



**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE UNISON HIGHER EDUCATION SERVICE GROUP
2023**

Welcome from the Vice-Chair of the Higher Education Service Group Executive

Dear all,

On behalf of Mobina Begum, and the Service Group Executive, I'm very pleased to extend a warm welcome to UNISON's Higher Education Conference 2024. This gathering provides a platform for us to engage in meaningful debate, discuss the significant challenges facing higher education workers, and unite in our collective pursuit of a better future for all of us working in higher education. Whether you're a first-time attendee or a seasoned UNISON veteran, I encourage you to actively participate and make your voice heard today.

Despite many personal and workplace challenges, our dedicated branch activists have showcased remarkable adaptability in their efforts to support, represent, and communicate with members across campuses during 2023. Collaborative campaigns within higher education branches, addressing issues from safeguarding pensions to opposing redundancies, highlight our collective commitment to achieving shared objectives alongside fellow trade unions.

In response to our members grappling with the most significant cost-of-living crisis in over three decades, the SGE has appropriately prioritised pay campaigns again this year. Consultations, ballots, and re-ballots have characterised these efforts, with notable success in strike action prompting some employers to propose resolutions to the ongoing dispute. The increasing number of branches securing a mandate for industrial action over the past year underscores the growing strength of our collective voice.

Members working in higher education have endured more than a decade of below-inflation pay offers, meaning that we're all working for less, with many of our members significantly struggling. While employers express appreciation for the dedicated efforts of our members in adapting and delivering services, we have to be clear that we're not going to put this right without putting up a determined fight. This means pressurising the employers to divert more of their institution's income to staff wages, whilst simultaneously campaigning for the sector to be properly funded, as all

public services should be. This won't happen by hoping that it will. History tells us that organised workers, such as us, need to fight for it.

As always, a massive thank you goes out to all our branch activists, as well as regional and national colleagues, who have collaborated tirelessly to provide unwavering support to our members and will no doubt continue to do so throughout 2024 and beyond.

In solidarity,

Ivan Bonsell

Vice-Chair, National Higher Education Service Group Executive

Section A

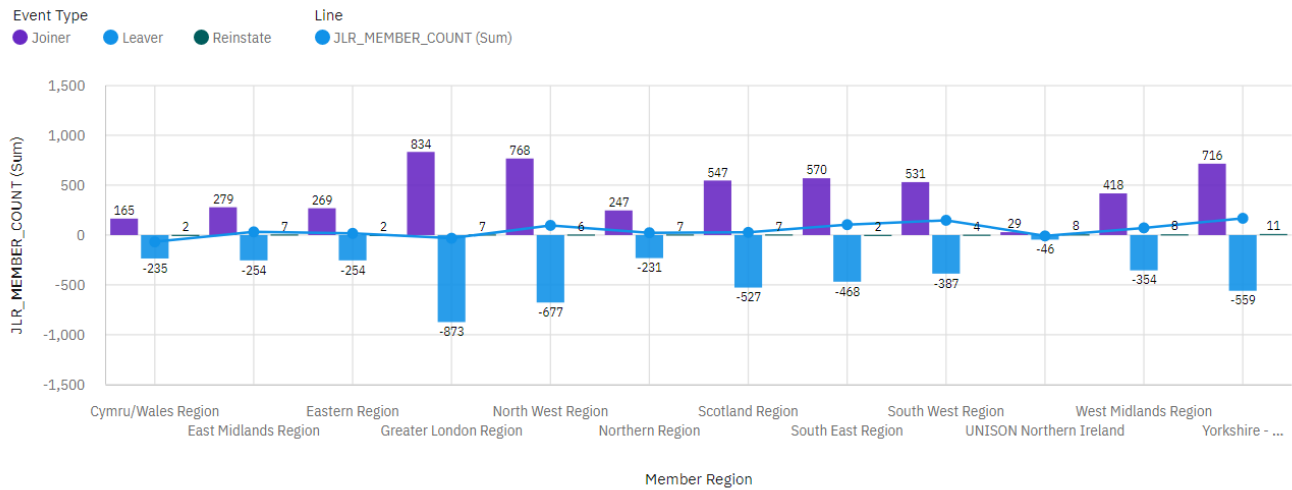
UNISON Objective 1 – Recruitment and organising

We aim to:

- Enhance our capability to recruit and retain members and meet the organising and representation challenges facing the union in the changing world of work.
- Ensure our union is relevant to all members who provide public services – including those who work in the community and private sectors.
- Identify and develop leadership and encourage union activism from across the union, particularly among young members and provide support and resources for them to lead campaigns.
- Enhance our democracy by increasing and widening participation of our activists and members.
- Identify strategic growth areas such as social care and under-5s education and implement a national organising strategy in those sectors.
- Encourage the recruitment of local stewards and Health & Safety representatives.
- In all trade union activity to promote the benefits of the organising approach.

1. Recruitment

Joiners and leavers by region in 2023



The graph above reflects the work done by branch activists, members and regions to recruit and retain members. The SGE is provided with statistics so that they are able to understand national and regional trends and to seek out best practice. Discussions on recruitment and organising also took place during the year at branch and regional level to devise strategies for growth and increasing density. The year has seen a mixed picture of increasing and decreasing membership across the UK. It is likely that significant industrial action balloting and strike action across the UK in higher education institutions, as well as continuing economic uncertainty and the cost-of-living crisis underpin these changes. The largest increase in net membership was in the Yorkshire and Humberside region, with over 700 new joiners. Month-by-month membership data is detailed in the appendices at the end of this report.

Section B

UNISON Objective 2 – Bargaining and equalities

We aim to:

- Deliver increased funding for public services and secure real terms pay increases, improved terms and conditions, and high-quality employment and pensions for UNISON members.

- Build confidence for industrial action when required, identify and support strategic industrial disputes at national and branch level and seek to co-ordinate action wherever possible.
- Promote equal pay and equality in public, community and private sectors.
- Actively challenge all forms of discrimination including racism and sexism; against LGBT+ people; against disabled people; and discrimination based on age, religion or social class.
- Provide support to migrant workers.
- Bargaining and lobbying to end two-tier workforce in outsourced public services and rolling out a strategy to ensure national agreements are awarded to outsourced workers.
- Provide assistance to those branches supporting outsourced members.
- Campaign for better facility time arrangements for our members in public services

2. Pay

2022-23

UNISON, UCU, Unite and EIS all remain in dispute with the Universities & Colleges Employer's Association (UCEA) over 2022-3 pay. Despite a suggestion that early negotiations over 2023-24 pay might include a sum to settle 2022-23, UCEA did not make such an offer, so the dispute has not concluded. UNISON branches in 22 Higher Education Institutions had ongoing mandates for strike action in relation to this dispute at the start of 2023. The majority of strike mandates ended on 18 February in Scotland and 25 February in England, but four continued beyond these dates.

Strike action took place in February in 13 branches before our mandates expired. Members at Glasgow School of Art and Queen Margaret University took action on 21 and 22 March and members at Arts University Bournemouth took action on 25 April, 17 May and 6 June. At Glasgow School of Art a further day of action was planned on 1 June to coincide with degree shows but was cancelled because a local settlement of the dispute over 2022-23 pay was reached at that institution and signed off by the SGE chair.

2023-24

After the 2022-23 pay dispute the pressure of five local deals and the other unions joining our strike action in late 2022 led to UCEA opening pay talks for 2023-4 early. As a result of the time pressure this entailed, no formal pay claim was submitted by the joint trade unions, but a headline pay claim of a flat rate increase of £4000 or RPI plus 2%, whichever was the greater, plus an equivalent increase in London Weighting was agreed between the joint trade unions and submitted to UCEA before negotiations began, in accordance with conference motion 7, and resolve 1 of conference motion 12. The New JNCHES 2023-4 pay negotiations took place on 9, 16 and 25 January 2023. The joint secretaries received a first offer in writing on 11 January and a full and final offer on 26 January. The offer was for a consolidated rise of between 5 and 8% on a tapered basis, with part to be implemented from February 2023 and the remainder from August 2023.

UNISON members were consulted on whether they accepted or rejected this offer, and the result was an 82% vote to reject on a 34.3% turnout. The HE SGE decided to go into dispute with UCEA over 2023-24 pay, as did the other 4 recognised trade unions.

With the agreement of the HE SGE and all 5 trade unions, conciliation talks brokered by Acas took the place of the normal dispute resolution meetings and the chair of the HE SGE represented UNISON in these talks alongside the senior national officer. The talks ended in impasse rather than agreement. The very slightly amended pay offer was unchanged at 8% for those at the bottom of the scale, reducing on a tapering basis a up to 5% for those at the top of the scale, with a very slightly increased amount added to annual salaries of £1000 or 2%, whichever was the greater, payable from February 2023, and the remainder payable from August 2023.

On 17 February the two sides issued a joint statement to say the dispute process over pay had been exhausted, with some limited improvement to the phrasing of the offer on pay, but the talks would continue to agree terms of reference on pay-related matters, on the basis of a suspension of strike action by the joint TUs and no imposition of the offer by the employers during a fortnight-long 'period of calm'.

