

## **UCU Rising podcast: concrete proposals to settle the pay, working conditions and USS pensions disputes**

**15 March 2023**

We have reached a point in negotiations where employers in both disputes have put forward proposals to settle our dispute with Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) and Universities UK (UUK). Listen to UCU's most senior officials discuss the proposals before you cast your vote in the informal e-ballot.

Hosted by UCU press officer Nathan Gayle, with UCU general secretary Jo Grady, UCU president-elect Justine Mercer, and UCU head of bargaining, organising, representation and operations Greg Barnett.

Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBpOAsISWGs>

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*\*Host\** HELLO AND WELCOME TO THE FIRST EVER EPISODE OF THE UCU PODCAST.

My name is Nathan Gayle, UCU's press officer, and I am your host today.

And there can surely be no more important point to start one, than as we have reached a point in negotiations where employers in both disputes have put forward proposals to settle our dispute with UCEA and UUK - a hugely significant moment.

Of course, we now have to move through the unions democratic procedures, including ultimately a members vote on the proposals, but we wanted to use this podcast to:

1. Inform you before you cast your vote in the informal e-ballot which opened today.
2. Give you as much information on the agreement as possible.
3. Let you hear from the unions most senior officials.

I also want to say that alongside this podcast, there will be a transcript available for members who prefer written communications. We will also be producing bite sized chunks clips of this broadcast as well as video messages - something for all members.

With me today we have our general secretary Jo Grady - hi Jo

We have our president elect and chair of the HEC, Justine Mercer - hi Justine

And we have UCU Head of Bargaining, Organising and Representation, Greg Barnett - hi Greg

All three of our guests were involved in the negotiations.

Our plan today is to let the general secretary set out the whole proposal but then we want to dig a bit deeper. We want to ask the questions you will be asking:

- is it enough?
- could we have got more by striking
- was it the right call to pause the dispute?
- can we trust the employers?
- were the talks serious?
- we'll go through each aspect of the agreement

We'll get into all of that but before we do, Jo can I ask you to set the scene in detail. What has been agreed? Is this a victory for UCU members?

\*JO GRADY INTRODUCTION\*

Thanks, Nathan. There is a lot to cover across both disputes so please bear with me as I think it's important for me to give members as much detail as possible.

Let's start with USS

Now as anyone who has been in UCU for a while will know, this is not our first USS pension dispute. In fact, our union has been in dispute about USS repeatedly since 2011. Taking action in 2011, 2014, 2018, most recently in 2019-2020, and again last year in 2022. These disputes have been prompted by valuations of USS which occur every 3 years by law. This culminated most recently in a 35% cut to the future guaranteed bit of our pensions in April 2022. A cut we argued was avoidable, but a cut imposed nonetheless due to a misjudged valuation that was conducted during the pandemic.

All of these disputes have been characterised by one consistent theme – our employers insisting that cuts to the value of our pensions are required, and us arguing that this is unnecessary.

Until now.

This dispute differs in one significant way, our employers no longer disagree with us. Our employers are not arguing for a cut to our pension. In fact, they are in agreement with us on the following things, and it is these things that they have put forward as a proposal to help resolve our dispute with them:

- Restore the cut in the value of your pension that took place in April last year
- Reduce the contributions that have risen significantly over the last few years, and led to the pension becoming increasingly unaffordable for lower paid staff to remain in
  - Accrual rate
  - Salary cap
  - Inflation protection
- Commitment to jointly work together to ensure long term sustainability of the scheme, avoid triennial disputes

All of this won't happen overnight. Unfortunately, they can't. But they can happen as quickly as changes to pensions permit, and in the UK law means that this would be provisionally signed off in September (when the final costings will be presented to the JNC), prior to cuts being restored in April 2024, and contributions being lowered.

Now, we won't know exactly what the contribution rate will be, but we anticipate the member rate being somewhere between 8% and 9.6%. And we anticipate the pension value being restored as closely as possible to what was cut last April – again, the exact figure may differ slightly, but this will be simply because of what is delivered by the valuation – but the intention by both parties and agreed at the JNC is that priority is to take members back to the pension they had prior to the cut.

I cannot overstate how huge this is. And what a hugely significant victory this represents for our unions, for our members, and for everyone listening, your hard work.

