals, your educational experience.

What can you do?

We would ask that you email your vice-chancellor or principal calling on them to press their national negotiators to produce a fair and sustainable proposal.

Talk to your Students' Union about how you can get involved.

Speak with your lecturers and other university staff and let them know you support them.

