

Greetings one and all!

Happy February! 🎉 We are thrilled to be launching our first policy newsletter! This newsletter will come to your inboxes every 6 weeks and provide you digestible policy news bites from the higher education sector. If you have any questions regarding content of this the UCU Strikes, UUK's spiking policy, the cost of living crisis or LSE's disaffiliation from Stonewall our inboxes are always open.

Best wishes,
Caroline and Kashi x



University and College Union (UCU)

Following on from the three day strike in November 2022, and the other walk-outs in 2022, 2021 and 2018, this February and March unprecedented strike action will hit 150 UK universities.

Unless university employers make substantially improved offers in disputes over pay, working conditions and pension cuts, 70,000 UCU members will walk out across an 18 day period.

UCU has stated that it would re-ballot staff at all 150 Universities and that the strikes are likely to continue further into 2023 if their demands are not met and support for strikes remain strong.

Who's taking part?

62 universities will see strikes over both pay and conditions and pensions. The individuals striking are academic staff and those in other professional roles including administrators, librarians, and technicians..

Why are university staff striking?

Some are striking over pay and working conditions, others over pensions. Some are striking over both.

The dispute over pensions began more than a decade ago but was reignited by the revaluation of the pension scheme used by academic staff when changes were introduced which resulted in pension contributions increasing and future benefits being reduced. The UCU revealed that the average union member "will lose 35% from their guaranteed future retirement income" and for members who are just beginning their careers, "the losses are in the hundreds of thousands of pounds." You can read more about the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) [here](#).

What are the UCU's demands?

On 25 January 2023, the UCU was offered an improved pay deal for 2023-24 worth between 5% and 8% and so during this strike action, they are demanding:

- a pay rise worth either [the RPI measure of inflation](#) +2%, or 12% — whichever is the higher
- action to end the use of zero hours and temporary contracts
- action to tackle "excessive workloads" resulting in hours of "unpaid work"
- that employers restore staff pension benefits

The reason they rejected the 'improved' pay deal is because it took place at the start of the pandemic "when global markets were crashing" and recorded a deficit of £14.1bn.

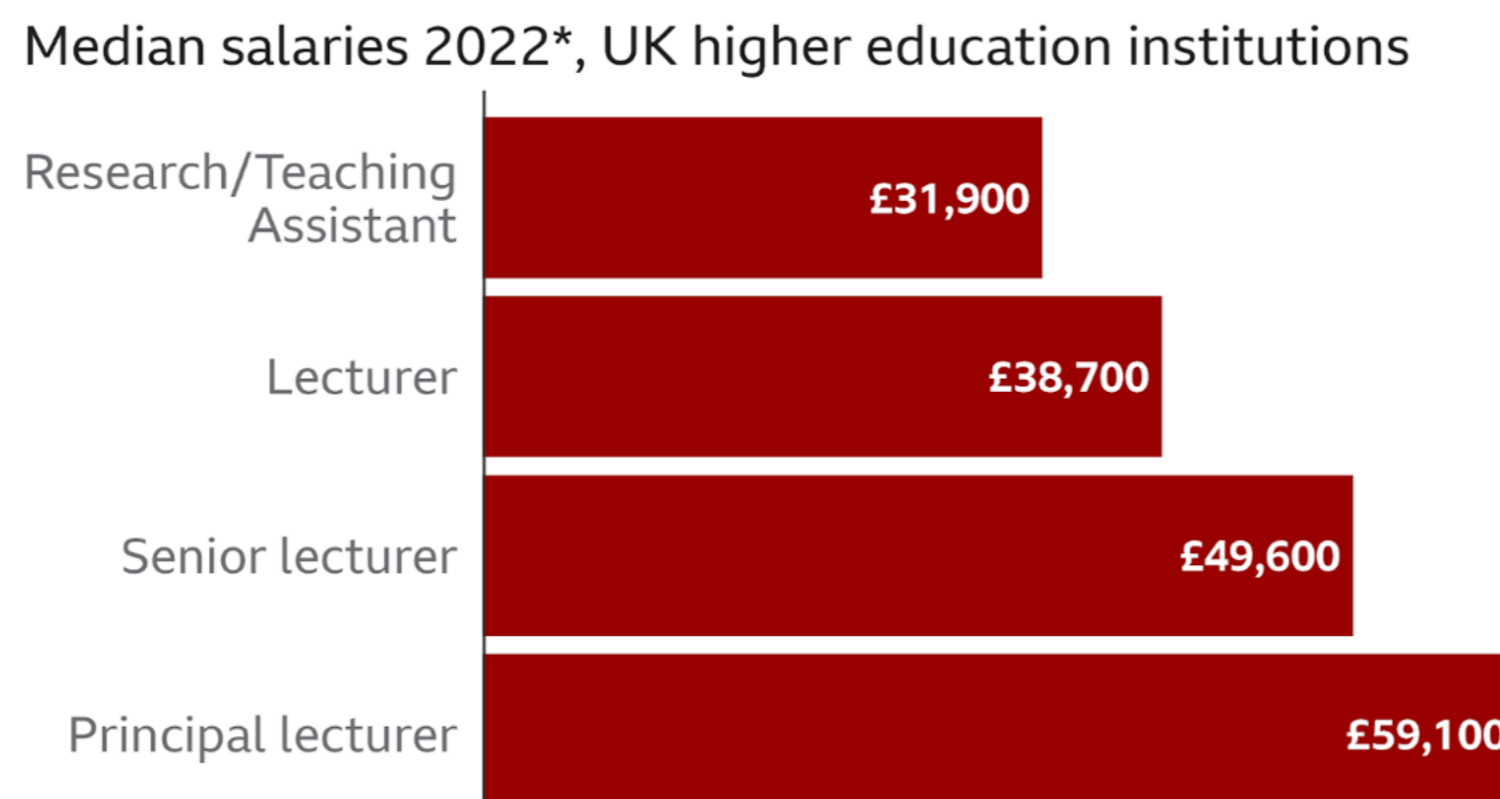
What does this mean for students?