It's been a long road since 2011 to get here, but it is the determination of UCU members has delivered us here. Other things are on our side too – the interim financial data that we have had from USS demonstrate that these things can happen. But it is not that has secured this change. It is you; it is our union. Balloting differently, taking action differently, negotiating differently, re-balloting differently. For now, I believe the proposal and agreements we have had from employers in USS is

enough for us to stand down action and agree to withdraw threats of future action. We still need to deliver a huge result in the re-ballot though, because if – and let's be honest it's an if we have to consider – our employers change their minds – we need to ensure we still have an active strike mandate and the threat of strike action to deploy if required.

But my assessment right now, is that until we have the costings in September, we can get off picket lines, stand down ASOS, and get back to the jobs we enjoy. The ballot result, the strike action, the pause, the intensive negotiations, your determination to never give up, it's got us firm agreements – the valuation pending – we will see our pension restored.

The only thing that could change this valuation is a severe change in economic circumstances – which I guess the Tories could trigger if they tried another mini budget – but for now we – and more importantly YOU have done everything you can to get your pension back.

UCEA

Now, onto pay.

This is complicated. Unlike USS, we have more employers involved in the pay dispute, and also more unions. So, in pensions it is just us and the employer UUK, representing around 65 employers. Whereas in the pay dispute, we negotiate with 4 other unions, and one employer body, UCEA, who represents over 150 institutions. This complicates matters, and that's before we get on to the point that our pay dispute is also essentially 4 disputes in 1: a pay dispute, a dispute about casualisation, a workload dispute, and a pay inequality dispute.

Again, those who have been UCU members will recall that we've been in dispute about these issues for some time, with the employer steadfastly refusing to negotiate with us on the 3 non pay issues of our dispute; casualisation, workload, and equality pay gaps.

I'm going to report on the proposal on the table from our employers – and crucially it involves significant movement on all those things. Specifically, it involves UCEA acknowledging, agreeing, and committing to negotiating new standards, frameworks, and principles across all 3 non pay related issues. I'm going to talk you through them all.

Lets' tackle casualisation first.

Depending on where you work in the UK you will know that some significant progress has been made locally because of negotiations by UCU branches and staff.

Many will know about the recent success we had at the OU, moving 4,800 staff onto permanent contracts. We've seen recent progress at Bath, transferring 286

this year, and 181 over the next two. And at Sheffield Hallam we've just seen the university pledge to stop using ZHC for lecturing staff – of which there were 440 previously.

This dispute has always been about moving the employer into a situation where they acknowledge that this is a problem that must be tackled and negotiated nationally too. We want to deliver the agreements we've seen at Bath, the OU and Hallam everywhere. So, employers have already acknowledged that the use of ZHC in any scenario where they are not the choice of the staff member involved must be phased out. The employer has agreed to consult the sector with a strong recommendation to confirm this will be implemented from August 2023 onwards. This means in institution where hundreds of lecturing staff are kept on ZHC will be over. This process will be subject to a review.

This is an incredible achievement – and a product of the unwavering commitment UCU members have to fixing the issue of spiralling insecurity on campus. This is also an important down payment on the broader work we have agreed to do with the employers.

At Acas, along with our sister campus unions, we have signed off terms of reference for negotiations that will include:

Agreeing principles that will frame negotiation of local agreements covering:

- Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs)
- Fixed-term contracts
- Post Graduate Researchers (PGRs)
- Hourly-paid contracts

A review process to monitor progress in reducing casualised contracts, with guidance and examples of success promoted across the sector.

Recommendations for Equality Impact Assessments so that mitigating action can be taken to address any issues identified around different contract types

These negotiations will conclude by Feb 2024 at the latest, with the new agreements and so on from the negotiations to be implemented thereafter. Now, we know that this

will involve local UCU branches implementing them. If we are in a position to settle this dispute and move into intensive negotiations we intend to put the resource that has been on ballot campaigning into supporting branches organise, build, and negotiate.

We will accelerate the process that has taken years in the OU, Bath, Hallam, and elsewhere. Every branch will be supported to ensure that come February 2024, they are organised and ready to work locally with their university to get what we have signed off nationally embedded locally.

