

Sue Webber MSP

Convenor,

Education, Children and Young People Committee

The Scottish Parliament

Edinburgh

EH99 1SP

By email: ecyp.committee@parliament.scot

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Dear Convenor

On behalf of the University and College Union Scotland (UCU Scotland), I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to give evidence alongside NUS Scotland, Universities Scotland and the Scottish Funding Council, in the session on universities and funding issues last month.

During the evidence session, and in our written evidence, we addressed the issue of higher education finances and our serious concerns over the direction of travel on funding levels.

Given the committee is currently taking evidence as part of your pre-budget scrutiny work, and we understand the minister for further education, higher education and science will be attending the committee in the near future, I wanted to write again reiterating UCU Scotland's concerns. We feel strongly that the current plans for higher education funding are unsustainable and will be detrimental for staff, students and their learning outcomes.

UCU wholly supports the concept of free university tuition and the determination that access to higher education should be based on your academic ability and not on your ability to pay. It does however need to be properly funded and for many years we have argued, along with others in the sector including NUS and Universities Scotland, that the cost of teaching should be fully met by the Scottish Government.

The year-on-year reductions in the funding of teaching costs, will be further

exacerbated by the Scottish Government's resource spending review which set out a flat cash post-16 education budget for the next four years. Rising and sustained high inflation means that the flat cash settlement for the universities over the next four years will mean substantial year-on-year reductions at a time when the demands placed on universities are increasing and more complex.

As we set out in our evidence session, the reality for staff in the sector is over a decade of falling pay in real terms, cuts to pensions, the proliferation of casual contracts in the sector, unsafe workloads and pay inequality. University employers can and should do more to address these issues, but the reduction in funding from the Scottish Government is having a pernicious impact, which will only get worse with the high inflationary pressures.

We all recognise the fundamental contribution universities bring to their communities, local economies, along with the skills for an education led recovery. They must be properly funded to deliver, and address the challenges of learning loss, widening access, supporting learners to progress. I have no doubt that continuing to underfund the sector will have a long-term detrimental impact on the sector, staff working in our universities, and students.

I hope these additional comments are helpful to the committee in its ongoing work.

Yours sincerely

Mary Senior
Scotland Official