

Job Action: Strike or Lock-Out Frequently Asked Questions

Updated July 21, 2025



Photos from the strike of 2002.

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Updated July 21, 2025

This document has been designed to answer your questions regarding job action, which includes both strike or lock-out. If you have other questions or wonder if an answer applies to your particular case, please contact the DFA at dfa@dal.ca. We will soon provide a second document answering more specific questions around strike pay, picketing, logistics and other issues.

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1. GETTING TO A STRIKE OR LOCK-OUT POSITION

What is a strike vote?

A strike vote is a vote taken among employees in a unionized workplace to authorize a strike. A majority vote of the full Bargaining Unit is sufficient to pass a strike vote, and includes those who are on leave. If a strike vote passes, it provides the DFA Executive with the authority to call a strike if, and when, they conclude such a step is necessary to reach an acceptable agreement.

Does a strike mandate lead to a strike?

On July 4, 2025 DFA members delivered a strong strike mandate – 91.2% of those who voted supported strike action should it become necessary. A strike mandate alone may be sufficient to get the Board to take the DFA seriously in negotiations – it is crucial to empowering the DFA Bargaining Team to negotiate a fair and equitable deal by demonstrating the support and resolve of the DFA membership. However, a vote for a strike can result in a strike if negotiations are not proceeding. Please note, the Board's best and final offer will be presented to the Membership for consideration before any strike action takes place.

If I am on leave when an agreement is reached, do I still have a chance to vote?

Yes, your vote is important. Confidential voting will take place electronically. The DFA will send voting information and a "voting key" to all Members, including those who are away, or on sick leave, disability or parental/compassionate leave. Please contact the DFA if you have any questions about this.

How will I know if a strike or lock-out is called?

At any time during negotiations, or if an agreement cannot be reached, either side in bargaining can file for conciliation. In this round of bargaining between the DFA and the Board of Governors, the Board filed for conciliation on June 2, 2025 after only a few days of bargaining. The Labour Board appointed a conciliation officer on June 23, 2025 and conciliation will take place throughout the summer. If no agreement can be reached through conciliation, job action may follow after a 14-day waiting period. The Minister of Labour must be given 48 hours' notice before a strike or lock-out begins; and that information is made public. You will be notified of the beginning and ending of a strike or lock-out.

2. STRIKE BASICS

If there is a strike, how long could it last?

There is no way to predict how long a strike would last, although the average strike in Canada's post-secondary education sector lasts for three weeks. In the 42-year history of the DFA, there have been four strikes: 1985, 1988, 1998 and 2002. They ranged in length from one day (1985) to almost four weeks (2002). In 2012, 2017, 2020 and 2022, we reached an agreement in conciliation.

How will I keep informed during a strike or lock-out?

During a strike or lock-out, you will be kept informed by a variety of methods, including email and various social media platforms (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook @dalfacultyassoc, and on Bluesky

@dalfaculty.bsky.social). We will also be creating a “Virtual Strike Headquarters”, a private group on Facebook that all Members will be invited to join for updates.

Updates will be posted on dfa.ns.ca under the Collective Bargaining tab. We will also post updates for students, parents and the broader public on our public-facing website wearedal.ca

If a strike or lock-out is called the DFA staff will use non-Dalhousie email addresses and we will notify you of those addresses.

I know that I can't teach, but can I get into my office during a strike or lock-out?

No. DFA expects all Members to honour the picket line, and historically the Board locks out DFA Members immediately after job action is called. If Members need their computers or files, they should be taken home before the beginning of a strike or lock-out.

Will I have access to campus during a strike or lock-out?

In general, no. It is useful to begin thinking now about what you might need to remove from your office or lab prior to a strike or lock-out deadline. There will be some exceptions to building access for certain limited circumstances, such as the care of animals or the maintenance of special equipment that could be damaged if left without attention. These exceptions are decided by the Association-Board Committee.

It is expected that the Board will allow access as needed to those employees who require the personal use of Staff/Faculty Health Services, dental clinic, and child care.

Will I have access to Dal email?

The Board has assured us that you will continue to have access to the share drive, Office 365 and your Dalhousie email throughout a strike or lock-out. However, you are reminded that you must stop all of your Dalhousie-related work during job action. You should not be communicating with students or colleagues on academic matters.

The DFA encourages members to set up out-of-office messages indicating that they are on legal strike and will provide sample informational text that DFA members may use to inform both students and colleagues at other universities of a strike or lockout situation.

Will I be expected/able to carry on with my clinical work with patients during a strike or lock-out?

If your clinical work is part of your Dalhousie workload, then you are required to withhold your work during a strike or lock-out.

If I am a department or program chair, do I have to go on strike?

Yes. If you are a DFA Bargaining Unit Member, you must respect the work stoppage.

3. STRIKE PAY AND ELIGIBILITY

What must I do to qualify for pay during a strike or lock-out?

You must withhold your work from the employer and remove yourself from campus. Anyone who does not withhold their labour (i.e., strike breaking or scabbing) WILL NOT receive strike pay. All striking Members must cease teaching, research, supervision, library work and counselling (unless it is determined to be an essential service), and administrative duties. Members must not hold classes on-line or off-campus, or ask teaching assistants to take over their duties (both are considered strike-breaking activities). You must participate in strike duty (either physical or virtual picket duty, or other tasks that will be assigned) and you must “sign in” for strike duty each day to receive strike pay. Details will follow as a job action becomes imminent.

