

Pay matters in higher education

Bulletin 8

31 October 2013 – National HE Strike

Members of UNISON, UCU and Unite in Higher Education have voted to take nationwide industrial action to seek an improvement on the employers' 1% pay offer. The first day joint day of action will be the 31st October .

Taking strike action is never easy, especially if it is your first time. However we urge you to take part to send a strong message to the employers that they need to increase their offer. We have been forced to take action as a last resort, after all attempts to negotiate and reason with the employers has failed. The following are reasons why you should strike.

The average pay settlement in the UK is currently between 2-2.5% in not for profit and private sector organisations - well above the 1% offer from the HE employers.

The employers argue that the package of terms and conditions that we have negotiated over the years is 'generous'. UNISON believes that offering fair pay, a decent pension scheme, adequate sick pay and holiday entitlement are necessary to reward the hard work and loyalty of the high quality staff that run our universities. These are not 'generous' but are a standard that staff should earn in a fair society for contributing to the continuing success of UK universities.

The employers claim that staff will get incremental rises, however over half of all employees are not eligible for such an increase and will rely on a pay rise to meet the cost of living.



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Many of the lowest paid employees have little or no progression. Over 4,000 earn below the Living Wage, a recognised benchmark for a decent standard of living. Many of the lowest paid this winter will face stark choices in light of the 10% rise in energy costs, escalating food prices and hidden costs such as higher campus parking charges.

The employers claim that universities offer annual performance awards or bonus payments. But not all do and such payments can be arbitrary, potentially discriminatory, and in some circumstances not contractual. They may also only be available to higher paid employees, some of whom are not covered by the negotiations. Half of Vice-Chancellors now earn more than £242,000 p.a. – over £100k more than the Prime Minister!

Meanwhile over 50% of staff are employed on zero hours contracts and many more face the threat of cuts to terms and conditions or privatisation. We want to look at closing the gender pay gap and have sought a national agreement to reduce the impact of redundancies. The national employers' response to these issues has been minimal.

The UK is a world leader in Higher Education yet threatens this by undervaluing its workforce. Total expenditure on staff has **declined** over the last 3 years, because salaries have fallen by over 15% over the last 5 years. Yet Universities are predicted to see their income rise over the next 5 years.

We regret the potential disruption to students, but are in close contact with the NUS and many students will be supportive of the action as they face similar challenges of surviving on a low income. The employers can prevent disruption by returning to the negotiating table with a better offer

You need to make a stand on the 31st October. A well supported strike is vital in getting the employers to listen to reason.

More information can be found on the UNISON website at:

<https://secure.unison.org.uk/unisonf0d2bfd2bf1d3bbfa7ac24c0e625b2ff6c26750879/unison1/at-work/education-services/key-issues/he-pay-dispute/home/> You can also follow us on Twitter at @UNISONinHE or our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/#/>.

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