

# 2020 strike handbook for UCU activists

Version 3.0



1. About this handbook .....	2	5.3 Stickers and badges .....	15
2. Introduction .....	2	6. Placards and banners .....	15
2.1 A key point: ask for help! .....	2	6.1 Preparing your placards .....	15
2.2 Another key point: protecting migrant staff, including GTAs .....	3	6.2 Fixing a placard in place .....	16
3. Picketing .....	3	6.3 Designing your own placards .....	16
3.1 How to encourage colleagues to picket .....	3	6.4 Banners.....	17
3.2 Picketing: where and why? .....	4	7. Images and messages.....	18
3.3 Picketing: when? .....	5	7.1 Visual impact and photo opportunities .....	18
3.4 How to distribute and keep track of your pickets .....	5	7.2 Colour co-ordination.....	19
3.5 Be inclusive and make picketing as easy as possible.....	7	7.3 Making noise .....	20
3.6 Stay safe and know the law.....	8	8. Teach-outs.....	20
3.7 What to take on a picket .....	9	8.1 What and why?.....	20
3.8 Collecting donations on the picket line.....	10	8.2 Finding a venue.....	21
4. Demos, marches, meetings and events.....	11	8.3 Topics to teach out on .....	22
4.1 Demonstrations and rallies .....	11	9. Other kinds of strike action .....	23
4.2 Protest marches and the law .....	12	9.1 Strike action at a distance .....	23
4.3 Branch meetings and visiting speakers.....	12	9.2 Action short of a strike.....	24
4.4 Benefit gigs .....	13	9.3 Digital and online organisation: planning and co-ordination .....	24
4.5 Make joining UCU at events easy .....	13	9.4 Digital and online organisation: communication and publicity .....	24
5. Leaflets, flyers and other handouts .....	14	9.5 Help from supportive non-strikers .....	26
5.1 Leaflet production and design .....	14	10. Have you forgotten...?.....	27
5.2 Leaflet messages .....	15	11. Other useful resources .....	28

# 1. About this handbook

This handbook has been compiled, with thanks, from material contributed by a wide range of organisers. It is released under [CC-BY 3.0](#): you're welcome to copy and paste, rework or adapt the text for any purpose, but please credit it with the title "2020 strike handbook for UCU activists" and provide a link back to this document at [jbsumner.com/StrikeHandbook](https://jbsumner.com/StrikeHandbook)

The handbook represents the experience of many individual UCU members, but is not an official UCU document and does not represent the position of the University and College Union, whose guidance may be found at [www.ucu.org.uk](http://www.ucu.org.uk).

Editing and version control by [James Sumner](#). Please contact James with any comments, corrections, additions or queries.

This is **Version 3.0** released **3 February 2020**. Earlier versions appeared as "2019 strike handbook for UCU activists". The current latest version will always be posted at [jbsumner.com/StrikeHandbook](https://jbsumner.com/StrikeHandbook)

## 2. Introduction

This handbook provides advice which may be useful to branch execs, and other activists and campaign organisers, in organising strike action and associated campaigning. It was originally released ahead of the [2019 strike days](#), and has been updated based on the experience of the 2019 action.

The main areas covered are

- **picketing**: the most powerful, enduring symbol of industrial action
- **demos/rallies**: allow the striking community to meet together, and demonstrate its size, in a way that picketing can't, so plan to include elements of both. Many branches tend to organise a morning session of picketing followed by a group rally
- **leaflet production**: produce your own leaflets to make the message as local as possible
- **teach-outs**: alternative education sessions off-campus
- **activism at a distance**: it's important to include members who want to contribute to the strike action but can't picket in person, for example because of disabilities. Promote both formal off-campus striking and supportive acts of all kinds.
- **digital organisation**: this has become an increasing focus for effective communication and publicity in recent years. It often works best in combination with face-to-face and traditional print-based approaches.

### 2.1 A key point: ask for help!

We hope this guide will be particularly useful to colleagues who are getting involved in UCU actions for the first time, or who have exec roles in branches that have recently rebaloted and are planning for what may be their first major strike action. The practicalities, and the responsibilities, can often

seem daunting. Please be reassured that many of the most effective organisers were themselves new to these challenges very recently, and will generally be happy to pass on the details of their experience and share tips.

If you're short of contacts, try nearby branches that were involved in the 2019 action, or ask around on social media (see below) to find people who can help. Experienced campaigners are also often happy to visit or Skype into branch meetings to discuss their experience and answer questions.

## 2.2 Another key point: protecting migrant staff, including GTAs

Be aware that migrant staff will have questions about how their status may be affected if they get involved in the strike. UCU has commissioned specific legal advice and has produced [a Frequently Asked Questions guide](#) which goes into detail on some of the main issues. If people have further questions, they're welcome to raise them directly with [Matt Waddup](#), national head of policy and campaigns.

The gist of this advice is that **staff on Tier 2 or Tier 5 visas are officially protected** for most relevant purposes. Please be sensitive, however, to the unfortunate fact that **official protections are not always respected in reality**, and that some colleagues may have well-founded concerns arising from their experience of the Home Office or your institution's approach. If members do not feel safe to strike, **please respect their judgment**, and encourage them to contribute or show support for the action in ways they are comfortable with. There's at least one [useful summary of what it's like to be in this position](#) on Twitter.

Be aware also that **graduate teaching assistants on Tier 4 visas** are in an unusual position. As regards their teaching contracts, they have the right to participate in the strike on the same basis as other staff. As students, however, they have no special status and so **may be compelled to attend classes given by non-striking staff or face being reported** for serial absence by the institution (which jeopardises their visa status). **Do not pressure Tier 4 colleagues to miss classes**. GTAs who are affected in this way are encouraged to let the pickets know they are crossing the line under duress.

## 3. Picketing

### 3.1 How to encourage colleagues to picket

**Set an encouraging tone.** Make sure everyone knows that picketing is **legal, friendly**, and generally marked by displays of goodwill rather than confrontation. **Experienced pickets can be good ambassadors** to others within their groups or departments.

**Assume no prior knowledge** about what picketing is and how it works. Our recent recruitment successes mean we have a lot of members who don't have experience. Without patronising, offer clear and direct guidance on the basics. **Be prepared for questions** like:

- do I have to picket if I'm on strike?
- does joining the picket mean I have to be there all day?
- why are we only picketing for part of the day?

Remember that some international colleagues come from jurisdictions where picketing is illegal. Others may assume that “hard” picketing (preventing access) is legal. Clarity upfront doesn’t just prevent mistakes: it makes doubtful members more comfortable with the idea.

People should generally be picketing in **pairs or larger groups**. That way, we can make conversation in quiet periods, relieve each other for loo breaks (etc), chat more easily to passing staff and students, and get leaflets into hands quickly enough at busy times. Co-picketing also means someone can capture any **unexpected photo opportunities** (and is available as a witness if there’s any confrontation – but stress that this is really very unlikely: there were hardly any cases in 2018).

**Those colleagues who are nervous or new to picketing are much more likely to join in** if you reassure them that they won’t be on their own. If possible, pair new people with folk who have done this before. **Solo picketing** is best left to enthusiastic pickets who are personally determined to make sure no exit is left uncovered: don’t “make” anybody do it.

### 3.2 Picketing: where and why?

Adjust your picketing and demonstration approach to make sure you’re both **as visible as possible** and **as hard to evade as possible**.

**On a campus site** with a clear single approach road or main gate, you’ll want to put a lot of people and activities at that point for maximum impact – but think about where you can do things inside the site to reinforce the message. **In a city university** with a lot of dispersed buildings, you’ll need to assign pickets to each building – but also try to arrange marches, and group activities in open spaces, to bring them together some of the time.

Picketing/demonstrating outside a building or site can serve any or all of **three main purposes**:

1. **forming a picket line** in the traditional labour-dispute sense, trying to persuade colleagues not to cross
2. making the existence and strength of the strike **visible**
3. handing out **leaflets** to staff and students

**Know which of these is useful on a building-by-building basis**, and tailor your plans. If a building has non-strikers who could potentially join the strike working in it, then as far as possible you want their striking colleagues, who’d normally be working alongside them, to be picketing outside. On the other hand, for a centrally timetabled teaching building with no staff offices, you’ll mainly be leafleting students: any available members can do this.

**Know your buildings.** Get hold of an up-to-date campus map, and identify **all the building entrances that are in regular use**. Produce a **map** showing the entrances ([see here for a quick-and-dirty way to do this](#)) and distribute it to any pickets who don’t know the whole area well.

