

General MAB information

This document covers the current marking and assessment boycott (MAB).

Please note that ASOS is also still in operation, in addition to the MAB itself, and all previous ASOS advice still applies until notified otherwise. MAB will continue until such time that the union decides to pause it or call it off.

It is very important that staff do not “mark and park”. Please see below and refer to the national FAQs for a more detailed explanation as to why this is a very bad idea. In the end you could be doing a lot of work for nothing.

If your question is not covered below, please refer in the first instance to the national MAB FAQs page, which covers a lot more areas:

<https://www.ucu.org.uk/MABoycottFAQs>

UCU has also developed a MAB Boycott Guide, which you can download here:

https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/13693/Marking-and-assessment-boycott-MAB-guidance/pdf/MAB_boycott_guide.pdf

1. What is a marking and assessment boycott? When will it take place?

MAB commences from 20th April onwards. It is a form of action short of a strike (ASOS) which takes place in addition to all the other ASOS elements already notified back in November 2022, which are still in force and ongoing.

If you are not scheduled to carry out any duties relating to marking and assessment during this period, as detailed in question 2 below, then you are not affected by MAB in any way.

If you are being asked to carry out any assessment duties that were meant to be carried out by other colleagues who are taking part in the boycott, you should refuse to do so, quoting ASOS. Such refusal would technically be on the grounds of ASOS rather than the MAB itself (although MAB would cover it as well), since that provision has been a key part of ASOS since November 2022.

Therefore, no colleague should under any circumstances mark any work that was previously assigned to another colleague who is participating in the boycott. This undermines the marking boycott, the sacrifices of your colleagues, as well as academic standards and is something covered under the ASOS rules.

2. What does the boycott cover?

No feedback or grading should be given through formal channels like the Blackboard or Turnitin. Our goal is to apply pressure on senior management so that they lobby UCEA to

improve their offer as swiftly as possible. The less pressure we apply at the outset, the less effective action would be, forcing us to prolong the action.

All marking, moderation and summative assessment is covered at both Undergraduate and Postgraduate levels. This includes all taught postgraduate summative assessment: PhD final vivas as well as MPhil to Phd progression/confirmation vivas/assessments.

The assessment boycott is not restricted to final examinations, but includes any form of in-course continuous assessment, including regular coursework, presentations, phase-tests and exams. It will include traditional essay marking, but also assessment of any student work falling within the formal assessment defined above, including, for example, the assessment of projects and dissertations, laboratory and other practical work, performance (i.e. in music or drama) and supervised practice (i.e. in teacher education). Final year projects, final year project presentations and examination of dissertations and theses at postgraduate level, as well as vivas, are also included in the action. All summative assessment is covered, regardless if this is in person, online, on paper or in any other form.

You should not organise or engage in any **moderation** activities either.

All other administrative processes linked to marking (such as organising assessment, collation of, or inputting of marks and/or submission of any marks, preparing module packs for exam boards, etc) are also included.

The MAB includes not only assessment itself but also the **setting of any assessment work**. Staff should not set or release any assessments that have not already been set or released before 20 April, regardless of what these are. If in doubt, please drop us a line at ucu@dmu.ac.uk.

Not attending moderation meetings, examination boards or pre-boards is also included in the MAB (see question 12).

3. Should I declare my participation in the marking and assessment boycott?

You should never declare your intention to participate in any form of industrial action in advance of starting that action and you should never disclose any future intentions either. You should also never volunteer any such information on your own if not asked and you should not set out MAB specific out of office messages to that effect either.

You should simply ignore any requests for information to declare your intention to take part in the MAB in advance, regardless of where they are coming from, and simply do not reply to them in any way. That includes the daily badgering emails.

The actual point when you are starting to engage in the marking boycott is different for everyone and **is when the marking deadline is due**, i.e. 12:00 noon 15 working days after the submission deadline, and not before that. Remember that there is an extra bank holiday on 8 May, which might not have been accounted for originally, so if the 15 working days span this period in your case, then the marking deadline would be one working day later compared to the originally designated marking deadline.

In a nutshell, like for any other type of industrial action, **you should only respond to any requests about whether you are engaging in MAB or not, only after you have started to engage in the MAB and even then only if you are being specifically asked for this information. Never volunteer this information on your own and never tell management (or non-union colleagues who might report it to management) about your future intentions.**

Migrant colleagues should refer to question 19. UCU recommends that migrant staff inform the employer promptly **after** commencing action under the MAB (ideally on the first day they commence taking MAB action). Like everyone else, migrant staff do not have to inform the employer about their intentions before they commence taking MAB action.

4. We've been asked to fill a form each day. Do we need to do that?

No. As noted in question 3, just ignore it.

