

Dear colleague,

Your Higher Education Committee is united in calling for you to vote **YES** to strike action and **YES** to action short of a strike.

### **Pension cap down to zero**

Currently, USS pension benefits are guaranteed for all your salary up to a cap of £55,000.

Universities UK (UUK), acting on behalf of your employer, is proposing that this cap is reduced to **zero**, effectively removing guaranteed pension payments in retirement.

These hard-line proposals mean that your future pension benefits would be based only on any returns from the 'investment' of your and your employers' contributions in stocks and shares.

### **Scheme benefits worse by 20-40%**

Independent analysts First Actuarial estimate that on a like for like basis, UUK's proposal would reduce retirement benefits paid by between 20% and 40%, depending upon grade and length of service.

While the employers say that past service benefits already accrued will be protected, this dangerous proposal will affect every member of staff who is a member of USS, or hopes to become one. In short, your employers are proposing to transfer the risk of providing pension benefits from themselves – a sector with a combined income of £34bn a year – to you.

### **Worst pensions in the education sector**

UCU believes that the UUK proposal would be hugely damaging if it were ever implemented:

- it would remove any certainty you have about your future pension income, creating stress and anxiety for you and your family
- it would mean that USS members would have by far the worst pension benefits in the education sector, far worse than those of both school teachers and academics in 'new' universities
- it would create a recruitment and retention crisis in our universities as staff seek the better financial security available elsewhere.

## To defend pensions, we need your help

UCU has called for extended national negotiations with the employers. Our aim in these talks will be to protect your pension benefits in any way we can. We know they can afford to pay more and that there are alternatives to the hard-line approach they are currently taking. This will also mean challenging the flawed valuation methodology, supported by the employers, which threatens the future of what remains a strong and growing pension scheme.

But the truth is that protecting your benefits will be tough, and **we will need your help**.

During this ballot, UCU will continue to press the employers to undertake serious negotiations aimed at protecting your pensions. However, there is complete unity within UCU about the need to be ready to take sustained industrial action to defeat these hard-line proposals from UUK.

## Only the threat of sustained strike action will make a difference

I want to be clear. Intermittent one-day strikes will not work to budge the employers.

That is why if you vote in favour of action, and there is no settlement, UCU will be calling sustained strike action aimed at **massively disrupting lectures, classes and the administrative life** of your institution next year.

## Your good will abused

However, I believe that in this situation your employer is cynically relying on your good will for their own ends.

Our universities run on the extra hours you put in; they trade on your success and expertise; and **they know you care deeply about your students**.

And yet they repay your commitment with a hard-line proposal which will destroy USS as we know it and lead to stress and uncertainty for you and your family.

Enough is enough. If we want to challenge this proposal, we must stand up and be counted.

## We built USS, now we must defend it

The current USS scheme did not land in our laps as a gift from benevolent employers. It was fought for by UCU's predecessor trade union and its members. It established for the first time a common pension across all participating universities and has given a comfortable retirement to many tens of thousands over the years.

But unless we show we are prepared to fight again USS as we know it will be gone for ever.

Whether you are months away from retirement or have just taken up your first teaching role as part of your PHD; whether you have been in USS all your life or haven't yet got around to joining; whether you are an academic or one of the thousands of academic related staff who help make our universities tick this union needs your vote and **your vote will really count.**

On behalf of the Higher Education Committee, I urge you to stand up and be counted.

Use your vote. Encourage others to vote too. Tell colleagues about the union.

**Vote YES to strike action.**

**Vote YES to action short of a strike.**

Sally Hunt  
UCU general secretary

PS. Remember that under new trade union laws we need at least a 50% turnout so please vote - don't leave it to others to defend your pension rights.