

# University of Sheffield proposal to address UCU's industrial action at Sheffield 27 May 2022

The following proposal represents the University's commitments in relation to the issues at the heart of the two national disputes. The University is also bringing forward financial commitments relating to the minimum additional annual investment in staff to be delivered through uplifts to the grade boundaries, which are the focus of separate negotiations between the University and UCU, Unite and UNISON.

This proposal is subject to:

1. UCU calling off the current action short of a strike including the boycott of marking and assessment processes at the University of Sheffield and agreeing not to instigate further industrial action under the current mandates for the two national disputes.
2. UCU instructing its members to return to normal working duties and arrangements with immediate effect.
3. The completion of all marking and assessment work not undertaken thus far due to the boycott in time for all students to graduate and/or progress in the normal published time frames (with an understanding that in exceptional circumstances there may be local flexibility as agreed with the Head of Department).

In return, the University agrees not to deduct pay from any member of UCU who has taken part in the boycott of marking and assessment processes from 23 May 2022 to date, and who completes the marking and assessment activity that has been disrupted.

## Our commitments

In relation to the separate joint trade union negotiations on **grade boundaries**:

- Local negotiations on our grade boundaries will continue, in line with the agreed [terms of reference](#).
- The University will commit **at least £5,000,000** (five million pounds) of additional annual recurrent funding to its pay bill to support this work and enable uplifts to grade boundaries
- The detail of the final costs, and how any grade boundaries will move, along with the impacts on staff pay rates will be reached through joint negotiations.

In relation to UCU's "**Four Fights**" dispute over working conditions:

- The University believes that staff in the HE sector deserve to have high quality terms and conditions of employment, irrespective of where they work, which role they undertake or how they are engaged.
- This University is committed to achieving this for our staff and to acting as an exemplar for the sector in our employment practices.
- There are many areas of good practice at Sheffield that we have previously jointly worked on and agreed with our trade union colleagues including:
  - Joint work on action plans to address the [Gender Pay Gap](#)
  - Joint work on developing the Stress Risk Management Policy
  - Agreement on the introduction of the Graduate Teaching Assistant employment contract and expansion to Grade 7 for this role:  
<https://staff.sheffield.ac.uk/hr/policies/gtc>

- Joint work and agreement on Workload Allocation Principles
- Agreement over our commitment that no regular scheduled teaching will be undertaken by anyone on a casual contract
- The introduction of a £10 per hour minimum pay rate:  
<https://staff.sheffield.ac.uk/news/change-minimum-hourly-rate>
- The University is committed to continuing to build on these areas of work.
- In particular we are committed to ensuring the principles and approach identified in our joint Academic Workload Working Group are adopted in every academic department by the end of the 2022-23 academic year and to undertaking a review of their implementation to refine and improve them, through a group, to include UCU membership.
- We also remain committed to responding constructively to further suggestions for improvements to the GTA contract at Sheffield and to engage in meaningful negotiation with UCU over these through a JUCS sub group on a time limited basis.
- The University will ensure consultation with UCU and other trade unions over work being undertaken in respect of the Professional Services Pathways, at the earliest opportunity.
- The University will ensure that input and feedback is sought from UCU to inform progress and further work on the use of academic metrics during the course of the next academic year and annually thereafter.
- The University further commits to establish with our trade union colleagues, through our agreed frameworks for negotiation and consultation, time limited joint task and finish working groups to explore and produce recommendations for UEB regarding improvements in areas including:
  - Exploring how gender, race and disability impacts on promotions and identifying/removing barriers.
  - Exploring issues and concerns around professional services workloads.
 These groups will be time limited, seeking to produce reports within six months of being established. The timing of the establishment of each group will be jointly agreed with the trade unions at the next available JUCS meeting.
- The Vice-Chancellor and UEB colleagues will use their leverage within the sector and with UCEA (the body representing employers in national pay negotiations) to influence the national negotiating position of the collective participating employers.

**In relation to USS:**

- The University shares a common interest with UCU and USS members that the scheme should be sustainable, affordable and provide the best possible benefits for members.
- The scheme should be responsive to the needs of both employers and scheme members.
- Future valuations of the scheme should be undertaken with evidence based, moderately prudent assumptions which recognise the unique strength of the HE sector and participating employers.
- The University urges all parties - UUK, UCU and the USS Trustee - to work collaboratively and as transparently as possible using an evidence based approach.
- Should future valuations show an improved funding position for the scheme, improving benefits for USS members should be given the highest priority.

- The University will continue to provide enhanced covenant support for any proposals formally presented and agreed through negotiations at the USS Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC).
- In the event of further changes to USS the University will undertake its own equality impact assessment (EIA) of the impacts and will call for a sector-wide EIA to be undertaken by the USS Trustee to ensure that any disproportionate impacts on members with protected characteristics are identified and mitigations put in place.
- Recognising the high numbers of eligible staff currently opting out of USS, the University supports work at a national level to attract more people to join USS in order to earn valuable pension benefits.
- UUK and UCU should continue the joint work on governance reform in USS as a matter of urgency, which should include serious consideration of the JEP recommendations on governance which this University supported when it was published.
- UUK and UCU should continue the joint work on possible future benefit structures for the scheme (recognising the value to members of defined benefits and also including exploration of conditional indexation).
- The local [USS Valuation Working Group](#), will be reconvened with refreshed University membership and in partnership with our trade union colleagues, to help navigate the complex issues that might arise from the next USS valuation and help inform the University's position in relation to it. These meetings will recommence from September 2022.
- The Vice-Chancellor and UEB will use their leverage to seek to influence the collective employer position in relation to future negotiations and national level work relating to USS and will urge UUK to engage constructively with UCU and the USS Trustee.

27 May 2022