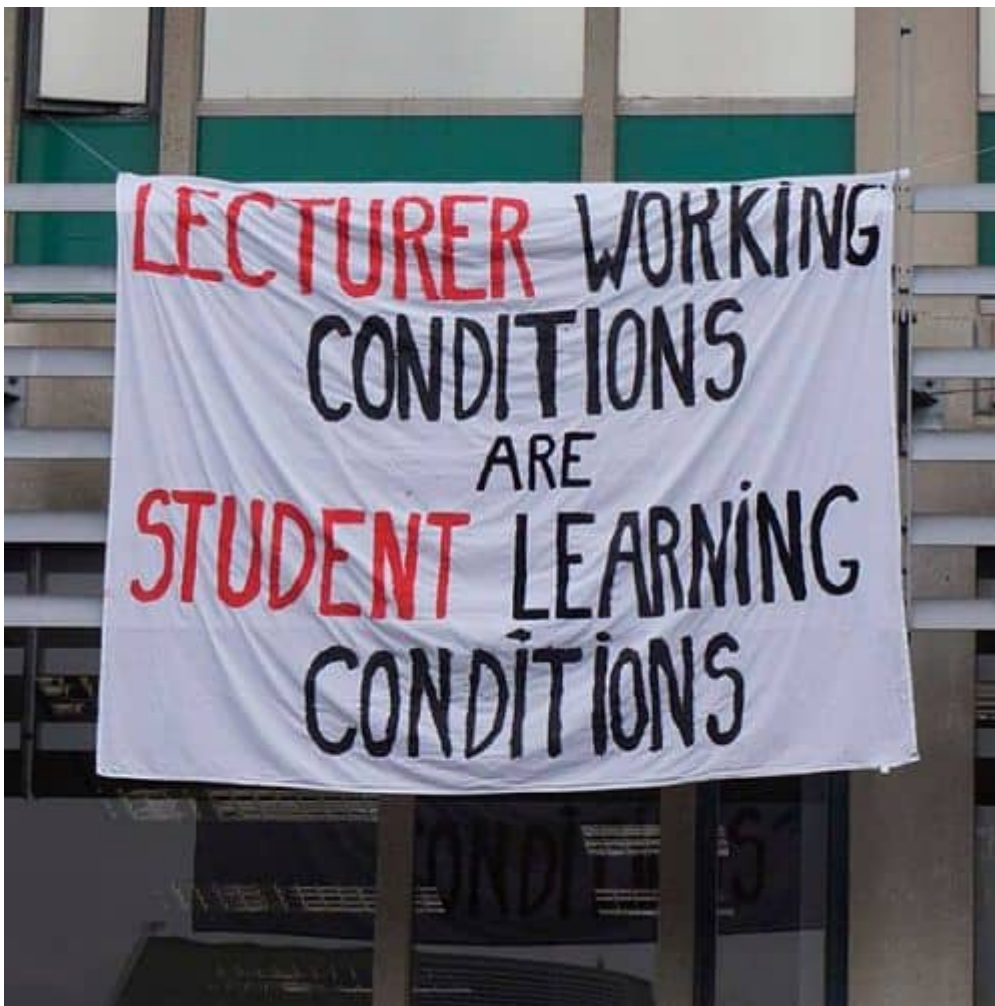




#PrecAnthro in support of #USSstrike: once the pension dispute is won UCU should prioritise the fight against casualisation

written by PrecAnthro
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On the 22nd of February 2018 University and College Union (UCU), the largest



academic union in the world with over 100,000 members went on an unprecedented long strike, 14 working days on the first instance. [The reason for the strike](#) is the assault against the USS pension scheme (Universities Superannuation Scheme). Given USS's £6.1 billion deficit, the vice-Chancellor membership body Universities UK (UUK) has proposed to change it from a defined benefit scheme, granting members a pension upon retirement, to a defined contribution scheme under which pensions will be subject to stock market fluctuations.

The strike is the biggest ever industrial action in UK higher education. Despite freezing weather conditions thousands of faculty and support staff have joined the picket lines across the country. Students have come out in support, with 61% in favour of strike action. 17 vice-Chancellors have split ranks with their colleagues, and have asked UUK to sit back on the negotiation table with UCU. UCU has been invited to 'renewed talks' by UUK on Tuesday February 27. Yet UUK precluded reopening the negotiations for which decision was met with a majority of one vote. A leaked letter reveals [VCs are not ready to alter their decision](#).

The [#PrecAnthro](#) collective stands in solidarity with academics and support staff on strike.

As the UK is one of the biggest employers of anthropologists worldwide many of our colleagues have joined the strike to protect their workers' rights. We see the strike as more than just a single issue campaign over pension. On the one hand, it is the reaction against the ever growing division between academic salaries and salaries of senior management with a few notable members of the latter group gaining in the range of 300-500,000 annual salary, including the Chief Executive of USS.

On the other hand, solidarity across ranks, with precarious teaching and research staff joining strikes, and a massive response by hugely indebted fee-paying students, is a response to broader problems of public higher education: the privatisation and commodification of public services, the casualisation,



automation and outsourcing of work, the introduction of inhuman performance mechanisms, the socialisation of debt and financial liabilities accumulated by universities while they service the private sector rather than crisis-struck national and international constituencies.

The solidarity of casualised teaching and research staff with the strike is not to be taken lightly. Given the grim reality of 54 percent of all UK academic staff and 49 percent of all teaching staff [estimated to be on fixed-term contracts](#), without serious structural reform most precarious academics stand little chance of gaining secure employment in academia. Those joining the strike from a precarious position suffer much higher risk and vulnerability than permanent faculty, with unclear returns in terms of their pension. We urge UCU once the pension dispute is won, to prioritise the fight against casualisation in the sector.

Follow the news on the strike on [Culture and Capitalism](#) blog, at the University of Sussex.