Will we end casualisation tomorrow? No. But we will end ZHC by August, and by Summer 2024 every single UCU branch in every single university in the UK will be ensuring their university is honouring what we've negotiated at a UK level.

We also know that workload is a key issue for many UCU members. Whether it is insufficient time to do key tasks, the fact that your work isn't valued highly by workload models, or simply the fact that there is too much of it and you frequently find yourselves working every weekend.

The same approach we have agreed on casualisation has also been established for dealing with workload. Along with our sister campus unions we have agreed terms of reference for time limited negotiations on workload, to be concluded alongside negotiations on casualisation, no later than February 2024.

The terms of reference include:

Agreeing clear guidance for universities and good practice in relation to workload management and reduction of work-related stress, to enable development of local agreements and action plans to reduce excessive workload and work-related stress/ill-health.

Negotiating a set of principles nationally that will seek to set the standard for how we manage workloads as a whole, but that does importantly relate back in a tangible way to the day to day realities of our jobs is not going to be a simple thing. We want to be in a position to by next Spring to give branches the tools they have needed to get the particular type of change they need locally.

On pay gaps we have signed off a set of terms of reference with our sister campus unions that not only puts this firmly on the negotiating table, but also offers forward a meaningful way to address the issue. If we settle this dispute, negotiations will begin straight away, and will conclude in February 2024. There can be no greater priority than ensuring we start the work necessary to close gender, ethnicity, and disability pay gaps. The terms of reference include:

Collection and review of available data on pay gaps across the sector, including consideration of intersectional aspects of gender, ethnicity, and disability pay gaps.

Recommended benchmarking against cross sector data.

Agreed principles and standards for action plans to address pay gaps based upon good practice.

Recommended timetabled Equal Pay Audits with data shared with the recognised trade unions. And involvement of trade unions in action planning developed and implemented locally.

Monitor progress on all pay gaps including HEI's making progress.

But – and importantly as an important first step – before these negotiations even get underway – UCEA has agreed to consult its members with a positive recommendation to take meaningful action now to reduce these gaps at a sector – as well as local – level. UCEA will work with HEIs and trade unions to agree principles which employers can use to develop local plans – which will involve trade unions. These plans will then be underpinned by detailed work that will be taken following commencement of negotiations already described.

Much like movement on ZHC is a powerful, and upfront indicator of progress on casualisation, this too represents the same in this area. No longer will we have a sector that says this is an issue that must be dealt with locally. Or indeed an issue for employers to address on their own, or at their own leisure. We will lead the UK in showing how trade unions, employers, and national bodies can and will work together to correct pay inequalities, reduce burnout workloads, and turn the tide on insecurity by immediately eradicating the worst form of insecurity – ZHC – and start transferring people on to proper contracts, which allow them to work and live in dignity.

I'll end with this – we got movement in these areas because of UCU members impressive dedication to their colleagues and their sector, the action they've already undertaken, and crucially them backing the pause in action that allowed for these intensive negotiations – we had no movement on these things before the pause, now we have a framework for improving our sector on every aspect of our dispute.

There is one final thing I want to discuss, and that is a pay and a review of the pay spine.

We all know the employers have begun taking steps to implement the first tranche of the pay offer that they made. For clarity, that pay offer is:

It's an uplift of 8% for all staff earning up to £19,333 (spine points 3-5) . It will ensure an uplift of at least 7% for staff earning up to £22,622 (spine points 15-25). All staff earning £30,502 or less will receive an uplift of 6% (spine points 15-25) . All staff earning between £31,411 and £65,578 (spine points 26-51) will receive a minimum uplift of 5%.

Up to spinal point 41, £1,000 of the uplift will be paid from March and from spinal points 42 and above, 2% will be paid from March, with the remaining uplift being paid in August 2023,

The substance of what they are offering on pay has not changed significantly. We have managed to push them to prioritise the lowest paid on pay. But there is no dressing up the fact that UCEA remain steadfast that they cannot move the sector more on pay. Sister campus unions have – and continue to – argue that employers should increase this offer. UCEA maintain that to do so would put some institutions in precarious financial positions. Now, as a union, we know the sector has the money. We also know the sector is in aggressive competition with each other to Hoover up and stockpile students (in some cases), and leave other institutions with insufficient amounts of money. There is a long overdue national conversation to be had in UCU about the reintroduction of student number caps – something I firmly believe should happen, and which I hope our union will make its policy at this years congress in May.

