

University and College Union

Higher Education Branch Action Note

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To	Branch and local association secretaries
Topic	National Negotiators' Report to UCU Higher Education Sector Conference, 25 May 2025
Action	To consider the national negotiators report and recommendations and circulate to members.
Summary	<p>This Branch Action Note provides the negotiators report on the New JNCHES negotiations which took place since the last Congress report circulated in May 2024. It covers actions relating to the ongoing dispute concerning the 2024/25 JNCHES negotiations and the joint union claim for 2025/26.</p> <p><i>This report is intended to provide an update on the third and final New JNCHES meeting held on 15 May 2025. It should be read alongside the UCU national negotiators report to HESC (UCUBANHE91) which can be found here: UCUBANHE91 Negotiators report HESC 2025 - final v2.</i></p>
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Addendum

This report is intended to provide an update on the third and final New JNCHES meeting held on 15 May 2025. It should be read alongside the UCU national negotiators report to HESC (UCUBANHE91) which can be found here: [UCUBANHE91 Negotiators report HESC 2025 - final v2](#).

1. Final New JNCHES meeting update

- 1.1 The third and final New JNCHES meeting was held on 15 May 2025.
- 1.2 In this meeting, UCEA presented their final pay offer of 1.4%. This would be applied to all pay points. The bottom two points on the pay scale would also be deleted.
- 1.3 UCEA also indicated a change from their previous position on the four negotiating

groups (on pay spine review, contract types/casualisation, workload, and equality pay gaps). Previously, UCEA had stated that they would not progress these negotiating groups unless the five HE unions agreed not to enter a trade (industrial) dispute – i.e. no union would ballot for industrial action this year. The unions had strongly criticized this position as deeply unhelpful and argued that it sent the message that UCEA was not committed to addressing serious issues such as equality pay gaps.

- 1.4 Consequently, UCEA stated that they had considered these points and would be willing to begin work on these negotiating groups in July 2025, but would pause if any union balloted for industrial action. UCEA also stated this extended to any of the five unions voting to ballot for industrial action and that this would be the point at which the work would stop.
- 1.5 UCEA confirmed that they would be willing to undertake joint work on lobbying government at UK and devolved level for HE funding, including emergency funding for institutions struggling, outside of the New JNCHES process. UCEA also confirmed joint work on updating redundancies guidance would take place outside of the New JNCHES process. This means that whilst the work would involve the New JNCHES parties (UCEA and the five HE unions), it would not be bound by the New JNCHES timelines or require full negotiation meetings but could be picked up partly offline.
- 1.6 With regards to the remainder of the asks, UCEA's full and final offer is appended. In the meeting, UCEA indicated they would be willing to pick up some asks carried over from the previous years, such as the gender pensions gap, but suggested this would fit better in the equality pay gaps working group as they viewed this as linked to the gender pay gap.
- 1.7 On the migrant salary threshold, UCEA reiterated their position that they would not be willing to adjust the pay spine to meet this visa threshold, but would be willing to do previously agreed joint work including writing to government on this, and to work together with the unions on this issue.
- 1.8 On the Just Transition, UCEA stated they remained sympathetic to this and would still be willing to facilitate discussions. They noted that the previous agreement had deadlines which had passed, therefore the parties might need to agree a new timeline.
- 1.9 On protection of national agreements, UCEA stated that they believe they have met this ask already and it is now dated, as they stated they have notified institutions of their need to follow national agreements and, where employers wish to vary these, these must be done in line with local machinery (agreement with the relevant union). They stated they could do this again if required but they felt they had met this ask. Our view is that we are still seeing breaches of national agreements and therefore we do not believe this ask has been met.

- 1.10 On the Foundation Living Wage, UCEA stated that this was a matter of institutional autonomy and they would not commit the entire sector to the Foundation Living Wage, or the £15 per hour minimum pay.
- 1.11 On the 35 hour week, UCEA stated that this was not part of their mandate and they would not commit the sector to a single national working week.
- 1.12 On London weighting, UCEA stated that they would make the usual recommendation to post-92s that maintain separate London weighting that this be increased by the same percentage as the pay uplift for the year.
- 1.13 On term-time only contracts, UCEA stated that their position was this was not a matter for New JNCHES.
- 1.14 On the Scottish sub-committee of New JNCHES, UCEA stated their position was that they don't see the need for this and that a forum exists through the STUC but they are hearing that this may not be working as needed and would be willing to have conversations about this.

