

Govt maintains 13 allowances for UTAG, TUTAG

By Mary Anane-Amponsah

THE government has agreed to maintain the 13 allowances tied to the base pay of members of the University Teachers Association of Ghana (UTAG) and the Technical University Teachers Association of Ghana (TUTAG), with the agreed adjustment resulting from ongoing negotiations for better conditions of service.

They include payroll items such as housing, owner occupier, research allowance, book allowance, fuel allowance, acting allowance, utility allowances and off-campus allowance, with some adjustment.

Responsibility allowance and entertainment allowance have, however, been deferred for further negotiations.

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Fair Wages and Salaries Commission (FWSC), Benjamin Arthur, said the demand for market premium as grounds for the recent walkout during a negotiation meeting with the



employer, the Fair Wages and Salaries Commission, and subsequent threats of strike were “inappropriate”.

He said the commission had already shown commitment to the negotiation process by increasing the base pay by 23 per cent for this year, which would impact the allowances tied to the base pay.

He said there was no benefit in the unions taking an entrenched position on their demand for better conditions of service when the government throughout negotiations had shown good faith in dealing with the demands.

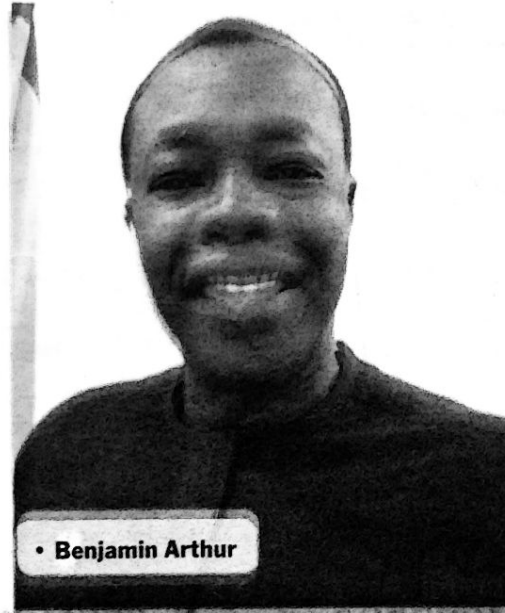
Unions' stance

However, UTAG and TUTAG have cited bad faith, contempt and a lackadaisical attitude on the part of the employer towards their demand for improved conditions of service.

They have insisted that they would not be part of meetings that did not yield benefits, and had threatened to strike to drum home their demands.

The President of UTAG, Professor Mamudu

Akudugu, told the Daily Graphic that the association would not go to the negotiations table until the government was ready to negotiate the market premium.



• Benjamin Arthur

Mr Arthur, in an interview with the Daily Graphic, said there had been substantial progress with negotiations, and, therefore, a “big surprise” for UTAG and TUTAG to have walked out of last Wednesday’s negotiation.

He disclosed that the proposed conditions of service submitted by UTAG had the component of payroll items, non-payroll items (namely allowances internally-generated funds related) and non-monetary items which the parties had reached certain agreements on.

As of now, with the exception of responsibility allowance and entertainment allowance deferred for further negotiations, the payroll items such as housing, owner occupier, research allowances, book allowances, fuel allowance, acting allowance, utility allowance, off-campus allowance, among others, have been maintained with some adjustment.

He appealed to UTAG and TUTAG to return to the negotiating table, stressing that the government had not shown bad faith.

The walkout, he said, had affected a meeting

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with the National Labour Commission (NLC) to consider the draft report by the technical sub-committee generated on the non-monetary items.

Giving a background of how the negotiation had progressed, Mr Arthur explained that the latest demands for import tax duty waivers for personal and official vehicles, market premium and professorial allowances had not been part of the proposed conditions of service as of April 2023 when negotiations commenced.

It was on November 21, 2023, that UTAG reopened negotiations, introducing their latest demands, and last Wednesday, the agenda was to negotiate those demands, including departmental allowances and the proposal for professors retiring on their salaries, when UTAG pulled the surprise walkout.

The grounds for the walkout, it emerged, was due to the government's inability to negotiate the market premium.

Government's position

On the issue of market premium, Mr Arthur

said the position of the government was that on the account of the 2013 Government White Paper on Market Premium, it was non-negotiable, citing Section 3.4 (f) and (g) to buttress this stance.

"Market premium shall not be based on service classifications or occupational groups or job classified as essential services as specified under Section 175 of the Labour Act, 2003 (Act 651), and as stated in regulation 20 of the Labour Regulations, 2007 (LI 1833)," the White Paper on Market Premium states.

Mr Arthur said the market premium would be determined by the government, and was not subject to negotiation.

He said market premium was not an allowance or entitlement but a mechanism for the employer to use and attract critical skills in short supply.

He said the objective of the market premium was to enable the public service sector to compete favourably with the private sector for critical skills, and to enhance performance and productivity in the public service.

On the issue of professors retiring on their salaries, Mr Arthur said it would open the floodgates for other government senior workers

to make similar demands, describing it as not sustainable.

Effect of walkout

"How can you threaten to go on strike based on market premium despite all the gains made in this negotiation?" the FWSC boss asked.

"There is no benefit for UTAG in taking an entrenched position. In this era that we find ourselves, dialogue is the way forward. We can only engage. Where the two do not agree, a third party may be required to handle the issues," he said.

"We need to understand each other; we are in challenging times, so when you come to the table, you do not expect that if you wanted a basket full of mangoes, exactly as you have requested should be given to you, and that is why we negotiate," he said.

UTAG position

But the President of UTAG said it was not going to the negotiation table until the government was ready to negotiate the market premium.

Prof. Akudugu said the online teaching

support, which was given to replace the market premium in 2022, was a one-off payment.

This was to allow government an opportunity to develop the guideline for market premium from the 2021 labour market survey and then implement it in 2023.

He said the government, had, however, been able to determine the market premium while their conditions kept deteriorating.

"The government has not fulfilled the context for which UTAG accepted the online teaching allowance," he stressed.

Prof. Akudugu said if government did not consider university lecturers as critical skills employees, it should come clear on the issues they move on.

UTAG, he said, was developing a comprehensive condition of service, and therefore, would not allow government to pick and choose the items supposed to form part of conditions of service.

"We walked out because if you say we cannot discuss items that are central to the negotiations, what do you want us to do," he said.

He said determining market premium was the only condition they would return to the negotiation table, and called on government to provide guideline for the determination of market premium.