

THE PAY CAMPAIGN IN BRIEF



THE HIGHER EDUCATION UNION

You are underpaid, undervalued and overworked

- Over the last thirty years, academics have delivered huge increases in productivity. Where, on average, lecturers taught 9 students, now they teach 21. This is an increase of around **150%**.
- Academics work long hours with increasing administrative and assessment based workloads. Occupational stress is now a daily reality for 70% of academics, a higher proportion than doctors and other professional staff.
- In return for this, unbelievably and uniquely, academics have taken a **40%** pay cut relative to their equivalent professions.
- Academics train, on average for four years, sacrificing key earning years, most now endure years of short-term contracts, start on lower salaries and their earnings at the peak of their careers are lower than any other profession, including teachers, doctors, lawyers and other highly skilled professionals.
- This has a huge impact on the lives of academic staff. But beyond this, pay is about how society and your employer, judges you and on the basis of university pay rates, then academic staff are at the bottom of the professional pile.

VCs have lied to you

- For twenty years, universities have miserably failed to address this problem. They have pleaded poverty and hoped that staff will simply put up with it.
- VCs have told us year after year, that they would love to increase pay, if only funding allowed. Even as late as May last year, Sir Geoffrey Copland, Chair of UCEA, the employers' national negotiating body, reiterated this pledge publicly.
- Now, with top up fees, additional teaching and research funding, and other grants coming onstream in 2006, there is **£3.5bn** of new funding coming into the sector over the next three years. This means that funding in the sector is rising by around **25%** over three years.
- Vice Chancellors lobbied for Top-up fees, the largest component of this new money, on the basis that they wanted to pay their staff more. They used low academic salaries as a way of convincing many MPs to vote for the new fees.
- Alan Johnson, then Minister for HE, assured MPs that 'University vice-chancellors tell us that, in general, at least a third of that money will be put back into the salaries and conditions of their staff. That will make an enormous contribution in tackling a very serious and deep-seated problem.'
- When it came to addressing the unions pay claim, guess what? VCs lied. UCEA publicly denied that they had ever made such a pledge, 'either individually or collectively'. But they were exposed by a London student paper which passed the AUT a transcript of a meeting attended by Alan Johnson in which he confirmed that he was given this assurance by none other than Universities UK, the body that describes itself as 'the essential voice of all UK universities'.

- So the employers have lied. They have forfeited their right to trust and their right to speak for the interests of Higher Education. Left to their own devices, they have no intention of addressing the problem of low pay. It is up to us to make them do it.

How did we get into this dispute?

- This dispute began last year, when AUT, our sister union, NATFHE and EIS, which organises in Scotland, submitted a pay claim to the employers. In essence, this claim sought to begin the process of re-establishing the profession by moving toward pay levels that truly reflect the skills and dedication of our members. This included what we called 'catch-up and keep-up' elements which would potentially lift pay by around 20%. As ever, we were prepared to negotiate on the basis of whatever offer was made in response to this claim.
- However, the employers' response was desperately disappointing. They offered 5% over two years: 3% in the first year and 2% in the second. We found that unacceptable, particularly since we knew that universities would be seeing around £3.5bn in new income from top-up fees and other grants from 2006.
- In October, our members voted to accept 3% for one year, on the condition that we campaigned hard for a significantly better offer in 2006. That is what we have done. AUT has tried everything to persuade the employers to negotiate.
- We have written to the employers' national body, our members have written to MPs, held meetings and distributed campaign materials, raising consciousness of the issues on campuses across the country.
- We have campaigned hard and won political support and we have raised the pressure on the employers.
- In October, both unions set a deadline of 2 December for hearing a positive response on the claim. No such response was forthcoming. Instead, the employers could only find their way to meeting us on 10 January. This game-playing could not go on forever.
- We agreed to meet on 10 January but the employers always knew that both unions were committed to declaring an industrial ballot on 13 January.
- AUT and NATFHE always considered this to be a last chance meeting for the employers. Having already missed our deadlines, we needed to see something concrete.
- In advance of this meeting, instead of making an offer on the claim, as is normal practice they asked for yet more details. In a spirit of goodwill and showing our commitment to negotiation, we submitted some proposals as to how they could address our claim. Once again, however, the employers failed to grasp their chance.
- Now, they are trying to claim that these details represented a 'new claim'. This is untrue and seems to be a sly attempt to twist our goodwill into a reason not to pay their staff more. The essential truth is that after all this time, we have still had nothing positive from the employers.
- We have no option now but to raise the pressure on the employers to show them we are serious.

