



**Answers for Students
from BU UCU branch – November 2022
#ucurising**

For more than a decade, university staff have seen their workloads rise, job insecurity and pay gaps increase and have seen their pay cut (by more than 20% since 2008). It is affecting our mental and physical health and is impacting our ability to do what we love: teach you. You deserve staff that are paid properly, employed on proper contracts and with fair workloads. We are at breaking point and we're rising up to show our employers that #enoughisenough.

We will be on strike **Thursday 24th November, Friday 25th November** (Week 21 on the BU Calendar) and **Wednesday 30th November** (Week 22 on the BU Calendar). And from Wednesday 23rd November we will begin indefinite Action Short of a Strike (ASOS).

We hope you find this Q&A helpful.

Who are UCU?

UCU (University College Union) is a trade union for staff working in Further and Higher Education. BU UCU branch includes academic staff (lecturers, course leaders, researchers visiting tutors) and postgraduate students. Nationally, 81% of UCU members voted YES to industrial action that included a strike and 88% of UCU members voted YES to other forms of industrial action.

What is a strike?

A strike is when workers withdraw their labour, i.e. refuse to work, disrupting 'business as usual' to create change. Strikes are taken as a last resort after more conventional attempts at negotiations have failed. They are used as a way to compel employers to come back to the negotiating table. Strikes are lawful and we will lose pay for the time we are on strike. You may have seen lots of news coverage about recent or planned strikes by the Rail Workers Union, Train Drivers, Nurses, Barristers and Communication Workers too.

BU, along with 147 other HE institutions, have been notified (by law they require 14 days' notice) but they do not know which staff will be going on strike and which won't as union membership is confidential. The university can ask us if we're going on strike, but we're not obliged to tell them. In fact, we encourage our members not to do so, so that the university can't make plans to undermine us – for example, by arranging short-term cover, or by (*ahem...*) 'accidentally' misinterpreting our messages to students. Staff on strike don't receive pay on days that they strike.

Staff on strike do not reschedule activities that took place on strike days. This is to prevent the BU from simply ignoring the strike, confident that it will just further increase staff workloads in the future.

What is Action Short of a Strike (ASOS)?

ASOS means actions that are not a complete stop of work. In this industrial action, ASOS means working to contract (working only the hours we are contracted to work, no more. If this sounds crazy, ask your lecturer how much extra work they do every week), not covering for absent colleagues, not rescheduling classes that are cancelled due to strikes, not doing voluntary activities and removing materials from VLEs for classes happening on strike days.

We will be commencing indefinite ASOS on Wednesday 23rd November.

Why are we going on strike?

Because despite trying to negotiate with employers, they have not come back with meaningful offers or responses to our claim which is:

- Nationally agreed action to address excessive workloads and unpaid work, to include addressing the impact that excessive workloads are having on workforce stress and ill-health.
- For the standard weekly, full-time contract of employment to be 35 hours, with no loss of pay.
- An increase to all points on the national pay scale of at least inflation (RPI) + 2% or 12%, whichever is the higher.
- An agreed framework to eliminate precarious employment practices and casualised contracts, including zero hours contracts, from higher education; converting hourly paid staff onto fractional contracts; agreeing national guidance to end the outsourcing of support services in higher education and to bring staff into in-house employment.
- Nationally agreed action, using an intersectional approach, to close the gender, ethnic and disability pay gaps.

How do we know if our lecturers/tutors are striking?

You don't. The aim of the strike is to cause disruption – thereby showing how valuable your lecturers' work is to the university. Your lecturers might talk to you before the strikes, explaining why they are happening, but they probably won't tell you if they are going to strike. If you ask, they might tell you, or they might not. This is up to the individual lecturer. You'll only probably find out on the day the strikes are actually taking place.

What will my lecturer be doing while they're on strike?

They will not be working – you won't see them at BU unless they are on the picket line (see Q below re: What's a picket line?). We will be having picket lines outside BU (more info to come) and we will be organising online solidarity meetings for those who can't attend the pickets due to personal circumstances. We're hoping to organise (what are called) 'teach outs' too (If we do, we'll share a timetable of these with SUBU).

Will classes/lectures/seminars/events still happen?

Some will, yes, but some might not. You might receive an email to say some have been cancelled because the teaching staff is on strike. If you don't receive an email saying a class is cancelled, you will have to decide what to do. You could attend the class – or you could choose to show solidarity with your lecturers and their industrial action by not showing up (and possibly also emailing BU and the Vice-Chancellor to explain why you will not be attending class).

