

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS – February 2020



Industrial Action

The University and College Union (UCU) has announced another period of industrial action in a dispute over changes to the Universities' pension scheme (USS) and pay.

1. When are the possible strike days?

UCU has asked members to take part in fourteen strike days which fall between weeks 6 to 9 of semester 2 on the following dates:

- 20, 21, 24, 25, 26 February
- 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 March

As well as this, UCU has asked its members to take 'action short of a strike'.

Please be aware that not all staff are members of UCU.

2. Which campus locations are affected by the strike action?

The strike may affect students studying at the Edinburgh, Borders and Orkney Campuses only. The strike does not affect students studying at the Dubai and Malaysia campuses.

3. What classes will be affected on the strike days?

By law, staff do not have to tell the University in advance if they are taking strike action; therefore we do not know which members of staff may exercise their right to strike, or whether a member of staff will choose to strike on all of the listed dates.

We encourage you to ask your lecturers and tutors to let you know as a courtesy in advance. We have asked our staff to ensure our students are kept informed and to do everything possible to minimise the impact of their action on you. Our staff are genuinely concerned with the academic welfare of students, and some may already have told you about their plans.

4. Will the University be open on the strike days?

Yes. During the industrial action the University will remain open.

5. Will study areas like the Library and Learning Commons be open on the strike days?

Yes. The Library and student support will be available throughout any period of strike action. At the Edinburgh Campus, in addition to the Library, facilities such as Learning Commons 1 and 2 and the James Watt Study Centre will be open as normal.

6. Will Vision and other online resources be available on the strike days?

Yes, access to Vision and other online resources should be uninterrupted during any period of industrial action. Students will continue to have access to all the learning materials available on Vision throughout.

7. What happens if one of my lecturers is working, my class runs as scheduled, but I decide not to attend in support of the strike?

Whilst it is your decision whether to attend a class, the University will not be able to make special arrangements for students who choose not to attend classes that run to the timetable. If the class includes an assessment or class test, you will be marked as absent if you fail to attend.

8. Am I expected to continue with my studies as normal?

Yes. You should work on the basis that your studies will continue as normal, unless you are told otherwise. This means you would aim to attend all scheduled teaching, complete and submit assessments

9. Will I be academically disadvantaged by the industrial action?

The University will make every reasonable effort to ensure that students are not disadvantaged academically by the industrial action and, if activities are cancelled, to mitigate the academic impact.

Examination Boards will be advised of the impact of the industrial action on courses to ensure that students affected are not penalized as a result.

10. Will it be necessary for individual students to submit 'Mitigating Circumstances' forms in respect of this industrial action?

The University will not require individual Mitigating Circumstance forms to be submitted in respect of this industrial action. Examination Boards will be made aware of all courses affected by the industrial action, and any measures taken as a result of this.

11. How will coursework submission dates be affected by the industrial action?

During any industrial action, you should work on the basis that coursework submission dates will be unaffected, unless you are advised otherwise. This information will be made available to you through Vision.

12. If I don't receive feedback on my in-course assessments this may impact on my ability to prepare fully for my written examinations. How will this be taken into account?

Heads of School will know which courses have been affected and will ensure that Boards of Examiners are made aware of this situation in determining final grades for the courses concerned.

13. Will I be able to appeal if I have not had feedback on coursework before taking my examinations?

If the examinations relate directly to the coursework, for which no feedback had been provided then this will be expressly brought to the attention of the Board of Examiners. The Board will be asked to take this into account, as a mitigating circumstance, in determining students' final grades. If this is done then there would be no academic grounds for appeal. For many written examinations, the learning outcomes being assessed will be different to those for coursework and therefore not directly related to the coursework feedback. In these cases there would be no grounds for appeal.

14. How will exam boards take the impact of industrial action into account?

The University has regulations and processes in place, approved by Senate, to deal with disruption including the impact of industrial action on teaching, learning and assessment. Examination Boards will be able to take into account these, and any other exceptional circumstances, when deciding upon course results, ensuring academic standards are upheld in all decisions made.

15. I am attending the University on a Tier 4 student visa and am worried that it might affect my visa. What should I do?

You should continue to attend the University as normal. Please continue to follow the normal reporting process. Your visa status will be unaffected by the industrial action.

16. I am on a joint degree Programme. How will I be affected?

It is important to remember that this is a UK-wide dispute. For students on joint Programmes with other Universities, we are aware that staff at Stirling, St Andrews and Edinburgh Universities may also be taking strike action.

17. I am a distance learner, what will the industrial action mean for me?

If the industrial action has any impact on your course (e.g. provision of course materials, access to tutor support or return of feedback on submitted work) your School will notify you. You will not be disadvantaged academically as a result of any teaching content which is not delivered as a result of the strike action.

18. What impact will there be for students on accredited degrees?

Final degree classifications (including classifications of degrees accredited by professional bodies) will not be affected by the industrial action. Schools will ensure that learning outcomes necessary for professional body accreditation are appropriately covered.

19. What is the University proposing to do with the salary deducted from staff on strike?

The University will use any salary deduction to maintain the quality of the student experience. This will include a contribution to the Student Hardship Fund.

20. Can I claim back any of my tuition fees if classes are cancelled?

It is too early to give a definitive answer to this question until the industrial action ends.

Individual Schools are working hard to devise ways of ensuring any impact on learning is minimised as much as possible, and that all students continue to have access to teaching materials and facilities such as the Library and Learning Commons.

Once the industrial action has concluded, we will need to assess the extent and materiality of the industrial action's impact on individual student's learning. This assessment will need to take into account the University's actions in mitigating the academic impact of any class cancellations.

The University will publish further information once the impact has been assessed and, taking into account our student terms and conditions, will provide detail of how students who believe they have been materially affected can raise this issue.

21. Where will I find the most up to date information on the action and how it affects me?

We will seek to keep you informed of any classes we know will be affected using MyHWU student portal, and through relevant course pages on Vision.

22. Who can I contact if I have other questions?

You should contact your School Office or the Student Service Centre (StudentCentre@hw.ac.uk).