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PAY: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE – A Review by Alastair Hunter, Vice-President (HE)

We are at a turning point in the matter of pay for Higher Education staff. The last five years have seen seismic changes in the scales used to determine pay, in the use of role profiles to ensure that pay is properly related to work done, and in the foregrounding of issues of equality in pay – both at the lower levels, where women are significantly over-represented in the ranks of fixed term and hourly paid, and in senior echelons, where in general the highest rewards are given to men.

Two campaigns, hard-fought by AUT and NATFHE, our predecessor unions, resulted in significant protection for members. The first, in which AUT forced the employers to sign up to the Memorandum of Understanding, meant that the implementation of the Framework Agreement (still not concluded in all institutions four years on!) had to ensure no detriment to pay levels currently or in the future. At the time this seemed a somewhat technical and recondite agreement, but it has proved to be a very powerful tool. As a result, many members at the lower points on the scales saw significant percentage increases in addition to the normal settlement. This was not true, of course, for all members – particularly those at or near the top of scales – but it did mean that for once we had achieved a catch-up for the low-paid. This is something the union should rightly be proud of. Moreover, the employers can take no credit whatsoever for this. They have proved implacably opposed to these changes at institution after institution, and have had to be forced, cajoled, or threatened with action before they would implement the agreement they themselves signed up for!

I want to be very clear that there are unresolved issues resulting from the Framework Agreement: not least its implications for the future promotion prospects of Academic Related Staff members, but also the resulting disparity between institutions, with a range of interpretations of the scales within the acceptable limits set by the Memorandum. UCU's Higher Education Committee is about to commission research into the first of these; the second is address specifically in one aspect of the pay claim we are about to submit.

The second campaign, fought jointly by NATFHE and AUT, resulted in a much-criticised three year deal. That deal was entered into with some reluctance at the time, since the percentage increases represented little better than a 'keep-up', and tying ourselves to a three-year period obviously restricted our scope for action. As it has turned out, the deal we struck then has fortuitously placed us in a relatively good position, with most universities honouring the final payment of

inflation at 5% in either October or November. In the context of public sector pay deals of 2.5% or less, this has proved to be a relatively good outcome. Indeed, for the first time in many years, our pay has risen by slightly more than the average of pay overall in the UK!

While UCU cannot claim credit for anticipating the credit crunch, what we can say is that the deal which was achieved with so much difficulty has left us well-placed to enter the next round, and those who negotiated the phrase 'or inflation, whichever is higher' deserve our thanks. That said, we face a far more aggressive employer stance in the coming pay round. Clear signals have been given that they will try to keep us as close as possible to 0%, claiming that the pot is empty, that redundancies threaten, and that we have had 25% increases in the last three years. These are quite simply the scaremongering tactics of an employer whose responsibility for the well-being of their staff is scarcely discernable amongst the noise created by the jargon of managements increasingly in thrall to business-speak, phony initiatives, flawed partnerships with private sector companies like INTO and Kaplan, increasing casualisation, and threats to union recognition. In this context the formula, 'employer of choice' used by many of them sounds increasingly hollow.

More importantly, the specific claims are dubious. Pay remains (despite our marginal improvement over the period) at around 58% of expenditure – and is predicted by the universities themselves to remain at that level. If the pot is empty, it is hardly UCU and the other campus unions that have emptied it! Redundancies have much more to do with restructuring in the interests of the latest fad endorsed by the latest VC than with downsizing or saving money. And 25% would be nice – but it only works for a few, and only if the effect of increments is included.

Colleagues, we will no doubt be accused of irresponsibility in submitting the pay claim agreed by sector conference on November 7th. But any claim other than 0% would be said to be irresponsible, since only a significant cut in real terms will keep our rapacious bosses happy. Indeed, we have responsibly built into the claim for a series of improvements designed to give UK universities an opportunity to give substance to the 'employer of choice' slogan: getting to grips with equality of pay, decent conditions for hourly paid staff, and scales for senior staff will all serve – at relatively little cost – to make HE a place worth working in.

It will not be easy. In all probability we will have to back up our claim with action. Please read the claim carefully, and support us in what is, after all, a moderate and responsible set of proposals to build on the framework and the 2006 settlement.

