**OU Branch of UCU Frequently asked questions about our local hardship fund**

**Q. Will UCU be able to support me financially, if I take part in strike action and face hardship as a result?**

A. Yes. With extended strike action, the local branch and national UCU appreciates that for some members this is just not a financial loss they can afford to take in full. This branch is also strongly committed to giving financial support to prevent hardship for members taking strike action. Those who need financial assistance can access both a national UCU fighting fund, and a local OU branch hardship scheme.

**Q. When should I expect the deductions to be taken from my salary?**

A. For the November action, the current understanding (at November 17) is that deductions will be taken from December payroll. We have asked the university to take deductions in February instead.

**Q. When can I apply?**

A. For both the fighting fund and hardship funds you can apply as soon as you have had pay deducted/received a payslip with a deduction.

**Q. What will I be able to claim from the UCU national fighting fund?**

A. The national fighting fund works as follows:

* in the sum of £50 for the second and subsequent days of strike action for members earning £30,000 gross **or more** per annum (this is subject to a cap of 11 days. This will be kept under review); and,
* in the sum of up to £75 for the second and subsequent days of strike action for members earning **less than** £30,000 gross per annum (this is subject to a cap of 11 days. This will be kept under review).

**Q. What will I be able to claim from the local OU branch Hardship Fund?**

A. Members can apply to the local OU branch hardship fund on top of the national scheme. The branch hardship fund works as follows:

Up to £90 from the first day of action subject to a cap of 11 days. This cap will be subject to review if further action is called after the 3 days in November 2022.

**Q. What rules will apply to both the national and local schemes?**

A. For both schemes:
• applications can only be made after the deductions have been made
• evidence will be required in the form of a payslip showing the deductions
• the total amount paid out across in the national scheme will be no higher than the deductions actually made for the days that funding is available. The local scheme will not pay out more than the difference between the total deduction and the amount paid by the national scheme because it the total claimed cannot be more than the original gross deduction.

For the local Hardship Fund, members are expected to have already applied to the national Fighting Fund first.

**Q. Is the funding from the fighting and hardship funds taxable?**

A. No, the funding is not taxable, and does not need to be declared as income.

**Q. What happens if the OU refunds strike deductions?**

A. In this scenario as a branch we would ask that you return back to us any funds from the hardship fund within 3 months of the OU refunding strike deductions. You will not be required to return funding from the Fighting Fund but can choose to make a donation instead.

**Q. What can I do now to make sure I am eligible to claim financial support?**

A. Payments from both schemes are dependent on the member paying the current UCU subscription rate for their salary.

This is the gross salary, before any deductions, including USS and tax, are made. If you think you might need to apply for financial support, it is essential that you check as soon as possible that you are paying the correct subscription rate for the contract you currently have. You can do this on the [MyUCU](https://my.ucu.org.uk/app/utils/login_form/redirect/membership%252Fmy_details/) website area.  In particular this may affect anyone whose salary has changed due to taking on a different role, or whose working hours (or FTE) has changed since they joined UCU. This includes ALs, whose correct rate must reflect all modules for which they are currently contracted, even if there is only a temporary FTE increase.

**Q. Who will be involved in handling claims to the local OU branch hardship fund?**

A. All applications to the local hardship scheme will be anonymised by the branch administrator before being put before a UCU branch sub-committee, including the Treasurer and Equalities Officer, for decision. No personally identifiable details of any member will be made available to the sub-committee.

**Q. Is there a time limit for making a claim?**

A. Claims must be made within 12 months of the salary deduction in question and within 3 months of the last salary deduction. So, in the case of the November action where a single deduction is made, the deadline is 3 months from that salary deduction.

If you have any questions about the support available, please contact the UCU office: ucu-hardship-applications@open.ac.uk.

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