

18 May 2023

Raj Jethwa  
Chief Executive  
**Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA)**  
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by email to [R.Jethwa@ucea.ac.uk](mailto:R.Jethwa@ucea.ac.uk)

Dear Raj,

We are writing to you in response to your letter dated 11 May 2023.

We are disappointed that UCEA remains unwilling to negotiate with UCU and the other joint unions over pay, and we are disappointed at the numerous pre-conditions which you set out relating to negotiations more broadly. We also do not agree with your characterisation of the higher education sector's finances, nor the justifications put forward for imposing a massive real-terms pay cut on our members.

Your claims that most higher education institutions are facing considerable uncertainty is not reflected in the financial data provided by these very institutions, which showed that the overwhelming majority of HE institutions reported a known surplus. The latest financial data released shows that universities generated a record total income of £44.6 billion, and secured a total surplus of £2.6 billion, while our members face a certain and substantial cut in the value of their earnings.

We cannot accept your claim that jobs will be at risk as a result of this uplift – despite it being a stark pay cut – nor can we accept employers' attempts to pass on the costs of past mis-management of university finances onto staff.

The combined impact of the 2022/23 and 2023/24 pay uplifts recommended by UCEA will mean that university staff face a sharp erosion of their pay at a time of record inflation and during a continued cost-of-living-crisis. Far from prioritizing staff in the crisis, the evidence from employers is that the proportion of university budgets spent on staff costs has fallen to a record low.

We have repeatedly expressed our willingness to re-convene negotiations in order to work together to resolve this dispute. We note that you highlight the potential disruption to student education from UCU's ongoing marking and assessment boycott to justify the unacceptable and punitive pay deductions which UCEA is recommending that universities implement. Yet it is UCEA's continued refusal to enter negotiations unless UCU calls off the marking and assessment boycott that is prolonging the dispute and disruption to students. You will also be aware that in recommending such a punitive approach to pay deductions, employers are giving many staff no option but to escalate their action.

Insisting on graduating students without reliable assessment risks discrediting the UK university degree with long-term negative consequences for our sector. Academic bodies, professional societies, and hundreds of external examiners are already questioning attempts by university senior management teams to 'mitigate' the boycott by estimating missing marks.

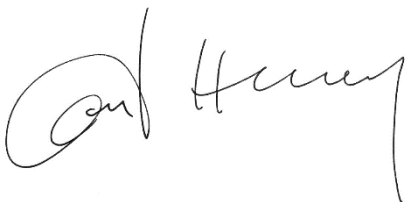
On our part, UCU has not set any pre-conditions for re-entering negotiations. We remain available, along with the other HE trade unions, to resume negotiations at any time over pay and working conditions including equality pay gaps, casualisation, workload, and pay spine reform.

We urge you to reconsider your position and the pre-conditions you have set, which are hindering the possibility of constructive talks and the resolution of this dispute. We would also urge UCEA to return to the negotiating table with a credible offer on pay that can form the basis for further negotiations.

We have been – and remain – committed to reaching a negotiated agreement for our members and resolve this dispute but we will not suspend our industrial action without a meaningful offer on the table to present to members.

We remain committed to jointly working towards improving the working conditions of university staff, which are ultimately the learning conditions of students, and we hope UCEA will reconsider its position for the benefit of the sector.

Yours sincerely,



**Jon Hegerty**  
**Head of Bargaining, Organising, Campaigns and Education**

cc Greg Barnett and Shahenda Suliman, UCU