Employers’ make revised offer, UCU action suspended by joint Presidents and joint general secretaries

Arising from a revised offer made today by UCEA, the Joint UCU Presidents and General Secretaries have suspended the current industrial action with effect from midnight tonight. Please pass this email on to all members.

Background

At the pay talks on 30 May the employers tabled a reworking of their previous original 12.6% offer as 13.1% on salary points over three years. The unions rejected the offer for the following reasons:

- This offer had sought to handcuff the union into accepting just a 2.5% increase in year three.
- Both AUT and NATFHE (as was) had said in response they were looking for 'at least' double figures over two years, and substantially more if the deal was to extend to three.
- The unions (AUT and NATFHE as was) had also called for a review of HE finances to establish just what could be afforded in the third year and beyond.
- The final outstanding issue was the return of monies deducted from those who are taking part in action short of a strike.

Commentary on the revised offer

Despite the employers once again saying that 30 May represented their 'best and final' offer, negotiations facilitated by the TUC and ACAS resumed last Friday. At a meeting of JNCHES this afternoon the employers tabled a revised offer. The revised offer addresses the key elements the unions had sought as follows:

'At least double figures' over first two years

The offer will increase salary points by 10.37% between August 2006 and May 2008 (22 months).

While this provides a significant uplift on salary points and therefore on increments too, it should be recognized that the 'cash' worth of the first two years is less than 10.37% because of the staging. Clearly, the union’s preferred solution would have been for the increases to be made in full in August of each year.

In 2006/07

Salaries will be increased by 3% in August 2006, and by a further 1% in February 2007

In 2007/08

Salaries will be increased by 3% in August 2007, and by a further 3% in May 2008

'2.5% in year 3'

The situation is that now there is a minimum offer of 2.5% or RPI (whichever is the greater) in year 3. As will be outlined below the employers have now agreed that there will be an independent review of HE funding. Although this review will not report until autumn 2008, the employers have agreed that, 'if the review were to provide evidence of HEIs' ability further to improve the pay of staff for the 2008-09 year this would be included within these negotiations.' The position therefore is that in year three, we will start from 2.5% (or RPI) and when the review has reported this will inform negotiations. In essence there will be no handcuffs. The union would have preferred the review to report earlier and in particular prior to the settlement date of August 2008, but the employers' acceptance that if money is there it will be included in future negotiations is a step forward.

'The scope of the review into HE finances'

The employers have now conceded that the review will be independently chaired and will draw on independent data. The review will also look at earnings for HE staff, and will inform subsequent negotiations, including any extra income that is shown to be identifiable in 2008/09.

The union welcomes the review, although we would prefer that it reported sooner. One feature of the dispute has been the demand by the unions that the employers 'open up the books', and this independent review should clarify the extra income in the sector which could be used for pay.

'Return of monies taken through pay docking'

The union has insisted that there can be no settlement without the return of all monies deducted (or threatened to be deducted) by institutions that penalized members who took action short of a strike. In addition, the union was concerned that members were not put under unreasonable pressure to complete marking, exam boards etc. The return to work agreement attached states that 'UCEA will recommend to its subscribers that they should seek urgently to restore good industrial relations locally and that they should not impose unreasonable deadlines as part of the necessary rescheduling of assessment processes.'

It also states that 'UCEA also recognises that UCU have made clear that the restoration of good industrial relations will only be achieved when, where relevant, issues relating to the withholding of pay are resolved. In the event of any difficulties which are not speedily resolved ACAS services will be available at local level to assist the parties.'

To this end the union will, with the assistance of third parties, clarify prior to the ballot that all those institutions that have deducted monies will return them, and that those institutions that threatened deductions will not now take this forward. In return we have agreed to assist locally in an orderly and timely return to work aimed at the minimum disruption to students but being mindful of the need not to 'impose unreasonable deadlines'.