



Dear colleague

Branches will by now be aware of the lack of progress in the 2020/21 new JNCHES negotiations. By way of background, the joint trade unions submitted our claim in March before the lockdown, in expectation that negotiations would begin on 31 March and conclude before the end of April. However, since the submission of the claim and the unfolding impact of the pandemic, the employers' representatives at UCEA repeatedly stated they were not in a position to start this year's negotiating round as they did not have a mandate from employers. UCEA and the HE trade unions kept the situation under regular review. The joint trade unions position is that we should begin negotiations as soon as practically possible. This position has been regularly reported to the higher education committee.

At the end of last week UCEA wrote to the JNCHES joint trade union side confirming the position of the employers in regards to the new JNCHES negotiating round for 2020/21. The email can be found at appendix 1.

The joint trade unions have sent an initial response to UCEA; this can be found at appendix 2 below.

The position of UCEA and through them the HEIs they represent, regarding this year's new JNCHES negotiations is concerning and an unprecedented development. It raises many questions about the employers' willingness to engage in pay and related matters for this year and a commitment to new JNCHES negotiations beyond that. At a UK level UCU will continue to press the employers to engage in the negotiating process and provide sector leadership on this matter.

The initial response from the joint trade unions seeks a range of commitments and guarantees and UCU will continue to work alongside the other HE unions on these matters.

What is needed at the new JNCHES level is stability, a plan to get us through the pandemic and a commitment to meaningful joint working based on the existing agreements and structures that we have UK level. UCU will continue to defend UK level bargaining and the new JNCHES agreement and work with our sister unions who also share our position.

Branches have an important role to play in putting pressure on their employers to confirm their support for the new JNCHES agreement and their commitment to UK level bargaining.

We know that branches are responding magnificently to a wide range of issues that have emerged with the pandemic. UCU has produced a range of resources for branches, [which can be found here](#).

The financial impact on the sector and individual HEIs is acute but varied and the need for a joined up response is pressing. UCU has also our 'jobs first' campaign with targeted resources for branches designed to help you defend members' jobs whatever the challenges being faced at your institution; [please read this guidance](#).

I will update you again soon when I'm in a position to do so. In the interim I would welcome any comments or feedback you have.

Paul Bridge
UCU head of higher education

Appendix 1

Email from Raj Jethwa UCEA chief executive

Dear Paul and Ruth,

I am writing to you as the Joint Union Side Secretaries. As you will be aware, UCEA has recently sought indicative views from its member institutions on the 2020-21 pay round. This consultation has confirmed the significant extent of the financial challenges facing our subscribing institutions.

UCEA's members are fully aware of, and very grateful for, the efforts of staff across all higher education institutions who have helped the sector to cope with the unprecedented challenges created by the pandemic. However, the scale of the problem is such that many institutions face high levels of financial uncertainty, with the real potential for significant financial challenges in the 2020-21 year. While institutions will try their utmost to minimise the impact on jobs, for many this will be extremely difficult.

In order to plan effectively, institutions need to minimise the degree of uncertainty facing them. Given the sizable proportion of institution budgets dedicated to the workforce, our members have indicated that they require clarity on pay bill for 20-21 as soon as possible to help with their planning. If this is not resolved it will simply add further uncertainty.

In view of the likely forthcoming pressures facing the sector, UCEA now believes it would be unwise for there to be a pay uplift for the 2020-21 round. We recognise that this will be disappointing for you and your members. I must stress that the conclusion that there should not be a pay uplift this year has not been arrived at lightly by our members.

Given the shared interest between all of us concerned with the sector in achieving a sustainable future for it, our proposal is to seek your agreement to a pay freeze for 2020-21, with the exception of adjustments to those points on the spine necessary to meet statutory National Living Wage levels.

The scale of the potentially difficult financial situation facing the sector means that institutions need this certainty as soon as possible, without necessarily going through the full negotiating process. Giving institutions this clarity as quickly as we can will better position them to make decisions which minimise the impact on jobs. However, in doing so, we would emphasise UCEA's ongoing commitment to national collective bargaining and our intention to recommence negotiations in 2021-22, subject to that being possible at that time. In our view this is the best way of preserving the national collective bargaining machinery, both this year and beyond. In reaching such an agreement UCEA would be absolutely clear, on behalf of our members, that we remain committed to the New Joint Negotiating Committee for Higher

Education Staff (New JNCHES) as the central committee for multi-employer negotiations and dialogue on pay and pay-related issues.

If this position could be agreed, we would suggest a continuing dialogue between UCEA and sector unions through the rest of this year, potentially following the format of our recent roundtable. This would allow us to monitor the financial situation as autumn unfolds and to share perspectives on the impact on the workforce. Such a dialogue would also help to inform our preparations for the 2021-22 negotiating round.

I appreciate that this is a difficult message to receive, but I hope that the Union Side will give it your fullest consideration, recognising the gravity of the situation. As we have emphasised previously, UCEA is committed to working with sector trade unions as we seek to deal with the challenges created by the pandemic.

I look forward to your response and, if it would be helpful, I am happy to discuss this with you further.

Best wishes,

Raj

Raj Jethwa
Chief executive

Appendix 2

Joint trade union initial response to UCEA

The Joint higher education trade unions, EIS, GMB, UCU, Unite, UNISON, were extremely disappointed to receive the statement from UCEA in relation to pay for the forthcoming year from 1 August 2020. We know that the proposal to not provide any annual pay uplift for higher education staff will anger and concern many particularly given the hard work of staff during the coronavirus lockdown.

The joint trade unions, in response to the UCEA position, are calling for the following:

- consideration to be given to increasing pay by, at least, inflation in order to ensure that staff don't suffer a pay cut from 1 August 2020;
- consideration to be given to providing increases to address compression at the lower end of the pay spine along with increases in pay on the lowest spinal column points in order to meet the national living wage (and the Living Wage Foundation rates where that is followed);
- a national higher education job security commitment;
- a commitment to the New JNCHES national bargaining structures for 2021/22, and future years, with HEIs signalling clear commitment to this process;
- a New JNCHES pay negotiation meeting to be held before mid-July 2020;
- for the New JNCHES autumn meeting to be convened as a higher education pay and finances review meeting

for discussion to continue on the equality and pay-related elements of the joint unions' claim including, but not limited to, tackling the gender and ethnic pay gap, casualisation of the workforce, workloads, Scottish JNCHES sub-committee.