5. Some of my colleagues are very unhappy about having to fill a form each day. They are also afraid that they would end up having to do other colleagues' marking. What do I tell them?

There's a very simple answer to that. They can join UCU and then they don't have to fill any daily forms and can easily refuse to do anyone else's marking or indeed any other work lost due to the industrial action, since this is an integral and ongoing part of ASOS ever since November 2022.

For a small membership fee they can save tens of hours of marking as well as having to report each day via an online form like a naughty school kid. In doing so, not only that they show their solidarity with their colleagues but are also putting more pressure on the employer and help secure a better deal for all of us, themselves included. It's a no brainer really!

Please also refer to question 14.

6. Is the boycott action for permanent and pro-rata staff only, or should hourly paid lecturers (HPLs) and PostGraduate Researchers (PGRs) take part? And if so, what if assessment is paid out only on condition of marking?

To be successful this action requires a coordinated, critical mass of UCU members to participate so that marking duties cannot simply be passed on to other colleagues. To achieve maximum leverage it is absolutely crucial that members stand together.

HPLs and PGRs should most certainly take part. Casualisation is one of the key issues in The Four Fights dispute – and the more inclusive the boycott, the stronger the leverage.

7. How can members who do not have assessment as part of their workload, for example professional service and administrative staff, take part in the action?

Members who are not marking can still take part in ASOS. They can track their hours, work to 37 hours a week (depending on contract) and stop performing activities that are not in their contract: in some cases this would mean not attending recruitment/open days, meetings, and refusing any additional workload. They may also consider donating to the local strike fund if they are not affected themselves to help those affected by punitive deductions. Our win is their win since we all share the same pay spine.

If any UCU members in professional services are involved in inputting data or compiling marks ahead of exam board meetings, our MAB requires them not to participate in these activities.

8. How do we deal with automatic marking? In some departments there is a good deal of marking that happens automatically, through online quizzes and other systems that are already in place and running. Should we take active steps to disable these systems?

No, we cannot recommend interfering in automated marking systems. That said, any points in the chain of production that are not automated and which require manual intervention, such as when staff have to set online quizzes, exams or tests, moderate, standardise, compile or submit any grades are a part of the boycott.

9. Are any assessed presentations also subject to boycott?

Yes, any assessed presentations, including final year project presentations and PG dissertations are part of the assessment and marking boycott. Colleagues should not sit in or participate in any way to such meetings.

10. Are exam-setting and/or online tests covered by the action?

Yes.

11. Should I pass any assessment materials to other colleagues (or to management) if they ask?

Absolutely not. That would allow them to set the assessment themselves and bypass the boycott. Just ignore any such requests for as long as MAB is ongoing.

12. Shall I still arrange/reschedule/reallocate any assessment activities and should I attend any moderation meetings, exam boards or pre-boards?

No. You should not allocate or reallocate marking, including to hourly paid staff or externally recruited staff, nor should you organise or attend any moderation processes or examination boards (including pre-boards, etc).

You should also not prepare any Module Enhancement Plans, moderation samples or materials for External Examiner(s).

13. What happens if part of my team/School is marking as usual?

That doesn't change the action of those participating in the boycott. Past experience of the branches who engaged in MAB last year, shows that for a MAB even small numbers can make a significant difference, although we would want as many colleagues to take part as possible to maximise its impact. To that end, please refer to question 14. If some grades are missing, in general this means that moderation can't reliably happen. In reality, senior management may find a workaround, but that doesn't negate the action of boycotting. Feel free to also point your colleagues to questions 5 and 14.

14. How should we discuss the marking boycott with non-UCU members in our school/department?

We encourage UCU members to disseminate the following text to non-UCU members if approached by them and/or there is an attempt by senior management to get others to mark and/or assess your work:

“We ask you not to participate in senior management's effort to pit staff members against each other and instead to sustain the collegial relations we have created over the years in the School, and not mark any assessments that were due to be marked by other staff members who are taking part in the marking and assessment boycott.

We therefore ask that you respond to any requests to mark assessments that were meant to be marked by colleagues who are taking part in the marking boycott, by noting that you lack the expertise to adequately mark such assessments for modules that you do not teach on (or are not in your area of expertise) and/or that you are already at full capacity in terms of your workload. [There are legal protections](#) for refusing to do so, even if you are not a union member. It is also worth noting that the university has no way of knowing whether you are actually a union member or not, and they cannot lawfully ask anyone to disclose their trade union membership status, which is protected information. UCU never discloses any membership information to the University.

Better still, we ask you to join UCU, even if just temporarily, for the duration of the industrial action, and then as part of ASOS you can safely refuse to carry out any such extra activities, at no risk of a pay deduction. In doing so, you will be able to easily avoid any work normally carried out by other colleagues being passed on to you. A small membership fee can save you tens of hours of additional work.

