



University of Bristol University & College Union

Bristol UCU General Meeting

Wednesday 24th January 2024, 13:00 – 14:00, MS Teams

Chair John McTague

Present: 125 attendees

1. Apologies & Minutes of the Last Meeting

5/12/23 Exec and 18/10/23 GM minutes approved.

2. Pay and Grade Structure Changes

Confidential negotiations have been held which have had to work to a tight financial envelope.

The outcome is a good faith attempt to do what is best.

We are not in dispute, so this is an unusual set of circumstances to consider an offer.

The proposed new structure has no detriment to UCU members.

James Bigwood says feedback to be gathered now, response from SMT by March.

All members would eventually see a benefit but few now.

By Aug 2026, the bottom of the pay spine will move up, grades A-C will likewise move up, and a new grade for Ass Prof (M0) will be invented. Spine points will be removed from the bottom and top of M grade. All staff will be entitled to 25 days' annual leave from the beginning of employment.

Senior management has re-affirmed commitment to collective bargaining. This offer does not impact any improvement that would come from that.

Concerns raised by reps, Exec member and BOs.

-Top of some grades will be above bottom of next grade up during transition period

-in-year appointments will be problematic because they could be on a lower pay rate than colleagues appointed only very shortly after them

TU's have been asked to consider and approve these changes to terms and conditions.

If these proposals are not agreed by all TU's, senior management claim they would be taken off the table.

Forthcoming branch member e-ballot will enable consultation of all members.

Debate among Unison Exec members is ongoing.

Unlike Unison, UCU did not suspend industrial action knowing these negotiations were coming.

The changes to the pay spine will make a more significant change to the salaries and reared packages of staff members on the bottom of the scale. The changes don't really reflect the cost-of-living crisis. The University would have had to make the uplift for Grade A and would have needed to do it for Grades B and C soon to meet obligation to be a living wage employer.

Lower paid UCU members may not see much of an uplift.

Management have claimed that if the Unions don't agree this deal, there won't be anything else. WE

would have to start a dispute to enter negotiations on a new offer, but national pay negotiations are about to start, and any local dispute would thus coincide with action in support of that negotiation.

Management are open to negotiations on non-pay-related issues.

By March '24, no new RAs or TAs will be eligible to come to the UK on a skilled worker visa.

But postdocs may be exempted from this.

Many members feel it's worth accepting the deal and the risks of not accepting it are too high.

The Chair of Unison made it clear that the fact that they were in dispute made them feel they would get more from these negotiations. Many Unison members are stuck for longer so only getting one increment at some point in a few years' time was disappointing.

ACTION BOs find out if you are promoted to SL in the new framework, will you be paid more than you would otherwise have been?

ACTION BOs find out why Unison is taking a stance against the offer.

3. Any Other Business

N/A

Member questions and comments

- Given UoB's claim to always implement the Real Living Wage, can we agree that the spine point deletion to the lowest points in grades A-C is not an outcome of the negotiation, but business as usual being sold to us as a giveaway? (<https://www.bristol.ac.uk/staff/protecting-your-interests/#:~:text=We%20have%20been%20advocates%20of,reflect%20the%20real%20Living%20Wage.>)
- We should ask for additional assurances relating to how this offer/agreement relates to the wider context of future national UCU pay negotiations. For instance, prior to branch approval, I'd want to see UoB give a written assurance that this local deal does not give them an excuse to bow out of future...
- (How) does this translate as a general pay rise? Will it amount to catching up with inflation?
- Will UoB lowball in national negotiations because they've achieved a local deal?
- Is it possible to approximately translate the offer into an average pay rise by some percentage? To make it easier to interpret.
- I can see how there might be issues with parity but if that translates to more benefit for the lower-paid, I don't see that as a big problem.
- A lot seems to be made of the £9m being invested (over three years). What is this as a percentage of the University spend on salary for that period?
- <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/finance/documents/UoB%20AR%20FS%202023%20WEB2.pdf> £484.6m in 22/23
- I think it is correct to say we are not being asked to give anything now in order to get this deal. But that's because we already made a down payment in September: <https://uob.sharepoint.com/sites/news/SitePages/university-and-bristol-ucu-joint-statement.aspx> "Up to and including the negotiations, Bristol UCU undertake to call no further locally-called industrial action so that discussions can continue openly and constructively." So, this isn't something for free...
- is anyone able to summarise how our sister unions on campus are responding to the offer

and their rationales for their stance?

