

“Do you believe that the Students’ Union should support the UCU industrial action this academic year on pensions, and on pay and working conditions”

No Campaign Manifesto

Put yourself in the shoes, if you would, of a third year student. You have faced disruption after disruption. Over your first two academic years, you only had 12 weeks of the ‘normal’ University experience, thanks to both rounds of strikes in 2019/20 and the ongoing pandemic. If strike action goes ahead this year, you will be entering your final year faced with total upheaval once again. Second years were, essentially, held captive in their halls for most of last year after having been cheated by the A Level results algorithm. First years deserve so much better than our Students’ Union blindly supporting further disruption to our lives and education simply in the name of “solidarity”.

The topic of industrial action is highly sensitive for all those involved, it is vital that this is understood before we step foot onto the battleground.

The objective of this campaign is to put forwards the point of view of what we believe is the average student.

This campaign is not one to question the motive to strike. We agree that our PhD Student members are disgustingly overworked and not paid enough in reflection. We agree that more needs to be done to eliminate the gender and ethnic minority pay gaps.

However, we disagree that strikes should take place this academic year.

Undergraduates pay a **minimum** of £9,250 a year. If industrial action goes ahead, the Uni would be pocketing that money whilst not paying striking staff and still underfunding so many services. That’s the real reason LUSU aren’t able to deliver what students expect; the university have consistently refused to increase funding despite an increase in student numbers. As a union for **all** students, it is our duty to represent PhD students too. We know, anecdotally, that many PGR GTAs simply cannot afford to strike. This is unacceptable and we have to listen to your needs and balance them with those of taught students.

This would be the 4th time that UCU take action over the same issues. As far as we can tell, nothing has changed between now and March 2020, the end of the last round of strikes, no goalposts have been moved, no one has come to the table – perhaps due to a slight global upheaval that’s happened over the last 18 months...

If, as UCU argues, strike action is a last resort, why has there been seemingly little public facing effort from UCU to make change before resorting to industrial action? Are we being gaslighted into blind, empty solidarity for the sake of solidarity?

We believe that if these strikes were to go ahead, they could be potentially fatal for students. The strikes in 2019/20 were detrimental to student mental health¹. That was before the ongoing student mental health crisis² that has snowballed throughout the ongoing pandemic³. Ultimately, we believe that it would be selfish for industrial action to take place this academic year. Students deserve better.

There is little to no benefit to the average student if strikes go ahead yet we're the ones who pay the price, emotionally, academically and financially. It's our education that's interrupted, it's our mental health that's damaged, it's our wallets that are aching whilst the university pockets fortunes saved on teaching costs. Frankly, you're more likely to see pigs fly than tuition fees refunded thanks to the joys of government gatekeeping.

At the end of the day, we are a Union for students. It's up to you, it's up to us to decide how our elected officers engage with potential industrial action.

¹ <https://mancunion.com/2020/03/05/ucu-strikes-and-student-wellbeing-version-2t/>

²

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/bulletins/coronavirusandhighereducationstudents/19februaryto1march2021#student-well-being-and-mental-health>

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/nov/18/students-feel-vulnerable-how-covid-19-has-put-a-strain-on-mental-health>