

26 November 2025

Dear Jon (and colleagues),

LOCAL CLAIM – UNIVERSITY RESPONSE TO REQUESTS BY DURHAM UCU

I write further to your email dated Wednesday 5 November 2025 with a ‘notice of dispute’.

We value the relationship with our four campus trade unions. Where we have common ground, we have previously collaborated to meaningfully reach agreements which have benefitted our staff.

We must consider the operating context. We remain in a difficult operating and financial environment, where our costs are rising faster than our income. While we made great progress in making savings last academic year and would be in a worse position if not for this collective effort, reducing expenditure remains a priority.

We must be proactive in ensuring our long-term sustainability through further savings and income generation. We must move from a planned deficit in 2025/26 to a sustainable surplus in 2026/27 and beyond. We have, and will continue to be, transparent with our trade unions and our staff about our financial position, including in Vice-Chancellor open meetings and inviting the Chief Financial Officer to JCNG.

Local claim

The requests that the branch have put forward in the local claim are not reasonable within a highly volatile higher education market. They would add a considerable amount of expenditure at a time when we are trying to make savings.

We disagree we have not engaged with or responded to the issues which the branch has raised. On Tuesday 21 January 2025, the branch representatives put forward a local claim. The University responded to in writing on Wednesday 5 February 2025.

Several elements of that claim have also been the subject of ongoing discussion in JCNG (for example in relation to a request to rule out compulsory redundancies). Some of the requests have been responded to repeatedly.

On Wednesday 2 July 2025 additional points were added to the local claim. They have also been the subject of discussion at JCNG.

We have explained why we cannot accept the claims put forward. The fact that your representatives do not agree with our position does not mean our explanations are unacceptable.

Regardless, you will find attached a detailed response to the issues in the local claim. In the interests of openness, we will be making this response available to the University community via SharePoint.

Motion dated Wednesday 15 October 2025

We are concerned the Motion of Durham UCU dated Wednesday 15 October 2025 states, *“given the discrepancies in timelines, we need an active mandate for industrial action to fight any job losses in the near future”* and the branch believes, *“a local ballot further strengthens our hand in local negotiations and local successes can provide momentum for other branches in the UK-wide dispute on working conditions, cuts and funding reform”*.

We respect the right of the branch to ballot its members. However, the Motion is predicated on an assumption of potential job losses. We have no current plans for potential job losses. If we were to create such proposals, we would discuss these with our trade unions in the first instance and we would prioritise voluntary measures. We consider that seeking a mandate on an issue for which there are no current proposals, noting that we have responded to the other matters raised, undermines a genuine partnership approach between the University and the campus trade unions.

For the reasons outlined above we will not enter into a collective disputes procedure with Durham UCU on the local claim.

We welcome a reset of relationships to be more open and constructive in finding areas where we can work together.

Yours sincerely,

Nic

Nic Johnston
Chief People Officer