Equivalent or Lower Qualifications (ELQs): request for information

In December, the Higher Education Funding Council for England will be reviewing the impact of the funding withdrawal for students studying for equivalent or lower qualifications (ELQs). In order to help us influence the review, we would like to hear back from UCU members about the effects of the ELQ funding withdrawal at your HEI. We suspect that the main impact has been on courses, funding and staffing in lifelong learning and continuing education departments and so we would particularly welcome feedback from staff working in these areas. If you have any information, particularly of a quantitative variety, please can you send it to Rob Copeland, policy officer rcopeland@ucu.org.uk by no later than 19 December 2008?

UCU is continuing to campaign to defend liberal adult provision in both further and higher education. Back in September, we were one of the founder members of CALL, the Campaigning Alliance for Lifelong Learning. For further details of CALL, see: <http://www.callcampaign.org.uk/>

Role of Universities in Scotland

UCU Scotland organised the Intellect and Democracy conference on October 31st to encourage debate of the role of universities for a modern Scotland - a debate that is intended to transcend the narrow deliberation on funding and structural issues undertaken by the Scottish Government's Joint Future Thinking Taskforce on Higher Education.

The conference was addressed by the leading historian of universities, Professor Robert Anderson, and the European higher education expert Jens Vraa Jensen from Education

International and also involved a round-table involving Scottish education professionals and staff representatives) covered the history and European context of Scotland's universities as well as the issues of funding, student hardship and broadening participation.

Announcing the conference, Terry Brotherstone, President of the University and College Union Scotland, called for an evidence-based review of higher education to inform decision-making about universities and colleges in the decades beyond 2010.

"Scotland's educational system, with the universities at its apex, has been central to a sense of nationhood since the 15th century, and to the way the country has been governed since the late nineteenth century," Brotherstone said. "The arrival of an SNP government at a time when higher education financing faces a crisis seemed to us an ideal moment for a strategic rethink.

"All we have had so far is a 'Taskforce', which meant the Government and the University Principals seeking a deal, without wider society being allowed to examine the role of universities in a properly informed way. And there are now rumours that the Taskforce can't even agree a final report. This should be seen as an opportunity to open up a much wider and more democratic discussion.

UCU says government's 'Higher Education Debate' needs proper debate

The University and College Union (UCU) said on November 12th that the government's future of higher education debate needed input from people on the front line if it was to have any genuine credibility.

The union said that the Higher Education Debate, first announced by Secretary of State for the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS), John Denham, in February, and published today, was an example of the government's worrying trend to cherry pick information, rather than invite a genuine critique of policy.

UCU general secretary, Sally Hunt, said: "We find it astonishing that the Secretary of State failed to ensure that those genuinely representing the people tasked with delivering government policy on the ground -

the staff - were afforded the opportunity to contribute to, or review, the submissions.

"Honest debate is part and parcel of university life and it must to be allowed to flourish throughout higher education. If the government wants its Higher Education Debate to have any credibility it must take on board the views of practitioners. Failure to do so will only lead to accusations that it is seeking evidence to back up current policy, rather than a genuine critique."

Nottingham Trent staff threat of protest on day University celebrates first chancellor

On Tuesday, November 11th, University and College Union (UCU) members at Nottingham Trent University (NTU) lobbied a ceremony being held at the city's Royal Concert Hall to commemorate the installation of Michael Parkinson as the University's first chancellor.

In an attempt to get their message across to those participating in the event, a small number of NTU UCU members handed out information to the 2,000 plus guests explaining the current dispute between NTU and the union.

They also be warned that NTU faces ignominy of becoming the first university to receive an academic boycott from UCU if it is forced to 'greylist' the institution. In a letter to the union, Sir Michael said he hoped for a swift resolution to the current impasse.

UCU is in dispute with the University over recognition of the union and has warned that if the issue cannot be resolved by the end of November then NTU will be 'greylisted'. Greylisting is the ultimate sanction available to UCU members and is only ever used where a university or college refuses to engage in meaningful negotiations with a branch or local association. No institution has ever been greylisted in UCU's two-year history.

Over three quarters of NTU UCU members voted for industrial action in a ballot in September and on Tuesday 21 October they took a day's strike action. Over 12,000 people have signed a petition condemning NTU's actions and the union said it had already received support from across the academic community to back up the greylist if a deal cannot be struck.

