

TA representatives and the Direction agreed to hold 3 negotiating meetings. When will these be?

Following the negotiation stallment that resulted from the cancellation of the meeting between Teaching Assistant (TA) representatives and the Direction on November 8th (Please refer to Bulletin 1), a conciliation procedure was filed to the CRCT (Chambre des relations collectives de travail - the Chamber for Collective Labour Relations) on November 29th, 2022. This measure was taken in accordance with the mandate given to TA representatives in the June 3rd and November 4th general assemblies (GAs). On November 30th, the CRCT summoned the Direction and TA representatives to a conciliation hearing on December 15th, 2022.

The TA delegation was composed of 8 members (SIT, ADA and elected delegates) whilst three members of the Direction were joined by the Institute's jurist and the external lawyer who provided advice that led to the 45% activity rate contract. During this CRCT hearing, the TA delegation reinstated TA demands, namely to negotiate with the Direction a contract that addresses precarity.

At this meeting, both parties agreed to convene for the first of three 1.5 hour long negotiating-sessions starting in the first week of February 2023, with a calendar to be fixed before Christmas. We agreed to keep the conciliation process open, meaning that parties ought to "*s'abstenir de toute médiatisation et de toutes mesures de combat*" (namely to refrain from publicly disseminating information or to take collective actions). Lastly, parties agreed to inform the CRCT of an eventual agreement or the need to have another hearing.

Unfortunately, both parties could not agree on a negotiation calendar. In addition, the Direction appealed to the Chamber arguing that an anonymous reaction statement to IHEID TA Salary Negotiations published in The Graduate Press on December 15th constituted a breach of the CRCT law regarding mediatization and public collective action. Therefore, the CRCT decided to summon both parties for a second conciliation hearing on January 17th.

SIT and ADA mandate!

In order to avoid any misunderstanding, we recall the mechanisms by which the SIT union is mandated by the IHEID's TAs to improve working conditions. This mandate was given to SIT by TA who are union members as well as through resolutions passed at several general assemblies. ADA was also given this same mandate. As such, SIT and ADA work together to carry it out. During the GAs, staff delegates were also elected.

Why are we still asking for negotiations?

We are still asking to meet with the Direction to negotiate because the heart of our problem, namely the remuneration for our work, has not yet been satisfactorily addressed. Although ADA and GISA representatives were invited to participate in several meetings with the Direction in 2021 and early 2022, remuneration increases have not been enough to allow TAs to lead a dignified life in Geneva. Previous consultations with TAs cannot be used as a reason to refuse to negotiate with a union and association mandated by its members. The renewal of the mandate by these assistants in November 2022, as well as a petition signed by 50 of the 68 teaching assistants, are clear signs that assistants are united and have not given up on their demands. We are confident that a solution can be found with management. Only a mutually-reached solution that suits both parties will close this chapter opened two years ago.

Additional information in response to the documents presented by the Direction to the CRCT

Clarifications about the PhD reform and the meetings held in 2020 and 2021

When the minimum wage law came into effect in the canton of Geneva on November 1st 2020, the ADA Board started a conversation with the Direction and HR to ensure that this law aiming to address the issue of the “working poor” in the canton was applied to TA and RA contracts. At the same time, while supporting the idea of funding the whole four years of the PhD programme, the ADA Board expressed doubts about the process and content of the PhD reform.

On the one hand, concerning the process of the reform, a draft of the reform was shared for the first time with GISA and ADA at the end of March 2021, despite being presented to faculty in December 2020. Furthermore, the ADA and GISA Board were prevented from making it available to students and assistants until it was approved by the Academic Committee and the Collège des professeurs later in the Spring.

On the other hand, concerning the content of the PhD reform, TAs contractual conditions were completely excluded from the discussion, even though two years of the packages are funded through TA positions (and current 1st-year PhD students were told upon admission that being a TA is a compulsory part of the packages). Nevertheless, the issues that TA representatives have been seeking to negotiate since May 2022 had already been mentioned in previous communications with management, including in the context of the PhD reform. For instance, in March 2021, the GISA Vice-President for PhD programmes highlighted the fact that the reform maintained substantial contractual inequality between TAs and RAs. Similarly, in April 2021, the Direction refused to discuss changes to TA contracts as the PhD reform was under discussion. Nevertheless, the ADA Board discussed TA contractual conditions in the Collège des enseignants on May 18th 2021 and shared a text and presentation on these issues with the Academic Committee and the Direction. In the PhD Forum the same day, doctoral students mandated the GISA Vice-President for PhD programmes to keep pushing for their perspective to be included in the PhD reform and stress the importance of addressing TA contractual conditions.