Conciliation talks through Acas continued to agree terms of reference on pay-related matters, and UNISON pushed for these to cover all of the additional points that conference motion 7 required in a pay claim, including convening the Scottish sub-committee. Not all of these were agreed by UCEA, and those that went forward focussed on: a revised pay spine, work to address equalities pay gaps, work to reduce the incidence of precarious

contracts and work to ensure that workloads are manageable. Wording was agreed within these that would have allowed further negotiation over a standard 35-hour week, establishing a lowest point on the pay spine above the Foundation Living Wage as per conference motion 6, agreement on flexible or hybrid working and bringing outsourced workers back in house. The draft terms were put to all parties in March 2023, and UCEA and four out of five of the unions, including UNISON, agreed to negotiate on this basis. Agreement was not obtained from UCU, and hence talks broke down and no progress was made for a period of seven months.

Given that the dispute process over pay had been exhausted, the HE SGE developed a clear plan to escalate the dispute, in accordance with conference motion 7, and decided to run a targeted disaggregate ballot of 14 HEIs with a high chance of winning a mandate before the summer break. Nine HEIs achieved a mandate and took impactful strike action during the exams/ assessment season from 1 June. The SGE agreed a longer, targeted disaggregate ballot of another 28 HEIs with a high chance of winning a ballot over the summer to deliver a mandate for strike action at the start of the Autumn term, and 13 HEIs achieved a mandate, making a total of 23 HEIs covered by a mandate at some point during 2023. At three of these HEIs, branches have since won local deals on non-consolidated payments or changes to grading structures to adjust staff pay and pay-related conditions without undermining the national pay scale, and talks are ongoing at one more.

Coordinated strike action took place at the start of the autumn term in Scotland on 20 September and in England on 2 and 3 October for maximum national impact, with some extra days of local strike action at some HEIs and rallies and protests over pay in HEIs without a mandate. Unite also achieved strike mandates in a few HEIs and took action alongside UNISON where mandates overlapped. UCU took strike action across the UK with an aggregate mandate, and ran a marking and assessment boycott, which ended in September. UCU and EIS re-balloted their members for action over 2023-24 pay on an aggregate basis across the UK in October and November but failed to meet the 50% turnout threshold.

The pressure of the UNISON (and Unite) strike action and the UCU marking and assessment boycott brought the employers back to the table this autumn to discuss a joint independent review of sector finances, which is expected to take at least a year to complete, with the possibility of a multi-year deal to follow, put forward by UNISON as per conference motion 7. All

parties have now also agreed to a re-examination of the Acas terms of reference on pay-related items with the aim of reaching agreement so that those negotiations can begin. Three meetings took place in September, November and December and preparatory talks are currently ongoing.

Since the publication of the new rates for the Foundation Living Wage UNISON has initiated talks with UCEA and the joint trades unions about issuing joint advice to HEIs about its implementation. This is the start of UNISON's campaign for all universities to become Foundation Living Wage employers in accordance with conference motion 7.

At the Autumn New JNCHES meeting UNISON raised an agenda item on the obstacles to resolving the 2023-24 pay dispute. This was the earliest opportunity since the breakdown of talks in February to push for an additional offer, which could be a consolidated pay uplift or a non-consolidated lump sum, as per conference motion 1, to end the dispute, and UNISON also pushed for a review of the UCEA practice of imposing their pay offer without the agreement of the joint trade unions. Negotiations on these matters are currently ongoing.

The joint pay claim for 2024-25 is due to be submitted in March 2024.

Local deals within New JNCHES

During the 2023-24 pay dispute parallel local deals have been agreed by branches, with sign-off from the HE SGE chair or vice chair, which have delivered a win to members who have taken strike action at the following HEIs: Manchester Metropolitan University (grading changes), University of Liverpool (grading changes), City University (non-consolidated lump sum), the University of Bedfordshire (working hours), Plymouth Marjon University (agreement not to defer 23-24 pay uplift for some grades).

3. Health and Safety in Higher Education

The SGE has continued to campaign on health and safety issues throughout the year and to support branches on health and safety issues. Through joint working with the employers and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in the Higher Education Safety and Health committee (HESH) we have sought to represent the key issues for UNISON members.

We have discussed the endorsement of a document related to University Safety and Health Association (USHA) leadership and management in health

and safety. We have relayed concerns that the document might give indirect encouragement to HEIs to set up “management” H&S committees possibly circumventing existing committees set up under the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees (SRSC) regulations. We have also raised the fact that the document does not contain much about the positive role of union H&S representatives, or about their rights and roles as part of the overall safety system. Both pieces of feedback were taken on board by USHA representatives, and we await a revised version of the document.

We have also discussed a joint statement with the employers on ventilation and have asked to include the following as additional points: a statement about the value of better ventilation standards over and above the legal minimum; removal of the specific reference to flu and inclusion of some examples of other measures that can improve air quality such as improving mechanical ventilation and using air purifiers. USHA and UCEA have taken on board these comments and we await a revised version.

We are also working through HESH on some joint principles relating to keeping campuses safe during an emergency health situation. These principles are intended to replace prior agreed documents, including the principles for working safely on campus during the Covid-19 pandemic, the joint statement between UCEA and the HE trade unions on staff vaccinations and the joint statement between UCEA and the HE trade unions on Covid-19 testing for Staff. As a potential replacement for these the UNISON view is that the document does little to learn lessons from the pandemic or reflect the fact that Covid-19 remains a significant hazard. The trade unions stated that the document, at minimum, needs to have a section at the beginning covering “baseline” actions employers should take to learn lessons from the pandemic regarding disease prevention and maintaining healthy workplaces. This should include, for example, reviewing sickness absence and attendance management policies to ensure they do not pressure workers (particularly lower graded workers) into work when unwell. It was also highlighted that while employers may no longer wish to do specific covid-19 related risk assessments following changes to HSE and government advice, broader disease prevention assessments may still be warranted to manage the still significant risks from respiratory infections.

UCEA's response to these concerns will determine whether the HE SGE endorses the new principles.

As well as discussion about these draft agreements we have also raised and discussed the significant risk from reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) planks that has been flagged by UNISON's health & safety unit as a high-risk area. At HESH, on 17 May, USHA attendees stated that they were confident HEIs were on top of this risk and had communicated with their members when the risk was highlighted by the HSE in May 2021. UNISON has continued to monitor the prevalence of RAAC at universities across the UK.

Regarding stress, UCEA confirmed at the May HESH meeting that they had updated and republished their stress resources pack in December 2021. At the UNISON Universities and Colleges Seminar we organised a workshop on managing stress as a workplace hazard, delivered by the Greater Manchester Hazards Centre, which was well attended.

UNISON has also asked how standards across the sector for display screen equipment (DSE) provision, particularly for those working at home, could be tracked. USHA offered to survey their members on practices and agreed that provision was probably very variable across the sector.

4. FE and 6th Form Colleges

4.1 Pay

In England, the Association of Colleges (AoC) failed to make a recommendation at pay talks in April and May 2023 but following an injection of funding into the sector, have now recommended a 6.5% cost of living increase. Since the funding is distributed via the 16-19 funding stream, colleges with a higher proportion of adult learners will receive less funding and not be able to make higher awards. For this reason, the joint unions are pushing for binding national negotiations by developing a political strategy aimed developing support from labour MPs.

In Scotland a successful statutory ballot on the 2% pay offer resulted in a 92% vote to reject on a 62% turnout. September to mid-October saw a rolling programme of industrial action across the country. The mandate has now expired and reballoting is currently underway.

In Wales, a joint union claim for 6.5% or the rate of inflation, whichever is higher, was submitted in July. Teachers' pay in Wales was agreed at 5% for 2023-24 as part of a 2-year pay deal and consequently ColegauCymru offered 5% to all FE staff to maintain parity plus a commitment to honour the £12 per hour Real Living Wage. This has been accepted by the trade union side.

In Northern Ireland, NJC pay, terms and conditions apply to directly employed staff.

4.2 Organising

Eastern region has agreed to act as a trial region in developing a new approach to organising in which UNISON takes the lead for support staff in FE colleges. A plan is currently being developed that will see a new organising space being developed by the national office with resources and Eastern have identified all key personnel to support the plan. In the Autumn term work will focus around identifying reps and consulting on the 2023-24 pay offer. In the Spring term branches will develop the champions campaign and the pay claim for 2024-25. In the Summer, branches will be supported to launch co-ordinated pay claims with all colleges in the region.

4.3 Campaigning

The Champions in our Colleges campaign continues to grow, and merchandise has been produced so that it is available for pre-order prior to Christmas, in preparation for the event on 9 February. A website will be designed with the nominate a champion competition going live in the New Year.

4.4 National bargaining

We can see from events in the devolved nations that binding pay negotiations lead to improved pay, terms and conditions for our members. For this reason, we are pursuing a political strategy to push for proper national bargaining in England. The AoC initially agreed to some exploratory talks on this, and a roundtable was held with Labour MPs in July 2023. We are now in contact with the shadow minister's office to develop this work further.

5. Pensions

Regular verbal reports have been presented by the UNISON pensions unit at HE SGE meetings on any significant issues around pension scheme provision in HEIs. The pensions unit continues to support branches facing scheme closures on campaigning against detrimental changes, calling in legal and actuarial support as necessary. The UNISON Universities and Colleges seminar included the launch of a new pensions organising guide for higher education and two training workshops focused on organising around pensions.

5.1 Pensions organising guide

UNISON launched a new guide on organising around pensions in higher education at the UNISON Universities and Colleges seminar. The organising guide covers the pensions landscape within HE, including locally administered schemes, employers moving staff away from the Local Government Pension Scheme, and the different schemes used in different types of HEI. It presents a comprehensive, detailed plan of action for activists to use to campaign against attacks on pension provision locally, and also on how to campaign to improve members' defined contribution (DC) schemes.

