

IN THIS ISSUE OF HE NEWS: NATIONAL NEGOTIATIONS AND PENSIONS CHANGES UPDATE

Employers Refusing to Negotiate – September Ballot

Earlier this year, the national trade union side (comprising EIS, GMB, UCU, UNISON, UNITE) submitted the first ever national claim to UCEA. The claim included three strands:

- v Pay - the claim asked for no real-terms pay cut this year and some underpinning for the lower paid in the sector;
- v Job security – the claim asked for national negotiations leading to jointly agreed proposals to improve job security across the sector;
- v Updating the framework agreement – the claim asked for the negotiations to address a range of issues associated with the national framework agreement, including those related to our equality agenda (e.g. hourly-paid staff assimilation and proposals to close the gender pay gap)

To date there have been four meetings of the full JNCHES bargaining machinery to discuss the claim. To date the employers' side offer is:

- v Pay – for the second year running, the employers are offering a pay cut. RPI inflation in the year to June 2010 was 5.0%, whereas the employers' current

offer is 0.4%. It is highly likely that UCEA will also argue for a pay freeze for the next two years.

- v Job security – the employers continue to refuse national level talks on developing jointly agreed proposals to improve job security across the sector. With more than 22,000 HE jobs at risk, it is clear that the employers' refusal to enter negotiations on this matter is irresponsible and unacceptable.
- v Framework agreement – no offer on our claim to update the national framework agreement to ensure that it remains relevant to the HE workforce.

Sector conference held on 31 May agreed that should no acceptable offer on either job security or pay be made then the union should organise national strike action to commence at the beginning of Autumn term.

Employers can avoid dispute

It is, of course, in the employers' gift to avoid this dispute. They could agree to enter meaningful talks to produce jointly-agreed proposals on redundancy avoidance. They could also make a more

credible offer on the other elements of the joint union claim. A final meeting of the national negotiating body will be held on 28 July.

However, signals as regards the employers' willingness to talk about our key issues are not good. It seems very likely, therefore, that to make progress members must be prepared to take industrial action. It is a disgrace that at a time of crisis, the employers expect our members to take a pay cut year after year and continue to refuse to talk about developing a national set of procedures to deal with the huge anxiety in the sector in relation to job losses.

Our claim is fair. Times are difficult and union negotiators recognise this but the employers' stance is taking a bad situation and making it worse.

A special meeting of the union's Higher Education Committee will be held on 3 September to agree the final details for the ballot. Branches should be organising meetings from 6 September onwards.

Further update

The outcome of the last meeting with the employers will be reported shortly after 28 July.

Battle Looms over Pensions

The employer-generated assault on the final-salary Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) has taken a step forward. The lines are also being drawn for an attack on the final-salary Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS).

USS changes – next steps for campaign

In an unprecedented move, the Chair's casting vote was used to force through the employers' proposals to 'reform' the USS scheme. This was despite a consultative ballot in which 96% of UCU members voting rejected the employers' proposals in favour of the package put together by UCU to ensure the sustainability of the fund.

Branches/LAs are reminded that UCU negotiators accepted that there was a need for change and, in a genuine attempt to reach agreement with the employers, proposed an increase in members' contributions, an increase in the retirement age for new entrants to the scheme and a cost-sharing mechanism should future increases be required. However, the employers seem determined to create a two-tier pension system as a step towards phasing out the final salary scheme and their objective of reducing what they contribute to the scheme.

If implemented, the employers' agenda will mean immediately:

- v Lower annual pension increases;
- v An increase in the normal pension age;
- v The abandonment of a final salary scheme for new entrants, creating a two-tier pension scheme with future pressure on existing members;
- v Existing members who are at risk of redundancy or on fixed term contracts who have a break of 6 months or more in service will not be able to rejoin a final salary scheme;
- v An increase in contributions for employees with no progressive proposals to make high earners pay more;
- v Removal of the right for individuals made redundant to take their pension unreduced.

The employers' proposals will be considered by the USS board on 22 July. It is inevitable that the employers' package will be approved by a majority of the board. What happens next is that the trustee company (USS) must consult with scheme members. UCU is arguing that if the employers' proposals are to have any legitimacy then there must be a ballot of all USS members on both our proposals and the employers' proposals. A token consultation exercise will not fool anyone.

The consultation is likely to start in September and close sometime in November 2010. The results of the consultation then have to be considered

by various internal USS bodies, including the Joint Negotiating Committee. The intention is to introduce the changes with effect from 1 April 2011.

Branches/LAs have been sent model motions with suggested actions to ensure that the consultation is not a sham.

UCU has a clear mandate to move to a ballot for industrial action should changes be made to the scheme which have not been agreed with us. We hope that by ensuring the consultation process is meaningful and by taking account of the responses then it will not prove necessary to move to a ballot for industrial action.

For further information see

<http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=4598>

Teachers' Pensions Scheme

The Hutton inquiry commissioned by the Government to consider the position of public sector pension schemes is a clear threat to many of our members in the HE sector. UCU will be working closely with the other teaching unions and the TUC to defend pension rights.

Taking the ... with your money

UCU has attacked an unelected quango for funding university employers to the tune of £627,000 to help them make the case for reducing their staff's pensions.

The Employers Pensions Forum (EPF), a group of university vice-chancellors lobbying for draconian changes to USS, spent thousands of pounds of taxpayers' money on things like catering and a PR campaign.

The money, provided by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), bankrolled a number of reports looking at the future of the USS scheme. However, it also covered costs linked directly to EPF's PR offensive, as well as room hire and catering.

The biggest project, which totalled £334,000, included £60,000 to a pension expert who backed EPF's position; £15,000 for a website; £16,000 on communications; £45,000 on legal advice and £10,000 on room hire and catering.

It is appalling that our taxes have been used to undermine our pensions. We imagine that most people will be shocked to learn that taxpayers' money has been used by a universities' lobby group to fund a PR campaign and their catering.

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