To our dear students in the School \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

You may have heard that the university and college union (UCU) has called for further strike action in the coming weeks. We want you to be fully informed about this situation which affects us all.

**Background to the strike**

UCU represents lecturers and other professional staff in a range of Higher Education (HE) institutions including Universities, Colleges and Prisons. Right now we are fighting to improve the state of HE, focusing on Four Fights - Casualisation, Workloads, Pay, Equalities - because in HE:

* women are paid on average 15.1% less than men
* the disability pay gap is 8.7%
* black academic staff earn 12-13% less than white colleagues of the same gender and experience
* salaries have fallen against inflation by over 20% since 2009.
* academic staff work over 50 hours during a typical week.
* Over 100,000 staff are employed on fixed-term contracts, and a further 70,000 are employed on other casual contracts.

This directly impacts you: our working conditions are your learning conditions. You are being short changed by a university sector which is happy to take your tuition fees but unwilling to provide the basics such as enough staff on secure contracts to teach on your courses.

**Why strike?**

UCU has given those who run universities a set of clear and workable proposals to improve the situation. Disgracefully, universities are refusing to implement these proposals. In other words, they are happy to allow the awful situation we are all in to continue. This leaves us with no choice. Striking is a last resort but we will not stand by and watch HE get steadily worse for staff and students. We are therefore going to take strike action on the following days:

* Week one - Thursday 20 & Friday 21 February
* Week two - Monday 24, Tuesday 25 & Wednesday 26 February
* Week three - Monday 2, Tuesday 3, Wednesday 4 & Thursday 5 March
* Week four - Monday 9, Tuesday 10, Wednesday 11, Thursday 12 & Friday 13 March

There will be disruption to your studies. We aren’t happy about that, but we believe that we must fight for the greater good. We simply cannot allow the shameful stats above to go unchallenged. If we do nothing, we are saying that we’re OK with you growing up in a world where people like us, in positions of relative power, choose to do nothing and just watch on while those who are worst hit by these inequalities suffer.

Whether these strikes go ahead is in the hands of the employers. If university managements like ours are as committed to addressing casualisation, inequality, unmanageable workloads and pay injustice as they claim, they should have no problem signing up to concrete mechanisms at the national level to address these issues.

**Is this connected to the strikes last year?**

At the end of 2019, we took 8 days of strike action aiming to force universities to commit to action that will improve the situation. You can see how that strike action looked here: <https://vimeo.com/378827716>. That strike action forced universities to make some concessions, but their most recent proposals are very vague and do not amount to a commitment to improve the situation. We still refuse to accept this shameful situation. The strikes proposed for February and March 2020 are a continuation of the action taken in late 2019.

**Does the Students’ Union support the strike?**

The National Union of Students (NUS), who represent you, are in support of our action. You can read the joint NUS/UCU statement here <https://www.ucu.org.uk/UCU-NUS-jointstatement> and can view a short video here <https://youtu.be/cnVe-aXan8Y>

“UCU general secretary Jo Grady, NUS president Zamzam Ibrahim, and NUS vice president Claire Sosienski Smith on why you should support the strikes and turn your anger on university management and the unfair treatment of staff. [#UCUstrike](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=%23UCUstrike)”

You can also read an updated statement from the NUS on “Everything you need to know about the UCU strikes this February and March” here: <https://www.nus.org.uk/en/news/press-releases/everything-you-need-to-know-about-the-ucu-strike/?load=5&top=204>

On February 10, Brighton Students Union put out a call to all students. They’re asking you for your opinion on the upcoming strikes. Make sure you have your say. You are the union. It’s the union officers’ job to represent your voice: <https://twitter.com/SUBrighton/status/1226879550031880192>

We hope that you support our actions and understand why we believe we have no other choice but to strike. Here’s how you can help and show your support:

* **Ask the vice-chancellor for fresh negotiations - you can do this online at:** [www.ucu.org.uk/studentvoice](http://www.ucu.org.uk/studentvoice)
* Visit the picket lines to express your support
* Show your support online with #UCUstrike

We sign off with the sincere hope that university managements will agree to UCU’s proposals, allowing the strikes to be called off. But also with the conviction to fight until university managements sign up to implement the real changes that are required to make universities fair for all.

Signed: Staff in the School of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_