Regardless of this debate – which I think is firmly related, as it impacts on the allocation of money to the sector – UCEA have not improved the headline pay offer.

What the union has been successful in negotiating is a review of the pay spine which we believe will result in pay being improved across the board, in due course, and the immediate improvement in pay for those on the lowest 2 spine points, which are being removed now.

In addition, negotiations will aim to reach agreement on ways of removing pay compression that has developed through the pay spine; to identify and address reasons for pay compression so that they can be avoided in future; to model potential changes and agree new pay spine proposal.

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\*host\* thank you Jo. That's great and very detailed. It was definitely worth us Justine, you've been in the Acas negotiations alongside colleagues and other unions. You've been involved in other negotiations too. How have these differed? Have these felt more serious? Do you believe the members actions have won concessions here?



\*JUSTINE ANSWER\*

Key differences have been:

#### Involvement

As Chair of HEC, I've led the Higher Education negotiations for both pay and pensions since I was elected in September 2020. That's why I was in the Acas process. But,

I want to start by paying tribute to all of our elected negotiators, not just in this negotiating round, but in all the previous ones and to all the members who took part in strike action, not just this year, but also in previous years. Their resilience and determination have brought us to this point.

Serious/concessions – I wouldn't say they've been more serious – they've always been serious, but I think it is fair to say the employer has been serious about trying to make progress with us in a way I haven't quite recognised before. I think it is accurate to say that a combination of us running the ballot differently, and taking action in a different way, along with the approach by Acas to move negotiations forward in a different environment has changed the game. It's also fair to say that other factors have done that too. And these are:

Re-ballot – The fact we are not just involved in action but also a re-ballot has definitely impacted on the employers.

Size – at JNCHES, the joint trade union side is bigger – there are 16 people on our side. . When you've got 5 unions, and 1 employer (bringing a comparable sized team) you can imagine that those meetings are big and can be unwieldy.

Speed of progress – there is no denying that we have made progress on the pay-related issues at Acas in a way that didn't happen at JNCHES. It might seem like we are making very slow progress, arguing over every word, but for me, the Acas talks are delivering results faster than New JNCHES did.

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\*host\* thank you Justine. Greg, a huge issue for our members listening to this will be trust. We are asking the very same people who introduced insecurity to our sector to trust them to remove it, for example. In short, can we trust them?

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\*GREG ANSWER\*

The short answer is no. We don't trust the employer. But negotiating with employers is the only way out of this dispute. And we aren't asking them to do things, and simply sitting back and hoping they do. If we take the example of ZHC, subject to us settling this dispute, the agreement will be that there will be no more involuntary ZHC from August onwards. We will have a review process built into this.

In the case of casualisation, equality pay gaps, and workload, we will commence the time limited negotiations, for which we have already agreed a tight and deliverable terms of reference. Us, and the other 4 campus unions will be on our employers at every single negotiation meeting to ensure there is no back sliding.

The same will be the case in USS. There is no blind faith here that things will happen for us. We will ensure progress is made. As we have in the negotiations thus far, and arrived here where we are.

But, and this is important, we are running - and will win - a re-ballot. That will keep employers' feet to the fire. In USS if come September the employers try any shenanigans, we could call action to impact Freshers week. The same is true in our pay dispute. And moreover, we can win national ballots. We never need to rely on trusting the employers. If this doesn't work, this isn't our last chance - but we owe it to ourselves, all our members, our students, and those entering the profession, to make a good go of this. To see if we can negotiate the new agreements, frameworks and principles we need to change higher education by Feb 2024, for full implementation from the new academic year in 2024 onwards.

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\*Jo interrupts\* - Can I just interrupt here quickly? - This is a funny one. Will we ever fully trust employers? No - that's fundamentally why trade unions exist. But we are in one hell of a position here. Not only all of the things that Greg rightly points out but also, they now know we can win a national ballot at any point. No more fighting them university by university. No more picking us off. They come for one, they come for all. Let me be crystal clear: we are confident this is different but we aren't complacent. We will monitor the progress of this agreement if the members and union endorse it - but we will not hang about if there are any breaches of it. We bank and build. That's the motto.