Students are encouraged to join the picket-line and demonstrate support for those striking. The Universities and College Employers Association (UCEA) said there was little disruption to lectures during strikes in November and the Universities UK (UUK), which represents 140 institutions, said some universities extend coursework deadlines and rescheduled teaching.

However, if students feel that the measures put in place are not adequate, they can complain using their university's complaints procedure. This occurred at LSE after the 2021/22 strikes, where students asked for a fee rebate and is likely to occur again this year. Unsurprisingly, LSE has yet to actually deliver on refunding students.

So, how much do lecturers get paid?

Median salaries 2022*, UK higher education institutions



*Based on a full time annual salary
Job titles and criteria for each job title differ across institutions
Source: HESA/UCEA

According to an analysis of the [Higher Education Statistics Agency](#), the median salary for a professor is approximately £80,000.

The Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) found that 25% of professor salaries are at or below around £70,000.

However, UCU says a third of academic staff are on temporary contracts and are paid hourly and that casual staff only get holiday entitlement based on the hours they work and have inadequate paid time to prepare for their classes.

What do university employers say?

The UCEA says any increase in pay "puts jobs at risk" — 30% of universities are already in deficit.

In August 2022, they offered a deal of an "uplift up to 9% for those on the lowest points" of the pay scale, and a 3% increase for all other staff. Supposedly, many also benefited from annual pay increments.

RE pensions: UUK said it is working with the UCU ahead of the next pension scheme valuation and that without the changes in the recently introduced pension benefits, employees would have had to pay much more in contributions.

UUK

[Student Suicide Response Guidance](#)

- Designed for step by step response when a student dies by suicide
 - The guidance provides a checklist from the point of an urgent incident being reported to dealing with memorials and responding professionally and with respect in the long-term
- Includes [guidance](#) on how to perform serious incident reviews to reflect and implement changes for prevention

[Response to speculation of UK Government's plan to reduce international student numbers](#)

- Vivienne Stern MBE, Chief Executive of Universities UK: "Cutting international student numbers would run directly counter to the government's strategy to rebuild the economy – given the huge financial contribution they make to every part of the country."

[Practice Note on Spiking and what universities can do](#)

"What is spiking?"

