

HEC Update

Members of UCU's Higher Education Committee (HEC) met on Friday the 9th October to decide the union's response to the Employers' final pay offer of 1% for 2015/16 and its ongoing strategy in relation to pay.

New JNCHES

HEC was updated on the recent New JNCHES dispute meetings where UCU pressed the employer's representatives at UCEA to improve the final pay offer, details of which were reported in HE News 40; http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/i/o/ucu_henews40_may15.pdf

HEC discussed the final pay offer and the UCEA suggestion of some future work dealing with data analysis in regards to gender pay and HESA atypical workers. It was made clear that the data analysis work, however useful, was conditional on accepting the 1% pay offer.

Branch consultation meetings

HEC considered the feedback from a series of branch consultation meetings (UCUHE253) that took place in Glasgow, London, Birmingham and Manchester between 23 September and 2 October. These briefings were called to further consult branches following the results of the member pay consultation indicative ballot of June 2015. A total of 91 branches were represented at these meetings. A further 21 branches that could not attend sent separate responses to the questions asked in UCUHE259.

The HEC heard that there was a clear appetite to maintain pay as a key campaigning and negotiating issue. The briefings highlighted other key campaign themes as well as considered branch and member willingness to take action on the 2015 final offer.

The key issues raised by branch representatives were;

- Pay is an important issue however the majority of branches did not feel their members would support taking sustained and escalating action for an improvement to the 2015 final offer of 1%.
- The majority supported a longer term campaign that covered issues such as; senior pay, pay inequality, casualisation, loss in the value of pay and comparable professions. The campaign must also be able to attract support from both activists and less engaged members.
- 14 branches did support a move to an early ballot at the end of 2015 and action in January 2016. The majority of feedback however would indicate January 2016 would not be well supported and UCU could lose a ballot if the timing was too early.
- A key reason influencing the timing of the ballot is the critical need to campaign and win a yes vote in the event of an unsatisfactory offer. The yes vote must be for both strike action and action short of a strike. The June 2015 consultative ballot had resulted in a yes vote for action short of a strike but a no for strike action.
- It was also a repeat theme of the discussions in regards to industrial action that it would take sustained and escalating strike action, combined with a marking and

assessment boycott, to shift the employers. The majority of branches expressed genuine concern about being able to deliver this type of action, whether now or in the near future.

Options for next steps

HEC considered four options for next steps that broadly fell into two areas for decision; the first two options were based on a short campaign period with a ballot and action to start in late 2015 or January 2016. A separate motion in line with these suggestions was put to HEC covering a similar timetable. All three were focused on the 2015 final offer.

The second two options set out a longer period for an escalating campaign starting now and running into and during the next New JNCHES round in March 2016. Option 3 proposed an early submission of the claim and the consideration of action linked to the New JNCHES timetable.

The Option 4 was based on a longer timetable focused on the autumn of 2016 and beyond.

Both of these options meant that the rejected 1% final offer would not be the basis of any action and that UCU would reluctantly NOTE the final offer. This means UCU will not accept the final offer but will not be taking any action in connection with it.

Option 3

After a wide ranging debate where all options were considered, a vote was taken and Option 3 was approved by majority.

HEC has agreed the following; to develop a campaign now and run it into and throughout the build up to the 2016 negotiating round (October 2015 – March 2016). Seek to develop and submit a joint claim early (January) and move to ballot and action in April or May based on a 2016 dispute, if the offer is unacceptable. UCU NOTES the outcome of 2015 and considers action in regards to 2016 only.

A ballot and action could take place in April or May or ballot over the summer for action at the start of new academic year autumn 2016.

The longer timeline enables a sustained period to campaign and link action to leverage over the 2016 claim and negotiating round and the final offer. UCU needs to seek agreement with the other HE unions to submit the claim early.

HEC also agreed by majority the following actions;

1. That a strategy should be developed around Option 3.
2. That the 2015 final offer is NOTED.
3. That this approach is communicated to branches and discussed with the other unions as a matter of urgency.
4. That HEC delegates to the national negotiators the development of a campaign and possible industrial action timetable based on Option 3.
5. That HEC delegates to the Chair the calling of a Special HEC to consider development and agree the claim for 2016.

<http://www.ucu.org.uk/he2015>