2. Next steps

- 2.1 Following the conclusion of this meeting, the joint unions negotiators unanimously agreed that the offer was deeply disappointing and to recommend rejection of this offer to their respective democratic bodies. A joint statement setting this out is appended.
- 2.2 The other unions also proposed coordinating and moving together this year in our next steps, including in terms of dispute resolution meetings, member consultation timelines, and any potential ballot or industrial action should the unions decide to progress in this direction. We agreed with this.

3. Dispute resolution meetings

- 3.1 The New JNCHES negotiation process allows for the parties to trigger dispute resolution meetings where the parties have exhausted ordinary negotiations and failed to reach agreement following the conclusion of negotiation meetings.
- 3.2 These dispute resolution meetings do not constitute a formal trade dispute – they are a resolution procedure set out under the New JNCHES agreement procedure. Triggering them does not mean that the unions have entered a formal trade dispute.
- 3.3 These meetings can be triggered by either UCEA or any of the five unions. If any party triggers the dispute resolution procedure, the parties must then agree within 7 working days the dates for at least two meetings to seek to resolve the dispute. Unless agreed otherwise, these meetings should take place within 14 working days. These meetings include the full New JNCHES negotiating teams.

- 3.4 In the past, two dispute resolution meetings have taken place. Where these fail to reach resolution, the parties then consider whether third party assistance, usually via Acas, is worth pursuing.
- 3.5 During this period of the disputes resolution procedure, the unions are expected to agree not to undertake industrial action, and employers will be expected to agree not to impose any offer.
- 3.6 It is our position that triggering the dispute resolution process is the best next step. It allows the parties to fully exhaust the negotiation process and focus on areas where we believe resolution has not been reached with the aim of reaching agreement, in a time-limited manner.
- 3.7 The negotiators also believe in coordinating with the other unions in terms of next steps and synchronizing our timelines, to ensure we move together with one united voice as proposed by the other unions.

4. Recommendations

1. HESC is asked to approve the negotiating team formally triggering dispute resolution meetings jointly with the other unions to conclude before the next scheduled HEC on 4 July 2025 in order to a) exhaust the negotiation process and b) maximise our capacity to coordinate with the other campus trade unions.
2. HESC is asked to approve coordinating next steps, including timing of dispute resolution meetings and member consultations and communications with the other New JNCHES unions.

UCU National Negotiators 2024/25

Appendix A: Joint Statement from HE Unions

The following statement was drafted and unanimously agreed by all five unions' negotiators (UCU, Unite, Unison, GMB, and EIS) on 15th May 2025, to be circulated to members.

Joint HE unions statement

The joint trade unions entered into this negotiation united in our aim to protect our members' pay, jobs and working conditions.

We have set out to work collaboratively with UCEA to call on the government to address the crisis in the sector and to avoid the catastrophic redundancies in our universities.

The joint unions negotiators are united in our strong disappointment and opposition to this offer of 1.4% which would translate into a real-terms pay cut of about 1.8% (relative to RPI in March 2025). As negotiators we will be recommending rejection to our respective executive committees.

Higher education is central to the economic success of our cities, regions and nations, yet it is falling drastically behind in terms of pay and conditions. Low pay is a symptom of how little our work is valued by those running universities. Year on year pay erosion has not saved jobs, prevented the use of insecure contracts types, exploitative workloads, or equality pay gaps.

Despite proclaiming their support for addressing inequities in the sector, UCEA have shown a lack of commitment to meaningfully address these issues.

The joint trade unions know that there is no trade off between job security, pay and equity in work. These are all symptoms of a failure to properly value HE staff. We are committed to working together as part of the New JNCHES process and beyond to create a positive vision for the sector which properly values the role of staff and students in H.E.

Appendix B: UCEA full and final offer