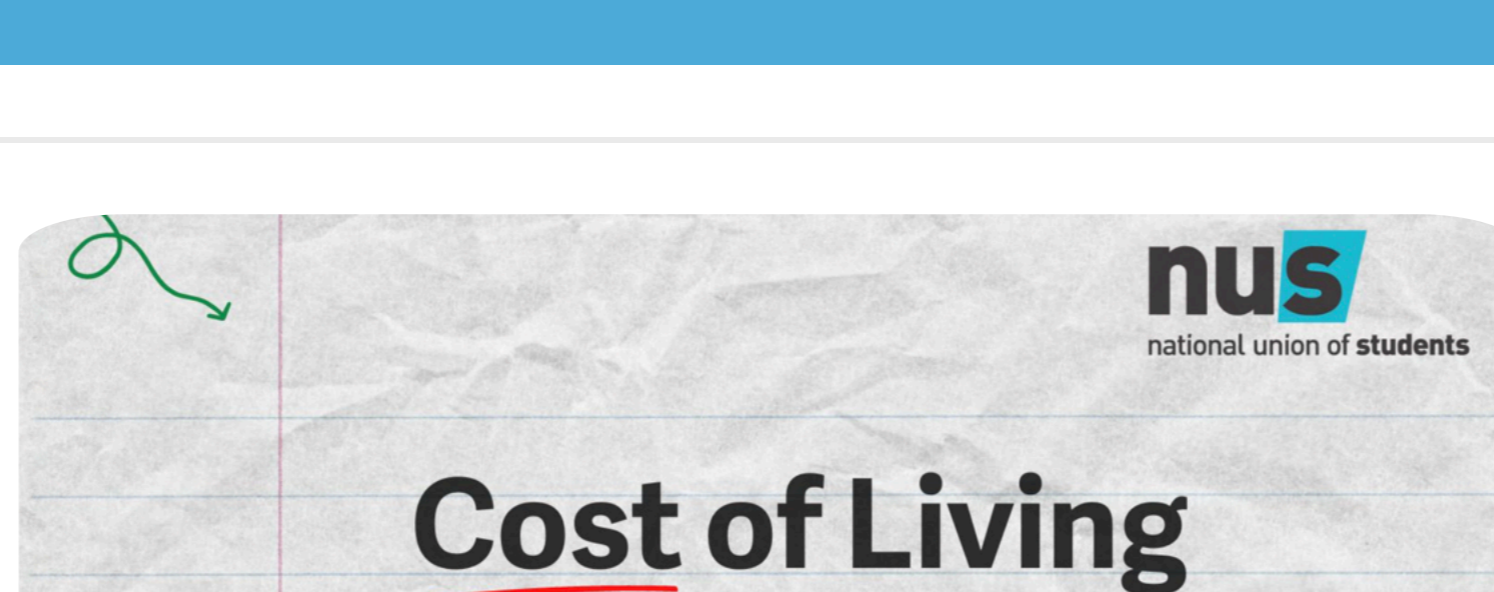
- People can spike others by:
 - alcohol, including putting alcohol or more alcohol into a drink without a person's consent
 - a range of different prescription drugs (such as sleeping tablets) • illegal drugs (such as cocaine, GHB or ketamine)
- Drink spiking is the most common form of spiking, but other items including food and cigarettes can also be spiked.
- Needle spiking also became a serious concern in the latter months of 2021."

Emergence of needle spiking

- "There were 2,065 needle spiking incidents recorded by the police between 1 September 2021 and 31 July 2022.
- Although students were not the only group affected, reports included spiking happening on university campuses, including students' unions, and at nighttime venues aimed specifically at students, including 'freshers' events."

Next steps for universities

- The document outlines a range of actions that universities and SUs should take to prevent and address spiking. This includes considerations for events, the use of anti-spiking devices such as drink covers and how the university handles communications, reporting and support mechanisms for students.



NUS

Cost of Living Crisis

A survey of 3,500 students and apprentices has found that 96% of students are cutting back on spending, almost a third left with just £50 a month after paying rent and bills.

So, NUS is calling for a tailored student cost of living support package right now, and for governments across the UK to raise the student maintenance package and apprentice minimum wage in line with the Living Wage.

Hardship Fund! A Victory!

On January 11, 2023, the UK Government announced an additional £15 million for university hardship funds and to help students in England with the Cost of Living — a win for SUs and activists who have been tirelessly campaigning. Ministers have finally acknowledged that the Cost of Living Crisis has resulted in students being unable to study and live in the UK and that existing support has failed to reach them.

- More than 25,000 people have actively participated in this [national campaign](#)
- More than 2,500 emails have been sent to MPs in more than 80% of constituencies.
- More than 100 SUs have engaged in our national campaign, signing open letters and attending events.

This showcases the power of campaigning!!

However, the fight is not over as a 2.8% rise in maintenance support for 2023/24 is still inadequate as recent calculations showed that students will be up to £1,500 worse off than if loans had increased with inflation.

LSE

Disaffiliation from Stonewall

For those who have not heard yet. LSE decided to pull out of their partnership with Stonewall just before the Winter break. Stonewall is the largest LGBTQ charity in Europe and offers a Diversity Champions Scheme to employers, which LSE until recently was part of.

What was LSE's partnership to Stonewall?

The scheme offers non-binding advice and guidance to employers seeking to ensure they are LGBTQ+ friendly. It serves as a benchmark for LGBTQ employees to ensure that their employer is a safe space for them to work in as well.

