

## Submission 5, dated 23 March 2022

I am a senior lecturer at the University of Edinburgh. I have been working in UK higher education for 14 years and I have never known a more pivotal moment for the future of the sector. The future of our colleges and universities is genuinely at stake. And that is why many of us are currently on strike – from academics like me, to colleagues in administration, IT workers, servitors, librarians, and other service professionals.

Many of us are **hopeful that your Committee may intervene** by examining the evidence and calling senior university management to provide a public account of their position. We believe that this would bring much needed scrutiny to the crisis and help to illuminate the situation so that a negotiated and evidence-based outcome can be achieved. Unfortunately, a lack of public accountability and oversight has led us to a situation where the foundations of the sector are at risk, undermining the future of both students and staff.

I understand that resolution of the industrial dispute is beyond the scope of the Committee; it is UK-wide and between the University and College Union and the employers' associations, Universities UK (UUK) and the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA).

The Committee could, however, examine the specific actions of Scottish universities that have prolonged the dispute. It could question University Principals in Scotland on what they are doing to resolve the dispute and to address the conditions that led to it. The Committee strives to “achieve the best possible experiences and outcomes for children, young people, lifelong learners and service deliverers.” Students are clearly not enjoying the best possible experience in higher education, nor is this possible while the strikes, and the conditions that led to them, continue.

Last month university employers forced through USS pension cuts which will see 35% slashed from a typical member's guaranteed retirement income. New retail price index inflation figures of 7.8% mean the University and College Union estimates staff pay is now down by 25.5% in real terms since 2009. Over 70,000 academics are employed on insecure contracts (42% of teaching staff at University of Edinburgh). The gender pay gap in UK universities sits at 16%, whilst the disability pay gap is 9% and the race pay gap is up to 17%.

University finance figures show total income across the sector is around £41.9bn with reserves of £46.8bn. On average, vice-chancellors enjoy full pay packages of £269k per year. [The National Union of Students and the Edinburgh University Students Association support](#) the strikes and many of our own students have expressed their support and are joining teach-outs, meetings, and rallies.