



Mr Jake Verity
President
University of Sheffield Students' Union

By email: su-president@sheffield.ac.uk

5 March 2020

Dear Jake,

Joint response to the letter from the student unions

Thank you for your letter concerning ongoing strike action at 74 universities. We appreciate that this has been a difficult time for students and would like to emphasise that universities are doing all they can to minimise the impact of the industrial action.

Employers respect the right of UCU members to express their concerns about these important matters and recognise that those voting to support industrial action would not have done so without having strongly held views or concerns. But UCEA and UUK have, in the separate negotiations, taken significant steps to resolve both the pay and working conditions, and pensions disputes.

The Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) remains among the most generous schemes in Europe. There have been a series of productive and positive talks between UCU, UUK and USS to develop a joint approach to the future of the scheme.

Employers have also agreed to pay 65% of the increased costs - £250 million more a year - required under law to maintain scheme benefits, but UCU continues to demand employers pay an unaffordably high share. Employers are now paying contributions of 21.1% of salaries, with members paying 9.6%.

Meeting the union's demands would be unaffordable for most of the scheme's 341 employers. For many, it could lead to cuts in teaching, student services and research at a time when they are operating in a challenging environment, with a freeze on tuition fees and prolonged uncertainty over the implications of Brexit.

UCEA continues to work with all the sector unions to deliver a university sector that works

better for all of us. The extensive and ongoing talks with UCU seek to develop approaches and progress ideas for both new sector-level work and institutional actions to meet the challenges in three key areas of this dispute – workload, gender pay gap and ethnicity pay, and contractual arrangements.

UCEA has been given unprecedented scope by our members which enables the offer of wide-reaching extensive proposals on behalf of universities. This follows exhaustive, but always constructive, dialogue with UCU over the last two months.

All higher education employers want to provide excellent working environments where everyone is valued. The recent proposals presented to all five trade unions (UCU, UNISON, Unite, GMB, EIS) in the national pay bargaining arrangements set out a series of expectations of higher education institutions around these three topics, while acknowledging that much is already happening in institutions and in the dialogue with staff representatives at institutional level. Taken together they provide a real springboard for staff and trade unions to engage in their institutions on the issues of highest priority to them. UCU is urged to consult all of its members, including the vast majority not taking strike action, and present these positive proposals to them.

We care deeply about the impact the strike action is having on students and will continue our dialogue with UCU (keeping NUS updated) to achieve joint and fair solutions as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,



Alistair Jarvis
Chief Executive
Universities UK



Professor Mark E. Smith CBE
Chair
UCEA

Cc: Dr Jo Grady, General Secretary of the University and College Union
Michelle Donelan MP, Minister of State for Universities
Professor Sir David Eastwood (Chair, USS Trustee Board and President and Vice-Chancellor, University of Birmingham)