

HE Support Staff Unions' statement on National Bargaining in Higher Education

The best way of advancing the agenda of all higher education workers is through the united strength of the HE unions. That agenda includes the fight to end low pay, to resist crushing workloads, the threat of privatisation and maintenance of the national contract in post-92 universities.

A pre-requisite for that unity is the continuation of national bargaining. The support staff unions (Unison, Unite and GMB) have consistently backed national single table bargaining which would enhance collective working. The alternative of local bargaining would lead to less stability and a local free for all with more local disputes and inequalities.

Single table bargaining is not about applying a veto to other union's demands, it is about ensuring fair pay for all workers, recognising that equal pay laws limit differential pay awards for different groups, and avoiding the employers' playing off one union against another or any unhealthy elitism.

Support staff unions reached a compromise with UCU negotiators at the end of last year, acknowledging their concerns (from the UCU conference). This led to a joint approach to the employers bringing further movement from UCEA and a final draft agreement. These new bargaining arrangements would not stop any union, including UCU from negotiating or pushing issues specific to their membership, or crucially from taking industrial action.

We take seriously the UCEA message that the deal on the table is the final one - with no further talks or changes or chances. The HE support staff unions are ready to accept the agreement brokered by all unions with UCEA last month. Suggestions that a 'no' vote in the UCU ballot will allow UCU to bargain alone are unrealistic. The danger is that a 'no' vote would divide the unions within HE, hasten the end of national bargaining and presage a local free for all where a few staff in a few institutions might prosper (to start with) whilst the majority lose out.

UNISON

Unite

GMB