

Dear [colleague]

This is to update you on the branch briefing today and the higher education committee (HEC) meeting that followed it.

The branch briefing received a briefing from me which included two new exchanges.

The first was a letter from Alastair Jarvis, the chief executive of universities UK (UUK) which states as follows:

'I understand that you have received questions from your members about the employer's positions on future benefits reforms that may be necessary to complete this valuation following the report of the proposed joint expert panel. I can confirm that Universities UK does not intend to return to the January joint negotiating committee (JNC) proposal to consult on moving to a defined contributions (DC) scheme. Instead we are committed to maintaining a meaningful defined benefit pension offer at this valuation. Longer term we would like to work jointly with UCU to consider other risk sharing alternatives.

We believe that working together to establish a joint expert panel on the valuation provides an opportunity to move forward from this difficult dispute. Universities UK and employers believe that the sector needs to be given time to pause, to reflect and to rebuild the trust that has been damaged over the past few months and to rebuild relationships with your members and those students who have supported industrial action.'

I also reported on confidential correspondence from the Pension Regulator (tPR) to USS which has been shared with UCU and which makes clear that tPR see this as an opportunity to bring all stakeholders together and avoid recurring disagreements around the methodology and funding framework for future valuations.

This correspondence was positively received by the vast majority of branch delegates.

While there were diverse views, and real distrust of UUK, only a small minority of branches wished to reject the proposal outright, a further substantial minority wished UCU to seek revisions to the proposal. A majority of branches present indicated that they wished the proposal to go to a members' consultation.

HEC took note of branch views and agreed to a consultation with members to begin next week. It was agreed that the consultation would include all the documentation received from the employer as well as context on the position of the tPR and USS in order to come to a considered view.

I will send more details next week after the Easter break.

If members vote in favour of the proposal it was agreed to keep the current industrial action mandate live and to re-enact it in the event that any agreement is blocked for any reason.

For the avoidance of doubt: members should note that while the consultation is ongoing we

are serving notice on the first wave of April strikes tonight (16-20 April at Cardiff University, Brunel University, Cranfield University, University of Dundee, University of Leeds, Loughborough University, University of Manchester, University of Oxford, Ruskin College, University of Salford, University of Southampton, University of St Andrews and 16,17 and 19 at Bangor University) with more notices to follow next week for other institutions. The action short of a strike (ASOS) stays on and we are continuing as normal our plans for further industrial action while the consultation takes place.

I will be in touch again next week.

Sally Hunt
UCU general secretary