UCU message to school presidents

UCU, the trade union for academic and professional staff, is in dispute with university employers over proposed changes to our pension scheme which would see the average academic lose around £10,000 a year in retirement. We have been forced to take strike action by the employers’ unwillingness to negotiate. This is a UK-wide dispute and it includes our institution.

Strike is a last resort and we are sorry to be causing disruption to our students. This imminent UCU strike action will no doubt be causing you additional work and concern. Our UCU local branch has been in frequent contact with the Students’ Association to set out the form of the action and our reasons for taking it. The UCU representatives in your school will contact you shortly.

This message sets out what is likely to happen during the strike and what you can do about it.

The strike days are

Week four – Thursday 22 and Friday 23 February (two days)

Week five – Monday 26, Tuesday 27 and Wednesday 28 February (three days)

Week six – Monday 5, Tuesday 6, Wednesday 7 and Thursday 8 March (four days)

Week seven – Monday 12, Tuesday 13, Wednesday 14, Thursday 15 and Friday 16 March (five days)

On these days UCU members, and possibly other members of staff affected by the pension changes, may not be undertaking any of their duties at St Andrews (and elsewhere). Lectures, tutorials and other contact may be cancelled. Some other university services (for instance Library, IT) may also be affected. Staff are not obliged to declare in advance of the action if they are taking it. It is therefore impossible to predict the extent of the disruption.

It is possible that some modules will be severely disrupted. UCU will always discuss ways of mitigating that disruption if and when the action is called off. In the meantime, students should address their concerns about the provision of teaching and conduct of assessment to the Proctor, Professor Lorna Milne, at proctor@st-andrews.ac.uk.

We hope our students will support us in this action. Supporting will show that you value our part in your education, and that you want higher education to be a desirable profession to work in now and in the future. You can support us by

* joining us on picket lines and other events on strike days (details will be provided to the Students’ Association);
* writing to the Principal, Professor Sally Mapstone, principal@st-andrews.ac.uk

 (a template letter that you can use or adapt is below);

* talking to other students about the action and persuading them to support it.

More details on the dispute can be found here: https://www.ucu.org.uk/why-we-are-taking-action-over-USS

Questions about the dispute can be addressed to the UCU St Andrews branch president, Tom Jones at tej1@st-andrews.ac.uk

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Dear Principal,

I am concerned to hear that industrial action by members of UCU over changes to the USS pension scheme is going to cause disruption to the University’s activities, including teaching, in February and March. However, I would like to express my support for staff fighting to protect their pensions.

I understand that the changes proposed to the scheme will reduce the benefits staff receive in retirement considerably. I believe that University staff deserve a good pension, and that in a time of unprecedented success for St Andrews, and of growth in the UK university sector at large, a good pension for staff should be a priority.

I recognise that the most likely way to prevent disruption is through a return to negotiations. I therefore ask you to use your voice within Universities UK to press for a return to the negotiating table, and to work for a solution that preserves staff pension benefits.

Yours sincerely,

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