- Given UoB's claim to always implement the Real Living Wage, can we agree that the spine point deletion to the lowest points in grades A-C is not an outcome of the negotiation, but business as usual being sold to us as a giveaway? (<https://www.bristol.ac.uk/staff/protecting-your-interests/#:~:text=>..
- Ye-es, but it makes something which is currently voluntary a permanent part of Ts & Cs and also redistributes staff across the whole pay spine to reflect this and mitigate compression for the benefit of others.
- For lower paid of ucu members there may not be an improvement?
- I assume making getting some/all of our lost pay back during the marking boycott a **condition** of accepting this deal is not an option? are the only two options accept or reject this deal?
- you are right we are not in dispute, so it is taken it or leave it at this stage.
- the annual report is the place to look for fun facts and figures for breakdowns of UoB spending <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/finance/documents/UoB%20AR%20FS%202023%20WEB2.pdf>
- So, most UCU members are at the top spine of our grade?
- Re last question I don't see what benefit there would be in not accepting it?
- Although there are delays, surely members up to Assoc prof will be one spine point higher than otherwise in a few years?
- We're not in a "dispute" but we're in a dispute!
- we've just saved the university money in their pension contributions, so are they even 'putting money' towards this or just banking savings that we generated?
- Yeah, this isn't a deal I'd vote to stand down action over, but given that we're not in that kind of position (either locally or nationally)
- How to feedback that there has been no genuine negotiation or consultation?
- just saved the university money in their pension contributions, so are they even 'putting money' towards this or just banking savings that we generated? Do we know how much per year they are saving because of this?
- How do we calculate what money has been saved due to the pension contribution decreases?
- I think "UCU just negotiated a spine point increase for everyone up to Assoc Prof" is a better recruiting tool than "UCU scuppered an increase in pay because it wasn't perfect". (Note: I am not speaking about UNISON because I don't know the details at the lower end of the scale.)
- Apart if they are on short term contract, they might get to the top of their grades in a few years or move to the next one.
- So then for me I'd need to understand better what our lower paid PS staff and other colleagues think of this deal, as I'd not want to vote for it (as someone who is a Senior Lecturer) when those who are much lower paid than me would prefer that I reject it.
- So then for me I'd need to understand better what our lower paid PS staff and other colleagues think of this deal, as I'd not want to vote for it (as someone who is a Senior Lecturer) when those who are much lower paid than me would prefer that I reject it.
- Very sympathetic to the concerns about this and also disappointed that we're being put in a 'take it or leave it' position and that the outcome of all our (and other unions') negotiating energies could just evaporate if members don't say yes...if this is not a dispute and they are amenable to these changes, then it does feel like they could just implement these changes anyway? sorry if that's a bit confused/confusing 🤔
- So, my uncertainty is still about promotion to SL. If there is an increase, there or not.

- It feels like it's an attempt to co-opt the union on a decision we have no power to change.
- Any scope for improving the timescale for those on skilled worker visas?
- There seems to be an exception for post docs from what I read yesterday (gov.uk website)

- Why to 'reject':

Out of sync with Unison colleagues

£9m over 3 years is not an investment in staff.

Risk of lowballing collective bargaining posture

'Take or leave it' is a bad faith posture, and one that would only be levelled as part of a formal dispute.

The inconsistencies of the proposal (sticking points) suggest a lack of due diligence.