People who are based in the buildings tend to have **useful inside knowledge** that’s not written down anywhere, such as the names of any supportive staff working inside (perhaps members of allied non-striking unions) who can circulate leaflets and put up posters, or the locations of obscure back

entrances used by senior staff which should be picketed. If you're planning operations centrally, be sure to take local knowledge into consideration.

Think about **what senior management will see**. Some VCs conspicuously stayed off campus during the 2018 action: if yours does this, can you work out who they're getting their information from on the ground, and what **those** people see? If your big bosses **are** on site, either daily or for special events, think about where they go, what they pass along the way, and what you can do to point up the scale and nature of the action.

Think about **the power of images** you can generate to share in and beyond the branch. In 2019 the University of Manchester branch sent a coach with a group of pickets to **Jodrell Bank Observatory**, which is 20 miles from the main UoM campus, in open countryside, hard to reach by public transport, and not a likely site for further strike recruitment. The return journey took two hours, and the picketing was brief; but the action produced [a great set of images](#) with excellent sharing potential. Get used to making judgment calls on inconvenience of setup versus usefulness of outcome.

### 3.3 Picketing: when?

Again, it's a case of knowing what resources you've got and working out how to use them to best effect. Not many members can manage to stay out on the picket line all day, and many buildings are quiet or unused at various times, so most branches focus on limited hours chosen and communicated in advance.

If your site has a definite pinch point such as a campus access road, you may want a **constant visible presence** there, which means organising a shift system for different parts of the day. On the other hand, if you have to disperse pickets to a lot of buildings and are short of volunteers, it may be better to go for **morning-only picketing** so that what presence you do have is more visible.

The obvious priority is to picket at **times when people are going in or coming out**. For teaching buildings, this means **lecture changeover times**. For staff offices in most situations, it means **early mornings** when people are arriving. (You can also catch them as they leave in the evening, but by that point, of course, they've already crossed the picket line...)

**Two morning shifts**, covering, say, 07.00(ish)-09.00 and 09.00 onwards, may be a good approach given that your membership is likely to contain some people who have no problem with an early slot and others who have to work around the School Run etc.

**Picketing in the dark** has some pretty obvious challenges. Favour buildings with well-lit frontages and bring things to make you visible (see below).

### 3.4 How to distribute and keep track of your pickets

[Jo McNeill's guide](#) available at the [Branch Solidarity Network resources page](#) is based on long-term experience and contains detailed guidance including a template for timeslot planning. The guidance below is more general and aimed particularly at less experienced organisers. Don't be put off if you don't have the resources to mount a precision operation: any level of planning is useful.

**Designate somebody to co-ordinate picket planning:** ideally, whoever's best with lists and clipboards. If you have a large campus, you may need to **divide it up into areas** with different people covering each.

Get potential pickets to **sign up in advance** with their preferred locations. This **does not** mean people can't just turn up and join you on the day, so ensure that's clear! But it will help you get a sense of who is likely to arrive when, and help you prioritise how to cover key entrances.

The **simple approach** works well: divide the picketing time into shifts, and ask members to respond to the picket coordinator with time slots they're most able to make each day. This can be done by email, but should also be complemented by sign-up sheets at General Meetings, reps' meetings, and strike planning meetings (face-to-face meetings are very effective for catching people who "meant to" email back!)

Some members will sign up across all slots to cover the whole morning; others will sign up for slots that are more workable around care arrangements, train times, etc. This allows you to target communications to try to maximise turnout across the whole morning, and to ensure a good spread across campus entrances.

Choose a **base location** on campus that's **central and easily visible** (custom placard?), if possible close to your storage space for placards etc. Some branches have a non-University building such as a Students' Union in a suitable location; others operate out of a **van** or set up a **portable party tent/gazebo** (Leeds UCU's choice of [a bright pink gazebo](#) is both colour-coordinated and highly visible) on a convenient grassed area to shelter your materials and volunteers from the elements.

You ideally want **two organisers**, including the main co-ordinator, at the base location to greet and advise pickets. Each should have a **phone** on them at all times. Give **both** phone numbers out to pickets. Note that somebody, preferably a couple of people, will probably need to **arrive at least 30 minutes before the official picket start time** to handle jobs such as fixing placards to street furniture; and you'll likewise need people to pack up at the end.

Your organisers should have **sign-in sheets** ready to take names, and a **map of agreed picketing points**. Direct pickets to **sign in on arrival** at the base location before going out to picket.

Have a **clear policy on how to position pickets**. Some branches encourage them to choose their own sites, usually those where they're known; others distribute them to maximise coverage. If you're going for this second approach, your co-ordinator should distribute people in pairs or groups. Starting with high-impact entrances first, and build up towards coverage of all entrances.

Give each group

- **armbands**
- a stock of **leaflets**
- **stickers** or **badges** if available

- **placards**, ready-mounted on sticks
- **cable ties** for affixing placards to railings etc
- **campus maps** if appropriate
- the **contact numbers** of the organisers
- and a **definite time** to come back to the rallying point.

While picketing is on, make sure someone – if possible, several people – **travels regularly around all the pickets** with **supplies of snacks and leaflets, taking photos, chatting** to see if there are any problems or ideas to take back to base, and asking people to **move** if some picketed buildings are well-covered and others are lacking. (This is where WhatsApp/Signal is useful for instant comms.)

**Take plenty of photos and videos**, and **post them online** with appropriate hashtags. Email the best ones to your branch or national comms contacts. Encourage pickets to take their own photos and give them the hashtags to share.

As always, the more **clear, advance distribution of jobs** you can manage, the better.

### 3.5 Be inclusive and make picketing as easy as possible

Dealing with factors that might exclude people will demonstrate the values we're standing for, as well as helping to create a stronger showing on picket lines.

**Many people can't stand comfortably** for long periods. You should think about this in terms of disability accommodation, but it's also significant for people who wouldn't class themselves as disabled. If possible, **provide chairs** of a kind that can easily be moved: folding, or lightweight plastic.

As a general principle, **talk to disabled members** about what it would be useful to do: the answers will depend a lot on the site and the people involved. Don't fall into the widespread error of thinking about obvious, visible motor disabilities (wheelchair access provision etc) and leaving it at that.

There is a detailed guidance document on **autism and the strike**, compiled by members, with advice both for branch organisers and for autistic strikers themselves: this is available [as a PDF download](#) or [on the Sheffield UCU site](#).

**Where are the toilets?** Plan so as to make it as convenient as possible for pickets to use the loo without themselves crossing the picket line. Most sites, including campus universities, have spaces that are not formally part of the institution (and therefore not subject to picketing) on site or nearby. This can include **cafés, retail outlets, and self-contained Students' Union buildings**, where the exec may be keen to help. Make sure local organisers have this information **in advance** to pass on to anyone who needs it. Don't forget to find **accessible** loos! And if there's really no alternative to going inside an institutional building, don't be oversensitive about picket-line etiquette...

**Storage space** for items people might need during the day is more difficult to manage, but may be possible with an SU or a friendly independent business nearby. Take what opportunities you get.

**Snow and rain** are occupational hazards which at least some pickets can and should contend with: picketing in the snow provided some of the important defining images of the 2018 strike. Always bear in mind that some colleagues can manage this better than others, and some not at all. Find some **fallback locations that are well under cover**, and let people know where they are.

**Very low temperatures** are perhaps best dealt with by arranging and publicising some way for people to contribute indoors somewhere if they can't manage, and getting everyone else to wrap up warm. The oil-can brazier is a traditional picket-line icon but an environmental disaster area; its modern-day successor the electric patio heater will also give off bad ecological vibes (but at least doesn't present the same health hazard).

**Food and drink on picket lines** are always very welcome. Supplies brought by supporters (students, colleagues in non-striking unions, etc) give a morale boost as well as sustenance, but you may wish to arrange something within your branch. On a cold day, you obviously need **hot drinks**. If you've got a well-equipped base outside the picket lines, you can arrange regular tea/coffee runs. Depending on what you can beg or borrow, you may be able to do this using **large Thermos-type flasks** (the stainless steel ones, often seen at academic conference coffee breaks), available in sizes up to 5 litres, or a **catering urn**, which usually holds from 10 to 30 litres and can be carried in a collapsible trolley (but requires power). There is now an excellent, detailed [practical guide to supplying coffee to pickets](#) compiled on the basis of one member's experience in the 2019 strike.

