

2023 MAB FAQ

Guidance for participating in the marking and assessment boycott (MAB)

Read about the [crowdfunding scheme](#) and the [pledge scheme](#).

Read the [Local Branch Hardship Fund guidance and application form](#).

- *When will the MAB take place?*

As of Thursday 20 April, action short of a strike (ASOS) in the form of a marking and assessment boycott (MAB) is ongoing.

To organise support and strategy most effectively, we are currently mapping MAB participation across departments, and have created a [participation form](#). Please note that no names for participating members will be collected. If you register that you are ‘currently planning on taking part in the MAB’, the form will only ask for your department and whether you are on an hourly contract. We strongly encourage all of those currently planning on taking part in the MAB to fill out this form as soon as possible.

- *If I am not a UCU member, can I participate in the MAB?*

If you are not a UCU member you may still participate. Once a mandate for industrial action has been lawfully acquired, any person directly employed by the institution in which it is taking place is allowed to join in, irrespective of union membership. However, if you are not directly employed by LSE (or another Higher Education institution where the MAB is taking place), then you are not included in this action.

Non-union members who take part in legal, official industrial action have the same rights as union members not to be dismissed as a result of taking action. If you are not a UCU member, we strongly recommend that you join. That way, you will have access to UCU strike funds (both national and local), and we can support you if any difficulties arise.

- *Is the MAB for permanent staff only, or should hourly-paid staff and graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) take part?*

To be successful, this action requires a coordinated, critical mass of UCU members to participate so that marking and assessment duties cannot simply be passed on to other colleagues. To achieve maximum leverage, it is absolutely crucial that members stand together. Hourly-paid staff and GTAs should most certainly take part. Casualisation is

one of the key issues in The Four Fights dispute (and is particularly salient at LSE, [see 2023 report](#)), and the more inclusive the boycott, the stronger the leverage.

Finance can be a worry, especially for precarious workers and members facing specific hardship. Therefore, in addition to the [UCU Fighting Fund](#), there will be a LSE UCU Local Branch Hardship Fund (see below).

- *What is a MAB and what should I do/not do during the MAB?*

During the MAB you should refuse to carry out any duties relating to summative marking and assessment, whether final (i.e., graduation/completion) or interim (i.e., progression decisions), including writing and submitting exam papers, marking exam scripts, essays, and other assessed coursework, dissertations, and theses, etc. The MAB includes PhD final vivas and MPhil to PhD progression/confirmation vivas/assessments. Additionally, any form of in-course continuous assessment which contributes to decisions about the suitability of students to continue/progress with their studies (e.g., at the end of the first or second year of a three-year degree course) or to undertake particular options/modules (e.g., where they have prerequisites) is included in the MAB.

Do not complete moderation or second marking. If you are asked to take on marking and assessment duties to cover for a colleague, you should refuse to do so. No colleague should under any circumstances mark or assess work that was previously assigned to another colleague who is participating in the boycott. This undermines the MAB, the sacrifices of your colleagues, and, potentially, academic standards.

Otherwise, you should expect to carry on with your other duties as normal, including revision sessions, thesis workshops, commenting on PhD chapters, etc., as long as they are not a summative assessment activity. You should make sure that you do not provide any feedback from which any mark or summative assessments could be reasonably deduced.

If you have partially marked a set of assessments before the onset of the MAB, stop marking and leave it partially marked. The union is obliged to advise people to carry on 'as normal' until the boycott begins and then 'down tools'. If you are given what you consider to be an inappropriate or unreasonable instruction to complete marking and assessment in order to 'beat' the MAB, please contact ucu.secretary@lse.ac.uk. Once the MAB has started, it is particularly important that you do not upload any grades or commit them to writing on any university system, because completed assessment material is the property of LSE.

- *What about oral and practical examinations?*

In the case of oral and practical examinations for undergraduate and postgraduate students, you should not submit any written feedback or numerical marks, or participate in any moderation procedure.

- *What about giving feedback to my students?*

The marking and assessment boycott does not prevent staff from giving feedback on formative assessments to students. However, you should not give feedback on summative assessments, or upload grades or commit numerical grades to writing on any university system. You can continue to provide general support to students, including in making applications for jobs, funding, and further study.

- *What should I do if my role involves administration relating to marking and assessment?*

If your role involves administration relating to marking and assessment, you can refuse to undertake that work as part of the action. The MAB covers assessment-related work e.g. exam invigilation, processing of marks, submission of completed marking through any university administrative procedure, assessment-related administration such as distribution of papers to be marked, organisation of/preparation for exam/assessment boards/meetings, and attendance at exam boards/ meetings.

