

## What is a Trade Union?

Trade Unions are groups of workers organised together to win a better deal at work. In most workplaces where unions are active, members will get together to talk about what's going on – and any problems they are having. The issues most likely to come up are pay, pensions, safety at work, unfair treatment, or simply the way work is organised.

In many workplaces, the union is legally recognised by the employer. In these workplaces, the union reps have the right to formally negotiate with managers about pay and other terms and conditions. At the University of Leicester, UCU is recognised alongside Unison and Unite.

## Who Are UCU?

UCU is the largest trade union and professional association for academics, lecturers, trainers, researchers and academic-related staff working in further and higher education throughout the UK.

We represent all academic and related staff, including lecturers, researchers, professors,

Find out more at [www.ucu.org.uk](http://www.ucu.org.uk)

## What We Do at Leicester

Leicester UCU is the local branch that represents UCU members at the University of Leicester. The branch has its own committee and departmental reps across the institution. We campaign locally on issues at Leicester and represent individual members when they have a problem at work. We also work collaboratively with other campus unions (Unison and Unite) and the University leadership in reviewing and amending University policies. More information about the branch and what we do can be found [here](#).

## Industrial Action

When we are striking:

- Thursday 24 November
- Friday 25 November
- Wednesday 30 November

Why we are striking:

- Meaningful pay rise to address over a decade of below inflation salary uplifts.
- Stamp out insecure and casual contracts.
- Revoke pension cuts imposed earlier this year.
- Address equality pay gaps (E.g. [Gender Pay Gap at Leicester is 20%](#))

The UK university sector generated a [record](#) income of £41.1bn last year with vice chancellors collectively earning an estimated £45million. The sector can more than afford to meet staff demands. Industrial action, and a strong mandate for action from 70000 members in the UK, is the leverage needed to bring employers to the negotiating table.

UCU is not unique. We join dozens of British trade unions with a mandate for industrial action. Workers are frustrated at wealthy employers with record profits and giving bonuses to those at the top, whilst workers at the bottom have their wages stifled in the face of rising costs and crippling energy bills.

Members will also commence Action Short of a Strike from 23 November. This involves:

- Working to contract (not undertaking duties outside of work contracts)
- Not undertaking voluntary activities
- Not covering for absent colleagues
- Not rescheduling missed classes due to industrial action
- Removing materials for classes that would have taken place on strike days from online learning platforms.

We never undertake action lightly. Members are at breaking point. We are doing this to save the institutions we love, and to achieve dignity at work. Students learning conditions are our members' working conditions.

### **How will our action impact students?**

As our members will be withdrawing their labour on strike days, you may find that you have classes cancelled, or your queries take slightly longer to be answered. Industrial action is intended to cause disruption, as this is one of the main ways we can bring the employers to the negotiating table. We have been forced into this action, and we do not want your learning being impacted as a result. What you can do is support our action. The longer the picket lines, the shorter this dispute will last. Unity is strength, and University leaders have the power to halt all action by meeting our reasonable demands.

### **How you can get involved**

Join us on the picket lines. Each morning of the strike days we will be picketing outside University entrances telling staff, students and visitors why we are on strike and encouraging people to join us. We will also have a number of teach out events, run by your lecturers on a number of different topics. These are lively, friendly and safe spaces which everyone is welcome to attend.

Share your support for our action on social media, tagging us on Facebook. Twitter and Instagram @leicesterucu #ucurISING

Download resources to show your support [here](#).

## **Trade Union Law**

The Trade Union Act 2016 restricts how and why trade unions can take industrial action, fund political parties and conduct their duties.

### ***Balloting***

The legislation stipulates that in order to call a strike, members must be balloted and must achieve a 50% voter turnout in order to validate the results. If we miss the threshold by one vote, even if 100% of those who voted, voted in favour of industrial action, then the action could not legally take place. There are no such threshold limitations for national and local elections (for instance, [the local by-election](#) for Evington ward achieved a turnout of 31.92%).

We are also limited to conducting postal ballots. Trade union members cannot vote in person or online. It is believed that this is a more cumbersome method of collecting votes, and can impact the ability of unions to take action.

### ***Mandates***

Votes in support of strike action are only valid for six months, which is why reballots are held to extend the mandate for prolonged bouts of action.

### ***Why take industrial action?***

Strike action is undertaken as a last resort. Unions have the power to strike in order to prevent the exploitation of employees. They act as a powerful bargaining tool to get a better outcome for workers. However, as the law makes achieving strike action difficult, the power of unions is reduced, and the exploitation of the workforce can be more likely.

### ***The Law & picketing***

Before any strike action we must inform the employer at least 2 weeks prior to the action, otherwise it is illegal. There are also specific laws about the nature of picketing. Each picket line must have a nominated supervisor. The name of this supervisor must be passed on to the police prior to any action, and they must be easily identifiable on picket lines.

You will see that the law restricts our ability to partake in industrial action, and that there are many hoops we must jump through in order to use strike action to hold employers to account throughout our disputes. This takes the power further from the workers themselves, which is why withdrawing labour is frequently threatened, and carried out. For instance the [recent news](#) that nurses will be going on strike this winter.