Negotiators' Statement

We entered negotiations this year recognizing that we are dealing with a university sector in crisis. While the employers wish to convince us that this crisis is out of their hands, in fact they have been very active, lobbying Government for higher tuition fees and gambling on speculative investment ventures, external consultancies, and vanity projects.

We called on the vice chancellors to improve job security and work with us to address the funding crisis in higher education. But we also called on them to address the successive pay cuts our members have faced year-on-year, to protect existing national agreements, and to progress negotiations on the four previously agreed work areas: casualisation, pay spine reform, workload, and equality pay gaps.

Unfortunately, UCEA's final offer did not meaningfully address any substantive elements of our claim. Following May's Higher Education Sector Conference (HESC), your negotiators, along with negotiators from the four other unions, UNISON, UNITE, GMB and EIS, agreed unanimously to trigger the formal 'dispute resolution' meetings.

Members are urged to read the negotiators report to UCU's HESC and the accompanying addendum which provides an update on the main negotiation meetings.

On 25 May, UCU's HESC voted to trigger dispute resolution meetings and to coordinate our next steps with the other unions, including any member consultation or ballot.

We are disappointed to report that these dispute resolution meetings failed to secure improvements to the offer. Whilst we focused these meetings on the elements of the claim we felt were the most pressing – pay, term time working, job security, the protection of national agreements, and joint work on sector funding – UCEA's overall offer remains deeply disappointing.

On pay, UCEA have insisted that they will not improve their final pay offer of 1.4%. It is worth putting this figure in context.

- This is another real-terms pay cut, one that is by far one of the worst pay awards given to any group of workers this year.
- Using the latest inflation figures (May 2025) it works out to a likely pay cut of 3% against RPI in one year and more than 2% against CPI.
- As a result of our pay not keeping up with inflation, pay points 15 to 25 are worth 12.5% less in RPI terms than in August 2021, and points 26 and above are worth almost 15% less. (See Appendix.)
- To put this another way, if we were paid at 2021 rates, those of us on points 15-25 are now working for free every year for a month and a half. For staff on point 26 and up, that figure rises to nearly 8 weeks!

This cut is on top of the 20% cut in pay between 2008 and 2021. And this year's offer falls far below offers made to other public and private sector workers, many of whom are in sectors that are chronically underfunded. For many marginalised staff in particular, the current 1.4% pay offer represents a further real-terms pay cut that compounds existing gender, disability, and race pay gaps.

On job security and joint work on sector funding, UCEA have failed to even agree to joint lobbying for increased funding to the sector to protect jobs. On the four previously agreed pay-related negotiating groups, UCEA has agreed to start work but threatens to pause this if any union seeks its members' views on industrial action in relation to any element of UCEA's offer via a statutory ballot. On national agreements, on the migrant salary threshold, on a Just Transition for the sector, UCEA's offer does not go far enough to support our members or address the climate emergency facing us all.

All five unions' democratic structures voted to undertake consultative ballots of their members, urging members to **reject** this final offer. We have agreed to coordinate with each other with the aim of campaigning together and taking any action collectively.

Our message is clear: the trade unions know that there is no trade-off between job security, pay and equity in work. We know all too well that pay erosion has not saved jobs, nor has it prevented the use of insecure contract types, reduced exploitative workloads, or narrowed equality pay gaps. These are all symptoms of failure, not just by governments, but also by employers, to properly value HE staff and to not to use cuts to staff as a first port of call in reducing budgets . We will not accept university workers, whether porters or professors, being made to pay the price for a disastrous market system that we have opposed at every turn. We remain committed to joint work to address the structural problems in the sector, without any preconditions.

HEC met on 4 July to consider the final offer, and voted to recommend that members **REJECT** UCEA's offer and vote **YES** to participating in industrial action. We join our sister unions – Unite, the GMB, EIS, and Unison – who have all launched consultations urging their members to reject UCEA's final offer.

We encourage every member to vote in the consultative ballot, and make sure your voice is heard.

UCU HE National Negotiators 2025/26

Appendix: Four-year pay losses against RPI

Figure 1: Pay as percentage of 2021 pay rates after inflation

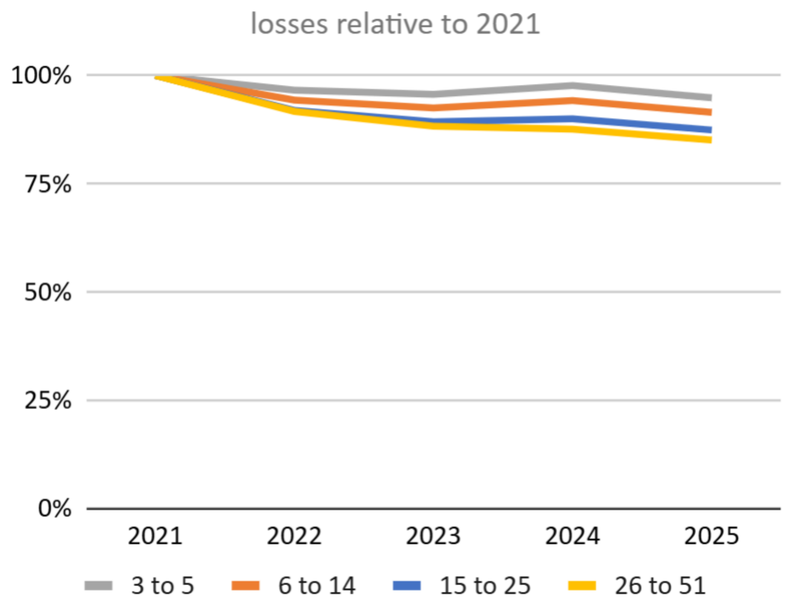
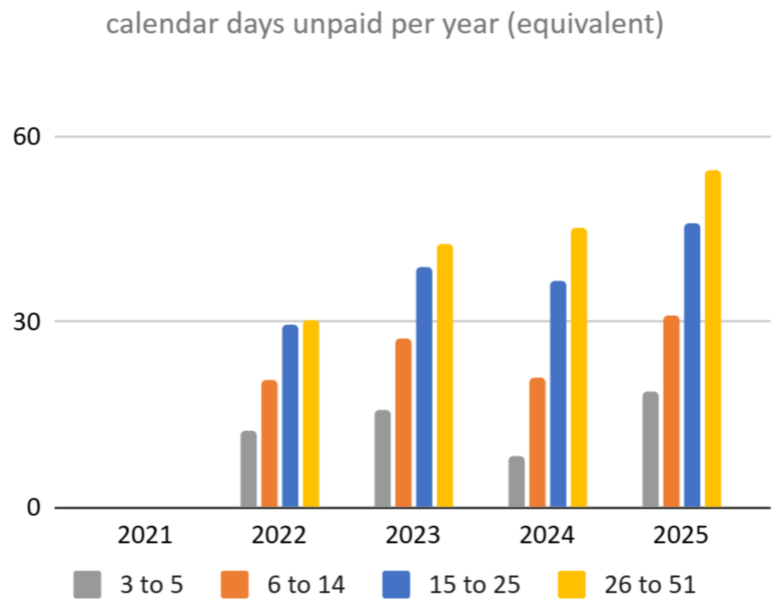


Figure 2: Pay cut expressed as unpaid calendar days (30 ≈ 1 month)



Notes:

The August 2022 pay offer was on a sliding scale for lowest paid. Spine points 3-5, 6-14, 15-25 and 26-51 were subdivided in August 2023 pay offer.

Source: ONS data. August RPI used except 2025 (Latest: May RPI = 4.4%).