- *Should I participate in exam panels and exam boards?*

No. Exam panels and boards are part of the marking and assessment administration process and should be boycotted. You may receive Teams invitations to indicate whether you plan to attend these. It is recommended you ignore the invitation (do not respond) rather than decline it in advance.

- *Should I continue to act as an external examiner for another institution?*

Your contract for external examining is separate to your employment contract with LSE, and is therefore not covered by the MAB. External examiners can have an important role to play in drawing attention to procedural irregularities and poor quality marking as a result of attempts by the employer to circumvent the MAB. Alternatively, if you do decide to resign in solidarity, doing so at the last possible moment (e.g., on the eve of an exam board) may have maximum effect. Additionally, if you resign, [please add your name to this form](#) to help put pressure on universities threatening punitive pay deductions.

- *Can migrant workers take part in industrial action (including MAB)?*

Migrant members can participate fully in lawful strike action, including the marking and assessment boycott.

The Immigration Rules are clear that an absence or a reduction in salary for participation in lawful industrial action - including action short of a strike such as a marking and assessment boycott - is not grounds for the ending of the Certificate of Sponsorship nor a refusal of ILR for sponsored Skilled Workers.

However, for the MAB period, UCU recommends that migrant members should inform their employer at the appropriate time of any absences for strike action or action short of strike in the same way as you report other absences. This should be as soon as possible after beginning participation in the action - ideally on day 1 - to ensure that employer records of reasons for absence / reduction in salary are correct.

UCU strongly suggests that members keep a record of all absences, including strike related absences and any that relate to a MAB.

For more specific guidelines for migrant workers, see [here](#).

- *What should I do if I am not supposed to be marking and are working normally during the period of ASOS?*

If you are not supposed to be marking and are working normally during the period of ASOS, you are encouraged to participate in the pledge scheme (MABers and Backers, see below). However, if you are subsequently asked to carry out duties relating to marking and assessment, you should refuse to do so. No colleague should under any circumstances mark or assess work that was previously assigned to another colleague who is participating in the boycott. This undermines the MAB, the sacrifices of your colleagues, and, potentially, academic standards.

- *When will the action end? Will I have to mark the assignments eventually?*

This is impossible to know in advance with certainty, and will depend on the outcome of any negotiations with the employers. The action may be short if quick gains are made, but a long period of industrial action may also be necessary. The action will not be concluded without a democratic consultation of members involved in it.

Whether marking will still need to be completed after the industrial action is over will depend on how long the action lasts and what, if any, mitigations LSE puts in place. If

action is suspended, then there will have to be a negotiated timeframe for turning marks around that is reasonable and safe. If you are given what you consider to be an inappropriate or unreasonable instruction to speed up marking and assessment, or if you are given what you consider to be an inappropriate or unreasonable amount of marking and assessment, please contact ucu.secretary@lse.ac.uk.

- *Should I declare my participation in the MAB?*

You are under no obligation to declare your intention to participate in industrial action in advance. You will not likely be in a position to say you have observed a MAB until the final opportunity to mark the work has expired. We would caution against members treating the formal marking deadline as the expiry of the opportunity to mark the work, because this can be extended.

If you are asked directly whether you participated in ASOS in the past (whatever the time frame, be it last week, or yesterday) you should respond truthfully, but you should not declare your intentions regarding future action. However, once again, you will likely not be in a position to say you have observed a MAB until the final opportunity to mark the work has expired.

Once the final opportunity to do the marking has expired (either because the work has been undertaken by a colleague who is not supporting our struggle, or because a decision has been taken to assess students based on averages or some other mechanism) it is recommended that, if asked, you declare that you have observed a MAB for the number of days it would typically take you to do the marking, counting backwards from the expiry of the opportunity to do it.

It will be clearly apparent when exam panels meet or are due to meet. No assumptions about non-submission of marking should therefore be made by anyone before the date of the exam panel. If your exam panel is postponed, it is recommended you similarly postpone your reporting of participation in the MAB.

The branch will issue further guidance on what to do when you return to work once the MAB ends.

- *What should I do if I receive emails asking me to declare my participation in the MAB?*

It can be anticipated that if you are believed to be withholding marks, you may be subjected to badgering even up to the point of harassment, and many staff have expressed anxiety that they may come in for bullying and punitive threats. Remember

always that the MAB is a perfectly legal and legitimate action. If you believe that you are being singled out in any way, please contact your departmental rep and LSE UCU at ucu.secretary@lse.ac.uk for support.

If you receive an email from your line manager asking to declare your participation in the MAB, it is recommended that you either ignore the communications (do not respond) or send a stock reply without being explicit about your precise actions. You may like to use the following as a template:

Dear X, Thank you for your email. As I'm sure you know, everyone is anxious to complete our marking.

