

Shahenda Suliman and Ruth Smith
Joint Union Side Secretaries
Joint Higher Education Sector Trade Unions

By email

16 June 2023

Dear Ruth and Shahenda,

2023-24 New JNCHES negotiating round

Thank you for your letter of 25 May 2023.

As you will recall, in January UCEA and the unions agreed to amend the procedure for the 2023-24 pay round so that we could begin and conclude the pay negotiations on an earlier and accelerated timescale, in order to seek to address the cost of living pressures facing staff in the sector. Negotiations on non-pay items would commence only once the negotiations on pay, including the dispute resolution process, had been concluded.

The acceleration in 2023-24 negotiations led to a minimum uplift of £1,000 on all points from February 2023, with a further increase planned from August. The pay uplift for 2023-24 is at the limits of the sector's affordability and cannot be revisited. Given that UCEA represents approximately 150 HE institutions (HEIs) in collective pay negotiations, we have to balance affordability with our shared desire for a meaningful pay uplift. Aggregate data on sector finances do not provide an adequate explanation of affordability for individual HEIs. However, in preparation for future negotiating rounds, UCEA is willing to work with the trade unions to arrive at a shared perspective on sector finances. We propose an independently facilitated exercise to establish the factual position in relation to funding and the financial challenges facing institutions.

[In February](#) the unions and UCEA agreed that dispute resolution in respect of pay had been exhausted. We also jointly agreed, through Acas, to develop terms of reference for negotiations on non-pay items. Once those terms of reference were agreed, UCEA undertook to consult its members on a firm mandate for time-limited negotiations on each of these areas.

UCEA remains committed to this process and to further negotiations on the basis of the jointly agreed Acas Terms of Reference. However, to date the Joint Higher Education Trade Unions have not communicated that they are willing to continue negotiations using the Acas Terms of Reference.

I would be grateful if the unions are able to **confirm that they accept the Acas terms of reference as the basis for further talks**, and that they are willing to pause industrial action for those talks to proceed. If the unions are unable to provide this confirmation, regrettably, UCEA will now regard the Acas terms of reference as lapsed.

The pay uplift was implemented with effect from February, following the conclusion of the 2023-24 pay negotiations. HE institutions permitted us to accelerate this process as well as push the pay packet to the sector's limit. Anything more would put further jobs at risk and increase workloads for colleagues.

For the absence of doubt, **UCEA does wish to continue our negotiations with the unions on the issues covered by Phase Two of the 2023-24 New JNCHES negotiating round if the marking and assessment boycott is called off**, specifically:

- Reform of the pay spine
- Use of contract types and improving job security
- Workload
- Gender, ethnicity and disability pay gaps in the sector – noting that they have been coming down and are lower than in the wider economy.

We very much hope that unions will come back to the table to progress these talks, on the basis set out in this letter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Raj Jethwa". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

Raj Jethwa
Chief Executive