



Dear Vice Chancellor or Principal,

We are writing to you as representatives of the five trade unions of the New Joint Negotiating Committee for the Higher Education Sector. On 30 March, we met with your representatives in UCEA, after having provided them with the headline demands of our claim one month before, on 28 February. We are also aware that UCEA has consulted its members in advance of the beginning of this bargaining round.

We were therefore surprised when, early in the negotiations, the chair of UCEA informed us that they were 'not yet in a position' to present their offer to our members, because they 'required more information and explanation' of the joint trade union claim. This decision rendered the first day of negotiations effectively wasted, and we were disappointed that a group of senior University leaders on behalf of the employer's association expressed an inability to table an offer, despite having access to our heads of claim, and feedback from their member institutions.

We did not receive an initial offer from UCEA until 21 April, and this was a below inflation rise of 2.75% on the majority of pay points, with an element of bottom-loading on pay points 3-19 to take account of the legal requirement to meet the national minimum wage. This offer falls well short of our claim.

We responded to UCEA at our second pay negotiating meeting on 25 April, explaining quite clearly that this offer represented a significant pay cut for our members in the context of the current very high rate of inflation, and that in the context of over 10 years of real terms pay cuts for staff in Higher Education, and the very real issue of poverty pay that now exists within the sector with the associated difficulties of not being able to recruit staff, increasing demoralisation and the impact on health and wellbeing of staff, we did not expect our members to accept yet another pay cut.

At the end of the second meeting, UCEA marginally improved the headline pay offer by 0.15% so that the majority of staff will receive a sub-inflationary 2.9%. The unions also pressed UCEA to do more for the lowest paid and to improve the offer to tackle pay inequality, workloads, job insecurity, outsourcing and career development.

As you will be well aware, these negotiations take place at a critical moment for our sector, in the context of an ongoing dispute and industrial action, and in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis which will disproportionately impact the lowest paid members of our sector. Given the immense pressure that is facing HE institutions and staff from continued industrial action, and the prospect of more joint action in the near future, we must question the judgment of UCEA's representatives in delaying meaningful negotiations, and whether they did in fact have a mandate to delay from their members.

We have been, and remain, committed to the process of collective bargaining, and the clear benefits that sector-wide standards for pay and working conditions offer higher education in the United Kingdom. We are prepared to work towards improving the unhealthy working conditions and fraught industrial relations in the higher education sector, and hope that employers share this commitment. We question whether UCEA's current actions are in the best interests of this process, or of the staff, students, and employers in this sector.

It is now crucial that negotiations take place in good faith, and on a timely basis, before further damage is done to industrial relations in the sector. We are asking you to contact UCEA to make your view known that a serious offer which addresses the trade unions' claim should have been made in the first bargaining meeting and must now be made at the final meeting on 5 May.

These negotiations are important to our members, and we are aware that they are important to your institution as well. We would be happy to provide any information or answer any questions which would facilitate your response to UCEA.

Best regards,

Ruth Smith, UNISON
Paul Bridge, UCU
Siobhan Endean, Unite
Deborah Shepherd, EIS
Avril Chambers, GMB

on behalf of New JNCHES joint trade unions