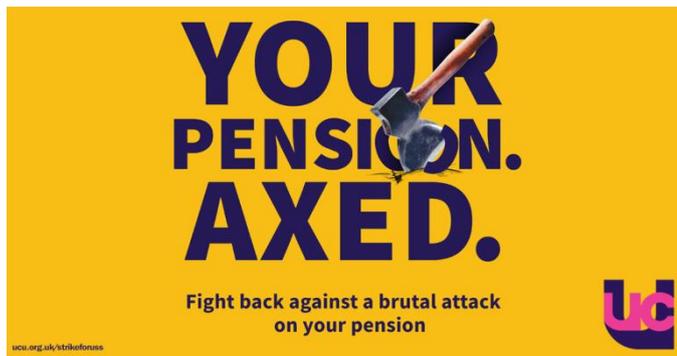


University of Leeds University & College Union

Pensions- what's going on?



University employers want to make big changes to the future pensions of academic and academic related staff in USS. They propose closure of our Defined Benefit scheme where we know what we pay and what we will get, replacing it with a Defined Contribution scheme with no guaranteed pension benefits and the certainty of a reduced retirement income for all. A typical lecturer would lose about £10,000 a year in retirement. The changes will have the biggest effects on staff early in their careers, and will discourage future staff from joining the profession.

UCU has repeatedly tried to negotiate with employers, to no avail. So now we feel we have no choice but to take strike action, as decided by 88% of UCU members who voted in a legal ballot. Our members in 61 UK universities will be striking on 14 days: 22-23 February, 26-28 February, 5-8 March and 12-16 March (unless the employers return to proper negotiations). This is longest strike in the history of Higher Education.

Is there really a huge deficit to deal with? No, it's part spin from the employers but mostly due to plans for reckless "de-risking" of pension assets by moving from growth investments into very low interest gilts, so the fund income will go down.

It's difficult to lose 14 days wages, for all of us. But when you compare that to a loss of £10,000 a year for perhaps 20 years, we can't afford not to fight this. Members who would have financial

difficulties, e.g. on casualised or part time contracts, will be able to apply for financial support from the UCU Fighting Fund.

Students have started a 'Leeds Students Support UCU' Facebook group, and UCU members are reporting great responses from their students.

Questions about striking

For advice on particular circumstances, how to respond to management, reporting strike action, the Fighting Fund and other questions see www.leedsucu.org.uk/dispute-information. Most importantly, you do NOT have to tell anyone beforehand that you will be striking. Management want to minimise disruption, but the prospect of maximum disruption will be what pushes them to work with UUK to negotiate meaningfully.

Pensions – how can you help?

Please write to the VC, write to your MP, spread the word to colleagues, tell your students (resources provided e.g. slides for lectures). See www.leedsucu.org.uk/uss-strike-what-can-i-do-to-help. And of course, join the picket lines on strike days. It's an energising and uplifting experience! If you're not a UCU member yet, you can join right up to the picket line and strike immediately.

'Striking Insights' strikes again!

We'll be running a teach-out on strike days enabling students to enjoy just as high-quality education as usual (but not geared towards passing exams), using venues just off campus. All members are invited to offer a session, see www.leedsucu.org.uk/uss-strike-what-can-i-do-to-help

Pensions – more information

There's lots more background, explanations about the pension valuation and the effects on staff on the national and local UCU websites:

www.leedsucu.org.uk/pensionstrike
www.ucu.org.uk/strikeforuss

Follow us on Twitter (@leedsucu) for latest news.

Gender pay gap



We will find out the size of the gender pay gap at Leeds by March, when all large organisations must publish details of pay by gender. Past data (HESA 2012/3) showed a gender pay gap at Leeds amongst academic staff of 12.6%, and that

5.2% of female academics were professors compared to 15.2% of males. LSE and Essex have both taken radical action to reduce similar disparity, and Leeds UCU intends to submit a gender pay claim. Watch out for UCU organised events on 8th March, International Women's Day.

IT reorganisation

UCU and the other campus unions are meeting weekly with HR and IT managers to discuss issues arising around the IT reorganisation. We've met with affected members in IT so that we fully understand their concerns and have passed those concerns on at the meetings.

Health and Safety Reorganisation

We've been supporting members through this difficult reorganisation. Our members in the H&S team have serious concerns about how this reorganisation will affect the health and safety of staff and students across the university, but their concerns have been dismissed.

Workload

Vicky and Tim (our President & Vice-President) met with the VC, senior HR and the other campus unions to discuss workload and stress. There seems to be a lack of understanding of what a serious problem this is for many staff. We are working with HR to ensure that the upcoming People Management Framework Survey questions pick up on relevant issues – please fill this survey in when it comes round so that management and unions get a full picture of how staff feel.

Sexual harassment support hotline

0800 138 8724

UCU members experiencing or worried about sexual harassment can ring this free confidential hotline for counselling, support and advice, 24/7.

Statutes dispute

Management still want to introduce dismissal for 'some other substantial reason' (SOSR), and to remove independent appeal chairs, and now also to move procedures to ordinances so they can be changed more easily. Patient negotiation had no effect, hence our strikes in October. So we are moving on to Academic Censure and Boycott of the university - a staged process whereby UCU colleagues at other universities boycott Leeds. Please give us your views on this, see www.leedsucu.org.uk/censure-and-academic-boycott-of-university-of-leeds

Scholarships for asylum seekers

After much pressure from staff and students, the university has agreed from 2018 to fully fund 10 scholarships for asylum seekers. We're delighted!

Ask a colleague to join

Many new members have joined UCU recently - being in the union is the only way to protect our future pensions and the future of HE! We're asking every member to talk to just one colleague about joining. It's easy to join at <https://join.ucu.org.uk>

Next UCU Meetings

General Meeting dates (see email for venues) are

- Thursday 15 February, 1 - 2 pm
- Monday 16 April, 12 noon – 1 pm

All members welcome. Watch your email for additional meetings on pensions.

Contact us:

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