

Dear colleague,

I am writing to you in relation to pensions and pay – two issues that have been linked to the ongoing national dispute that has seen industrial action continuing to affect 150 universities across the UK, including Queen Mary.

### **On pensions**

Regarding the USS pension scheme and the long-running sector-wide dispute following the 2017 valuation, Universities UK (UUK) and the University and College Union (UCU) issued a [joint statement](#) on 17 February in response to the latest information released by the USS Trustee. Based on its latest [Financial Management Plan monitoring report](#), the USS Trustee indicated that the forthcoming 2023 Valuation may see an improvement in the financial health of the scheme that could possibly lead to improvements in defined benefits and a reduction in contribution rates.

While the valuation date of 31 March 2023 is some weeks away, we welcome the positive news about the health of the scheme. We have been clear since 2017 that we are committed to ensuring Queen Mary staff have access to an attractive pension scheme that is both sustainable and affordable for members and employers. We also strongly support the UUK position of “*working with scheme stakeholders to achieve greater long-term stability, and to agree a solution where benefits and affordable contributions are adjusted through a pre-agreed framework, based on the USS valuation process*”. The UUK statement is available on the [USS Employers website](#). By agreeing a framework it is hoped that we do not return to an industrial dispute at each pension valuation (which must be carried out every three years).

### **On pay**

On 20 February, Louise Lester wrote to you to explain that Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) and the joint higher education trade unions (comprising UCU, UNISON, EIS, GMS and Unite) had issued a [joint statement \[PDF\]](#) on 17 February. That statement confirmed an agreement to “*pause industrial action and not call any new industrial action in weeks commencing 20 and 27 February on the basis that no pay award will be imposed/implemented by [universities] during that period*”. The statement also confirmed the conclusion of the New JNCHES Dispute Resolution Procedure for the 2023-24 pay round.

On 30 November 2022 [I wrote to all staff](#) to confirm that the University was strongly supportive of a five per cent increase in pay in the next national pay settlement, which equates to an eight per cent pay increase over two years, and up to 14 per cent for those on our lower salary scales. This is in addition to our local pay increase of 21 per cent to London Weighting which we agreed in August 2022. We have also supported bringing forward some of this year’s pay settlement to enable us to make some of the pay award as soon as possible with the rest to follow as usual in August 2023.

I continue to have discussions with staff across our campuses about the increases in the cost of living and the impact that is having. I know that everyone is struggling at the moment. We therefore welcome the conclusion of the 2023-24 pay round and the possibility this brings of us being able to implement these pay increases, with a proportion to be implemented as soon as possible and the rest in August 2023.

I will write to you again with further updates.

Best wishes,

Colin

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