

Jo Grady
General Secretary
University and College Union

By email

31 July 2023

Dear Jo,

2023-24 Negotiating Round

I write to you following our meeting on 27 July 2023, which was the third in a series of discussions to explore the obstacles to resolving the current dispute and whether a basis could be identified for the resumption of negotiations between UCEA and the Joint HE Trade Unions. We have had three sets of exploratory talks with UCU and the Joint Union Side Secretaries since 14 July. In these meetings, the focus has been UCU's requests as set out in its letter of 30 June:

- UCEA should recommend an immediate end to pay deductions and a return of deductions already taken
- A commitment from employers to recognise staff's entitlement to leave and to a reasonable workload on their return to normal working
- Any interim agreement will be subject to consultation with UCU members
- An improvement in pay to deal with the cost-of-living crisis

The main focus of these exploratory talks has been UCU's request for the return of deductions for participation in the marking and assessment boycott. UCEA has explained that HEIs have been focused on the impact of the boycott on students, that their policies for withholding pay for MAB were clearly communicated prior to the boycott, and that many staff did not participate in the boycott and have worked tirelessly to mitigate its impact. It would, therefore, be unfair to return deducted pay to staff who had already participated in the boycott.

However, UCEA has tried to show some flexibility in our talks. On the first three points of your letter, UCEA has offered the following:

- A recommendation to HEIs that where planned pay deductions, as per the HEI's policy, for assessments not marked, have not yet been withheld, that these are deducted on a phased basis to ease the financial impact on UCU members who have participated in the MAB
- A recommendation that employers recognise the pre-booked leave arrangements of staff and the importance of having a reasonable workload upon the resumption of normal working
- An acceptance that any interim agreement is subject to consultation with UCU members

Given the majority of our time in the exploratory talks has been taken up with discussions on pay deductions, we would welcome your views on whether the UCEA proposal provides a basis for reconvening our adjourned meeting.

In respect of the pay award, UCU's pay claim is for RPI+2%, which would currently be equivalent to 12.7%. This is far beyond the sector's affordability. Given the financial pressures facing the sector, UCEA was at the very edge of its mandate with this year's pay uplift of 5-8%, nearly half of which was delivered six months early to address cost of living pressures. This uplift prioritised the disproportionate effect of high inflation falling on the lower paid. HEIs also have to factor in pay progression for around half of their staff on the pay spine, typically worth 3% on top of the base pay uplift. The overall affordability for the majority of participating employers has not improved and so we do not believe it would be correct change our position, which is that the 2023-24 pay round is closed and should not be re-opened. As you will be aware the remaining portion of the 2023-24 uplift is due to be implemented from 1 August 2023.

UCEA is willing to work with UCU and the other unions on a joint, independently facilitated review of sector finances. Given the wide difference of views between the unions and the employers on the ability of the sector to pay higher increases, reaching an agreed understanding is an essential precursor to discussions.

I am copying this letter to the Joint Union Side Secretaries, to be shared with the wider Union Side. UCEA will be in touch with the Joint Union Side Secretaries to suggest dates for the purpose of agreeing the composition, timetable and terms of reference of the joint review of sector finances.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Raj Jethwa". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Raj Jethwa
Chief Executive

cc Shahenda Suliman, UCU
 Ruth Smith, UNISON