

Dear colleague

We are writing to you about the next steps in the Four Fights disputes.

UCU has been in negotiations over the 'Four Fights' dispute over casualisation, equality, workload, and pay. The dispute saw the entire HE sector mobilised, with strike action in 60 universities in November/December 2019 and 74 universities earlier this year and solidarity campaigns from other branches across the union.

As you were **previously notified**, we have received an **offer from UCEA**, consisting of a pay offer of 1.8%, and a series of expectations on employers with respect to casualisation, equal pay and workload. UCEA has previously refused to bargain in these last three areas entirely, making a set of expectations a significant step forward in the HE sector. Nonetheless, it is clear that this offer does not demonstrate the duty of care that we expected UCEA, and our individual employers, to show towards staff across the sector. Moreover, UCEA has declined negotiators' requests to meet to negotiate a memorandum of implementation with respect to the current Covid-19 conditions.

In May, UCU asked branches to consult their members and send representatives to a branch delegates meeting, to make recommendations to UCU's Higher Education Committee (HEC). On 8 June, the HEC met and voted to adopt the recommendations of the Four Fights branch delegate meeting, which were as follows:

- to reject the offer as being insufficient to settle the current dispute;
- to ask members to take a view on the offer by balloting members with a recommendation to reject; and
- if rejected, to pause a re-ballot for further industrial action until the Autumn.

UCU is now conducting a consultative ballot of members on the UCEA final offer. At the end of this email, there is a link to vote. The ballot will close on 29 July 2020 at noon. Please vote before then.

Below, you will find information about the outcomes and decisions that will arise if members vote to reject or accept the current offer.

## **HEC's recommendation to reject**

The Four Fights dispute represents the first time that UCU has engaged in sustained national action over casualisation, inequality and workload in our sector. This dispute has broken new ground. Prior to our 22 days of strike action, UCEA refused to negotiate with UCU on these issues, let alone to recommend meaningful change. It was your first week of

action that brought them back to the table, and your continued action that kept them there.

The result is an offer which places expectations on employers to reduce their dependence on casualised employment practices, develop action plans to close the race and gender pay gaps, and reiterates their health and safety obligations with regard to workload.

The question is, are these expectations sufficient to end this dispute? The branch delegates meeting and the HEC both believe the answer is no.

The expectations in UCEA's offer do not go far enough, and lack sufficient guarantees regarding their implementation. The current Covid-19 crisis has shone a spotlight on HE employment practices, as it has on other sectors of the economy. Many institutions are responding to the crisis with increased job insecurity and dubious employment practices. In this climate, we are concerned that they will not follow through on the expectations in the current offer. With job losses mounting in the sector because of predictions of next year's finances, we may need to call on members to take further action in the future.

HEC is therefore recommending you vote to REJECT the UCEA final offer.

## **What are the outcomes of my vote?**

Whichever way members vote, UCU will continue the fight.

To support branch negotiations, UCU will create concise negotiation guidance packs for each of the expectations contained in UCEA's current offer.

At a sector level, UCU will call an HE special sector conference in the autumn, for members to review progress and decide our next collective steps. If we are still in dispute over the 2019-2020 claim, this conference will have the power to consider plans for further industrial action, and what form this action would take. This conference will also have the power to propose a new UK-wide claim to defend jobs.

- If members vote to reject the final offer then UCU will confirm the result to employer's representatives at UCEA. At this point, individual HE employers, and UCEA as their representative body, may or may not choose to engage with UCU over the expectations in the offer on workload, casualisation, and gender and race pay inequality. UCEA has advised its members to impose the 1.8% headline pay offer as of August 2019.

A reject vote also means that UCU will remain in dispute over the 2019-2020 offer.

- If members vote to accept the final offer then this will be communicated to the employer's representatives at UCEA. UCU would demand that the joint work on gender pay and casualised contracts and workloads be taken up immediately by employers as a demonstration of their commitment to the offer, and would push at a UK and local

level for this to happen. UCU would keep HEC and members updated on the progress of local negotiations, and UK negotiators would meet with UCEA regularly to discuss sector wide progress.

An accept vote also means that UCU would no longer be in dispute over the 2019-2020 offer.

Voting will be open from today until noon on 29 July 2020. HEC recommends that you vote to reject this offer.