I am writing regarding the forthcoming strike at the University from Monday 25th November to Wednesday 4th December, which will impact our classes. Sometimes actions like this are not adequately communicated to students, and so I want to take some time to explain the situation to you, and to encourage your support for our strike. For that reason, this email is rather long!

Members of the University and College Union (UCU)at 60 universities will take part in the strikes, which have been called in response to five closely related issues: precarious work, the gender pay gap, workload, pay, and pensions. It would take too long to explain the context of each of these issues and what the union is asking for at the national level. However, it is worth knowing that:

1. The issue of casualization is particularly pronounced, with 68% of staff in the sector on insecure contracts, many of these hourly paid or effectively zero hours arrangements. These numbers have risen sharply in recent years.
2. Since 2011 changes made to our pensions scheme have meant we will already lose £240,000 per person during retirement. In 2017 we took strike action to fight further damaging proposals – see [this Guardian article from the time](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2018/jan/30/university-staff-are-right-to-be-striking). We agreed to end that strike on the understanding that universities would negotiate in good faith to secure a long term solution to the pensions issue. But although the joint expert panel (JEP) that was set up by all parties concerned supported the union’s claims, its recommendations have been ignored. Universities and the pensions scheme trustees are pressing ahead with further unnecessary changes. Pensions may not seem to be the most important aspect of university life around which to take action, but as ‘deferred pay’ they are no less a part of lecturers’ livelihoods than our salaries.
3. The gender pay gap is something that so far universities nationally have repeatedly refused to take action over. The University of Manchester pay gap has recently risen to 18.4%, with the ethnicity pay gap 10.5%.
4. A series of sub-inflation pay awards has meant that academics have had a pay cut of 20% since 2009. This has taken place at the same time as salaries of vice chancellors have rocketed into several hundreds of thousands of pounds (and numbers of senior managers employed by Manchester University on salaries in excess of £100k have increased dramatically).
5. Workload: full-time academics are assumed to work a 37.5 hour week. The reality is that most academics regularly work in excess of 45 hours a week and many work more than 50 hours a week. That’s one or two days of unpaid work per week. Overwork and related stress take their toll on our professionalism and our ability to deliver good teaching. Our working conditions are your learning conditions.

What this all means for your studies is that many of your lecturers or administrators will not undertake any work on the strike days, including lecturing, office hours, administration, marking, research, or writing. To be clear, lecturers will not rearrange any lectures that fall on a strike day. I appreciate that this is a serious disruption, affecting two of our lectures and those on your other modules. You have all devoted time to study for your degrees, and are having to pay large fees. We don’t relish the disruption the strike will cause; it is our last resort. I hope that you will direct your frustration at the employers whose actions have given us little choice but to strike.

We’re very pleased that the [NUS supports the strike](https://www.ucu.org.uk/UCU-NUS-jointstatement), and in previous disputes has provided information about ways that students can support us, including writing to Vice Chancellors to express solidarity with our actions and to complain about the impact the strike will have on your learning. I would suggest you e-mail the University’s President (Dame Nancy Rothwell), and Registrar (Patrick Hackett) urging them to use their influence to find a negotiated settlement to this dispute. Their e-mail addresses are nancy.rothwell@manchester.ac.uk and patrick.hackett-REGISTRAR@manchester.ac.uk.

We understand the challenges we face as part of challenges which affect students too. The current funding model has shifted the burden of university funding from general taxation onto students, such that students in England now graduate with higher debts, on average, than their peers in [any other English-speakingcountry, including the US](https://www.ft.com/content/a1c27f38-0c86-11e6-b0f1-61f222853ff3), while students from abroad are asked to pay significantly more. We understand these strikes to be a part of the struggle against these developments, and for a better university. We hope you will support us. Should you have any questions, I will be happy to address them as best I can.