



UHR Conference 2025

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THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Landing a New Grade Scale 2024

Experiences and Lessons Learned

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Why did we carry out the review

- No review since 2006 with sector Pay modernization
- Struggling to attract and retain good staff, a need to improve our offer
- Increased use of market supplements and paying off-scale salaries
- More requests for retention payments to compete with outside offers
- Over 50% of staff stuck at top of pay spine
- Real Living Wage caused compression every year in grades 1-3
- Key enabling step in our commitment to improve the areas that our joint trade unions confirmed matter most to staff, including precarity of employment, workload and equality pay gaps

A challenge to deliver - but the right thing to do



Joint Working Group



Mapping - Where are the issues?

- Helped to see where staff were on the scale and off scale/market supplements being paid
- Where would the impact of potential changes arise now and in the future
- Help with design thoughts
- How many people are impacted and what might the costs be

| G7 Steps | Grade 7 | EE Count | G8 Steps | Grade 8 | EE Count | G9 Steps | Grade 9 | EE Count |
|----------------------|---------|----------|----------------------|---------|----------|----------------------|---------|----------|
| | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | £37,099 | 231 | | | | | | |
| 2 | £38,205 | 509 | | | | | | |
| 3 | £39,347 | 462 | | | | | | |
| 4 | £40,521 | 342 | | | | | | |
| 5 | £41,732 | 353 | | | | | | |
| 6 | £42,978 | 283 | | | | | | |
| 7 | £44,263 | 1145 | | | | | | |
| 8 | £45,585 | 128 | 1 | £45,585 | 117 | | | |
| 9 | £46,974 | 39 | 2 | £46,974 | 255 | | | |
| 10 | £48,350 | 85 | 3 | £48,350 | 212 | | | |
| | | 3,577 | 4 | £49,794 | 173 | | | |
| At top of band | | 32% | 5 | £51,283 | 208 | | | |
| In contribution zone | | 7% | 6 | £52,815 | 184 | | | |
| | | | 7 | £54,395 | 711 | | | |
| | | | 8 | £56,021 | 150 | | | |
| | | | 9 | £57,696 | 38 | 1 | £57,696 | 131 |
| | | | 10 | £59,421 | 26 | 2 | £59,421 | 203 |
| | | | 11 | £61,198 | 34 | 3 | £61,198 | 59 |
| | | | | | 2,108 | 4 | £63,029 | 146 |
| | | | At top of band | | 34% | 5 | £64,914 | 547 |
| | | | In contribution zone | | 12% | 6 | £66,857 | 160 |
| | | | | | | 7 | £68,857 | 80 |
| | | | | | | | | 1,326 |
| | | | | | | At top of band | | 41% |
| | | | | | | In contribution zone | | 18% |



1. Benchmarking Grade Structure against other HEIs

- Start and finish point of each grade
- RLW compression impacting on first few steps
- Number of grades and steps
- Contribution zones
- Grade Overlaps

2. Benchmarking Salaries

Matched volume, key or hard to recruit jobs within each grade

- These were identified by Management and HR Partners
- Median of market at middle point of normal grade zone
- Sources: UCEA, XpertHR (Cendex), Korn Ferry, KF Russell Group

| National Spinal Point | Full-Time Salary from 1st November 2022 | Grade 5 | Grade 6 | Grade 7 |
|-----------------------|---|---------|---------|---------|
| 17 | £24,285 | 1 | | |
| 18 | £24,948 | 2 | | |
| 19 | £25,642 | 3 | | |
| 20 | £26,396 | 4 | | |
| 21 | £27,131 | 5 | | |
| 22 | £27,929 | 6 | | |
| 23 | £28,762 | UE05 | | |
| 24 | £29,619 | | 1 | |
| 25 | £30,502 | | 2 | |
| 26 | £31,411 | | 3 | |
| 27 | £32,348 | | 4 | |
| 28 | £33,314 | | 5 | |
| 29 | £34,308 | | 6 | |
| 30 | £35,333 | | UE06 | 1 |
| 31 | £36,386 | | | 2 |
| 32 | £37,474 | | | 3 |
| 33 | £38,592 | | | 4 |
| 34 | £39,745 | | | 5 |
| 35 | £40,931 | | | 6 |
| 36 | £42,155 | | | 7 |
| 37 | £43,414 | | | UE07 |
| 38 | £44,737 | | | |
| 39 | £46,047 | | | |

| | | | |
|--|--------------------|--|--------------------|
| | Normal Grade Point | | Contribution Point |
|--|--------------------|--|--------------------|



