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Staff at SOAS are going on strike for 14 working days, between Thursday 20th February and Friday 13th March. This is part of a national UCU dispute with 74 universities across the country taking part. Members of SOAS UNISON will also be on strike for 3 working days between Thursday 20th February and Monday 24th February.

Read more on
https://ucusoas.wixsite.com/strike2020/
or
soasunion.org/campaigns/ucustrikes2020

WHEN?

- Reading week
- Strike days
- SU open meetings
- Student-staff assembly
- SU elections
- End of term
We love teaching and we do our best to support your studies, but University employers have made it difficult for us to do so by consistently failing to address these issues.

We are striking for better working and learning conditions.

We thank you for your support and hope to see you at the picket lines. By supporting the strike you will be helping us get employers back to the negotiating table and hopefully address these urgent issues.

University staff are striking to address 4 problems:

1. **Precarious employment**
   Often referred to as ‘casualisation’, there has been an growing reliance on fractional, highly insecure and underpaid teaching contracts in the sector.

2. **Pay inequality**
   Across the sector, there is a 9% BAME pay gap and a 14.8% gender pay gap.

3. **Reduced pay & threats to pensions**
   There has been a 21% drop in pay since 2009. Current pension reforms will mean we pay more and receive less. Staff could lose up to £240,000 in pensions under current proposals.

4. **Unsafe workloads**
   Staff are being required to take on excessive and ever-growing workload. University staff work, on average, 2 days a week unpaid. This workload has become unmanageable and unsustainable for most staff.

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The SOAS Students’ Union has passed policy to support staff members who are striking for their working conditions, which are our learning conditions. We believe that fairly rewarded staff are the cornerstone of the university experience and that it is vital for students to come together to support our lecturers, as well as our postgraduate students who teach and other striking staff members, in their fight for better conditions.

The dispute at the heart of the UCU strike is further evidence of the larger structural problems inherent in our educational system. The growing marketisation and neo-liberalisation of higher education not only affect staff members at large, but also us as students, particularly damaging working-class communities, people of colour, disabled and queer students, and those with these intersecting identities. The current structure continues to facilitate engagement for certain people while actively silencing others, producing kinds of knowledge that help and maintain these systems, and eventually shutting down the learning experience we all have been hoping to gain through higher education.

Students have been forced to act as customers for decades now, as the commodification of Higher Education has been a process led by the Government without the support of staff or students, especially since the late 1990s. This broken and unfair system has become less accessible for many of us, and the gaps keep increasing in the name of austerity and financial crisis. We keep being excluded, be it through the cancellation of grants, the reduction of support, or through the increased exploitation of our academic members of staff, which they are now rejecting.
SOAS Students’ Union supports the UCU strike

Ultimately our lecturers have no other way to stop this – after many meetings and negotiations, striking is the only option left. This strike is their leverage to change conditions and to change the future of education. Although these actions will disrupt our teaching and learning in the short term, we believe any potential resolution will be in the long term interests of all students and workers. We want to fight for an education system that is funded, accessible and lifelong. We need to protect education together, and therefore we support the striking staff members of our community. It is time to join forces, as staff and students, to reject the exclusionary higher education model that some are pushing for, and rethink what university spaces should look like from a liberation perspective.

We truly believe that an empty SOAS will send a clear message across - that we are collectively rejecting the models that are in place at the moment, and are ready to fight for the education system we all want to be a part of.

For that reason, we encourage all our students to not cross the picket lines on the strike days. We understand that different groups of students will be differently impacted by the actions. The needs of international students, working class students, students with disabilities or need of support are at the centre of our conversations, plans and negotiations. We are working closely with the School and the trade unions to ensure students are properly supported throughout the period of the industrial dispute. We are also making a lot of effort to alleviate as much as possible the impact strikes could have on our students, and have put together resources and events to ensure that university life (both social and educational) continues throughout the strikes without having to cross the picket line. Check out the next pages for information on this, especially Varsity and LGBTQ+ History Month events.
What does striking and picketing mean?

Striking . . . is about withdrawing labour to demonstrate staff importance to the university and to disrupt the 'business as usual' running of the institution that they are striking against.

Staff . . . who are on strike do not work and do not get paid on strike days.

Picketing . . . is a form of protest in which strikers gather outside a place of work (in this case, our universities) to talk to colleagues as they arrive, encouraging them not to go to work, and encouraging them to join the union and the strike. This is a picket line.

Picketers . . . will ask anyone entering university buildings, such as students, to not cross the picket line as an act of both symbolic and material support.

Symbolically... fewer people within university buildings demonstrates the effectiveness of the strike

Materially... fewer people going into campus buildings is more disruptive to normal university activities.
What does striking and picketing look like?

**Strikes are disruptive**
They aim to stop the normal functioning of the workplace. Sometimes disruption is the only way to move forward.

**Strikes are educational spaces**
We will all at some point have to work. Strikes are a way of learning about how workplaces function and understanding what collective action by workers looks like. Strikes can teach us more about ‘the real world’ than many classrooms.

**Strikes are social spaces**
Due to workloads, it is increasingly difficult for staff and students to meet and socialise. Strikes are a rare opportunity to get to know each other better outside the limiting dynamics of a classroom.