UCU general secretary, Sally Hunt, said: "The University's proposals are quite unique in higher education and opposition to them is far-reaching throughout the academic community. The eyes of the academic community are on NTU and we have been bolstered by the support we have already received should we be forced to press ahead with greylisting. We strongly feel that the current impasse is not in the interests of anyone connected to NTU and we have no desire to harm its proud reputation as a leading new university. We can only hope the University shares our concerns."

NTU UCU representative, Mark Weinstein, said: "Staff at Nottingham Trent have no desire to damage either their own reputation or that of the University, which is why we will have a dignified presence at today's event. What we want most of all is the current problems resolved as swiftly and painlessly as possible. Greylisting NTU would be incredibly damaging but UCU members at NTU will not, and should not have to, settle for anything less than the widely accepted standards of good practice that exist in the higher education sector in the UK."

Stamp Out Casual Contracts

On the 1st November UCU launched 'Stamp Out Casual Contracts', a major campaign against casualisation, at a well-attended event at UCU's Britannia Street conference centre. Participants were introduced to a range of web-based and other materials and in the course of workshop and plenary sessions developed a range of ideas and practical measures to take the campaign forward. UCU is preparing for a national day of action on 3rd December to highlight this issue. Please contact your branch or local association in the first instance to find out how your institution is getting involved.

Hourly paid, fixed term, agency and casual workers are among the most vulnerable within both further and higher education, where the use of such insecure and unfavourable contracts is proportionately amongst the highest in any employment sector. Despite changes in the law relating to fixed term contracts, the use of these continues to be widespread. Early career workers, junior researchers, teaching assistants and part-timers suffer from a culture where casualisation has become

ingrained. It is, of course, not only those workers on these contracts themselves who are disadvantaged – the knock-on effects of inefficiency, insecurity and workload have an impact on the working lives of full-time, permanent staff in every workplace where casualisation of education professionals takes place.

Please contact Justine Stephens jstephens@ucu.org.uk with any details of your branch/local association plans for the day of action if you have not done so already – and if you need materials or suggestions for the day.

Further details of the campaign can be found on our website at <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=3532>

Workload Seminars

UCU has developed a series of one-day seminars to be rolled out throughout the UK in the coming months to examine the use of workload protection modelling to demonstrate the excessive workloads experienced by academic and related staff in both the pre- and post 92 sectors. University managements have often used such models to attempt a form of regulation of staff activity, with an emphasis on outputs. Similar techniques, in the form of actual accounting for time spent across the range of activities necessary to fulfil the demands of the job can, however, be used as tools to argue not merely for adequate time to perform, but for adequate time to perform well.

Relative autonomy, the freedom to pursue excellence in one's subject area, meaningful interaction with other staff and students and control over one's own professional development are of course essential for all academic and related staff. Nobody engaged in teaching, research, or both, or the support of these activities, would wish to curtail their commitment to their work.

The purpose of the workload seminars is to devise and develop tools to limit what managements can demand, not to limit what staff may choose to do.

The first seminar took place in Bristol on November 5th, where participants tested the

materials and suggested various improvements. Further seminars, which include a demonstration of computer and paper-based materials, workshops and discussion, are scheduled to take place in

- Manchester (December 12th),
- Birmingham (January 14th)
- London (January 21st)
- Newcastle (January 30th),
- Edinburgh (February 18th)
- Belfast (date to be confirmed)
- Cardiff (to be arranged).

For further details contact Martin Sundram msundram@ucu.org.uk or your regional office.

Points Based immigration system for international students and staff

The new Points Based immigration system was introduced on February 29th 2008, and goes live on November 27th 2008. Institutions and organisations under the system, overseas staff and students will have to apply for visas under one of five tiers:

Tier 1: Highly skilled individuals to contribute to growth and productivity

Tier 2: Skilled workers with a job offer to fill gaps in the UK labour force

Tier 3: Limited numbers of low skilled workers needed to fill temporary labour shortages

Tier 4: Students (from August 2009)

Tier 5: Youth mobility and temporary workers: people allowed to work in the United Kingdom for a limited period of time to satisfy primarily non-economic objectives

Tiers 1 and 2 immediately affect overseas (non-European Economic Area) staff recruited to posts in UK institutions, and Tier 4 will affect students (and staff required to monitor and apply the scheme) from next year. Institutions are required to register to be licensed with the UK Borders Agency before accepting applications from overseas staff or students – as of 10/11/08 only 97 higher education institutions had done so,

with an even lower response rate in further education.