If you have any off-campus cafés near the picket lines, it's worth sending a persuasive branch member to ask about **picket discounts**. They may be glad to offer them: during recent disputes at Leeds, several nearby cafés stepped up with a range of other help, including charging the PA system every day!

### 3.6 Stay safe and know the law

There's a [summary of the law on picketing](#) at the gov.uk site. Note that "hard picketing" (preventing access) and threatening/intimidating behaviour are explicitly **criminalised**. However, it's equally explicit that we **can legally encourage colleagues** to respect the picket line and to support the strike in other ways. Much of what it's currently illegal to do would most probably be counterproductive for building support anyway.

Typically, **the police are not interested in disrupting strike action** and will not want to throw scarce resources at situations where there is no public danger. The police are categorically not responsible for enforcing civil (as opposed to criminal) law.

However, **some employers may take a hostile line towards the strike**: this may include looking for arguable threats to public order and trying to involve the police on that basis, as well as having their own monitoring or security presence. It's a useful precaution to **know the law** and to be able to explain why our actions are compliant.

The [code of practice on picketing](#) is an interpretation rather than a statement of the law. It's the basis of the well-known **six pickets rule**: "pickets and their organisers should ensure that in general the number of pickets does not exceed six at any entrance to, or exit from, a workplace; frequently a smaller number will be appropriate," and the police have "considerable discretionary powers to limit the number of pickets at any one place where they have reasonable cause to fear disorder."



Realistically, though, **there is very little likelihood of law-enforcement action against a larger picket** (eg, at a campus access point) if it's orderly, not presenting crowd problems, and clearly not blocking the route into the workplace. If you want to be cautious, you could distinguish a small picket group (with armbands) from a larger **supporting demonstration group** nearby (without armbands).

A more important restriction is that **you can only legally picket at your own workplace**, and in relation to a dispute you're involved in. You are not legally protected if you go to picket at a university that doesn't employ you. Colleagues who are not union members, or whose unions are not in dispute (and that applies, as things stand, to the other main campus unions Unite, Unison, the GMB and EIS), can't picket with you.

On the other hand, **anyone can demonstrate in support of a picket action**. You don't need to get permission for a static demonstration (as opposed to a march), provided it doesn't have public order implications. Supporters can stand with the pickets in any way they like provided the result doesn't block building access. Just make sure they're not wearing picket armbands. Demonstrating at **lunchtime** usually gives the best opportunities for colleagues in other unions to join you.

The code of practice also explains the role of the **picket supervisor**, which you'll need to understand.

### 3.7 What to take on a picket

The designated **picket supervisor** has various formal responsibilities as set out in the [code of practice on picketing](#), including being readily contactable and having a letter of approval from UCU.

Your **picket co-ordinating team** should have

- convenient equipment for keeping in touch (**mobile phones** at least; **walkie-talkies** if you find them useful) and the appropriate people's **contact details**
- supplies of **placards, leaflets and armbands**, and somewhere to store them
- any extras your branch has produced, such as **stickers or badges**
- **power banks** for USB and other charging as required, and a range of **connector leads**
- a **first aid kit**
- a **megaphone**
- a **laptop** or other convenient means of sending emails in a hurry if you find you have to
- spare **waterproof outerwear**
- **umbrellas**, preferably in UCU colours (pink and purple)
- **hand warmers** for cold weather
- **spare gloves** (if you have any – someone will thank you!)
- basic **tool kit: gaffer tape, staple gun** (for running placard repairs), **string, scissors, Stanley (box cutter) knife, punch pliers...**

- **cable ties** for affixing placards
- **marker pens** (you will always find a use for them) and **biro pens** (waterproof ink)
- **clipboard(s)** and **plastic wallets** housing a supply of nice dry **paper**

If you have a competent **photographer** or **videographer** on the team, and can spare them from other tasks, make it their main role to go around chronicling the strike action.

**Individual pickets** should be encouraged to bring/wear

- **good-quality outerwear**, preferably both waterproof and insulated
- **comfortable but hard-wearing boots or shoes**: walking boots are generally a good bet, although the task is mainly standing around
- **hats, scarves** and **umbrellas** to taste
- **gloves**: we recommend a pair with Thinsulate, which is available even in basic pairs costing under £5. Look for **stretch gloves** if you're planning to leaflet with gloves on or need to work equipment, or **ski gloves** if you want to be sure of keeping warm. Gloves with special patches to allow you to work a touch screen are sold as **touch screen gloves** or **phone gloves**.
- **hand warmers**
- **a thermal base layer** if the weather's cold: this can be outdoor sports gear, trad thermal underwear (long-sleeve top, long johns), or just ordinary tops and leggings. Remember, people will need more insulation than usual because of the amount of standing around involved.
- **sustaining light snacks**: energy bars and the like are good
- if required, **a massive Thermos of very strong black coffee**, or **tea** (we don't all like coffee!)

### 3.8 Collecting donations on the picket line

Conversations on picket lines and at demos can often lead to potential donations for the national **UCU fighting fund** or your **branch-level hardship fund**, particularly from supportive University staff who are not striking. If you think this may happen regularly, try to make it convenient to take **cash donations**.

The best tool for the job is a plastic **collection bucket** with a recessed quick-fill lid and a handle (**not** the traditional small collecting tin: they're too fiddly). [Many suppliers online](#) can provide these at sizes from 1.5 up to 5 litres. Most also offer them with custom-printed bucket labels, which are very useful to make clear the collection is official. Include a UCU logo and a short description in large, prominent text, in UCU colours, and try to make sure the bucket itself is white, purple or pink.

Make sure you **explain the purpose of the fighting or hardship fund**: you probably want to emphasise strike payments to financially precarious members.

The **law on collections** is mostly framed around registered charities and public places, neither of which applies here, but exercise common sense and don't do anything that risks objections from passers-by or the employers. It's probably worth taking a look through the [Code of Fundraising Practice](#) to get a sense of the considerations involved in more organised collecting, but in general, if you make sure you have goodwill for whatever you're doing, you'll be fine.

**Golden rule: do not physically approach people, do not pester people, do not block anyone's path.** Let them come to you, or mention donations as a possibility at the end of a conversation if it seems a reasonable bet.

(Contrary to popular belief, there is no formal regulation against **rattling tins or shaking buckets**: it is, however, widely regarded as **an annoying thing to do**, and counterproductive when some people can't afford to donate. It also means holding another thing, and you'll probably find yourselves short of hands: if you get a big bucket, you can leave it on the ground.)

Also, of course, make sure you have **information at hand for donating online**. The fighting fund page is [www.ucu.org.uk/fightingfund](http://www.ucu.org.uk/fightingfund) and has a quick link to donate by PayPal. If you have a branch hardship fund, make sure it's similarly easy to access: consider using a **link shortener** such as [tinyurl](#) or [bitly](#).

## 4. Demos, marches, meetings and events

### 4.1 Demonstrations and rallies

Most branches tend to have a clearly defined daily picketing period followed, on some or all days, by a massed demonstration gathered in one prominent place. Some of the advantages of doing this are

- the **overall show of numbers** which picketing does not provide
- **discussion, networking and social gathering** between strikers who were at different picket points
- the opportunity to **communicate messages to, and get feedback from**, most of the striking membership at once.

Your gathering point should be clearly announced to all pickets on arrival, along with the time to gather. The location does not have to be in the same area as the picket organisation base, and should be a reasonably **open space where the crowd will be noticeable** to passers-by and/or senior university management. Think about **where your photographer will be positioned** to take crowd shots: they'll probably need to do this from above.

Legally, **you don't need any special permission** for a "static" demonstration (in which people basically stay in one place), but take care that the crowd can't be construed as blocking non-strikers' access to buildings, as the same legal prohibitions will apply as for picketing.

A **rally** is a demonstration featuring speeches or other campaigning addresses. It's a popular basis for individual protests, and it can be useful for morale to bring in a guest speaker such as a local MP or supportive celeb. Think twice, though, before inflicting a series of speeches on pickets who have been standing around in the cold for a few hours: you may find your audience melting away.

If branch organisers or guest speakers will be speaking to a crowd for any significant length of time, you really want the very best **sound system** you can get. This probably means a dedicated PA: megaphones are worth having for short-range and brief messages, but are generally too distorting for long-term attention and don't carry particularly far. Speakers should gain **height** over their audience any convenient way they can (even a crate makes a passable stage for one person). Whatever the setup, always work on the assumption that somebody somewhere can't hear you properly.

