

Landsrapport – Island 2024

Union of University Teachers, Union of Professors, and the Union of University Teachers in Akureyri

Collective agreement:

Collective agreements for the three unions were signed in the spring of 2023 and took effect from 1st of April 2023. The validity periods were short, valid until 31st of March 2024. New salary scales came into effect on April 1, 2023, and increased salaries by an average of 7.2%. This was to try to contain the inflation and buy time to better prepare long term contracts in the next round. Increases in vacation bonuses for the year were also agreed upon, along with action plans for the contract period. Included in this action plan was talks of implementation of shorter work week for academics. This action plan also included revision of the sick leave section of the collective agreements. A protocol was also agreed upon in the collective agreements, which stipulates analysis of cost of academic staff due to long-term education.

In March 2023, a milestone agreement for Article 7 on the equalization of wages between markets was agreed upon, but that agreement was made in connection with changes to the pension fund system in Iceland in 2016. The agreement was between umbrella associations (BHM, BSRB and KÍ) on one hand with the Minister of Finance and the Economy and the Union of Icelandic Association of Local Authorities on the other hand. In this agreement, it was decided to work on correcting the salaries of certain groups within certain organizations of the state and local authorities. In unions within universities, adjuncts, assistant professors and associate professors were included in this agreement. A final decision was signed in December and included the following increases:

- Pay increases for adjuncts II after one and three years,
- increase in minimum wages of Adjuncts 1, Assistant Professors and Associate Professors,
- first step of pay increase timeline of academics shortened (applies to all academics but only impacts Adjunct 1 and Assistant Professors).

Significant cooperation has taken place between the Association of University Teachers, the Association of Professors at the State University and the Association of University Teachers in Akureyri in the run-up to the collective bargaining, and the unions agreed to join hands in the current round of collective bargaining and submit a joint claim. The main theme of the unions' demands is salary increases, for example corrections to salary tables and corrections in the salary setting of members. The unions jointly conducted a survey among members asking about pay-related issues. Amongst other things, this survey showed high number of members that have difficulties in making ends meet and high percentage of members with stress related issues (indication of burnout)

Following that, the associations held two seminars, in March on salary issues and the working environment for members of the associations and in May on the evaluation system of public universities in Iceland, which largely determines the pay grade of academic staff and largely determines other wage-related issues. The three unions are also in cooperation with 10 other unions within BHM (confederation of university graduates), which is umbrella organization of professional and trade unions of university-educated people.

New distribution model for Icelandic universities:

Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation proposed new model for financial contributions to universities. There are some radical changes in those rules, e.g. to pay only for successfully completed ETCS. The associations sent comments on these new rules to the Ministry.

In conclusion:

Universities in Iceland have been underfunded and the situation has gotten worse in recent years. This last year has been characterized by a great defensive struggle, especially at the University of Iceland, and various benefits, which are not related to the collective agreement, have been reduced. Here are examples of actions implemented in the past year:

- A special travel fund at the University of Iceland was discontinued,
- reduction of payments for participation in certain committees within the academic departments of the University of Iceland,
- plans on discontinuation of meal reimbursement introduced at the University of Iceland,
- reductions of payment for the postdoctoral incentive fund at the University of Iceland,
- decision on financing of long-term illness of grantees repealed at the University of Iceland. Another hot topics are plans on staff having to have to pay for parking spaces and having open office spaces for academics (as we have discussed before).
- On top of that the economic situation in Iceland has also been hard on our members. The inflation has gone over 10% and the housing market is really in a hard place. The eruption in Grindavík and the relocation of its inhabitants has not helped. The cost that the government has used in helping them, for example by buying their houses and building defence walls is used against us as an argument that our demands have to be reasonable.
- FH agreed in May to increase (symbolically) the amount that goes into so called “strike fund” and the Professors Union founded such fund in May for the first time. This was done in order to send out a signal that we are willing to take the matter further than usually as our members are getting tired of their salaries.

The associations have sent statements and resolutions to university management and university authorities on government level, for example on concerns of measurement of teaching load, the cancellation of the travel fund at the University of Iceland and a resolution that stipulates that private offices should be available to all academic staff.