

UoK-UCU Joint Statement: Ending the local dispute

We are pleased to confirm that the local dispute between Kent UCU and the University has now ended, with all associated action short of a strike (ASOS) including the marking and assessment boycott called off with immediate effect. This is separate to the ongoing national UCU disputes, with other forms of ASOS still in effect.

In recognition of the time required to deliver marking and assessment to a high standard, the University will allow sufficient time for staff to complete marking and assessment not carried out during the boycott alongside their other work, under the principle of fair and sustainable workloads. It is expected that any outstanding marking and assessment would be completed by Friday 6th May 2022¹.

Through this dispute we have continued regular and constructive conversations in the interests of a positive outcome. While the formal local dispute between UCU and the University has now ended, we will continue to work together on a positive way forward. As the outcome of initial reviews in Arts and Humanities has indicated, further time will be required in order to develop long term sustainable plans.

We remain committed to working together to develop a positive future in areas facing challenges and this will include immediate work on agreeing a new approach and process aimed at avoiding the need for both compulsory redundancies and industrial action.

Ruling out compulsory redundancies

The University has stated that at no stage were compulsory redundancies proposed or planned and that they are something that would only ever be considered as a last resort. UCU has stated that reviews of subject areas and the creation of academic redundancy selection criteria have given staff genuine concerns over job security.

Given the time required to develop sustainable plans and in the interests of reducing disruption to our students and of providing assurance for staff, the University has now categorically confirmed that there will be no compulsory redundancies in, nor compulsory redundancy processes started during, the calendar year 2022. We hope that this clarity will make it easier for staff who are under pressure to work together on developing future plans. The University and UCU agree on working towards continued job security for all staff.

Reducing workload pressure

The local dispute also raised concerns around staff workload and budgets for hourly-paid teaching staff. Approaches to address these together have been agreed, often building on work already underway.

The JSNCC Workload and Wellbeing Working Group is continuing its work to review workloads, based on analysis of the staff survey conducted this January. The findings from

¹ This deadline assumes that a new marking and assessment boycott does not come into force at Kent before this date as part of the national disputes on pay, conditions and pensions. If a new boycott does come into force, the University reserves the right to seek to re-prioritise work in order that activities critical to student progression and graduation can be completed beforehand.

this will shortly shape action plans at both University and divisional / directorate level as necessary.

The University is committed to establishing best practices for workload allocation, with an emphasis on fairness and transparency, and a commitment to not increase the workloads of fully-loaded staff. This will take time to develop and its introduction will be phased in recognition of the amount of change colleagues have already experienced, with the earliest implementation not until autumn 2023. As a principle, while recognising the need for greater equity of workload, the new approach will not place further work on staff who are already fully loaded and, therefore, there will be no detriment to the WAM of staff in 2022-23.

The University has confirmed that divisional hourly-paid teaching budgets for this year remain at the same level (and in some areas higher) as in 2019/20. Given it has been some time since the HPL payments menu was introduced, the University and UCU have agreed to work together to review this – including setting up a working group of cross-University staff to identify appropriate changes.

Continued collaboration

Over the next three months, the University will continue to work with UCU on developing a framework for collaboration over issues raised in this dispute, including the review of the Arts & Humanities Division and the academic WAM review. Working groups, which will include UCU committee members, UCU reps and staff reps from affected areas, will be set up to provide active input and collaboration on these issues.

While we don't always agree, reaching this point has required both sides to keep an open mind and work together in acknowledgement of the challenges we face – this will need to continue as we work on a way forward. The University's ability to seek to implement changes to ensure we have a sustainable future and one that is in the best interests of students and staff is critical; as is the right of union members to take industrial action where agreement can't be reached.

We are also all conscious of the huge impact on students, who have already faced significant disruption to their studies through no fault of their own – we hope this resolution will go some way to address their concerns and thank them for their patience throughout.

5 April 2022