

This report follows our final meeting with Unite at Acas on 19 March.

We attended Acas to discuss what more could be done to resolve the dispute with Unite. We came to resolve the dispute.

We are so disappointed to inform you the meeting essentially ended when Unite UCU made the statement “We are not going to resolve the dispute here today. That is not what we came here for”. - You deserve so much better.

Action plans

We prepared to work through anything outstanding on the action plan ([attached, document one](#)), which Unite developed in earlier Acas meetings as a means of identifying outstanding issues. There is very little that needs to be done, which makes the call of 20 days action by Unite completely disproportionate and irresponsible.

Prior to our arrival at Acas, we received a new document from Unite ([attached, document two](#)), which presents an entirely different negotiating strategy and set of demands from the action plan. This not only discards the hours of work done over subsequent weeks but completely changes the terms of what it would take to settle the dispute and sets us back by months. No genuine trade union or its representatives should conduct themselves in this manner.

New demands

Sadly, today was no different as we have been asked to agree to either purposefully vague, or impossible demands. These demands bring UCU and Unite no closer to a resolution, in fact they extend aspects of the dispute. For example, in the absence of a hybrid working policy, Unite have requested, ‘that staff will not be asked to return to the office until relevant safety controls are in place’. On multiple occasions (including in Acas today) we have asked what relevant safety controls constitute, Unite have failed to communicate what they mean by this. How can we make future promises on something so uncertain. You deserve clarity. That’s all we have been trying to deliver.

Moving goalposts

This is not the first time this has happened. Since Summer 2024, we have been trapped in a cycle with Unite where their negotiation position had oscillated; presenting one paper as a route to resolution, only for this to be swapped with a new paper, and a fresh set of demands. This has made negotiating a resolution with them difficult, if not impossible as the goalposts change whenever we edge to what appears to be a resolution.

Unlawful demands

We have been presented with an impossible and unlawful demand from Unite, to ‘remove the threat of dismissal currently being used against two Black staff’. We want to be fully transparent in terms of the facts of this. There are two outstanding disciplinarys for Black members of staff, though we do not consider either of these disciplinary investigations to constitute the threat of dismissal as Unite has suggested. One of these proceedings originated from a complaint against that member of staff by a Black member of UCU.

A further disciplinary proceeding is underway in relation the treatment of a Black UCU member in a meeting attended by staff and UCU members.

Casework

We currently have no active case work about bullying or harassment from line managers, this is despite multiple claims in various communications from Unite that bullying and harassment is endemic in UCU. If bullying and harassment is taking place in UCU we want to address it, but we are provided with no evidence from Unite about where this is happening, or who is perpetrating it. Public and sustained unevidenced claims made by Unite, are having a negative impact on our union, including on our members' perception of their union. If Unite want to work with us to address these matters, we need them to engage with our processes and bring case work forward.

Summary

In summary, since we began Acas negotiations in June 2024, we have seen increasingly defamatory and unevidenced public statements from Unite, the tabling of changing, impossible and vague demands, all of which has led to months of time lost on a merry-go-round of shifting negotiating positions, needless days of action taken by UCU staff, unnecessary distress caused to UCU members, reputational damage to UCU, and sadly culminated today in another lost day spent at Acas where we had to wait until 1pm to see Unite, despite arriving at 10am. All to repeat the same pattern again.

We have come to the conclusion that sections of the Unite committee are executing a vendetta, which regardless of how much we have tried, we fundamentally cannot resolve (as evidenced by the never-ending switching up of negotiating positions). In calling 20 days of action they are choosing to paralyse UCU whilst our members face unprecedented redundancies and attacks from university and college employers, and waste thousands of pounds of UCU members subscription money.

Next steps

We are now concluding the Acas process.

We need to be honest and open with you all. We do not believe the Unite Committee are engaging in good faith and have no intention on restoring industrial relations.

This is a difficult time for us all. Please do come and speak to us. We have recently initiated open door sessions which we encourage you to sign up to. We will also be in touch directly with teams to support you with managing the upcoming strike action.

Finally, our fair measures to resolve the dispute ([as outlined in document one](#)) remain on the table, and despite the behaviours of the Unite UCU representatives we will not be withdrawing it as we know the vast majority of you want this dispute settled.

Regards

UCU senior management team

19 March 2025