5.2 Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS)

Due to government accounting rules, employer contributions to the Teachers' Pension Scheme are going to be raised by 5%. The university sector, predominately post 1992 institutions which are required to offer TPS membership to academic staff, will face increased cost for this. The government has provided additional funds to cover the cost but are only offering this to the employers which are funded centrally through departmental expenditure, which does not include universities. The increased cost of the employer contributions will not lead to increased benefits for TPS members. UNISON is a signatory to a letter to the Department for Education arguing for the increased cost to be met by the government and is continuing to monitor ongoing correspondence between the Universities and the Department for Education regarding this, as

financial instability is likely to have a knock-on effect on our members jobs in these institutions.

5.3 University Superannuation Scheme (USS)

In many pre-92 universities, higher banded professional services staff are offered membership of the USS. In a few universities (the Open University, the University of Stirling and Trinity Laban), staff in all professional services roles are offered membership of the USS pension scheme rather than a local scheme. The USS has been worsened in recent years through changes in accrual rates and a change to a hybrid scheme, where members with pensionable pay above a set level accrue benefits in a DC scheme for that portion of income. Earlier in the year, USS announced a consultation on changes that would restore a lot of the elements of the scheme that were previously removed. These changes were possible because of changing economic conditions and the clearly expressed demand from scheme members for reversal of the previous reforms. The changes were positive for UNISON members in the USS, with the only possible detriment in the proposals being for those who may have preferred having a greater proportion of their contributions in the DC scheme.

In March 2023 hackers targeted USS' technology supplier, Capita. USS use Capita's 'Hartlink' platform to support their in-house pension administration processes. The USS data concerned was contained in files generated by Capita from Hartlink, and held separately on their servers, to facilitate their operational processes. On 11 May 2023 Capita formally informed USS that member data was accessed by the hackers. USS then started to inform members of the incident from 12 May 2023. USS have confirmed that information potentially accessed included: Title, Initial(s), Name; Date of Birth; National Insurance number; USS member number, and retirement dates (as correct in 2021). USS have been reassured that individuals pension and My USS login information are safe.

5.4 Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS)

In post-92 institutions, there is not the same history of employers having locally administered schemes. Employers have had less opportunity to reform or worsen members' pension benefits. The attack on professional services staff pensions here has taken a different form, with universities seeking to move new, and sometimes existing, staff out of coverage of the

local government pension scheme (LGPS). The LGPS is a statutory defined benefit (DB) scheme and provides very good and predictable retirement incomes. Post-92 universities and further education colleges participate in the LGPS as 'scheduled bodies'. They have to provide LGPS membership for their employees. The university employers (UCEA) lobbied government to remove the requirement for post-92 HE institutions to offer professional services staff membership of the LGPS a few years ago. The Government held a consultation on this matter in 2019, but the plans were dropped after active UNISON opposition. To try to get around this requirement to provide the LGPS for employees, some post-92 universities have created a separate 'wholly owned subsidiary' (WOS) to employ professional services staff so that they can be offered a DC scheme rather than the LGPS. UNISON's Bargaining Support Group have published a detailed guide to assist branches who face proposals to create a WOS. The guide also details how to protect terms and conditions where a WOS goes ahead and how to return a WOS back in-house.

There is still no firm commitment about when the new Fair Deal Regulations will come into force. Such regulations would give transferred staff the right to continue to access the LGPS after a transfer. UNISON continue to press the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and the Scheme Advisory Board (SAB) wrote to the department on 16 October asking for an update.

UNISON continues to press for regulations that will address underpayments of survivor benefits that arose because of retrospective changes in entitlement following the Brewster judgment to backdating widowers' pensions commencing after 2005 with service before 1988. DLUHC still cannot put forward a timetable for changing the regulations. The LGPS Scotland and LGPS Northern Ireland have already amended their schemes.

Regulations are now in force allowing the McCloud remedy to be applied for all eligible members who were in service in April 2012 and have service between April 2014 (in England and Wales) or April 2015 (in Scotland and Northern Ireland) and April 2022. Work is starting over the next few months on applying the test to the backlog of cases for those who have already left. A high proportion will be still better off for those years under the 2014/5 section so no change in benefit would occur.

The UNISON LGPS Forum has met twice in the last few months, most recently on 14 September, when it considered our response to the investment consultation. It also shared experience and practice across regions and identified priorities for the LGPS pension conference on 14 March next year. The HE SGE is represented on the LGPS Forum.

The Government consulted on proposals which would give them more influence over LGPS investments. They proposed “encouraging” at least 10% of each individual fund to be invested in private equity, and at least 5% in investments which would promote levelling up. They also proposed requiring Funds to pool all their liquid investments by March 2025. In the UNISON response we pushed back strongly in all these areas; we argued that it is not for Government to tell funds how to invest; and that the Pools are not sufficiently accountable to members. Most other respondents have made broadly similar points, particularly concentrating on the unwise of requiring specific levels of investment in specific asset classes and requiring rapid sell-offs of assets to fit an artificial timetable for pooling. UNISON awaits the Government’s response.

6. Regions and devolved nations

6.1 Eastern Region

All Eastern HE eyes were on the University of East Anglia for the first half of 2023 as UNISON members led the fight against mass sackings and a pay freeze. Battle opened in January, when the university in Norwich revealed that it was millions of pounds in the red. It announced an accelerated strategic review programme, which turned out to mean widespread compulsory redundancies among professional services staff, scrapping its commitment to the real living wage and delaying implementation of the nationally agreed pay award for 11 months. The branch leapt into action, launching a high-profile campaign to stop the cuts. Membership figures soared spurred by regular communications, on-site mass meetings, workplace walkabouts, drop-ins, a march and rally, lobbying of MPs and ministers and appearances in the local press and radio. Staff were angry and wanted to make a stand and knew joining UNISON was the best way to do it. Activists worked with other campus unions but led from the front, as the axe would fall particularly hard on professional services staff. A consultative vote saw a massive 93% reject the university’s cuts package and push for a legal industrial action ballot. Branch activists were busy preparing for the

ballot when managers sent out an all-staff message: no compulsory redundancies, mirroring the real living wage rates and paying the 2023 award on time. All down to the hard work and commitment of UNISON UEA members. This battle may have been won but with UEA finances still looking bad, the branch is getting ready for the fight that looms. They'll take on that struggle with better density and a far bigger activist base.

But other branches did not take their eyes off the ball while attention was on UEA. Anglia Ruskin University UNISON had a great 2023, making UNISON's Year of Black Workers their priority. The hard work paid off, ARU became the first university to sign UNISON's Anti-Racism Charter – celebrating the landmark with a signing celebration and panel discussion – and the branch now has two Black members officers – one for each campus in Chelmsford and Peterborough. They are now on a much stronger footing to improve the working environment for their Black colleagues at ARU. Professional services staff also won an increase to their annual leave entitlement, with reps negotiating an increase to 30 days annual leave for all professional services staff the moment they join ARU. Their next campaign is to achieve a reduction in the standard working week from 37 hours to 35 hours and building on the lessons learnt for Year of Black Workers to celebrate the Year of LGBT+ Workers which the branch plans to hold in June 2024. All this helped UNISON ARU smash the organising to win target of a 1% net increase in membership, with numbers up 7% for the year.

In the latter part of 2023, it was the University of Bedfordshire UNISON which became front-runner in the dispute stakes. It was the only Eastern region institution where UNISON members managed to overcome the Tories' anti-union laws and break the 50% threshold in the vote for better pay. Staff staged strong pickets at the Luton and Bedford campuses for three days of action. They're now preparing for a rebalot to push UCEA to offer more.

But the inspirational picket lines have another contender for the highlight of Beds Uni UNISON's 2023: professional services staff won an extra five days of annual leave! Support staff are now on 30 days, but that still lags five days behind academic staff and branch reps won't rest until they have parity. On top of that, the branch has been actively promoting equalities, contributing to a joint Black members' group with UCU. The Black members officer continues to push university managers to sign UNISON's Anti-Racism Charter. Other work includes the renegotiation of the recognition and facilities agreement, seeking release of two full-time equivalents per union, though the employer is more interested in removing some of the sections we

like. All this has helped significantly boost membership – up 5% to 266 – and activist numbers. The branch committee is now 20 strong, the largest ever, with most posts filled.

Elsewhere, there's been a UNISON resurgence at Norwich University of the Arts, part of Norfolk County branch. Eighteen months ago, there were no reps and 38 members, fast forward to today and there are two stewards who have spurred a 16% rise in membership, going up to 44. The new reps have been working on a new hybrid working policy, directly engaging members to incorporate their views and try to improve work-life balance for staff. Reps are also engaged at a national level with one attending the national UNISON universities and colleges seminar in Liverpool on 8-9 November.

At the University of Cambridge & colleges, UNISON has been busy reviewing and updating policies, including the grievance policy, flexible working, car parking, transport and more. The branch negotiated an updated and improved facility agreement. The branch also held a very well-attended wellbeing event attracting members and non-members and had a successful World Mental Health Day.

6.2 East Midlands

The year 2023 in the East Midlands continues to be shaped by ongoing challenges within the higher education sector.

Commencing the year, familiar concerns persisted, focusing on remote working models, health and safety for on-campus workers, and the complexities surrounding the return of more staff. As pandemic-related restrictions fluctuated, new challenges emerged, including the transition of some staff returning to campus, the integration of hybrid work models, and uncertainties surrounding eligibility for continued remote work.

