Strike Action Frequently Asked Questions

[1. Why has UNISON called for members employed by Goldsmiths to take strike action? 2](#_Toc96942988)

[2. When we take strike action, what am I expected to do? 2](#_Toc96942989)

[3. Do I have to take strike action on all the days called for by UNISON? 2](#_Toc96942990)

[4. Do I have to strike? 3](#_Toc96942991)

[5. What is a picket or picket line? 3](#_Toc96942992)

[6. When and where will the picket lines be? 3](#_Toc96942993)

[7. Do I have to join a physical picket line every day of the strike? 3](#_Toc96942994)

[8. What are the guidelines on picketing? 3](#_Toc96942995)

[9. What is the law on picketing? 4](#_Toc96942996)

[10. Covid-19 health and safety picketing advice 4](#_Toc96942997)

[11. What about the students? 4](#_Toc96942998)

[12. Do I have to tell my manager or Goldsmiths if I am going on strike? 4](#_Toc96942999)

[13. If I take strike action, will the University take action against me? 5](#_Toc96943000)

[14. Will I get paid while I am on strike? 5](#_Toc96943001)

[15. When will Goldsmiths deduct pay from my salary for the days I take strike action? 5](#_Toc96943002)

[16. Is there financial support from UNISON for members taking strike action? 5](#_Toc96943003)

[17. I can’t afford to strike. Money is so tight at the moment. 5](#_Toc96943004)

[18. I’m not a UNISON member, can I join in with the strike action? 6](#_Toc96943005)

[18. I’m still on probation — what are my rights? 6](#_Toc96943006)

[19. What if I’m on sick leave? 6](#_Toc96943007)

[20. What if I take annual leave? 7](#_Toc96943008)

[21. Am I breaking my contract by taking strike action? 7](#_Toc96943009)

[22. What if I’m pregnant, in my last year of service, or receiving state benefits? 7](#_Toc96943010)

[23. Will taking strike action be seen as a break in service? 7](#_Toc96943011)

[24. Are my pension contributions affected by taking strike action? 7](#_Toc96943012)

[25. Can I join the strike if I have not been balloted? 7](#_Toc96943013)

[26. If I am not employed by Goldsmiths, can I take part in this strike action? 8](#_Toc96943014)

# Why has UNISON called for members employed by Goldsmiths to take strike action?

Strike action is an option of last resort. Earlier this year, UNISON members directly affected by the Professional Services Blueprint (PSB) at Goldsmiths voted overwhelmingly to take strike action over planned compulsory redundancies and pay cuts for those in tranche one. This means that, despite a high uptake in the VSS scheme which, in our opinion, would mitigate the need for compulsory redundancies, Goldsmiths have refused to take this option off the table.

In addition to a better-than-expected financial outlook for Goldsmiths due to an increase in the number of overseas students, we believe this would not hamper the banks restrictive covenants, and so we have repeatedly asked for compulsory redundancies to be removed and to negotiate with UNISON on the planned pay cuts and re-grading. But the employer has not budged, despite repeated requests and opportunities. The only options left to UNISON members are to face compulsory job losses and increasing financial hardship in the future or to take strike action in order to get the employer to return to negotiations.

# When we take strike action, what am I expected to do?

UNISON only takes strike action once every other avenue of influence has been exhausted and when the democratic decision-making bodies of the union believe there is no other way to make employers change their position.

Withdrawing our labour and taking industrial action is a very serious sanction, and that is why we ask that every member observes the strike. Every member who does not observe the strike is directly undermining the union's bargaining power and making it harder for the union to protect all its members. Every member who does observe the strike is helping to advance the interests of all staff at Goldsmiths.

When we call a strike, we ask that members do not do any work for all the days specified by the union. This includes, for instance, time before 9am and after 5pm, and includes any activity which is part of your work such as administration, meetings, emails related to work, etc. Basically, do not do any work at all on strike days!

On strike days, the best possible thing you can do is contact your UNISON rep and volunteer to help at the picket lines, and ask colleagues in your department to join you. Picketing is a vital opportunity to demonstrate to the employer the scale of the disruption that the union is able to cause, and get support for your action from students and other colleagues.