UCU has opposed these provisions and we continue to have a number of concerns with both the objectives and application of this scheme, including the impact on workloads and the effect on the relationships between members of staff and students, with staff being obliged to check attendance and other requirements associated with its terms. Staff will effectively be expected to keep tabs on overseas colleagues, and from next year, on students, with a range of penalties threatened for non-compliance.

We will shortly be setting up a web-based questionnaire asking members in both FE and HE to respond to a number of questions. In the meantime, we urgently ask members to assist us in collating information by providing us with any guidance or advice being issued to staff locally by HR departments. Please email Chris Nicholas cnicholas@ucu.org.uk with any information.

UCU has issued a press release, which can be viewed at <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=3599&from=3588>

HE EVENTS FORTHCOMING...

UCU Conference – Tackling Bullying - Thursday 27 November 2008 ~

Britannia Street Conference Centre

The extent of workplace bullying and harassment for UCU members is reaching alarming proportions, according to a survey earlier this year. This conference will take a closer look at bullying and harassment in post-16 education. Speakers include Dr Iain Coyne (University of Nottingham), Hannah Essex (College and University Support Network) and John Bamford (UCU's health and safety advisor). There will be practical workshops on negotiating an anti-bullying policy, and on organising around this issue. The conference will also have a report on the initial findings of UCU's in-depth survey of bullying in post-16 education. Visit <https://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=3524> for further. Please contact pcooper@ucu.org.uk if you have any questions.

at <http://www.ucu.org.uk/USSbriefings> The deadline for booking is 5pm on December 1.

USS Review – Briefings

USS undertook the regular triennial valuation of the scheme earlier this year. The final figures will be made public in December. In addition the employers have approached UCU to undertake a review of the scheme given the need assess the impact of changes within employment patterns and demands on the scheme. The review panel, chaired by the independent chair of the USS Joint Negotiating Committee met for the first time in October.

To inform this process and to provide more information about the issues under discussion UCU is holding a round of briefing sessions. The first of these will be held

On Tuesday 9 December 2008

At the UCU Conference Centre, Britannia Street, London

Later ones will be held in the New Year at locations around the UK and details will be notified when they are confirmed. Current plans for these are:

Scotland 29th January 2008

Birmingham

Manchester

Bristol

Wales

Northern Ireland

The briefings are of course designed specifically for members of USS but this is not a stipulation for attendance. HE Branches/LAs will be funded for the expenses of up to two representatives. This is not a limit on attendance and other members will be welcome to attend but at their own expense.

For further information or to register, contact Chris Mason on cmason@ucu.org.uk / pensions@ucu.org.uk or use the online booking form

NIACE CAMPAIGN - a right to a voice: Survival English for Asylum Seekers Wednesday 10 December 2008, London, 9.45am – 3.15pm Attendance is free

Substantial research evidence shows that language is the key to social integration for newcomers to Britain and also leads to employment giving newcomers an opportunity to contribute to the economy. NIACE calls on a wide range of organisations and individuals to support asylum seekers in the first six months in the UK and offer them 'survival English' within a 'Welcome to Britain' programme of support. This will include getting to know your local area, accessing essential local services and some basic first aid English.

In 2007, the Government changed the rules regarding learners' access to ESOL provision and shockingly asylum seekers were denied access to this essential support during the first six months of their application for asylum. During the government's consultation on ESOL and community cohesion during the period January to April 2008, an overwhelming body of evidence was offered from asylum seekers and made clear how important language was to them. The obligations freely entered into in 1948 were made by government on behalf of the British people. NIACE believes that where government fails to fulfil its obligations, civil society needs to act – firstly to secure support for people at a time of acute vulnerability, secondly to advocate change in public policy.

This conference aims to:

- To raise awareness of the needs of asylum seekers
- To engage with the voluntary sector, refugee community organisations and faith community organisations
- To plan action to set up survival English groups.

For further information look up:

<http://www.niace.org.uk/Conferences/Conferences.htm>

Enquiries to NIACE Conferences Team - Tel: 0116 204 2833: email:gurjit.kaur@niace.org.uk