

University staff angry at 3% pay offer

UNISON members at universities across the UK have reacted angrily to an announcement by HE employers of a 3% increase on all pay points for 2022/23.

The offer comes after the final round of pay negotiations took place on 5 May.

In addition, there will also be a bottom loading from 9% at spinal column point 3 to ensure that those on this level still receive the minimum wage, as a failure to do so would see some universities breaking the law.

UNISON's pay claim (see box right) was for an above inflation increase plus 2%.

At the current rate of the Retail Price Index, this would be a figure of around 10% across the board.

Given years of below-inflation pay awards and the current cost of living crisis, this latest offer of 3% looks woefully inadequate.

The HE committee has therefore taken the decision to run a consultative ballot of all HE members from 11 to 27 May to gauge whether members wish to take this campaign further.

The consultation will be conducted online via email and branches will be encouraging members to make sure they have their say.

Sarah Pickett, chair of the South East region's HE committee said: "Like millions of others, our members are beginning to struggle with the increases in tax and National Insurance, energy bills, petrol, food and housing costs."

"As a result of this we're all now over £2600 worse off and our wages are simply not keeping pace with these rising costs."

"University employers need to recognise that recruiting and retaining staff is going to become an even bigger issue if they don't start to pay decent wages," she added.

UNISON'S Claim

- A pay rise that is at least inflation (RPI) plus 2%, on all pay points
- A minimum wage of £12 per hour for all
- For the standard weekly full-time contract of employment to be 35 hours per week with no loss of pay
- Meaningful action to address excessive workloads, stress and unpaid work
- A fundamental review of the New JNCHES HE pay spine to be concluded by 2024 which will look at the number of pay points on the scale



This year might see a number of universities in the region take action over pay, in the same way as members at University of Brighton have been doing
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Keeping in touch - Moved house? Changed job?

If your details have changed, please amend your membership record at unison.org.uk/my-unison or contact your branch. If you would like to find out what is going on in HE across the region you can join our online, informal HE meetings which are held every few weeks. Please send your email address to n.duncan-jordan@unison.co.uk if you'd like an invitation.

University support staff feel the pressure

Support staff numbers dropped at about half of UK universities last year in the midst of the pandemic, with some losing about a tenth of their non-academic workforce, latest data suggest.

Figures on full-time equivalent (FTE) staff numbers from the Higher Education Statistics Agency show that out of 130 institutions that provided data, 66 saw a fall in non-academic staff.

There had already been warnings that many universities were looking at reducing professional service staff numbers as a way to keep a tight rein on spending during the Covid crisis.

Support staff numbers were between 1 and 5 per cent lower at most institutions with a drop, but at about 20 universities the loss of roles was higher and three institutions recorded a fall above 10 per cent.

In the region, Solent University which made a number of redundancies in 2020 in a bid to safeguard its finances – saw its FTE support staff fall 15 per cent to just under 400 in 2020-21, a figure 43 per cent below its peak in 2016-17.



Workload stress is rising across most universities

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As a result of these cuts, those remaining staff were being asked to do more and more.

Ruth Smith, senior national education officer at the Unison union, said it was “foolhardy false economy” to cut the number of professional services roles because universities would “lose the expertise of people who make a huge contribution to the smooth running of operations and student life”.

“Universities around the UK need to rethink their priorities, recognise the importance of support staff and give them the respect they deserve,” she said.

Government plans for HE offer no solutions

UNISON has warned that plans for higher education, set out a worrying picture for those wanting to enter higher education and those working in it.

Under government plans, students in England will have to pay back university loans over 40 years rather than 30, in a move that is designed to save the Treasury billions of pounds.

The proposals will also see graduates needing to start to pay back their loans when they reach a lower income threshold of £25,000.

This change will have the greatest impact on lower and middle earners and the least impact on the wealthiest.

UNISON believes that education should not just be the preserve of those whose parents can bankroll them through university.

The extended repayment period means that those entering higher education in their teens will now be paying for their degree well into their sixties.

The government is also seeking to reduce student numbers by introducing minimum standards for access to student loans and attacking what it believes to be poor quality, low cost courses associated with the arts.

Neil Duncan-Jordan, HE Lead for the South East said: “These plans will have the most detrimental impact on lower and middle earners and do nothing to improve the overall funding of the sector.”

“That’s what happens when the market is allowed to dictate the role of education.”

“Universities desperately need to be funded properly rather than rely on the income from student fees,” he added.

TAKE ACTION: All HE members will receive an email between 11 and 27 May on the latest pay offer. Make sure you vote. If you do not receive an email, please contact your branch for help.