Dear Engineering, Product Design and Informatics Students,

As many of you know, the trade union that many of your lecturers and other staff at Sussex belong to, UCU, has declared a national strike. Trade unions represent workers in negotiations with their employers at the local and national level over pay and conditions, and call strikes when those negotiations break down.

A number of your lecturers will be joining the strike, which involves withdrawing their labour without notice from all activities, including teaching. This means that you may turn up for some classes or labs only to find the lecturer absent - unfortunately we cannot know in advance. Some will remain at home, and others will join a "picket line", i.e. a protest at the entrance to a workplace in which members of the union peacefully discuss with people on their way to work the issues over which they are striking, and seek to persuade them not to cross this line and enter the workplace.

I'd like to assure you that during strikes that we have had at Sussex in the past, people have always behaved in a way that is as respectful and friendly as you'd wish to expect on a daily basis, and you will be able to move around freely.

It is worth telling you a bit more about the context for this strike. The first and most important thing to know is that this is a national dispute, involving 61 universities. It is not a protest against our University's management. It comes as a result of a failure to agree in negotiations at the national level over proposed changes to the University Superannuation Scheme (USS), the pension scheme in which most academics are enrolled. These changes are anticipated to bring reductions in the income that your lecturers will receive when they retire. Pensions can be regarded as deferred wages, paid for by employees and employers over the course of their working lives; they are not a benefit or luxury. For many academics, this strike is as much about the future for their younger colleagues and the academics of tomorrow – which may include you! – as their own pensions.

The purpose of a strike is to disrupt, but the disruption in this upcoming strike is not aimed at you - it is intended to send a message at the national level. All of us within the School of Engineering and Informatics care deeply about you and your education, and nobody wants to cause our students to suffer in any way. We are therefore encouraging staff who are striking to do whatever they can to help you to prepare for this period. For example, I have asked EngInf faculty to ensure that lecture notes and assessments are made available online beforehand. We will endeavour to keep laboratories running as smoothly as possible. For those who are not joining the strike, the University will function as normally as possible during the strike period, and since most if not all EngInf faculty have an "open door" policy, lecturers who are not striking will be available to help you with problems. I am meeting regularly with other senior managers from across the University to see if there is anything else that we can do to support you. Meanwhile, I would strongly encourage you to study the lecture notes and any other available material, and to set up independent study groups.

As you know from earlier communications sent by the Vice-Chancellor, the University has set up a list of [commonly asked questions](#) to help you to find out more about the dates of the planned strikes, and how the University is working to minimise disruption. In addition, **I will be available in the Chichester Lecture Theatre (CLT) on Wednesday 14th Feb from 3:30-4:30 pm** to answer any questions that you may have.

I'd like to end by assuring you that we are deeply committed to doing all that we can to ensure that this national dispute has as little impact on your education as possible. The University will be sending out regular communications, so I'd urge you to keep your eye on the internal webpages for updates, and to stay in touch with your reps for more information.

Best wishes,

Jonathan

Professor Jonathan Bacon
Acting Head of the School of Engineering and Informatics