**DRAFT LETTER ON USS DISPUTE**

I am writing to you to express concern about the ongoing dispute over the future of the USS pension scheme.

As you know, following the 2018 strikes the University and College Union suspended action in good faith to allow the Joint Expert Panel to review USS’s governance and valuation methodology. They are now balloting for further strike action because they do not feel that their long-standing concerns have been resolved. USS has chosen to reject the Joint Expert Panel’s most important recommendations and is now demanding higher contribution rates from both employers and members.

I share the concerns raised by UCU that higher contribution rates for members will lead many to withdraw from the scheme altogether – a situation that is not only bad for those individuals in retirement, but potentially destabilising for the scheme as a whole. It is concerning that the employers have backed these increased contributions rather than pushing USS for full implementation of the JEP recommendations, and I echo UCU’s call for you and fellow USS employers to cover the additional costs which face staff as a result of this decision.

I am also concerned by the various reports in relation to the scheme’s governance, not least the recent dismissal of whistleblower Professor Jane Hutton. As the controversy around USS has intensified, including with an investigation by the Pensions Regulator, it has not been encouraging to see employers respond to these developments by reaffirming their confidence in USS.

Staff at your institution deserve a good, guaranteed, affordable pension that gives them dignity in retirement and makes the sector an attractive place to work. None of this will be possible if USS and employers fail to address concerns about the scheme’s governance and valuation methodology. I hope, therefore, that you will do everything in your power to ensure that, on your behalf, Universities UK is holding USS fully to account for its decisions and approach.

In light of the current ballot for strike action and the concerns outlined above, I therefore urge you to make a firm commitment to push for implementation of the Joint Expert Panel’s findings, cover the costs of the 2018 valuation and put pressure on UUK to return urgently to unconditional talks aimed at resolving the dispute.

**DRAFT LETTER ON PAY AND EQUALITIES DISPUTE**

I am writing in relation to the current industrial dispute over pay and equality in higher education.

I note with concern that this year’s final pay offer to staff is below inflation and fails to address the 20% drop in the value of higher education pay in recent years. I am also disappointed that the employer body, UCEA, has failed to make meaningful commitments to action on sector-wide issues related to workload, job security and the race and gender pay gaps.

The combination of pay erosion, unmanageable workloads and the widespread use of insecure contracts is undermining professionalism and making the working environment more stressful. I find it particularly shocking that a third of academic staff are employed on fixed-term contracts and that zero-hours contracts are still widely used to employ teaching staff in universities. This widespread precariousness is not conducive to a stable and high-quality student experience.

In these times of wider Brexit-related uncertainty, it is more important than ever to ensure that we can continue to attract brilliant staff to work in universities. It is therefore imperative that you and your fellow employers do everything you can to ensure that careers in higher education are both attractive and sustainable.

I hope you will engage with UCU locally to address these concerns at your own institution, and use your influence to push UCEA for an effective sector-wide response to these important issues.