## 4.2 Protest marches and the law

A march can be a useful addition or alternative to a demo or rally in a single place. It's an extra level of complication, though: a static demo is easier to organise safely, about as effective in its visual impact, and much easier to photograph. Therefore, make sure you know **why** you're marching. Good reasons may include

- to be **visible, as a large group, in a wider range of places** than you can hit with a static demo. In particular, if your university's in a city, you may be able to march along public streets (but see below on the law around this)
- to create a sense of **build-up**, if the march is towards a rally point. If you've got a large campus or are distributed through a city, you may be able to get the effect of columns joining from different directions
- to **present the form of a deputation**, if you are marching to, for example, the building that houses the Vice-Chancellor's office. There's precious little you can do once you get there apart from shout, but you may feel it's worth it at the symbolic level
- to **demonstrate commitment**: a march may look more serious and determined than a static protest (though this depends how you handle it)
- **for variety**, if you've already got static demos planned.

**There is a very important difference in law** between a march and a static demo. If you are publicly marching – that is, if your protest involves walking concertedly as a group from one place to another – [you need to advise the police at least 6 days in advance](#), and they have the power to impose various conditions, including some that would effectively make the march impossible. There's no such requirement for a static demo.

If you're at a self-contained campus university, this requirement may or may not be relevant depending on whether your route includes any designated public roads. It's safest to check.

## 4.3 Branch meetings and visiting speakers

Branch organisers should organise multiple (perhaps weekly) Extraordinary General Meetings, and less formal meetings as appropriate, before and during the strike period to keep members informed, hear members' views and experiences, and generally make sure the local UCU community is engaged and co-ordinated. Meetings are also an excellent opportunity to identify active members who may be interested in branch exec service.

Visiting speakers are a good way to encourage attendance. Members of the **national negotiating teams for the disputes** are keen and available to speak to EGMs and other branch meetings in person or by Skype. If you don't have direct contacts, contact [Christine Bernabe](#) to request a speaker.

#### 4.4 Benefit gigs

Public entertainment with an admission fee to support the strike (usually by direct donation to a hardship fund) is another long-standing convention of industrial action in the UK. However, organising an external event that needs to turn a profit is a tricky job, with plenty of traps for the unwary: if you're new to all this, your efforts can almost certainly be spent more productively on other activities, such as teach-outs. It's more something to consider if you've regularly organised events – or know someone who has – and already have a suitable venue in mind which can offer you a night at fairly short notice and at no or token cost.

Several branches organised benefits during the 2018 action. Most of these were **music** gigs and kept things as simple as possible, with just one or two bands or solo acts on the bill. The acts, by definition, need to be prepared to work for nothing. Assuming Billy Bragg doesn't suddenly turn up on your doorstep, you are probably at best looking for supportive semi-pros with some degree of local name recognition who don't play in some impossibly niche style.

The main alternative to music (which has any chance of drawing an audience beyond your core supporters) is **comedy**, but please be warned that an audience will tolerate a sub-par musician far better than a sub-par comedian; also, short sets mean more acts mean more organisational load and potential for things going horribly wrong. A possible exception exists in the [Bright Club](#) network, which has the unusual feature that most performers are also higher education professionals to begin with.

The psychologically optimum price point for a benefit gig (which does not have a "name" act) is often reckoned to be **£5**. You might want to consider a pay-what-you-can-afford approach, as your potential audience has some mightily big gradations in what people can afford; if so, still publicise £5 or some other definite figure as a suggested donation.

You will probably want to take **cash on the door** (online services such as EventBrite, although easy to use, impose quite a large rake-off for paid tickets). Publicise this clearly on your posters and in your online publicity, along with a prominent simple statement along the lines of "All proceeds to the branch hardship fund."

You will, of course, want the funds to be available as soon as possible, which means holding the gig as soon as possible. There is no special reason why it can't happen **before the strike**.

#### 4.5 Make joining UCU at events easy

New members always join up during any convincing action. Make it as easy as possible for them. Assign people to have **recruitment materials** with them (and to know how to talk joiners through the process) at your main concentration points during picketing, at demos or marches, and during branch meetings.

At large gatherings in public spaces, have a prominent **JOIN HERE** placard which people can see from a distance.

The keenest new recruits may be up for **photo-opportunities**: take advantage if possible, and put the results out on social media: it's good to show that the strike is in itself making the union grow.

[UCU's Build The Union pages](#) have a range of useful materials for recruitment in general. See in particular [Organising toolkits](#), [Branch resources](#), and the letter template on the [Basics](#) page.

## 5. Leaflets, flyers and other handouts

### 5.1 Leaflet production and design

**New daily handouts** are very useful – difficult to manage in practice, but it's worth trying. Most of the staff and students you'll interact with are on site every day, and every document will quickly outstay its welcome.

You should therefore plan to have a stock of **material to use that's not time-sensitive**: for instance, stories of why people chose to strike. In an ideal world, each daily leaflet would also include some response to the previous day's developments, but it can be hard to manage such a quick turnaround. (If you do have that ability, flaunt it: put the "news" on the front as the main item.)

Your main production choice is between printing/photocopying yourself, and using a print shop. Doing it yourself – if you have the facilities – has the advantage that you can produce things quickly on your own schedule (best for time-sensitive content) and quickly produce more if you run out. Sending things for print gets results more slowly, but is usually cheaper for long print runs, and gives you the option of different paper sizes and finishes.

**Paper size: A4 single sheet** is the easiest size to work with if you're printing yourself, and the easiest to find templates for, but its size makes it a bit unwieldy for easy leafleting. **A5 single sheets** are much easier to distribute quickly, and a pile of them will fit conveniently in a large jacket pocket. Most printers can easily do **A4 folded to A5**, which, if you can fill four pages, works well enough.

**Paper finish**: most print shops will give you the choice of **uncoated** (like photocopier paper) or coated with a special finish, usually either **gloss** (shiny) or **silk** (not very shiny). Uncoated looks more homespun; coated looks more professional. If you're pushing the boat out and printing in **colour**, coated will work better. Coated also has the advantage that the sheets are much less likely to stick together while you're doing rapid-fire leafleting.

**Design principles**: keep it simple. Few fonts, large bold text to grab the attention, detail in smaller text, images and/or white space for variety. If at all possible, **get someone with graphic design experience to make a template** which you can adapt with your own content. Always try to make the main message **readable from a distance**.

**Pictures are important** both to draw the reader's attention and to quickly signal to them that there's some difference between this particular handout and any they've previously seen. In the 2018 strike, [comic-strip presentations](#) of standard points were very helpful in getting the message across.

## 5.2 Leaflet messages

Many staff and students **don't know what a picket is**, or the history or meaning of the picket line. Some don't know what a strike is, or what the union is. Have leaflets available which clearly and briefly explain this.

Know your audience and focus your coverage accordingly. **Poor working conditions resonate with students and the wider public; pension issues only really resonate with existing pension-holders.**

Remember to confirm that **the employers caused the strike** by refusing to negotiate adequately, and that the ball is in their court as to ending it. Suggest ways students and non-striking colleagues can lobby them to do this.

Stress that **some university leaders are sympathetic** and are working within UUK to get meaningful negotiations. In 2018, Bob Allison, Loughborough's V-C, visited the picket lines and was photographed helping out with a barbecue: several branches used this photo in their leaflets. Glasgow's Principal, Anton Muscatelli, issued a joint statement with UCU Glasgow which was similarly useful. We've already seen something similar for 2019 with [Anthony Forster's comments](#) in the *Guardian*. Look for similar signals of support. **If you have a hostile V-C**, on the other hand, you can obviously emphasise the contrast.

## 5.3 Stickers and badges

**Stickers** are a cheap, simple and effective way to spread the word. Being highly disposable, they're best suited to short-term and local strike messages. You will easily find [dozens of print shops online](#) which can supply 1000 stickers for around £20 to £30, sometimes with next-day delivery. **Use the UCU colours** but **choose local or branch-specific language or messages** for maximum impact.

**Badges** are likewise [easy to order online](#): £30 will probably buy you 100 or so. They're obviously more permanent and substantial than stickers and are great for giving out to supporters, particularly students. The standard "button badge" (of indie-fan cliché), which is 25mm across, is too small to be read at any distance. 38mm is a better size for most designs with text.