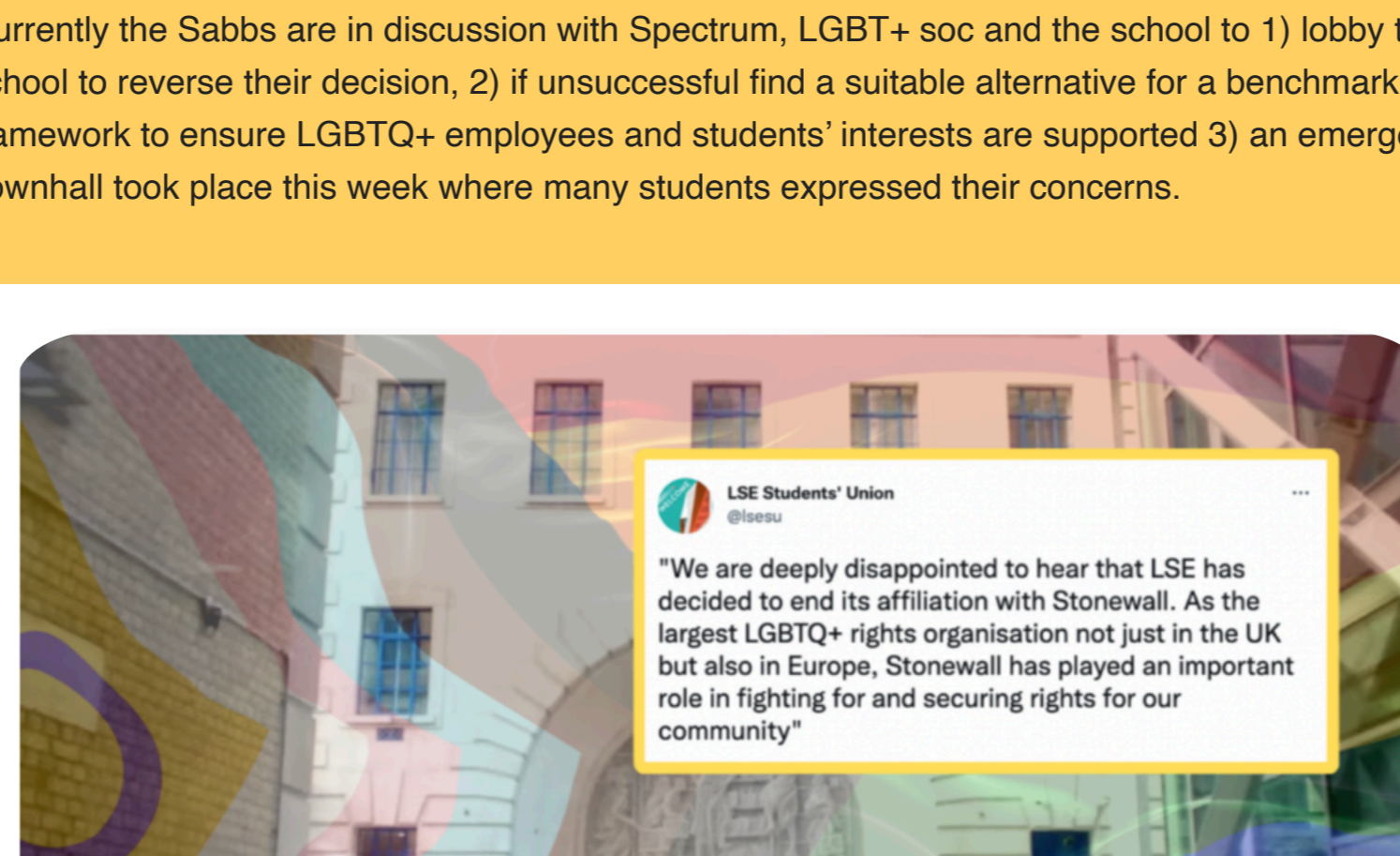
Why was the affiliation ended?

There is currently a wider national debate ongoing against trans rights in conjunction with concerns for freedom of speech by so called "gender critical" persons and TERFs (Trans-exclusive "feminists"). As part of this many LGBTQ charities have come under attack for supporting trans individuals and their rights.

Within LSE similar voices have contributed to this narrative, leading to the disaffiliation without previous discussion with Spectrum members or the Sabbatical officers.

What are the next steps in this change?

Currently the Sabbs are in discussion with Spectrum, LGBT+ soc and the school to 1) lobby the school to reverse their decision, 2) if unsuccessful find a suitable alternative for a benchmark framework to ensure LGBTQ+ employees and students' interests are supported 3) an emergency Townhall took place this week where many students expressed their concerns.



Condemn LSE ending its affiliation with Stonewall & sign the petition [here](#).

