

# SUPPORT THE STRIKE

UCU UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM

Our action in December has made employers more cooperative, but we haven't seen the movement we need yet. Later this month, university staff will go on strike to defend their working conditions and pensions. **Staff will be taking 14 days of strike action in February and March**, the action will start on Thursday 20 February and escalate each week, culminating with a week-long walkout from Monday 9 to Friday 13 March.

## What is a strike?

A strike is when, as a result of unacceptable working conditions, members of a trade union collectively refuse to work. Instead, they gather outside their workplaces to protest; these gatherings are called picket-lines.

## How are strikes meant to work?

Strike action is the last resort workers have when negotiating with their employers. It's not something anyone treats lightly. Unions have to meet stringent requirements to declare a strike; meanwhile, striking workers lose their pay, often suffering significant hardship as a result. But it's a tried and tested way of protecting and improving working conditions.

## What are the strikes supposed to achieve?

UCU is calling for:

- An end to precarious employment practices, including zero hour contracts, in universities
- A concrete and binding plan from employers to close the gender and BME pay gaps, and to reduce workloads
- A modest pay-rise - to match inflation, and to start making up for ten years of cuts;
- No rises in pension contributions

Universities say they can't afford to increase pay. But over the past ten years, the proportion of revenue they've spent on staff has fallen, while spending on flashy buildings has soared. That's where your tuition fees are going - to university vanity projects, not to the people who teach and support you.

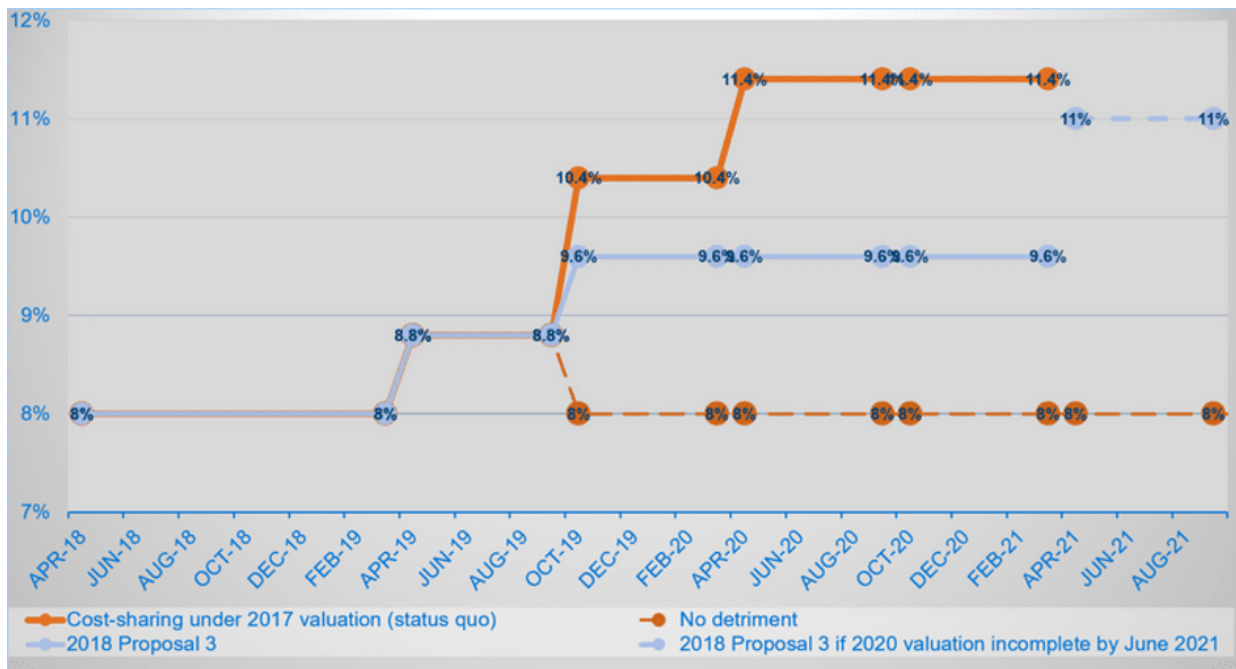
# What are strikes about?

