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Special HE Sector Conference – 11 February 2010

Draft National claim

At the HE Special Sector Conference on 11 February, UCU's national negotiators were authorised to finalise with the other HE trade unions a joint pay claim. Conference agreed an outline claim for a number of pay and pay-related issues but much of the debate was focussed on the need for national talks on job security.

Conference asked the negotiators to submit proposals for the following:

- a pay element approximately equivalent to an increase on all pay points in recognition of the real terms deficit between the 0.5% paid for the period 1 August 2009 to 31 July 2010 and the considerably higher rate of RPI expected for the same period; together with;
- an increase on all pay points of the expected rate of RPI in August 2010 to ensure that there is no real-terms pay cut;
- further possible discussion of other measures to address the position of the low paid;
- the need for jointly-agreed proposals to improve job security, including the issue

of increased workload resulting from job losses.

Conference agreed that the UCU team should press for consideration to be given to the following structural issues:

- removal of points at the bottom of the nationally agreed spine and the extension of the nationally-agreed spine from point 51 to point 64;
- the assimilation of hourly-paid staff to the national pay spine;
- the need for equality impact assessments be carried out and action undertaken to close identified pay gaps;
- the need for positive proposals from the employers to develop a nationally-agreed system of remuneration of external examiners;
- increases to London weighting and the establishment of a working group to consider the development of high cost area supplements;
- ensuring career progression for academic-related staff.

Campaign

Conference agreed that we should seek to agree with the other unions that the national claim should be supported by a joint union campaign strategy involving:

- National support for co-ordination of local activities both within UCU and with other campus unions; working under the collective banner "5 unions/1 demand – defend higher education" ;

- Building a campaign together with students, parents and service users in opposition to the planned devastating funding cuts;
- Challenging Vice Chancellors/Principals and all employer organisations to join with UCU and others in resisting the cuts and fighting for a high quality publicly funded education system;
- Demanding that all proposed redundancies be subject to impact assessment on the workloads of remaining staff, including the impact on professional effectiveness, quality of academic provision and staff well being;
- Approaching our sister unions to organise a national demonstration 'Defend Education, Defend Jobs' in spring 2010.
- Preparing for a national mobilisation for simultaneous industrial action at all HE institutions before the end of this academic year, should the component institutions of UCEA refuse to agree to negotiations on jobs.

Update - Joint unions meet to discuss joint national claim

The HE national trade union side met on 23 February and made good progress towards agreeing a joint claim. UCU negotiators were successful in ensuring that the vast majority of views expressed at Conference were reflected in the outline claim.

The plan is to agree the final document in the next two weeks. Branches/LAs will be kept informed of progress.

Senior Staff Pay

Conference also noted that in some institutions the pay of senior managers has not been restrained in the same way as that of other staff. This situation continues at a time when many UCU members are

threatened with redundancy. Conference therefore instructed HEC

1. to map the growth of senior staff pay over the past five years on a per-institution basis, and to estimate the savings which each institution might make by capping salaries at (a) £150,000 and (b) £120,000; and

2. to campaign in support of a cap on the salaries of public sector staff, including the provision that, in all cases where salaries are permitted to exceed the cap, the identities and role of the individuals receiving such salaries should be published.

HEFCE Workforce Report

HEFCE launched a report on the higher education workforce on 25 February. According to HEFCE, the report is designed to initiate a debate about how higher education should respond to the most pressing challenges for people working in universities and colleges. The report poses a number of questions regarding the nature of industrial relations and collective bargaining in the sector. It refers to the need to increase the flexibility of the sector and to respond to change, to balance reward for its employees with affordability, and the need for a sustainable pensions system. It also questions whether existing contracts and university statutes require change to optimise performance management and workforce flexibility. See

http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2010/10_05/

The report identifies many of the key issues that higher education needs to respond to, and makes a number of points that UCU welcomes. For example, it recognises that it is a high-quality HE workforce, characterised by excellence, creativity and innovation that has delivered outstanding results at national

and international levels for universities. The report also suggests there is broad support for current national bargaining arrangements and the nationally-bargained Framework Agreement.

