

Submission 3, dated 22 March 2022

I am writing as an academic at the University of Edinburgh. I imagine you are aware of the ongoing strike action that is taking place across Scotland and the UK. I'm writing to you to ask you, as a member of the Education, Children and Young People Committee, to investigate the actions of the University of Edinburgh Principal and to uncover what I believe are discrepancies around financial surpluses at the University and the University's rushed decision to implement massive pension cuts across the sector.

I am a female academic who will be disadvantaged by the gender wage gap throughout my career. I am also a late-starting academic after other careers, which means my pension earnings only started building up in my late 30s. Coupled with this, I am part of a single income family and will likely be the only one with an employer's pension. All of this means that I will likely be living very precariously in retirement. This will be after working 30 or so years at one of the richest universities in the country.

Our university leaders write to us to say that it 'hurts' them when employees assume that they don't care, but in my view they don't. At a meeting in October 2021 Gavin McLachlan, Vice-Principal bragged to a senior management meeting of the "larger than expected fiscal surplus" because "we thought we would have to contribute a lot more money to the USS pension scheme ...which is, of course, fantastic news".

The compromise proposal from UCU would have only required a small fraction of increased contributions and only for a short time until a proper valuation of the fund could be made.

Instead, Principal Peter Mathieson continues to insist that the University and College Union (UCU)'s compromise proposals are 'unaffordable'.

There is widespread failure to admit that the valuation was made at the bottom of the market in March 2020 (start of first lockdown) and has since increased significantly in value.

The Principal was asked to address this issue and he simply said it was out of his hands. We are a university which is supposed to uphold truth, facts, good research, but we are being treated as if we are too daft to notice that a pandemic valuation is being treated as an excuse to remove defined benefit pensions from the sector. All this shows to me is that they in fact don't care, and that the good will of academics, required for any institution to run - especially a university - is being severely abused.

In line with others, I write to say that we think a full Committee inquiry would provide the best scrutiny of the fiscal position of Scotland's universities, of managers' claims of pension 'unaffordability', and of their ongoing dependence on insecure contracts and indefensible pay gaps. We know this Committee cannot resolve the current dispute. But an inquiry is in our common interest to better understand decisions being taken in Scotland, regarding the governance of Scotland's universities, with clear and deleterious outcomes for staff and students alike.