



Friday, 14 February 2020

Dear Lord Clement-Jones, Professor Colin Bailey

We understand that, as a USS employer, Queen Mary are being consulted on employers' and members' contribution rates.

Since April 2019, members of USS have been forced into higher contributions to USS, rising in October 2019 to 9.6% of their salaries. This has hit the lowest-paid and casually employed university staff the hardest, and risks a potentially destabilising exodus from USS. On the eve of another 14 days of strike action by the Union, we urge you to pressure UUK into making a new offer to UCU.

It has long been clear that staff at this University have a huge reservoir of anger about employer's knee-jerk support for the valuation, previous pension cuts and the recent contribution rises, especially coupled with a decade-long decline in real-terms pay. Members of Queen Mary UCU voted convincingly to take action over USS, with almost 85% support. Branch meetings and consultations over recent weeks have made it obvious that this support has not gone away. Members are serious about the upcoming strikes.

In your email to all staff of 10th January 2020, you said that you considered and, with the rest of the Senior Executive, supported the recommendations in JEP2. You also indicated that you would seek an agreement between UCU, UUK, USS and the Pension Regulator, in order to achieve a long-term sustainable and affordable pension scheme that is attractive for all staff – a commitment we all share. This is now the time to put this into effect.

However, while a resolution to the pension valuation and contribution issues will be welcome, we cannot disaggregate the pensions from the other issues. Declining real pay means declining real pensions. Precarious workers are forced to opt out of the pension. Rising workloads are in effect cuts to hourly pay. Gender and race pay inequality exacerbates all of these issues.

We urge you to join us in making Queen Mary a beacon of best employment practice, and use national negotiations to ensure the sector follows a Queen Mary lead.

Without decisive action from you and other principals and vice chancellors, the impact of the strikes will be severe. Employers' refusal to listen to UCU arguments on the valuation lead to the first strike. Given that UCU has shown flexibility on headline pay, do not let employer intransigence extend this round of industrial action.

Many students have already experienced two waves of industrial action. Our members deeply regret the impact on students, especially given the enormous support so many students have shown to our cause. But, failing to address the five issues at the heart of the two disputes creates the conditions for long-term decline in research and teaching quality.

It is in your power to stop these strikes. You now have a short window in which to take real steps towards resolving these disputes. We, therefore, urge you to respond to UUK's consultation by supporting additional contributions for employers in the period prior to the implementation of the 2020 valuation to ease the burden on staff. We ask further that you publicly commit to the recommendations of the JEP2 report, published last December, regarding approaches to the 2020 valuation and reform of USS governance. Only by acting now will you take the heat out of the pensions dispute and enable us to find a long-term solution.

We also ask you to persuade UUK to take the initiative and demonstrate long term commitment to real advancements inequality, to eliminate casualization, to address the workload issue, and end pay deterioration. These advancements are needed to make Queen Mary part of a sector fit for purpose, that attracts and keep the best staff, and is a beacon and example for students and their future employers.

Yours sincerely

On behalf of QMUL UCU Executive Committee