The following set of Frequently Asked Questions provides information and advice in relation to the proposed strike action by The University & College Union (UCU).

- **What is the strike/dispute about?**

  Birkbeck is one of 61 universities operating the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) staff pension. The Pensions Regulator is concerned that USS assets may not be sufficient to cover all future pensions. As a result, the USS has proposed changes to the amount individuals and Universities pay into the scheme and the retirement benefits that staff will receive for future payments. Members of the University and College Union (UCU) - which represents academic and professional services staff - voted for strike action to protest these proposals. You can read the UCU statement about the strike here.

- **What is Birkbeck’s position in the dispute?**

  This is a national industrial dispute, not a local one. Professor David Latchman, Master of Birkbeck, has made clear the College does not believe a dispute is in the interests of students or staff. Professor Latchman has called for both employer bodies and the UCU to negotiate a compromise based on the best affordable future pension package. Birkbeck staff are committed to our students, who often make extraordinary sacrifices to study with us. Please be assured the College will do all it can to minimise any disruption to your studies.

- **When will the strike take place?**

  - Week one - Thursday 22 and Friday 23 February (two days)
  - Week two - Monday 26, Tuesday 27 and Wednesday 28 February (three days)
  - Week three - Monday 5, Tuesday 6, Wednesday 7 and Thursday 8 March (four days)
  - Week four - Monday 12, Tuesday 13, Wednesday 14, Thursday 15 and Friday 16 March (five days)

- **How will it affect me?**

  Unfortunately, we don’t yet know what impact the strike will have on each individual or module, as disruption will depend on which staff participate. The College will not necessarily know in advance who is taking part in the strike, but has asked UCU members to help give students as much notice as possible, if they plan to participate.

- **Where will I find the latest information on whether my class is cancelled?**

  Teaching staff have been asked to let you know in advance if they will be on strike. Please check your emails for the latest information.

- **What will happen if my lectures are cancelled?**

  The College recognises the extraordinary sacrifices students make to study at Birkbeck. We have stressed, in our discussions with the local UCU union branch, the importance of minimising disruption and asked staff to provide information about cancellations as early as possible. Material may be provided for cancelled classes or incorporated into other lectures or seminars. Birkbeck
will seek to ensure that all students receive the necessary education and support to enable them to meet the learning outcomes of their programme of study.

- **If my class is cancelled, is there somewhere I can meet on campus with my fellow students for a study group?**

Yes. At the Malet street reception on strike days you will find a list of teaching and computer rooms (not laboratories) available for study within the normal teaching times.

- **How can I continue my studies during the strike?**

We believe many classes will continue as usual and we are doing all we can to mitigate the impact of those that are cancelled. Study resources and reading lists remain available on Moodle and the library continues to be open throughout the strike action so you can continue to conduct individual and group learning. You can access study skills support here.

- **Will my coursework or assessment submission deadlines be altered by the strike?**

No; please continue to submit your coursework and assessments by the published deadline. Please talk to your department if you are concerned that assessment and/or feedback is not being delivered within four weeks of submission.

- **Will I still get supervision and/or work marked?**

Whilst there is no specific marking or supervision boycott, due to the volume of strike days there may be delays to marks being returned or supervisory meetings being scheduled. You are encouraged to contact your supervisors or lecturers to ask for clarification.

- **What can I do if I feel my work is being affected by the strike?**

Please contact your Personal Tutor to discuss your concerns or the Student Advice Centre who will be able to signpost you to other support. You do not need to submit Mitigating Circumstances as the Sub Boards of Examiners will be asked to consistently take into account the potential impact of strike action.

- **Will exams contain questions on the areas that should be covered during the strike action?**

If material relevant to the assessment has not been delivered as a consequence of the industrial action, departments will adjust the marking criteria for the assessment to factor out the requirement for students to demonstrate learning relevant to that material.

- **Will examinations be affected by the strike?**

Departments are responsible for ensuring that students are informed about arrangements for any examinations, but most exams are unaffected as they do not occur on days of the strike. Any scheduled in-class assessments, or PhD vivas and upgrades that are scheduled on a strike day may be affected and you should expect to be notified by your department about this.
• Will my Tier 4 status be compromised if I miss a lecture due to a strike?

Tier 4 students should continue to attend their classes as normal, unless they receive confirmation from their tutor or school administrative team that a particular session is not going ahead. Schools will continue to liaise with and support Tier 4 students should there be any concerns with attendance. Students will not be recorded as absent from classes that are cancelled.

• Can I work unsupervised in a laboratory setting during a strike?

If a laboratory class is cancelled you may not use the laboratory in the absence of supervising staff. Project and PhD students should only work, in the absence of the normal oversight, where they have been given the permission of their supervisor to carry out experiments without direct supervision and a COSHH/risk assessment has been completed for the tasks undertaken. If the work is assessed as unsuitable for lone working if there is no one else present, the work should not continue. There are some situations when lone working must never take place e.g. where there is a risk of sudden serious injury, ill health or death should a procedure go accidentally wrong or if safety procedures are not followed.

• Will training and professional development events for PhD students be affected by the strike?

If a training session is cancelled you will be contacted in advance to confirm this. You should check your emails for updates about training events on strike days in case they need to be cancelled or postponed.

• Will Birkbeck be offering refunds for cancelled classes?

We believe many classes will continue as usual and we are doing all we can to mitigate the impact of those that are cancelled. However it is still too early to assess the impact of the strike on your learning objectives. Your tuition fees contribute towards your entire learning experience and are not directly linked to specific contact or teaching hours. Your tuition fees also cover infrastructure such as buildings, library and IT infrastructure. We are doing everything we can to mitigate any impact on your student experience and your ability to succeed in your studies. We will continue to review the situation over the coming weeks.

• What should I do if there’s a picket line outside the building?

When faced with a picket line, it is at your absolute discretion whether or not you stop and talk to the people undertaking industrial action. You aren’t obliged to take a leaflet if offered one. Neither is anyone on a picket line allowed to prevent you from entering a Birkbeck building. You may even see people on the picket line that you recognise. Our advice is that if you don’t want to talk to them on this occasion, just walk on by. There are many reasons why you may be going into a Birkbeck building - to visit the library, to access a computer or student support services or to visit the Students’ Union. You do not have to explain why.