A pivotal development this year is the achievement of Living Wage accreditation at Loughborough University, negotiated by the branch with their core employer, reflecting a commitment to fair and equitable compensation for members. This success aligns with broader efforts within

the higher education sector across the union to address the well-being and financial stability of members.

The year saw active engagement across UNISON branches in the region, particularly in relation to ballots on both local and national pay offers. Throughout, branches maintained their commitment to democratic processes, striving to involve as many members as possible but also recognising there is more work to do to increase both turnout and engagement in the coming years.

Branches faced diverse day to day challenges, including organisational restructuring, discussions on the potential reintroduction/increasing costs of campus car parking fees, concerns about workplace toxicity, bullying, and threats to incremental payments. Navigating the dynamic landscape of higher education in the East Midlands, the Living Wage accreditation achieved by Loughborough University branch stands as a positive milestone, reflecting a commitment to fair pay for members' work.

6.3 Greater London

Recruitment & Organising

Whilst some branches continue to see a net increase in membership, our recruitment & retention figures for HE across London unfortunately reflect members lost in restructures, leaving us with a slight net loss of members over the year to date. We currently have just under 5500 members and have not yet reached the 1% net increase target. However, recruitment and organising initiatives around pay, local campaigns, cost of living and equalities continue. Recruitment of new activists is also ongoing, as is succession planning in branches with several new branch secretaries and other key branch officers, including equalities and Black members officers taking up post, which is extremely positive.

Pay

Imperial College is the only HEI in London not included in national pay bargaining. The joint trade unions pay claim asked for 10.9% with an additional 2% to compensate for the loss of value from USS pensions. The joint unions highlighted the fact that Imperial College is in a much better position to address the needs of staff than some HEI's. Imperial made a full

and final offer (as detailed below), which resulted in members being balloted for industrial action and exceeding the 50% threshold.

The effective date of the increase will be 1 August 2022, and is as follows:

- 3.3% pay increase across the board, subject to a
- £1500 minimum payment
- £3300 maximum payment

The distribution of the award in this way (excluding any incremental increases) across the 52 point pay scale means there will a greater increase to salaries for the lower to middle paid staff, who may be more affected by inflation and energy costs. Members at Imperial therefore took 7 days of strike action.

After industrial action and ongoing negotiations - the joint trades unions and Imperial College management met on 12 October 2023 to discuss pay. The discussions took into account the agreement between UCU and UUK on 2 October in relation to the latest USS valuation. In the light of this agreement Imperial College has agreed to bring forward pay negotiations for 2024-25 to January 2024. As part of any proposed settlement, the College has agreed to bring forward an element of any pay increase to the date on which reduction in USS employer contributions take effect. In the statement referred to above, it is reported that this is likely to be 1 January 2024. Following a joint union members' meeting on Monday 16 Oct, UCU, UNISON and Unite agreed to withdraw their notifications of industrial action on 18 October 2023 as a gesture of goodwill and to facilitate negotiations in January. The joint trades unions have been asked to submit a pay claim by December 2023. Members will therefore receive an additional £500 (or more, if more savings are made) which will be consolidated, from January.

In terms of national pay bargaining two branches in London achieved a mandate for action – SOAS in the advanced party and City University in the autumn term ballot and both have taken a number of days of successful industrial action to bring the employers back to the negotiating table on HE pay 2023/24.

Reps at University of Greenwich Student Union, falling under the Higher Education Branch, submitted a claim to the employer which would amount to a 10% basic pay increase in the event that all elements were met.

Following the claim UNISON reps negotiated with the employer over the implementation of a new pay policy which entailed members receiving a 17% increase in pay over a 10-month period. The branch is also in the process of agreeing structures for ongoing negotiations over pay with the Greenwich Students Union.

London Weighting and Cost of Living

Both Kings College and University College London branches have successfully negotiated an increase in London Weighting from £4200 to £5000 per year, from December 2023. The offer by Kings College is on the basis that London Weighting will stay at this rate during 2024 with any potential negotiations on an increase opening early 2025. The increase in London Weighting at UCL will be extended to all workers on UCL outsourced contracts.

In 2022 Queen Mary University of London (QMUL) Branch were successful in securing the payment of historic underpayments for low paid QMUL members. The branch identified that the employer had incorrectly applied previous national pay awards (going back to 2014), with the effect that some staff (particularly those on lower grades) had suffered from historic underpayment. Staff received back-payment in November last year, however the branch remains in dispute with the employer about the effects of earlier pay awards (since 2006) effectively entailing that lower graded staff attracted lower levels of London Weighting and continues to actively campaign on the issue. The branch has also been campaigning for the abolition of salary grade 1, so that all staff would start on grade 2. It is anticipated the payroll cost of this is in the region of £200,000.

University of Westminster branch have negotiated a £500 cost of living payment (non-consolidated) calculated pro rata (min 0.2FTE) for staff, with outsourced staff currently not receiving this but a commitment from management to facilitate this.

City University UNISON branch committee has secured an offer of a non-consolidated payment of £1,500 (pro-rated for part-time staff) to all staff on

Grades 2 and 3, and commitment to a series of meetings with UNISON on grading/spine points and non-pay related benefits.

Other bargaining successes

Following a campaign by the Middlesex University Branch the closure of an onsite nursery has been halted. The campaign protected jobs and ensured the nursery for staff and students remained on campus. One year has been won to find an alternative site to ensure the long-term future of the nursery and the branch are working with the employer and other trade unions/stakeholders on this.

Kings College have also successfully negotiated maternity and paternity leave to be applicable from the first day of service, childcare benefit (20% subsidy) and annual leave for all staff increased to 30 days, including wellbeing days.

London School of Economics have secured improvements to the parental leave policy, specifically 12 weeks neonatal leave and 2 weeks carers leave, in addition to special leave. Members are currently being supported in claims over unsocial working claims and a collective grievance on a ban on overtime for staff who have taken sick leave.

A number of branches are running campaigns for parity of annual leave with academics and decisions are awaited on these, including University of East London have a 'Fight for 35' campaign to win parity of annual leave with academics (35 days per year).

At the Royal Veterinary College, a workplace survey has been sent out to members to collate data and comms drafted to support members if they are affected by bullying in the workplace. Work is also ongoing to ensure that HERA (Higher Education Role Analysis) job evaluation is undertaken regularly to ensure staff are not completing the duties of a higher grade without the pay to reflect this.

Year of the Black Worker and Equalities Initiatives

The region has written to all HEI's asking them to sign up to UNISON's Anti Racism Charter, and to date Goldsmiths College are the first to agree to sign, subject to formal approval by the board. It is hoped this can be formally signed and implementation be underway by the end of the year. All other employers will be encouraged to sign up to demonstrate their commitment

to race equality and we will continue to push for this and implementation of the objectives within the charter into 2024 and beyond.

University of Westminster has successfully recruited Black members' officers and has been working with both Black members and the equalities officer on a Year of Black Workers campaign during October and November.

Bargaining initiatives particularly impacting our Black members are ongoing including campaigns for services to be brought back in house, and campaigns to remove the lowest salary bands.

Restructures & Redundancy

Unfortunately, restructures continue across the region but thanks to the efforts of branches we have minimised any compulsory redundancies.

At the end of 2002 Birkbeck College announced plans to cut around 140 jobs, as part of a bid to save money. The university claimed the cuts, including a reduction in the number of lecturers and administrators, were down to the fall in student numbers. The branch launched a campaign, strongly opposing the plans and following long running negotiations compulsory redundancy of any of our members was avoided. However, those members that remain are now raising concerns regarding workload and stress which continue to be raised with the employer.

At University College London a 'transformation' project proposed changes to security at UCL. The proposals included changes to job descriptions, shift patterns (which were Monday – Friday, moving to 7 days a week) and working hours (which were 60, proposed to be reduced to 48) of security staff, all of which would have had a substantial impact on our members. Whilst some members took voluntary redundancy UNISON secured agreement on principles covering pay protection and maintaining hours which will protect these for staff who wish to maintain these in the new structure.

London South Bank University proposed a large-scale restructure affecting large numbers of staff, but in particular those in the estates department, when it was announced this service would be outsourced. The members have been balloted over failure to protect their terms and conditions and after achieving a mandate for action are planning for industrial action as well

as ongoing negotiations with the employer to try to avoid strike action taking place.

Serious financial deficit has been reported at Goldsmiths, which has led to quite challenging circumstances for branch and members. The branch is holding regular all members meetings to address rumours and concerns and to inform on branch activities and have also distributed a workplace survey to gather data on current issues/increased workload as a result of previous restructuring. The branch is proactively supporting members and reps are undertaking Redundancy and the Law training to equip them to deal with any issues that may arise going forward.

Outsourced Workers

Following a long running UNISON campaign staff employed by Bougyes at Kings College (cleaners, security and catering) will be brought back in house from August 2024 when the current contract ends, joining other staff (security and reception previously employed by CIS and Servest) who came back in house back in 2019. This will result in increased pay and improved terms & conditions as well as recognising those that were on campus throughout the Covid-19 pandemic and are essential to the running of the campus/student experience are recognised as part of the Kings College family.

6.4 Northern Region

Despite challenges with retention and delays in filling posts in HEIs overall recruitment has been positive with net growth in 3 out of 5 branches. We have seen a significant number of new reps coming through in all branches and participating in a range of training including; stewards, health and safety, ERA reaccreditation and a regional HE trans ally training.

