

Why vote yes?

It's a mistake to think of these as separate ballots. Why?

Pensions are deferred pay. It is no good winning on pensions if we lose more on pay and vice versa. A pension like USS is an especially valuable form of deferred pay, one which defines and guarantees the benefits a member will receive in retirement.

Solidarity is a key principle of trade unionism for good reason. UCU has a variety of members who stand to gain or lose in different ways. Casualised staff stood alongside permanent staff in the 2018 pensions strike and need permanent staff to support them over casualisation. Permanent academic staff have to some extent been protected from pay erosion by increased levels of promotion to higher grades. This does not apply to most professional services staff, who are therefore more affected by failure to maintain pay in real terms.

Pay, casualisation and workload

Increments are not pay increases. They are pay progression. We get paid less at the start of a career and more later. Many staff arrive quite early at the top of a grade and stay there for many years. They do not deserve to lose pay with cost of living increases that are below inflation.

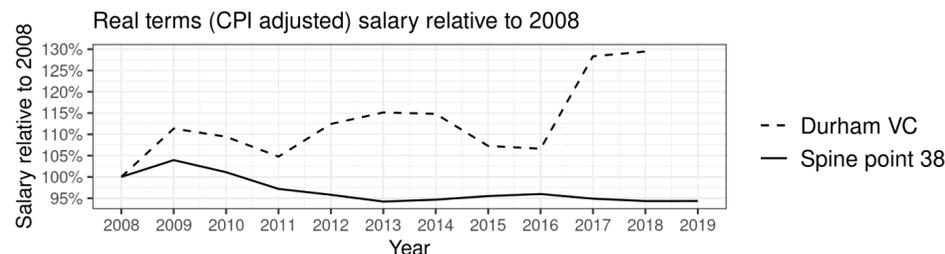
Salary is down by at least 5% in real terms for spine point 38 compared to before the 2008 economic crash and by at least 10% compared to the start of 2009. This is true using any of the accepted measures of inflation. Exactly how far salaries have fallen in real terms depends on the spine point, the measure of inflation used and the start date for calculations.

Changes to USS contributions and benefits have been a further major real-terms pay cut, however one quantifies the effects of increases in employee contributions and loss of benefits.

In contrast, Durham Vice Chancellors have seen large pay rises: at least 25% in real terms since 2008 and in 2018, his pay alone rose by £10,000 (3.4%). You can see how much you should be getting via <https://www.ucu.org.uk/rateforthejob>.

Much more needs to be done to protect the pay, conditions and career development of fixed term staff, including researchers. Durham Casuals had great success by making University management commit to 12 month contracts for fixed term teaching staff. DUCU is currently negotiating with University management over terms and conditions for hourly-paid casualised staff. But DUCU members keep spotting teaching contracts advertised at Durham for <12 months and we need to ensure that the proposed new terms and conditions for hourly-paid staff are truly fair. Action is needed.

Workload increases insidiously each year as we all know, and there is a culture of expectation to work longer hours, many of which are wasted by demands from University management. Recent examples include reviewing Encore recordings and the introduction of the 600 hour PGCLTHE teaching qualification for new academic staff. The decision by University management – taken without trade union consultation – that we should empty our own bins works out at an additional 2½ days of work per year (based on it taking 5 minutes a day).



Pensions

We had a big win in the 2018 strike in so far as we successfully defended the status of USS as a "defined benefit" scheme. However, a major part of that win was the agreement between Universities UK (UUK) and UCU to form the Joint Expert Panel (JEP) with a view to stabilising the future of USS on an agreed basis. The JEP's recommendations have not been accepted by USS, which seeks questionably to lay the blame at the door of the Pensions Regulator (TPR). If the Joint Expert Panel (JEP) recommendations had been followed in 2018, we'd now have a prudent valuation that shows no deficit and no need for increased contributions. UUK have reneged on their commitment to JEP. **The 2018 dispute is therefore not over and we need to show our commitment now to avoid the win becoming a loss.**

The second phase of JEP is crucial and should genuinely make USS stable. We need to show our resolve and ensure that UUK honours its commitment to JEP. UCU and UUK need to work together to persuade USS (and if need be, the TPR) to accept the proposals from JEP.

The new contribution rates (8.8% from April, 9.6% from October) imposed by the USS JNC at UUK's behest are an immediate loss of pay. The 11% rate, which will by default take effect from April 2021, would be in effect a 3% pay cut relative to the 8% rate since 2018. The table below shows how much an average UCU member stands to lose in increased pension contributions alone.

A big yes vote for industrial action will remind our employer and the rest of UUK that we can take serious action and show we are committed to getting a fair outcome to the pension dispute. If we don't send that signal, UUK will walk all over us.

If the USS changes are implemented as planned, how much will you lose from your salary EACH YEAR to get the same pension?

Annual increase in USS employee contributions versus 2018 levels*					
	FTE salary (per year)	2018 rate (8.0%)	April 2019 rate (8.8%) [disputed but imposed on us]	Oct 2019 rate (9.6%) [under dispute and about to be imposed]	Oct 2021 rate (11.0%) [under dispute]
Grade 6 (S.P. 26)	£30,046	-	£240	£480	£901
Grade 7 (S.P. 33)	£36,914	-	£295	£590	£1,107
Grade 8 (S.P. 40)	£45,361	-	£363	£725	£1,360
Grade 9 (S.P. 47)	£55,750	-	£446	£892	£1,672

*Assuming no change in salary for simplicity.

Please vote YES for strike action in both ballots