If you receive emails from other colleagues about marking being due, second marking and/or moderation requests, it is recommended that you either ignore the communications (do not respond) or send a stock reply without being explicit about your precise actions. You may like to use the following as a template:

Dear X, Thank you for your email about the XXX marking deadline. As I'm sure you know, everyone is anxious to complete our marking.

- *What should I do if my head of department or someone else threatens me if I do not produce marks (e.g., implying career progression might be blocked)?*

If you receive threatening messages, please immediately contact your departmental rep and LSE UCU at ucu.seretary@lse.ac.uk for support. You are not alone. You are legally entitled to take industrial action, including a MAB, and your employer is not allowed to victimise you for taking part. The LSE UCU branch can challenge victimisation and the violation of legal protections, with national UCU providing legal support and representation if needed.

- *What salary deductions will I face for participating in the MAB?*

On 3 May, workers received an email from LSE, outlining their decision to make pay deductions of 50% for those participating in the MAB, taking effect 16 June onwards. LSE UCU completely opposes these wholly disproportionate punitive deductions.

However, because they are not being implemented until July payroll, this gives us time to gather considerable donations for the Local Branch Hardship Fund. Therefore, to ensure that the MAB is a success, we encourage any members who are in a financial position to make donations to the [crowdfunding scheme](#) now. Please encourage family, friends, union and non-union colleagues, and anyone else who is in a financial position,

to donate. Additionally, if you are able to, please sign up to the pledge scheme (MABers and Backers, see below).

Pledges and donations are always voluntary. We don't encourage members facing financial hardship to donate.

- *What financial support is available to members participating in industrial action?*

There are funds available to provide strike pay for members who have wages deducted for taking industrial action. There are two sources of funds:

1. UCU Fighting Fund – This is a national fund. Where the employer has deducted between 50% and 99% of daily pay for partial performance, the fund will pay: £30 for each day of ASOS taken by members earning £30,000 gross or more per annum; and up to £45 for each day of ASOS taken by members earning less than £30,000 gross per annum. This is subject to a cap of 9 days. More information can be found [here](#) and [here](#).
2. LSE UCU Local Branch Hardship Fund – This is a fund initially established from £25,000 of local branch reserves, giving first consideration to providing adequate support to hourly-paid staff and GTAs, and members facing specific hardship (e.g., due to child/adult care costs). **Please find the guidance and application form below.**

The Local Branch Hardship Fund will be further enlarged through a crowdfunding scheme and the launch of a pledge scheme to assist members taking the action (MABers and Backers).

- *What is the pledge scheme? (MABers and Backers)*

Taking prolonged industrial action can be costly for those who participate. To ensure that the MAB is a success, we need to make sure that we can collectively mitigate the potential financial hardship that members might face. The Local Branch Hardship Fund will be established from branch reserves. However, to ensure that we can take sustained action, it will be necessary to raise funds from members who will not directly receive pay deductions. Therefore, the fund will be further enlarged through a pledge scheme (with MABers and Backers).

The degree of extra financial support that the LSE UCU Local Branch Hardship Fund will be able to provide to MABers (LSE UCU members taking part in MAB) will be dependent on how much money we can raise, and especially on the degree of financial solidarity

from LSE UCU members not affected by the MAB-related threats of pay deductions (Backers).

For now, we are asking those members without marking or assessing duties to sign up as Backers. If LSE goes through with its threat to implement deductions, we will call on the Backers to honour their pledge, and donate to the Local Branch Hardship Fund. The branch committee will then distribute from the fund to members taking part in the MAB who are facing financial hardship, giving first consideration to providing adequate support to hourly-paid members and GTAs, and members facing specific hardship (e.g., due to child/adult care costs).

In response to the threat of 50% pay deductions, if members unaffected by the MAB (because e.g., they have no marking or assessing responsibilities at present) commit part of their salary to supporting those taking part in the MAB, we will be able to limit the individual cost of this industrial action by spreading the burden across UCU members at LSE. Indicatively, we encourage Backers to commit the equivalent of one day's pay a week or a month (20% or 5% of their salary). This will ensure greater resilience and solidarity in our branch, and will greatly heighten the chances of success at moving employers (including LSE) on pay, working conditions, and casualisation.

The [pledge form](#) is designed for members who do not have marking or assessing duties, to register their intention to provide financial support as a Backer through the pledge scheme. The purpose of the form is to estimate the scale of financial support needed (for MABers), and the scale of support that members (Backers) can offer. If you are in a financial position to do so, please register your participation in the pledge scheme as soon as possible. This will enable us to set up the best possible support system for MABers. No names or information will be published or shared beyond the Local Branch Hardship Fund sub-group of the branch committee.

We completely understand that members are in a wide range of positions. Some may want to support the MABers but be very limited financially. No donation is too small. Any members who are in a financial position to make donations now, please support the [crowdfunding scheme](#).