

Pensions Strike Action

WHY WE ARE GOING ON STRIKE

Two years ago, after strike action, universities agreed that our pensions valuation was faulty, and needed to be redone. But now, despite TWO detailed independent reports recommending a fairer and more rational valuation, our pension contributions continue to rise without justification, resulting in a real-terms pay cut. Employers want us to accept below inflation pay rises and above inflation contributions to our pensions.

Many staff are on zero hours, short-term or hourly contracts; these changes make the pension scheme completely unaffordable for them. Many of these are younger staff, threatening their ability to ever retire. While VC pay has increased above inflation, the value of academic staff pay has declined in real terms by 17% since 2009, in a context of growing job insecurity. Support staff across the university are also affected, in your library, Student Services, and other parts of the university. And if they can't afford to join the pension, the entire pension scheme becomes unsustainable for all members.

We don't take the decision to strike lightly. **We don't get paid during strikes.** Our union, UCU, offers limited funding to help those in the most need, but does not cover the pay we lose during strike action. We really don't want to hurt your learning experience, but employers aren't listening.

We need firm commitments and recognition of the unjust and incompetent handling of our future security. We need to make sure we don't have to keep striking over pensions. We need to make sure that you too have access to pensions when you enter the workforce.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Student support is essential. The stronger your support, the sooner the action will end. Some staff live on campus at Keele so there is no clear picket line, but we can be found every strike morning at the front and back entrance until around 11 am. Feel free to come and chat with us, or attend activities like teach-outs.

Here are other ways you can demonstrate support:

- Email Vice Chancellor, Trevor McMillan (vc@keele.ac.uk) and tell him you support Keele staff pension demands, and so should he.
- Email Pro-VC for Students, Anne Loweth (provc.students@keele.ac.uk) expressing your concern about how the pensions changes will affect your education at Keele.
- Contact KeeleSU or the KPA, and volunteer to help with teach-outs and other activities.
- Spread the word! We are not an elite trying to protect fat-cat salaries. This will affect you.

FACT CHECKING

Myth

Students pay high fees and this means staff are really well paid.

Reality

While VC pay has increased, the value of academic staff pay has declined in real terms by 17% since 2009. The percentage of the budget Keele spends on all staff salaries has been consistently decreasing during that period. Many pension scheme members are not academics, and some are paid very poorly indeed. On top of this, there is a gender pay gap; at Keele, this is 15.4%, the 5th worst in the country (official 2017 figures). Because women get paid less, and are more likely to be on part-time or casual contracts, they have less to contribute and will get a smaller pension at the end too.

Myth

Cutting benefits is the only way to make pension provision affordable for the future.

Reality

Our pensions scheme is actually in a strong financial position, with contributions from members exceeding pensions paid out, and with strong growing investments. Employers recognised this after our last strike action, but have now gone back on some of their commitments regarding this. For more about the pensions dispute, see <https://www.ucu.org.uk/uss-explained>.

Myth

None of this affects me really; it's just an annoyance.

Reality

The erosion of decent pension schemes affects the pension that will be available to **you** in the future. It also means we can't afford to retire, so there are fewer job openings in academia for you, unenthusiastic teachers who don't want to be there (we *all* remember those school teachers who *needed* to retire), and less innovation in your field.

Myth

The university has promised that most classes will be rescheduled.

Reality

This is a promise the university cannot keep. Some staff may do this because they don't want to affect your learning experience. But they are not paid to do this. Their pay has already been deducted. The university cannot force staff to do this, nor are there enough classrooms on campus to fit all of the cancelled classes. If you are concerned, do feel free to complain to senior management.