

Paul Bridge and Ruth Levin
Joint Union Side Secretaries
Joint Higher Education Sector Trade Unions

By email

11 May 2021

Dear Paul and Ruth,

Full and final offer – New JNCHES negotiating round 2021-22

Following the conclusion of the third New JNCHES meeting of the 2021-22 pay round, I am writing to set out the details of the Employers' full and final offer. Employers are committed to a pay outcome that is fair and sustainable, within a context of increasing costs, uncertainty and significant financial constraints resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. This includes substantial increases in the deficits of university-sponsored pension schemes, as well as static and in some cases falling per capita fee levels and research income. Many of the costs associated with the pandemic are expected to remain high for some time to come. Many HEIs have used reserves and nearly all have reduced capital spending to meet current funding requirements, showing the importance they place on their staff. The offer set out below has been very carefully constructed to balance affordability for our member institutions across a wide spectrum of financial viability, with a meaningful uplift for staff in the sector.

Pay uplift

In respect of the uplift to the pay spine, UCEA's offer is for an increase in the paybill of 1.6 percent, which is a substantial additional investment of £164 million in round terms. Our proposal for the structure of the award is set out in the appendix to this letter. The uplift would be graded in such a way as to award increases of between 1.54 percent and 3.6 percent for pay points below Spine Point 22, with an increase of 1.5 percent to all pay points at Spine Point 22 or above. Furthermore, employers would want us to note that around half of the staff covered by the negotiations are also eligible for additional progression pay increases ranging from 1.5 percent to 3 percent.

We have listened carefully to the arguments made by the union side. We hope that you will recognise that as a result there was a significant improvement upon our opening offer and that we moved twice over the course of this negotiating round. The structure of the uplift would enable HEIs to meet the Voluntary Living Wage rate of £9.50 an hour at a 35-hour week. It would also ensure an uplift on all Spine Points above the current rate of inflation as measured by the Consumer Price Index including owner occupiers' housing costs (CPIH, 1.0 percent, March 2021).

This award compares favourably with other sectors. Most public sector workers falling under the remit of the Westminster Government will be subject to a pay freeze for 2021-22, with a pay rise of £250 for workers earning below £24,000. In the not-for-profit sector the median pay award stands at 1.3 percent.

Pay spine compression

Following confirmation of the pay uplift, UCEA is willing to commit to the establishment of a New JNCHES working group to examine the drivers, impact and potential recommendations in respect of the compression of the pay spine. The group would examine this issue to see what recommendations can be made jointly and to ensure that any proposals are properly costed. Our preference is for such a working group to develop a jointly agreed position which both UCEA and the trade unions could test with members in preparation for the beginning of the 2022-23 annual New JNCHES pay round.

Career development

Promoting career development is something which our members, as good employers, support. We would, therefore, propose the establishment of a joint working group to examine career development and training opportunities. We understand the aspiration of the joint unions that such a working group would explore, but not be limited to, technicians and the Technician Commitment and academic-related staff. We would anticipate that the working group would be able to identify good practice with regard to career progression from within and outside the sector. However, it would remain a matter for HEIs to determine their own policies on progression between grades.

Graduate Teaching Assistants

With reference to Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) contracts, UCEA is prepared to engage in joint work with the sector unions to establish information on the nature of GTAs and similar roles, and the nature of the issues faced by your members and ours in the use of such roles.

Workload management

As a sector of autonomous employers there is a range of approaches to monitoring workloads both between HEIs as well as in relation to different staff groups. Although workload is not within the scope of New JNCHES, UCEA is willing to recommend through its existing structure of the Higher Education Safety and Health (HESH) Forum that HEIs adopt the HSE Stress Management Standards approach (or suitable equivalent system), where they are not already doing so. UCEA wishes to continue to work with the trade unions outside JNCHES, through the HESH Forum and through the roundtable group on coronavirus workforce issues. This could include:

- Potential changes to working practices and the impact on workload caused by the pandemic.
- Local action to reduce the incidence of work-related stress ill-health.

Redeployment

Although redeployment is not within the scope of New JNCHES, UCEA would agree to enter into discussions with the joint trade unions outside of New JNCHES to explore whether there are examples of best practice and mechanisms which could be promoted to HEIs and further improve visibility of opportunities at different institutions.

Gender, ethnicity and disability pay gaps

UCEA and its members share the commitment of the sector trade unions to taking action to reduce the gender, ethnicity and disability pay gaps. This commitment was highlighted by the UCEA report *Caught at the crossroads: outlining an intersectional approach to gender and ethnicity pay gaps in HE*. UCEA's commitments in respect of the gender pay gap, and the steps already being taken by HEIs, were further

underlined by the UCEA report *Taking action: Tackling the gender pay gap* which was also referenced in the joint unions' claim. UCEA would, therefore, support the creation of a New JNCHES working group to examine the intersectional data to the extent it is available, and potential institutional-level solutions based on best practice. UCEA is also willing to endorse and encourage declarations in the collection of data on protected characteristics, in line with GDPR requirements.

UCEA was pleased to note the trade union acceptance of its position that any national agreement or a binding framework setting out how the sector will make progress in these areas is not within our mandate. However, like our members, we share the aspiration to see improvements in these very important areas and believe that data and case studies can be used to promote real change. A working group could produce clear time-limited outputs to show what good practice looks like and the principles underpinning that practice, both within and outside of the sector and recommend that HEIs adopt similar practices where they are able to do so. A working group could examine the national data, giving prominence to the findings, and also invite HEIs to submit and/or publish their own data on a voluntary basis. The work could then include identifying exemplar organisations who can help institutions who volunteer as pilots on their journey to reduce equality pay gaps.

In summary, UCEA believes that the above offer comprehensively meets many key elements of the trade union claim, where these fall within the New JNCHES remit, not least an inflation-beating pay offer. We hope, therefore, that individual trade unions will be able to recommend the offer to their members so that the new academic year, with all its uncertainties, can at least commence with a clear way forward on pay.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Raj Jethwa". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Raj Jethwa
Chief Executive

Appendix: UCEA final offer – New JNCHES negotiating round 2021-22

Points 3 – 22 only

Spine point	Salary from August 2020	Uplift		Salary from August 2021
	£	£	%	£
3	16,736	602	3.60%	17,338
4	17,046	550	3.23%	17,596
5	17,361	540	3.11%	17,901
6	17,682	530	3.00%	18,212
7	18,009	520	2.89%	18,529
8	18,342	510	2.78%	18,852
9	18,709	500	2.67%	19,209
10	19,133	490	2.56%	19,623
11	19,612	480	2.45%	20,092
12	20,130	470	2.33%	20,600
13	20,675	460	2.22%	21,135
14	21,236	450	2.12%	21,686
15	21,814	440	2.02%	22,254
16	22,417	430	1.92%	22,847
17	23,067	420	1.82%	23,487
18	23,754	420	1.77%	24,174
19	24,461	410	1.68%	24,871
20	25,217	410	1.63%	25,627
21	25,941	400	1.54%	26,341
22	26,715	401	1.50%	27,116