

How to answer the 'why join' questions

Q: Why should I join if I get all the benefits anyway?

A: UCU advice, representation and other benefits are only available to fully paid-up UCU members. While non-union staff get the benefits won by UCU members they do not get an opportunity to have input to any debate on the issues being negotiated. UCU's bargaining achievements are based on its membership strength, so the more people who join, the more UCU can achieve.

Q: Will I have to take industrial action if I join?

A: Industrial action is only taken as a last resort, and cannot take place without the consent of a majority of UCU members via a secret postal ballot. Most situations are resolved via expert UCU negotiations, supported by UCU members, long before the threat, let alone the use of industrial action is required.

Q: Won't joining the trade union damage my career prospects?

A: No. Trade union membership is a right and UCU is the sole recognised union for the post-school education sector. As UCU offers protection in the workplace, not joining is far more likely to damage your future career if something does go wrong.

Q: What have trade unions ever achieved?

A: Most of the gains made in the workplace are down to unions. Without unions there would never have been paid holidays, superannuation schemes, equal opportunities or health and safety legislation. Without the constant work of unions there would be no annual pay rise, nor preferential pension schemes. Unions offer a voice at work, expert advice and information and protection.

Q: I am on a fixed-term contract, why should I join?

A: Staff on fixed-term contracts are vulnerable, especially at the beginning and end of a contract, or if your contract is very short and is likely to be renewed or extended. Your UCU branch/local association can represent and advise you. Information provided by the UCU is often not provided by employers. What happens when your contract ends – is it fair for the university to 'dump' you? Is this really the best outcome for your work, and for your own career? What are your rights? Members of the UCU are campaigning for all university staff to have open-ended contracts – the

UCU believes this is best for everyone involved. Our ability to campaign and negotiate at the local level depends on active membership interest and participation. It is extremely difficult to negotiate effectively on behalf of a group of staff who are not members.

Q: I can't afford to join, but I'll think about it.

A: UCU membership ranges from under £3 to around £18 per calendar month depending on earnings. This means national membership can cost at most about the same as buying a sandwich & drink for lunch once a week!

Also, UCU negotiators regularly achieve annual pay increases higher than the employers' original offer and this easily covers the subscription rate.

But the real question is: can you afford not to be a member? Not to have a say in the way your department and indeed institution is run; not to have access to expert advice, up-to-date information and guidance; not to have access to representation, including legal representation, if things do go wrong? UCU can only help you if you are a member.

The suggested frequently asked questions above should help you in your one-to-one recruitment work. If you come across any that you would like an answer for, or any you think would be useful to colleagues across the UK, or need any other advice, support or guidance in the vital work you do as an UCU activist, you can contact the organisers at your regional office (see the Contacts section on the UCU website) or email the campaigns team on Campaigns@ucu.org.uk.