## Pensions

Staff have been told their pension fund, USS, is in trouble, and requires them to pay higher monthly contributions into it.

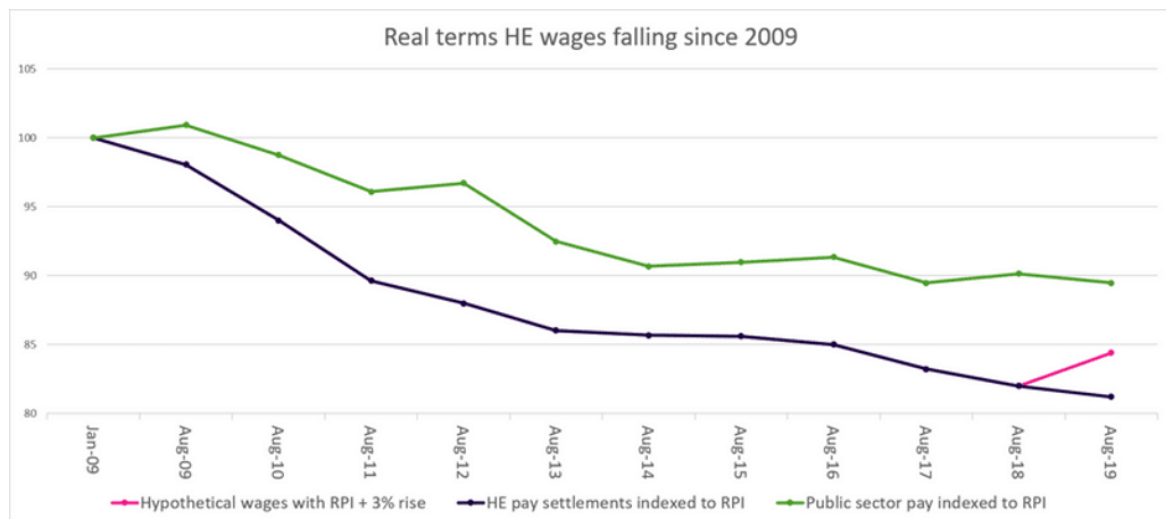
From October, **contribution rates jumped up by 20%** compared with last year; and in 2021 they're set to rise again, **ending up at 37% higher than in 2018**.

These rises are unnecessary. As an independent expert panel concluded earlier this year, the USS pension scheme is in good health, and doesn't need higher contributions. In addition, these are rises that many university staff simply can't afford.



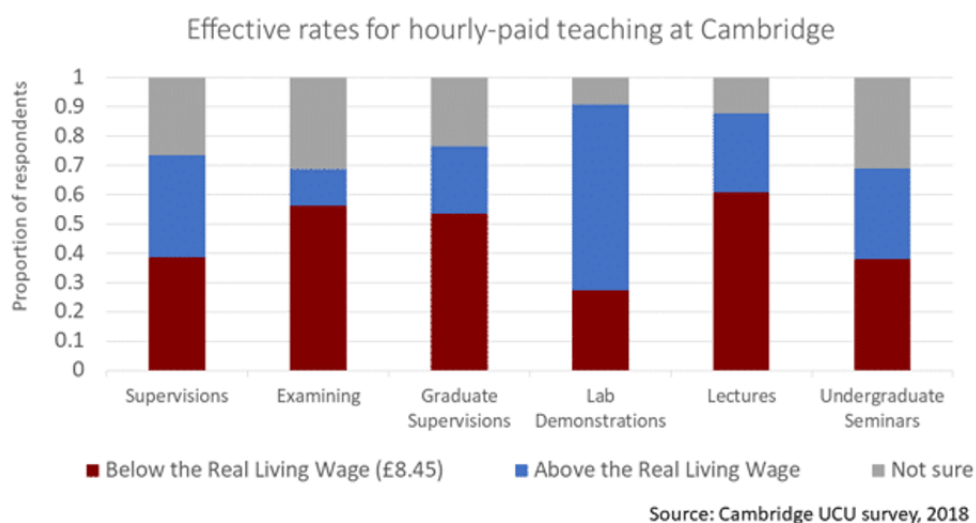
## Pay and Equality

Over the past ten years, **staff have seen their pay fall by almost 20% in real terms**. This year, the university are offering another below-inflation pay offer: in other words, **another pay cut**.

