

Vote **YES** to stand with staff and postgraduate students

Lancaster UCU, our staff union, are taking a stand against inequality, marketisation, and unfair working conditions in our university.

Our university is a vibrant community of scholars: not just a business where staff are exploited for profit. This strike action, and whether we as students decide to support it, is ultimately about what kind of university we want, and what its future should look like.

If you want to see staff and students standing together to build a fairer university for all then vote **YES** to mandate the Students' Union to support staff.

What is the strike about?

Strike action is being proposed on two issues: The UCU's four fights on pay, equality, workload and casualisation and on cuts to staff pensions.

Staff are going on strike for:

Fair Pay

- A £2500 pay rise across all pay grades meaning that those on the lower grades will benefit more than those on higher grades to help address the disparity between the highest and lowest earners. Between 2009 and 2019 staff pay fell by 17.6% relative to inflation, so a decent pay rise is long overdue.
- A £10 an hour minimum wage for all contract types to help fight precarity

Job security

- Fairer contracts to combat casualization. Currently 42% of academic staff on casual contracts struggle to pay household bills, let alone pay rent or mortgages.
- An end to precarious working conditions

Manageable Workloads

- Action to address workloads, including a standard contract of 35 hours per week across the university. The current average working week for academics is over 50 hours long and 78% saw their workload increase during the pandemic.

Equality

- Action to close the gender, race, and disability pay gaps. Currently, the pay gap between black and white staff is 17%, the disability pay gap is 9%, and the mean gender pay gap is 15.1%. Workloads for staff from these groups are also disproportionately higher.

Pensions

- Staff on the USS staff pension scheme already pay 9.8% of their income towards their pension, which is higher than in many other sectors. Major cuts and changes are being proposed to this pension scheme that would see staff significantly worse off after retirement.
- A lecturer on a starting salary will face a cut of 35% to their post-retirement benefits. Staff will also have no guaranteed income after retirement if the pension scheme is changed to a defined contribution only scheme.
- After previous strike action, the Joint Expert Panel convened in negotiations between Universities UK and the UCU proposed a solution that would address some of the issues with USS whilst ensuring lower-paid members are fairly treated but the employers backtracked and rejected the proposals, forcing the UCU into further strike action.

Student-Staff Solidarity

Staff members from the Lancaster UCU, Unison, and Unite branches stood with students when we took on university management, such as with the student rent strikes during the pandemic, and the UCU in particular have repeatedly campaigned to scrap student tuition fees. On these important issues for students, staff are standing with us, and we should now stand with them as they take action for a fairer workplace.

Previously, the Students' Union AGM passed a motion mandating the SU to support the UCU in their strike action and it was SU policy to stand with staff and teaching postgraduate students. We should not reverse this policy, and should extend our support in the best interests of all staff and students at Lancaster University.

The UCU have tried to negotiate with Universities UK (UUK) and the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA), have repeatedly and publicly campaigned to these bodies, the government, and to individual universities, and have exhausted all the other routes. Throughout this they have been ignored, and strike action is now the only way to get the employers to listen. Strike action is always a last resort but if we let unfair working conditions and the creeping marketisation of our universities go unchallenged then things are only going to get worse for staff and students alike in the coming months and years.

It is also important to remember that some of the most precarious members of the UCU are postgraduate students on GTA or Associate Lecturer contracts who do a lot of heavy-lifting when it comes to teaching undergraduate courses but who are not always offered fair working conditions. Student teaching staff are at the forefront of casualization, precarity, and increasingly unfair conditions at work and this is why strike action over the UCU's four fights on pay, equality, workload and casualization are especially important.

If we, as a union that exists to represent students, don't stand with our fellow students and LUSU members in this desperate fight for a fairer workplace, then we lose any right to call ourselves a Students' Union.

Students and staff are the heart of the university, and we should be siding with them rather than with university managers and the government. We should stand together in solidarity and call on our Students' Union to support Lancaster UCU in their fight for a fairer university.

Vote **YES** to supporting UCU strike action and make it clear that staff and students are united in the struggle for a fairer Lancaster University.

For the facts and figures, see:

<https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/11818/Four-fights-dispute-FAQs>

<https://www.ucu.org.uk/uss-faqs#what-is-the-uss-dispute-about>