# 6. Placards and banners

## 6.1 Preparing your placards

National UCU campaign placards and OFFICIAL PICKET boards will be sent out from Head Office, but there's nothing to stop you developing your own local placards too (see below). These preparation steps are very important:

- **waterproof your placards**, and any other cardboard materials, because **it will rain**. This particularly applies to the OFFICIAL PICKET placards which will be on display constantly and need to stay looking presentable. A roll of self-adhesive **carpet protector film** is the most convenient thing we've found for waterproofing.
- most placards are not supplied with **sticks or poles**, and most groups have to improvise. **Timber roofing battens**, 25x38mm or any similar size, cut into 90cm lengths are good. A heavy-duty **staple gun** is a reliable way to attach sticks to placards quickly (speed is

important if you've got a lot of placards to do...) **Gaffer tape or duct tape** will also generally do the job: use plenty. Try panel pins or nails if you're using thicker or heavier sticks. If you need to be able to remove the placard from the stick, use **Velcro tape**. [More suggestions here](#).

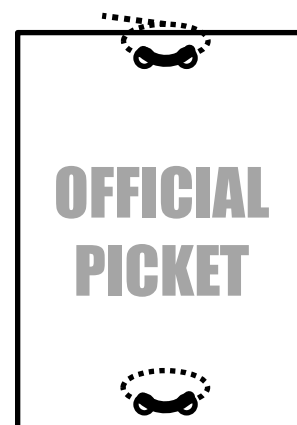
The OFFICIAL PICKET boards are the same size as a campaign placard and can be attached to a stick in the same way, but it's more usual to fix them in place (see below) at a picket point. They are not legally required for picketing, but they help to clarify the situation, emphasise the validity of the strike action, and improve the look of picket photos.

## 6.2 Fixing a placard in place

Outdoors, the best way to secure a placard or OFFICIAL PICKET board is usually with **nylon cable ties** passed through two holes in the placard and looped around a vertical railing, thin pole or similar. Cable tie lengths of 160mm to 200mm will suit a good range of situations.

One cable tie at the top and one at the bottom, as shown in the diagram, will usually be enough. If you're attaching the placard to horizontal rather than vertical supports, you may need four cable ties looped through four pairs of vertically arranged holes, two on each side.

**Punch pliers**, rather than stationers' single-hole punches, are the best tool for making the holes. The [revolving type](#) is best as it allows various different hole sizes.



When done with, remove the cable ties using a Stanley knife (box cutter knife) and dispose of carefully.

Multi-tasking protestors who want a placard to be ready for waving, but able to be left in place while they're doing other stuff, may find this approach useful: attach a stick to the placard in the normal way, and use two or three cable ties to tie the stick, not too tightly, to a vertical rail. You should be able to slide the stick out, and can leave the cable ties in place to re-insert it later.

An alternative to cable ties is to pin your placard to a [wooden A-board](#) or similar if you have one.

## 6.3 Designing your own placards

The standard designs of the national UCU placards will become very familiar to passers-by very quickly, so aim to add variety. Think about whether there's a **local dimension** you can use to attract support and attention: this could be a reference to a local campaigning issue, an image of a campus landmark, or a slogan in local dialect, for instance. Similarly, if you're with a group of subject specialists or picketing a discipline-specific building, look for appropriate puns or subject references.

Past actions are a good source of inspiration: if you scroll through the Twitter hashtags [#ucustrike](#) and [#ucustrikesback](#) around the 2019 strike dates, you'll find images of placards displaying such slogans as [Newcasual University](#), [All I want for Christmas is fair and equal pay](#), [Biologists say save our pensions from extinction](#), [Angry librarians](#), [GTAs can strike!](#), [Stop zero hours contracts](#), [Our working conditions are your learning conditions](#), [The University of Sheffield is closed for repairs](#), [Professional](#)



[Services Staff have feelings too, I myself have a secure well-paid job but I'm striking for people who don't](#), and these [assorted art puns](#).

If you're producing your own materials, you can find a lot of advice online for both art design and physical construction. Much of this is geared to what supplies are available in the USA, and not all of it is reliable, but reading a range of sources will be useful. For instance:

- [How to make protest signs](#) (WikiHow)
- [How to make a sturdy, rain-proof protest sign](#) (Felicity Shoulders on Medium)
- [How to make a protest sign that isn't garbage](#) (Justin Caffier for Vice)
- [How to make the best protest sign](#) (Sophie Bushwick for Popular Science)
- [How to make an easy sign holder](#) (carverswoodshop on YouTube)
- [Banner making 101](#) (Bob Olson via Campaign Gears)
- [DIY a frame sign](#) (Simply Handmade on YouTube)

**Professionally printed** placards, panels and signboards are usually made of **Correx** (fluted polypropylene). A more hard-wearing alternative is **Foamex** (PVC foam board: the foam's just the interior, the finish makes it look like solid hard plastic). Many print shops will print your designs on Correx or Foamex at any size, or you can buy blank cut sheets to letter by hand. An **estate agent's T-board** is a standard size of large placard for which you can easily find printing services.

## 6.4 Banners

The main advantage of **banners** is that they can be **very large** without creating storage difficulties, as they simply roll or fold up. This means they're good for **photographing from a distance**, which is great if you've got a large crowd. Most branches have one main banner with the name of the branch, but some campaigns have also produced slogan banners.

Unless you have a local expert on hand, we don't recommend trying to make your own banner, as it's hard to produce something that will last. Commercial suppliers will provide a reliable custom-printed banner with hemmed-over edges and durable metal rings (eyelets or grommets) for securing it to supports. The default material, and generally the cheapest, is PVC ("vinyl"). "Fabric" banners are often polyester; if you're looking for non-synthetics, search for "cotton" or "canvas".

Suppliers will make any **banner size** you could practically use and this is very much up to you, although there's probably no point going for anything less than 80cm high. If you see photos of banners you like the look of from other groups, get in touch and ask for the measurements. Bear in mind the difference between these two display approaches:

- **wide banners**, typically around 80 to 120cm tall and between 3 and 10 times as wide, are supported by vertical poles on both sides, sometimes with horizontal poles or wiring along the top edge. They're usefully versatile as they can be held at chest height in the foreground of a static demo to be photographed ([example here](#)), raised above head height in the middle

of a march or other crowd, or again at chest height at the front of a march. Simple messages and clean design work best for wide banners.

- **traditional trade union banners** ([examples here](#)) are square, or not much wider than they are tall, supported by rigid poles at both sides and along the top, and designed to be lifted to a height – in fact, they only really work when raised up over the heads of a group, or as a stand-alone focus of attention. Traditionally they were handmade with elaborate designs: [national UCU has one](#) commissioned from the specialist maker [Ed Hall](#). If made double-sided, they're good for marches, particularly amid similar banners belonging to other groups. They're much less effective at static demos, because of the difficulty of arranging things so that they're not blocking people's faces and people aren't blocking them.

[This press photo](#) shows a wide banner being carried at the front of a march group, with a large traditional banner raised on poles behind it.

Support struts are sold as **banner poles** or **banner frame tubing**, or you can improvise. Some banner suppliers will optionally add **pole pockets** for conveniently storing these supports. To attach the banner to its supports – or to street furniture such as railings, if you're fixing it in place – don't use string: use nylon rope, bungee cords, or cable ties ([see here for advice on securing a banner](#)).

An ordinary banner will billow like a sail in windy conditions, and can become hard to control. It's traditional to cut **wind slits** in the fabric ([see this video showing one way to do this](#)), but banner manufacturers now discourage it: the venting effect tends to make little difference, and the slits can create tear points that weaken the banner over time. If you want to be able to deal with windy conditions, a better option is a **mesh banner**, which is now a standard option from most banner printers (sometimes listed as **airmesh banner**). No banner is easy to manage in heavy rain.

However you plan to stabilise your banner, it's best to **rehearse** before taking it out in public. Unforeseen problems with setup, general operation or packing up can be very inconvenient on the day.

## 7. Images and messages

### 7.1 Visual impact and photo opportunities

Aside from making your protests noticeable on the day, you'll want to take and circulate photos, and perhaps video, to raise awareness of the strike and emphasise the breadth and scale of support.

Think first about what **messages** your choices might send out. We need to show the strike is part of a movement which is **big, confident, inclusive, pro-students, pro-education, pro-research, realistic, resilient** and **human**. It's OK to be **angry** and it's also OK to be **cheerful**, provided you don't mix those messages in a confusing fashion.

