

#NoDetriment

Keep The Action On Until We Get A Clear Settlement



A week is a long time in politics – and also in Higher Education management apparently! On Tuesday 13th March the limit of affordability for employers, while conceding that members of staff value a defined benefit pension scheme, was £42K at an accrual rate of 85th and a CPI cap of 2.5%. By the end of the next week (10 days later) the status quo was being guaranteed, at least until April 2019, and any long-term changes would ensure a ‘broadly comparable’ pension would be the outcome.

This apparent change of heart of the employers is being scrutinised by striking UCU members with a fine-tooth comb due to their understandable lack of trust in their

managements. Unsurprisingly, members are finding the change of heart might not be quite as great as we first thought. April 2019 is the earliest possible date of implementation of any USS changes so conceding ‘status quo’ until then is not a concession.

Our Action Gets Results

The offer from UUK is however significant and does tell us much about what has happened in our 14 days of strike action and also what we need to do next.

Back in February, a wholly defined contribution scheme was “the only affordable option available” and defined benefit was a

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utopian dream. According to one commentator, 'it is unclear how anything less than [massive disruption] that could bring about a proposal that conforms to UCU policy.' Well, we now know the disruption did work.

First the employers moved to offer a (very poor) defined benefit scheme after three weeks of action. However, that offer was completely inadequate. Accepting it would have been disastrous, amounting to a 19% cut in value for employees at the absolute minimum. That deal was thrown out by the mobilisation of rank and file members of UCU on 12th and 13th March. In university after university, college after college, members met quickly and decided to oppose it.

Now, 10 days later we have a more serious offer that could get us to a point where the existing defined benefit scheme was maintained and even protected in the future. But the offer is not yet sufficient.

It is our action that has achieved this. It is only the threat of our action next term that can now win a settlement that is worth the paper it is written on

We Are Winning: Keep The Action On.

The UUK offer does provide the basis for settling this dispute but ONLY if the ambiguity and obfuscation is removed.

- The 'status quo' must not simply be guaranteed to 'at least April 2019' and must also be accompanied by a commitment to #NoDetriment if (for some reason) the Independent Expert Group discovers that the valuation is in deficit and changes must be made. Any changes must leave current and future members no worse off than under the status quo.
- The 'current regulatory framework' has created the mess we are now in.

Therefore we must demand any changes to the scheme must not be undermined by the 'current regulatory framework'. This means action should not be called off until USS JNC, Trustees and Pension Regulator have agreed the proposal.

- 'Guaranteed' benefits must be genuinely guaranteed, i.e. defined. It should not mean guarantees for a minimum pension topped up by hoped-for additional payments dependent upon the vagaries of the market. Guaranteed benefit must mean defined benefit, if it doesn't, the guarantee is worthless.
- 'Inter-generational fairness and equality considerations' must mean no to a two-tier scheme whereby new members get worse pension benefits. The casualised staff joining our strike deserve the same rights to the same pension as the rest of us as soon as they get jobs. In the medium term we should resume the debate about Final Salary vs. CARE. Currently those facing discrimination in career progression also get discriminated against in their pensions due to the way the current CARE scheme. Equal pay for work of equal value must also mean equal pensions for work of equal value.

This offer by UUK has not been negotiated with the UCU elected negotiators. Indeed they saw it for the first time just one hour before it was released to members. They have not been able to change a single word.

UCU branches must now mandate their delegates to Wednesday's branch reps meeting to demand the negotiators return to talks with UUK and ensure the words on the deal are understood by all to be consistent with those above. If UUK are serious and agree with our interpretation then this can be resolved in days.

If not, then the deal is not worth the paper it is written on, and the action must continue.

#NoDetriment: Do not call off the action or ballot members until we have secured a commitment from the employers not to make detrimental changes to members' benefits in the current valuation round

#NoDetriment Do not send it out to ballot by members until USS JNC, Trustees and tPR have agreed it

#NoDetriment: Keep the action on until UUK agree to UCU's demands