



Dear Vice Chancellor,

The Branch Executive of ARU UCU, meeting on May 12th 2021, decided unanimously to send the following statement, subsequent to the presentation of our concerns at the Joint Consultative and Negotiation Group (JCNG) meeting of May 7th, 2021.

Preliminary comments

ARU UCU wishes the University to succeed. There are senior managers who do inspire confidence. Elsewhere, there are problems. We have brought these to the attention of the University leadership.

Suppressing employee voice can never resolve conflict and the associated high costs, but merely make them harder to anticipate and to manage. As recent staff survey results have revealed, dissatisfaction with and low levels of trust in managers are rampant. UCU membership at ARU continues to grow and all member meetings are larger than ever. Management need to work with us to improve our institution.

Collective bargaining is the key to success. When important decisions are made they must be presented, discussed and agreed through the established machinery of collective consultation and negotiation. Decision making must be forged through the search for consensus. As the largest and most significant independent expression of collective employee voice, wisdom dictates decisions require the consent of UCU. The university needs to invest further in its relationship with UCU and deepen and extend collective bargaining, so that we can all work together to make the University the community we all want and deserve.

Moving forward

It is in such a spirit that we call on the University leadership to engage with UCU in addressing and resolving a number of outstanding concerns.

At JCNG, UCU representatives submitted a number of papers. Time constraints did not permit for full and proper consideration. The absence of the Director of HR (who we are informed was on holiday) meant that explanations, requested well in advance of the meeting, were not forthcoming verbally, but neither was the opportunity taken to provide credible answers in writing. While we welcome the expressions of concern expressed by the management representatives present, the absence of timely and concrete action, combined with a timetable for resolution, can no longer be regarded as tolerable.

Certain areas of concern can be resolved through correspondence (the demand for an inquiry into the failures of HR and the implications for the wellbeing reviews; issues around transparency; and, the proper recording of work related stress absence). In addition, we see no reason why the University cannot make a written commitment, in line with the comments made by James Rolfe at JCNG, that proposals for “Agile Working” are to be properly discussed through our system of collective bargaining and that no decision to advance this novel approach to work will and can be made without consent. On this issue, we note that he was genuinely surprised that no such consultations or negotiations were entered into prior to the imposition of this new working arrangement in the Faculty of Business and Law, where it now prevails as a *fait accompli*. A clear statement from the university on this matter, declaring a moratorium, might go some way in allaying the scepticism and suspicions currently at large.

However, there are fundamental issues of contestation which require negotiations to take place as a matter of urgency. Overwork is clearly demonstrated by the soaring levels of work-related stress, with absences placing the “survivors” under additional immense strain and vulnerable to illness. We need solutions for the coming academic year. Our members cannot carry on as before. We know University leaders recognise the problem. But greater urgency is required.

UCU calls for the establishment of talks with the University leadership to address the following demands:

1. An agreed “headroom” figure to be built into workload allocations for the coming academic year, to bring working hours substantially below the target of 1585.
2. In recognition of the contractual obligation upon the University to those staff who are employed to conduct research and teaching, the restoration of research time in AWBMs.
3. That untaken annual leave, which is carried over from the previous year, is factored into workload calculations.
4. That colleagues receive allowances for teaching preparation, marking and moderation which reflects the actual time required to produce work of sufficient quality to meet the reasonable expectations of students. The allowances as they currently stand are a scandal.
5. The institution of punitive overtime payment, for every hour any member staff is called upon to work beyond the 1585 ceiling (or equivalent where no AWBM is in place). The aim here is not to promote overtime pay as a route out of staff shortages or as a means to attenuate the costs incurred as a result of real terms pay cuts, but to set a price upon the failure of managers to plan and properly organise workloads.
6. That shortages in capacity are met not with the employment of Associate Lecturers, where possible, but through the offer of full and fractional contracts, with all the benefits of full-time permanent employment.

The UCU Branch Executive calls upon the University to enter into negotiations. Any final collective agreement can be reached through dialogue and reasonable compromise. Given

the obvious implications for planning and operational efficiency, the timeframe within which an agreement needs to be struck is tight. But this is a health and safety, as well as wellbeing, emergency. The levels of demoralisation and stress-related illness are shocking. We expect to hear from the University by 6pm on Wednesday, May 19th, with an agreement to enter into talks with UCU, with a view to reaching a collective agreement by the end of the month.

Such is the urgency of the situation, if progress is not made then we will be left with no choice but to declare a dispute, with immediate effect. We very much hope and trust that this will not be necessary. UCU wants to work with University management to find an amicable settlement, which will allow us to build a workplace that delivers for all and where wellbeing, safety and health are accorded the attention required.

We look forward to hearing from you.

ARU UCU Branch Executive

May 12th, 2021