

13 APRIL 2018

Q & A

FOR STUDENTS: INDUSTRIAL ACTION

WHAT NOW?

WHAT IS BEHIND THE UNIVERSITY STRIKES ?

Staff at 65 universities took part in industrial action in February and March this year. The national strikes were called by the University and College Union (UCU) in response to proposed changes to the USS pension scheme. At the start of the action, the number of UCU members voting in favour of strike action represented an estimate of 16% of academic staff in those institutions, and 12% of active USS members in higher education.

The strikes have caused uncertainty and concern for many students and their families at the universities affected.

For more information on the pension proposals, and the negotiations between Universities UK and UCU – through Acas – to end the dispute, please see the [pensions section](#) of the Universities UK website.

WHAT ARE UNIVERSITIES DOING TO MANAGE THE DISRUPTION OF THE STRIKE ACTION IN FEBRUARY AND MARCH ?

Minimising disruption from the recent strikes to students and their learning is a priority for universities. Over the Easter period, university staff and lecturers have worked hard to make arrangements to stop students losing out. If your university was affected, you should have already been contacted about this.

Activities to minimise disruption will vary across universities and faculties and will be dependent on how much strike action each institution experienced. Activities might include:

- making specific learning materials available online
- establishing internal working groups of senior management and student representatives to keep the situation under review
- rescheduling lectures and seminars
- ensuring exam papers are a fair reflection of the learning that has taken place
- communicating with you about any changes to teaching or assessment
- setting up online information pages to keep you updated about strike action

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I MAY HAVE MISSED KEY PARTS OF MY COURSE DUE TO THE STRIKES, WILL THIS AFFECT HOW I AM ASSESSED ?

No. Universities affected by strike action are proactively seeking to minimise the impact this has on you. Universities have procedures for ensuring that students are not disadvantaged in exams and assessments, if you missed out on teaching for any reason. They are committed also to ensuring that academic standards are maintained.

The specific approach of each university will be different, as the impact of the recent strike action has varied from course to course. If you haven't already been notified, we recommend checking your university's online student portal and faculty website to better understand what their policy is.

Universities will also have procedures in place to consider carefully whether there are any implications on the way you are assessed and will inform you if they think they need to make a change to ensure you are not disadvantaged.

All affected universities have provided assurances that all eligible students will progress and graduate as planned this year.

WHAT CAN I DO IF I FEEL LIKE THE STRIKES HAVE SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECTED MY STUDIES ?

We understand that missed teaching time is unsettling, and universities are working hard to make sure that you do not miss out on getting the most from your course.

If you are unhappy, you can make a complaint via your university's complaints procedure. Information about making a complaint will be available on your university website or student portal. Universities will deal with complaints on a case-by-case basis as everyone's circumstances will be different. If you make a complaint and a resolution is not reached, you can contact the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) in England and Wales, an independent body that can review your complaint. The OIA has published [guidance](#) about its approach to complaints by students affected by the industrial action.

Scotland and Northern Ireland have their own, separate arrangements. Students in Scotland can complain to the [Scottish Public Services Ombudsman](#). Students in Northern Ireland can take their complaint to the [Public Services Ombudsman](#).

If you feel as though you are struggling and need additional support because of the strike action, you can access welfare services at your university or speak to your student representatives.

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HOW WILL UNIVERSITIES DEAL WITH COMPENSATION CLAIMS FROM STUDENTS ?

Compensation claims will be considered on a case-by-case basis at each university, reflecting the individual circumstances for the student and institution concerned, and the institution's own policies and procedures.

It is important that universities treat students fairly and do what they can to mitigate the impact of industrial action on students' learning, including missed lectures. Universities affected by the strikes acted swiftly to mitigate the impact so that students are still able to achieve the learning outcomes from their course.

If you make a complaint and a resolution is not reached through internal procedures, you have access to the alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, mentioned above (including the OIA and the ombudsman services in Scotland and Northern Ireland). Students do not have to pay to make a complaint to these ombudsman services. Their processes are informal and designed to be an alternative to the adversarial legal processes. Students should not, therefore, need to use lawyers when making a complaint to one of these alternative dispute resolution services.

I'M AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT, WILL THE STRIKE ACTION HAVE AFFECTED MY STUDIES OR VISA STATUS ?

No. Universities have put measures in place to ensure that all students – including international students – are not disadvantaged in terms of learning, exams and assessments.

The strike action should not have affected your Tier 4 visa status. The usual attendance monitoring for Tier 4 students will have continued to apply during any industrial action. If any classes or contact points have been missed by international students as a result of the strikes, it will be recorded as authorised absence due to the industrial action. Any international students concerned about the industrial action or their visa status should seek help and advice from the university's international office.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FROM THE OFFICE FOR STUDENTS:

The Office for Students (OfS), the higher education regulator for England, has also published [information](#) on its website for students affected by the recent industrial action. It has also published a [statement](#) on its role in relation to the industrial action.