

REGION

Amicus Section

Our Ref: MJR/VT/HE/04/09

31st March 2009

**To: All Workplace Reps and Branches
Regional Officers responsible for HE for information
Sue Sharp NEC for information
Paula Bartle NEC for information**

Dear Colleagues

The latest pay negotiations on the 2009/10 pay claim (previously circulated) took place in London yesterday.

UCU were formally in attendance for the first time having agreed to sign up as part of the NEW JNCHES agreement. This agreement in theory should allow for a more streamlined pay negotiations system with many of the early preliminary rounds condensed into fewer sessions.

I say in theory because as the negotiations progressed it became clear that despite the joint trade unions having presented their claims (UCU submitted their own claim, attached, due to their late inclusion in the process) and an agreed joint heads of claim, the employers made no attempt to make any formal offer on pay. This was most disappointing and resulted in the following press release being agreed unanimously and issued by trade unions after the meeting.

HE Employers' fail to make a pay offer.

The HE Unions EIS GMB, UCU, UNISON and Unite expressed their amazement that the national HE employers': The Universities, Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) failed to make an offer at pay talks yesterday (30th March 2009).

UCEA used the woes of the economy to go against the spirit of the negotiating process in holding back from making an offer. They also asked the unions to choose between jobs or a pay increase, adding some vague promises of discussions exploring some of the other issues that the unions had raised. The unions' responded that they would be happy to have national discussions on job security in the sector, however did not accept the picture painted and would be looking in detail at the figures presented to the meeting. The unions also expressed concern that the lack of an offer undermined the spirit of the recently agreed negotiating timetable.

The unions will be discussing the employer's initial reaction and will follow up as a matter of urgency further discussions with a view to teasing out money available for this year's pay round.

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The employers attempted to suggest that in applying any increase it could result in sector job losses and that if pay was not increased then jobs would be saved. This was quickly exposed in a series of questions to the employer by asking were UCEA saying that compulsory redundancies could be avoided by implementing something less than our expectation on pay. The UCEA quickly retracted any suggestion that compulsory redundancies could be avoided so exposing the lacuna in their argument.

The meeting ended in my view on a very sour note when UCEA, as they left the JNCHES meeting, proceeded to hand out their supposed response to the claims. I have written to Jocelyn Prudence Chief Executive to complain about this off handed attempt to respond to the NEW JNCHES claims. I attach for your information my email to Jocelyn Prudence.

Jocelyn

Following discussions at yesterday's JNCHES I have raised with colleagues the paper that was passed around to the trade union side as the UCEA delegation left after the end of the last JNCHES meeting.

In our view the paper was never referred to in detail at the meeting nor was it presented whilst JNCHES was in session. I notice also that it is presented with JNCHES a letterhead despite the fact the only time the trade union saw the document was after JNCHES had ended..

I think all my colleagues and union representatives took exception to the paper and the off handed manner it was distributed after the meeting had concluded.

Whilst UCEA may well wish to be associated with the document none of the JNCHES trade unions recognise the paper as a formal or valid JNCHES document. Nor in our view should the JNCHES minutes support any contention that the paper was tabled at JNCHES meeting. It as clearly issued after both yourself, yesterdays JNCHES Chair Bill Wakeham and your main negotiating team had left the meeting.

I would hope UCEA would not claim the document was formally tabled during JNCHES as this was clearly not the case. In fact I seek your reassurance no such assertion is being made by UCEA as in the trade union view such an assertion it would be untruthful and incorrect.

If this view is not accepted by UCEA then the minutes and opening of the next JNCHES meeting will clearly be difficult.

I have also been asked to convey the expectation from the full trade union side that at or before the next JNCHES meeting we should receive a formal offer on a pay increase for 2009/10 from UCEA as part of the 2009/10 detailed claims submitted to UCEA in advance of the JNCHES meeting.

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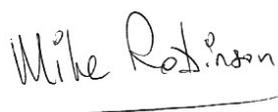
Yours sincerely
Mike Robinson
Unite- National Officer

The next meeting is planned for the 27th April. That should be the end of the normal negotiating process. If no offer or an unacceptable offer is tabled then the NEW JNCHES condensed procedure means the next steps could be to enter into the disputes procedure. The employers have a small window of opportunity to avoid a dispute on pay but time is running out in view of their wasted opportunities yesterday.

The meeting also heard from Chris Kaufman National Officer who announced he was standing down from JNCHES and that the meeting would be his last. All parties present paid tribute to Chris's excellent work and previous chairmanship of JNCHES and wished him well. I would like to record my thanks to Chris and my deep admiration for all that he has done for Unite members.

I will keep you advised of any progress after the 27th April.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Robinson".

Mike Robinson
National Officer
Higher Education



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