

UCU Rising MAB branch media and political mobilisation guide (April 2023)

To support the marking and assessment boycott (MAB) and to push back against punitive deductions being threatened by employers, it is important that UCU branches take measures to increase the pressure in their area.

This short guide provides instructions for UCU branches when responding to threats of deductions including media and political work.

Please do contact the communications and public affairs team if you have any queries:

- media support: **Nathan Gayle**, UCU press officer
- political support: **Will Pickering**, UCU public affairs and press officer

Utilising local media

Your university employer is highly attuned to the way it is reported on in local media. They will monitor coverage and produce regular reports which highlight the favourable and unfavourable mentions they will have received in the press.

From a tactical point of view it is therefore important that we use the local media to report on the behaviour of the employer, particularly when it is a matter as egregious as severe wage deductions.

Below are directions and a model press release which we encourage branches to use and send to the news desks (or regional journalists you already know) of the local newspapers and BBC stations. Once sent, these emails should be followed up with a phone call to confirm receipt.

1. fill in the blanks: using the template below, please add in information relevant to your dispute
2. adapt the quote if necessary: the quote has been written to land some clear, strategic lines in the dispute. However, there may be local matters you also want to draw upon. Feel free to add these, but be aware that with a quote, less is more and punchy is better
3. final proof: before sending, be sure to do a final proof between branch officers. Any significant errors may require a correction to be sent to journalists
4. use a catchy email subject line, such as: **NEWS FROM UCU: local university staff condemn massive wage deductions**
5. send wide: When sending your complete press release, send this to your local BBC stations and your online and in-print regional publications.

Draft press release

[Click here to download a Word \(DOCX\) version](#) of this draft press release.

UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE UNION (UCU)

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[INSTITUTION NAME] named & shamed for 'shameful' **(XX%)** pay deductions

The University and College Union (UCU) today **(DATE)** condemned **[INSTITUTION NAME]** for threatening to cut **[XX%]** of staff wages in what has been described as an attempt to intimidate staff from demanding better pay and conditions.

[INSTITUTION NAME] is one of 145 universities across the UK where staff are taking industrial action in the form of a marking and assessment boycott. **[In an all staff email, VC/Head of HR]** threatened pay deductions of **[up to XX%]** for those taking part in the boycott, despite staff continuing to teach, lecture and support students as normal.

Many universities are also threatening to deduct staff wages even on days when there is no industrial action taking place, a move which UCU has described as a 'shameless attempt to punish workers for fighting for better pay and conditions'.

The union said punitive deductions will only prolong industrial action, potentially stopping students from graduating. It called on **[vice-chancellor/principal XX]** to stop attacking staff and students and instead work to resolve the dispute.

Staff taking part in the marking and assessment boycott are fighting for an improved pay offer, and for an end to the use of casualised contracts which have become endemic across the sector. UCU is also calling for gender, race and disability pay gaps to be closed and for action to be taken to address dangerously high workloads.

XX (INSTRUCTION: click on the hyperlink, select 'Terms of employment', search for your institution in the table, use the fixed-term figure) staff at the **[INSTITUTION NAME]** are on short term, insecure contracts and the gender pay gap is **XX** (INSTRUCTION: search for XX university gender pay gap report on Google).

The average salary is just **£XX**, whereas **[vice-chancellor/principal XX takes home £XX]** (INSTRUCTION: average salary and VC salary are in the university's most recent financial statement, available on its website).

[BRANCH SPOKESPERSON NAME AND BRANCH NAME] said: 'It is scandalous that **[vice-chancellor/principal XX]** is threatening staff with brutal pay deductions in the midst of a cost of living crisis. Staff are fighting for long overdue improvements to pay and working conditions and even though they are taking a form of industrial action are still carrying out the majority of their duties.'

'[VC/principal] takes home [SALARY] each year, but rather than address staff demands, increase pay and put staff onto secure contracts, the university would rather push staff into poverty and prolong the dispute.'

UCU general secretary Jo Grady said: 'University bosses threatening punitive deductions are only prolonging this dispute, poisoning relations between staff and management, and hurting students. We urge them to instead make an improved offer and end the disruption.'

Ends

Media Contacts

[INSERT YOUR NAME, EMAIL AND CONTACT NUMBER]

www.twitter.com/ucu

Working with your local politicians

Local politicians are key figureheads in any constituency and will have close working relationships with a university in or around their patch. Additionally, the university itself will be keen to foster a good working relationship with whoever is their local MP.

It is for these reasons that it is incredibly important you make your local MP aware of the threats to make deductions and encourage them to show support by putting pressure on the university to withdraw.

All Westminster MPs with a university in their constituency have been written to and briefed by UCU head office, but it is now the job of branches to engage at a more local level.

We need you to email your MP and communicate the following things:

1. make them aware of the situation at your university regarding deductions
2. request a meeting to discuss the matter further
3. request the MP make a statement of support for staff on social media.

You may already have a good relationship with your local MP and councillors, but you can find their contact details here:

- **MP contact**
- **Local councillor contact**

If your university is within the patch of one of the nine metro mayors, please **contact your local UCU regional official** before beginning correspondence.

Key national talking points you may wish to include:

- thousands of UCU members are engaged in a marking and assessment boycott at 145 universities across the UK; this began on Thursday 20 April
- despite boycotting marking and assessment staff are back at work full-time and continuing to perform the majority of their duties
- staff are fighting for improvements to their pay and conditions
- staff pay has fallen by 25% since 2009
- across the sector 90,000 staff are on insecure contracts
- staff are working on average 16 hours extra each week because of toxic workloads
- shocking gender, race and disability pay gaps exist across the sector
- by attacking staff, vice-chancellors are putting a resolution to the dispute further away
- vice-chancellors should get round the table and make an improved offer.

By supporting this work, you will be helping UCU to further increase the pressure on vice-chancellors.

Those who lead our universities will sit up and take notice when constituents and local politicians speak out in one voice.

If you have any questions about this briefing, please contact:

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