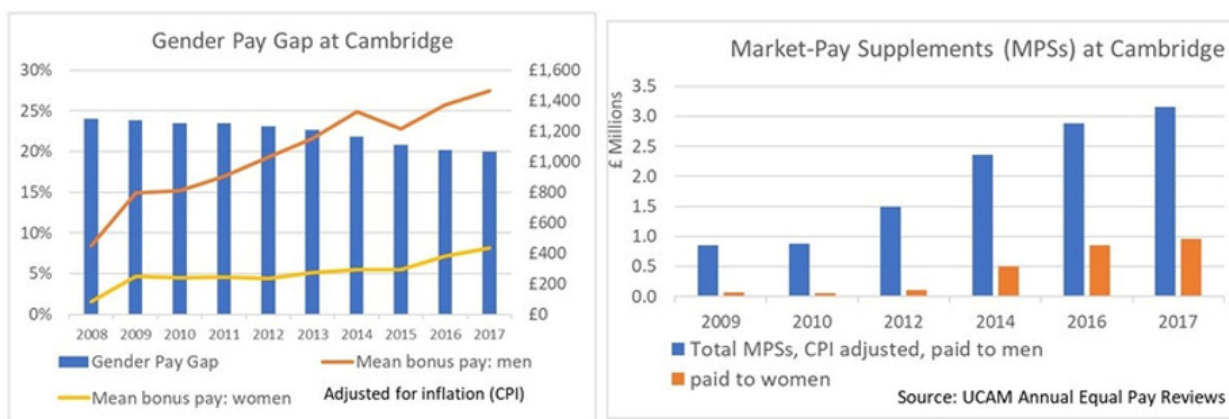


At the same time, staff are working longer and harder than before. **On average, people at universities perform two days' unpaid work every week.** Current workloads are unsustainable: they threaten the mental health of staff, and make it impossible for them to enjoy a life outside work.

Adding to the strain is the increasing casualisation. **More and more people are employed on precarious, fixed-term contracts, with limited rights,** and little hope of a more secure future. Others - including graduate students - don't have a contract at all.



These deteriorating conditions hit staff at the bottom the hardest, and further widen the inequalities in higher education, especially for female, BME and disabled staff. **The gender pay gap** in higher education is on average of 12%.



## How will I be affected?

During the strikes, lectures, seminars, classes and demonstrations organised by your faculties may be cancelled. This will cause disruption for students, and the university will blame it on striking staff. Many buildings will have picket lines in front of them. These do not mean you should not enter the building if you want to - they are a way for the strikers to make the strike visible.

## So why should I support the strikes?

Because your teachers and support staffs working conditions are your learning conditions. Worsening conditions in higher education affect us all. Staff don't want to go on strike: they'd much rather be teaching, researching, doing the work they love. In fact, strikes are a way of making sure they can continue doing what they do. Insecure employment, intolerable workloads, unequal pay, and uncertain futures - all these threaten the future of higher education as we know it. The union is fighting back on behalf of students and staff alike, to build a better and fairer university for everyone.

## How can I show my support?

There are plenty of ways to show your support for university staff:

**Picket lines**, if you feel like it, come and join them!

### Join our rallies

**Write to the Vice-Chancellor:** tell Professor Shearer West you back the staff email her at [shearer.west@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:shearer.west@nottingham.ac.uk)

**Come along to teach-outs:** just because they're on strike, doesn't mean your teachers don't want to see you! There'll be a programme of lectures and events ('teach-outs'), where they'll share their research in a less formal setting, beyond the limits of the curriculum. Come along to learn more about the modern university, and how we can improve it, as well as a range of other pressing topics.

**Stay informed:** keep an eye on our website <https://uonucu.org/> and follow us on twitter **@UoNUCU** for more information on what's going on and how to get involved.

**When staff and students unite, we can make real change happen.**

**Only by coming together can we resist the cuts that threaten our university, and make it a fairer place for the future.**