Why is AUT asking for a 'yes to action' vote?

- AUT has pursued negotiations over our pay claim now since October 2005 and we have found the employers body, UCEA, which represents university VCs to be absolutely unwilling to negotiate meaningfully. They have refused to make us an offer, instead preferring to engage in a propaganda war of misinformation.

- We cannot go on like this forever. At some point, we have to stand up and say that enough is enough and that we want to be listened to.
- Taking strike or other actions is always the last resort for any union and AUT is no exception. We are committed to negotiated settlements and our negotiators at local and national level spend long often difficult hours proving this commitment day after day.
- But sometimes we cannot achieve what we know to be right through negotiation alone. Employers have to know that we speak for the union and that we will not simply accept anything that damages our members' interests.
- The threat of action to withdraw labour is the last, ultimate weapon at our disposal. If a union votes for action, this often works to focus the employers' minds and, paradoxically, can lead to renewed and more fruitful negotiations. And if this doesn't work, we have to be prepared to undertake this action together, supporting each other in the interests of us all.
- AUT is asking you to vote yes to send a clear message to the employers that we are serious and will not accept yet again being sidelined, neglected and undervalued by university managements.

What will happen if I don't vote or vote no?

- Every vote that is not cast or every 'no' vote, is in effect a vote for the university employers. It sends a very clear message that you are happy with your pay as it is. Not only that, but it allows management to say that staff are happy with their working lives as they are. It is a vote, in other words, that endorses all of the detrimental developments in the sector and the profession.
- Obviously, also, every person who forgets to vote or who votes no will undermine the union's position and that of everyone who votes yes. It will also undermine the union's position in the long-term, for the foreseeable future, impeding our ability to represent our members and make a difference to their lives. It would, in effect be a vote for status quo at best and would, therefore, directly affect your colleagues' lives.
- Conversely, if we stick together, we can win improvements that will enhance the lives of all university staff. We know this because we did it last year.

Action works:

- Last year, AUT members took action to defend our members' career progression and, for the first time in a long time, we won a significant victory. We forced the employers to concede that all staff transferring to the new pay spine would enjoy no detriment and that many should secure increases at local level.
- If we had not taken this action, including a strike and an assessment boycott, not only would we have seen none of the gains, but we would have seen our members pay getting even worse.
- This is what unions are all about. Not only on pay, but right across the board, in every part of our working lives, unions intervene to improve conditions for their members. Without our union, we would not have the pay, the health and safety rights and the securities that we do enjoy.
- A union's ability to deliver these depends on members' ability to stick together and demonstrate their collective strength.
- When we act together in unison, we can make a real, tangible difference to the lives, not only of our members, but of all staff. That is what is at stake here.

Won't this hurt our students?

- Students will be far more damaged in the medium and long term if the crisis in low pay is not tackled decisively.
- An assessment boycott is the most difficult thing that academic professionals could undertake. It goes against every instinct of dedicated professional staff. It will, potentially affect students.
- For such dedicated professionals to contemplate such an act is a measure of the extent to which we have exhausted every other means and stands as a condemnation of the complacency of VCs. For years, they have taken university staff for granted, passing off the costs of under funding onto us.
- We have been driven to this action by our refusal to withstand any more and by our commitment to education. Students have nothing to gain from being taught by a diminishing band of demoralised, overworked and underpaid lecturers.
- Students will support us. If we make our case to students they can understand our position and will support us. Nationally, NUS supports us and we have formed a close relationship with them. We support their campaign against lifting the cap on fees and they support our campaign on pay.
- In making this stand, we are not simply after more money; we are making a stand for the sector.
- Higher Education is a huge and vital part of any civilised, developed and prosperous nation. But VCs have shown that they no longer represent the interests of UK Higher Education.
- They have forfeited their right to our trust, demonstrating that they are unconcerned about the plight of the staff who conduct research, the staff who teach our students or the students themselves.
- Only we can now speak for the interests of Higher Education as a whole. The voices of staff and students together, represent the best interests of the Higher Education sector and together, we can persuade VCs to take our needs and our views seriously. But we can only do this by being willing to undertake the most serious action.
- Other professionals, such as secondary teachers, have only seen their needs addressed when they have reached the point of being willing to take action and have done so. We have to be able and willing to make our stand too and to say enough is enough, pay us a decent professional wage.
- Industrial action and assessment boycott are our only options now and we have to be ready to use them.