

IN THIS SPECIAL ISSUE OF HE NEWS:-

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HE MEMBERS TO VOTE ON NEW JNCHES BARGAINING STRUCTURES – USE YOUR VOTE!

Ballot papers will shortly go out to all higher education members giving you the opportunity to vote on the future shape of the structures through which the union negotiates pay. Discussions between the unions and employers produced a set of proposals which are now being put to members to vote on. The ballot will run from 25 January to 27 February and the outcome will be considered by the Higher Education Committee meeting on 29 February.

While the details may seem complex, they are important as they will shape the way we bargain on your pay in the future. This is your chance to tell the union what direction it should follow next. As UCU general secretary Sally Hunt says, "It is vital that the union emerges with a united position and a clear mandate for the negotiators. So whatever you decide, please make sure that you use your vote."

Detailed information is now available on the UCU website at

<http://www.ucu.org.uk/negotiatingreviewballot>.

Message from Alastair Hunter, VP HE and Chair of HEC

The timing and process for the ballot on the proposed new negotiating agreement between UCEA and the trade union side has raised some questions. I would like to address some of these in the hope of clarifying what is undoubtedly a complex set of circumstances.

I won't go into the reasons for HEC's decision beyond noting the obvious, that there was no consensus on the question of making a recommendation one way or another. Having agreed

to put the question to members through a ballot, the constraint that dominates is that for a variety of reasons it is essential to have a decision by the next HEC on 29th February. The principal reason is that we have to design our next pay claim very soon, certainly in time to put something to sector conference in May. This is true whatever the outcome of the ballot.

That said, it is indeed important for there to be as much time and opportunity for debate, discussion, and the provision of information as possible. For this reason we have set the closing date of the ballot as late as possible. 27th February is the last possible date which will allow HEC to receive the result and make at least a preliminary response. Since information is already widely available, it is to be hoped that LAs and Branches will be able to run meetings within the time frame available should they wish to do so. I hope that it might be possible for members of HEC to be invited to such meetings, and that a fair presentation of both sides of the case can be provided for.

I believe it is true to say that the revised proposals do not fully meet the requirements set out by Conference, but it is also true that the conclusions of the conference were a negotiating position, and HEC accepted the view reported by the negotiators that the current proposals are the best that can be achieved by negotiation. It is, therefore, a matter of judgement as to whether the latest proposals adequately address the concerns identified by conference and it is for that reason we have asked members to express their view.

We are faced with essentially a take-it-or-leave-it decision. If the vote is “**yes**”, then we will have to begin the process of working closely with the other unions, while looking at the best way to defend and enhance the interests of our own members; but that will certainly be within the context of national bargaining. If the vote is “**no**”, the future is less certain; but we will equally have to engage at once in a process of negotiation, which may or may not include an element of local negotiation. At least it will be unequivocally focused exclusively on our own membership.

It is obviously a matter of concern that a low turnout in response to the ballot may itself pose negotiating problems; but there is no other decision-making process which is likely to produce a more definitive result. While membership ballots ought to be used sparingly, the importance for the union of asking all members to participate in this peculiarly important decision is one that I personally endorse. I do not accept any suggestion that HEC has resiled from its responsibility in taking the decision to ballot, and I do urge you all to visit the UCU website and to study the information which will be available elsewhere in this issue of HE News and in due course in the UCU magazine.

HERE'S WHAT SOME HEC MEMBERS HAVE TO SAY:

Due to space limit in HE News and in order to allow as many views as possible we have had to limit contributions to 50 words. We appreciate that this may not provide the opportunity to convey the full flavour of members positions and these statements should be read with this understanding.

Alan Carr, Hon Treasurer and HEC member:

Accepting "Single Table" bargaining would surrender our case for professional pay and sound the death knell for the academic/related link. Employers threaten to end national bargaining unless we capitulate – a bluff we've called time and again. Let's have the confidence to defend our right to negotiate for members. Vote No.

Sue Birch (HEC, equality – women): Just briefly I would like to say that I am in favour of a YES vote because I want to preserve national bargaining at all costs. In addition, did we spend years fighting to improve the conditions of part timers to potentially see their situation become untenable?

