

Context

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PhD Student

You are full-time PhD student with funding for three years and must teach as part of your funding arrangement. You work between 40 and 50 hours per week for gross pay (i.e., pre-tax and deductions) of £1,500 per month, resulting in take-home pay (i.e., after tax and deductions) of roughly £1,100 per month. You currently pay 8.8% of your gross salary into the pension scheme, which will give you a defined benefit (i.e., specified amount of money per year) when you retire, whilst your employer pays an additional 19.5% of your gross salary into the pension scheme on your behalf. You have been asked to increase your contribution to the pension scheme to 9.6% of your gross salary this year, and to 11% next year. Your employer has also been asked to increase their contributions to 21.1% this year and 23.7% next year.

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Research Fellow

You are full-time research fellow on a three-year contract who works between 45 and 55 hours per week for gross pay (i.e., pre-tax and deductions) of £3,500 per month, resulting in take-home pay (i.e., after tax and deductions) of roughly £2,300 per month. You currently pay 8.8% of your gross salary into the pension scheme, which will give you a defined benefit (i.e., specified amount of money per year) when you retire, whilst your employer pays an additional 19.5% of your gross salary into the pension scheme on your behalf. You have been asked to increase your contribution to the pension scheme to 9.6% of your gross salary this year, and to 11% next year. Your employer has also been asked to increase their contributions to 21.1% this year and 23.7% next year.

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Junior Lecturer

You are full-time junior lecturer on a permanent contract who works between 50 and 60 hours per week for gross pay (i.e., pre-tax and deductions) of £3,750 per month, resulting in take-home pay (i.e., after tax and deductions) of roughly £2,400 per month. You currently pay 8.8% of your gross salary into the pension scheme, which will give you a defined benefit (i.e., specified amount of money per year) when you retire, whilst your employer pays an additional 19.5% of your gross salary into the pension scheme on your behalf. You have been asked to increase your contribution to the pension scheme to 9.6% of your gross salary this year, and to 11% next year. Your employer has also been asked to increase their contributions to 21.1% this year and 23.7% next year.

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Professor

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Union Negotiator

You are now representing the lecturers' union. It has branches at all the universities where academic staff have been asked to increase their pension contributions, and you have just found out what percentage of employees have chosen to become members. The union has annual income of £20 million, almost all of which comes from members' subscriptions, and annual costs of £16.3 million. You may share as much or as little of this information with the members as you wish.

The union is in dispute with the employers over the necessity of the pension contribution increase and have called for, and begun to organise, strike action, including gaining the public support of the national union of students. You must try to convince as many academic staff who are members of the union to vote in favour of the strike. This is so that you have the strongest possible negotiating position with the employers.

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Employers' Representative

You are now the organisation representing universities as employers. Your members are the universities employing staff who have been asked to increase their pension contributions. The universities have also been asked to increase the pension contributions that they make on behalf of staff from 19.5% of gross salaries to 21.1% this year and 23.7% next year. The universities have total income of £23 billion (of which 49% comes from student fees) and total expenditure of £22.4 billion, of which approximately £8.4 billion are academic staff costs. Within that, pension contributions currently stand at £1.37 billion and, in line with the above outlined rises, will increase to £1.48 billion this year, and £1.67 billion next year.

Committing to a revaluation of the pension scheme may increase your liabilities further and you are hesitant to increase staff costs, which would require cuts elsewhere (e.g., new buildings). You must also be financially responsible so as not to jeopardise the future viability of the universities. However, you are also concerned to avoid a strike and the associated negative consequences for student satisfaction.