# Do I have to take strike action on all the days called for by UNISON?

When we call a strike, we ask that members observe every day of strike action called for. You are, of course, free to choose not to. However, every member who does not observe the strike is directly undermining the union's bargaining power and making it harder for the union to protect all its members. Every member who does observe the strike is helping to advance the interests of all staff at Goldsmiths.

There is financial support in the form of strike pay and hardship funds to help members cover the financial impact of taking strike action more details can be found at <https://unisongoldsmiths.org.uk/strike-pay/>

# Do I have to strike?

As a member of a democratic union, we would hope that you would participate in a strike after there has been a vote for strike action. At Goldsmiths, in the strike ballot 64% voted in favour of action. You cannot be forced to take strike action, but it is part of belonging to a democratic union where decisions are made collectively. We recognise that taking strike action is very serious, which is why UNISON asks you and every other directly affected member to observe the strike. Every member who does not undermines our bargaining power and makes it harder for us to protect all our members.

# What is a picket or picket line?

A picket line is where workers and union reps (‘picketers’ or ‘pickets’) stand outside a workplace to tell other people why they are striking. Pickets may also ask people not to:

* + do some of their usual work
  + go into work

Pickets must not prevent people from going to work or doing their usual work if they want to do so.

# When and where will the picket lines be?

Our branch’s Industrial Action Committee is planning when and where we will have picket lines. We are also coordinating with the Goldsmiths UCU branch. Details will be announced closer to the first day of action. Generally, picket lines will start at 9am and finish by 12pm.

# Do I have to join a physical picket line every day of the strike?

If you can get to campus to join a picket line each day, then that will be great! The more of a visible presence UNISON members have outside the University during the strike, the better!

However, we know that for some members caring responsibilities, Covid-19 concerns, or the practicalities of the commute mean this will not be possible. If you are unable to physically join a picket line, then please get involved in online strike activities instead. Details will be announced close to the first day of action.

# What are the guidelines on picketing?

Picketing is a legal activity to peacefully persuade members not to go in to work. Pickets should wear an armband indicating they are on duty. Placards and posters should be displayed stating ‘OFFICIAL PICKET.’ The Branch will be in touch with members about picketing, and volunteers for the picket line will be advised about what to do. Each picket line will have a ‘Lead Picket’ who is an experienced trade union activist, and in contact on the day with the Branch Committee.

# What is the law on picketing?

Peaceful picketing is entirely legal. Picketing should be carried out at or near an entrance or exit from a site at which the picket works. When others who are not in dispute come into work or use these entrances or exits, pickets must not interfere with them.

# Covid-19 health and safety picketing advice

UNISON advises all members involved in picket lines and other similar activities to:

* + wear face coverings. Face masks can significantly reduce the risk of close contact aerosol transmission and can reduce far-field airborne transmission risks. Please also note that FFP2 or FFP3 masks will offer improved protection to the individual in higher risk situations
  + practice social distancing of 2m where possible; and
  + anyone with Covid-19 symptoms should self-isolate unless they have had a negative PCR test. We recommend pickets make use of rapid lateral flow tests (LFT) each day before engaging in picketing to prevent any asymptomatic transmission.

# What about the students?

We all work in a University because we are committed to supporting students in their education. UNISON members are taking strike action as a last resort after years of University employers refusing to give us the respect we so desperately need. Goldsmiths and other Universities have it in their power to stop the strike action and disruption it will cause by agreeing to UNISON’s demands for a commitment to no compulsory redundancies and negotiate on better pay protection for staff.

Goldsmiths Students Union (GSU) have backed UNISON’s strike action.

# Do I have to tell my manager or Goldsmiths if I am going on strike?

No! UNISON has officially informed Goldsmiths of the days of strike action, and they should assume that all members will be striking.

Goldsmiths has encouraged staff to declare ahead of taking strike action the days they will be on strike. **This is intended to minimise the effect of the action and can have the effect of misleading and intimidating members.**

You are under no obligation to inform your employer in advance as to whether you will be taking part in strike action. If you manager asks you if you intend to strike, simply say to them you don’t have tell them. If you feel they are pressuring you, then contact your UNISON rep for support.