Participation in the regional HE service group, conferences and seminars remains good with new reps attending from a number of branches. We have had an increase in activists filling self-organised group officer roles and attending self-organised group policy weekends and conferences.

We have seen policy and terms and conditions improvements on a range of issues including; the development of a pregnancy loss policy, improvements to maternity, paternity pay and neonatal care leave, successfully campaigning for an increase in annual leave in 2 branches with more seeking

discussion in their HEIs, increasing facility time in a number of branches, changes to locally agreed pay scales to relieve the cost of living for the lowest paid and work on workload issues for professional support staff.

6.5 Northern Ireland

UNISON Northern Ireland have been busy in 2023 working with our two Ulster University branches. The majority of our members are employed by the two private contractors; Bidvest Noonan and Compass. These include the facilities services of cleaning, portering, security and catering. Our ongoing work has always focused on improving all members' pay, terms and conditions through negotiations with Bidvest Noonan, Compass and the university management for the directly employed members.

In 2022 UNISON was able to secure Ulster University signing up to the Real Living Wage (RLW) Foundation and raised members pay in the autumn and winter of 2022 in line with RLW pay rates. From 1 December 2023 the new RLW rate of £12 per hour was implemented by the two contractors, giving our lowest paid members a 10% pay rise. The differentials for supervisors and team leaders were also maintained. This involved the Ulster University agreeing to provide the funding to the two private contractors to raise the hourly rate for all. Another major success for UNISON at the four university campuses.

The facilities services contract, cleaning, security and portering, went out to tender in early December 2023. UNISON has asked the Ulster University to bring the services back in-house, but to no avail. We then contacted the Northern Ireland MPs and the NI Assembly MLA's seeking support for our in-house campaign. It has been a difficult ongoing campaign as we, as yet, do not have a Northern Ireland Assembly operating due to issues that one political party has with Brexit. Therefore, with no currently functioning devolved administration in place, the campaign has been hindered. The

results of the tendering process are due to be announced by the university in February 2024.

Our work has continued with the directly employed Ulster University members, protecting the jobs, pay, terms and conditions of members working in St Mary's University College.

6.6 North West

Much of the year has been focused on pay in terms of campaigning, running consultative and industrial action ballots. Branches are now overcoming the hurdles of hybrid working and looking at more creative ways to engage members.

For the first quarter of the year, we had Manchester Metropolitan University and Liverpool Hope University continuing strike action days for 2022-23 pay with good support and engagement from members. It was unfortunate that we couldn't get more branches over the line in the re-ballot on 2022-23 pay.

However, despite University of Liverpool employers questioning data to block our ballots for 2022-23, the branch overcame the hurdles, spent a lot of time on site visits, updated all the data and finally delivered a successful mandate for action which started in June, with a great turnout and support from members over the three days of initial action, repeated again in October.

Whilst no further 'one off' payments were made, both University of Liverpool and Manchester Metropolitan University have since arrived at successful conclusions around changes that address poor pay at the lower end of the pay and grading structure. At the same time Liverpool Hope University have seen some improvements to annual leave and other areas related to terms and conditions.

The joint HE/FE/6th form committee and the region, pay tribute to the hard work and commitment by all our HE branches in their efforts to increase turnouts, but in particular to Manchester Metropolitan and Liverpool Hope University Branches that delivered effective strike action in Manchester Metropolitan University, Royal Northern College of Music, Liverpool Hope University and University of Liverpool.

A number of universities in the region are reporting shortfalls in funding and some significant budget deficits. This then leads to further attacks or undermining of our members' terms and conditions, with restructures and voluntary redundancies depleting the workforce, resulting in members that are left being expected to pick up the pieces, with pressures to deliver more with less which in turn is leading to increases in stress. This is something that the committee recognises and will be working on in a campaign in the coming year.

Recruitment this year has gone well, especially in those branches involved in the pay disputes, and reaffirms that all the activity around pay and cost of living has resonated with staff in HE and they see the value of UNISON in the workplace. At the time of writing this report the region is undertaking its activity fortnight with a specific focus on education. Branches are engaged in this at the moment, with events taking place around the region.

The joint HE/FE/6th form committee will soon be reaching its third year and, from feedback received, has been of value to everyone involved. There is recognition that further work is required to increase participation amongst activists from FE. However, this is not specific to the committee, and is an issue that the region recognises with further work being proposed for the FE sector.

We held a well-attended training event in the Summer based around organising to win, with further events being planned for 2024. The committee has met regularly throughout the year, both formally and informally. Online meetings have continued to increase attendance and participation. We will be putting together a new workplan based around the objectives of UNISON, incorporating strategies and ideas from an event held in the summer.

We would like to thank all our branch activists who have worked so hard again this year to meet all of the conflicting demands whilst, at the same time, doing their best to keep the region updated and fighting hard for our members!

Linda Holden

For all of us, the sad news of Linda's passing came as a shock, Linda was an inspiration and friend to everyone on the committee and in the union and remains sadly missed by all who knew and worked with her. Her passion for

the trade union movement was plain to see, and anyone who met Linda could not help but be inspired. It was Linda's caring side, which for me personally, shone through, always ready to give advice and support on many matters, either HE or personally, and we would like to thank the HE SGE for the opportunity to have a period of remembrance and reflection at the recent Higher Education seminar in Liverpool.

6.7 Scotland

As in recent years, the main focus of UNISON Scotland's campaigning and organising work in higher education has been pay.

Members at Queen Margaret University and Glasgow School of Art (GSA) took strike action in April with GSA members winning harmonisation of annual leave, increasing their allowance to 35 days, and a commitment to becoming living wage accredited this year.

As part of the national ballot which concluded on 31st July 2023, our members voted to take industrial action in four institutions: University of Dundee, Glasgow Caledonian University, Glasgow School of Art, and University of Glasgow.

The work of our activists in organising and campaigning around pay has been fantastic with high numbers of members taking industrial action when called upon and filling picket lines day after day, with fantastic support from students and the general public.

Whilst talks remain ongoing we are hopeful of securing local deals on top of the national pay increase in these institutions and will be re-balloting where required to extend our mandate.

But our work goes beyond pay and members have been affected by a wide range of issues in the last 12 months.

Health & safety remains a very important aspect of our work particularly with the discovery of reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) in institutions across Scotland. Further to this, as of 1 July this year, firefighters will no longer automatically come out to automatic alarm activations in Scotland. This has increased workload and responsibility for our members in each institution that have to deal directly with fire activations, whether it

is the planning and response process or management of an activation as well as keeping themselves and their community safe when this happens.

Activists in University of the West of Scotland have been advising and supporting members through a crippling cyber-attack which continues to impact on their day-to-day work, as well as having exposed them to the threat of identity theft.

A key part of this year's Scottish policy seminar focussed on the need for sharing of best practice and in that regard Napier University reps will be sharing details of their multi-faceted 2022 pay campaign. This coupled with an upcoming Branch Support and Organising Fund (BSOF) bid should ensure that there is a real organising focus to 2024 throughout the region.

It has become clear from recent conversations with Universities Scotland that there is the opportunity to make real gains in terms of fair work across the sector in Scotland, and we intend to take this into 2024 along with our policy of campaigning for Scottish bargaining in HE.

Finally, we must mention the devastating loss of our friend and comrade Phil Welsh, branch secretary of the University of Dundee branch. Phil was a dedicated, committed, and articulate champion of UNISON members' rights and his experience, leadership, and friendship will be sorely missed by all.

6.8 South East

The South East higher education committee has continued to meet regularly throughout the year, combining formal committee meetings with informal online networking meetings which allow a larger number of reps to take part and share information. These meetings have helped with building engagement from branches that have otherwise tended not to be involved in the wider union.

At the beginning of October, a number of branches in the region took part in sector-wide industrial action over the 2023-24 pay offer. Members at Brighton, Chichester, Solent, Sussex and Winchester were all out and Solent took further action at the beginning of December as well. As yet, there have no significant local offers made as a result of this action, but members are now being reballoted to extend their mandate up to the end of the academic

year. Brighton, Solent and Sussex branches will therefore be working with regional staff to maximize turn out and surpass the 50% threshold.

The committee has recently been comparing pay and grading structures across the region's HE sector. It is clear that each university has a different grading approach - even though they are all using the New JNCHES pay spine. Comparing job titles and pay will therefore be necessary before any meaningful analysis can be done. In addition, the committee has also been looking at policies such as redeployment, sickness and grievance. One of the key areas emerging is the large number of universities that are offering staff some form of voluntary severance. However, these offers seem to be markedly different between institutions and more work is planned to consider this further.

Redundancies have also been proposed at a small number of institutions throughout the year and there are concerns that in 2024 there may be further restructures, especially as some universities have failed to meet their student recruitment targets. These have undoubtedly had an impact on the staff that have been left who often have to manage the extra workload of their redundant colleagues as well as doing their own jobs. Pressure in the sector is therefore more noticeable now than ever before, with staff feeling stressed and overworked. This will be a key area for organising around in the coming year.

During the year, the committee also said goodbye to its long standing chair, Sarah Pickett from Brighton. Sarah was replaced by Ann Jones from Solent and after she retired, Holly Foster from Sussex was elected. We wish her well for the coming year.

6.9 South West

2023 has been a busy year with strike action taking place at a number of our branches, including University of Bristol, University of the West of England and University of Gloucestershire. This year they were also joined by Plymouth Marjon University, who were striking for the first time and have undertaken three successful days of action.

