

JNCHES Pay

We have registered a formal dispute nationally in relation to the pay freeze.

UCU and UNISON have done the same.

We will be participating fully in national framework meetings with UCEA going forwards and to ensure that we represent you to the best of our abilities throughout this process, we want to hear your views on pay and associated issues.

As a result, you will shortly be receiving a survey from us. This is a critical issue so please take the time to complete the survey and encourage any colleagues who are also Unite members to do the same.

Phased Return to Campus

In our meetings with the Department for Education, we have been told to expect further announcements on 22nd February about a phased return to universities from around 8th March.

This plan is likely to be an updated version of the phased return that was due to take place from January, targeting students on practical courses, final year students, etc. although there are several points of confusion on this issue.

- 1) We know that in many halls of residence at universities across the country, students have already returned – in large numbers in several instances so it seems a case of closing the stable door after the horse has bolted. We will be raising this in our meetings going forwards and if there is any information you would like to share from your own universities, please feel free to do so
- 2) There are mixed messages from government sources so far saying that in spite of the phased return to work, there will be no requirement for face to face teaching to resume. However, elsewhere we have heard that universities are expected to offer the full student experience which under the circumstances is not going to be possible.

Most Russell Group universities have already made it clear that they will not be returning to face to face teaching at all this academic year.

We are also making it clear in our meetings that:-

- 1) Students must be tested before arrival
- 2) There must be plans in place to protect staff and students in the event of any students testing positive while in halls/ on campus
- 3) We need a clear vaccine strategy
- 4) Risk assessments must be updated to ensure that they are robust and fit for purpose in light of the spread of new COVID variants
- 5) Ventilation is increasingly a priority in ensuring protection from the virus and this should be a renewed focus in any updated risk assessments

- 6) Risk assessments must be enforced as we are seeing some students not wearing masks or maintaining social distancing

We are also pushing for updated guidance for repairs and maintenance work as workers should not be having to carry out any non-essential maintenance work.

In any instances where repairs, maintenance or any worker feels unsafe going into work, remember that Section 44 and Section 100 of the Employment Act are there to protect you and your union will back you 100% on this.

We will be seeking clarity on these issues and will provide you with the necessary updates, support and guidance as soon as we have it.

Further Education White Paper

Although promised last year, the Further Education White Paper was finally published last month and we got a greater insight into the government's vision for the sector and for skills more generally.

Tellingly, there was no mention at all of trade unions or UnionLearn and Further Education and skills are firmly in the hands of employers, who have the power over how training courses are designed and implemented.

The collaborative way of working that the government has been talking about for months was absent and there was no mention of promoting partnerships between providers, employers, workers and unions. In fact, just the opposite is true as we know that the government has cut arguably the most successful social partnership – UnionLearn – as government funding of this will come to an end as of 31st March.

Equally significant was the absence of any funding commitment to deliver the much-promised skills revolution.

The publication of this white paper is just the beginning and we must continue our work in holding the government to account in this area, along with colleagues from other sectors representing apprentices.

[You can read more detail about the union's reaction to the Further Education White Paper by clicking here for our article on UniteLive.](#)

Technicians' Commitment

We participated in meetings on the technicians' commitment alongside a wide range of organisations including UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), who spoke about a new action plan they have developed to further the technicians' commitment.

The report pushes for action in five main areas. These are:-

- 1) Leading and Communicating

This is a clear commitment from UKRI that it will lead the sector in championing the Technician Commitment, working with key stakeholders including funders, research

organisations and businesses to demonstrate and celebrate the importance of technicians to the UK economy and society and the benefits of a visible, well recognised and sustainable technician workforce empowered to reach its potential.

2) Technician Identity and Community

We will ensure that the contributions of technically skilled people are recognised through our funding, policies and processes as both a funder and an employer. UKRI will build an inclusive technical identity, aiming to empower workers to build their own communities for greater visibility and career development as a direct result of the technicians' commitment.

