

Q&As for students on strike action at the University of Surrey

1. Why are staff striking?

Following their recent ballot across 68 higher education institutions (HEIs), University and College Union (UCU) has notified the University of Surrey that its members will be taking industrial action over proposed changes to the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) pension. These proposals are subject to further consideration once the formal consultation process has been undertaken, and we expect this consultation to commence in mid-March and run for at least 60 days. We have been notified that strike action will commence on 22 February, and run for 14 days over the following 4 weeks. In addition Action Short of a Strike (ASOS) will commence on 22 February and will terminate no later than 19 June 2018. This ASOS will consist of working to contract; not covering for absent colleagues; not rescheduling lectures or classes cancelled due to strike action; not undertaking any voluntary activities.

2. What is the difference between strike action and action short of a strike (ASOS)?

Strike action is where employees refuse to work. ASOS occurs when employees of an organisation engage in action that cannot be classified as a full strike. Such action can be working to contract or refusing to work additional hours.

3. Will my studies be impacted?

UCU have 282 members and 123 voted for strike action and 137 for ASOS. As such, some lectures will need to be rescheduled and turnaround time for essay marking may be delayed. The strike action could impact some students more than others, depending on the numbers within each department who decide to strike or take ASOS.

4. What happens when a member of staff is on strike and so refuses to teach a scheduled lecture?

The relevant Head of Department will designate an alternative member of staff to take the lecture. If this is not possible the Head of Department will use appropriately qualified current, new or previous Associate staff who are familiar with the module to deliver its content. Where it is not possible for a teaching session to be delivered in its timetabled slot due to industrial action, the Timetabling team will work with academic staff to re-schedule the teaching. Where lectures have to be cancelled due to strike action students will be informed by the Timetabling team via text and email at the earliest possible opportunity.

5. How will I find out if my lecture is going ahead?

We will text and email students if we have to cancel. Please assume your lecture is on if you don't get a message from the University. However, if lecturers don't tell us in advance (as they are being advised to by UCU), then you may turn up for a lecture and discover that no lecturer present. If this happens, please contact the timetabling team who will investigate and try to reschedule.

6. I have to travel a long distance to campus, when will I know if my lecture is cancelled?

Where lectures have to be cancelled due to strike action students will be informed by the Timetabling team via text and email at the earliest possible opportunity.

7. What if I have a class test on a strike day?

Class tests scheduled to take place on strike days should be unaffected by the industrial action.

8. Where should students report to if they believe that a lecture has been or may be cancelled due to strike action?

Students should contact the Timetabling team at timetablehelp@surrey.ac.uk

9. Can temporary staff be hired to cover the work of employees involved in the industrial action?

The University is not able to hire temporary agency workers to cover the work of those involved in industrial action. The University can, however, cover the work by temporarily reallocating work to other appropriate staff not involved in the action or by identifying other workers (NOT agency) who could provide suitable temporary cover, such as Associate Staff or retired staff.

10. Does the University withhold pay for strike action?

The University withholds full pay for each day of action, whether strike action or ASOS.

11. What happens to money that the University will save by withholding pay for staff who go on strike?

The money will go towards the student hardship fund.

12. Does the University withhold pay for working to contract?

So long as an individual fulfils the full range of his/her contractual duties, the University will not make any deductions to pay. However, where working to contract results in partial performance of the individual's explicit and implied contractual duties this will amount to a breach of contract and pay can be withheld.

13. Is it possible that the Semester will be extended to make up teaching time?

We are not currently planning to extend the semester. Where lectures are cancelled the timetabling team will work with academic staff to reschedule the teaching.

14. Will I receive compensation for loss of teaching?

Where it is not possible for a teaching session to be delivered in its timetabled slot due to industrial action, the timetabling team will work with academic staff to re-schedule the teaching.

We remain committed to minimising disruption or disadvantage to students. However, we will keep this under review and give individual consideration to cases where students believe they have not received appropriate teaching provision. The University has a complaints and appeal process available to students should you wish to make a complaint and appeal based on the impact of the strike on your studies.

15. What happens if one or more of my dissertation or project supervision meetings is cancelled due to strike action?

Supervision meetings will normally be rearranged for a day when the staff member is not taking industrial action, and if for some reason that is not possible then your department will put alternative appropriate supervision in place for you.

If a dissertation supervisory meeting is cancelled due to strike action, please therefore liaise with your supervisor to reschedule the meeting. In the event that this proves problematic, please contact your Head of Department so that she/he can make appropriate alternative arrangements.

16. How will my course be assessed if I have not received the teaching?

We will ensure that students are not disadvantaged in their assessments where some module content is not delivered as a result of strike action (e.g. if lectures are cancelled and cannot be rescheduled). In such circumstances we will review and if necessary revise the content of assessments. The formal Boards which review and ratify the outcomes of examinations and assessments will also be made aware of any impact the industrial action has had on your teaching and learning, so that they can take this into account in their considerations.

17. Can I make an application to submit extenuating circumstances for the impact the strike action has had on me?

There is no need for you to submit an Extenuating Circumstances application, since the Exam Board will be made aware of all the relevant information concerning the impact of the industrial action on every module and assessment (see detailed response to previous question).

18. Will the strike affect my examinations this summer?

As things stand at present, and at all universities, the period of strike action will end on 16 March and Action Short of a Strike on 19 June. The UCU could decide to proceed to a subsequent period of action affecting the examination period, and if this were the case we would again take all practical steps to minimise disruption and disadvantage to students. As yet, however, this is unknown. We will provide more information when it is available.