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\*host\* thanks Greg and Jo. Jo, let's get into some of the more challenging points. I want to start with pay. Some members will undoubtedly say this is not enough. Some

will say we could get more with an effective programme of strike action - particularly when we win the re-ballot. Jo, your position on pay - both in isolation and as part of the whole agreement.

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**\*JO ANSWER\***

The employer never wanted to negotiate the 3 non pay issues with us. They never wanted to establish national negotiations on insecurity, on workload, or on equality pay gaps. UCU members dedication has ensured that position is now history. If we settle this dispute and move into this new, uncharted period of negotiation, we will be at the beginning of a journey that will change working in higher education for the better. It will turn the tide on casualisation, at a time it is running rampant elsewhere, it will reduce workloads back to something those of us who have been around a while remember life used to be like, and it will – importantly – prioritise the removal of pay gaps that exist (often in intersectional ways) for those already marginalised in higher education. I'm not going to shy away from celebrating that as progress. It's huge. It's bucking a trend compared to pretty much every corner of the UK, and it's down to UCU members saying we will not give up on our sector, or each other.

But yep, pay as a headline figure, hasn't budged. There is no talking around that. And if that is your primary concern in this dispute, then you're probably not happy. But I do also think the majority of UCU members will see this as a rounded agreement with gains in several areas. Bank and build.

Making sure our colleagues have a job, making sure we get our weekends back, making sure our black, disabled, and women members get paid fairly. These things matter. And in the case of pay gaps, these things will deliver more pay to the most marginalised in a way that a flat rate pay increase won't.

I said from the beginning our employers needed to make us a rounded offer – one that allowed us to see how the sector could be rebuilt, and how staff could begin to enjoy working in it again. I think we have that. But ultimately, it is what UCU members think that matters. It is UCU members who voted to launch a pay and pensions dispute. It was UCU members who voted in large numbers in a ballot to take strike action, and it will be UCU members who vote to reject or accept any offer in these disputes.

For what it's worth, I think the proposals on the table in both disputes should be put out to members to vote on. This dispute has had more democratic involvement of members than any other. If you've been on a picket you deserve the right to have your say – whether that is to reject and offer, or accept it.

I think with regards of more action to push them further on pay, my point would be that in disputes you use the leverage you have, and you decide when is best to cash out, and when is best to keep going. We are the only union out of the 5 on campus with a national ballot. Our leverage is doing a lot of heavy lifting in the pay dispute. If the membership decides pursuing higher strike action in pursuit of more % on pay that's what the union will do. We have a MAB scheduled to commence on April 17<sup>th</sup> – I have been clear from day one – this is your dispute.

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\*host\* Excellent - Justine talk us through the time limited negotiations element of this agreement. Isn't this just the employer putting things into the long grass?

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\*JUSTINE ANSWER\*

I appreciate that it could be interpreted that way, but no, it really isn't.

For anyone listening who has negotiated local workload agreements, or anti-casualisation agreements, you will know they typically take years, not months. The deal that shifted 4,800 OU staff onto permanent contracts took 3 years. The deal Bath have just agreed locally took 5 years. The gender pay deal that Bristol negotiated, again, took over a year. We are seeking to take something as complex as the UK HE sector – with all the variance that exists across 150 institutions. The good practice that does exist, along with the bad practice that we see all too regularly, and provide outputs from those negotiations that will stand the test of time, and that will – importantly – deliver to our branches workable tools, outputs, and frameworks that they can use to change their institution, and grow their branch.

This isn't long grass. This is the process we need as a union operating at a UK level to ensure we get what we need and want.

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\*host\* Thanks Justine. Greg - ending involuntary zero-hour contracts. Is this a serious commitment? Is this something some VCs will simply dodge? How many members could this positively impact?

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\*GREG ANSWER\*

This is very serious. We have seen one employer in the last week commit to doing this – Sheffield Hallam. But we need many other institutions to clean up their act. We have dozens of institutions that keep significant numbers of lecturing staff on ZHCs. Removing these is a very important first step in the employers showing us they are serious. It will positively impact on the people it effects in several ways, not least:

Greater job security

Reliability a/ predictability of income for HE staff

Greater consistency in provision to students (Something we know they have been asking for)

VCs won't be dodging this. We will be reviewing this with UCEA as we move through our time limited negotiations with them. And we will have a live ballot mandate during this entire period if our employers give us the need to resort to using it.