The Direction showed the willingness to discuss TA contractual conditions in the Fall of 2021 following an awareness-raising poster campaign on the poor funding available to PhD students at the Graduate Institute. These were on the agenda of a meeting held with the ADA Board and the GISA Vice-President for PhD programmes on November 23rd (whose content could not be shared with their respective constituencies) and a Town Hall held on December 8th during which the following was presented:

- 70% time rate, 16h/week for assistant tasks, 12h/week for PhD research
- Same gross wage as the previous contract (22,800CHF/year) and a scholarship of 16,800CHF/year
- Total net remuneration of 3,212.65CHF/month, 2,962.40CHF/month after tuition fees.

On December 9th, 2021, after a group of students staged a sit-in in the IHEID’s cafeteria, the Direction met with the ADA and GISA Boards, as well as with class representatives, however, TA contractual conditions were not discussed. This meeting was followed by a message to the entire IHEID community stating that “the following decisions, based on the proposals already mentioned at both Town Halls and at the 23 November meeting with the two associations, were formalised during the 9 December meeting: a salary increase bringing the net salary slightly above the UNIGE equivalent; and a bonus for the past year. It was also decided to work together without delay to discuss and resolve a number of technical issues related to social benefits. Finally, it was decided to set up a common discussion schedule with the objective of reducing, in stages, TA tuition fees.”

Do not hesitate to reach out to ada.president@graduateinstitute.ch or cbarrelet@sit-syndicat.ch for any questions or doubts!

Many TAs felt that this message from the Director was not in line with the tentativeness of the terms proposed on December 8th. As such, between December 2021 and March 2022, TAs mandated the ADA Board to gather more information on the new TA contract proposal. TAs also systematically rejected the proposed new terms as these failed to address contractual structural issues and created further precarity for some TAs, such as parents. In response, while making limited concessions, the Direction and HR did not provide sufficiently clear information about the new terms nor addressed TA concerns. Instead, the new terms were to come into effect from September 2022, eventually bringing a number of TAs to accept them in April 2022.

Finally, concerning the process of agreeing on the current Terms of Employment (ToE) for TAs, it is important to stress that, as pointed out by the ADA Board and various TAs, this is not implemented uniformly across departments. From our perspective, this is the result of a piecemeal approach. According to the ToE, each TA can be assigned a maximum of 12 ECTS worth of classes per semester but it remains unclear how this allocation plays out within the 15h/week maximum stipulated in the TA contract. As demanded by TA representatives, the negotiations concerning TA contracts, which include the ToE, should be held together, especially as the budget constraints and the limits imposed by the PhD reform on the number of TAs (maximum 70 per year) are in contradiction with the increasing number of students per class and the offer of courses and, hence, of TAs needed to support them.

A recap of the attempted negotiations since May 2022

Since April 29th 2022, when a General Assembly voted to give both SIT and ADA a mandate to negotiate a contract for TAs that addressed the issue of precarity of assistants and improved our financial situation, the TA representatives had been actively seeking a meeting with the Direction in order to fulfil their mandate.

After a first meeting that took place on 1 June, the Direction offered the TAs the option to vote on two contracts, with a 70% and 100% activity rate. After ADA put the two contracts to a vote, a majority of TAs opted for the 100% contract and the results were communicated to the Direction, together with the modifications to the statutes and the new composition of the ADA board.

The Direction then called a meeting on short notice to be held on 15 June, when only three TA representatives could be present. Unknown and unannounced to the TA representatives, an external lawyer joined the meeting, who had advised the Direction to rescind the 70% or 100% activity rate options as, from their perspective, such contracts did not represent the reality of TA work. This led to the unilateral imposition of a 45% contract on all TAs, that only considers the 15h of TA work as salaried work. TAs could either accept the new contract or would have to abandon their position at the end of the previous contract.

The Direction framed this change as more advantageous to TAs in terms of social contributions. However, these claims are represented exclusively by the increase in retirement contributions, which more than doubled with a 45% contract to 110CHF/month, an amount that remains low. This sudden change is due to the fictional reduction of the activity rate, as the number of hours TA work and the remuneration they receive stays mostly the same. The lower activity rate, on the contrary, has negative effects in terms of access to other social protections and benefits, including unemployment and childcare. TAs continue to push for a contract on which social charges are paid on the basis of their full income and that brings together into one salary payment both the scholarship and TA remuneration.

Since then, TA representatives continue to attempt to sit with the Direction at the negotiation table, to find a co-constructed solution to the problem of precarity.

IHEID's TA representatives

Do not hesitate to reach out to ada.president@graduateinstitute.ch or cbarrelet@sit-syndicat.ch for any questions or doubts!