Local negotiations on pay and grading have been taking place across the region, although at times these have been slow and have not yet produced

results for the majority. Bath Spa University is the exception on this, where a local pay settlement was successfully reached.

Recognition must be given to University of Bristol, who have achieved a spectacular increase in membership and activism. The rest of the region have been keen to learn lessons from their success.

The regional higher education committee has met regularly, and this year has undertaken a tour of branches. Meetings having taken place at University of Bath and Plymouth Marjon University. The University of Gloucestershire will host our next meeting.

Sharing of best practice and strategy has been widespread, both in and out of meetings, and has provided an energising focus to branches. This has led to a number of small wins in policy and governance across the region. As we enter 2024 we are in good shape to take on the challenges before us.

6.10 Cymru/Wales

Cymru Wales Higher Education Service Group Committee

The AGM was held in January where Dan Beard was elected Chair. Outgoing Chair Stephen Storey was warmly thanked for his commitment to the role over previous years, Stephen remains as the Cymru Wales representative on the HE standing orders committee.

Overnight Seminar

Fifteen delegates attended the overnight seminar which was held in Aberystwyth on 18 and 19 April, all eight university branches in Wales were represented.

We were pleased to welcome Emma Proctor, NEC member, who ran the trans ally training. It was a challenging and interesting session which stimulated debate, all attendees agreed it was very valuable on a personal, work and activist level.

Ruth Smith, senior national officer for higher education, presented a very informative session giving an overview of current issues affecting HE across the UK. Delegates had the opportunity to ask questions and take part in discussion thus gaining a better understanding of the SGE, negotiating and bargaining at a national level and national issues in HE. Over the two days

there was much opportunity for networking with colleagues, and the group identified shared objectives which culminated in the development of the Cymru Wales higher education service group action plan.

CETR

The Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act became law in 2022 and established the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research, a new Welsh Government sponsored body, and will dissolve the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) once operational in April 2024.

The Commission for Tertiary Education and Research was established in September 2023 and will be operational in April 2024, when it will become responsible for the strategy, funding and oversight of the following sectors:

- further education (FE), including colleges and school sixth forms
- higher education (HE), including research and innovation
- adult education and adult community learning
- apprenticeships and training

This commission potentially will have a huge impact on HEIs in Wales and our members working across HE, FE and schools. We have been working this year to respond to consultations including the trade union representation on the Commission Board. We have proposed that there should be an increased number of seats for professional services staff trade union lay reps as at present only one seat is proposed, we await the outcome of our submissions.

Student Numbers and Finances in HEIs in Wales 2023/24

There is a reduction in student numbers for both domestic and international students across universities in Wales for the current academic year and HEIs are looking at voluntary severance and leaving vacancies unfilled. We are currently gathering data and reports from branches to understand the

national picture and provide negotiating and bargaining advice to representatives to protect jobs, along with terms and conditions.

6.11 West Midlands

2023 has been the year when the Government's lack of proper funding for higher education, together with the ongoing fragmentation of the sector, has really begun to be laid bare across the West Midlands.

At the University of Birmingham, which is no longer part of national pay bargaining, at the time of writing our members have just completed eight days of strike action, held over four months, after a ballot producing a 90% mandate for action over the employer's proposals to weaken terms and conditions. Similarly, at Staffordshire University, we remain in dispute over the poor pension provision of the arms-length company which now employs the majority of our members. At the University of Wolverhampton the employers have deferred the last two years of national pay rises, meaning further hardship for members during the worst cost-of-living crisis in memory. Nonetheless, our branches have continued to fight hard for better pay, terms and conditions across the region, and our spirit remains undimmed.

Again, our branches and activists have succeeded in improving health and safety in workplaces, as well as fighting in areas such as equalities, with the Year of Black Workers being marked across our Universities. Branches have also had success in further increasing facility time, and we secured a new recognition agreement with Coventry University Students' Union. The University of Warwick also held a very successful event highlighting the benefits of trade unionism.

The regional higher education committee has continued to meet regularly and has been well-attended by branches.

2024 looks like being a year of continuing challenges, but we look forward to meeting these head on, stronger together in UNISON.

6.12 Yorkshire and Humber

Objective 1: Recruitment, Organising and Representing Members

There are 4166 members in the higher education sector in Yorkshire & Humberside and the sector is growing. This has been largely due to disputes and reorganisations, in particular, the hugely successful industrial action in the Leeds University UNISON branch.

We have two local organisers allocated to projects in the sector to support recruitment and organising in two branches that have identified that support is needed.

Objective 2: Negotiating and Bargaining on behalf of members

The University of Leeds held their 50th day of industrial action with well turned-out pickets and vibrant rallies. The vice chancellor stood down after presiding over the worst industrial relations in recent memory. Leeds Trinity University joined the action, taking industrial action for the first time in many years. At going to press we are hopeful a settlement can be reached.

Some universities in Yorkshire & Humberside have offered settlements that benefit staff, without overstepping the national pay offer or endangering national bargaining, such as reviews of the local pay and grading structure – how the nationally set spine points are mapped onto the local grading structure at individual HEIs, or one-off payments (usually unconsolidated), extra days holiday etc.

Leeds Beckett University and Leeds Beckett University Student Union have approached us to talk about becoming Real Living Wage employers and these discussions are ongoing and positive.

Redundancies and Voluntary severances

There is a potential whole university reorganisation at the University of Sheffield with unclear implications about what this means for staff employed at the University. A campaign is being established to withstand this and prevent compulsory redundancies. At the time of going to press we are about to run a training session on being ballot-ready and effective to withstand reorganisations and redundancies in the sector. This is to be delivered through the regional HE SGE.

Objective 3: Campaigning and promoting UNISON on behalf of Members

Branches supported the union's student nurse recruitment initiatives at the beginning of the 2023-24 student intake. While these members don't

contribute to HE branch membership numbers (because they go into health branches), the high visual profile of UNISON on campuses during student nurse recruitment focuses members and potential members on the union's profile in public services.

We are focussing on the 2024 Year of LGBT+ workers which we anticipate will have real impact on recruiting and organising, particularly among young workers on our campuses, throughout the year. Young workers on campuses are heavily influenced by the growing recognition of LGBT+ issues supported by young students and so this is a real area of potential opportunity for us to organise around issues affecting all LGBT+ member and in particular young members.

Objective 4: Developing and Efficient and Effective Union

We are rolling out a number of training programmes specifically targeted for the HE sector that will assist all our branches including 'understanding university finances' and 'campaigning for insourcing'.

7. Equalities

7.1 Disabled members

The HE SGE disabled members working group carried out an audit of branches with higher education members to find out where there is no agreed reasonable adjustment passport or policy, where there is no agreed paid disability leave policy and where there is no elected disabled members officer. The regular online Disabled Members Officers and Contacts training has been advertised to branches with higher education members, and UNISON's new Stewards Guide to Representing Disabled Members and the Guide to Representing Deaf (British Sign Language users) have been circulated to activists in higher education. In early 2024, the working group will meet with representatives of the National Disabled Members Committee to discuss implementing a disability equality bargaining strategy for the service group in the light of the audit outcomes, thus delivering all the resolves from conference motion 5.

7.2 Year of Black Workers

To acknowledge UNISON's Year of Black Workers, the HE SGE formed a working group focused on tackling race-related issues within higher

education. The UNISON universities and colleges seminar included significant focus on the Year of Black Workers, including a keynote speech from Sonia Basseby MBE, a workshop on responding to racism from Show Racism the Red Card, and a plenary focused on the Year of Black workers: “Establishing legacy to generate change” and the “Ethnicity Pay Gap” campaign. The working group has also drafted questions to form part of the annual HE members survey, asking Black members about their experiences working in HE, and what more they think their employer and union can do to tackle racism in the workplace. They have also asked members what knowledge and interactions they have with the Advance HE Race Equality Charter mark.

Following this the SGE vice chair agreed a donation of £100 to Mandela8 and the SGE received anti-racism training from Show Racism the Red Card.

7.3 Conversion therapy

In response to motion 10, branches with members in higher education have been sent a factsheet containing facts about conversion therapy and have also been provided with resources to help them campaign for their local institutions to add conversion therapy to university safeguarding policies.

UNISON has continued to promote the call from the Parliamentary Women and Equalities Committee Inquiry into Transgender Equality for all higher education institutions to take proactive steps to promote trans equality including providing all staff with gender identity training and a trans champions scheme.

8. Job evaluation

The 2023 HE activists’ survey was sent out on 30 May, asking all UNISON activists in higher education whether they had had any involvement with the HERA job evaluation scheme, and if so, what their experience of that was. This delivered the first resolve of conference motion 8.

The response to this survey showed that 36% of respondents were trained HERA role analysts and were involved in job evaluation (JE) in their workplaces at varying levels, with mixed experiences. A smaller proportion used the Korn Ferry JE scheme (previously known as Hay), and others were keen to learn more.

As a result of this feedback, a workshop on 'understanding job evaluation' was included in the programme for the UNISON universities and colleges seminar on 8 and 9 November, providing updated guidance on the use of HERA and other JE schemes. The workshop was well attended. This workshop covered both the HERA and Korn Ferry JE schemes, as the two schemes most commonly used by HEIs. The presentation has since been made available to all HE activists on the UNISON organising space, delivering the second resolve of motion 8.