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\*host\* that's brilliant Greg, a real marker in the sand. Talking of wins. Jo - USS pensions. Now I know on occasion UCU has been accused of being a tad bombastic with how we communicate our victories.... But I don't think many could have foreseen the scale of what our members have delivered here. From my knowledge, no other union has achieved this type of reversal. Have we made history?

\*JO ANSWER\*

Nope, this is truly historic.

Having the value that was unfairly taken from our pensions is the least we deserve, but that doesn't make getting it back any less remarkable. No other union has ever achieved this. There is usually only one trajectory in pension disputes; pension cuts and scheme downgrades. The proposal on the table, to restore our pension and lower contribution is ground-breaking. And it could not have been achieved without the members backing a new set of tactics and never giving up. Nothing is final yet, we won't have that until September, but if UCU members invest the same levels of energy into the re-ballot, and keeping pressure up through their branch, we will deliver the restoration of the pension when we value the scheme later this year. And we then believe that will put us in a good position to work with the employer on establishing a better valuation process, so we avoid these triennial disputes, and reset industrial relations so we can work together to better lobby the government to change the way they regulate multi covenant schemes like USS.

But yes, this is a huge victory for UCU member. And, will be powerful for the rest of the trade union movement, who will look to what we have achieved and demand the same.

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\*host\* Justine. We are big fans of acronyms at the UCU. I'm sure the average member will be wondering what a BDM is? Who are the HEC? What are the next steps now we have a negotiators agreement? Can you set that out in clear terms?

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\*JUSTINE ANSWER\*

Very good question.

Simply a BDM is a branch delegate meeting, and the HEC is the higher education committee.

A BDM is a meeting that brings together every branch in a dispute and asks them to report feedback from their branch members about how they want any aspect about the dispute to be managed at any particular moment. There have been numerous BDMs already this dispute, and they have proved effective at relaying branch feedback to the HEC.

The HEC is an elected body, and essentially, they are the group who make all the key decisions about disputes in our union. When to call ballots, action. What types of ballots, and what type of action. You elect them once per year, and we just had the election results for next year's HEC recently.

With regards next steps, all UCU branches are being asked to survey their members and establish what members want the next steps to be. For example, do they want the opportunity to vote on these offers from the employers. Do they want to continue action, or do they want to pause it. Do they want the offers to be voted on together? Branches will then relay these views to a BDM. The results of the BDM will then be presented to the HEC who will use that to make their decision as to what happens next. This is going to have to be a rapid process. In order to make sure all members get an opportunity to have their voice heard we are also launching an all member survey. Please make sure you are checking your emails as this is how it will get to you. Check your junk too, some universities send the UCU surveys there. And check in with your branch to feed into the local feedback process they have.

Nothing will happen without you, this is your union. But the next steps as stipulated by the unions democratic procedures is member engagement, a BDM, followed by a meeting of the HEC. The HEC will ultimately decide what happens and how feedback from branches is interpreted.

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\*host\* Greg, you were in the negotiations obviously. Some members may well be listening to this saying we could have got more via further strikes. Do you think this is as far as the employers will move?

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\*GREG ANSWER\*

I'll let Justine answer that with regards pensions, as I haven't been involved there.

What I will say about pay is this, the employer has moved into a space they have never been in. Ever. A space we have been trying to get them into for years now, but failing. We have got them there. We have got them signed up to negotiations where we will nail them down. And we've got some big-ticket concessions up front in the form of ending Zero hour contracts, establishing a review of the pay spine, and a commitment to meaningful action to reduce gender, ethnicity, and disability pay gaps.

We moved them on pay before we got to Acas. If UCU members decide as a while this isn't enough, then we'll continue taking action. But for what it is worth I think for the action we have taken this is a very good time to vote to end this dispute and negotiate for the change we want and need to see.

I think we should be immensely proud. We are the only union with a national ballot, out of 5 on campus. And our density is around 30%. Could the sector afford more than the current pay offer, yes it could. The question is, collectively are we as campus unions in a position to push them to offer more, and I have to say I'm not sure about that one. I'd like to see every union win a national ballot, and for us to coordinate in the future – for the next pay round – to do that. Right now, UCU is bringing most of the leverage to the table, and I think that's reflected in the significant progress we've made on non pay – which disproportionately impact on UCU members.