However, the report raises issues of major concern to the union. These were reflected in the initial UCU press response from UCU's national head of higher education, Michael MacNeil:

'... there is a concern that while signalling support for the current national bargaining process, those commissioning the report have insisted on asking questions to kick off a debate that could destabilise the sector and lead to a worsening of industrial relations. The proposed solutions floated by HEFCE are largely based on jargon and buzzwords drawn from unsupported management theories and the report contains a contradiction between the recognition that the sector performs outstandingly well on the international stage and an obsession with ill-defined notions of performance management.'

The national office will be arranging briefing sessions around the UK for branches/LAs on the implications of the HEFCE report and other policy initiatives. Further details will follow.

Hourly Paid Staff – assimilation to framework agreement

Branches/LAs are reminded of the sign-off procedure in place for any local proposals for the assimilation of hourly paid staff to the framework agreement. There is advice on the process and a checklist that branches/LAs can use in local negotiations was sent to branches/LAs in HEUCU35 and can be found at:

<http://www.ucu.org.uk/circ/html/UCUHE35.html>

Please ensure that your regional office is aware of any on-going negotiations or of any refusal by management to assimilate hourly paid staff to the national pay spine. Nearly 6 years after the framework was agreed, and nearly 4 years after the deadline for implementation, many hourly paid staff are still waiting to feel the benefit of the agreement. If that's the case at your institution please make sure that it gets onto the agenda of your joint meetings.

Privatisation and Outsourcing Survey

With the private sector encroaching ever more deeply into our sector, in 2009 UCU congress asked for the union to conduct a survey to establish the current situation. The survey asks a number of questions regarding the level of private sector involvement, outsourcing and use of agency workers in higher education institutions. Could all branch secretaries, chairs and presidents ensure that someone from their branch has filled in the survey? Fill it in here (preferably by 5 March 2010):

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

UCU has produced a detailed campaign pack for branches telling them how to campaign and negotiate against privatisation or public-private partnerships. You can download it here:

http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/r/e/ucuc_challengingthemarketguide.pdf.

Or you can order hard copies from campaigns@ucu.org.uk

Research performance management and the REF

Research assessment and funding is one of the priority areas for the UCU's Higher Education Committee (HEC). In recent months there has been a particular focus on influencing the development of the Research Excellence Framework (REF). As part of the Stand Up for Research campaign the HEC submitted a detailed response to the funding councils in December. The UCU's response to the consultation, as well as other materials (including the 17,500 signatories calling for HEFCE to withdraw their controversial 'impact' proposals), are available on the website at:

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

Although these interventions have been mainly over national policy matters, the REF is already having an impact at the institutional level. In the run up to the 2013 REF a number of universities are attempting to bring in new 'research performance' measures for academic staff. We are seeing an increasing micromanagement of individual research plans as well as the application of unacceptable capability or performance criteria (both in relation to grant income and publication behaviour). It is clear that these pressures are likely to increase in the coming period, particularly after the recent announcement by HEFCE that the research funding formula will be even more selective in the 2010-11 academic year.

The Higher Education Committee is keen to get a better picture of the new 'research performance' processes that are being introduced or piloted at a number of universities. Please can you send in any information, including details of the management's proposals and local UCU

responses, to Rob Copeland, policy officer
rcopeland@ucu.org.uk

UCU Fighting Fund

Although taking strike action is a last resort, sometimes it is necessary to do so in order to combat intransigent managements. It's always tough to lose a day's pay, and so UCU has set up a fighting fund to support members facing difficulties as a consequence of supporting the union's actions.

HOW TO DONATE

Make a direct bank transfer, or set up a regular standing order, to:

Account name: UCU Fighting Fund

Sort code: 08-60-01

Account no: 20179432

Reference: 'Fighting Fund 2010'

or send a cheque (payable to 'University and College Union') to:

Fighting Fund 2010
Finance Dept
University and College Union
Carlow Street
London NW1 7LH