

Ms Debbie Driscoll
Regional Support Officer
London Region
University and College Union (UCU)

Gail Brindley
email : g.brindley@gre.ac.uk
Telephone : 020 8331 8837

Date : 11th August 2022

Dear Ms Driscoll,

Re: Declaration of a trade dispute – new academic workload planning tool

I am writing in response to your letter dated 4th August 2022 addressed to Professor Jane Harrington, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Greenwich (the University) where you give written notification of a formal industrial dispute between UCU and the University of Greenwich. The Vice-Chancellor has asked that I respond on this matter.

In your letter, you state that the grounds for the dispute are as follows:

- The circumvention of the existing collective bargaining forum (the Joint Negotiating Committee) as the right and proper place to discuss, consult and negotiate changes to working conditions for staff in UCU's bargaining group.
- That the University of Greenwich assert that changes to the workload allocation model is a matter on which UCU is to be consulted, as opposed to reaching an agreed, negotiated outcome.
- That the proposed workload allocation model ("WAM") represents significant detriment to UCU members.

The University rejects the notion that there has been a circumvention of the Joint Negotiating Committee for the reasons set out below.

The University is fully aware that as set out in paragraph 5.1 of the 2014 "Trades Union Recognition Agreement between the University of Greenwich; UNISON; GMB; Prospect and UCU", the purpose of the Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) is to provide a regular and effective means of joint discussion, consultation and negotiation on matters of common interest, affecting staff of the University which are not covered by national negotiations. However, I would highlight that section 6.11 of the agreement states that:

Greenwich Campus

Old Royal Naval College,
Park Row,
London SE10 9LS

Tel: +44 (0)20 8331 8000

“The parties accept that outside formal meetings of the Committee, the parties will from time to time engage in discussions regarding (inter alia) changes to Conditions of Employment and changes to working arrangements on the understanding that formal ratification of a change to Conditions of Employment requires the formal approval of the Committee.”

The workload planning tool was discussed at JNC as early as 28 June 2021 when it was confirmed that a steering group had been established to oversee the design of the new workload tool with UCU as active participants. There have been subsequent further discussions at JNC. As the workload planning tool is a matter which does not concern the professional services trade unions’ bargaining unit, it was wholly appropriate that consultation on this matter took place at separate meetings. As already communicated within the University, 2022/23 is a transition year for the new tool to allow us to ensure its effective operation and there will be further discussion both at the steering group and also JNC in due course.

As previously advised in my letter dated 22nd May 2020, the University acknowledges that Appendix A of the Trades Union Recognition Agreement includes allocation of work or the duties of employment as between workers or groups of workers as an example of items for negotiation and that this reflects the matters for collective bargaining as defined by TULRCA s178. However, the University’s position remains that the new academic workload planning tool will not be used to allocate work between workers or groups of workers and thus is not a matter for negotiation (i.e. it is a matter for consultation). Furthermore, the University view is that it has consulted fully on this matter and remains committed to doing so.

As you are also aware, the Post-92 National Contract states that the make-up of an academic’s duties will be determined from time to time by their Head of Department in consultation with the employee and will be reviewed regularly through the staff appraisal system. The new academic workload planning tool is a tool to promote fairness when an academic’s duties are determined and as such, is entirely in keeping with the Post-92 Contract.

The University does not accept the assertion that the new workload planning tool represents significant detriment to UCU members. On the contrary, the University is confident that the new tool represents a fair and transparent approach. The University has already made a public commitment that staff will not be worse off under the new system. During the pilot, UCU are of course encouraged to discuss any concerns or observations about the implementation and application of the tool with me or with Professor Jane Roscoe, Deputy Vice-Chancellor.

The University rejects the suggestion that the matters you raise can be referred to the Collective Disputes Procedure. Appendix C of the Trades Union Recognition Agreement sets out the Collective Disputes Procedure and states that *“A Dispute is a failure to agree arising from either part concluding that the prospect for agreement by negotiation has been exhausted and giving notice thereof to the other party”*. As set out above, the workload planning tool is not a matter for negotiation and so consequently, the issues you raise cannot constitute a dispute.

Finally and with regards to the “chronology” attached to your letter dated 4 August, I would highlight that the University does not accept this as an accurate reflection of the timeline of events. For example, you reference “21.10.21 UCU lodged a failure to agree re: Workload Allocation and/or a breakdown in the Machinery of Negotiation” but do not refer to the letter sent to you by the University on 29 October 2021 responding in full to the matters raised. You also state that following the meeting held on 13 July 2022 no further meeting between Professor Roscoe, myself and UCU has been scheduled. This is incorrect and the meeting was diarised for Wednesday 10 August with Richard Wilde (as agreed with Ruth Ballardie at the meeting on 13 July due to her forthcoming annual leave). It was unfortunate that Richard was unable to attend but we have agreed that we will look to reschedule.

Please rest assured that the University remains committed to consultation with local UCU representatives on this matter and we will continue to engage in dialogue with them regarding any points of concern.

Yours sincerely



Gail Brindley
Director of Human Resources