What about if I have an urgent question for my lecturer and they're on strike?

If you know your lecturer is on strike, you should direct your query to their Line Manager. If the Line Manager is also on strike, go higher up the chain and email their boss.

When will the strike end?

The current round of strikes ends on 30 November. We hope employers will come back to the negotiating table for serious negotiations. If not, we will organise more industrial action.

What's a picket line?

A picket line is where workers stand outside a workplace to tell others why they are on strike and to ask staff and students not to cross the line. Staff on picket lines try to persuade other workers and students not to go into work or use the facilities in the buildings, by talking to people. Not crossing the picket line is an act of solidarity with striking staff and helps put pressure on employers to address the issues staff are striking over. Picket lines are also places of learning where you can find out about the situation in Higher Education, your lecturers' lives as university professionals and where you can show your support and add to the power of the strike.

If there is a picket line in front of a building I am trying to enter or exit, what should I do?

We hope that you will respect the picket line and not enter. Lecturers on the picket line are there to fight for fair pay, manageable workloads and equitable practices at BU. If students cross the picket line, it tells the University you don't care about the way it treats its lecturers. If your lectures are not cancelled, you can support us and force the University to operate differently by not turning up. As a student, you must weigh up the benefits of crossing the picket line against the damage that doing so would cause to the strike movement itself. [Read more here.](#)

If I see my lecturers on a picket line, can I talk to them?

Of course! We'd love to chat with you! Come say 'Hi', ask questions and find out *why* your lecturers are on strike. You can hang out with us on the picket line too. There's a lot of solidarity on a picket line and you are part of this – it's a great way to show your lecturers you support them.

Will assessments be affected?

If you have assessments on that day, and a member of staff who is on strike is supposed to be attending, then the assessment may not happen and like any teaching planned for that day, will not be rescheduled. This is part of the power of strike action, the university should not try to make staff still do their teaching/assessing on other days and further increase their workloads. It is the university's responsibility to solve this, and we would hope that the university would address this clearly and succinctly to its students. If you find yourself in this situation, we encourage you to ask your head of department, your head of school and yes, even senior university management about what they are doing to address students' needs on the days of strike and what they are doing to support staff's needs for fairer working conditions.

What support is the University putting in place?

We don't know. This is for the University to organise. They will not know who is on strike until the strike days as we don't have to tell the employers beforehand. If you want to know, we suggest you email the university.

Will attendance records be affected (including Tier 4 visa holders)?

If you miss a class because it is cancelled due to strike action, it should not affect your attendance. If you are an international student on a visa, it should not be counted as an absence from your expected 'contact points'. It states in the Home Office's guidance, 'an expected contact point is one which the student would in principle have been able to attend. If a lecture, tutorial or other planned contact point with a student is cancelled due to industrial action, any missed contact points caused by the industrial action of lecturers should not be treated as unauthorised absences.¹ Unfortunately, if the class is not cancelled, and the student decides to show solidarity and not cross the picket line, we believe the Home Office will expect the university to record that as an unauthorised absence.

How does the University intend to spend the pay that's been withheld from staff who participate in industrial action?

We don't know. They might just try to keep it. We are going to ask them, and suggest you ask them too, to donate it to the student union or student-facing activities, local food banks, educational charities.

Can I claim compensation for missed teaching?

You can write to the Vice-Chancellor. BU may be able to offer you some form of compensation, without you needing to take the complaint any further. If not, ask what you should do next. As students, you are entirely entitled to do this and if you feel that your studies have been interrupted, we encourage you to do this knowing that the national strike is the result of employers continually treating staff unfairly.

How can I show my support for my lecturers at this time?

- Visit our picket lines and show your support by not crossing them.
- Come to our banner/placard making workshop (more details to come).
- Come hang out with us on our picket lines - chat to the lecturers and find out why we're on strike.
- Help spread the word on social media. Follow and share our posts on Twitter @BU_UCU.
- Write to the Vice Chancellor [jjevinney@bournemouth.ac.uk] to tell him that you support our efforts to protect working conditions at BU. We'll share a template to help you with this soon.
- If we organise teach-outs, come learn with us.

If you have any other questions, please email SUBU (subu@bournemouth.ac.uk) and they'll pass them along to us. We value your support and want to make sure you're informed.

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1022004/Student_Sponsor_Guidance_-_Doc_2_-_Sponsorship_Duties_2021-09-29_FINAL.pdf