What did we find

Lower and mid-grades

- Grades UE01-07 benchmarked well, and change could make us market leading
- Real Living Wage is a driver of compression and needed addressed
- There was little benchmark difference between grades UE01 & 02 salaries in both HE sector and elsewhere

Higher grades

- Grades UE08, 09, 10 were behind benchmark which is a barrier to attraction and retention
- Grade UE09 is too short, leading to market supplements, lower retention and regrading requests
- Our pay gaps at UE10 are exacerbated by the 2 year progression rule for first 6 steps and starting salary is low

Scenarios

Tried out many
until we settled on
our final version

Remember moving
one grade down a
step can have a cost
impact all the way
down through other
grades!

| National Spinal I | Full-Time Salary from 1st November 2023 | Current Grade Structure | | | New Grade Structure 2024 | | National Spinal I | Full-Time Salary from At Implementation | Bench mark | Grade |
|-------------------------|--|------------------------------|------------------------------|---|------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|--|---------------|-------|
| | | Normal Grade Contribution | Normal Grade Contribution | | Normal Grade Contribution | Normal Grade Contribution | | | | |
| 3 | £20,410 | | | | | | 3 | £20,410 | | |
| 4 | £21,900 | | | | | | 4 | £21,900 | | |
| 5 | £21,900 | 1 | UE01 | 1 | | | 5 | £21,900 | 20,893 | 1 |
| 6 | £21,900 | 2 | UE01 | 2 | | | 6 | £21,900 | 20,960 | 2 |
| 7 | £21,978 | 3 | UE01 | 3 | | | 7 | £21,978 | | |
| 8 | £22,056 | 1 | | 4 | | UE02 | 8 | £22,056 | | |
| 9 | £22,134 | 2 | | | | | 9 | £22,134 | | |
| 10 | £22,214 | 3 | UE03 | | | UE02 | 10 | £22,214 | 22,868 | 3 |
| 11 | £22,681 | 4 | | | 1 | | 11 | £22,681 | | |
| 12 | £23,144 | 5 | | | 2 | | 12 | £23,144 | | |
| 13 | £23,700 | 6 | UE03 | 1 | 3 | UE03 | 13 | £23,700 | | |
| 14 | £24,248 | 7 | | 2 | 4 | | 14 | £24,248 | | |
| 15 | £24,533 | | | 3 | 5 | | 15 | £24,533 | | |
| 16 | £25,138 | | UE04 | 4 | 6 | UE03 | 16 | £25,138 | 25,987 | 4 |
| 17 | £25,742 | 1 | | 5 | | | 17 | £25,742 | | |
| 18 | £26,444 | 2 | | 6 | | UE04 | 18 | £26,444 | | |
| 19 | £27,181 | 3 | UE05 | 7 | | | 19 | £27,181 | 27,567 | 5 |
| 20 | £27,979 | 4 | | | 1 | | 20 | £27,979 | | |
| 21 | £28,759 | 5 | | | 2 | | 21 | £28,759 | | |
| 22 | £29,605 | 6 | | | 3 | | 22 | £29,605 | | |
| 23 | £30,487 | 7 | | | 4 | UE05 | 23 | £30,487 | | |
| 24 | £31,396 | 8 | UE05 | 1 | 5 | | 24 | £31,396 | | |
| 25 | £32,332 | 9 | | 2 | 6 | | 25 | £32,332 | 32,731 | 6 |
| 26 | £32,982 | | | 3 | 7 | | 26 | £32,982 | | |
| 27 | £33,966 | | UE06 | 4 | 8 | UE05 | 27 | £33,966 | | |

Thoughts On Designing Our New Scale

Pay
Competitive
Salaries

Fairness to
All

Improve
Consistency

Cost Impact*

Reward Team costed implementation impact (year 1) - but we needed to understand the longer term impact too...

