

29 November 2021

Alistair Jarvis
Chief Executive
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Dear Alistair

In April this year, UUK forced proposed detrimental changes to the USS pension scheme which UCU warned would devastate the retirement income of its members. These changes were forced through the Joint Negotiating Committee in August.

Before the cuts were forced through, UCU released its own modeller which detailed their impact on members' pensions. That modeller, developed by First Actuarial, showed that a typical lecturer on around £39k per year would lose 35% from their defined, guaranteed retirement benefits built up in the future.

In response, UUK repeatedly described these figures as 'misleading', claiming on a number of occasions that the scale of the cuts would actually fall between 10 – 18%.

These messages from UUK were communicated in press releases, via social media and in emails seen by UCU that were sent directly from UUK's head of pensions to university vice chancellors, principals and chief executives. These messages were then repeated in communications to members of staff by senior management in universities, including by vice chancellors.

However, this month, USS released its own modeller illustrating UUK's cuts. USS's modeller indicates that cuts to defined, guaranteed benefits built up in the future would amount to 41% for a USS member earning around £39k, a typical lecturer salary. Overall, once the non-guaranteed, defined contribution element of the scheme is taken into account, it shows that a lecturer earning around £39k would lose 31% of their annual retirement income under UUK's proposals when they retire, which would worsen to 36% after 20 years in retirement. These figures far exceed those used by UUK.

I am deeply concerned that UUK have not only been using misleading figures regarding the scale of the cuts in the press, across social media and in emails to university senior managers, but also encouraging those same senior managers in universities to use them in communications to staff. These communications, seen by UCU, ranged from attempts to persuade staff not to take industrial action, to encouraging staff to support UUK's proposals. More worrying still, some of these instances continued to occur after the USS modeller had been released.

I am therefore asking you, as the chief executive of the body which represents universities across the UK, to urgently do the following:

- Issue a clarification over the scale of the cuts to vice chancellors at each USS member institution in the UK and explain the rationale for UUK's use of misleading figures;
- Agree to carry out a new consultation with vice chancellors asking if they still support the cuts now that the full scale of them is clear, and if they would be willing to revoke them and re-enter negotiations

It is deeply regrettable that UCU members are yet again being forced to take industrial action over cuts to their pensions – action that could have been avoided if UUK had been honest about the damage their cuts would do to our members' retirement income.

I'm sure both staff and vice chancellors look forward to reading your response.

A copy of this letter will be sent to vice chancellors at all USS institutions.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jo Grady". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Dr Jo Grady
General Secretary