Dear Helen

I write at a time of great challenge for our University and our sector. We are facing disputes relating to core elements of our national HE structures over which we, as individual institutions, have limited ability to directly influence. To further complicate matters, not all of those whom your organisation represents are experiencing the same immediate pressures of industrial action and disruption to students’ education.

Whilst those in institutions not in the midst of strikes may consider that there is no driver for further action, there is pressure here in Sheffield, and at the 59 other universities, experiencing another period of industrial action, to explore what more can be done to reach a negotiated outcome at a national level.

I appreciate that, as a member-led organisation, UCEA must balance the demands of all its constituents and their diverse views. Such divergent views inevitably put considerable pressures on our national pay bargaining arrangements. I therefore welcome your commitment to meet with UCU this week and hope that some negotiated outcome may be identified, and progress be made through further discussions.

Here in Sheffield we are working closely with our UCU, and other trade union colleagues, to seek solutions to some of the big challenges that our staff tell us are important – workload issues, gender and ethnicity pay gaps and seeking more secure ways to engage and employ staff who bring great expertise to our University. These are important issues for us too. We know that our reputation is built on our people’s contribution and we seek to support staff and develop a diverse and collaborative community of scholars, professionals and students.
However, these are all issues that affect our entire sector, so if there is anything we can contribute to the broader discussions around these areas, my colleagues will be ready to support this work more widely.

I look forward to hearing of developments in the coming days.

Yours sincerely

Professor Koen Lamberts
President & Vice-Chancellor