The HERA job evaluation scheme is owned by the Educational Competencies Consortium (ECC), and only they can provide the training required to qualify as a HERA role analyst. UNISON checked this with ECC, seeking to action the third resolve of motion 8, and were informed that we could not host training which would lead to qualification as a HERA role analyst, as the employer is the ECC consortium member and only staff authorised by the member (the employer) are licenced to access HERA and ECC Online. Unfortunately, therefore, it is not possible for UNISON to deliver the third resolve of motion 8.

UNISON has arranged for a day-long course for UNISON activists to be delivered by ECC entitled 'Introduction to the job evaluation process and the Higher Education Role Analysis (HERA) Scheme' on 21-22 February 2024.

9. Wholly owned subsidiaries

In order to tackle the growing prevalence of wholly owned subsidiaries within education, the HE SGE worked with the Further Education and Sixth Form Colleges Committee to commission a new guide on tackling wholly owned subsidiaries at a local level within higher and further education. The guide was launched at the UNISON universities and colleges seminar with an accompanying presentation and workshop. Both the presentation and guide are available on the organising space in the higher education section.

Section C

UNISON Objective 3 – Campaigning and influencing

We aim to:

- Campaign against climate change and work with other relevant organisations to achieve a net-zero carbon economy in the UK at the earliest opportunity and recognise that the climate emergency is a trade union issue and commit to sharing our values in order to protect our planet.
- Develop our campaigns in support of quality publicly owned public services and in defence of the NHS, education, local government, social care, police, probation, Energy, WET and all public services including private and community sector.
- Build our political influence, forging alliances with other unions and appropriate campaigning and community groups to challenge the austerity programme, including attacks on the welfare state.
- Campaign for the election of UK governments and councils that value public services and working people, rejecting the arguments of the Tory government and far right parties.
- Promote the new political fund arrangements to increase participation and opt-in.
- Promote the union's international work.

10. Higher education funding and policy

A new workshop on 'understanding HEI finances' was developed with the HE SGE vice-chair and delivered at the UNISON universities and colleges seminar on 8-9 November. As per resolve 2 of conference motion 12, this highlighted the massive funds available to some institutions and how to find out how excessive the pay of a particular vice chancellor or principal actually is. It also demonstrated that not all HEIs are in this situation, and that many universities are not in a strong financial position, and this position has been reflected in our social media posts.

The 2023 UNISON HE freedom of information request included questions on outsourcing and wholly owned subsidiaries to provide information to branches and regions to use in local campaigns against marketisation in higher education, as per resolve 3 of conference motion 12.

Shadow minister for higher education, Matt Western MP, was invited to speak at the UNISON universities and colleges seminar about the Labour Party's vision for higher education after the next general election, and attendees had the opportunity to put their questions forward for him to answer on higher education funding, the disadvantages of marketisation

and competition, how to stop HEIs going bankrupt and the ideal future system of higher education for the UK. UNISON's policy position on a free higher education system and an end to tuition fees for all UK-domiciled students has been highlighted to the Labour Party as they go through the process of drawing up their manifesto for the next general election, delivering resolves 4 and 5 of conference motion 12.

Those branches facing proposals for restructuring and redundancies as a result of financial difficulties have been supported by the bargaining support unit to analyse finances and identify cogent arguments to limit job losses and reductions in terms and conditions for members, delivering resolve 6 of conference motion 12.

The issue of higher education funding has been discussed with UCEA in many New JNCHES pay negotiating meetings during 2023 and remains a live issue in negotiations, which could lead to a joint campaign approach in future.

11. Four-day week and flexible working

In response to motion 11, the SGE formed a working group focused on campaigning for a four-day week and improved flexible working conditions. They agreed to work with the official four-day week campaign and invited a representative to the UNISON universities and colleges seminar to help train activists to campaign for four-day week policies and trials in their HEI. Branches have been encouraged to ask higher education employers to utilise their own academic experts and HR resources to launch their own four-day work week trials in consultation with their recognised trade unions, work with other campus unions to ensure trials are launched and involve a diverse range of employees from all staff groups and they have been provided with the evidence from previous four-day week trials to quote in their campaigns.

Evidence from previous and current four-day week trials will be raised with the other four joint trade unions in New JNCHES and included in the 2024-25 pay claim if their agreement is forthcoming. There was no pay claim submitted for 2023-24 due to UCEA's accelerated timetable for negotiations.

12.FOI 2023

UNISON commissioned the Labour Research Department to send out a freedom of information (FOI) request to all higher education institutions in the UK in June 2023, to manage the receipt of responses and to collate them into a report and associated data sheets. This FOI asked questions about pay increases at vice chancellor/ director level, any additional sums paid and the reasons for these additional sums, delivering the first resolve of conference motion 2.

That report was delivered in draft form in November 2023 and will be shared with the HE SGE, regions and branches on the organising space as soon as it is finalised, delivering resolves 2 and 3 of conference motion 2.

13.Organising in students unions

UNISON membership employed by students' unions across the UK has been mapped, and those currently accredited as Foundation Living Wage employers have been identified. UNISON has written to all students' unions employers in the UK calling on them to become accredited members of the Living Wage Foundation and to adoption the national New JNCHES pay spine. Branches have been sent resources to help them campaign locally on this issue.

Section D

UNISON Objective 4 – Building an efficient and effective union

We aim to:

- Ensure that the union's structures including organisational, lay member, ICT infrastructure, digital and internal management systems and the distribution of our resources are accessible, efficient and effective to meet the changing needs of all sections of the union and its members especially in relation to global sustainability and to include the ability to take effective industrial action when required.
- Undertake a root and branch review of the union's structure and operations taking account of climate change including travel, waste and efficiency

- Ensure that branches are provided with the support they need, promptly, when they need it.

14. Higher Education Conference 2023

Higher Education Conference 2023 took place in at the Crowne Plaza Newcastle on 2 February 2023. Key topics discussed at the conference included HE sector funding, the four-day working week, pay in higher education, and conversion therapy.

15. Universities and colleges seminar 2023

For the first time, it was agreed by both the Higher Education Service Group Executive and the Further Education and Sixth Form Committee that we should hold a joint HE and FE focused seminar. The seminar took place over two days, with the first day being exclusively focused on HE issues, and the second day being a joint HE and FE day.

The programme was as follows:

Day 1 – HE only day

Time	Duration	Session	Presenter
09.00	60 min	Registration for HE delegates /Tea / Coffee	
10.00	30 min	Opening session Welcome to Seminar	Ivan Bonsell, HESGE Vice-chair Kevan Nelson, Regional Secretary, UNISON North West Region
10.30	30 min	Organising around Pensions in HE – Peter Urwin, Pensions Officer	
11.00	20 min	Showcase of branch activity on pensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allison Buchanan, Chair of Scottish HE Committee, on University of Dundee pension dispute • Lorraine Brown, Northumbria University
11.20	25 min	Refreshments	
11.45	60 min	Morning Learning Session	
		A) Organising around pensions – Peter Urwin, Pensions Officer	
		B) Campaigning for a 4-day week – Phil Lindsey, 4-day week campaign	

		C) Reviewing the pay campaign, making plans for the future - Ivan Bonsell, HESGE Vice Chair / Rebecca Passingham, Assistant National Officer
		D) Understanding HEI finances – Ruth Smith, Senior National Officer
		E) Getting started with digital organising – Martin Russo, Education Officer
12.45	60 min	Lunch & Networking
1.45	30 min	Update on HE Pay - Ruth Smith, Senior National Officer – Education & Children’s Services
2.15	45 min	Showcase of branch activity on pay <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ian St John, Plymouth Marjon University • Sophie Watson and Kirsteen Fraser on the University of Glasgow campaign
3.00	30 min	Refreshments
3.30	45 min	Plenary Address from Matt Western MP, Shadow Minister for Higher Education Q&A
4.15	60 min	Afternoon Learning Session
		F) Organising around pensions – Peter Urwin, Pensions Officer
		G) Campaigning for a 4-day week – Phil Lindsey, 4-day week campaign
		H) Reviewing the pay campaign, making plans for the future – Ivan Bonsell, HESGE Vice Chair / Ruth Smith, Senior National Officer
		I) The gendered impact of the cost of living crisis – Josie Irwin, Senior National Officer - Equalities
		J) Managing stress as a workplace hazard – Janet Newsham, Manchester Hazards Centre
5.15		Close of first day of seminar
7.00	15 min	Arrival for dinner. <u>Doors will be closed promptly at 7.15.</u>
7.15	30 min	In memoriam: Lessons learned from the life of Linda Holden
7.45		Seminar dinner and quiz – Liverpool suite

Day 2 – Joint HE/FE day

Time	Duration	Session	Presenter
09.00	60 min	Registration of FE delegates / Tea / Coffee	
10.00	5 min	Opening of day 2	Ivan Bonsell, HESGE Vice-chair Gavin Cartwright, Chair of UNISON FE and 6 th form colleges committee

