

Students Union Pay Claim 2023/24 (with Addendum)

Introduction

This pay claim is submitted by UNISON on behalf of staff working for Brighton Students' Union [BSU].

Context

- BSU has rightly recognised that students are struggling financially in this crisis and are actively looking at ways to alleviate that. The same applies to our staff.
- Our last claim of an RPI increase as of June 2022 was not accepted in the 2022/23 round, We were awarded 4% which members appreciated was higher than previous uplifts but also acknowledged that it was still below inflation which in June 2022 which was 6.21%. However, while household costs continue to rise while the value of our pay continues to fall.
- In the last year, gas prices rose by 132%, electricity prices by 66%, mortgage interest payments by 26% and petrol and oil costs by 22% - over the same period BSU pay increased by 4%.
- BSU staff have endured nearly a decade of below inflation pay awards.
- Interest rates have continued to rise, meaning the cost of borrowing increases for those of our staff with mortgages.
- The South East has one of the highest costs of living in the country and rents are going up. The average monthly rent for new tenancies in the south-east are up year-on-year by 8.9% to an average of £1,228 as of January 2023. Only in December 2022 did we see the first drop in the average UK rental price for over a year. Prices are likely to continue to rise overall throughout 2023. ([HomeLet Rental Index](#)).
- Major increases in the cost of living over recent years have significantly reduced the value of staff wages.

Summary of Claim

We recognise that BSU's commercial trading has not recovered to pre-pandemic levels at this point in time, and the university is also under current and potential financial pressures that may inform future awards of our block grant. However, the above context for SU staff cannot be ignored. As the cost of living crisis continues, we want to ensure that our staff' pay does not fall further and further behind after years of below inflation pay uplifts, or that of staff within the university.

We have consulted members about their pay and we request the following:

- **A cost of living increase of between 8% and 5% in line with the recommendations of the [Universities & Colleges Employers Association \(UCEA\) final offer for university staff in the 2023/24 pay round](#).**
- **For the above to start as an interim uplift backdated to 1st February 2023 and a further uplift from 1st August 2023.**
- **Should the UCEA pay offer for 2023/24 change through the ongoing negotiations with HE unions, that this will be matched by BSU.**
- **For all future pay awards to be based on the UCEA offer as a minimum and as a basis for future SUJNC pay negotiations.**

Why use the UCEA pay offer as a basis for this uplift, and as a minimum into the future?

The current UCEA offer is as follows, against university spinal column points:

Spinal column points	Uplift
3 to 5	8%
6 to 14	7%
15 to 25	6%
26 to 51	5%

Our analysis has shown that when approximately matched to our pay scales, the BSU current rate of pay sits slightly above that of university colleagues. This has now changed with the UCEA uplift for university staff this year. This will see our colleagues in the University pull ahead in terms of pay.

Mapping our scales to the university is not an exact science, but as an example we believe a BSU staff member on Scale 4, Spinal Point 15 will be 5.76% worse off compared to a colleague on

Grade 3, Spine Point 16 on the university scale without a matched uplift. At present this BSU member of staff would currently be paid almost exactly the same as a university staff member on a roughly comparable grade and level of seniority.

If a 4% uplift by BSU is repeated in this pay round, this staff member would still be 2% worse off, with a £499 annual difference in pay.

Because of the staggered nature of the uplift down from 8% through to 5% through the grades, BSU Scales 2 through 6, representing the majority of BSU staff, will fall behind in pay disproportionately to scales S01 through to SM9.

BSU staff work collaboratively, side-by-side with staff within the university. Students' Unions are unique in the charitable sector in that we are financially linked so closely to the institutions we exist alongside. While we understand and value our overall independence from the university, we believe we are just as valuable as any member of university staff. We believe our pay should, as far as possible, stay in line with that of our professional services colleagues working for the University of Brighton.

We think that we do fantastic work for our members. We believe that it is the responsibility of BSU leadership to ensure that the university understand this and argue that our block grant should increase to match pay awards within the wider HE sector in order to reflect the work that we do.

Mirroring UCEA pay awards is common across the SU sector. We believe that setting UCEA pay awards as a minimum for future pay uplifts in BSU will ensure as far as possible that at the very least our pay does not fall behind that of our colleagues within the university.

As you are aware, UNISON and UCU are fighting for higher pay awards for our colleagues in the University and are currently in dispute, with strike action having taken place. The current UNISON proposal to UCEA is for a flat rate increase of £4,000, or a percentage increase to match RPI plus 2%, which ever is greater. In comparison, we ask that you note that in recognition of BSU's current financial position we are only requesting BSU match what UCEA has already offered university staff.

The University have already taken steps to impose the uplift from February 2023 for their staff. The agreed UCEA uplift is what universities have collectively agreed that they can afford for their staff, including the University of Brighton.

This is the absolute minimum we can reasonably ask for on behalf of our members, and this rate sits significantly below inflation.

3. Why an interim uplift in February 2023?

We recognise and welcome the discretionary, one-off pay award of £500 to all staff toward the end of 2022. However, as set out in the context above our members remain under significant current and future financial pressure.

UCEA, acting for universities, have offered an interim uplift from February 2023 “primarily in recognition of the cost of living pressures facing HE staff within the 2022-23 financial year”.

UCEA proposed the following from February 2023:

Spinal column points	Uplift
3 to 5	3.2%
6 to 14	2.8%
15 to 25	2.4%
26 to 51	2%

They proposed the remainder of the uplift from 1st August 2023 as follows:

Spinal column points	Uplift
3 to 5	4.8%
6 to 14	4.2%
15 to 25	3.6%
26 to 51	3%

BSU staff will experience continued financial pressure between now and August 2023. We believe that a similar interim uplift is necessary.

The UCEA example can be mapped to the BSU spinal column points as far as possible.

3. Why use RPI rather than CPI?

RPI statistics (from the Office of National Statistics, Consumer Price Inflation Reference Tables, October 2022) show an average percentage increase to October 2022 of 18.1% to housing and household expenditure and 15% to food and catering. All items increased 14.2%.

UNISON believes that the Retail Prices Index (RPI) remains the most accurate measure of inflation faced by employees.

CPI the Consumer Prices Index consistently understates the real level of inflation as it fails to adequately measure one of the main costs facing most households in the UK – housing. Almost two-thirds of housing in the UK is owner occupied, yet CPI almost entirely excludes the housing costs of people with a mortgage. It is also less targeted on the experiences of the working population than RPI, since CPI covers non-working groups excluded by RPI – most notably pensioner households where 75% of income is derived from state pensions and benefits, the top 4% of households by income and tourists.

4. Conclusion

We believe that staff wages should be at a level which keeps up with their cost of living. Without the proposed uplift we feel the majority of our staff are going continue to struggle, our pay will lose coherency with our colleagues in the university, and the Student Union may face issues with retention and recruitment.

Addendum

At our meeting at SUJNCC on 18th April 2023, UNISON were asked to clarify our pay claim in terms of which Students' Union spinal points and what uplift we are requesting.

You can find this below:

SU Spine points	Uplift
8 – 14	7%
15 - 25	6%
26 - 31	5%

Our claim only extends to Grade S02, Spine Point 31. We think it's important to focus on the lower pay bands considering the current wider economic situation.