With that in mind, think about **what will get noticed**. If you've got a lot of different pictures of pickets picketing, that's a good start – but more unusual images will reach places that those images can't. The following are tried and trusted:

- protests on or in front of **familiar landmarks**

- **dogs on picket lines** (see the [#DogsOnPicketLines](#) hashtag, featuring such gems as the [Stop Working Us Like Dogs](#) coat): make sure there's nothing going on that can distress them
- **costume and fun activities** (dance, kickabouts, etc). There's always some debate about seeming to trivialise the issues, or disrespecting members who are not in the mood for fun and games, versus the potential of a more playful atmosphere to keep morale up and to encourage thought about how we could be doing education differently. Less debatably, the appearance in 2018 of **outlandish mascot characters** such as Southampton's [Dinosaur of Solidarity](#) really helped to spread awareness and engagement: the Dinosaur's most visible successor so far, Newcastle's [Shark of Solidarity](#), has already picked up [some media attention](#). On the other hand, **dressng for effect doesn't have to be complicated or silly**: easily sourced outerwear such as **lab coats**, or **hard hats and hi-vis**, can give a strong signal at a distance. Or, for the practical/silly interface, see [the case for onesies](#).
- **representations of your work**. Cliché is your friend here. Art historians can point at prints, geologists can hammer flints, mathematicians can scribble on portable blackboards (make sure the chalk shows up in the photo!), astronomers can peer into handheld optical telescopes (you can surely find someone who's got one), software engineers can fiddle with a laptop in a state of apparent oblivion. If your field has a tradition of spectacle in its public work, use it: chemists make [Elephant's Toothpaste](#), drama folk deliver barnstorming soliloquies, roboticists see if you can borrow the promotional android that plays football (can we get #RobotsOnPicketLines trending?) Musicians, even if they work exclusively with the violin, should for preference bring a sousaphone.
- **umbrellas**: rain and cloud damage the effect of most images; the only way to address this is to make a virtue of it by having members posing with umbrellas aloft (even if you're not relying on them for ordinary rain protection). Go for UCU **pink and purple** if possible. **Golf umbrellas** are good because of their size.

If you want **sounds (speeches, songs etc)** to be shared more widely, this will have to be as **part of a video**: think about how you can make the sights and sounds effective in combination.

## 7.2 Colour co-ordination

**Multi-coloured lettering** is for some reason widely used on placards and banners, but perhaps best avoided unless the colour is part of the message. If not, it has a single advantage in making your statement look personal/homespun, but often at the cost of making it hard to read. If you do use it, at least note that **yellow on white is invisible**: the result ends up looking like **HAN S OF UR PEN IONS**, which is no good at all.

**Colour co-ordination** is a better approach. People will identify your messages with UCU more easily if they're in the standard colour scheme of **white, pink and purple**, plus black for any longer body text.

If you have the opportunity to match them exactly, the colours are as follows:

	Print	Screen: R, G, B decimal	Screen: RGB hex
<b>UCU pink</b>	Pantone PMS 219	240, 49, 144	#F03190

UCU purple	Pantone PMS 269	51, 6, 101	#330665
------------	-----------------	------------	---------

You can also get more ambitious and try to co-ordinate clothes, hats, umbrellas, etc.

### 7.3 Making noise

Sounds are an obvious way to be noticeable beyond immediate lines of sight. This works best for scheduled demos with larger groups, rather than for distributed picketing. **Live music** is the ideal thing if you can get a tolerably good performer or band on the case. A **strong rhythmic beat** is the main priority. [Solo drumming](#) with limited portable kit is simple and effective. Think hard, though, about whether you really want to have people blowing whistles or other noisemakers to no particular musical effect. And be sure to get a sense of what participants want or need. Loud noise is a serious problem for some members with disabilities, and annoys the bejesus out of a fair segment of the membership more generally.

**Strike songs** – usually versions of popular songs with suitably rewritten lyrics – were popular during the 2018 action, with some branches compiling their own songbooks and handing out lyric sheets for a singalong. This obviously works best at demos or in the more concentrated picket groups, rather than for small numbers of pickets distributed to cover entrances. It can be a good basis for **videos** that will be noticed by other branches: try to have a strong visual dimension to accompany the singing.

Large gatherings will need **voice amplification**. The familiar style of handheld **megaphone** (loudhailer, bullhorn) with a hand grip sells from around £20 upwards: check recommendations before buying, as some models are hopeless. Some megaphones have a small **separate microphone** which you can more conveniently hold to your mouth. If you need more or better amplification, but still need to be able to move from site to site, go for a **portable PA speaker system** (“busker’s PA”): these are either shoulder-strapped or carried like a wheeled suitcase, and usually come with a wireless microphone.

## 8. Teach-outs

### 8.1 What and why?

A teach-out can be **any kind of learning session in support of the strike** that happens while it’s on, as a pro-strike alternative to normal activities. Teach-outs are inspired by the [teach-ins](#) which evolved from [sit-ins](#) during US campus protests in the 1960s: it’s a teach-out, of course, because the participating staff all respect the picket line and organise everything outside of university buildings.

There’s a nice detailed section on [organising a teach-out](#) at the Leeds UCU website, based on experience during a local dispute in 2017. Some of the advice that follows overlaps that section. There’s also a partial [list of links to 2018 branch teach-out details on this page](#) at the 2018 USS Strike Archive.

Teach-outs are an excellent contribution to any branch’s strike action programme because

- they **telegraph to students, and to the outside world, that we’re strongly committed to education**. They can be particularly useful in challenging the perception that strikers are not

thinking about students or are prepared to treat students as collateral damage. (The perfect teach-out would be one that participating students found just as useful as their scheduled curriculum, but without making any contribution at all to the intended operation of the university...)

- they present a **chance to do things differently**, experimenting with new approaches that “the system” doesn’t allow for – particularly as regards student participation in decision-making
- they **foster communication**, bringing colleagues and students from across the university with more scope for in-depth discussion than is usually possible at a picket or demo
- they are a good way to **get active contributions from colleagues who can’t or don’t want to picket**.

## 8.2 Finding a venue

As we’ll be striking in cold, possibly rainy, and sometimes dark conditions, your priority will probably be to find a **warm heated room** (or group of rooms) in a convenient location. You need reasonably **good acoustics** without much competing noise, but you **don’t** necessarily need a lecture room-type environment. Most teach-outs try to get away from the traditional lecture format to some degree, and unusual venues are often part of the appeal.

Putting some planning time into checking the available local options, and making an advance booking if necessary, will really pay off in making sure things run as smoothly as possible. Depending on your local situation, the possibilities may include

- **a Students’ Union building:** these are often on campus but not University-run and therefore outside the picket line. SU execs are usually supportive of our actions and will often join in with co-ordinating teach-outs.
- **an upstairs or back room at a pub or café nearby:** these are often well-designed for small public events and usually don’t cost much – you can sometimes book them for free, if the staff are supportive and/or if a fair proportion of your party will be buying food or drinks.
- **other friendly venues:** you have a good chance of a favourable response from community centres and social enterprises, trade union organisations, some religious organisations (the [Society of Friends](#) has a good track record for living up to its name in this respect), arts spaces, and smaller and private museums and libraries.

If you don’t know the possibilities in your local area, you almost certainly know someone who does. The kinds of people who may be able to advise include **performers** of all kinds, **activists**, **community group organisers**, **university public engagement officers**, anyone involved in **adult education**, **science communication freelancers**, and anyone running local events for a **scholarly or professional society** or similar group.

Activities you can run without booking a venue include

- **trips to museums or galleries**, ideally ones with free entrance: you may well have a member who can lead discussion on some of the exhibits, or you can just go as a group and discuss your responses – for best results in that case, pick someone to moderate the discussion, and choose a definite “research question” to guide the group. (Make sure your chosen site is not institutionally part of a strike-affected university: if so, it’s forbidden territory during the strike, even if it’s off-campus)
- **walking tours, weather permitting**: if you have someone who knows the history of your campus site and can tell interesting stories, there’s nothing to stop you walking around stopping at the various buildings, being careful not to enter them. Or you can go off-campus and choose an interesting site nearby. Don’t forget to take photos!