How much is strike pay?

The DFA Executive has approved strike pay that increases as the strike continues:

- For days 1-7, \$150/per day x 7 = \$1050/week
- For days 8-14, \$160/day = \$1120/week
- For days 15 and up, \$170/day = \$1190/week

Strike pay is paid by the DFA to everyone who works their full weekly shifts on picket or other strike duties. You will be paid for seven days per week (even though strike duties will only operate five days per week). Pay is issued every two weeks. **Strike pay is not taxable.** Also, there are no deductions from strike pay for union dues, benefits premium, or pension. The DFA will pay the full premium for your benefits during job action. We do not contribute to Members’ pension plan.

I work part-time, but I am a Bargaining Unit Member. Am I eligible for the same strike pay as a full-time Member?

Yes, providing you complete strike duty.

What happens if I am on vacation when job action is taken? How would I be compensated?

As soon as a strike or lock-out is called, all provisions of the Collective Agreement are suspended. You would not get paid by the employer after a strike or lock-out begins, whether you are on vacation or not, as the Administration would likely consider all vacations cancelled.

You must perform strike duty to receive any strike pay. In the event of job action, **Dalhousie will terminate payroll to all DFA members.** DFA members will be required to complete strike duties to receive strike pay.

Am I eligible for EI during a strike?

No. You cannot receive Employment Insurance during a strike if you are a member of a Bargaining Unit that has called a strike or has been locked out. There are a few exceptions to this rule, for example, parental leave if it was planned before job action began. Please check with Service Canada for your particular situation.

If I have a moral objection to a strike and will not picket, do I get strike pay?

Strike duties of some sort must be performed in order to get strike pay.

4. STRIKE/PICKET DUTY

How many hours of strike duty am I expected to perform week?

Physical picket lines will run from 7:30 am to 4:30 pm, Monday to Friday (except statutory holidays). Shifts will be organized in 2-hour blocks, and Members will be required to perform a total of 10 hours of strike duties per week to receive full pay (e.g. one picket shift per day, Monday to Friday). Partial hours do not lead to partial pay. You will be able to sign up for shifts to allow flexibility for accommodating your child care and other responsibilities/commitments.

I am unable to physically picket. Can I do something else?

Physical picketing is the norm, but Members who are unable to physically picket can perform alternative strike duties. There are other jobs that will need to be done during job action, and everyone will be accommodated as best as possible. As a strike or lock-out becomes imminent, we will have a comprehensive list of alternative strike duties.

If I am filling in for someone on sabbatical, am I expected to picket?

If you are a Bargaining Unit Member of the DFA, you will have to respect the work stoppage. If you wish to earn strike pay, you will be required to perform strike duty.

5. FINER POINTS

What happens if I am on sabbatical or parental/maternity leave, sick leave or disability leave?

Members on sabbatical/education leave are deemed to be on strike and will receive strike pay if they perform strike duties.

We are waiting for clarification on a few issues related to Members on parental/maternity leave. These answers will be provided as soon as they are available.

Short-term sick leave benefits and LTD benefits continue as the Member is not considered to be on strike. Members on short-term sick leave and LTD are not expected to perform strike duties, and therefore will not qualify for strike pay. Members who are on an unpaid leave of absence are not considered to be on strike and will not be paid by the Administration.

What sort of financial preparations should I make before a strike or lock-out?

It is never too early to begin thinking about prudent financial preparations for a potential strike or lock-out. You should consider contacting your bank managers, mortgage officials, or other financial advisors and inform them of potential job action. Some credit card companies and banks offer insurance in case of job action, and can also make alternative payment schedules. You will need to check with your own

financial institutions. If you have expenditures that need to be reimbursed by the Administration, it is to your advantage to submit receipts in a timely manner.

If I attend a virtual conference, would the Administration reimburse me for the registration fee after we return to work?

If your claim was put in before a work stoppage, the Administration would reimburse you.

I serve as a member of a grant selection committee for a tri-council agency. In the event of a strike or lock-out what should I do?

External service of this kind is a part of your Dalhousie work and it should therefore cease during a strike or lock-out. As a matter of courtesy and for planning purposes, we encourage DFA Members to keep in communication with external agencies to alert them of the possibility that your work could be interrupted due to a work stoppage - most agencies will be understanding and supportive.

If we incur expenses for research during a strike, will the Administration reimburse us for these expenses after we return to work?

You should not personally be incurring any research expenses because you are suspending your research activities as part of the work stoppage. The Administration would continue to pay for staff (technicians, assistants and post-doctoral fellows), supplies they may buy, and infrastructure costs out of the research grants. The Administration could rightly refuse to reimburse you for personal research expenses, as the Collective Agreement is suspended during a strike or lock-out.

Can students continue my research during job action?

Students should not continue your research during a strike. There could be liability implications if anyone is hurt.

Will my teaching assistant get paid if DFA goes on strike or is locked out?

Any research personnel or students with timesheets might not be paid if the grant holder/signing authority is on strike. Anyone with students or employees in this situation should make alternative signing authority arrangements with their Dean or Associate Dean.