Dear colleagues,

This circular update branches on developments since UCUHE265. Please find the latest exchanges of correspondence between UCEA and UCU in regards UCEA presentations of HE pay data below.

- **UCEA response letter to UCU** can be read here:
  

- **UCU reply letter to UCEA’s response of 2 March** is attached below in appendix A.

Michael MacNeil  
National Head of Bargaining and Negotiations
Appendix A - UCU reply letter to UCEA’s response of 2 March

9 March 2016

Helen Fairfoul
Chief Executive
UCEA
3rd Floor Woburn House
20 Tavistock Square
London WC1H 9HU

our ref: JN3

Dear Helen,

Thank you for your letter of March 2 in response to my letter of March 1. I am writing to you again as your response does not address my original criticism of the UCEA infographics, and instead focuses on the methodology of the Pay in HE report, which was not my primary concern in my original letter. Despite UCU’s objection to the methods used in the report and our refusal to endorse it, my complaint in this instance was not about the report itself, but about the way in which the data from the report has been used in this series of misleading and poorly referenced infographics.

I will now respond to each point of your letter. You start by detailing the history of the Pay in HE report, and state that my description of the report as disputed is disingenuous. UCU has not participated in the publication of the report since 2008 because of my unhappiness with the methodology used to produce it. The report is indeed disputed, by us, the union with the largest numbers of members engaged in the New JNCHES process, and this is not disingenuous as you claim but merely a statement of fact.

i. Information about the source of the data

Your response focuses on UCU’s knowledge of the Pay in HE report, but our complaint is not about the report or our knowledge of it, but about how information on the source and methods used to derive this data are not available to others who may come across these infographics on social media or in the media. There is no way for the casual observer to know the source of this data, or that it has not come from an entire sector sample (as would be provided by HESA) but from a subset of the ASHE.

ii. Hourly earnings charts
Again, my concern regarding this chart was that the infographic makes no reference to the reasons for using mean or part time averages, and someone who was not familiar with the Pay in HE report would have no way of identifying how this ASHE data was split.

The use of part time median earnings and mean earnings for some occupations continues to concern me. The part time averages for cleaners and catering assistants used in this chart would seem to significantly underestimate earnings. Based on the published ASHE 2014 revised tables, full time cleaners earn an average of £7.24 per hour and part time cleaners earn £6.76 per hour, close to the ‘rest of economy figure’ of £6.74 per hour that was used in the infographic. Similarly, full time catering assistants earn an average of £6.80 per hour and part time catering assistants earn an average of £6.47 per hour. Both figures for these occupations are sufficiently robust so why has UCEA decided to use only the part time figure, which underestimates the wages of cleaners outside of HE and inflates the difference in average salary between the HE sector and other sectors?

While I have not disputed that the infographic does indeed specify where mean values have been used, the full explanation found on page 10 of the 2013 pay report, that “Mean earnings are reported where median earnings estimates were less reliable. This report therefore uses mean estimates for earnings of the same occupations that were identified as less reliable in the first report” does not explain why you have chosen to use mean values for this infographic, released separately to the report, when there is no concern in the ASHE 2014 about the reliability of the median figures for these staff groups.

Continuing to use mean averages in 2016, for data collected in 2014, because the 2008 data indicated some issues, does indeed support our opinion that the methods used for this chart are out of date.

iii. Specially commissioned ONS data

My concern is not the existence of this data, but the fact that there is no way for someone who has come across these infographics on the web to determine their true source. By citing ONS as the source, those viewing the charts are likely to believe that the data is published as part of the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, and therefore may give it the credence of published national statistics, which it is not. While UCU has received the specially commissioned datasets for 2011 and 2012 from UCEA, we have not received the 2013 dataset or the 2014 data referred to in these infographics.

iv. The section of comparator professional occupations
In your letter you state that “the chart takes on a broad cross section of the professional occupations, including but going beyond many of those that are in the highest twenty paid professional occupations table produced in the Pay in HE reports.”

This begs the question why your infographic ignore Legal Professionals, Senior professionals of educational establishments, IT project and programme managers and Dental Practitioners? These are the first, third, fourth and fifth highest paid professionals according to your Pay in HE report, and according to table 4.4 of that report all of these 2XXX SOC coded occupations earn more than HE teaching professionals, yet none are included in the infographic. As stated in my previous letter, this omission of four of the top five earning professions is clearly designed to give the impression that the earnings of those working in HE are second only to medical practitioners, and this is blatantly untrue.

v. Overstating the median HE teaching professional salary

Again, I do not understand UCEA’s continual reliance on a flawed methodology agreed eight years ago, particularly one that continually overstates earnings in the sector. Surely the most appropriate data to use would be median salary by contract level and academic activity as available from HESA? This would have the advantage of being based on the entire HE workforce, rather than relying on a weakened subset of the subset of the workforce included in the ASHE.

vi. HE Teaching Professionals and medical practitioners

The infographic states that the HE Teaching Professional and Medical Practitioner comparison is “median full time annual earnings in 2014”, not annualised weekly earnings as you state in your letter. The coefficient of variation of between 5-10% you refer to as “less accurate and biased” is considered reasonably precise by the ONS and is available for publication, unlike actual imprecise data, which is always suppressed by the ONS.

Once again, it appears that you have chosen to select the sample group and method of calculating the average that best suits UCEAs aims, and have ignored all other sources and methods that might contradict your chosen narrative.

vii. Measuring HE pay growth in the 21st century

If you review my original letter you will find I do not dispute that the chart precedes 2008 or UCEA’s right to produce a chart with data preceding 2008. However, my concern is with the way the chart has been designed (apparently deliberately) to obscure sharp declines in real terms wage rises from 2008, as the indexed change for that year is obscured by the icons representing the sectors and CPI inflation. There is also a worrying lack of actual data available in this
viii. Comparing HE teaching professionals pay

My concern about this chart was not addressed in your letter so I will raise it again. It ignores the significantly higher levels of qualification and training required to teach HE compared to FE, secondary school or other professional occupations.

I remain concerned about the selection and presentation of UCEA’s infographics.

Yours sincerely,

Michael MacNeil
National Head of Bargaining and Negotiations