10.05	40 min	Plenary Leadership, Legacy and Allies – Sonia Bassey MBE
10.45	20 min	Launch of the guide to wholly owned subsidiaries – Kevin Russell, National Officer, Bargaining Support Group
11.05	15 min	Refreshments
11.20	60 min	Morning Learning Session
		K) Managing stress as a workplace hazard – Janet Newsham, Manchester Hazards Centre
		L) The gendered impact of the cost of living crisis – Josie Irwin, Josie Irwin, Senior National Officer, Equality Unit
		M) Understanding job evaluation – Ruth Levin, Senior National Officer
		N) Tackling wholly owned subsidiaries – Kevin Russell, National Officer – Bargaining Support Group
		O) FE priorities – Leigh Powell, National Officer
12.20	60 min	Lunch
1.20	30 min	Plenary Address by Jon Richards, UNISON Assistant General Secretary
1.50	60 min	Afternoon Learning Session
		P) Managing stress as a workplace hazard – Janet Newsham, Manchester Hazards Centre
		Q) The gendered impact of the cost of living crisis – Josie Irwin, Senior National Officer - Equalities
		R) Bringing services home: organising for insourcing – Ruth Levin, Senior National Officer
		S) Understanding HEI finances – Ivan Bonsell, HESGE Vice Chair / Ruth Smith, Senior National Officer
		T) Active Allyship: Responding to Racism – Show Racism the Red Card
2.50	20 min	Refreshments
3.10	45 min	Plenary Year of the Black worker: “Establishing legacy to generate change” and the “Ethnicity Pay Gap” Campaign – Margaret Greer, UNISON Equality Unit
3.55	5 min	Review and close of seminar – Ivan Bonsell, Vice Chair of HESGE and Gavin Cartwright, Chair of UNISON FE and 6th form colleges committee

16. Promoting UNISON as the union for Higher Education professional services staff

In response to motion 9, the SGE formed a working group focused on how the union promotes itself as the union for professional services staff. The objectives of the group were to produce new specific higher education and student union focussed leaflets and materials, update the higher education pages on the UNISON website, work with UNISON's learning and organising services department to produce specific higher education learning opportunities and work with regions and branches to build a campaign to promote UNISON as the union for Higher Education professional support staff. As a result new materials specifically targeted at recruiting higher education professional services staff and student union staff have been commissioned and are in production. UNISON has also created a higher education tile on the organising space, giving activists in HE access to multiple resources to use in promoting UNISON in their workplace. Further work is underway on developing learning opportunities tailored to members in higher education and on the campaign to promote UNISON as the union for professional services staff in HEIs and students unions, thus delivering conference motion 9.

Section E

Appendices

17. Higher Education Service Group Executive 2023-24

Region/ Nation	General Seat	Female Seat	Reserved (low pay) seat
Eastern	Martin Thurlow	Vacant	N/A
East Midlands	Irvin Hendrickson	Vicki Morris	N/A
Greater London	Vacant	Vacant	Vacant
Northern	Denise Ward	Lorraine Brown	Vacant
Northwest	Andrew Beech	[was Linda Holden – now deceased]	Vacant
Scotland	June Maguire	Davena Rankin	Fiona McDonald
Southeast	Ivan Bonsell	Vacant	Vacant

Southwest	Joe Sucksmith	Vacant	N/A
West Midlands	Michael Moore	Amelia Rout	Vacant
Wales	Vacant	Katie Hall	Wendy Williams
Yorkshire & Humberside	Mark Adcock	Mobina Begum	Vacant
Northern Ireland	Thomas Strawhorne	Vacant	N/A
NEC	Joanne Tapper	Kath Owen	N/A
FE observer (non-voting)	Fran Murray	Vacant (sub)	N/A

18.Higher Education recruitment report 2023

		Prior Two YTD	YTD 2022	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23	Apr-23	May-23	Jun-23	Jul-23	Aug-23	Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23	Dec-23
Eastern	All Joiners	215	307	57	29	30	17	31	13	15	16	15	21	21	3
	Leavers	236	273	39	14	11	29	19	24	13	44	18	20	24	3
	Change	-21	34	18	15	19	-12	12	-11	2	-28	-3	1	-3	0
East Midlands	All Joiners	219	306	20	23	37	20	16	35	22	26	21	23	32	7
	Leavers	370	359	43	17	11	16	15	23	16	29	24	39	22	40
	Change	-151	-53	-23	6	26	4	1	12	6	-3	-3	-16	10	-33
Greater London	All Joiners	730	930	86	98	94	46	66	68	63	54	68	81	89	16
	Leavers	832	930	96	86	50	76	110	54	53	78	82	103	80	15
	Change	-102	0	-10	12	44	-30	-44	14	10	-24	-14	-22	9	1
Northern	All Joiners	149	264	23	19	33	16	18	25	14	24	23	27	23	3
	Leavers	235	256	20	16	59	19	19	15	9	19	9	30	11	4
	Change	-86	8	3	3	-26	-3	-1	10	5	5	14	-3	12	-1
Northern Ireland	All Joiners	23	27	11	4	2	1	2	6	3	1	1	2	0	0
	Leavers	26	41	18	1	1	1	4	2	4	6	5	3	0	1
	Change	-3	-14	-7	3	1	0	-2	4	-1	-5	-4	-1	0	-1
North West	All Joiners	466	1053	78	84	77	48	37	122	37	40	86	80	71	9
	Leavers	574	594	52	72	81	72	103	57	58	46	41	54	40	13
	Change	-108	459	26	12	-4	-24	-66	65	-21	-6	45	26	31	-4
Scotland	All Joiners	322	746	52	59	59	31	42	39	33	40	101	33	57	3
	Leavers	356	426	40	37	102	39	57	38	37	30	60	42	42	4
	Change	-34	320	12	22	-43	-8	-15	1	-4	10	41	-9	15	-1
South East	All Joiners	316	508	41	35	70	41	26	51	33	74	55	84	51	4
	Leavers	425	528	52	31	42	33	36	38	27	51	49	40	68	14
	Change	-109	-20	-11	4	28	8	-10	13	6	23	6	44	-17	-10
South West	All Joiners	246	604	96	92	36	21	32	51	43	24	38	33	63	11
	Leavers	291	400	28	39	35	44	39	19	34	37	29	45	38	5
	Change	-45	204	68	53	1	-23	-7	32	9	-13	9	-12	25	6
Cymru/Wales	All Joiners	141	171	20	21	15	11	8	9	13	17	18	17	14	1
	Leavers	249	215	20	26	49	22	12	18	3	10	14	8	52	2
	Change	-108	-44	0	-5	-34	-11	-4	-9	10	7	4	9	-38	-1
West Midlands	All Joiners	259	339	31	44	41	21	21	41	50	38	55	38	38	4
	Leavers	484	426	29	41	28	48	50	21	22	35	20	30	30	4
	Change	-225	-87	2	3	13	-27	-29	20	28	3	35	8	8	0
Yorkshire & Humberside	All Joiners	381	791	61	84	48	45	56	111	77	67	47	62	62	6
	Leavers	459	490	35	61	68	46	61	44	28	32	41	89	53	3
	Change	-78	301	26	23	-20	-1	-5	67	49	35	6	-27	9	3

19.New JNCHES pay spine from 1 August 2023

The table below shows the application of the 2023-24 pay uplift imposed by UCEA in March 2023, which was an increase of between 5 and 8% dependent on spine point with effect from August 2023* with an interim pay

award of £1000 or 2%, whichever was the greater, added to annual salaries with effect from February 2023 (See notes below).

The full and final offer made on 24 February 2023 also referenced deletion of spine points 3 and 4 by 31 July 2024 and a 5% increase in London Weighting in all post-92 universities with a retained London Weighting allowance.

Spine point	Salary from 1 August 2022 (£)	Salary from 1 February 2023 (£)	Salary from 1 August 2023 (£)
3	18,898	19,898	20,410
4	19,092	20,092	20,619
5	19,333	20,333	20,880
6	19,578	20,578	20,948
7	19,863	20,863	21,254
8	20,134	21,134	21,543
9	20,400	21,400	21,828
10	20,761	21,761	22,214
11	21,197	22,197	22,681
12	21,630	22,630	23,144
13	22,149	23,149	23,700
14	22,662	23,662	24,248
15	23,144	24,144	24,533
16	23,715	24,715	25,138
17	24,285	25,285	25,742
18	24,948	25,948	26,444
19	25,642	26,642	27,181
20	26,396	27,396	27,979
21	27,131	28,131	28,759
22	27,929	28,929	29,605
23	28,762	29,762	30,487
24	29,619	30,619	31,396
25	30,502	31,502	32,332
26	31,411	32,411	32,982
27	32,348	33,348	33,966
28	33,314	34,314	34,980

29	34,308	35,308	36,024
30	35,333	36,333	37,099
31	36,386	37,386	38,205
32	37,474	38,474	39,347
33	38,592	39,592	40,521
34	39,745	40,745	41,732
35	40,931	41,931	42,978
36	42,155	43,155	44,263
37	43,414	44,414	45,585
38	44,737	45,737	46,974
39	46,047	47,047	48,350
40	47,423	48,423	49,794
41	48,841	49,841	51,283
42	50,300	51,306	52,815
43	51,805	52,841	54,395
44	53,353	54,421	56,021
45	54,949	56,048	57,696
46	56,592	57,723	59,421
47	58,284	59,450	61,198
48	60,027	61,228	63,029
49	61,823	63,059	64,914
50	63,673	64,946	66,857
51	65,578	66,890	68,857

Notes:

*8% for SP3-5, 7% for SP6-14, 6% for SP15-25, 5% for SP26-51

Spine point values have been rounded. Where a percentage increase is applied they are calculated on an unrounded basis from year-to-year to reduce rounding error.

The offer was sent to HEIs with the following paragraph allowing them to defer payment:

As with previous years, there is a clause that allows an HEI with extenuating circumstances to defer implementation of the pay uplifts by up to 11 months on the grounds that this is determined to be in the wider interests of the institution's sustainability or due to immediate cashflow issues. This would be done following discussion of the reasons with the institution's recognised trade union(s). This means a full deferral, i.e. without back pay.