

Union Stance on UCU Action

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Union Notes:

1. The UCU (University and College Union) is the union representing lecturers, teaching postgraduate students and academic-related staff in universities and colleges.

2. The Imperial College UCU branch voted to support the national dispute on USS pensions and the local dispute on pay at Imperial at the same time.¹

3. In 2017 UUK (Universities UK, representing university management and pension provider) announced a new valuation of the USS pension scheme based on updated valuation methodology; UUK proposed changes to the scheme which increase pension contributions from 26% to 36.6%. Much of this cost would fall on employees, and independent analysis carried out on behalf of the UCU further suggested retirement income losses under these plans of between 20-40%.²

4. Imperial College's position was to reject the research led by a panel of their own researchers who investigated the valuation methodology. Later in the strikes they began to support more research into the valuation of the fund.

5. After the 2018 strikes a Joint Expert Panel (JEP) was established, which agreed with UCU's claims and found that the mandate to 'de-risk' the pension fund was based on 'misleading results' which 'appear to be inconsistent with many employers' wishes' for its risk level. Moreover, it found that the valuation of the fund was incorrect, and the indication of a large deficit was likely due to the outputs of 'Test 1', used in the valuation, being 'highly sensitive to the input assumptions, many of which are very subjective.'

6. The UCU has argued that the JEP report vindicates the 2018 industrial action, and have proposed accepting the JEP proposals of returning to the September 2017 valuation, delaying de-risking the fund, changing the valuation methodology, and placing pension contributions at 29.1%.³ The UCU position is to support a position of no detriment to its members.

7. The UUK have rejected the postponement of de-risking and the smoothing of future contributions, and an independent review found the current proposal would leave staff £240,000 worse off than before 2017.⁴

8. Imperial College UCU members were balloted on 30/10/2019 and did not engage in industrial action due to turnout being below 50%. Union members were re-balloted over pensions and pay on 28/01/2020 and reached the requisite turnout.^{5 6}

Pension Ballot	Yes	No	Turnout
30/10/19	72.6%	27.4%	48.0%
28/01/20	72.5%	27.6%	54.1%

9. A separate local dispute over pay is also part of the strike action; UCU members have seen a real-terms pay cut through below-inflation pay rises and are seeking to negotiate a pay rise with Imperial College management.

10. Strikes over pay was balloted on 28/01/2020 and passed.

Pay Ballot	Yes	No	Turnout
30/10/19	67.9%	32.1%	56.4%

11. The National Union of Students has come out in support of the UCU, publishing a statement to students in support.⁷

Union Believes:

1. The interests of students are best served by a staff workforce which is highly motivated and fairly compensated.

2. The result of such a reduction in deferred compensation through pension cuts would have a damaging impact on the lives of staff, and therefore students, at Imperial, as well as the ability to attract future staff.
3. That by not abiding by the findings of the JEP, university employers and UUK are responsible for the disruption caused by strike action, and that College must encourage the pensions provider to agree a fair way of valuing the fund and to reduce contribution costs.
4. That College must engage in productive discussion with UCU regarding pay negotiations.

Union Resolves:

1. Mandate appropriate Union representatives to call on their respective faculties/departments to ensure disruption to major coursework and exams taking place during the strike period is minimised.
2. Mandate the Union President to write to the Provost to encourage College to enter into meaningful negotiations with the UCU and pressure UUK to do the same.
3. Mandate elected representatives of ICU to support the UCU position in meetings with College if and when the issue is raised.
4. Encourage elected union officials to visibly support the UCU where possible, including attending events and writing in *Felix*.
5. Encourage appropriate/available Union officers and staff members to disseminate material publicising the strike and UCU's position in the dispute. These materials could include, but are not limited to: leaflets, posters, badges, and adding images/video to any Union-owned monitors.

References

- 1 <https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/10621/UCU-announces-14-strike-days-at-74-UK-universities-in-February-and-March>
2. The analysis was carried out by independent experts at First Actuarial https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/8916/TPS--USS-no-DB-comparison-First-Actuarial-29-Nov-17/pdf/firstactuarial_ussvtps_nodb_29nov17.pdf
- 3 <https://ussjep.org.uk/files/2018/09/report-of-the-joint-expert-panel.pdf>
- 4 https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/10433/FA_analysis_of_USS_benefits_and_contributions_September_2019/pdf/FAanalysisofUSSbenefitsandcontributionsSeptember2019
- 5 https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/10695/USS-reballot-results-January-2020/pdf/ucu_uss-reballot_result-breakdown_jan.204.pdf
- 6 https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/10533/USS-ballot-results-autumn-2019/pdf/ucu_uss-ballot_result-breakdown_oct19.pdf
- 7 <https://www.nus.org.uk/en/news/press-releases/everything-you-need-to-know-about-the-ucu-strike/>