3) Technical Careers

This underlines the importance that a career as a technician must be recognised as a valuable and rewarding one, for which individuals have a good understanding of the potential entry points and progression pathways to attract more people to the sector.

4) Research and Innovation Culture

This promotes the need for greater recognition of the vital contributions that technicians make to research, innovation and society. It also notes that the success of the research and innovation sector lies depends on the wellbeing and diversity of the workforce.

5) Rewarding and Recognising UKRI's Technicians

This includes embedding the technicians' commitment into internal HR programmes, promoting the benefits of pursuing technical careers and, as an employer, tackling the barriers that employees face around visibility, recognition, career development and sustainability. This is a concrete promise to invest in opportunities for staff career development.

[You can read the report in full by clicking here.](#)

The meeting also discussed that at some universities issued specific facility time for staff to work on the technicians' commitment. If this is the case at your university, please could you let us know the details of any arrangements.

Letter from Minister Donelan

Minister Michelle Donelan MP, Minister of State for Universities has written to universities to thank their staff for their hard work during the pandemic.

While government recognition of the efforts of university workers is appreciated, the government has it in its power to thank workers in a more appropriate and tangible way – through issuing the pay rise you all deserve.

[You can read the letter in full by clicking here.](#)

We suggest that staff reply to this letter, thanking Minister Donelan for her sentiments but assuring her that actions speak louder than words and the government giving you key workers a pay rise would be a better way of the government showing its appreciation.

Office for Students

On 8th February, Lord James Wharton was appointed as the new Chair of the Office for Students. His term will start in April 2021.

The Office for Students is the independent regulator of higher education in England, and although not directly part of government, they report directly to government through parliament.

There have been some questions raised around the suitability and transparency of Lord Wharton's appointment to the role, including some accusations of cronyism, as not only is Lord Wharton a Conservative Peer in the House of Lords, he was also the former Campaign Manager of Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

We hope to see Lord Wharton use this position to commit to ensuring well-paid, decent, secure jobs across the sector.

TUC Public Sector Pay Campaign

The campaign to win a pay rise for key workers is progressing well, with more than [50,000 people having signed the petition](#) and us beginning to confirm meetings with MPs.

The TUC has launched a dedicated campaign website, where you'll find links and actions to send members and supporters: <https://www.tuc.org.uk/campaigns/winning-pay-rise-key-workers>

If you or other colleagues are ready to start organising meetings, you can register here: <https://tuccampaigns.typeform.com/to/F1Lc5bkP>

This is just the beginning of the campaign and new resources will be added to the campaign material as and when they are ready. [You can find those here](#).

National Apprenticeship and Heart Unions Week

From 8-14 February, we worked hard to get everyone talking about our union. It was the annual TUC Hearts Union week and National Apprenticeships week (Scotland's Apprenticeship week is taking place from 1 to 5 March).

You can find out more about how you can get involved in #HeartUnite [here](#) and #NAW2021 [here](#).

These are really tough times for our members, most of whom have been working all through this crisis, and there are more tough times ahead.

It's always important that they know that their union is here for them, protecting their health, defending their jobs and fighting off attacks on their incomes, but Hearts Union week is another opportunity to shout about our successes.

Young people in particular have been hit hard by this crisis. Whole parts of the economy have been swept away taking with them the entry-level jobs. But Unite is determined to fight for decent work today for our young people, which is why we always get engaged in Apprenticeship week.

We have produced some materials for use on social media or to download to use in the workplace to promote Unite to members and soon-to-be members alike. You can find these here:

[Heart Union week](#)

[National Apprenticeship week](#)

This is a time like no other but Unite is a union like no other. Let's make sure everyone knows.

Carbon Offsetting in the Higher Education Sector

The Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) reached out to us to share some work they are doing on carbon offsetting in the Higher Education sector and how this can help the sector achieve net zero emissions.

Many of our higher education institutions have already responded to the climate challenge by declaring climate emergencies and setting ambitious 'net zero' emission target dates.

In light of this, we wanted to share a recent blog by HEPI which sets out their project in more detail. [You can read the blog in full by clicking here.](#)