Roger Brooks (HEC member North West England): The Special HE Sector Conference last November set non-negotiable conditions for an agreement, including a standing subcommittee with UCU lead negotiating rights for all academic and academic-related staff and the right to take industrial action at any time. These have not been met, so we should vote NO.

Philip Burgess (NEC HEC): The proposals fail to give us:

- 1** Negotiators accountable to UCU alone.
- 2** Any prospect of achieving catch-up.
- 3** The deterrent of industrial action before mid July.
- 4** National Bargaining in any meaningful sense. Institutions pleading poverty will still be able to opt out of settlements.

Only the employers will benefit. Reject these proposals.

Jim Guild (HEC member South of England): This proposal doesn't meet the requirements of the HE Special Conference; it requires a single pay claim; it makes pensions part of future pay deals; it betrays academic-related members; it's open to interpretation by UCEA; and the dispute resolution process is effectively a barrier to industrial action. Just say NO!

Marion Hersh (NEC, HEC):- Vote yes to: Maintain national bargaining – only way to get good pay rises for everyone, remove the gender and other pay gaps, maintain AR link and ensure hourly paid get pay rises. Improve relationships with the other unions – critical for effective industrial action. Gain time to build for industrial action for real pay increases and a better agreement.

Lesley Kane (HEC nationally elected): The issue is not just single or multi-table bargaining. There are two serious negative considerations involved one on each side of the debate: - the threat to national bargaining, and the proposed limitation on the timing of industrial action. The discussion needs to focus more on how to respond to these.

Elizabeth Lawrence (HEC North East England): As one of the negotiators, I appeal to all members to vote in this ballot. A high poll will strengthen UCU's position; a low poll will benefit only the employers. This vote affects how your pay is determined in future. I believe we should vote yes to retain national bargaining.

Nick James (NEC, HEC): Accept. We must join the single table in a spirit of unity. The potential `final offer` date is problematic, but not unprecedented. When negotiations are clearly not going anywhere, we should withdraw and take action. Losing national bargaining means losing the academic related/academic link, and would divide and weaken us.

Jill Jones (HEC London & the East): As one of the negotiators, I urge you to accept. For all its flaws it is the deal which will protect national bargaining on pay. It binds us more closely with other unions for future action, and it is not beyond us to manage balloting timetable restrictions in our favour.

Gavin Reid (HEC North East England): The timeline for negotiations ending in May is unacceptable - not least because many exams are over by then. Consequently, any industrial action would have to be held in the following autumn term, will inevitably affect classes and likely be very damaging to students. The employers only have themselves to blame.

UCU GETS SET FOR ITS ANNUAL MEETING FOR ACADEMIC-RELATED STAFF

The annual meeting for academic-related staff will be held on **5 March 2008**. All details will be sent to HE branch and local association secretaries shortly and will be available on the UCU web site at

<http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2097>. Each branch and local association is entitled to send 2 voting representatives to the meeting and can submit up to three motions.

The deadline for the submission of motions is **13 February** and for the registration of delegates is **20 February**. Please contact your branch or local association secretary for more information.

Academic related staff: tell us what you think!

The academic related committee is working on making revisions to the UCU manifesto for academic related staff. It is also considering issues of concern to academic related staff related to out of hours working.

In order to find out the views of academic related members two web discussion forums have been set up. These are available at

<http://www.ucu.org.uk/arforum>.

Please take the time to post your thoughts on one or both of these topics. Your views will be considered at the next committee meeting on 6 February and at the annual meeting on 5 March.

FIXED-TERM AND HOURLY PAID STAFF COMMITTEE SETS ITS PRIORITIES

UCU's Fixed-term and Hourly Paid Staff Committee has set its priorities for the forthcoming year. These priorities will direct the work of the Committee who next meet on 8 February.

The Committee's priorities are:

1. Job Security: - to identify and promote means of improving job security for FTHP staff in FE and HE.
2. Inclusion of fixed-term and hourly paid staff: - to promote the explicit

inclusion and integration of members on fixed-term and hourly paid contracts within the union.

3. Information gathering: - to gather information about the pay, terms and

conditions of fixed-term and hourly paid staff in FE and HE.