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\*host\* Jo, let's go back to the pause. On reflection - did it give us the space we needed to deliver the agreement or was it an error that allowed the employer to have the upper hand?

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\*JO ANSWER\*

The pause was hugely beneficial.

It gave us the space to make this progress – I need to be really clear, we would not have gotten to this point in either negotiations without the positive environment the pause created.

I was serious when I said at the beginning of the UCU ballot campaign that I would do everything I could to ensure yes votes were protected and that members would not be on picket lines if they didn't need to be.

In pensions the pause allowed USS employers to come out of the shadows and make commitments that we had discussed in private, public. It allowed for the development of a set of proposals that will restore pensions and secure the long-term sustainability of USS

In pay the pause allowed for Acas, which allowed for all sides to break free from what was a merry-go-round of disagreeing about pay, to talk about the other aspects of our dispute that need urgent negotiation and progress. It allowed for the development of a set of proposals that get us closer than ever to fixing higher education.

It financially benefited members by lowering the amount of days they were getting strike pay deducted.

It also allowed us to keep vital support from our students. I heard just last week from an SU president how the pause helped him convincingly argue to keep students on board. And I've heard countless other examples of this.

Ultimately UCU members will have their say on the proposals in both pay and pensions, but the fact we are here is because we created the best environment possible for negotiations. In this case, the pause helped.

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\*host\* thanks Jo. I'm going to come right back to you if that's okay. Why can't we take the elements of the agreement we like – pensions, action on equality pay, ending zero hour contracts etc and still be in dispute on pay for example?

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\*JO ANSWER\*

Good question.

The pay proposals stand as a package. Members will have to look at what is being offered as a whole and decide if sufficient progress has been made in the whole – across all 4 fights – for them to say either now is the time to take our chips off the table and stand down action, or alternatively to say this isn't enough and now is the time to accelerate to a MAB and more strike action.

For members in institutions in both disputes obviously this will be a larger consideration they take alongside a decision in the pensions dispute.

In both disputes the proposals being made by employers – assuming members vote to accept them - are dependent on strike action being stood down. Again, for members in institutions in both disputes employers are seeking to resolve both, and have action stood down in both.

The reality for us is we came into this dispute looking to deliver a settlement on all issues. We believe this set of agreements achieve that goal and we should bank and build. We also have national ballots, so we do not want to return to the era of only USS universities taking strike action or just a pay dispute. The strength we have built is based on how we have coordinated this campaign from day one.

Now is the time, we believe to bank this significant progress and build the union to an even stronger level than ever before.

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\*host\* - thank you jo. I'm going to give you all the chance now to give your final message to members. Why this is a victory. Why they should reply to the re-ballot and anything else you want to add.

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Firstly, Justine

\*Justine final message\*

\*host\* thank you Justine. Greg - your closing thoughts.

\*Greg's final message\*

\*host\* brilliant Greg. Over to our general secretary for the final message.

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\*Jo final message\*

I want to start with a thank you. To our members, representatives, branches, senior officials, and staff. You have all done an incredible job.

I also want to say now is not a moment for hyperbole. It's a moment to reflect on where we were and where we are now. I believe that if any member does that then they will see the considerable progress we have made.

12 months ago, we were fractured. Now we are on the brink of winning our second national ballot, restoring our stolen pensions, securing a pay award and delivering significant movement on precarity – we did that.

It isn't utopia but it is further than we have ever got before. I look forward to engaging out branches and the HEC in the coming days and ultimately, I really hope members get the chance to have the final say – it's your dispute.

Keep supporting the action, keep voting and I hope like me, you are UCU and proud!

.....

\*host\* - thank you Jo. Firstly thank you to all of our panel today. You've done a great job. More importantly though, thank you to every member listening to this. Not only for tuning in but for your outstanding support which has got us to this point.

As I said earlier, share this podcast, watch our videos, read the transcript, use your e vote, join branch meetings. And be proud. Today we are closer than ever to delivering change in our sector. That's because of you.

We'll catch you all soon.

[End]