

HE pay dispute...

Joint union strike action is coming – name the days

Three of the four other higher education trade unions are now balloting and will hopefully soon be joining UCU in taking industrial action on pay, casualisation and the gender pay gap.

UCU officials and UCU Left consider the measly improvement from 1.0% to 1.1% and the still more grudging talks over the gender pay gap and the abuse of casualisation nowhere near being acceptable.

On the other hand, this small improvement on what the employers said would be their ‘final’ offer shows that our action is having an effect.

Gender

We can win this dispute, but will need to carefully plan for action to win. First we need to remember the nature of the dispute – action on casualisation and the gender pay gap as well as the headline pay figure.

The four pay briefings taking place across the UK provide us with a starting point for this. However, we then need to make them planning meetings for the forthcoming successful industrial action.

Our pay has fallen by 14.5% since 2009 in real terms. Increased pension and national insurance contributions have further pushed down our real income. The costs of commuting and living in areas of high housing costs have meant still greater cuts in real disposable incomes.

Casualisation is still affecting

around 75,000 staff, despite some important UCU successes. There have been few real moves to address pay inequalities based, for instance, on gender – where we still see a 12.6% gap. On race and disability it is no better. We cannot wait for the next century to see these inequalities disappear.

It is no wonder that members voted by large majorities for strike action and action short of strike (ASOS) last term.

Escalating

UCU committed at its Congress in May and Higher Education Committee (HEC) in July to an escalating plan of action involving strike action and ASOS in the ‘autumn term’ (HEC/1014).

Strikes provide an opportunity for joint action with the other unions, allow the whole membership to participate and give confidence to members that they have power.

UCU needs to urgently coordinate with the other campus unions to name strike dates running from October through to December.

These strikes, it was agreed, would be to ‘support’ the introduction of a setting, marking and assessment boycott.

We know that this will have maximum impact towards the end of the semester so should be announced to begin in November or December.

An assessment boycott late in the term after strikes will minimise threats of 100% deductions for partial performance and build support for a position that such

threats will be met with national strike action.

However, successful action requires participation of members.

This requires maximum visibility of the action e.g. plastering campus with posters and other campaign materials, branch and building/department/school meetings and campus campaign teams.

Branches are encouraged to invite NEC members to speak at meetings.

Industrial action is also an opportunity to recruit new members and their involvement further strengthens the action.

Engaging with the other campus unions and students’ unions to build support for the action are equally important, as is involvement of local communities and the wider labour movement.

Publicity

UCU nationally and locally needs to step up the publicity and media campaign but we also need to publicise the fact that we are fighting for the future of a publicly funded higher education system that is free to students.

We need to oppose the Tory HE Bill, which aims to privatise and asset-strip higher education, and to make alliances with other organisations fighting cuts.

There is significant opposition to this Bill, for instance Martin Wolf’s *Financial Times* piece calling the HE Bill a ‘disaster [that] has to be stopped’ and the NUS national demonstration on 19 November, which we need to publicise and support.

Proposed motion for branches on the HE pay campaign

This UCU branch notes;

1. The most recent ‘final’ offer from the employers’ body UCEA. This branch believes that the offer is totally unsatisfactory. The offer includes some very small movement to talks on gender pay and casualisation. While this is totally inadequate, the fact that the employers have made another ‘final’ offer including this (when they said they could do nothing on these issues) shows that our industrial action is having an effect and is hitting the employers. Otherwise they would not have made another offer. We therefore need to step up the action.
2. Our pay demand was made on the basis of addressing the continued drop in real pay, rises in National Insurance contributions, rises in pension contributions and cuts in pension provision.
3. Members have been inspired by the desire of UCU to place equality issues, specifically the gender pay gap and abuse of casualised contracts, as central components to our pay demands.
4. The UCU pay briefings at the end of this month provide branches with an opportunity to discuss restarting and escalating the pay campaign since the action at the beginning of the summer.
5. Other campus trade unions including EIS, UNITE and UNISON are currently engaged in balloting members to join the pay dispute.

This UCU branch believes;

1. UCEA’s latest pay offer fails to address any of the elements of the pay claim. The employers have to demonstrate action to end the gender pay gap and the abuse of casualised contracts rather than just talking about it.
2. Escalating industrial action including strike action is required to ensure a fair settlement of the pay demand is achieved.

This UCU branch resolves;

1. To reject the ‘latest’ offer from the employers.
2. To call on UCU to restart the pay campaign with new publicity and material focusing upon the continued discrimination faced by women and casualised staff in Higher Education.
3. To mandate our delegates to the pay briefing meeting to call for an escalation of the pay campaign with a return to industrial action including strike action leading to action short of strike this semester.
4. For UCU to name dates for strike action beginning the end of October and escalating ASOS later in the term.