If we approve, SMT will have an easy win, and compromises our long-term negotiating capacity.

- I can see that there are some technical queries which may need to take place (e.g. about parity issues) before a ballot, but I see no huge problem with balloting (and indeed saying yes) to this. Even if it's deckchair-rearranging, if there is no detriment anywhere, why would we just not say yes, and crack on?
- Do we have to make a separate decision, or can we decide to align with Unison (i.e., only accept if they do too) to avoid fracture?
- it's being presented as all three unions need to accept, and if one union does not, then the proposal will not go ahead.
- Did the negotiators consider a structure that doesn't see increases in M grade, in order to fund even better uplifts in A-C?
- No doubt UoB will hope this may deter future votes for IA, but I don't see that it will.
- minor point, but we have only seen an FAQ & excel file - what about the 'briefing note' ref'd in the FAQ? What text or other things are we agreeing to alongside this?
- If we say yes, then exec will be extolling their collegial relations with campus unions, when they've been doing nearly everything to work against us over recent years.
- But as someone else said, it's a better recruiting tool for UCU to assent to this than not - and the current speaker is wrong, it will be advantageous for those at the bottom of the pay scales.
- If we say yes, then exec will be extolling their collegial relations with campus unions, when they've been doing nearly everything to work against us over recent years.
- I don't see this as a big issue.
- But how can a broadly beneficial incremental change put us at a future disadvantage?
- we just don't know, really, as the negotiations at UCEA level are not transparent...so we don't know. I don't think we should be defeatist about whether or not we take further action, that will likely happen anyway. But I'm also up in the air about whether saying yes somehow ties us into inaction...why would that be the case?

Comments in the meeting poll at the end of the meeting (74 respondents)

1	anonymous	I don't think there is very much to lose from this approach. It's not a pay offer.
2	anonymous	I'm not sure what happens if Unison declines the offer but U
3	anonymous	Abstain, wait and see what Unison say and further clarification
4	anonymous	This is not great and doesn't seem to offer much material ch colleagues at all but I don't know what rejection will lead to
5	anonymous	I just don't think we have any leverage to change the propos get some benefits than none (plus there are more benefits fo staff which is super important)
6	anonymous	This is not detrimental, it moves us incrementally forward, w whole dispute about something which is basically positive, e 'p'?
7	anonymous	On the face of it accept, but I'd like to know more about the have
8	anonymous	I would vote yes, and focus our efforts into the national pay

9	anonymous	Inclined to accept, but no formal decision without UNISON.
10	anonymous	Let's move together with Unison. There not much to gain so lose.
11	anonymous	Accept, but with a statement that the changes are not seen a union.
12	anonymous	Take the money and release a strongly worded statement of intention to escalate to a dispute if further progress is not made. It is terrible but we should probably take the deal.
13	anonymous	Little to be gained by rejecting.
14	anonymous	it is bad faith to offer it as take it or leave it, so I lean towards bad faith and renew the strategy
15	anonymous	There seem to be inequities - it would be good to get clarity. There seems to be compression of the grade structure from 1990. Is this an issue? I don't know about pay compression and whether it is bad.

16	anonymous	Seems like a generally positive, but very small change for the moment, though it's not enough. If there really are no detrimental effects, and executive feeling smug, seems like a no-brainer.
17	anonymous	This is an improvement to our pay spine, for no detriment, and should harm our hand in future negotiations.
18	anonymous	Stupid to reject! Doesn't disadvantage us in any way. Keep so for action when the time is right (including national level action).
19	anonymous	I am minded to say yes for all the reasons outlined in the memo, with caveat that there needs to be clarity on the situation where more than existing staff. this feels needlessly divisive and should be discussed before we approve.
20	anonymous	This proposal is nowhere near the salary uplift we originally proposed, with no financial or reward benefit for Professional Services staff (especially at the lower end of their grade (these roles do not get promoted via staff pathways). Even with an additional spine point added, this is not worth the inflation.