

11 December 2019

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Dear Helen,

Thank you for your letter of 5 December, which arrived at the end of eight days of strike action at 56 universities supported unequivocally by the National Union of Students. We were disappointed to see that you have neglected to engage in any substantive way with any of the four elements of the current dispute.

As you know, the trade unions' current JNCHES claim clearly connects four important grounds of dispute. Our members have collectively made it clear throughout the current negotiating round, and the current dispute, that all four elements are of equal importance. We are further disappointed that you have misrepresented our position in your letter by claiming that we did not pay any 'real attention' to the portions of UCEA's offer earlier this year which covered casualisation, workload, and pay gaps. We reject this: we have repeatedly made clear to you that these offers fell far short of a serious attempt to address our claim, and it was on the basis of all four elements of the dispute that UCU rejected UCEA's final offer.

Indeed, the 'broad principles and expectations' outlined in your letter continue to fall short of addressing the significant sector-wide issues we have raised, by only referencing institution or casework-level interventions without providing any specific detail. As we have previously discussed, such interventions are already occurring, and are no longer sufficient to address the systemic difficulties faced by this sector. You may consider our current dispute to constitute UCU raising sector-wide concerns about workload demands, precarious work, and equalities-driven pay gaps which all directly relate to pay. As such, only solutions on a sector-wide scale are appropriate. At our last meeting, we ourselves outlined multiple proposals for sector-wide best practice policies which we would consider to address elements of our claim, none of which are directly responded to in your letter. We are keen to continue to discuss these matters when we next meet.

Considering the pay element of our claim, you state that you have 'no mandate at all from the collective of employers to re-open discussion on the final offer of pay.' Our members have seen their pay decline by at least 17% in real terms over the last decade, by your own calculations, and we would like to restate in the strongest possible terms that the collective of employers, in their refusal to even discuss the issue of addressing this decline, are acting in dereliction of their responsibilities to

their staff and by extension to the students we work with. Employers need to meaningfully address all four grounds of dispute if we are to escape repeated disputes.

You further indicate that UCEA does not see an interconnection between the pay element of our claim, and casualisation, workload, and pay gaps. We are astonished that UCEA doesn't share our position, since those staff affected by pay gaps, casualisation and unmanageable workloads will experience acutely the real-terms decline in the sector's pay over the last decade. In our last we gave you a number of examples of this effect, for example where staff who are 'stuck' at the top of a grade suffer the double impact of stagnant recognition and progression opportunities, and the erosion of pay levels in the sector.

As you are aware, UCU will continue to pursue this dispute vigorously across the higher education sector. We continue to be willing to meet with UCEA, and have accepted your proposal to meet on 17 December to discuss specific proposals and potential solutions to the four areas of this dispute. This sector has been brought to a point of crisis through a decade of consistent de-prioritising of staff. As a matter of urgency, we urge UCEA to show leadership in reversing this trend, by consulting again with your subscribers, encouraging them to mandate UCEA to make an offer that substantively engages with each element of our claim, in the interest of avoiding further disruption to the sector.

Kind regards,

Vicky Blake  
on behalf of UCU HE pay and equality national negotiators