### 8.3 Topics to teach out on

As one of the main aims of the teach-out approach is to increase members’ direct participation, it’s probably a good idea to be **led by the ideas that come in** (see [the Leeds document](#) for how the branch collected suggestions from the membership), at least to some extent. But note that some kinds of content have particular advantages:

- **activities which directly help with strike preparation in their own right** are good for very obvious reasons. Consider a **banner-making workshop** with input from visual arts or design staff before the start of picketing, or a **“What is a strike?”** session as the strike begins.
- **topics relating to labour and social campaigning issues**, besides helping to support the work of the union, have the practical advantage that you can always find someone to put a session together and you can always find people to attend. Reliable topics include **decolonising the curriculum, the marketisation of higher education** and **the history of labour disputes** – you can no doubt think of others...
- ...but there’s an excellent case for **making the coverage as broad as possible**. You’ll get a critical mass of attendance by catering for activist students, but we’ll spread our message more widely if we can also bring in some of their less politically engaged peers, affirm that we want to include them, and give a real showcase of the power of education in the widest sense. Think about the kinds of topics some students might pick up on out of curiosity, or just for fun: this could be anything from “Chinese for beginners” to “How do smartphones work?” to “The history of [big local football club]” to “The philosophy of *Game of Thrones*.” (**Don’t over-claim!** Interesting-sounding talks have to **be** interesting.) The abovementioned [Leeds teach-out](#) achieved a notably varied programme.
- in particular, **work actively to get science, engineering, and maths into your teach-out curriculum**: there’s a strong tendency for these things to end up dominated by the social sciences, history and the creative arts, unless you have the right kinds of specialists in your organising group. Try to bring in colleagues with experience in **science communication/STEM public engagement/schools liaison**: they’ll be used to thinking about what works well for different audiences (and also tend to be well-adapted to situations where nearly everything is going wrong nearly all the time). The “talks” sections of various [science festivals’](#) programmes may provide some inspiration.

- **student involvement** in designing and running teach-outs is very valuable – not only from striking graduate teaching assistants, who have often taken the lead in organising teach-out activities, but from undergraduates and others not directly involved in the strike. For some of them, this will be their first opportunity to voice an opinion on teaching content or methods and expect to have it taken seriously. Think about how we could run a productive session without the staff taking the traditional authority-figure roles, or with teaching responsibility switching between students and staff.
- consider running **drop-in activity sessions** that can broaden the size and variety of your teach-out programme without much extra organisational effort. Successful activities in past actions have included **zine production**, **crafts** (knitting for yarnbombing, etc) and **maker culture** activities (another opportunity to bring in technology). As ever, the trick is to identify what skills and supplies you have available and build around them.
- don't be afraid to **take inspiration from entertainment**, particularly if you're running a fundraiser gig and your teach-out and official entertainment end up happening in the same place. Think about how your teach-outs could incorporate music, drama, poetry, or – facilities permitting – a bit of visual spectacle. (Any chemistry lecturer who has organised a [flash bang show](#) is your friend, particularly if they've ever done so in the upstairs room of a pub with no nearby access to running water and managed to clear the risk assessment process.)

## 9. Other kinds of strike action

### 9.1 Strike action at a distance

**Be proactive** about offering ways to join the strike for members who can't picket or demonstrate in person, for instance because of disabilities or care responsibilities, or because they are distantly employed. You should also be looking to include people who are supportive but feel they can't visibly support the strike, such as migrant colleagues worried about intimidation over visas.

Strike action at a distance can include:

- members **publicising the fact that they're not working**, on social media, in email out-of-office replies, etc
- **photos of strikers off campus**, or [personal/virtual "picket lines"](#) (put a placard in front of a desk with a conspicuously unused computer, or whatever you'd be using but aren't)
- **producing strike materials** such as leaflets
- **circulating and promoting strike messages online**
- **letter-writing campaigns**
- wearing **badges**; wearing and placing **stickers**
- **organising donations** to the UCU fighting fund or branch hardship fund

## 9.2 Action short of a strike

This handbook does not cover action short of a strike (ASoS) in the post-strike period at present: the [official advice from UCU](#) is clear as far as it goes, and any more specific practical advice will depend on how the strike develops and whether stronger ASoS measures are proposed at national level.

## 9.3 Digital and online organisation: planning and co-ordination

The importance of digital and online methods was one of the most notable stories of the 2018 action, particularly for communication among members and to the wider world.

The most useful tools actually tend to be the obvious ones you'll probably be familiar with: posting on social media, co-ordination by instant messaging, [Doodle polls](#) for scheduling, online surveys or info collection ([Google Forms](#) is, perhaps regrettably, usually the best quick tool for the job), collaborative documents (via [DropBox](#) or similar services, or [Google Docs](#)), etc. Anyone planning collaborative graphic design should take a look at [Canva](#), a basic but quick and easy online tool.

It's wise to **keep it simple**, which often means continuing with more traditional methods: some of the most efficient picket distribution operations have been built on clipboards, handwriting, and visual inspection. But look for places where you can quickly and easily **build convenient online tools into your system**. Case in point: are you collecting a lot of names, addresses and numbers on paper and having to type them all? This ties up a lot of time and you **will** make mistakes. Can you collect them with an online survey? (The answer may in practice be **no**, as some people aren't very responsive online... think about what will work for your situation.) If you need the wider membership to use a particular system, they need to **not only understand it but also be comfortable with it**.

If you're collecting personal data (usually contact information), [GDPR](#) applies. Problems are unlikely but can happen. To avoid getting tangled up in the complexities of compliance, it's best just to resolve from the outset **never to do anything that might realistically give a member grounds for objection**, even if this limits your options. So: announce upfront that (a) you won't be using the data for any purposes other than the ones you've specified and (b) if anyone asks you to remove their data you will comply without quibble as soon as possible. Make sure any online storage you use is secure. If you don't know your way around these issues, find someone who does, or else go for more basic approaches.

Many people find **instant messaging** more convenient than email, particularly for rapid co-ordination on the move via smartphone. A lot of branches use [WhatsApp](#) groups because the technology's familiar to members, although [Signal](#) is much more secure, and [Slack](#) has extra functions that might be useful. Bear in mind that some people won't want to work this way, so don't make it a sole point of passage for involvement.

## 9.4 Digital and online organisation: communication and publicity

It's generally easy to get going here just by watching what other groups are doing. (By definition, any comms output that's easy to find has the right strategy!) Have a scroll through the [Twitter top search results for #USSstrike during the time period of the 2018 action](#) to get a sense of some of the possibilities.



A very useful planning priority is to **connect online and face-to-face/paper-based methods** of spreading the word: each can help to push the other into places it wouldn't otherwise reach. [Andy Balmer wrote an excellent piece for USSBriefs](#) on this, based on experience in the 2018 action: he focuses mainly on Action Short of a Strike (particularly external examiners' resignations), but the principles at the end of the document apply generally. The whole USSBriefs project was in fact designed around this principle: apart from operating on multiple online platforms ([standalone website](#), [Medium site](#), [Twitter](#), [SoundCloud](#), [podcast channel](#)) they make [all their documents available in PDF](#), to be printed out and left lying around in communal areas etc. Another example is the close interplay between the [online academic boycott list](#) and the [regularly updated paper leaflets](#) recording the state of the boycott. One useful basic thing you can do is **put a web link to more information on your printed posters and leaflets**, using a **link shortener** such as [tinyurl](#) or [bitly](#) to make the link easy to type.

Your main presence and point of contact **on the web** should ideally, of course, be your existing branch website – but if you can't update it quickly, or you're planning or supporting activities outside the branch structure, there's nothing to stop you setting up a stand-alone **strike website** (providing you don't pass it off as UCU-endorsed). This is not a particularly technical task: if you can edit a Word document, you can build a website using a tool like [Squarespace](#) or [WordPress](#). A good example of this approach is the [Supporting the UCU pensions strike](#) WordPress site from 2018.

Of the main social media platforms:

- **Facebook** is excellent for reach, particularly for personal conversations with non-strikers. How-to tips are not really necessary or useful here: your best approach is probably to do whatever comes naturally based on your existing relationships with your Facebook friends.
- **Twitter** proved its worth impressively in the 2018 action. If you don't have any regular users among your branch organisers, **it's probably worth somebody devoting the time to learning their way around it** (probably the only platform for which this is true!) The big advantages of Twitter are its **public reach, pithiness and speed** – famously, things that eventually show up on Facebook were often doing the rounds on Twitter days earlier. There are [a lot of helpful and reassuring Twitter guides "for academics"](#) out there whose lessons are broadly transferable to the strike, and you can also learn a lot simply by **following prominent strike-related accounts and watching the action unfold**. A priority is to know what you're doing with **hashtags**: [advice for marketers is often broadly applicable](#). For the 2019 action [the #UCUstrike hashtag is already well-established](#) and you should consider using it in all tweets.
- **Instagram** got [a certain amount of use in the 2018 action](#), but is probably not worth spending time on unless you have a good photographer and are familiar with the platform. Likewise if you have any regulars on **TikTok** it might be worth considering (mainly for student rather than colleague engagement), but don't make any special effort. Many popular platforms (Snapchat, Pinterest, Tumblr...) are for various reasons not likely to be to be useful here.
- **YouTube** is probably not useful to us as a direct networking tool, but it's invaluable when combined with other comms approaches, particularly when you link out from a Twitter post to a relevant video. 2018 examples range from [recordings of talks](#) likely to be of interest to

audiences beyond the room and [interviews](#) helping to get the message across, to [music videos](#) (highly professional and highly amateur both work fine) and picket-line [poetry](#). You'll need to entice people to play the video: this can be a case of selling its merits, or just saying "[That guy with the ukulele](#)". (seriously: watch the guy with the ukulele! You won't regret it.)

