

# Professorial Pay

## 1. Background

Following the appointment of a new VC, and a vote for UCU to represent the professoriate staff, the question of professorial pay is current at the University of Bath. The senior management of the university and UCU wish to reform the current system in broadly the same direction: a spinal-point system of a kind similar to that used for all other staff, along with greater transparency. There is goodwill from all to make a positive change.

The details of a new system are to be negotiated, bearing in mind adherence to the principles of spinal-points and transparency. The University have made an initial outline proposal, salient details can be found in Section 2, A Summary of the University's Proposal. Their proposal has been sent to the professoriate with an invitation for comment to the UCU. The UCU have received several comments, from UCU members and non-members. We (UCU) also held a members e-meeting. Section 3, Issues Arising. We have distilled these issues into a set of proposed amendments to the University's Proposal. We will consult with members to make sure that our position has the fullest support possible.

## 2. A Summary of the University's Proposal.

The University notes there is no nationally agreed approach to remuneration for grade 10 staff, but a spinal system of some kind is not uncommon. Having looked at comparator universities (including Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Exeter, Glasgow, Leeds, Manchester, Reading, Sheffield, Southampton, and possibly others) the University proposes:

- a pay scale comparable with other institutes in terms of top and bottom pay levels;
- to introduce three bands, "A", "B", and "C", a successful application is required move upwards (from C to A);
- a spinal-point system of 42 steps, upward movement in a band based on performance;
- an "introductory zone" within band C progression is automatic;
- to review everyone on a biannual basis;
- to allow some to progress above the top-most step.

The University have not given any indication of the criteria that will be used to decide either movement from step-to-step, or from band-to-band.

The full proposal from the University is attached.

## 3. Issues Arising

UCU has now received comments from about 20 staff, most but not all from UCU members. For clarity: the opinions summarised in this section are not necessarily those of UCU. This section is a distillation of views that we (UCU) have received and are reporting here. Many of the issues are inter-woven.

### Broad Support

The majority opinion is strongly in favour of the mood-music coming from the University. Reasonable scepticism has been voiced from people with experience of stepped-and-banded pay structures for professoriate staff. They can be divisive and demoralising, possibly even harbour bullying.

### Too Many Spinal Points

Comparator universities have about half the number of spinal points. It is not clear why grade 10 is divided into about as many steps as all other grades combined.

### Banding

Several voices raised concerns about banding. While people were not always against this per se, it was felt that banding introduces a hierarchy into the system that is neither necessary nor welcome. Banding, it was, felt could lead some to indulge in a race to the “top”, a race that has the potential to be un-collegiate, demoralising, upsetting for others – enough for some to want to leave. Others claimed that appointees into a chair from outside are often placed higher than equivalently qualified promotees.

### Frequency of Review

The number of steps combined with a biannual review cycle is causing concern. It would take 84 years to move at the slowest steady rate through the whole scale. Some have pointed out that moving more than one step is possible – likely even. Others have suggested that such practice leaves scale points redundant, so can be safely removed.

### Criteria of Review

If they exist, criteria for moving with a band and between bands have yet to be made public. The number of steps in the pay ladder make specifying detailed per-step criteria at best a difficult task. Not least because very detailed criteria are not regarded as appropriate – the academic sector is a broad tent, the diversity of roles expected from the professoriate extend well beyond grant capture. Value should also be placed on scholarly activity, on pastoral roles, on public engagement and many other activities that are marks of both leadership and of care (for the discipline and for others).

Some suggested the use of SDPR for step-to-step movement.

### Demotion?

Some expressed concern at the possibility of demotion. So far as UCU is aware, the University are not proposing any mechanism for demotion.

### Panel Membership

Questions surrounding the composition of panel membership relate to bias, unconscious or otherwise. The traditions of one discipline do not always easily translate into the language of another. The value judgements made by a panel member are likely to be conditioned by their own career route. The net effect would be to maintain the status quo, if only by default rather than design.

## Appeals

The possibility of an appeals process has been raised. It was argued that appeals are restricted to the correctness of procedure: appeals do not mitigate against bias and vexatious decisions, appeals do not over-turn decisions. Also, people may feel reluctant to appeal – especially so if they do feel themselves to be the victim of bias (conscious or unconscious) or vexatious behaviour.

## Initial Spinal Point Position

There is feeling that the previous system was unfair, and that people disadvantaged by that system should not continue to be disadvantaged by a new system. Mapping people directly onto the proposed pay scale may not be appropriate.

## ED&I

A considerable number of responses raised ED&I issues. This was especially in relation to panel membership, criteria, and initial spinal point position.

## Pay as a Whole

Some pointed out that it is staff on lower grades who deserve the greatest attention.

## 4. Shaping a Proposal

In shaping a proposal to put to the University, we would like to add a third principle to a stepped pay scale and transparency: namely democratisation. The argument is that the greater degree to which staff have control over their own working environment, the better that environment will be to work in. And with that, the more content and productive people are likely to be. Democratic workplaces are necessarily more transparent and non-democratic ones.

We propose the following amendments.

- A 24 point spinal points and annual review, in line with the comparator institutions because:
  - people can move upwards as rapidly as elsewhere (failure in this could all too easily see people leave);
  - to mitigate against the need for an appeals procedure.
- The use of fractional steps for those on fractional contracts because:
  - it coheres with principles of equal treatment.
- Panel membership should not comprise a fixed cohort of senior managers, because:
  - a rotating, mixed panel mitigates against unconscious bias;
  - a rotating, mixed panel mitigates against the all-round stress of appeals (especially with annual reviews – next year's panel may well take a different view);
  - the panel may be fixed, if it takes advice from a rotating panel, eg one that has been stochastically drawn from the professoriate and possibly wider staff.
- Boot-strapping the new system must take into account the feelings of staff who have felt unfairly treated by the current system.

- The use of broad criteria is acceptable, provided they are seen to be broad enough to cover the range of activities expected from the professoriate. There should be no undue emphasis on a single activity, grant capture for example. Being aware that under-specified criteria can be used as a cover by some is an argument for a rotating panel. To be clear, we are not suggesting management here do or will engage in such practice, unclear criteria offer an opportunity that is best acknowledged.
- Avoid naming bands – some steps might still be wider – but do not name bands.
- Professors at Bath should be treated comparably with professors elsewhere.

Pay as a whole is an issue raised by more than one colleague. In partnership with Unite and Unison, the UCU is doing all it can to raise terms and conditions for all staff. It is important to support one another, no matter where we are on the pay scale. The introduction of a spinal pay scale that looks something like the ladder for all other staff is one step towards placing the professoriate in line with everyone else. Promotion to professor should not take the newly promoted outside a nationally agreed system.

Local inequalities occur even within a nationally agreed framework. If you are interested in seeing yourself compared to others at other institution's, the UCU offer website: <https://rateforthejob.web.ucu.org.uk/>. Type in your employer, your position, salary, and gender – the site tells you how you compare.)