After you have been on strike, if you are asked directly whether you participated in strike action then you should respond truthfully.

# If I take strike action, will the University take action against me?

See https://worksmart.org.uk/work-rights/trouble-work/industrial-action

You are protected from any formal action or harassment if it’s because of strike action. Our protection comes from two sources:

* + The law (in particular, section 64 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992) – we can take the University to court if they punish you for industrial action.
  + Sticking together – if we meet the threshold for industrial action, we will have shown the University management that hundreds of people are unhappy with working conditions at the University and prepared to act together to change them. This is the best protection for all of us – we’ve shown we will stick up for each other!

# Will I get paid while I am on strike?

Goldsmiths policy is to withhold a day’s pay from staff for each day of participation in strike action. For staff participating in strike action, the relevant day’s/days’ pay will be withheld from salary payments made at the end of March 2022. In their FAQs on their approach to the strike, Goldsmiths have said they will calculate a day’s pay as 1/365th of annual (FTE) salary. The deduction with be from gross pay (e.g. before tax and other deductions are made).

UNISON has strike pay of up to £50 per day available to all members taking strike action. There is also Hardship Payments available to members facing extreme financial difficulties as a result of taking strike action. Strike pay is not counted as earnings from employment and therefore is not taxable.

# When will Goldsmiths deduct pay from my salary for the days I take strike action?

Goldsmiths have said they will deduct pay from anyone who now declares participation in strike action or ASOS from their February salary and then in subsequent months according to when they declare participation.

# Is there financial support from UNISON for members taking strike action?

Yes! UNISON has strike pay of up to £50 per day available to all members taking strike action. Strike pay will be £50 per day unless this exceeds the amount of pay deducted by Goldsmiths per pay, in which case it will match the amount of pay deducted.

There is also Hardship Payments available to members facing extreme financial difficulties as a result of taking strike action; <https://unisongoldsmiths.org.uk/strike-pay/>

# I can’t afford to strike. Money is so tight at the moment.

UNISON understands your concerns. UNISON members are among the lowest paid at Goldsmiths. We know that with inflation at a record high and the cost of living getting more expensive, many members are struggling financially. This is why 64% of directly affected members voted to take strike action to fight against compulsory redundancies. Why should we be willing to allow Goldsmiths to end long standing careers because they have mismanaged their finances over the years! And it’s important to think about what you could gain.

An outcome of no compulsory redundancies and to negotiate against pay cuts will mean actual jobs saved and money being put back into your pockets. This means:

* + more staff to cope with an increasing workload
  + your hard earned pay/salary/grade will remain
  + the value of the pension pot accumulating is higher than it would otherwise be

The employers are relying on workers and unions being too weak and too scared to put up enough of a fight against this attack on your jobs. We have to show them that they are wrong. If we aren’t able to make them re-think their stance, the employers and government will continue to attack your lively hoods, cut your pay and conditions and we may never be in a position to recover the ground we have lost. Falling pay also means loss of pension, which could affect you for the rest of your life.

All members taking part in strike action are eligible for up to £50 per day strike pay and hardship payments for members at risk of extreme financial difficulties mean that members will be financially supported when going on strike.

# I’m not a UNISON member, can I join in with the strike action?

Yes! New members can join UNISON and join the strike (provided they are employed by Goldsmiths) right up to and including on the day of action. You just need to fill in an application form and hand it to your local rep or [join online](https://start.unison.org.uk/about-you?first_name&email).

# I’m still on probation — what are my rights?

Employees are protected from dismissal during the first 12 weeks of any lawful, balloted, official industrial action. Any dismissal for taking part in industrial action in the 12-week period, regardless of how long the employee has worked, or their age, is automatically unfair unless a tribunal decides the dismissal was not to do with the industrial action.

# What if I’m on sick leave?

Workers who are absent on sick leave when a stoppage of work starts retain their right to statutory sick pay during the period of industrial action. If an employee reports sick on the day the action starts, the employer can be expected to make their own judgment as to whether they should be regarded as on sick leave or on strike.