You'll probably be posting mainly from your branch or personal accounts, but think about what kinds of other **account identity** might get a following. 2018 examples ranged from "character" accounts designed to get attention and/or provide partial anonymity (the [Dinosaur of Solidarity](#) again being the most high-profile), to [particular picket areas with their own activities](#), to specialist [discussion on topics such as pensions](#). How about an account that focuses on casualisation experiences? Or posts practical tips for strikers? As ever: think about what opportunities you've got, and build on them.

## 9.5 Help from supportive non-strikers

You will hopefully encounter a wide range of people who aren't part of the strike but want to help, including students, colleagues in other unions, and strikers' families. Make good use of any help you can get! This may include

- **public displays of support**, at pickets/demos or elsewhere. Standard rules on looking for good photo opportunities apply. It's particularly good if your supporters can demonstrate that they represent a wider community, whether it's people in [other unions](#) attending with their banners, or people in particular jobs coming along in uniform.
- help with **producing and distributing strike materials**. Do you know any graphic designers? Do you know anyone who can place leaflets or posters where they'll be read?...
- **visiting the picket line** to distribute food, hot drinks, or just goodwill
- **strike baking** and other useful preparation of supplies. A tin of flapjacks presented at the right moment turned the balance from despair to hope many times in the snows of 2018.
- **loans of equipment**: pickets and demos can make good use of many things that a union branch is unlikely to have hanging about the place for any other purpose, so borrowed equipment is worth its weight in gold. The standard examples are vans, PA systems, and portable tents/marquees, but the same principle may apply to inflatable armchairs, scrolling LED display boards, improbably large brass instruments, and anything else opportunity throws your way. (Having a lot of friends with very, very strange jobs is a considerable advantage here)
- wearing a **badge or sticker** with a supportive message. It's not expensive to get multiple designs printed up, so consider getting a version with "I'M BACKING" or "I'M SUPPORTING" above the logo or design.
- **letter-writing campaigns**: note that **students**, in particular, can usually expect to get at least some sort of response from the university authorities. The employers will be trying to focus attention on the idea that the strike harms students, so it's fantastic when students indicate firmly that they think it's worth it.

- **graduating students** who support the strike may be encouraged to wear [solidarity sashes](#): the cheapest we've found for custom sash printing is [£3 per sash](#).
- **circulating and promoting supportive messages online**
- **donating** to the UCU fighting fund or branch hardship fund.

Remember that you'll almost certainly have co-ordinated groups of **supportive students**, via the Students' Union or at a grassroots level. Make contact and share ideas; find out how **you** can help **them**. Aside from teach-outs, you can encourage them to develop their own study and discussion groups, meeting in their own rooms or in the kinds of non-picketed venues you'll be scoping out for your own meetings.

These students will also be **fighting to persuade their fellow students to support the strike**. They can make good use of the same kinds of material that are useful to us, particularly testimonies of hardship owing to casualisation and accounts of how the university (really) works.

## 10. Have you forgotten...?

Much of the avoidable conflict, and many of the missed opportunities, during strike action can be put down to well-meaning organisers overlooking the needs or expectations of a part of the membership or audience – often simply by following established or traditional approaches that don't fit the situation we're in. With due apologies for stating what will be obvious to some, here's a non-exhaustive list of constituencies you should keep in mind:

- **non-academics.** UCU's membership includes a wide range of ([from its website](#)) "teachers, trainers, instructors, researchers, administrators, managers, computer staff, librarians, postgraduate teaching assistants and other education professionals". People in non-academic roles have their own particular opportunities for recruitment and strike promotion ([ever seen an angry librarians' picket?](#)) and should be included in all strike messaging and picket planning. Say "striking higher education professionals", not "striking academics", and certainly not "striking lecturers". (It's perhaps fair to use "Why are my lecturers on strike?" as a headline in a leaflet aimed at students, but the text should make it clear the strike is broader.)
- **academic researchers.** The point here is similar. Postdocs and staff on other research-focused contracts make up a significant proportion of the union but are often overlooked in discussions which focus on disruption to teaching, or picket planning that refers mainly to lectures. Research associates often have a particularly valuable role to play in trying to persuade their colleagues to come out – sometimes at considerably more risk than is likely on the teaching side, given the steep power gradient of the PI/RA relationship. If your institution has a research presence but you're not regularly talking to researchers, make an effort to get to know them. And, at a bare minimum, make sure all your guidance at least **makes sense** for members who don't have teaching jobs.
- **disabled and ill colleagues.** Be accommodating of mental and physical barriers to "typical" strike action. **Listen to what the people concerned are telling you**, as nobody else will have full insight into their needs. But there are also accommodations you should do your best to

offer by default without waiting to be told: seating on picket lines, clear directions on toilet availability (with picket-crossing exemptions if necessary), ways to participate without crowds and noise or from a remote location, etc. Above all, **challenge any emerging macho culture of competitive displays of commitment** with the point that there isn't a level playing field for these things. Some members can be on the lines at 7am in the freezing cold every day; some can't; you need to encourage and find a role for both.

- **financially precarious colleagues.** It seems odd to have to stress this in a strike which is partly **about** precarity... but it's important for financially stable colleagues to note that some of us may be limited in our options – and some of us may genuinely be **unable to afford to strike**, or to observe the whole of the eight-day strike period. Yes, you can ensure that people know about sources of help that are available (including the national fighting fund and your branch hardship fund), but it's not going to help anyone if you lecture them for strike-breaking or tell them they must have misunderstood. They know their situation better than you do, and they're not where you should be concentrating your anger or your powers of persuasion.
- **international colleagues.** In these times, migrant status is itself becoming a kind of precarity, and similar considerations apply: by all means draw people's attention to [the UCU Frequently Asked Questions guide](#) which indicates all the various official protections, but trust your colleagues' judgment as to what they feel it is safe or proportionate to do. This applies both to non-EU colleagues on visas and to EU27 citizens, who have been subject to almost constantly misleading official guidance for more than three years now. Also, a point which is often overlooked: your **striking UK colleagues involved in field research or collaborative placements outside the UK** may have obligations that don't fit easily into the usual pattern of strike solidarity. Again, trust their judgment in how they respond.
- **students.** Obvious but sadly too often missed in messaging: students are directly affected by most of the same problems that affect us, and are our most useful potential allies. Plan on the basis that your communications will be circulated to students, and make them inclusive of that audience. Some members have a tendency to proclaim their specific intention of disrupting students' lives, as a way of emphasising that the strike does not only consist of token measures: the problem here is that **the students can hear you** (often literally: if you say this at a branch meeting, your audience probably includes student GTAs). While it may be true that university leaders see disruption to teaching and assessment as a prime risk, the message is not a constructive one: better to focus on how the strike will work to the good of staff and students alike. Also, **consult students:** it's usually easy to make contact through SUs, supportive activist groups, or GTAs and the wider postgraduate community. You will find that they have strategic ideas and practical tips of their own.

## 11. Other useful resources

This section may grow in future versions as the strike progresses, and there's an overwhelming volume of material we **could** include, but for now we just want to offer a few starting points which are themselves collections of other resources:

- [2019-20 strike resources](#) at the Branch Solidarity Network site is a very useful clearinghouse of material from various branches, including templates for leaflets, letters to students, etc.
- The [Raising UCU's profile](#) page on the national UCU website is an itemised list of links to publicity materials which may provide inspiration. You'll find other useful stuff on several pages in the [Activists and branch resources](#) section, including the various versions of the [official logo](#).
- [The 2018 USS Strike Archive](#) is a large collection of items relating to UCU's previous major strike, from journalistic coverage to members' views expressed on social media. Although the issues this time are partly different, it's a good idea to skim through this material for a refresher or introduction to what happened last time. The [Protestival](#) page is a handy collection of humorous treatments, artistic responses, and teach-out syllabi.