



Open University branch of UCU Information for Students – UCU Marking and assessment boycott from 20 April 2023

As you probably know, there has recently been UK-wide strike action in universities about pensions, pay, job security, equalities issues and workload. Thanks to those of you who have offered support to your tutors and who have e-mailed the OU's VC. There is a clear pathway to a resolution on pensions, which is good news. Unfortunately, negotiations on other issues have not yet been so productive.

UCU have therefore notified universities that a marking and assessment boycott begins on 20th April, [view press release](#).

If you are an international student whose visa status may be dependent on receiving grades, then please contact ucu@open.ac.uk.

Branch information about the [Marking and assessment boycott](#).

[OU branch of UCU letter on the OUSA Hoot website](#) - added 3 May 2023

What this means for you as an OU student

A marking boycott may delay delivery of TMA marks, module grades and award and classification of degrees:

- Your tutors will not mark or return TMAs. This is a delay, not a cancellation; the OU will look for alternative tutors to mark your academic work.
- EMAs and exams will not be marked on the normal timescale.
- Staff participating in the boycott will not be doing work that immediately follows EMAs and exams, including module results panels. This means that end-of-module results may be postponed, which will also delay awarding of degrees for students who are at that stage.

How we will continue to support you

- This is a marking boycott, not a teaching or learning boycott.
- Here at the OU, our TMA feedback has always involved teaching as well as assessment. We had proposed that tutors be allowed to return assignments with teaching feedback but without a mark (which would have been awarded when the dispute is resolved). Unfortunately, the university rejected this proposal despite our argument that lack of feedback would be damaging to many students. This means the boycott will also include postponement of assignment feedback, not just marks.

- Your tutor and Student Support Team will be available as usual and tutorials will go ahead as scheduled. Your tutors can help you to prepare for TMAs and exams but may not mark them.

What you can do

- We understand that this situation may cause inconvenience and stress. If there is one for your module, use the Assessment Calculator (from your StudentHome page, go to 'online TMA/EMA service' and then 'predict your module result using the Assessment Calculator')
- Continue to register for your next module as usual.
- We understand if you are angry about this dispute. So are we (your tutors are particularly angry that they have been prevented from providing feedback on your TMAs despite the offer to do so throughout the boycott) and appreciate the support we have received. You can play an important part in changing the direction of this dispute.
- You can email the Vice Chancellor (vice-chancellor@open.ac.uk) asking him to negotiate nationally on pay, workload, other staff at the university still lack security.
- We hope that together we can improve your learning conditions and our working conditions.

What is the UCU?

The UCU is the University and College Union, a union of staff and postgraduate students who teach and work in universities and colleges across the UK. UCU is one of two trade unions at the Open University, the other one is UNISON who represent Secretarial, Clerical and Technical staff.

A union is a democratic collective of staff who negotiate for good and safe working conditions, fair pay, and a decent and equal working environment. The UCU negotiates with employers on behalf of staff at university and colleges across the UK. At the OU UCU represents academic staff including your tutors, and professional services staff that support the university's work from the library to student services, finance, HR and many other areas.

What is a strike?

When a union takes strike action, we withhold our labour for a period of time – that is, we don't work at all on the days of the strike. We also *don't get paid* for these days.

During the strike, we hold in-person picket lines (demonstrations at the sites of the employer), rallies, and other face-to-face and online events, to raise awareness of employment issues and put pressure on management to negotiate.

This is not a decision we take lightly at all, and we only ever strike when negotiations with employers have broken down and we have no other alternative.

What happens to the pay deducted from staff on strike?

UCU has asked, as we always do, for any pay deductions from our members to go to the OU's Student Support Fund to help students.

[Letter for OU students, Welsh translation](#) - added 3 May 2023

Open University branch of the University and College Union

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Branch website: <http://ucu.open.ac.uk>

Branch Twitter: <https://twitter.com/oubucu>

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