4. Framework Agreement and national representation in HE: - to work vigorously to ensure the explicit inclusion of hourly paid staff in both the pre-92 and post-92 sectors in JNCHES national negotiations including a review of progress of assimilation of hourly paid staff under the Framework Agreement, a review of hourly rates of pay (for those not yet

assimilated), and the negotiation of minimum hourly rates in both the pre-92 and post-92 sectors (for those HP not yet assimilated)

5. Communications: - to improve communications with fixed-term and hourly paid members and potential members.

6. Organising and recruiting: - to promote the organisation and recruitment of fixed-term and hourly paid staff at national, regional and local level.

If you would like to contact the Committee please contact the Chair Jean Crocker at j.f.crocker@durham.ac.uk. If you would like to be added to UCU's fixed-term and hourly paid mailing list please email Christine Bernabe (cbernabe@ucu.org.uk).

KEELE UNIVERSITY REDUNDANCY – A NATIONAL ISSUE FOR UCU

Just before Christmas UCU members at Keele University voted to take strike action if managers press ahead with plans to make some 40 staff redundant from the School of Economic and Management Studies (SEMS). It has been a somewhat long process including Sue Davis, UCU Regional Officer attending a consultation meeting with management on December 12th. The union called for an extended consultation period, a guarantee of no compulsory redundancies, and the assurance that, if a voluntary severance scheme was introduced, that members could be substituted between the University's 'A' and 'B' lists. All these requests were denied by the management side.

With proposals being made public the Local Association then called an emergency general meeting on Monday 17th December which called for a ballot for strike action among members in SEMS and for industrial action short of a strike by all members at Keele.

In a recent press release UCU general secretary, Sally Hunt, said: 'Keele University can rest assured that if it does decide to try and push through these hurried and nonsensical redundancy plans that we will fight them all the way. The university's attempt to rush through redundancies at a quiet time of the year outside its own internal structures is little more than cowardly and offensive. We will be fighting any job cuts all the way.'

Preparations for the necessary ballots are in hand. UCU has set up an online petition so that members can lend their support to colleagues at Keele and help build up the pressure on managers to reverse their decision on

<https://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=3015>

You can also read more on Keele at <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=3005> and send messages of support to the local association by emailing Jonathan White at jwhite@ucu.org.uk. These will be forwarded to the branch.

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT CONFIRMS SNUB OF UCU

The Scottish government's commitment to finding real solutions for higher education is being questioned by the UCU in a letter to Fiona Hyslop MSP, the Cabinet Secretary for Education & Lifelong Learning.

Following the poor spending review settlement for higher education, Ms Hyslop has formed a Future Thinking Taskforce which only includes representatives of University Principals and government. When the remit and membership of the task force was announced just before the holidays, Terry Brotherstone UCU Scotland President condemned the lack of consultation:

'Given our excellent relations with the government in its early months, we are deeply disappointed UCU Scotland has not been consulted about the nature of the review or included in the task force. If the new Scottish government is genuinely interested in a new approach to Scottish Higher Education what is needed is something closer to a Robbins report rather than this narrow review.'

However, in an answer to an oral question last Thursday (10 January) in the Scottish Parliament the Minister stated 'the remit and membership of the task force must remain fairly tight, as we want the key decision makers in the university sector—university principals and the Government—to deliberate and make decisions by the summer.'

This means these key decisions will be made without the input of all the staff and students. For UCU Scotland this has come as a particular shock as we had worked well with Ms Hyslop in the past and the UCU Scotland President first mooted the idea of a review. Further, previous reviews have included both UCU and NUS with working parties chaired by the presidents.

In the letter UCU Scotland seek an early meeting with the Cabinet Secretary to discuss and seek to resolve the situation. It goes on to state that:

'Deliberation on how Scotland's universities should shape up and be supported to meet Scotland's needs in 10 and 20 years time cannot conceivably be regarded as matters to be determined by Scottish Government and the Principals in a tightly knit taskforce. The in-depth research and policy work to support and trigger that must involve all of the key stakeholders and have a public stature which involves some independence from Government.'

UCU will campaign on this issue if not resolved but in the meantime we would encourage members to contact their MSPs to inform them on the futility of holding such a review without the main actors in Scottish higher education.