For the purposes of statutory sick pay payable in the eight weeks after a period of strike action, average earnings will reflect the lower earnings during the period leading up to the illness.

# What if I take annual leave?

UNISON does not regard anyone who takes annual leave on strike days to be participating in the strike action. If you can, we would like you to postpone your leave so that you can take part in any strike action.

# Am I breaking my contract by taking strike action?

Almost all effective industrial action is a breach of your contract of employment. However, UNISON has carried out a lawful statutory ballot. The law protects workers from dismissal whilst taking part in lawful industrial action at any time within 12 weeks of the start of action and depending on the circumstances; dismissal may also be unfair if it takes place later. Members of UNISON have the full protection of the union when taking lawful industrial action, and so no problems are anticipated.

# What if I’m pregnant, in my last year of service, or receiving state benefits?

It is common practice for these categories of staff to be exempted if they will suffer longer term financial loss. Speak to the branch if you fall in to one of these categories for advice.

# Will taking strike action be seen as a break in service?

No. During a strike your continuous employment is treated as ‘postponed’. This means that the period you were on strike for will not count towards your continuous employment, but it does not break the continuity of your period of employment.

# Are my pension contributions affected by taking strike action?

Goldsmiths does not have to make employer pension contributions for the days they deduct pay for taking strike action. You also will not have paid your employee part of the pension contribution for that day. The impact on your final pension would be extremely small but you might want to consider replacing the lost contribution.

Goldsmiths have provided information at <https://goldmine.gold.ac.uk/About/Pages/Industrial-action.aspx>

However, the death in service and life cover elements of the employer’s contribution will be maintained for the relevant strike action dates.

# Can I join the strike if I have not been balloted?

Although there is no positive legal right to strike in the UK, strike action organised by a trade union is legal provided some tough conditions are met. For example:

* The union must have conducted a lawful ballot of all the members it believes will be called upon to take part.
* The action must be over a trade dispute between workers and their employer over an issue like terms or conditions of employment and as defined in s.244 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.
* The general secretary or someone else authorised by the union’s rules, must authorise any industrial action.
* The person named on the ballot paper must make a call for action before industrial action can take place.
* There are very strict rules about the ballot and the notice that must be given to the employer about the action.

For the current Goldsmiths industrial action, we are only calling members affected by tranche 1 of the PSB plans to take part in industrial action. Our previous indicative ballot showed that a majority of the members affected by tranche 1 were in favour of industrial action however the collective UNISON membership was not in favour of strike action. Therefore, the branch decided to only ballot members affected by tranche 1 based on these results and likely outcomes of future ballots.

If you are a UNISON member who has not been called to take part in industrial action we would encourage you to attend demonstrations outside of your working hours and to please send messages of solidarity and support on [Twitter](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Ftwitter.com%2Funisongold&data=04%7C01%7CD.Lernihan%40gold.ac.uk%7Ce6d62305573844435f0e08d9f5f14f1c%7C0d431f3f20c1461c958a46b29d4e021b%7C0%7C0%7C637811239039685254%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=zbfu%2FVd%2Bgm2OyzFbW8JmiYCctr9OHx9RjNVfNULzXHY%3D&reserved=0) and [Facebook](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.facebook.com%2FUNISONGoldsmiths%2F&data=04%7C01%7CD.Lernihan%40gold.ac.uk%7Ce6d62305573844435f0e08d9f5f14f1c%7C0d431f3f20c1461c958a46b29d4e021b%7C0%7C0%7C637811239039685254%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=dMdz%2Fxf4qRLvAOYvLo4YBuu8SryMJvCqvU4LFpyEkOU%3D&reserved=0).

# If I am not employed by Goldsmiths, can I take part in this strike action?

No unfortunately not. You must be directly employed by Goldsmiths, University of London to be legally part of this dispute. If you want to support members who are taking strike action, get in touch at [unison@gold.ac.uk](mailto:unison@gold.ac.uk) and we’ll let you know how.