March 3, 2022

Dear Dr. Ono and Ms. McKenzie:

As we do not often correspond directly with you, we wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge the approach taken by the University towards our Union members throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The work done to minimize negative employment consequences to our members has been appreciated, as was the collaborative approach taken in order to reach the temporary layoff and retention agreements.

That notwithstanding, the primary purpose of this letter is to convey to you on behalf of our respective memberships, comprising over 7,000 employees, the profound frustration with compensation levels for our members at the University.

It is incumbent on us to raise the issue of wages and compensation with you as our Collective Agreements expire in the coming months and as we plan and prepare for the upcoming round of Collective Bargaining. As you know, bargaining in the Public Sector in British Columbia is framed by the Provincial Ministry of Finance through the Public Sector Employers’ Council (PSEC) and the mandates that they impose on Employers and Unions. These mandates have not been beneficial to our members – over time our wages have increased at a level far below the rate of inflation. The austerity of these PSEC mandates have also prevented other components of employee compensation from remaining impactful. For example, extended health paramedical benefit levels have barely moved in more than twenty (20) years, greatly diminishing their utility.

Recruitment issues are already prevalent at UBC and retention issues will soon follow if these issues are not addressed. The physical location of UBC’s Point Grey Campus exacerbates these pressures, increasing the time and expense required for our members to commute to work. We do not need to be prescient to know that UBC’s competitiveness for attracting talented and dedicated staff members will regress even further without meaningful increases to the remuneration rates at the University. Already reported associated impacts of increased workload, increased sick leave usage and injury rates, as well as decreased morale and productivity will also become more stark. Without change, the University will become a less desirable choice for workers of all vocations, and many will decide that they simply cannot afford to work at UBC. Another restrictive mandate from PSEC will further aggravate this situation.
The student experience and UBC's vision, purpose and values depend on the ability to employ the best Teaching Assistants and English Language Instructors, to offer well-maintained libraries and facilities and to provide a safe, welcoming living and learning environment. These qualities are provided by our members, your employees. Our memberships constitute a workforce that want to be able to continue to work at UBC. They are proud to work at the University and are loyal to it, as well as being accountable.

It is for these reasons that we call on you to lobby the Provincial Government for the necessary latitude to work to address compensation issues for our members at UBC and to impress upon them the urgency of this problem. We commit to working collaboratively with you and your delegates to fulfill this undertaking. The University community expects us and relies upon us to deliver on this responsibility.

We look forward to hearing from you and to future productive dialogue on this important issue.

Sincerely and with respect,

David Lance
President
CUPE Local 116

Phyllis Pearson
President
CUPE Local 2278

Chloe Martin-Cabanne
President
CUPE Local 2950

cc Honourable Anne Kang, Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Training
Karen Ranalletta, President, CUPE BC
UBC Human Resources
CUPE 116, 2278 & 2950 Executive Boards