

Dear colleagues,

This Thursday sees the start of a period of industrial action at our University, so I wanted to write to colleagues in all areas of the University, whether you are planning to take action or not.

Firstly, while it is disappointing that industrial action is taking place, I want to make it clear that I and members of the University Executive Board fully respect the right of those planning to take part in peaceful industrial action to do so, and I urge all colleagues to both respect that right and show courtesy to those who are taking action. Equally, I hope that those who do take part in industrial action will have similar respect for, and show equal courtesy to, those colleagues who choose *not* to participate in the action.

I know from talking to a number of you that some of you planning to take action do so with very mixed feelings, and I do understand the very real dilemma you face between supporting the call for industrial action, and not adversely impacting on your students, whose interests matter greatly to you. I know this has not been an easy decision, and I appreciate this has aroused strong feelings. I am also sure that all of us are united in our desire to limit any disruption to our students, and to ensure their learning experience here is not damaged.

I fully understand that planning for financial security in retirement is an issue of considerable importance to all members of staff, and that

the proposed changes to the national USS pension scheme, and to our own PASNAS pension scheme, are a cause of concern and worry to many of you. While recognising the financial challenges, our University has never called for the existing USS defined benefit (“guaranteed pension”) scheme to be closed.

I recognise that there is a wide gap between the various viewpoints on these issues, and that all sides feel their position is the only valid position. I would urge you not to simply base your understanding on a single perspective. Read all of the information, including the information provided by USS itself, and Universities UK. These are very complex and important issues.

The dispute over USS pensions is a national matter and will not be decided locally. Universities, Vice-Chancellors and local UCU representatives are not directly involved in the negotiations. The decision ultimately rests with USS and its trustees and the Pensions Regulator.

However, I have personally made it clear to UUK, USS and the Board of the Russell Group that universities need the best possible and affordable pensions for all of us who work in universities, and I will be doing so again at UUK sector meetings later this week. Time is desperately short, with a Pensions Regulator deadline looming, but if there is still a possibility of genuinely meaningful negotiations, which means realism on all sides about the long-term financial sustainability of the USS pension scheme, then I would of course support that, and urge meetings to take place as soon as possible.

Industrial action is never easy for any institution, but I hope that, whatever our individual feelings are about this debate, we can continue to engage with each other in a respectful, constructive and

collegial manner, during and after this period of industrial action, and that we never forget that the interests of our students are of utmost importance to us all.

Kind regards,  
Professor Sir Christopher Snowden  
President and Vice-Chancellor

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