**Strikes will have Teach Outs**
Staff love teaching, so on strike days they’ll be running ‘Teach Outs’ on the picket line. These will include a variety of free events, lectures, workshops and discussions. You can even organise one yourself (get in touch with the SU to do so!). See the programme on our social media and website.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How can we as students support the strike</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tell your lecturers that you support the strike!</strong></td>
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<td>It can be a really difficult time for striking staff, so knowing that they have the support of their students could make it a lot easier.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Join picket lines on SOAS campus, as well as in other unis!</strong></td>
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<td>Picketing is a legal activity, and these lines are aimed at spreading awareness, gaining support and convincing as many people as possible to join the strike. Staff immensely value student presence on these picket lines, so pop along to say hello to your staff, give them a cup of tea and a biscuit and tell them that you support them!</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sign up to host a Teach Out event!</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>UCU is organising a series of Teach Outs on the picket line, which are alternative activities to promote education outside of the traditional university teaching schedule. UNISON and the SU are actively involved in supporting those so make sure you come by!</td>
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<td><strong>Demand your fees to be reimbursed to the School or the Office For Students</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>If we are treated as customers, so be it: file a complaint against the School, or join the SU’s campaign against the Office for Students for a bigger national solidarity movement!</td>
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Ask her to use her voice as a member of UUK to resume negotiations with UCU and UNISON. If you wish to, you can use the template email prepared by the UCU. You can find it here: ucu.org.uk/studentvoice

Tell them you support the strikes, and ask them to put forward real proposals which properly address staff concerns. Check the SU website for templates.

Promote the strike fund!

Staff will not be paid for time they are on strike: they are risking a huge amount financially to take part in this campaign, so any financial support that can be given to the strike fund is massively appreciated.
Are university support services still running during the strikes?

Yes, SOAS services such as the library, CILT, careers and Student Advice and Wellbeing (SAaW) are still running on strike days. However, some of their activities may be disrupted by striking members of staff.

Also, as we are encouraging students to not cross picket lines, we have lobbied the School into moving Student Advice & Wellbeing to a venue off-campus, to avoid as much distress as possible. The School has also committed to maintaining the Learning Lounge in the Main Building (G1) open until 1am on non-striking days (27th, 28th Feb, & 6th Mar) as well as the week after the strikes (16th-20th March) to alleviate the impact that not accessing the library during the day could have on students. Check our list of alternative study spaces at the end of this booklet for study spaces during the day, and if you need to return a library book, please do so after 5pm when the picket line finishes.

How will the strikes impact my attendance, deadlines & assessments?

This is particularly important for international students on Tier 4 visas - the Home Office has approved the School’s decision. Also, all deadlines after the first day of strikes (20th February) have been pushed, and we have been confirmed that the topics to be covered during strike days will not be included in any form of assessment, particularly exams at the end of the year. These adjustments also mean that students can choose to not go to their scheduled classes during strike days as respecting the picket line by not crossing it will not negatively impact their attendance and assessments. You can encourage your non-striking teacher to reschedule or record the class, so you don’t have to cross the picket line. Check the email templates on the SU website if you wish to do so. You can instead attend the teach-outs on the picket lines to engage in alternative learning opportunities that striking-members of staff are organising all around London.
As much as we hate being customers in a marketised education system, the reality is that we still pay really high fees for an education that undermines workers’ rights and encourages precarity. For that reason, if some students feel like they would like to request a compensation for the industrial action, we will support them in doing so through the School’s complaints procedure. You can also do it by yourself, or in a group. All information on SOAS’ website - please keep in mind the sector’s average compensation ranges £100-300. Additionally, the SU alongside other unions across the country are putting together a campaign for compensation against the Office for Students, the regulatory body for Higher Education institutions in the UK. As they are responsible for “our rights as customers”, we want to take the struggle a step further and use our (much-rejected) status as customers against the very ones who push for this commodification agenda. We believe this can be an effective way of putting pressure at a national level to end the dispute, and to move towards a free education movement.

While the Students’ Union staff will not strike during this period, they will not be working from their offices within the buildings since we are encouraging students and staff to not cross the picket. This means that as students you will still be able to contact the Sabbs, Exec team, and staff via email, virtual office hours and over the phone. Check more information on this on our SU website. Events hosted/organized by the Students’ Union will only occur during non-striking days and after the picket has ended at 5pm during the strike days. This go from Varsity to LGBTQ+ History Month events. With regards to room booking, we highly encourage societies to book rooms after the picket has ended. If societies have rooms/events booked during strike times/days, we ask you to please contact Jesse at jd124@soas.ac.uk to reschedule your booking. Please note that election dates have also been moved and nominations will now close on Monday 16th March. We will then hold campaigning, hustings and voting on the same week, with results being announced on Friday 20th March, last day of term.
Alternative Spaces

Learning Spaces

1. Senate House Library
   As a UoL student you can become a member for free! Free Laptop Loan Service available!

2. Wellcome Library
   Inside the Wellcome Collection museum, north of SOAS.

3. LSE Library
   Since staff is not striking. To make use of it as a SOAS student, fill in this form, easy peasy: shorturl.at/auH09

4. The British Library
   The largest library in the world (by number of items catalogued), so close to us.

5. Holborn Public Library
   Very close to SOAS, just in Theobalds Road!

6. National Art Library
   In the Victoria & Albert Museum. As a major public reference library it's free to join (bring ID!)

7. The BFI Reuben Library
   Great for quiet study! The library collection spans the history of cinema!

8. Barbican Library
   A vibrant public library with resources available for loan to all visitors

A list of Safe Spaces & Faith Spaces coming soon! Check the S.U. website!