



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

5 March 2018

Alistair Jarvis
Chief Executive
Universities UK

By email: Alistair.Jarvis@universitiesuk.ac.uk

Dear Alistair,

I write to convey to you the strength of feeling amongst the staff of the University of Edinburgh, whether UCU members or not, that new initiatives are needed to resolve the pensions dispute. In particular, we applaud the suggestions from Alice Gast at Imperial that an expert group should be set up to enhance the evidence-base for the discussions (a group to which we would be pleased to contribute) and that greater transparency is needed about the assumptions on which the discordant valuations of the pensions “gap” have been based. This expert group’s terms of reference should be broad and include aspects of governance of USS as well as detailed methodology for valuations and projections, the criteria for retention of an element of defined benefits or the precise conditions which would allow a later return thereto, and examination of the viability of alternative schemes. The consent of the Pensions Regulator to extend beyond the current deadline following the recent valuation is likely to be needed to enable such a group to complete its work. The talks between UUK and UCU together with ACAS should be without preconditions and take account of the existential issues highlighted below.

My justification for writing to you at this stage is three-fold:

First, as a newcomer I am one of the very few UUK members that has not previously contributed to the debate.

Second, a large volume of correspondence (spoken, written and electronic) from students and staff leaves me in no doubt as to the depth of concern at the University of Edinburgh. This was exemplified by a letter whose signatories included over 350 professors, and today I met with around 150 of those colleagues.

Two themes have emerged: a) heartfelt concern for the sector’s ability to attract and retain top quality staff in the face of these changes, added of course to Brexit, the competition from industry and the international mobility of today’s higher education scene; and b) the impact of the proposed reforms on staff members at all levels, plus real anxiety about early career staff, late joiners, part-timers and those on insecure contracts, the last two of these having a gender dimension.

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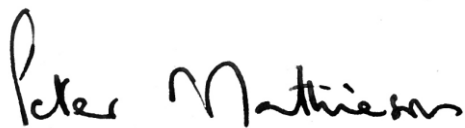
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No staff members take industrial action lightly but it is notable on this occasion that many are saying that they have never taken industrial action before but they do so now because of the wide implications of the pensions issue.

Third, a strong desire on my part to demonstrate my genuine wish to contribute constructively to a sustainable long-term solution to the pensions dispute. Even before I left the UK for Hong Kong, this issue was looming and my preference is to aim now to resolve it once and for all. We have to balance the needs and wishes of our staff current and future; our students, many of whom are torn between support for their teachers and concern about their studies, examinations, dissertations etc; and the needs of the wider sector. I fully appreciate that if it was easy it would have been solved long ago. My appeal is to use imagination, thinking outside the box, flexibility and conciliation to restore trust and bring the dispute to an end. If I personally, or any member of the University of Edinburgh, can contribute, this will have my support. It is well understood that UUK represents a diverse group of organisations but we should all be able to agree to the need for a firm evidence-base and broader acceptance of the numbers and how they have been arrived at, a spirit of conciliation and a keen eye on the implications for the sector which we all love and which we believe has a vital role to play in the UK's future.

With best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Mathieson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'P'.