

Negotiators' statement on Four Fights negotiations

Negotiations on the Four Fights dispute continued this week after UCEA invited UCU's HE negotiating team for pay and working conditions back to the UK-bargaining table. This invitation came after the 14th day of industrial action taken in 2019/20, with 70 branches mandated to take between 14 and 22 days of action.

This was the latest in a long and intense series of without prejudice talks, throughout which significant progress has been made in some areas of the dispute, but remains to be made in others. For the first time, prompted by solid strike action, employers' representatives have agreed to negotiate on working conditions for which they have previously claimed employers gave them 'no mandate'. Securing agreement to negotiate over working conditions is a significant achievement.

UCU negotiators have continued to press home the importance for members being able to trust that the sector-level expectations we seek to agree would be translated from words on paper to concrete commitments to locally negotiated implementation agreements, with built-in review mechanisms to keep track of progress at the local and UK levels.

UCU's negotiators proposed a UK wide, sector level framework that will be implemented through formal, meaningful negotiations at a local level with trade unions. UCU negotiators appreciate and have accounted for the limitations of UCEA as a membership organisation and recognize employers wishes to retain institutional autonomy.

The main objective and the driving force which we must not lose sight of, is the urgent need for concrete changes to improve working conditions and foster equity in our sector. Ensuring words in any offer become actions is fundamental to the resolution of this dispute.

With the shared goal of a healthy and fair higher education sector, UCU negotiators have proposed the following headline outcomes, as a potential path to resolving this dispute:

- a headline pay adjustment of + 3%. This number represents far less than we deserve given over a decade of below inflation pay cuts, nonetheless constitutes an above inflation pay adjustment.
- the sector wide adoption of workload models, or equivalent arrangements that are compatible with contracts of employment.

- the phasing out and ending of zero hours contracts, reduction in fixed term contracts and the movement of hourly paid contract holders onto fractional contracts with stronger employment rights.
- the development of concrete action plans on equalities pay gaps, including at minimum, plans to address unequal promotion and progression patterns, and inequalities deriving from part time work.
- adoption of a UK wide sector level framework of national expectations under which 2-4 can be:
 - a. discussed locally via formal negotiations with local trade unions (as per local framework agreements). A plan for such local work will be agreed with 3 months of the resolution of this dispute.
 - b. evaluated locally via a mechanism for relevant data collection and review.
 - c. evaluated at an aggregate level each year via JNCHES.

UCU negotiators have repeatedly emphasised our readiness to negotiate, and the importance of understanding that progress must be made across all four intersecting grounds of our claim. We call on our employers, both collectively, and individually, to reflect on these proposed outcomes, as a reasonable path towards resolving our current dispute over pay and conditions.

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