Please also consider that marking assessments which would have normally be marked by those participating in the marking boycott, will very likely have long lasting detrimental consequences for staff relations in our School for years to come. You would be actively participating in a direct effort to undermine the basic social justice principles that union members have been fighting for, and which De Montfort University supposedly stands for. People have long memories, and such actions are not likely to be soon forgotten. Moreover, using other staff to carry out the work of union members who are withdrawing their labour at great financial cost to themselves - for the good of all academic staff - is a well-known strategy of **union busting and we do not think that any colleagues should be an active part of such tactics**. It is also counterproductive, since whatever gains UCU members can secure as part of this action, will equally apply to you as well, not just to union members. We are all in this together and we ask you to show solidarity with your colleagues.

Furthermore, marking assessments without being aware of the wider context of that assessment and without any guidance from the UCU members who lead those modules will likely not reflect the expectations they conveyed to students and could potentially hurt the students. This will inevitably undermine the quality assurances that we give our students in terms of the integrity and fairness of the marking process.”

15. Can I just mark and park? i.e, write feedback and grades and keep them on my laptop / on paper / etc?

We would strongly discourage this, as any completed assessment material is the property of our employers. Our marking and assessment boycott means that we will not be generating any marks or formal written feedback for the duration of the boycott. This also means that members should not carry out any assessment activity on Turnitin or Blackboard, should not share assessed material amongst colleagues, nor should they participate in moderation or standardisation meetings etc.

16. Can management ask other colleagues within the School who are not taking action to cover the marking (either full marking or just moderation) of members participating in the boycott?

They *will* likely do just that if they are not taking part in ASOS themselves. But that of course doesn't mean that others need to do that marking. Please refer to questions 5 and 14.

For anyone engaged in ASOS they absolutely **can and should** refuse to cover the work of others, as part of our ongoing lawful Industrial Action. If pressured in any way to do so, please let us know at ucu@dmu.ac.uk.

17. 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 the national dispute and that of any potential local dispute in response to management's punitive action. The action may be short if we all stand together and quick gains are made, but a longer period of industrial action may also be necessary.

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 the university puts in place. If marking still needs to be carried out after the action ends, it will have to be completed in a reasonable and safe time frame.

Should progress be made and MAB action be 'paused' at a certain point in the nearer future, then there will have to be a negotiated timeframe for turning marks around that is both reasonable and safe given our working hours and the likely on-going ASOS.

18. Will marking 'never' happen, or is it simply deferred until later?

Clearly, students want grades and need results in order to progress or graduate, so senior leadership will take mitigating action in order to keep wheels turning. This means that assessment may be farmed-out to others, or the university would find other 'creative' ways of bypassing normal quality assurance processes and standards in order to allow students to graduate. As far as the boycott is concerned, that is outside of our control.

Once, or if, the boycott is called off, and if it is still applicable at that point, then members could potentially begin marking – if it hasn't already been done. Liverpool maximised the impact of their marking boycott by starting to work on assessment after the action ended, but taking the usual marking turnaround time to return marks. So, in their case a 3-week boycott meant that grades took some 6 weeks to deliver.

NEW FAQs

19. Is there any MAB advice available for migrant staff?

Yes. The latest detailed guidance for migrant workers is available here:

<https://www.ucu.org.uk/heaction-migrantworkers>

Please note that this guidance was **recently updated on 24 April and again on 7 May** to clarify that migrant members can participate fully in lawful strike action, including the marking and assessment boycott. Please refer in particular to section "1. *Marking and Assessment Boycott 2023 (Updated 24 April 2023)*" which provides the updated advice.

UCU recommends that migrant staff inform the employer promptly **after** commencing action under the MAB (ideally on the first day they commence taking MAB action). Like everyone else, migrant staff do not have to inform the employer about their intentions before they commence taking MAB action.

20. Are things such as granting student extensions and supporting requests for deferrals part of the MAB?

No. Granting student extensions and/or supporting requests for deferral is not part of the MAB. You can still handle such requests in the usual supportive way.

21. I'm an external examiner. What can I do to support the MAB?

The national FAQs offer some useful suggestions (see question 16):

<https://www.ucu.org.uk/MABoycottFAQs#16. What if I am external examining at another institution?>

As it was recently reported (<https://twitter.com/ucu/status/1656338544799907841>), growing numbers of UCU members are starting to hand their notice and resign as external examiners in protest against punitive wage deductions in the institutions they are external examining for.

If you are an external examiner and want to support the staff engaged in the boycott who are threatened with disproportionate punitive wage deductions, like it is the case here at De Montfort University, you can join them in resigning and signing the petition here:

<https://t.co/HxoJS2r2Gs>