

Policy to Mitigate the Educational Impact on Students of UCU Industrial Action

Last update: 11 November 2022

1. Background

1. Following national votes in favour of industrial action regarding proposed changes to the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) pension scheme and a separate ballot related to pay and wider issues, the Universities and Colleges union (UCU) has announced industrial action in the form a series of strikes and “action short of strikes” (ASOS) across the sector, including at Durham. This may disrupt teaching and learning.
2. Students have a reasonable expectation that the University will enable them to progress in their studies and complete their awards. This policy’s objective is to find a pragmatic means to enable students to fulfil the learning outcomes specified by their programmes of study.

2. Programme Requirements

3. The Statutes of the University determine that awards are made to students who have completed an approved course of study and passed the relevant examinations in accordance with University regulations (Statute 21). Programmes are approved on the basis of a statement of intended learning outcomes which are delivered through the programme modules and assessed in corresponding summative assessments. Year-on-year progression is determined in the same way.
4. Programme learning outcomes, as listed in Programme Specifications, are set at a relatively high level. The purpose of mitigation is to ensure to the best of our ability that all students receive the necessary educational opportunities to enable them to meet the learning outcomes of the programmes on which they are registered.

3. Industrial Action

5. Not all members of academic and related staff are members of the UCU, and not all of those who are members participate in industrial action. Many classes will proceed as usual. This policy thus focuses on measure to mitigate the partial cessation of teaching during strike days.
6. Strike action is planned for 3 days, on Thursday 24, Friday 25 and Wednesday 30 November 2022.
7. On those days in which a member of staff participates in the strike, their classes may be cancelled. Cancelled classes may include lectures, seminars, tutorials, laboratory classes, fieldwork and individual UG, PGT or PGR supervisions. Some assessment activities may be affected. Some research students may experience disruption through cancellation of PhD viva voce examinations. Department offices should remain open, as many of these staff have different union arrangements. The library, and study spaces in the Teaching & Learning Centre, will remain open.
8. UCU’s action short of strike (ASOS) will also commence on Thursday 24 November 2022 and is intended to be continuous from that date. When a member of staff participates in ASOS, they may do the following: work to contract; not undertake any voluntary activities; not cover for absent colleagues; remove

9. uploaded materials related to, and/or not sharing materials related to, lectures or classes that will be or have been cancelled as a result of strike action; and not rescheduling lectures or classes cancelled due to strike action.
10. Striking staff are not obligated to inform their head of department about their strike intentions in advance, and thus the university will not know until after a class was due to take place that it has been cancelled. Staff who are intending to strike may elect to inform their students of their intentions. Absent this information, we ask all students to assume that their classes will be held as scheduled, and that assignments can be submitted as usual.

4. Mitigations

11. Mitigating the impact of the strike on students is Durham's highest institutional priority.
12. After a strike day, staff will be asked to confirm whether they have participated in strike action. They will also be asked to take measures that will enable students to complete the learning outcomes for the module.
13. There are a number of options available to staff seeking to cover the content of classes and supporting the learning and development of our students. Some combination of the following should be used:
 - Rescheduling classes and learning activities affected by the strike;
 - Reordering module content to ensure that priority material is covered within the remaining scheduled classes;
 - Posting lecture notes and/or recordings on Learn Ultra;
 - Directing students to library resources;
 - Directing students to public online material;
 - Rearranging individual supervisions;
 - Rearranging vivas;
 - Holding additional office hours, either in-person or online;
 - Any other reasonable measure.
14. Assessment is an essential part of the learning process. After a strike day staff should make every effort to provide timely feedback.

5. Examinations Policy

15. No student will be disadvantaged in assessments and examinations as a consequence of industrial action. All evaluations will be fair, consistent and transparent.
16. Programme Learning Outcomes, as listed in Programme Specifications, are set at a high level. It is unlikely that they will not be met. Moreover, fulfilling programme learning outcomes is not dependent on the completion of all learning outcomes in every module. If compromises in module learning outcomes are necessary, they can be taken account of in examinations and assessments.
17. Where delivery of material for assessment by examination has been affected by the strike, the following policy will apply:
 - Students will be responsible for learning material covered through mitigations, but they will not be tested by examination on it.

18. An important premise of this policy is that when studying for a degree students develop and demonstrate independent learning skills. Not every learning outcome relies on material delivered in lectures and other classes, and we do not require all material to be assessed by examination. Exams are one of many different methods used to ensure the rigour and high quality of a Durham education.
19. Exam papers may need to be adjusted to reflect this policy. The Academic Office will provide support and guidance to departments during this process.

6. Assessment Other Than Examinations Policy

20. Where delivery of material for assessments other than exams (e.g., essays, projects, labs and presentations) has been affected by the strike, the following policy will apply:
 - In modules where the delivery of material has been affected by the strike, departments will audit assessments other than exams to ensure that they are fair and appropriate.
21. Given wide variety in the nature and purpose of assessments other than exams, and variation in the impact of the strike on them, each department must determine how best to implement this policy.
22. If you have any questions or concerns about how these policies will apply to your course, please contact your department.
23. We will add these policies to the FAQs on the University web site. Please check the site regularly for information and updates.

7. Group Mitigations

24. The standard process for considering exceptional personal mitigating circumstances – things beyond a student's control – is called Serious Adverse Circumstances (SACs). In addition to the usual process, we have put in place measures to automatically consider mitigating circumstances for all students affected by the strike. Where teaching has been disrupted in a specific module, either for all students or for a specific group of students, Boards of Examiners will consider the extent to which the disruption is likely to have affected a student's performance. Where appropriate, the Board will apply the equivalent of a SAC to affected students.
25. How will a Board of Examiners gauge the impact of the strike? Each department is keeping track of:
 - which members of staff have taken strike action on which days;
 - which modules were affected on those days;
 - what mitigations have been provided to students in those modules;
 - what the overall impact of the strike has been on the learning experience of students in those modules.

The decisions of Boards of Examiners will be informed by this information when confirming degree classifications and considering students enrolled in modules affected by the strike.

26. **You do not need to submit a SAC form simply because of strike action.** There may, nonetheless, be exceptional reasons relating to personal circumstances which give you good reason to submit an individual SAC form. To better understand the options available to you, please consult the information available [here](#).