

Dear Professor Debra Humphris and Professor Tara Dean,

Thank you for your reply to the letter from PhD students regarding the previous strike. However, the responses have not satisfied us that the University of Brighton is seriously addressing these issues. Notably, this suggested that the university has no say over UCEA decisions. The university is actually a member of this body, and should make a public statement to ask the UCEA to prioritise staff and student concerns. Broadly speaking, the responses indicate that the university has disengaged from the day-to-day experiences of staff. While national awards are good, there are also specific local issues that are not captured in these awards, and resolutions should involve working in a collegial way with staff and trade unions.

Regarding pay, the figure of 3.5% pay increase does not cover all staff. While it is positive that the lowest paid staff should see this increase, the university should commit to a 3% increase to all staff at least. As stated in the JNCHES 2019/20 claim, since 2009, factoring in the costs of living, staff have seen pay decline by up to 20% over the last decade. Your message also claims that internal research suggests the pay scales are fair. This is something we are struggling to understand: could you please circulate the research this claim is based on?

Messages of overwork, stress, and unfairness are consistent across the university. Experiences of these problems may differ across positions, departments and schools, but the message is clear that there are major issues. In our conversations with academics, their experiences are that the workload system is not capturing real workloads. Working with the local UCU branch is essential to resolving this.

It is also apparent that more stress results from staff having little say over timetabling, and that the planned merger of schools may result in admin staff losing their jobs, putting even more workload on academics. We believe that mergers should not result in job losses. Anyone leaving their positions should be replaced, and should not be an opportunity for the university to save money.

It is positive that the university is working on improving the position of staff on casual contracts, and it appears progress is being made, but we would need to see the data on the current position to be able to measure any progress. It is not clear from your statement if your own understanding of 'casualised' or 'temporary' contracts fully captures all those that are teaching at the university, such as PhD students.

We feel that more needs to be done around equality in the university. It is positive that there are leadership courses for BAME workers, but the pay gap is still not acceptable and the university needs to work with UCU on other local issues. Staff and PhD students are also finding that disability and mental health support is lacking, while gatekeeping and bureaucracy means a heavy burden of proof is required for even the most basic support.

Given that equality, anti-casualisation, workload and pay are the four pillars of the dispute, we support UCU to pursue the aim of ensuring that this is a university which is fair to everyone, and which provides the best learning and teaching environment for us all.

We fully support the strikes, and call for the university to take action on the points raised. Take the lead on national issues, listen to staff experiences rather than denying them, and work in a cooperative and collegial manner with trade unions.

Signed,

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