- We drafted in the help and expertise of a Finance Business Partner (Business Planning)
- Working together we built a 10 year cost projection as staff moved through the grade steps
 - Our role was to help Finance understand Reward policy, pension, legacy grade T&Cs
 - They helped us understand the longer term cost implication of our decisions



Our Proposal

- Moving all grades to start higher up the pay scale
 - Merging grades UE01 and UE02 to reflect the similarities in roles, responsibilities and pay benchmarks
 - Starting first grade from spine point 7 instead of spine point 4
 - The start point of grades UE02-UE05 moved 2 or 3 points higher up the pay spine
 - Shortening some grades and extending others restored some consistency
 - The start of grades UE06-UE09 moved 2 points higher up the pay spine
 - Extended grade UE09 from 5 automatic steps to 8 to reflect time in role and expertise
 - Phase in the move of start of grade UE10 from spine point 50, to point 53 on implementation, to point 54 in Aug 2024 and point 55 in Aug 2025
 - Move to annual progression for steps 1 to 6 of UE10, from biennial
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What it meant for our staff April 2024

Move all staff to be within the new scale boundary for their grade - over 5,000 staff received an increase



All Grade UE01 Staff move up to become Grade UE02




If staff were already within the new grade boundary then no immediate increase required




What it meant for our staff August 2024

Auto increment as usual
– but almost everyone compared to 50%



7,000 staff who were at top of scale before
now get an increment and now many more
have 2-3 additional years of increments
available to them



Everyone on the pay scale (not grade 10 off
scale) benefits even those still at top of new
scale/contribution zone – we gave them an
increment or one – off payment anyway!



What did we achieve

- All salaries now ahead of or on benchmark
- Salary is no longer given as a reason for harder to hire roles
- Reduced the number of off-scale salaries by 50%
- Gender pay gap reduced on average salary by 1.05 percentage points
- Number of steps in grade reflects likely time in grade
- Enabled recognition steps for long serving staff
- Real Living Wage did not impact grades for the first time this year!



Lessons Learned – What worked well

- The power of the hive mind – and great data – team capability was increased
- Share-point site dedicated to Grade Scale Review was critical – single source
- On-line FAQs updated regularly as issues arose
- HR Helpline taking all the queries – no compromise
- Early Union Engagement – their buy-in is essential – Joint Statement issued
- Regular Engagement with Senior Leadership Team (SLT)
- Have some low cost high value options for low paid staff (standardise leave, merge grade 1 & 2, start one point higher up)
- A positive outcome for (almost) everyone enabled harder negotiations to go well
- Team humour – we needed a laugh, especially when writing FAQs



Lessons Learned – What could have been better

- Have a clear governance route for approvals – multiple visits to various Committees, Boards, Exec, Court, etc.
- Steering group formed early on – define their role and don't go round them to SLT, Committees, Exec
- 10 year financial models should be standard projection across all projects
- Don't assume managers are supporting by explaining to their staff
- Make sure Finance are briefed for impact of volume changes on general ledger and budgeting plans.
- Reduce multiple spreadsheets being updated by more use of shared files, drives and controlled access



Tips for successful implementation - HR Helpline

- Prepare your **FAQs in advance**, and continue to add to these as questions come in
- Single place for directing all employee queries
- FAQs are the first line of defence, then have one source where employees can seek **further assistance – HR Helpline**
- **Prepare your first responders** – as far as possible have template responses for the queries coming in
- Have a **clear route** for your first responders **to escalate queries** to experts at pace
- Direct **ALL queries to Helpline** – do not try and make anyone else an expert!



Tips for Engaging the Unions

- Key to successful implementation: **engage the Unions** at an early stage, involving them in the design of the new grade scale
- Allow and facilitate **negotiation** of the design of the new grade scale
- **Show them the working**, not just the answer – important to let them know how we reached our proposal, rather than just the proposal
- **TRUST** - showing them behind the scenes builds trust about what we're doing (example: share benchmarking data)
- Live the principle of **meaningful consultation**



Expect the unexpected

- Some challenges you will expect – Unions asking for the scale to start at point 7 rather than 6; staff didn't like less experienced staff getting paid the same etc
 - Some challenges you might not see coming...
 - Individuals who were happy at top of grade, saw it as a status point and saw new room for growth and getting increments as “demotion”
 - Individuals unhappy it hadn't been implemented earlier in their careers so why now?
 - Individuals unhappy at colleagues “catching up” faster on the grade scale, without having served the time they had to
 - Complaints of inexperienced new starts being paid more than they were when they joined
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Summary

- Keep the team focused on the end goal but communicate the wins loudly. Took 18 months from start to finish – we needed motivation!
 - Be clear with Unions from the outset where there are red lines you will not negotiate on. Set expectations, but listen. If Unions are saying something, chances are staff will do too. Get them on board with the positive messages
 - Know your data and your facts – get the right people involved from the start and let them be the experts
 - Don't let the negative minority outperform the positive majority – from 18,000 staff, we got 120 complaints but our attention on them was disproportionate
 - Celebrate – end of project team drinks were much needed!
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Questions?





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