

Jo Grady
General Secretary
University and College Union

By email

4 September 2023

Dear Jo,

2023-24 Negotiating Round

I write further to my letter to you of 4 August, to which I have still not received a reply. In that letter I set out proposals to resolve the outstanding aspects of the 2023-24 New JNCHEs negotiating round.

The Joint Union Side Secretaries explained that all trade unions would all be able to revert by 16 Wednesday August, allowing for the internal processes to take place, including UCU's emergency HEC meeting on Monday 14 August. It is now a month since my letter and failing to respond is unfair to any remaining students seeking to progress in life but suffering as a result of UCU's marking and assessment boycott.

The proposals contained in my letter included convening a meeting with all five sector trade unions to agree the terms of reference and membership of the independent assessment of sector finances. We proposed that this meeting should be facilitated by Acas.

HE institutions are essential to providing opportunities for people of all backgrounds, driving social mobility and improving life chances and the quality of life through their social and cultural impact. However, significant changes to our sector's funding models have created new pressures for institutions, placing increasing strain on industrial relations over the last decade. One objective of our proposed review of sector finances, therefore, might be for HEIs and unions to reach a shared understanding of a sustainable funding model for higher education.

Our proposals also recognised the significant progress that was made earlier in the year when terms of reference for further negotiations were agreed through Acas collective conciliation. Those terms of reference, signed-off by both parties in March, offered the opportunity to work together on issues of importance to employers and unions alike – on the pay spine, workload, contract types and pay gaps. We proposed further meetings, as required, to finalise these terms of reference. This would enable us to begin the important work in each of the four areas identified within them. We proposed that we jointly approach Acas to consider facilitation of these meetings.

Although we have yet to receive formal confirmation from UCU, UCEA understands that UCU has been conducting an e-ballot of its higher education members on the continuation of the marking and assessment boycott. We also understand that that UCU plans to call strike action and to open a new industrial action ballot this month. As you know, the 2023-24 pay round is closed and the remaining portion of the 2023-24 uplift was implemented from 1 August 2023. It seems senseless to inflict further damage on students and staff through unnecessary industrial action.

UCEA's proposals in respect of the joint review of sector finances, together with commitments to negotiate on the pay spine, pay gaps, workload and contract types, is significant and offers the opportunity to make substantial progress in these areas.

I very much hope that the sector trade unions share UCEA's aspiration to improve the industrial relations climate within the sector and bring to an end the cycle of industrial action which has been a persistent feature of pay rounds over recent years that has focused on students learning.

I will be writing in similar terms to the Joint Union Side Secretaries.

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

cc Shahenda Suliman, UCU
 Ruth Smith, UNISON